



Mediation as a Response to the Challenges of Our Time: From an Alternative to an Essential Social Competence

CONFERENCE MARKING THE 20TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE SLOVENIAN
ASSOCIATION OF MEDIATORS (DMS)

**FACULTY OF LAW,
UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
29–30 SEPTEMBER 2026**



8.45 – 9.30

Registration

9.30

Welcome Address:

Aleksander Jakobčič, President of the Slovenian Association of Mediators

9.45

Opening Address:

Mihael Zupančič, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Slovenia

10.00 – 11.30

Panel Discussion: Mediation and Society

Peaceful Conflict Management as the Foundation of a Culture of Dialogue and Modern Society

This panel will explore the broader societal role of mediation and peaceful conflict management, examining how mediation competencies contribute to the development of contemporary society. Since conflict is an inevitable aspect of human coexistence, the essential question is not how to eliminate conflict, but how to understand and manage it in ways that foster dialogue, cooperation and trust.

The discussion will be based on the premise that mediation is important not only because it helps resolve disputes, but because it cultivates a way of thinking that enables coexistence within a pluralistic society. At the same time, the panel will emphasize that mediation is not a panacea for all social conflicts. Its value lies not in denying differences, competing interests or power imbalances, but in creating a space where these can become the subject of constructive dialogue. Dialogue and mutual respect are not prerequisites of mediation but rather objectives of the mediation process, which is grounded in patience, responsibility and careful consideration of the specific context, interests, timing and circumstances of each conflict. This pragmatic approach gives mediation its unique social value and establishes it as one of the key competencies of the twenty-first century.

The panel will seek to answer whether peaceful conflict management should be understood merely as a method of dispute resolution or as one of the fundamental social competencies of the twenty-first century.



MODERATOR:



Aleksander Jakobčič

is President of the Slovenian Association of Mediators, mediator, entrepreneur with extensive experience in the international business environment, negotiator, and doctoral researcher in diplomacy and international relations. His professional work focuses on mediation, negotiation, conflict management, and the role of dialogue and peaceful conflict management in contemporary society. He actively contributes to the development of mediation, the education of mediators and negotiators, and the promotion of a culture of constructive conflict management both nationally and internationally.

PANELISTS:

Assoc. Prof. dr. Jernej Završnik, MD, Consultant Paediatrician,

is Associate Professor of Paediatrics at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Maribor, Director of the Dr. Adolf Drolc Health Centre in Maribor, and an expert in child health, leadership and mediation. His work focuses on communication, conflict resolution and mediation in healthcare. He co-founded the first mediation office within the Slovenian healthcare system and has chaired the Mediation Council of the Medical Chamber of Slovenia since 2019. He is the author of numerous scientific and professional publications.



Prof. dr. Svetlana Slapšak,

is a classical philologist, anthropologist, public intellectual and one of the most prominent intellectuals in the former Yugoslav region. Her work bridges the humanities, social criticism, human rights, and issues of culture and social coexistence. She has published more than 100 books and has received numerous national and international awards, including the American PEN Freedom of Expression Award, the Helsinki Watch Award, and the Župančič Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2005 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as part of the 1000 Women for Peace initiative.





Assoc. Prof. dr. Boris Vezjak,

is a philosopher, public intellectual and Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. His research focuses on the history of philosophy, discourse theory, argumentation and media analysis. He is widely recognised for his critical analyses of media and political discourse, as well as issues concerning media accountability. He is the author of numerous scholarly publications and a regular columnist and commentator on social and political affairs.



Dr. Janez Markeš,

is a philosopher, scholar of religion, journalist, editor and commentator, and one of Slovenia's leading public intellectuals in the fields of political philosophy and social issues. Throughout his distinguished journalistic career at Slovenec, Mag and Delo, he has established himself as an insightful analyst of politics, society and the culture of dialogue. He is the author of The Point of National Misunderstanding and Reflections on Slovenia.





DAY 1

11.30 – 12.00 **Questions and Audience Discussion**

12.00 – 13.00 **Lunch break**

13.00 – 14.30 **Workshop:** From Exploration to Negotiation:
Facilitating the Transition to Generating Solution

The transition from exploration to negotiation is one of the most critical stages of the mediation process. How does a mediator recognise that the exploration phase has achieved its purpose? What should the mediator understand about the parties' interests, needs and constraints, and how can the information gathered during exploration be used to facilitate an effective transition into negotiation?

Through a practical workshop, participants will explore how to organise and connect the information obtained during the exploration phase, identify each party's interests as well as their shared and compatible interests, and use these insights to formulate the key issues the parties need to address. Particular attention will be given to the transition itself—how to summarise the discussion and open negotiations in a way that enables the parties to move from understanding the past towards jointly exploring possible solutions.

Through practical exercises and guided reflection, participants will develop the skills needed to manage this transition in a thoughtful and effective manner.

14.30 -15.00 **Coffee Break**

15.00 – 16.00 **Workshop:** From Exploration to Negotiation:
Facilitating the Transition to Generating Solution (part two)



WORKSHOP CO-FACILITATOR:



Rudi Tavčar

holds a degree in Psychology, an MBA in Management, and is an Imago Relationship Therapist, mediator and mediation trainer. He is a founding member of the Slovenian Association of Mediators, former Vice-President of the Association, and one of the co-developers of its mediator training programmes. In his professional work, he combines management, entrepreneurial and therapeutic experience, delivering training in mediation, negotiation, communication, conflict resolution and team development. He is co-author of the book *Mediation in Theory and Practice* and author of *The Psychology of Negotiation – How to Achieve What You Want While Preserving the Relationship*.

