



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

AN INITIATIVE OF
THE WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
AND THE BOBST CENTER FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Series: Anti-Corruption

Interview no.: E 1

Interviewee: Robert Crepinko

Interviewer: Gabriel Kuris

Date of Interview: 22 November 2012

Location: Ljubljana, Slovenia

KURIS: I'm here with Mr. Robert Crepinko the deputy director of the National Bureau of Investigation (NPU) in Slovenia. Previously, Mr. Crepinko had been deputy director of the National Criminal Police Directorate. Mr. Crepinko, would you please start at the beginning to tell us about your work?

CREPINKO: *We have a linguistic problem in Slovenia in that we don't have two positions for assistant and deputy, this is one position; we call it deputy director. In Slovenia we have what is called a National Criminal Police Directorate, one single body responsible for all criminal offenses in the country. There are eight Police Directorates at the regional level. So I was deputy director of the Criminal Police Directorate.*

One of the chapters or branches of this is the economic crime section that also includes an anticorruption division. So normally a police officer or a criminal police officer in the region would investigate cases. The economic crime section coordinates and supervises and stuff like that. Six or seven years ago we saw that some cases simply could not be investigated in the regional environment, so we took the approach of having taskforces. We invited police officers from different regions to the national level and through taskforces we investigated these really big cases with many millions of euros of "stolen" money. That was a problem because regional police directorates are very busy and we took a few of the best people from them for six or eight months and that caused a lot of problems in managing cases in the regions because the vast majority of cases were still investigated there.

In 2008 when we had the elections, the fight against corruption and the fight against high-level economic crime was one of the topics that politicians were tying to each other, "You did not do well" and blah, blah, blah. You know how it goes.

Up to that moment, it was the opposition who was fighting really hard with that argument. They won the election and then of course there was a bill that had to be paid. "Okay, now you are in the government, now show us how it can be done better". Before the election, there was the idea that we would build up a separate financial police who would take care of all the problems Slovenia was facing at that time. In 2008 the crisis was already there, but still not as harsh as today.

Luckily the politicians came to the police and asked us for our suggestions and our ideas about how to be more successful in that area. We had a brainstorm. We took a look at the environment we already knew, the European police forces, and suggested that instead of building up a separate investigative body, because we knew from other countries that caused problems from overlapping authorities doing the same cases, we suggested building up internally in the police an independent body that would take care of those cases.

The idea was taken on board and we were tasked to do a proposal on that. An intergovernmental working group of different experts in all areas of these tasks the anticorruption commission, customs, everybody who knew something about economic crime, corruption, fighting, and the money laundering office, everybody sat together and worked for many, many months on the model and everything else. There were seven such groups. I will not go into that. The result was a proposal to establish an independent body, the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation) or NPU as we call it in Slovene, an independent body. At that time, I was the head of the sub-group responsible for the organizational part of the

criminal police. We had to establish where to put it, its' relationship to other groups and everything like that. So we decided to put it into the criminal police, but as an independent unit.

KURIS: And is it under the Ministry of Interior?

CREPINKO: *The police, the director-general of police and within that the criminal police are under the Ministry of Interior. The idea was then accepted and we have survived three years with this organization. Now we will change in the future few months. We can come back to that later.*

The unit is now established. Maybe you will laugh, but we invited professors from the university to help us in running the project because we wanted to have background and risk assessment. We were really running the project using all the tools available for what was hoped to be a good result.

KURIS: So were these experts in criminology?

CREPINKO: *There were also experts in project management because we did not have experience in that. We had the knowledge of how to fight crime, but did not have the knowledge of how to introduce change or how to have a strategy for results. You know, we're police officers or lawyers and we did not have that knowledge so it was a big help to have professors help us.*

Before we came to a solution, we questioned all the criminal police force officers to find out what the reasons are that we are not as successful as we want to be in fighting high-level economic crime on the national level.

You know, then we made a decision. One of the activities was to ask them why the criminal police aren't more successful in this area. There were seven areas, I think, narrowed to five areas because we didn't have the proper organizational structure, we didn't have the proper legal basis, didn't have equipment, the education or enough information from other bodies.

So for that inquiry, then, we set up five subgroups each to tackle one of these five problems that were discovered to be the most problematic for our success. As I said, I was responsible for the new organizational structure and other people were responsible for other areas.

