SLOVENIAN BASKETBALL ON TOP OF THE WORLD
THE PROJECT OF THE DECADE

SLOVENIA HAS BEGIN 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.

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. The project of the decade has resulted in a very reasonable compromise – and there is no reason to fear a different outcome on this occasion.
Participating 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, 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 particularly 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.

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 owed 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 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.

Pahor and Tadić support joint rail company

At a meeting in early September in Gorica Bida, 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.
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 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, 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 changes are needed and how far-reaching those changes should be, and they are often dependent on which side of the table the social partnership they come from.

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In Focus

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 66
• incentives for extending employment periods (rewards, penalties)
• a gradual increase in the accounting period, from the 18 to the 34 best successive years
• a 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 viability 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 accrued 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.

The pension system reform

Secure old age for all generations

Alenka Čebular Photo Shutterstock
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 11 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 persons 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, the number of people over 80 is forecast to rise from 71,200 to 249,500, which will significantly soften the reforms from the viewpoint of the individual.

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 889,900, and will represent 34.4 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 2006 in Slovenia, 108 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.
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. ‘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.’

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 an increasing scale clear global leadership in the area of water management.

‘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 Vengrads, 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 urgent by necessity. 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.

In Focus

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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 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.

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.
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 the country needs both. Health care reform will have to have a much freer hand and decision-making autonomy, and with it also responsibility; both are currently missing. We should seek a compromise; but if the trade unions remain in their trenches and refuse to discuss, this will cause additional delays.

The urgency of pension reform is related to that of the public sector: Without pension reform, nobody can avoid making those decisions. Very simply: the crisis has shown that some like Germany more radically, while some like France less so, but nevertheless the public sector has not been able to solve the problem on its own. All of the European countries are taking that road.

Serious conflicts with the public sector trade unions are forecast over wage freezes. What is your response to the trade unions? We have just had a two-month strike in the public sector; that is not quite enough. Again, we have to make sure that our public sector does not suffer a loss of jobs and up to ten percent lower wages, it is not fair for the public sector not to share that fate.

All of the European countries are taking that road. The public sector does not want any 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 sensitive as long as they lead to a reasonable result. So I believe that the public 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 and the system of financing it. In the former we are anticipating huge opportunities in the management of health care institutions, especially in 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 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, we need the public sector trade unions to help us to reform 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 easier for me, at least within 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.

You still have half your term ahead of you; what will the Government’s priority tasks in the next two years? As we urgently task about sustainable 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 the long run this is the only way to raise the competitiveness 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 in Slovenia. I have been watching how the public 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.

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Slovenia breaks out of recession in second quarter

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

Vesna Bertencelj Popit, Delo

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.

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 growth away from the socially secured 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 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 is gaining importance in the wider area of the country. AgrA, a fair that is ascribed to ecological farming, the feed and plant protection products distribution companies to start reimbursing consumers for excess charged electricity consumption. The same association, headed by economist Rado Pezdir, has set implementation date. A special civil association has succeeded in getting 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.

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

F irstly, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the editors of Studio 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 and 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 operation in the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Turkey and Slovenia 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 the liberal 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 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 affecting 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, Turkey has also become a destination for winter and summer tourism for Turkish people. In this regard, the recent abolition of visas for Slovenian citizens, 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, painters and photographers. 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 foster cultural dialogue between Turkish and Slovenian students. There is a growing trend of student exchange and co-operation between our universities, taking place both at the high school and university level. Both countries have expressed a great interest in the 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 Portorož is steadily creating a place for itself within that framework. One of the key frameworks for our mutual cooperation is Turkey’s active role in the cultural and educational exchange and 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 standing fact that just before the beginning of the World Basketball Championship, Turkey waived visas for Slovenian citizens. The Turkey-Slovenia 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. The honour of being Turkey’s non-resident ambassador to Slovenia and of being given the opportunity to write these lines is a great pleasure for me. I am fully aware of the importance of this position and the responsibility it carries. I am also aware of the importance of this position and the responsibility it carries. I am also aware of the important role Slovenia plays in the region. I believe that, Slovenia’s efforts to support Turkey’s membership in the EU are an important factor in the region. I am also aware of the importance of this position and the responsibility it carries. I am also aware of the important role Slovenia plays in the region. I believe that, Slovenia’s efforts to support Turkey’s membership in the EU are an important factor in the region. I am also aware of the important role Slovenia plays in the region. I believe that, Slovenia’s efforts to support Turkey’s membership in the EU are an important factor in the region.

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 Portorož is steadily creating a place for itself within that framework.

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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 attractiveness of the region’s various advertising festivals, Portorož’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 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 Prelepriv 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 Jaworčnik and associates) and design studio Studiobotas, exists 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 is an integral component. 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 is a vision of the concept of the Biennale and therefore a fusion of the concept and its approach and a 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 be of course make sense to consider a Slovenian Pavilion in the Arsenele, 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 photographers Peter Kozlun, Saso Kahan, who created the audio background that accompanies the exhibition, and the illustrator Urh Solohčan. The well-conceived exhibition is accompanied by rich catalogues, catalogues, containing, among other things, an article by architecture historian Luka Škanci 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, 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 them.’

