

## **THE ELECTION OF 2 APRIL 1989**

Right up until Friday 31 March, the date of the final TV showdown with the other candidate, Marko Bulc, the opinion polls were indicating a win for Bulc. But on that Friday everything was turned around. As soon as the TV show was over I had the feeling that I would win the election. Somehow I became completely calm and "resigned to my fate". All the earlier anxieties about what would happen if I won, what I was letting myself in for, slowly vanished. The die was cast. It was too late to change anything. Now I would have to go with it and accept the consequences. Saturday was the day of the pre-election media blackout. I spent it quietly, just like any other Saturday, and then on Sunday morning it began. In Izlake, my home constituency - the polling station was actually in the same block as my apartment – the photographers and TV reporters were already there waiting for me. I was still not used to such things then, and it all seemed a bit overdone. The morning was quiet, and then in the afternoon came the first hints in the media. All the indications were that I had won. By the evening it was clear. I had won with approximately 57 per cent of the votes. Even during the day it

seemed to me that a kind of excitement was taking hold of everything. People seemed to be thrilled by the idea that something special was happening. Then a stream of congratulations started to come in over the telephone. Finally I gave up answering it. The telephone answering machine recorded messages from people I did not even know. These were the spontaneous and emotional expressions of people who felt for the first time that they had actually been able to decide on something, that something momentous was happening, and that something was changing.

In the evening the TV people managed to get hold of me. They wanted me to come to Ljubljana, but I was quite puzzled by this, and wondered why. The election had been held, everyone had voted, the results would be announced and that was that. But the excitement had risen to fever pitch, people were euphoric, and they wanted to broadcast a new statement on TV. I found out that the SZDL had also invited me to Ljubljana, where the official announcement of the election winner was supposed to take place. There was actually more pressure on me to appear on TV than in the SZDL ceremony, where everything had already been prepared for the announcement. The political elite were expected to assemble there to celebrate the result. But the news of my win seemed to have poured cold water over everything. I told the TV people that I could not come to Ljubljana, and that I did not feel like driving. However, they talked me into it by saying they would send their own minibus, which duly arrived and took me off to Ljubljana. I arrived at the SZDL building, where there was a great deal of excitement, and a mass of people, journalists and politicians. But there was a generally hushed mood, particularly among the politicians, as if they were at a funeral. The president of the SZDL, Jože Smole, announced the results, and the other candidate, Marko Bulc, stood there stoically. He behaved very properly, and congratulated me. I made a statement and gave some brief interviews for the media. I was overcome with a sense of unreality, as if everything that was happening was a dream. When the announcement of the results, the short ceremonies and interviews were over, I left. I was alone, and realised that I had to get back to Izlake. The other officials and politicians left the way they had come, in official cars with drivers, so I went home on my own in a taxi. It was a clapped out old Renault 12. The taxi driver was talking the whole time about something or other, including the

election. He did not recognise me and I said nothing. At Izlake and at the Medijske Toplice hotel a crowd of enthusiastic local people was waiting for me. They set up a big celebration. They were having a whale of a time, but I was tired and before long I left the party, which went on until the morning. I disconnected the phone, so no one could wake me too early. When I got up at around ten, there was panic everywhere. Everyone was looking for me. There was a message for me that Kučan, Stanovnik and the rest of the political leadership wanted to see me in Ljubljana. I met the President of the Slovene Presidency, Janez Stanovnik, Kučan, Šinigoj and Potrč, who was then president of the Assembly. Until then I only knew Šinigoj and Potrč. I had not met Milan Kučan, head of the Slovene League of Communists. This in itself was a sign that the Slovene political supremos had not expected me to win the elections. They had banked on Bulc and Šinigoj, the Slovene prime minister, who had himself stood. It was not altogether clear whether Šinigoj had stood as a reserve or simply to give the desired impression that there were several candidates, only to drop out later. I had no particular contact with him. It seemed to me that I was in some way needed in Slovenia as one of the rare specialists in credit and monetary systems; at the same time I was considered to be something of a maverick. I often went my own way, and promoted a different view from others in Slovenia's political and professional elite, and this led to clashes. The basic reason for these clashes was the fact that I approached problems with clear professional neutrality, since I was not involved in politics. In fact at that time I did not keep up with day-to-day politics, its reasoning or procedures. I even arranged my specialist studies or language courses abroad on my own -in the USA, Norway, Spain and France. For years my standard reading material was *The Economist*, the French paper *Le Monde*, the German *Der Spiegel* and Spain's *El Pais*.