The result was we made changes in the legislation on a legal basis. We introduced NPU (Nacionalni preiskovalni urad or national bureau of investigation in English) as part of the Police Law. We introduced a joint taskforce for numerous cooperation agreements with different bodies, like the one with KPK (Commission for the Prevention of Corruption). This was the legal one. In the material and equipment area, we scoured the premises for computers, for cars, for everything else that we needed for this unit. The educational subgroup prepared the training with help from outside partners and my group was responsible for putting it into the organization and how it should look and how should it function. We went with what is now very modern, to a flat organizational structure since police, you know, are hierarchical.

Although I have been a police officer since I was 14 years old, I really hate this hierarchical structure because although it is good for some things police have to do, it is bad for developing new ideas. So we have decided to have a flat organizational structure without subunits or departments. We don't have

anything. We just have a director. The idea was to have— maybe it is not politically correct, but I will risk it— as many Indians as possible and to have few Indian chiefs, to have a big army and few generals. So we have the director and the deputy director at the first level of management then we have seven heads of investigation, now five, and we have 70 investigators.

We don't have fixed units so it is a case-by-case approach. When we have a case on the table, it's, " You will be the head of investigation and you will get this, this and this" three investigators for this case or ten or twenty, how many the case requires.

KURIS: And the chief would assign that?

CREPINKO: *Yes, in a moment we will come to how we take cases on report. At one moment, you, as head of an investigation, could have twenty investigators and later on two or three. Now everybody has approximately ten, some have more, some less. We decided to buy laptops. On a case-by-case basis, the investigator takes a laptop and works in the new office for the next three weeks or a month, doing this and that. It is not happening on a weekly basis, but people are moving and it is happening. That is the reason we have about 60 people: 46 investigators, 5 heads of investigation and a director and a deputy director. We started with three heads of investigation and thirty investigators at first, then we went to 44 and now we are at 55. We make Indian chiefs when the number of Indians is rising; then we are also raising the heads.*

How does a case end up in the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation)? The director is unique in our organization, which is of course a big advantage but also a big disadvantage because in old and very stiff or rigid organizations, change is really difficult to push through but now it does. The heads of investigation are the busiest guys because everybody has six or seven cases and a lot of stuff and they have really to do it.

KURIS: For each of those cases they have different teams?

CREPINKO: *Yes, more or less. We have in Slovenia the so-called legalistic approach, not opportunistic, but legalistic. We have to investigate all cases, all criminal offenses. Nobody in this country has a right to say, " No we will not investigate that" as is the case in the UK (United Kingdom) or also part of the Netherlands and some from the States.*

NBI is special also in this matter because we have put in the Police Law that the director of NBI has the right to decide which case he will take on board. There are five criteria that he has to follow, but they are only advisory: if it has international links, if it is dynamic or if it takes a multi-agency approach, if the value of money that is being stolen is big, and two more, if there are people in political power involved in the commitment. If he decides not to do it, then he can give it away to the criminal police and they decide who will do it. The prosecutor's office has the right to propose a case to the NBI so if they are already dealing with a case then they can propose that we take it on. If they are dealing with a case, they might say this is very big and problematic for the regional police directorate and we should take it on. Then also all of our closest partners, KPK (Commission for the Prevention of Corruption) is one of them, and then the money laundering office, the custom office, the tax authority can propose a case. If we decide not to take it, then we have to explain our reason why we won't do it.

If there should be a fight between the regional police directorate and us, then the director-general decides who will do it. That has not happened in the three years since we set it up. That is basically how we do it.

We are working all the time on about forty cases. So 48 criminal investigators are dealing with about forty cases. Our cases don't result in many criminal offenses. In the last year we have written 47 criminal charges only. One might say one per investigator and that, of course, causes a lot of problems because the Slovenian police meanwhile have written 50,000 criminal reports and we have only 47. It was never a problem until now. It takes a lot of knowledge and understanding to know how it is possible that one corruption case or white-collar case takes one year or year and a half to investigate.

KURIS: Your cases involve a lot more money and are very complex.

CREPINKO: *The reason that we have for why we should do it in this way is that we came through analysis to the conclusion that the regional police directorates are not capable of dealing with these kinds of cases. It is because everybody knows everybody and we have very small police directorates and because the power on the other side is too big. We are dealing with very important people. We have arrested two mayors already. We arrested a prosecutor because of bribery. It was a case of perfect cooperation between KPK (National Bureau of Investigation) and us. They received the information first then handed it over to us. We did the investigation and made the arrests, it was really a case of perfect cooperation.*

KURIS: And that was very unique for Slovenia, right? Usually the prosecutors don't have problems.