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 Galleria 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 the organisers focused in particular on the incorporation of 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 presented 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 Olimpija 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 in Turkey also 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?’ Slovenian supporters attending championships in other countries continue to be a source of good cheer and positivity. They are a real phenomenon with their Kdo 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.

The day before the official start of the 12th World Championship in Turkey, The Government Communication Office (Ukom), the Slovenian Tourist Board (SMB) and the Association 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 Matevž Paternoster and Tomal Rožanec, and 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 organisations focused in particular on winter programmes and sports tourism in Slovenia. The presentation was an introduction to the presentation of 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 presented in the field of sport and at major
VERONIKA AWARD GOES TO ANDREJ MEDVED

T he 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 Tjdah Gallery (Piran Coastal Galleries). His poetic works cover over 20 poetry collections and always garner considerable interest, since, in the words 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 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.

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

Polenca 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 mountain 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 climbers, mountaineers and Alpinepists have strived for over a century to see their achievements preserved in the Slovenian Alpine Museum,” said Boris Pekler, president of the Alpine Association of Slovenia. Mojstrana, which sits right at the entrance to the Triglav National Park and to the Julian Alps, 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 40. 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, visitors can learn about mountaineering interactively through audio-visual aids, computer content and interactive games. The museum staff working in other countries are being asked 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 Kranjka 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.

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 Preleveč Photo STA

MOST SIGNIFICANT FOR BOOK lovers was the biggest literary event in Slovenia – the 25th 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 was also focused on Slovenian writers living in Piran, who has had a major impact on the arts as artistic director of Tjdah Gallery (Piran Coastal Galleries). His poetic works cover over 20 poetry collections and always garner considerable interest, since, in the words 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 to himself, not dallying with the postmodernists, more or less artistic dead ends, for whom so-called intertextuality plays a central role.”

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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 Isabelle Faugeras and the main concert, 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 the Muzica 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, Kongoj Days, a festival of contemporary classical music that bears the name of the composer who was born in Piran, Johann Konrad Haid. 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 interaction, which was remarkable for this environment. The programme of this year’s Kongoj Days is set by the conductor Anton Nanut. It has become an established tradition for the festival to visit other places in the region and beyond the national border. This year it will visit Goričina and Trieste, Tribul Superiore and Dvrsne Goričina 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 Posto 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 Eugene Ionesco, an international coproduction (Slovenia-Luxembourg-Macedonia-France) directed by Silvius Purcarate. The play examines an inscrutable moment in the life cycle: the death, decay and decomposition of the human being and the transition from one state to another.

The 2010 Polona Prešeren Museum”, said Bojan Rotovnik, considered by theatre connoisseurs to be one of the most interesting directors currently working in eastern Europe.

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If someone’s “axe fell into honey”, he experienced an unexpected stroke of good fortune.

Word for Word Without Words

Andrej Savelli

ART & CULTURE

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 the direct, literal interpretation of the idiom and present it in a spatial installation. The exhibition thus shows us what the making of an artwork, or for the context of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the CEF had to implement 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 Répanski. “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 professional training in the sphere of public financial management 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:

“If someone’s “axe fell into honey”, he experienced an unexpected stroke of good fortune.”

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 1939).

The entrance, a fine example of early Ljubljana modernism, is situated on Cankarjeva, a street in the centre of Ljubljana, in the former Post Office Savings Bank building (built in 1939).

The Centre of Excellence in Finance (CEF) is an institutional structure for strengthening the capacities and regional understanding of the People’s Bank of Slovenia and the Central Bank of Slovenia, as well as other institutions. Thus the Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF) is also working 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

EXCELLENCE AT EVERY STEP

Sanja Prelevič

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 Répanski, 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!”

“If someone’s “axe fell into honey”, he experienced an unexpected stroke of good fortune.”

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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 31 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 2001 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 a 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 in the region which, besides the countries of the Western Balkans, include Turkey and Moldova. They are frequently joined by colleagues 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 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 Dobovšek 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 find a similar organisation based on the Slovenian CEF model.

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.

Biofutura’s green energy

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 a climate-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 Excellence

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 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 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.

ART THROUGH CARDBOARD

Valerija Mencej  Photo Archive of Primož Antloga

C AN 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...’

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.

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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 holding 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.

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.
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.

C URVED 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...

IT’S BEAUTIFUL (AND TASTY) IN THE MOUNTAINS

Polona Prešeren Photo Iztok Dimc

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Slovenian Delights

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, cuddle 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, 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 order your lunch just before noon; nowadays it is enjoyed by the most die-hard hikers. It is a hearty flouy 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 typical served on colder days. But as a reminder of summer you can still order homemade plum dumplings.

How do you get to Kofce?

