

Portrait of an Activist



Elena Pečarič sings, writes, shoots and edits videos, leads, protests... Elena Pečarič ran for President of Slovenia and tried to become a Member of European Parliament. Elena Pečarič is a woman with muscular dystrophy "spinalis progresiva" and has been using

a wheelchair all her life but she does not feel disabled. She fights for equal rights and for other issues. Elena Pečarič is a politician is a free politician that refuses to bind herself to a party but only to her values and ideas and she does so with an ironic sense of humour. Do you think this is possible?

The story the documentary is based on is Elena Pečarič's attempt to become a Member of European Parliament. The camcorder documenting her struggle is always by her side. To achieve her goal, she needed either the support of four members of the National Assembly (Slovenian parliament) or signatures of support from citizens of Slovenia. Both objectives turned out to be impossible to for her to achieve. National Assembly members liked her very much and have immense respect for her and her work - at least that is what they all assured her. However the signatures of support of the members, whose parties have candidates of their own, would effectively mean their withdrawal of support for their own candidate. Even members whose parties did not have candidates of their own ultimately decided against supporting Elena. On the other hand, collecting signatures of the citizens, certified at administrative units, would require resources which Elena did not have.

Against all odds, she succeeded in being involved in politics a few years ago. Elena Pečarič became involved in political discourse of Presidential Elections of 2007 at the highest level and raised questions about equality and equal opportunities for all. She is a person who refuses to be silent; far from it, she speaks out loudly and draws attention to important issues – breaches of basic human rights, problems faced by Slovenian disabled people, the mistakes and broken promises of Slovenian politicians amongst others.

Elena's progressive political convictions and determination are the qualities that make her an excellent journalist. She is a columnist and

journalist of the web news portal Vest and column editor and author of features and interviews for a web news portal Eurovizija (Eurovision) whose focus is the European Parliament. Primary points of interest of her journalistic work are disability and issues dealing with the European Union, however she does not shy away from other important political topics either. Elena is also a video documentarist. Ever since she has fastened a camcorder to her wheelchair, she has been shooting features and interviews. She also creates original satirical videos that ridicule current affairs in politics and in our community. They are an important part of Elena's creative process, through which she expresses her views of our social reality that she at the same time mocks.

During her struggle to become an MEP candidate, Elena founded Equal Opportunity Party with the help of like-minded people. The party represents a natural continuity of her political life in which she has always declined to conform to existing political groups. When it was founded, the party was too small to provide Elena with meaningful support for her MEP candidacy. However, she is confident that the party has a future because equal opportunity is a far-reaching concept, covering much more than merely issues concerning disability.

During Elena Pečarič's preparations for candidacy she published a book titled "Eutropy". In it she discloses her idea of European Union, which should, in her opinion, become even more focused on equality in terms of social, interpersonal and international relations. Elena Pečarič criticizes the Lisbon Treaty. She takes issue with militarisation of politics and poses questions about equality as a universal political issue, for which she attempts to provide answers. Esteemed Slovenian intellectuals have reviewed her book as an important contribution to the debate on the future of the European Union.

Elena Pečarič was born in 1971 in Ljubljana and was the founding force and co-creator of an informal group Youth Handicapped Deprivileged, which was later developed into the Association for Theory and Culture of Handicap, where she is still employed since 2000. The association provides personal assistance to many disabled persons all over Slovenia and attempts to conceptualise



the policy of disability. Elena is YHD's running force who will not let its activities come to a halt even for a second.

Beside the plethora of Elena's activities linked to activism (which apart from what is mentioned above, range from protests against militarisation of politics to organisation of petition against GMOs), for which a 24-hour day is too short, the film also documents her intimate relationships; with her parents, friends, co-workers, and people who help her lead a life through personal assistance. Their stories portray Elena as a steadfast person who does not accept objections with grace but at the same time she also never shies away from taking on more and more responsibilities. Her recollections of her youth disclose a segregation policy against disabled persons, against which Elena still struggles relentlessly. The institution in which she spent the years of her elementary and secondary education was a place of severe abuse and source of memory of being taken away from her family and put away for many years. Still, there she met teachers and friends that she has been working with until now. Her recollections of childhood and traumatic years inside the institution for disabled children and youth uncover her motivation to become, as she dubs herself, "a rebel with a cause".

Elena Pečarič is a philosopher who wants to understand the world. As she puts it: "Disability is not something you have; it is the society that defines you as disabled." Elena Pečarič speaks frankly about her disability, religion, life and death and about why she has become a woman without prejudice, open-minded, with fresh ideas, an activist and critic of modern society. Elena ultimately failed to become an MEP candidate but, of course, that does not deter her from trying again. Although she did not succeed, she is not disappointed. Her struggle continues.

A Documentary film about politics, disability, activism, art and journalism.

Producer: Jani Sever

Directors: Marko Bratuš, Katja Lenart

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Info: Vest d.o.o. Vožarski pot 3

1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija

info@vest.si