CREPINKO: *No, it is not usual in Slovenia that the prosecutors should be corrupt. So it was something new for us.*

KURIS: How much has the NPU (National Bureau of Investigation) solved the problems that it was set up to solve?

CREPINKO: *I have to admit I'm addicted to the NPU. I was working in the establishment at that time not knowing that I would ever end up here. Hierarchically I was higher before than I am today. But the reason was that the director of the Criminal Police at that time said, "Robert, I would like you to go there, to build it up and then you can come back". I never went back. Then the director left and I'm still here. So maybe I am overly enthusiastic, but it is also my way of seeing life. I try to push nice things up and bad things down, otherwise you cannot survive in this crazy world. But this is my approach. I think that if we stayed as we were, if we ignored the fact that since 2008 the number of criminal offenses in economic crime and corruption tripled, the costs caused by these criminal offenses would be multiplied by I don't know what number.*

So if we stayed at the same level that it was at that time, we would never be capable of taking the cases that we have in the past three years. But, of course, immediately when you touch important people, then you have another form of pressure than if you touch normal drug couriers with 100 grams of amphetamine.

KURIS: Right, so how have you dealt with that obstacle? I mean that is one of the big things that I study. Once you were launching these big fish cases, how did you work with the politicians or with the public? How did you protect yourselves?

CREPINKO: *I have to go back to the current legal basis we have. The director, as I said, is a very strong person who can say, "I will take this", or "I will not take this." So that's the reason why we had to make it a very strong person not only personally but also legally. So we gave him a five-year contract.*

We gave him a five-year position mandate that might be prolonged for one more period. It takes an opinion of an independent commission made out of three persons. The director-general advertises the position. Then the applications come and he gives it to the three-man commission, one from the general prosecutor's office, one out of the money laundering office and one from the civil. I would say, like you.

KURIS: The civil society, academia?

CREPINKO: *Yes, he is a professor of criminal law, one of the professors of the College for Security Studies.*

And the director can only be removed before that mandate if he wishes so and in other cases only if he commits a criminal offense, of course, and in all other cases, only upon the opinion, or on the decision of that commission, the same one. So he is protected. If he would say, "Blah, blah, blah, put pressure on the minister" and the Minister would put pressure on the director-general and the Director of NPU could be removed. So this was a very strong security for this guy to fulfill this task.

KURIS: Similar to the head of the KPK (Commission for the Prevention of Corruption)?

CREPINKO: *This was the same idea. It was being prepared almost at the same time. This is, in my opinion, a very strong tool and it will disappear in the next law. It is working. It made the director who was here, a very strong one. We have finished criminal reports worth 300 million euros in these three years and we have confiscated or made a proposal to the prosecutor and then to the judge to confiscate 50 million euros. Of course, in these cases you touch very influential people when you take 50 million euros away from them. NPU is still being attacked very hard in the media and inside the police and everywhere. But now as I talk to you, this is just my opinion. So this is how I see things. Fifty million euros make you a lot of enemies. One month you're attacked from the left and then one month you're attacked from the right. At the end of the day it comes that you don't have any friends apart from your guys in NPU. What is also important is that one of the things we have discovered hindering criminal police from being more successful is also, of course, the salaries. You cannot employ a good expert if you give him 800 euros per month. So that is the reason why we searched and we found a solution. NPU investigators are paid better than the regular criminal police officers. We are talking about 300 euros more per month on average, or 400. It can be also five. In life, it's always that everything you do, you do something good here and then you bring something bad else.*

We have underestimated how to succeed to get good stuff. But on the other side, the guys not wanting us to succeed have godfathers who are losing 50 million euros through our work. This lights the flame of envy.

KURIS: Jealousy?

CREPINKO: *Yes, jealousy. It is a true fact that a criminal police officer at the regional level is technically doing the same job as one in the NPU. So he goes, makes the search of houses, writes a criminal report, blah, blah, blah.*

KURIS: And you have fewer cases.

CREPINKO: *We have fewer cases and more money. This is a problem for an overloaded guy in the region. He can never ignore it. It is normal. It is human.*

KURIS: Yes, especially in a small country where they all know each other.

