

## **THE BEGINNING**

It all started just after we saw in the New Year of 1989. On my first day back in the office after the holidays, I found quite by chance, in the pile of other papers and New Year greetings cards on my desk, a letter of notification stating that I had been proposed by four municipalities as a candidate from Slovenia for the Yugoslav Presidency. The letter asked me to indicate whether I would accept this candidature. I looked at the date, and realised that the deadline was for that very day, and that I would have to reply immediately. For several minutes I sat at my desk, looking over this piece of paper and wondering what to do with it; should I throw it in the bin, or perhaps just out of curiosity confirm my candidature. It said that a total of 75 candidates had been proposed, so from the outset this whole idea seemed rather a long shot. I studied the list of candidates and saw that it contained almost all the more prominent politicians as well as a few lesser known outsiders. I also noticed on the list the name of an acquaintance of mine who was well-versed in political affairs. I decided to ask him what he thought about this candidature, so I called him up. He said that in the leadership of the League of Communists they were thrashing out the deal of who would stand; he told me that their president, Milan Kuèan, would probably not stand, and that they would agree who their candidate would be, with the remaining Party candidates - including my acquaintance - eventually dropping out. The gist of it was something like: "If you want to, then go ahead and stand. It's all the same anyway, since in one way or another our agreed Party candidate will win." I then left my office to see to some other business, and returned in the afternoon. I hadn't given the proposal any more thought, but I saw the list of

candidates again on my desk. Without thinking about it, I quickly filled in the form and added it to my other mail. What will be, will be;

most probably nothing will come of it, and I will just take part in one round of elections. Later on I thought quite a few times how much coincidence there was at play that day. It was the last day for confirmation of candidature. If I had not come into Ljubljana, to my office – at home I had actually thought about extending my New Year's holiday by an extra day – then I would have missed the deadline. If I had bumped into someone that afternoon and gone out for a coffee, I would have missed it. Or if I had needed to deal with some other matter. And then my life – and and probably not just mine – would have turned out quite differently.

Why in fact had these municipalities even put me on the list? Probably because around that time I had written quite a few professional articles, including for the daily papers, I had appeared in several TV interviews and round tables, and I had given a number of lectures on the subject of credit and monetary policy, and on the world debt situation. I had also had my doctoral thesis - entitled *The International Monetary Fund and Yugoslavia* - published as a book, and it had enjoyed some recognition in expert circles. At that time I was a member of the Slovene delegation in the Yugoslav Federal Assembly, representing Slovene interests in the credit and monetary committee. Here, too, my activities were very much of a professional nature, and I had developed no great interest in political matters. I had numerous contacts in international banking circles and monetary institutions.

In the absence of any clear political alternative, particularly with any well-known names, I was probably proposed at that time as someone with the image of a finance man, as opposed to those candidates who represented political continuity. People wanted a change. At 38 I was relatively young, a doctor of economics and I had a knowledge of languages. My articles were targeted at quite a narrow readership, although it was obvious that I was always taking the "authorities" to task. But above all this, it was likely that the Slovenes preferred someone who understood business.

On the Monday I sent off the confirmation that I would stand. I remember that on Friday of that same week the Coordinating Committee of the Slovene SZDL (Socialist Alliance of Working People) was meeting to determine who would be candidates for the Yugoslav Presidency. They confirmed that six candidates had accepted the candidature. I heard this on the evening news on TV, which gave a brief presentation of all six of us. I was just watching the news and it made me

sit bolt upright. Not even in my dreams had I expected to find myself immediately in the last six out of 75 candidates. The whole business had a lot of publicity surrounding it, since the Slovene member of the collective Yugoslav Presidency was in line to become President of the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and therefore also the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, since the next summit conference of non-aligned states was scheduled for September in Belgrade. In short, we were talking about a leap into the very highest office in the land. At that time I likened it to being rocketed to Mars. In fact I knew as much about what awaited me there as I knew about what might await me on Mars.

The other candidates were Marko Bulc, president of Slovenia's Chamber of Commerce, Dušan Šinigoj, president of the Executive Council of Slovenia, Professor Gojko Staniè, Tomaž Kalin, director of the Jožef Stefan Institute, and Vinko Vasle, a journalist. It was obvious that they had agreed within the League of Communists to start off with two candidates, Bulc and Šinigoj. The other three candidates had not been proposed by the political establishment, and were probably put forward on independent tickets, as I was. In addition to the Party candidates, who stood down in line with the directive from the leadership of the League of Communists, a number of "alternatives" had also dropped out. These relatively new politicians were obviously not confident about aiming for the highest office in Yugoslavia in the complicated situation of the time, especially with no "base" - that is, without the support of the political elite in Slovenia.

Although I had found myself so unexpectedly in this narrow circle of candidates, it still seemed quite far-fetched that I might actually be elected. Bulc and Šinigoj were right at the top of the Slovene political elite, and had a long political pedigree. Their positions also gave them constant media exposure. Added to this, I did not see myself at all as a politician. I was always involved with economics, and followed politics as it were in passing, my knowledge coming more from foreign magazines than from the domestic media. Curiously enough, I had spent October of the previous year on a study trip in the USA, just at the time of the final presidential election contest between George Bush and Michael Dukakis. I had followed that contest with considerable interest, and tried to put myself in the place of both candidates. The organisers of the Yugoslav election wanted all the candidates to submit a pre-election policy outline, which would be published in the media. After mulling it over a little I wrote down a very concise policy outline, which was explicitly economic in nature, with an emphasis on orientation towards Europe. Yugoslavia was at that time undergoing a very serious political crisis. Serbian nationalism had reared its aggressive head, the crisis in Kosovo was escalating, and the primarily Serbian pro-Yugoslav rallies – the mitingi – had brought revolution to Montenegro and Vojvodina. All in all, the political situation across the country was looking quite grim. So the thought of possibly being elected President of the Presidency in such a situation was by no means a soothing

prospect. My father visited me at my home in Izlake, just after I had written my policy outline. Again, it was the final deadline for submitting it. I was wondering whether I would not rather stand down, or perhaps just not send in my policy outline. But I said to myself, we haven't even begun yet. I must play at least one stroke, if I'm in the game. My father was terribly afraid of me being elected. He begged me to stand down. He definitely had some presentiment that I would win in the election. And what would happen then? In that crisis in Belgrade, with those increasingly angry and militant Serbs? What did I want that for? At that time the SZDL was starting to collect votes in the field from the basic candidature conferences, and the first ranking of candidates was being put together. Rather surprisingly I found myself in second place, with a small lead over Šinigoj. But Bulc had a commanding lead, so this whole venture still seemed a bit far-fetched, although the prospect was emerging of me being able at least to take part in the final round of two candidates, which could of course open up entirely new dimensions in the election campaign. All my colleagues and acquaintances were keeping pace with these developments, although no one believed that I could seriously stand for this office. Given the way politics had been organised up to then, it seemed quite unthinkable.