

Jožica Puhar (1942 -2024)

A sad news reached us last Monday, 15 January. A long-time member and a Vice-President of ZDUS and member of AGE Platform Europe, Jožica Puhar, left us. We are not yet fully aware of her lost. Her death left us breathless.

Jožica Puhar was born in Kranj, in an industrial town of Gorenjska region. When she was a Minister for labour and social affairs, she left her roots in Kranj, but these roots were so powerful and cunning that, despite her seemingly cosmopolitan life, always sucked her back into their bosoms. As a high school student, she high jumped and threw the shot put, and as part of the high school shooting club, which she co-founded, she achieved excellent results with an air rifle and a small-caliber rifle, and also participated in national competitions. High School appeared to be a springboard for her study field. Her keen sense of "what is right and what is wrong" probably led her in to law school,



but she was quickly drawn away from the former country mansion to research into complex social processes and graduate from FSPN, University of Ljubljana, majoring in sociology.

When the Government of the Republic of Slovenia was appointed in 1990, she was one of its members and republican secretary of labor, then Minister until 1994. From 1994 till September 1999, she was the ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia in Macedonia, and for two years she also covered the Republic of Albania. She was the first Slovenian ambassador to these two countries.

After that, she was ambassador to Greece for four years, also responsible for Cyprus, Armenia and Georgia. Even in this environment, she continued to build good relations between Slovenia and the countries under its jurisdiction. During this mandate, Slovenia became a member of the EU, and a number of important activities took place in Greece, including the signing of the declaration of accession to the EU.

In 2006, she retired and took time for herself and her family, devoting herself to the role of grandmother to her granddaughter and grandson. After some time, she was invited to share her knowledge within the Slovenian federation of pensioners organisations which means, that she just continued her diplomatic activity. She was a member of the Expert Council, and in 2017 she became a member of the Board of Directors of **AGE Platform Europe**, based in Brussels.

Jožica Puhar was interviewed quite a few times in most prominent magazines. Conversations with her were almost comparable to essays with a touch of monodrama. Her sense of the spoken word was downright charmingly acting. I have selected some of her thoughts on the activities that each of us is subjected to...

About cooperation:

'Our generation is characterized by persistence, so we need to keep older people together more than ever, because the younger ones have their own priorities...'

About physical activity

'I wanted to go to gym classes that were not during school hours, ever since the first grade of elementary school, but my parents' understanding of what was suitable for me at the time was not in favor of these wishes...'

About music, culture...

'I started learning the accordion in the third grade of elementary school, and at the age of ten I became interested in the flute and started regular studies at the Music School. I finished all 6 classes, as far as was possible in home town. At the age of twelve, I already played with the Carniola Brass Band, as the first woman in Slovenia. Members of my family also played there. My father, uncle and brother, so joining the ensemble was quite logical... I am very fond of all kind of music...'

About judging at first glance...

'In high school, some of my maits and myself decided to found a shooting club, which I led. It was also one of the most successful shooters - taking into account the women's and men's teams. This skill stayed with me and even later I surprised myself hitting with accuracy if I got involved in some informal competition. Looking into the target is similar to looking into the eyes of a human. A skilled eye immediately notices sincerity or elusiveness...'

About our politics (and politicians)...

'After independence, Kranj (25.000 inh.) had as many as three ministers. For education and sports, for the small economy and for work, family and social affairs. But I'm not sure that it meant much to the city. At least I never felt it myself. The first post-independence mayor of Kranj even "threw me" out of one of the broader government party consultations because I wasn't of "his (party) color...?!"'

About ministering...

'Despite the modest financial possibilities at the beginning of the suverenity, we managed to ensure the payment of pensions every month, which for me was an extraordinary success, if I compared what happened in other countries of the former Yugoslav republics, where they failed to do so. We also opened several homes for the older people and workshops for people with special needs and established the Andragogous Center of Slovenia...'

On the recruitment of ambassadors...

'Ha, ha... we negotiated with the prime minister, who was the proposer of ambassadorial candidacies at the time. I mention to him, I' woud, like to go somewhere north.... And he answers, everything is full, you are going south. And I went south...'

About mutual relations...

'I prefer cooperation to competition, and fortunately in a non-governmental environment this can be achieved. At meetings of the AGE Board of Directors and at international conferences or seminars, I realized that they value knowledge and a professional approach. Since we have committed to hosting a meeting of the AGE Administrative Council during the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, I proposed some protocol changes and most of them were taken into account...'

We will never forget You. Rest in peace, dear friend!

Črt Kanoni,

ZDUS Executive Editor and head of Press Relations