CREPINKO: *Of course, and you know, "He was lazy, but now, he's there and I'm here. I'm still working"—and people's minds are not very realistic sometimes when emotions are involved. So we already estimated that problems would arise through that channel, but especially now when everybody is losing 10% of the salary these differences are very high and it causes some problems in the criminal police organization.*

Did we succeed out of it? It was also part of the idea when we were looking for what people to employ in NPU. We said, "Okay, we can invest a lot of money and then train criminal police investigators to become good economic experts, bank experts, or we can go to the market and buy these experts and introduce them to the organization".

Because of the fact our salaries were better, we had enormous interest when we were publishing the positions in the NPU. More than 300 people from outside the police were applying for the job. At the end of the day we took 18 guys. So 30% of our staff here did not have police background before arriving to NPU (National Bureau of investigation).

KURIS: Are these mostly lawyers or economists?

CREPINKO: *Economists—they were working in stock markets, in private companies, in banks.*

KURIS: So they understand all the finances.

CREPINKO: *Now when criminal police officers are looking at us they say, "You have fifty people and you are doing fifty cases. I have ten people and I'm working 200 cases". Of course it is difficult to understand. But we are using these experts that we bought on the market in more investigation groups. These are the most dynamic people moving around, because they are working on more cases. You know, stock market experience is needed here maybe for a week and then, there, for a month, so they are very flexible and are giving us expertise. It was much cheaper to buy them than to make them. It would take us years and years to make out of a police officer a good expert.*

KURIS: And they have the inside view on how these firms operate.

CREPINKO: *And colleagues. It makes things easier. For cooperation it was essential. Now we are talking about KPK and other partners. It was very good, because through the establishment of NPU they were only involved in this inter-governmental project. So we were forced, I'm making a joke forced, because we knew each other from before—we were forced to work close together on that project. Every one of them had a feeling that part of this project was also theirs. With that solution, our ways of communication were very fast and still are. Sometimes it took a month, two months, or three months to get an answer from the customs office or tax authority office and now it takes a day or even within hours.*

Also the KPK gave lectures to our experts. The cooperation is, I would say, excellent. Of course there is always room for improvement and of course there are always moments when each of the units is very busy and cannot reply in an hour. It takes three days to meet, not two. But to go back to that prosecutor's case, I received a phone call from the chief commissioner. I was there in, I think, fifteen minutes because our buildings are very narrow. In three hours, we were at the prosecutor's office. The police had already done preparations and the case was closed in two weeks. It was very harmonious with everybody respecting each other's powers and making the best out of both legal solutions. I believe this is a good approach to tackling cases.

KURIS: Was it hard to prevent leaks of information?

CREPINKO: *It always is. I am very proud that up to this moment we did not have a single case that would go out of the NPU. You can imagine that it is always stressful when we are doing searches of houses, when our investigation is coming to a certain stage, when we are making thirty or forty house searches at the same time all over the country. It takes a hundred to 130 people and keeping it secret to the very last moment, but at the same time letting people know what they will be doing and how they have to do it is always stressful. But we have succeeded. It takes a lot of energy.*

KURIS: Were there ever any security threats working with such high stakes?

CREPINKO: *Not so far. I'm a little bit scared about the next stage because, as always, in such a situation we are facing harsh attacks from the media and through attempts to change the legislation, through that channel. From the theory, then if one way of using power is not functioning, then you go to the next level. So I'm sure that one day we will also face this. We are doing everything we can to prevent it from happening by giving security to our staff. We have not had problems up to now.*

KURIS: Your agents, are they armed when they go out in the field?

CREPINKO: Yes.

KURIS: They don't wear masks or do they?

CREPINKO: *No, we are part of the criminal police and for special things we use special - forces trappings.*

KURIS: So let's talk about the media relations that you mentioned because the KPK has a pretty good reputation in the media, but it is harder for you guys because sometimes you look like the bad guys. So how do you manage relations with the media and how do you try to build up public support?

CREPINKO: *It is a very interesting area. I think we are making the best of it as possible, especially when you're running cases like we do. You have to know that the legal system in Slovenia has a huge problem in my opinion, and we're not proud of it. When we finish our job and up to the moment that the person is sentenced, fully sentenced in the court, approximately it takes six to eight years. We have cases now that run for one or two years. This is a bad situation in our court system. Of course in one way, you have to respect the right that everybody is innocent until proven guilty in court. You have to show that you are working correctly and you are bringing results. You know that it will take eight years until they come out of the court, the usual situation. Because of the reason we discussed before,*

attacks from media and questions being asked by this media and that media, you already know who is behind it and what is the purpose of the question.

KURIS: Because the defendant can keep talking because they're still not proven guilty but you guys can't—.