So my meeting that Monday with the political leaders of Slovenia was formal and brief. They expressed their willingness to help me. We also set up a system of formal communication, although this was far from being as close and intense as it was between each other or indeed as it would have been had their own candidate won. That Monday I also had to give another statement on TV, which seemed to me really excessive, but the media were all ablaze, the public were thrilled and I went along with it. They also came to Izlake, a small town of 2,000 people, and all at once

there was a horde of journalists, policemen and foreign TV crews. They came from everywhere. It was truly entertaining. I went for a walk, followed by a train of journalists and photographers, who recorded every step I took. For my fellow townsfolk this must have been a very unusual experience after the quiet idyll of normal life in Izlake. I gave numerous interviews, and in my answers I was always brief and concise. I was able to respond quite adroitly to a variety of delicate questions. A press conference was organised by the Ministry of Information in Ljubljana, entirely under their own auspices. With resignation I agreed to appear. A large number of journalists came, especially foreigners. I managed to steer my way through this conference, too, although again there were a lot of delicate questions. I took the whole thing as a training exercise for what was awaiting me in Belgrade, when I eventually took office.

These are some of the media reactions:

"Young economist to become Yugoslav President," reported the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, which went on to describe the "first president elected in a direct and secret ballot. This is a precedent and an important development in a country saddled with crisis, and split between orthodoxy and liberalism."

"From Slovenia there is now projected across the whole country a picture of youth, freshness and optimism, far removed from Serbian nationalism and the orthodox predilections of Milošević. The job of the new president, who is due to take office in May, will be very tough. He will perform his duties without any real power, although this will become an important point, since he will also be head of the armed forces in the crisis which is crippling dialogue within Yugoslavia." (*La Repubblica*, 5 April 1989.)

"Slovene liberalisation is the answer - and more than that - to the repression in Kosovo. The more that Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević arouses Serbian nationalism, for which the Albanians are now paying, the more the Slovenes raise their heads, in defence of their differentness. This game is about autonomy, which as of yesterday now has a name - Janez Drnovšek, a young economist, and future head of state." (*Corriere Della Serra*, 13 April 1989.)

On 14 April the Slovene Assembly formally declared me the member of the Presidency of Yugoslavia representing Slovenia. There was consensus over this, which in view of the election result was to be expected. I gave a short speech, in which I touched on the basic guidelines I held for performing my duties. I took my pre-election policy outline seriously, and all my statements were of the same orientation. My overriding principle was that I must fulfil my pre-election policy programme.

Excerpts from my speech on being elected member of the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, 14 April 1989:

"I am convinced that we are all aware of the complex socio-economic situation in the country. I am entrusted with this responsible office at a time when inflation has reached dizzy heights, and when it is clear that we have not yet been able to find a true way out of our deep economic crisis, and when at the same time political and social relations have become extraordinarily complicated, particularly between our peoples. We all have grave anxiety about what tomorrow will bring, when the crisis might be further exacerbated and differences within the country made sharper. In Yugoslavia there are clearly differing approaches to the resolving of political and economic problems. In my policy programme I have offered a vision of a way out of today's crisis, and with your resolution today you have confirmed that you share this vision. We wish to increase the efficiency of our economy by stimulating market competition and by freeing the energy and initiative which our people possess, but which owing to the excessive bureaucracy and administrative inertia of our system, could not find expression. We desire a stable currency, which will not be possible without the withdrawal of politics from direct economic decision-making, and particularly from financial administration. We desire equal involvement for our country in international economic currents, and a place for ourselves in the developed world, above all within Europe, to which we belong geographically. We are committed to the further democratisation of our society, to a legal system in which all are equal before the law and in which there can be no abuse of state authority. It is equally beyond

dispute that we are committed to equal relations between all the nations and nationalities of our common state, in which we are not imposing our will on others and in which we do not expect others to impose theirs on us. On this basis we are prepared to contribute creatively towards the further building of our common state, and we offer to all others a patient and constructive dialogue in seeking a solution to the current crisis situation. Patience and constructiveness, however, do not mean yielding to undemocratic pressure or to one or another threat. We offer our hand to all those who are prepared honestly and openly to work together in overcoming our current difficulties, but not to make compromises with those who exploit crisis situations and social pressures for their own individual political aims and in their struggle for power. We will not reconcile ourselves to the idea that at the end of the 20th century Yugoslavia might become a dark haven of political despotism and economic incompetence."