

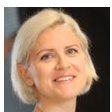
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Conflict of interest? Company of Minister Počivalšek's right-hand evaluates the use of EU funds

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Everything is in accordance with the law, according to the government's service for development and cohesion



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How successfully we spent European funds from the period 2007-2013 and what to change in the future - this is roughly what the purpose of the evaluation made for the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (**SVRK**) by **MK project** for 42,700 euros . The MK project is half-owned by **Karin Žvokelj Jazbinšek** , who has been employed at the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology since September last year.

How "hygenic" is that?

Karin Žvokelj Jazbinšek was initially employed as a secretary in the cabinet of Minister **Zdravko Počivalšek** , but now, on behalf of the Minister, she is the head of the Development Funds Service - for the money whose success in spending was determined by the above-mentioned evaluation. MK projekt also helps companies with applications for subsidies. We wrote about how the Ministry of the Economy took care to avoid in the article "**Conflicts of interest. The Minister's right hand serves with the left hand in the private sector**".

This is not the first project

SVRK published the tender in September last year, four bidders applied, and the MK project succeeded. The payment for the evaluation comes from European funds, more precisely from technical assistance, which is intended to better draw on European money. The company has already prepared one evaluation for SVRK, namely the operational program Slovenia - Croatia 2007-2013, the contract value was just under 93 thousand euros.

The MK project also received a public contract from the Ministry of Labor, which evaluated the self-employment measures of the active employment policy in the period from 2007 to 2013. The value of the public contract was 85,278 euros. The **FDV** also participated in the research , as well as the subcontractor **Re-forma** owned by Snežana and **Janez Šušteršič** , the former Minister of Finance - they received 11,250 euros without VAT for their work.

It will be recalled that during the crisis, the state gave the unemployed up to five thousand euros in subsidies if they opened their own company or espa. In the last five years, around 100 million euros have been spent on promoting self-employment, and about two thirds of the companies and institutes established in this way are still operating today.

SVRK: They met the conditions and were the most favorable



Karin Žvokelj Jazbinšek and her husband Miha Jazbinšek own the company MK projekt, which helps companies with grants.

Did they and how did the government's development service make sure that the remaining bidders were not at a disadvantage and that there was no conflict of interest? "The procedure was conducted in accordance with the Public Procurement Act, but in accordance with the law, the contracting authority had no reasons or legal basis to exclude the bid of MK projekt, as it met all the conditions of the tender documentation and was also based on tender criteria. the most favorable. Mrs. Karin Žvokelj Jazbinšek is not employed by the contracting authority, she was not (was) a member of the contracting authority's team and at no stage did she participate in the implementation of the public procurement, "the Government Office for Development explains.

Evaluation is optional

The evaluation is not a document required by the **European Commission**, for example, and would be a mandatory part of the drawdown. "We agreed with them to prepare an evaluation that will give a comprehensive picture of the achievements of European cohesion policy in the 2007-2013 programming period in terms of sustainability, synergies between programs and experience gained on both the management and implementation side," they said. And did they get such a comprehensive picture? "Our assessment is that the findings are relevant and we will definitely take them into account. Of course, not everything is in the domain of professional services, especially in terms of the stability of the implementation system. If this is ensured, it will be much easier to follow all the remaining recommendations." It is expected that in the autumn they will decide which evaluation recommendations will be followed and which will not.

How they did the evaluation

Let's look at what concrete evaluation brings. The MK project, with four employees, used several sources of information to make the evaluation, as can be seen from the sources. Among other things, the findings of the final pumping reports prepared by SVRK, the reports of **Umar** on the development in the years from 2013 to 2016, the Court of Audit and the ministries, among other things, used one of their evaluations. To carry out the evaluation, they also conducted a survey both among those who received European money and among employees in ministries.

Physical effects - very good and excellent

And what does the evaluation find out about the achievements of European cohesion policy in the period 2007-2013? The evaluation covers a total of 139 pages, here are just a few main findings. They found that the physical impact indicators of the three operational programs (OP; strengthening regional development potentials, human resources development, development of environmental and transport infrastructure) were largely exceeded. "The high assess-

ment of achievements means that the targets of all three FPs in key indicators have been significantly exceeded on average and should therefore be assessed with an intermediate assessment of between very good and excellent."

Bottlenecks due to administrative overload

However, the analysis is not only full of praise for the execution, but also identifies bottlenecks that hindered the implementation, which was reflected in delays in the implementation of operations, failure to achieve objectives and, last but not least, less absorption of funds. They find that excessive administrative burdens are to blame for the bottlenecks.

"According to the contractors, this is also related to the inadequate organization of tasks and employees and changing and unclear instructions for the implementation of projects," the evaluation reads. And: "In general, the transfer of experience gained during the programming period was far from good." The problem, they note in the evaluation, is that experience-based learning is not built into the system.

The Ministry of the Economy also found that they have problems with the organization in the operation of the Development Funds Service - as Minister Zdravko Počivalšek recently said, they had problems with the content of the preparation of tenders due to poor organization. With the arrival of Žvokelj Jazbinškova, the service was reorganized. **And in half a year, according to Minister Počivalšek, they have made progress .**

Some concrete recommendations

Among the recommendations are: "To increase would be necessary capacities for strategic planning and conversion plans through the implementation of the results." And for example, to achieve indirect effects: "Horizontal authorities (SVRK, MF , MF LPG MZI, MESP , EARS , DRSC) should be trained for horizontal operation. "Which is supported by the findings of the Strategic Evaluation of the Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia, interim report from 2016.

You can get the full analysis **at this link .**