CREPINKO: *No, but we will just wait six years and he will come out and he will get ten years. You cannot do that. From the establishment, from the very first day and up to now, we are trying to have as open approach to media as possible because we know that only through that channel can we get the information out. I mean the information about who we are and what we are doing, not the persons, but what are our techniques, what are our approaches, what are our efforts, what are our goals. We are very open. I have given thirty interviews. We are always giving press conferences when possible. You can have an investigation covered as long as you don't go out on thirty house searches at the same time or to one at the mayor's office. Wait six years and we will tell you what we just did. We have a very great guy who is the PR guy for the whole criminal police on the national level who used to be the head of one of the regional criminal police directorates so he has the personal knowledge and he has the media knowledge now, PR instincts, and we succeed in my opinion. We succeed in being present in the media, being proactively present. So now we have to arrest five people. Immediately there would be ten independent lawyers, experts, standing up, saying this case should be done another way. "There was no need to search their house". You always have to fight to get your information out without saying anything prejudicial.*

Now the new director said he is not a big fan of the media, so we will now probably face a new strategy toward the media. This is the feedback we are getting from the journalists. We are very open, we are very friendly and we always take time for this because I think it is very important.

We are using it also for prevention, especially when there is a corruption case or something like that, to inform the public on dangers that might occur. One prosecutor can maybe ruin ten cases, but if that gets to be a practice then we can close the country down.

KURIS: Besides the media is there anything else you do to build public support?

CREPINKO: *We are having a lot of activities. Together with KPK, we are hosting our partners in one European project, the so-called EACT, European Anticorruption Training. Throughout the last two years, we also participated with other countries, with anticorruption fighters, preventers and other persons. That is going to finish next year. That is running very well.*

We are hosting 35 students out of the law faculty tomorrow. We will lecture for two hours to them about NPU, about our efforts, about the problems with the aim of getting out of them ideas of what could be done differently. We are doing that in some universities. Either I go there or they come here.

We are taking part in education as lecturers and as students from other state bodies. So we are trying to do that. I don't know what else.

KURIS: You mentioned EACT, are there other forms of international cooperation or international support that has helped a lot?

CREPINKO: *We are using old channels of international police cooperation, so Europol, Interpol, Sirene. We are using these channels. Of course we have a lot of bilateral cooperation directly. We and other heads of investigation have been active in the international environment and have a lot of contacts from them that we are using regularly. None of these cases, or maybe just a few of them, had any influence on the international environment in other countries, without actually being moved there.*

KURIS: So connected to other countries.

CREPINKO: *It is vital to have good connections.*

KURIS: Do you think that the nature of corruption has changed over the last five years? Do you see any kind of trends or any changes?

CREPINKO: *What we are seeing—and we don't have many cases this direction- is that we have six criminal cases that are direct corruption, criminal offenses. We see that not a lot of them happened nor are we capable to investigate or hear about them. Many more corruption cases are hidden in other criminal offenses. Is it abuse of power? You know the classical economic criminal offense where you see that the trigger for that offense committed was a corruption case. This is then being investigated as a bigger criminal offense, not as a direct corruption case.*

We saw that this is maybe not police business, but I think everything is police business, from different aspects. The harsher the financial crisis, the more jobs get lost, the lower the ethics and integrity of a person becomes. And now I'm going to the KPK area, not only because a crisis is the time when these things appear, but because people are afraid to lose jobs and are much more easily influenced to do something inappropriate, by the simple fact, "I have to lose three or four so you decide. Either we will do it this way or we will have to say good-bye".

So I think it has changed in one way because in this economic environment, people are doing stupid things in order to survive, in order to keep their companies alive, but also simply from the fact that when the economy is going downhill everybody tries to put something aside often with the abuse of corruption.

KURIS: The public often wants to see short-term, quick victories but a lot of the cases here must be very long-term investigations. How do you manage that challenge? How do you manage to devote the proper resources to do the long-term investigations necessary to trace the money?

CREPINKO: *We are lucky with the staff we have here because they have been trained. I was able to convince them that this is the right way to do things. They know that there are no quick wins. This is one of the things that will probably change in the near future because it is not enough that you are convinced and you're optimistic that this is the right way, have the experience, the knowledge, the international approval of what you do, but you also have to convince your stakeholders and of course your management.*

In the time of crisis everyone would like to have big and fast results and you cannot offer that. Then you have two possibilities, either you change your way and go then for quick wins or you will have to lower the pyramid where you want to end. "That's okay, I can finish all these cases in two months".

