

Sinfo

OCTOBER 2010

BUSINESS • CULTURE • ENVIRONMENT • POLITICS • SPORTS

**SLOVENIAN
BASKETBALL ON TOP
OF THE WORLD**



38 NATURAL TRAILS
KAYAKING DOWN THE KRKA. PRICELESS.



Darijan Košir
 Director

THE PROJECT OF THE DECADE

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

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

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

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

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

Sinfo - Slovenian information

Editorial Government Communication Office
 Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana
 Tel. +386 1 478 2630, Fax +386 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si
Director Darijan Košir
Editor-in-Chief Vesna Žarkovič, vesna.zarkovic@gov.si
Editorial Board Alenka Čebular, Albert Kos, Mateja Malnar Štembal, Valerija Mencej, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, Andreja Šonc Simičič, Andrej Savelli, Branko Vidrih
Photo Editor Veronica Ditrh
Production Videotop Color Media d.o.o.
Graphic design Boštjan Krajnc **Printed by** Mobinet

Gateway to information on Slovenia www.slovenia.si
Government Communication Office www.ukom.gov.si
Government of the Republic of Slovenia www.vlada.si
Slovenian Tourist Board www.slovenia.info
Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry www.gzs.si
Slovenian Chamber of Craft www.ozs.si
Public Agency of the RS of Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments www.japti.si
Ljubljana Stock Exchange www.ljse.si
Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia www.stat.si
State Portal of the Republic of Slovenia e-uprava.gov.si

SINFO is printed on the eco-friendly FSC label paper. The FSC label provides assurance, that paper originates from responsible forest management according to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards.

MONTHLY REPORT 04
 New solution to outstanding issues

IN FOCUS 06
 Secure old age for all generations
 Bled Strategic Forum a success for economic diplomacy

INTERVIEW 12
 Borut Pahor – Slovenian Prime Minister

BUSINESS 16
 Slovenia breaks out of recession in second quarter

LETTER FROM AMBASSADOR 18
 Derya Kanbay, Dr Milan Jazbec

ART & CULTURE 20
 A fusion of the urban and nature, Word for word without words

OUR EXCELLENCE 25
 Excellence at every step, Biofutura's green energy, Art through cardboard

SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS 31
 It's beautiful (and tasty) in the mountaint

SPORTS 34
 The greatest acquisition for Slovenian sport

PEOPLE 41
 Uroš Ahčan - physician and surgeon

NATURAL TRAILS 45
 A new beginning for Jesenice.



22



9



12



29



36

Cover photo Sportida

A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with short brown hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a blue and white vertically striped button-down shirt. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage.

UROŠ AHČAN, physician and surgeon

The devaluation of the word
is the main problem

Miša Čermak Photo Šimen Zupančič

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are you still as reflective and rational today?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

We are a little contradictory, are we not?

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

Do you ever correct unsuccessful cosmetic surgery?

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

our biggest challenges.

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

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

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

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

Were you an outstanding student?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are you an artistic spirit?

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

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

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

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

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

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



Otočec Castle
PhotoSTO