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**AUSTRIA**Next issue:  
BUSINESS FOCUS  
CHINA AND INDIA**Bridge-builders are everywhere**BY BEATA BALOGOVÁ  
Spectator staff

THE CHILDHOOD idol of Markus Wuketich was Hugo Portisch, the son of the owner of the German Pressburger Zeitung newspaper in Bratislava who grew into a legendary journalist in Vienna, able to explain on TV the most complicated political cases. Wuketich, however, became a diplomat rather than a journalist. The Austrian ambassador to Slovakia understands at least four languages of central and eastern Europe and believes that the Iron Curtain was only a temporary and artificial separation of nations who have shared many bridges in their histories and cultures.

The Slovak Spectator spoke to Wuketich about Austria's newly opened labour market, diversification of energy resources, his country's opposition to nuclear power, as well as the many kinds of bridges that bring together the nations of central Europe.

**The Slovak Spectator (TSS):** Almost all European Union citizens are now able to work in Austria and Germany under the same conditions as domestic employees since these labour markets



Austrian Ambassador Markus Wuketich Photo: Jana Liptáková

opened on May 1 to citizens from the eight countries in central and eastern Europe that joined the EU in 2004, including Slovakia. What has been the response in Austria so far?

**Markus Wuketich (MW):** Generally the response in Austria to the opening of the labour market has been positive. Workers from central and eastern Europe are welcomed to Austrian companies, as they're mostly skilled and have a good command of German, especially those coming

from border areas. The estimation goes that around 20,000 to 25,000 workers from these countries will seek employment in Austria in the coming months. In terms of public debate, there was some - but I would not call it widespread. Some smaller companies in the border areas voiced concerns but these did not dominate the discussion.

**TSS: The Austrian government took measures to prevent what it called social and wage dumping in the form of**

the Anti-Wage and Social Dumping Act (AVRAG). What was the main reason behind passing the law?

**MW:** The objective has been to secure fair competition on one hand and on the other hand to have just, equal pay or wages, for Austrian and foreign citizens. Securing these two principles is recognised as legitimate by the EU, as is the protection of free movement of labour. This law also benefits workers from the newer European Union countries, including Slovaks. Since we are EU members we always have to find a compromise. The act does not mean that the companies now have to pay the maximum wage; it is rather the minimum collective wage.

**TSS: What type of foreign labour is welcomed in the Austrian labour market and why?**

**MW:** One should not forget that almost 90,000 people from the newer EU-member states had already been legally employed in 2010, which was well before the end of the transition period. The sectors where Slovak employees have been taking jobs are tourism, health care, agriculture, construction and also industry. But I think that other sectors also offer job opportunities.

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**Slovak-Austrian firms swap know-how**BY JANA LIPTÁKOVÁ  
Spectator staff

BRANCHES of Austrian companies operating in Slovakia are eager to keep improving their operations by using know-how and experiences from their parent companies. But knowledge and good business practices also travel in the opposite direction. The Slovak Spectator spoke with Luboš Sirota, the general director of the Slovak arm of Trenkwalder, a human resources provider, and Markus Jelleschitz, country manager of Gebrüder Weiss Slovensko, a provider of logistics services, about their experiences in sharing business practices and know-how between Slovakia and Austria.

**The Slovak Spectator (TSS):** What business models or best practices have you adopted from your parent company for use in Slovakia?

**Luboš Sirota (LS):** We have transferred from the parent company the practice of care for corporate clients, the prin-

ciples of marketing communication, and the Trenkwalder Academy as the educational model for internal employees.

**Markus Jelleschitz (MJ):** Service Excellence is one of the core values of Gebrüder Weiss and due to this best practices are always transferred throughout our whole network. By doing so we can make sure that we are permanently increasing the quality of our services and the processes involved. In addition to the general transfer of know-how, Gebrüder Weiss is also using the very strong know-how in Slovakia to adapt to Slovak market requirements and legal standards.

**TSS: Have any of your business models, best practices or other positive initiatives been taken up by your parent company or other affiliates?**

**LS:** Several sister companies have adopted our recruitment processes for white-collar positions. Furthermore, management via a method called the Balanced Score Card is used by other affiliates and Slovakia was the first place where this was implemented and tested. It enables better measurement of the

company's performance by taking into account the quality of services provided and the satisfaction of clients.