KURIS: You won't get to the top kingpin.

CREPINKO: *It is impossible. My brain functions very mathematically.*

KURIS: I did want to ask you about some of the political obstacles. If it makes you more comfortable I can turn off the recorder but then again I won't quote you without permission. First of all it seems that there has been a rotation of acting directors. Has it been difficult getting a permanent director appointed?

CREPINKO: *Just one bit of information is important. When we were established, I was asked to launch the thing, the idea was to make this unit as multi—what is the word, multi-agency? We were looking also for a candidate for the director of the NBI who would not be a police officer. We wanted also to give a signal that things have changed and we wanted to really tackle things differently.*

Then when the publication of the position was written out, the chosen candidate was the former head of the specialized prosecutor's office on the national level dealing with high-level crime. He became the director on the first of July. So I was the acting director for six months, then he became the full power director in July 2010 and he left the office in February 2012. So he was there for almost two years but he left the office because he was appointed as the new head of the specialized prosecutor's office. There was a change in the prosecutor's law and there was a new specialized prosecutor's office established and he went back for that position, he was elected. So that was the reason why he left. He did not finish his five-year mandate.

It is a valid question. I don't have an answer, but I have an opinion on that. Then again I became the acting director as the deputy director. I was hoping that it would be a short period, but it turned out to be eight months. The current situation, a new legal base for the functioning of the police, is being discussed in the parliament already. The director-general explained that he appointed a new acting director and after the adoption of the new legal base there will be a new selection procedure for the full power. So you can say that I'm driving the car in the meantime until a proper director is coming.

KURIS: You said you didn't want to be there for a long time. You don't like to be the director?

CREPINKO: *I did not want to come here—"like" is too strong a word. I never imagined working here because I had a very good job.*

KURIS: Oh yes.

CREPINKO: *Now I love this job. I was deeply convinced that the idea to have a non-police officer as the head of NBI was a good idea. That is the reason why I did not apply for the position the first time and this was the only publication of the post up to this moment.*

KURIS: So why is the government proposing a new police law? What is their justification?

CREPINKO: *This is the million-dollar question. No, to be frank, the Police Act was from 1994 or '97, I don't recall, but it has to be renewed. That is why one year ago there was a decision to make from the one police act, two police acts; one is organizational powers and one is policing power. So there will be police powers in one act and organization in another and part of this new law is also the NBI*

thing. From that moment on, I was involved in the preparation of the first amendment to the old Police Act establishing NPU and I was not involved in the preparation—nobody from the NPU was involved in the preparation-- of the new legal base. So that would be only speculation about how and why. These are the facts.

The director of the NPU will be nominated the same as every other police chief in the country and can also be then removed. I was a very keen supporter of the previous solution. I think this one makes the director a little bit weaker, but I might be called cynical or over frightened.

KURIS: Do you think they might change other things about the structure, like about your powers?

CREPINKO: Yes.

KURIS: Okay. Do you think they would abolish the whole office?

CREPINKO: *No, no. In the coalition agreement, they will strengthen the NPU. Apparently our job according to the media and the public was good, so nobody dared to think to abolish or to make a big change in this. But you know sometimes small changes can have a big influence in the future.*

KURIS: Yes, yes.

CREPINKO: *In the past year, we made searches in the government building of one of the state secretaries of the government, so we are really hitting the right targets. I'm not alone in this opinion and I am very proud of the job we did. So the foundation is very good.*

KURIS: Do you think there is a perception that the NPU leans to one side politically or is there is a perception you go after everybody?

CREPINKO: *You know if you step on the cat's tail the right will scream that it was because of that. Of course, I don't know how it is in other countries you have more experience in that, talking to more people. Particularly in Slovenia, we don't have that traditional approach to the state and to the state authorities that some things are sacred*

I am being investigated by the police, but we will find out what the court will say". You don't criticize police for that. In our country you aim at someone who could be leaning to one wing of the political bus and you hear everybody, politicians, parliament, ministers, ex-ministers, other experts claiming that it is because you have the power. Why I am very happy with the development is because, as I understand criminal offenses at the high level, you have to investigate those who are in power at the present time, not previously. The criminal police in Slovenia are overloaded with cases and it normally takes two or three years to happen. They are investigating cases that have happened in 2005, '06, '07, and '08 at this time.