The most common route is from the Matizovec Alpine farm, which is reached from a mill in the valley. “Some city dwellers 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 iganci, masovnik, jota or ričet (bacley 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 Dolan gorge and Jelenjol, 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 backpackers and skiers. The mountains are even more fantastic during the winter.
The following players appeared for Slovenia:
Uroš Slokar, Jaka Laković (captain), Hasan Rizvić, Gašper Vidmar, Goran Dragić, Miha Zupan and Primoz Brezec.

Slovenia's results:

Preliminary round: Turkey 85:66, USA 77:99, Croatia 93:84, Brazil 80:77, Iran 65:60, 1/8 final: Australia 87:58, 1/4 final: Turkey 68:55, 5th to 8th place: Spain 109:97, Russia 78:83

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. Taeon has played an important role in Slovenian kayak history. 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 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.

Vugačič, Nesterič, Lorhek, Smodić 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 Bečirović. They were not part of the team in Istanbul. Even so, the team acquitted itself extremely well under the expert guidance of coach Memi Bečirović. They are an excellent sign for the next big competitions. Alongside experienced players and former NBA stars, but for various reasons they were not part of the team in Istanbul. Even so, the team acquiesced itself extremely well under the expert guidance of coach Memi Bečirović. They are an excellent sign for the next big competitions.

Slovenia became one of the handful of countries to be 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.

The quarter-final match between Slovenia and Turkey was watched by the Presidents of the two countries, Danilo Türk and Abdullah Gül. Slovenia was watched by the Presidents of the two countries, Danilo Turk and Abdullah Gul. Slovenia became one of the handful of countries to be 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.

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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 it is true. With such encouragement and fanatical support, it is not difficult to play at the very highest level. It is a matter of pride that the condition of our national team is extremely good 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.

At the World championship! This history can be traced back to 26 October 1981 and the foundation of the first kayaking club in Ljubljana – the Kajak kanu klub (KKK) Ljubljana. The canoes established its unrivalled position in Slovenian canoeing in 1939, when the Championship of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was held on the left bank of the Sava river.

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 to 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 knew 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 Armsgol Toška Badía, 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 kayaks came to Armsgol Toška Badía 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, rating 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 Soka 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 28 primary schools from Ljubljana and surroundings, Krško, Brežice and Hrastnik and participants in a holiday club organised by the Šoča River Power Plant Kayak Club of Nova Gorica andSolkan. 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 Spica and the Botanical garden, and the Prule, Karlovki, Žitni and Ambrožev trg bridges). •

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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.

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 Yoga 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 those 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
- 1966 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 European Ice Hockey Championships, Group C
- 1974 European Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
- 1984 World Weightlifting Championships
- 1984 World Ninepin Bowling Championships
- 1991 World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
- 1995 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 - weltweight world champion title match: Zavec (Slovenia) – Martinez (Argentina)
- 2010 World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B (Division I)

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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 those 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
- 1966 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 European Ice Hockey Championships, Group C
- 1974 European Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
- 1984 World Weightlifting Championships
- 1984 World Ninepin Bowling Championships
- 1991 World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
- 1995 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 - weltweight world champion title match: Zavec (Slovenia) – Martinez (Argentina)
- 2010 World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B (Division I)
In these late summer days the River Krka, the main artery of Dolenjska, is quiet and mysterious. It may seem as if it is 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 been longing for instant adrenalin, which isn’t always the only challenge. “Okay, let’s go. First choose a wetsuit, then let’s get on the river!” no more waiting, straight into action. And speaking. “Okay, let’s go. First choose a wetsuit, then let’s get on the river!” no more waiting, straight into action. And speaking. “Okay, let’s go. First choose a wetsuit, then let’s get on the river!” no more waiting, straight into action. And speaking.

KAYAKING DOWN THE KRKA. PRICELESS.

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 suha Krajina. at first glance the Krka is a calm river, as it winds around dolenjska’s 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 Kika, 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 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 farmer, he also knows many of the secrets of the Krka’s upper course. When Borut looks at the Krka he sees a Karstic river featuring naturally-occurring 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 instantaneous 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. 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 farmer, 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.

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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 homemade apple juice.

When people slowly begin to harvest the grapes from the vineyards that spread over the slopes of the Kika 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

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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 unresolved. 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 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, whereas in the hospital ‘24 hours a day’, and who had enough money to eat well. 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 makeup 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 reconstructions? We work every day. But word of mouth is comparably 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 amongst 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.

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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 designation 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 you can never stay 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 – I am right in thinking you have not been married so far. Your 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 nine months of pregnancy. Of the municipalities which had formed the former ironworks plant, which it had built in the eastern suburbs of Koroska Bela during the good years, Jesenice is still thought of by many Slovences 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 nineteenth-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 Ratece on the Italian border southwards to Postožne on the Primorska side of the Julian Alps and to the east as far as Kranj, and to a considerable extent also from 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, treated 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 Koroska 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 bombning 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 A NEW BEGINNING FOR JESENICE

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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 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 music school, a library and public areas for weddings. They are renovating the old water collectors which once powered 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.

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