**TSS: What are your company's plans in terms of investment and development in Slovakia over the next few years?**

**LS:** Our interest, after getting over the crisis years, is to continue our growth in market share in the segment of agency employment in Slovakia. In a short period of time we expect new acquisitions in the Slovak market, which would be a continuation of the strategy from 2006 and 2007. During that period of time Trenkwalder acquired 10 smaller companies operating in Slovakia.

**MJ:** Gebrüder Weiss Slovakia has made permanent investments over the past years to set up a high-quality transport and logistics network to serve the needs of customers in this market. In the future we also will follow this strategy and our investment plans cover further improvements in our IT solutions as well as establishing state-of-the-art terminals and enlarging capacities, particularly at our main terminal in Senec, near Bratislava.

**Austria: General facts**

**Political system:** federal parliamentary republic  
**Capital:** Vienna  
**Total area:** 83,855 square kilometres  
**Population:** about 8.3 million  
**Official language:** German  
**Currency:** euro

Source: www.austria.at

**Austrian institutions in Slovakia**

**Austrian Embassy**  
Ambassador: Markus Wuketich  
www.rakusko.eu

**Advantage Austria** (the official Austrian Foreign Trade Promotion Organisation) in Slovakia  
www.advantageaustria.org/sk

**Austrian Culture Forum**  
www.rakusko.eu

**Slovak-Austrian Chamber of Commerce**  
www.sohk.sk

**Österreich Institut**  
www.oei.sk

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# MW: The Iron Curtain was just a temporary separation

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**TSS: Austria and Slovakia are working on a new crude oil pipeline connecting the two countries. But in Slovakia there are environmental concerns about potential damage to drinking water reservoirs. What is the response of Austrian side?**

**MW:** This is a joint Austrian-Slovak project to diversify sources and routes of energy. We have been aware of the environmental concerns and I think at this point it is clear that the Bratislava-Schwechat oil pipeline will not cross Great Rye Island [Velký Žitný ostrov], the largest drinking water reservoir in Europe. As far as I know, just recently a study has been completed suggesting two possible corridors with several routes. The challenge now is, in my mind, to find an ecologically-acceptable and also economically-viable route. It is up to the experts to make this choice. This study lists two corridors with several routes which gives altogether ten possible routes. I am confident that all sides involved will be able to handle both the economic and environmental challenges.

**TSS: The Austrian cabinet has announced plans to file a lawsuit against both Slovakia and the Czech Republic before the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to stop the construction of power plants at Mochovec (in Slovakia, 170 kilometres from Vienna) and Temelin (in the Czech Republic, 95 kilometres from Linz). What are the reasons?**

**MW:** Austrians, not only their government, are very much concerned about the safety of nuclear power plants in their vicinity. We, the Austrians, do not consider nuclear energy to be a sustainable or a 'green' form of energy as it entails risks of serious accidents just as we witnessed a couple of months ago at Japan's Fukushima. Other concerns pertain to the storage of nuclear waste. For all these reasons Austrians are seriously concerned about the construction of new nuclear reactors in our neighbourhood. To clarify the issue: the Austrian government has not taken the decision to file a lawsuit against Slovakia or the Czech



Markus Wuketich

Photo: Jana Liptáková

Republic. This option, however, has been left open in the above-mentioned decision of the cabinet. On the other hand, the Slovak government has assured us on several occasions that it would take the safety concerns of Austrian citizens into serious consideration and aim for transparency.

**TSS: Has the Austrian public always been so cautious of nuclear energy?**

**MW:** I think this attitude goes back to 1978 when there was a referendum on the use of nuclear energy. Since then this attitude towards nuclear energy has been reinforced. There is a national consensus throughout all the parties that nuclear energy is not a sustainable form of energy.

**TSS: Is Austria self-sufficient in energy?**

**MW:** Roughly speaking we are self-sufficient, but in peak times we cannot do without electricity imports. In a way, we are in a lucky position because 65 percent of our electricity comes from hydro power plants and 25 percent of our waterways could still be used for power production, so we have room for manoeuvre and we can do without nuclear energy. We, of course, want to grow completely independent from electricity imports and we want to further diversify our energy resources. This is why we are supporting both the South Stream and the Nabucco gas pipelines.