We were capable of doing that. You get rid of the accusation that the leading party is now investigating the opposition. But I'm happy to say we were attacked from all sides, which is good. So apparently we are doing it right. It's funny, it's controversial, but it is true. The same people have been accused of being the supporters of the right and the left. So we are in a good way. But you can feel it

from the media. Sentences given by different people that they are pushing left, right, left, right, so we are probably in the center.

KURIS: In some countries part of the problem is when a new government comes in they just want to get rid of everything the old government did and take credit for new things. Is that part of the problem too? Is the NPU associated, as a reform with the previous government?

CREPINKO: *Yes. You can sense it, but as I said, probably doing so many good or right things means that we cannot be just simply deleted. Normally the projects of the previous governments are just deleted or stopped being financed or whatever can be done. This is the problem when nothing is sane. If you have time to go through our cases, you can see that now we have right or center parties in the coalition and the vast majority of our cases are from the left political sphere, especially the live cases because they were in the government in the previous period.*

So it is funny, the vast majority of our cases are on the other side and this side is claiming we were connected to the previous government, but it is part of the game.

KURIS: Are there other big obstacles besides the media and the politicians? Let me put it this way, are there challenges that maybe you did not expect coming in?

CREPINKO: *No, but there is one thing. I like to be prepared and this is sometimes an obstacle to happiness in life. I try to keep my eyes very open and I see bad things that can happen. I like to be positively surprised not negatively. We were really preparing for the worst-case scenario and we are in that scope.*

One thing we did not mention is the pressure on our workers. When you have a new team, especially the first time the thirty investigators begin, I said to them, "Please prepare yourselves and your families and friends that they will hear things about you in the media that only you will know are not true and everybody else will be sure that is true". This is the biggest pressure, this and also of course, criminal charges from the defendants.

KURIS: Oh yes, defamation charges.

CREPINKO: *So I have faced it, I have been to court and this is one of the pressures that we have seen.*

KURIS: What about the budget of the NPU? Has it suffered a lot with the economic crisis and the change in government?

CREPINKO: *It has changed. Luckily the project was the most active in 2009 when the money was still here more or less. The big investments had been done in 2009 and '10, so the cars, the building, the computers, everything that was needed, was there. But we could see already in 2011, for those guys who came to us from the outside, it was foreseen by all of them that to go their way, they would need to go to trainings and seminars, in their branch, in order to keep everybody in good shape for a long time. The budget for the education and training went down of course when the money ran out. This is the area that suffered the most, but we still managed to get the training that was really important, but there was a big, big*

decrease on this. So the budget remained the same in other areas, but education training, international travel and these activities were reduced the most.

KURIS: So you didn't have to lay off any staff or anybody?

CREPINKO: *No.*

KURIS: Do you have a separate line in the budget or is it just part of the—?

CREPINKO: *No, it is part of the criminal police.*

KURIS: If you could have any reforms that you would like if you weren't under this pressure, but instead the government came to you and said, "Mr. Crepinko, how can we improve things? How can we help you?" what would be on your wish list of reforms?

CREPINKO: *I would have on my wish list a specialized prosecutor and a court dealing only with our cases. I have to say we have that. There is a specialized group of prosecutors who are led now by a former director of NPU. It is still employing staff so it is on the rise. It will function probably in the near future. They are overloaded with cases. I would wish for myself a group of prosecutors able to say what they will do and not do and a group of judges dealing with our cases who would be educated and trained in this area. It is also in the written law. They are already being elected, but it is still being constructed.*

I would wish for myself a different legal basis for the criminal procedure. It is not functioning well. It is old. It is not systematic. It causes a lot of problems. It allows court procedures to take six, seven or eight years, as I explained to you before. It is not very efficient.

KURIS: I have heard that there are some efforts at reforming the criminal procedure process to introduce more plea-bargaining.

CREPINKO: *Yes, the problem with our criminal procedure code is that it has been amended too many times. We are now talking about amendment "L." So the first amendment was "A." You can imagine, then, how many amendments of the act there have been up to this moment. It is very difficult to build something very nice on an old foundation; it is easier to tear it apart and build it new, but nobody really has an idea which model to take. Also the integration model is not perfect but it allows some cases to come to an end. Maybe it is not politically correct, but such cases will never come to an end in Slovenia.*

KURIS: Because there are so many ways to delay it?

CREPINKO: *Yes, not motivate witnesses to wait to testify.*

KURIS: I hear this a lot from countries I go to, Lithuania and Latvia.

