

TIME

THE SURVIVOR

For 60 years, the **Dalai Lama** has been the face of Buddhism. China has another plan

by CHARLIE CAMPBELL



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SLOVENIA

The Green Nation

Fly over Slovenia on a clear day and the overall impression is of one enormous forest. Sixty-six percent of the country is covered by trees, and that figure is growing, thanks to the natural reforestation of abandoned farmland. Along with the country's environmental and cultural attributes, this natural beauty prompted the United Nations to declare Slovenia the world's most sustainable country in 2017, just a year after the European Union named Ljubljana as Europe's Greenest Capital.

The UN award was part of its International Year of Sustainable Tourism, and right now Slovenia's tourist industry certainly looks like it has the potential to keep powering forward for years to come. More than four million overseas visitors now come to see this small Adriatic state each year.

Among the most popular destinations -- and one that resonates fully with Slovenia's green and sustainable credentials -- is the 24-kilometer cave system near Postojna, which celebrated its 200-year anniversary

in 2018. It is home to the "baby dragon," an aquatic salamander whose conservation is a top priority for Park Postojna Cave president Marjan Batagelj, who has seen visitor numbers double under his stewardship.

Batagelj is also president of the Slovenian Business Club and is well positioned to appreciate the recent successes of the Slovenian economy, which has seen steady growth mainly due to industrial exports primarily to the European auto industry resulting in unemployment falling below 5%. Yet these successes have also generated challenges, such as increased pressures for higher wages and overdependence of Slovenian industry on (mainly German) automakers. "We are fully aware of these challenges," Batagelj says. "Most members in our club agree that we have to produce our own products that will have higher added value. That is why we have been investing heavily in R&D."

Success brings fresh challenges. The secret is to find sustainable solutions.

AKTON – Connecting the Adriatic to the World

The Adriatic Sea's location at the heart of Central Europe has historically given its maritime trading routes great strategic importance.

With China now spending billions of dollars to revive the old Silk Road trading routes, the countries along the Adriatic's eastern coastline – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania – have once again assumed a commercial significance of their own.

This has generated demand for improved telecommunications infrastructure, which Slovenia's Akton Group is on a mission to deliver -- and not just between the countries of the Adriatic littoral, but also to the rest of Europe and beyond.

Already operating in four neighboring states, Akton is well on its way to becoming the preferred telecoms services provider for the Adriatic region. "Our client base includes all the major telecommunications players, and a wide

range of international corporate customers, international organizations and regional business customers," says CEO Igor Košir. "Our mission is to connect the Adriatic to the world."

Akton's product portfolio is as comprehensive as its customer portfolio (which includes almost everybody active in the central European region, regardless of sector, from Al Jazeera, World Bank and Heineken to Pfizer, Oracle and Ikea). Akton has been investing heavily in both its physical infrastructure and organizational and technological capabilities to successfully position itself as a one-stop shop for voice, data, and SMS A2P services.

Over the years Akton has acquired or laid more than 150 kilometers of metro optical fiber cable to build a network that reaches into virtually every major business center in the region. Its team of highly motivated and

experienced telecommunications professionals are backed up by an equally committed cohort of customer service experts who have access to state-of-the-art network and monitoring software offering round-the-clock support.

The results speak for themselves: revenues reached \$54 million in 2018 -- and that is after a significant investment in extending Akton's metro network into Skopje. Košir is planning to invest in a Tier3 / Tier4 carrier neutral data center in the region, which he hopes will attract "some serious international customers like Netflix, Facebook, Google and Amazon."

In the longer term Košir wants to establish more cross-industry, non-competitive partnerships. "The main goal is to connect smart people to smart devices using the existing network, and basically to make life even easier for the consumer," he says. "We add great value to businesses and their customers."

Akton
communications