**TSS: Austria and Slovakia signed a partnership agreement in early**

**June for the Twin City Rail project. What benefits could come and how do you see the Twin City concept between Vienna and Bratislava?**

**MW:** I think the idea itself is marvellous and it has brought Vienna and Bratislava closer. Transportation between our capitals has improved. The aim of the project is also to make travelling between Vienna and Bratislava faster, more ecologically-friendly and efficient. The entire line between Bratislava and Vienna, via Marchegg, will be electrified, with more train stops added. This will enormously benefit commuters. The Twin City concept involves several other projects, for example a pupil exchange programme which has already benefited 3,700 students. There are many projects that will bear fruit as time goes on. For example, the results of the water management project might not be felt and seen immediately but it improves the situation in the cities. Just to mention a detail: if Austrians buy a train ticket to Bratislava it already includes the price of public transportation in the Slovak capital. Another benefit is the Twin City Liner on the Danube River, which is very attractive for tourists.

**TSS: Austria and Slovakia are building a cycle bridge between the countries over the Morava River. What benefits will this bring to local businesses or tourism?**

**MW:** We hope this project will give a strong impetus to tourism in the region, as this bridge will help to

better integrate bicycle paths in Austria and Slovakia. This will make the region definitely more attractive for tourists. There is a tourist region on the Austrian side and connecting Schloss Hof and Devínska Nová Ves across the Morava River will let tourists go to Schloss Hof or, if they want, they can just continue to Hainburg and the Carnuntum region. It's really making the region more attractive.

**TSS: Austria is a good performer in tourism. What are the lessons that Slovakia could learn? Is Slovakia an interesting destination for Austrians?**

**MW:** Slovakia has a great potential for tourism but the main challenge is to build infrastructure. Austrian companies are ready to cooperate with their Slovak counterparts in this sphere. The trade section of our embassy is organising several events on tourism infrastructure since we know there is a demand for these economic missions or seminars. We do have the ambition to bring together the Slovak and Austrian partners.

If you just take a walk on Bratislava's streets you will hear many Austrians speaking, especially on Austrian holidays. Bratislava is attractive to them because of its nearness. The challenge, however, is to lure Austrian tourists deeper into the country; let's say to the High Tatras or the spas. To do so you also need a well-functioning tourism infrastructure.

Many Slovaks already speak foreign languages and bridging the language gap is one of the preconditions for successful tourism. The situation in Slovakia has been improving and some generalisations no longer work; situations where customers feel they might be intruding on the peace of restaurant or shop staff become less and less frequent.

**TSS: There has been a lot of discussion about the status of German and its importance in the region because many young people are now learning English. Have Slovaks maintained their interest in learning German?**

**MW:** Slovaks will remain interested in studying German along

with English. Austrian, German or Swiss companies always look for employees with command of German and there are a high number of such companies here. Solid knowledge of German opens job opportunities in Austria, which is very close to Slovakia, but also in Germany, Switzerland, and countries like Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. German brings job opportunities; after all German is the most-widely spoken native language in the EU.

German also has a historical tradition here in Slovakia and I think this tradition will remain to a certain extent. Under the communist regime, Austrian television and radio stations served as a voice of freedom for many.

The embassy has been supportive of education in German. We have native lecturers at universities and teachers at schools. Currently, we have 9 or 10 lecturers and Austrian teachers in Slovakia.

**TSS: How do cultural bridges function between the countries?**

**MW:** The Austrian Culture Forum and the Slovak Institute in Vienna are excellent cultural bridge-builders. Singers, musicians and composers have always contributed to an ever-closer cultural relationship between the countries. Just an example: the Slovak singer and professor, Eva Blahová, was given a high Austrian award for her teaching activity in Austria just a couple of months ago. Music is also one of the aspects of Slovak culture that has always been very interesting for Austrians and when they think about Slovakia they often think music: both classical and folk music.

Slovak literature is not very well known in Austria but there are bridges as well: for example, Zdenka Becker, an Austrian writer who also writes in Slovak recently had her short theatre play performed at our Cultural Forum here. If one digs deep into history one would find many other kinds of bridge builders and the communist era in central and eastern Europe was just a temporary and artificial separation from those traditions.

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