WORKSHOP CO-FACILITATOR

Simona Frumen

is a lawyer, mediator and mediation trainer. Since 2005, she has been actively conducting mediations at the District Court in Ljubljana, several Local Courts, and since 2021 at the Higher Court in Ljubljana and, since 2025, at the Higher Court in Koper. She also provides mediation services outside court proceedings. As a trainer, she contributes to mediator training programmes organised by the Slovenian Association of Mediators, the Association of Centres for Social Work, and through her private practice. She helps organisations strengthen collaboration by transferring mediation skills to leaders and teams, enabling them to communicate more effectively and manage conflicts constructively. She also has extensive experience in conducting online mediations and facilitating peer supervision sessions for both new and experienced mediators, providing professional and collegial support in addressing practical mediation challenges.





DAY 2

9.15 – 10.00

Registration

10.00 – 11.30

Panel Discussion:

*Court-Annexed Mediation,
Significance, Challenges and Future Perspectives*

The panellists will explore the role and future of court-annexed mediation. They will present current developments and statistical trends, discuss the future direction of court-annexed mediation, and consider whether participation in an initial information session with a mediator should become mandatory.

The Head of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Department at the Higher Court in Ljubljana will explain the benefits of mediation at the appellate level and discuss whether similar opportunities should also be available before the Supreme Court. A participant in the Teneiške environmental mediation will share first-hand experience of taking part in a mediation involving more than 300 participants, highlighting the unique challenges of such complex proceedings. Participants will also gain insight into the experience of parties awaiting the implementation of mediation agreements.

The panel will conclude with a broader discussion on the future of mediation, asking whether mediation has developed to a stage where out-of-court mediation alone could meet society's needs.

MODERATOR:



Mag. Gordana Ristin

is a mediator, former Senior High Court Judge and one of the pioneers of mediation in Slovenia. Since 2001 she has been actively engaged in court-annexed mediation and, as the long-serving Head of the Mediation Department at the Higher Court in Ljubljana, has made a significant contribution to the development of judicial mediation. She is Honorary President and Vice-President of the Slovenian Association of Mediators, lecturer, author of numerous professional publications and an active member of several international mediation organisations.

PANELISTS:

Prof. dr. Marjeta Terčelj Zorman, MD,

is a specialist in internal medicine and pulmonology and Full Professor of Internal Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana. She headed the Department of Pulmonology and Allergology at the University Medical Centre Ljubljana for many years and has made a significant contribution to the development of modern pulmonology in Slovenia. She is the author of numerous scientific publications, mentor to young researchers and, since 2007, Vice-Chair of the National Medical Ethics Committee of Slovenia.



Gregor Špajzer

is a Senior Judge at the Higher Court in Ljubljana, where he has headed the Department for Alternative Dispute Resolution since 2024. He has served as a mediator in the court-annexed mediation programme since 2010 and at the Higher Court in Ljubljana since 2021. His professional work focuses on the development of mediation and alternative dispute resolution within the judicial system.



Mag. Valerija Jelen Kosi

is a Senior High Court Judge at the Higher Court in Ljubljana, specialising in commercial and insolvency law. As a long-standing judge, mediator and mediation trainer, she has made an important contribution to the development of alternative dispute resolution in Slovenia. At the Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia, she leads project teams within the Improving the Quality of the Judiciary programme, recipient of the European Crystal Scales of Justice Prize. She is a member of the Council for Alternative Dispute Resolution at the Ministry of Justice and co-author of the book Mediation in Theory and Practice.





11.30 – 12.00 **Questions and Audience Discussion**

12.00 – 13.00 **Lunch break**

13.00 – 14.30 **Workshop:** Why Do People Persist in Conflict?
The Psychology of Conflict from the Perspective of Developmental Analytical Psychotherapy

Why do people remain trapped in conflict even when it is clear that everyone is losing? Why do they reject reasonable proposals, cling to the need to be right, or become willing to pay a high price simply to avoid giving in?

This lecture offers a psychological perspective on conflict, exploring why people sometimes act against their own interests. Through real-life examples and psychological paradoxes, participants will examine how conflict changes the way people think, what they are actually trying to protect, and why understanding these underlying processes can open new possibilities for conflict resolution.

14.30 – 15.00 **Coffee Break**

15.00 – 16.00 **Lecture: Mediators Do Not Resolve Conflicts.**
What, Then, Makes Mediation Successful?
If the parties themselves make all the decisions, what is the mediator's real contribution?

This lecture offers a different perspective on the mediator's role—not as a problem solver, but as someone who creates the conditions in which people become able to listen, reflect and search for mutually acceptable solutions. Through practical examples and psychological paradoxes, participants will explore why the way a conversation is facilitated, the ability to tolerate tension, and an understanding of human behaviour are often more important than the strongest arguments or the most carefully crafted proposals.

16.00 – 17.00 **Closing Reception,**
Award Ceremony and Musical Performance *by Propertea*



Dr. Polona Matjan Štuhec

is a clinical psychologist, psychotherapist, group analyst, supervisor and training analyst specialising in clinical psychology and developmental analytical psychotherapy. She has extensive experience in clinical practice, university teaching and professional education. She completed postgraduate training in group analysis at the Institute of Group Analysis in London and holds the European Certificate of Psychotherapy. A former President of the Slovenian Psychological Association, she currently chairs the Ethics Committee of the Chamber of Clinical Psychologists of Slovenia. She continues to lecture and provide professional training in Slovenia and internationally.

Društvo mediatorjev
Slovenije