CREPINKO: *Yes?*

KURIS: Do you have any reflections or advice for people in your position in other countries that might start a specialized group like this?

CREPINKO: *We have put a lot of security measures in the law to protect the unit, to protect the cases, to protect the investigators, but they can still be changed very easily if there is political will that is part of the democratic model. So you have to work*

hard on the integrity of the people working there. You have to be a little bit crazy, you have to be enthusiastic and you have to be well educated. You have to make your own safeguards in order to be successful. You have to be very self-confident that you are doing a good job although you are reading every day that you are doing a poor job, a wrong one. It takes a steady personality.

KURIS: Do you have code of conduct?

CREPINKO: Yes.

KURIS: Special?

CREPINKO: *No we have the general one for the police, but it is a valid one. It is rather new and modern.*

KURIS: Are there any other measures you use to ensure the integrity and cohesiveness of the group, a common ethos?

CREPINKO: *Luckily up to this moment, we were a rather small group. Because of our history, excluding here the new colleagues who came from outside, almost everybody knew each other from before. There was this common wish to do something different. We saw the vast majority of stuff as a huge privilege to do something new, something different in our organization. This is what I am trying to explain to them now when they're talking about wanting more money and everything else.*

There was an idea at the beginning that this unit should be totally separated as NBI maybe, as a prosecutors' office, somewhere else. We would have lost eighty good-paying work jobs in the police. We have kept it here, but now it seems to be a problem. Why do we have these guys who are better paid? So we are trying to reduce stress through openness. My approach to management, to leading the organization was always to give as much space to the investigators and as much independence as possible, but still be in the police organization. It is also not appreciated in the old rigid organizations.

Now when we are facing these changes it will come for sure. I spoke to other colleagues in Europe and other places. There are always two questions: one of them is, "Okay, this sounds very nice but if half of it is true why are you still active, why haven't you been demolished by politicians earlier?" The second thing I then say is that it was a huge privilege, first to have the opportunity in your job to work on such a project, to get resources, to get knowledge, energy. Then to work in the project you have helped to establish which is of course then a big challenge. You cannot say, "This idiot made something and I have to deal with it" because you're the idiot who did it. It was a lot of hard work and a lot of fun the previous three years.

KURIS: One quick question about the staff. For the outside staff you recruited them through an open recruitment process it sounds like but then for the police staff you just went with the people you know because it is very small?

CREPINKO: *No, the procedure was the same, it was written in the law that there has to be a special selection procedure which involves not only experts in the police but it is obligation that also experts from this, what we call the closest partners, so KPK colleagues were part of the selection procedure, money laundering, tax authority, customs authority. So there was a team, I was the head of the selection committee. There were experts from the human resources unit and two or three guys from this. It had two purposes. One, they helped us to check their*

knowledge in other areas, not only the police, and the other one was to prevent anybody, including me, myself, to build up a unit on some other criteria than strictly business needs based. It was a wise thing to write. It is nice to think why we did it and see how right we were.

KURIS: It must be very difficult in such a small country; you must know all the peace officers.

CREPINKO: *Yes, and this was the problem when we were talking now about the relationship between NPU and regional police directorates. We had to say no to more than a hundred very good police investigators. "Sorry, we will not take you". Of course they went back "Who do they think they are, they're earning more money". The loudest criticism from inside was of course from those guys. But we had only 38 posts and there were 160 internal candidates to fill out these posts. When you take on such a project something you have to take care of is internal communication and relationships, especially in a small country, in this cultural environment, which in my opinion and by my experience, is not in other cultural environments. Like Germany, when they publish jobs you get it or you don't get it. Then you apply in two years again. We are more passionate maybe because we are a little bit more to the south. "Who do they think they are"?*

KURIS: Yes, there are not always new opportunities here because it is a small country. Are there other challenges from being a small country, like for the crush of investigation or—?

CREPINKO: *The biggest problem is that everybody knows everybody. This is the biggest problem. You have to survive, investigating somebody who is living on the same street. Okay, we are avoiding that because if we have a case and the investigator says, "I'm connected to that person from there to there". Then we of course move the investigator so nobody investigates somebody he personally knows.*

KURIS: But that must be difficult because everyone does know everyone. It is very difficult to avoid the conflict of interest?

CREPINKO: *Yes, there was only one case where one investigator said that his girlfriend was somehow connected to the accused persons.*

KURIS: Thank you for allowing me to take up so much of your time.

CREPINKO: *It was a pleasure.*