

# Fresh Energy SOLUTIONS

Since its establishment in 2004, GEN-I Group has been ranked among the most innovative and rapidly growing market players in the European electricity market.

Images courtesy of GEN-I Group

**G**EN-I Group was established in 2004 and is owned equally by parent company GEN Energija d.o.o. and shareholder IC Energetski Sistemi. With presence in Central and Southeast Europe, the business operates on a sales and trading model. Its activities include international electricity trading, the sale of electricity to end customers and associated purchases of electricity from producers.

Robert Golob became CEO of GEN-I Group in 2006. He says the group is highly knowledgeable in the electricity field, as well as flexible and respectful—all key values that have enabled it to achieve great success. “Our success truly lies in being the most advanced and the most knowledgeable player on the market,” Robert explains. “Flexibility means that it’s not enough to develop a solution and then just stick to it; you need to constantly improve it because that’s how you stay ahead of the flux, or competition, as well.

“Finally, respect doesn’t just mean that you ask for respect, but that

you give respect to all those who can contribute to your success. That’s what comes when you truly work within a team. Some of the people at GEN-I Group have been together for more than 15 years, working as a team in various fields even before the business was founded.”

Robert started his professional career in academia and after roughly a decade moved into public administration. He worked as the Republic of Slovenia’s Secretary of Energy, which was an appointed role straddling the line between administration and politics. In 2002, he joined the business environment, which is where the first foundations for GEN-I Group were set.

“I would say I had three different stages in my professional career, and being in business was the latest one,” Robert says. “This has helped a lot to be able to understand all three different environments. On one hand, the academia with all the research-oriented tasks; on the other hand, the public administration and dealing with politicians; and, of course, applying all that knowledge

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and experience to the energy sector. This has helped a lot because energy is quite tightly related to both—the research on the one side and the public administration on the other.”

GEN-I Group is still fairly new to the game and was created on the idea that there needed to be an organisation which was different and better than what was already out there—offering fresh solutions, tailoring its services to the customer and providing win-win results. “We need to reinvent those products and solutions every day and every year to stay ahead of the competition,” Robert says. “That’s how we have ensured our expansion throughout the years, through purely organic means. We haven’t done any acquisitions as yet. We just organically grew to our present level in the past nine years.”

Currently, the group is breaking up the monopoly that exists in the European electricity space. In 2012, it entered into the gas market and in a period of fewer than three months it was able to secure approximately 20 per cent of the market share >



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in the Slovenian market—a significant achievement.

Robert says the future is also looking positive as there will be more industry harmonisation, which means fewer obstacles for international trade and the potential for GEN-I Group to be able to cover a broader geographical area. “This is exactly what we are looking for,” he notes. “It is bringing more opportunity. So, whenever we are speaking about an ‘energy union’, which is a political buzzword at the moment, that supports our business because it facilitates cross-border trading and it also somehow harmonises the regulatory environment in different countries. That all works for us.”

GEN-I Group’s operations are predominantly in Central and Southeastern Europe where the landscape is quite fragmented in terms of the number of countries and regulatory environments. This provides a challenge for the group as it has to adapt and link them all into a network that works. However, this hasn’t hampered the business’s success. “We are, at the moment, the leading trader in the region, meaning that we cover all of these 19 national markets in the most efficient way. Really, the most important thing for us is to build the business infrastructure and the interfaces to link together all of these

*“Our collaboration is driven by our common interests and wish to create synergies in the field of electricity retailing. Elektro Ljubljana d.d. is striving to join forces with GEN-I d.o.o. for the development of new market opportunities outside Slovenia.” - Andrej Ribič, CEO and President of the Management Board, Elektro Ljubljana d.d.*



different regulatory environments into the one platform.”

Having said this, it is a constant challenge for Robert and his team to navigate and make the right decisions in each particular setting. “There’s not just one national regulatory framework; there’s a myriad of them. In different countries the regulatory environment is changing at different paces but for whatever reason they often come into a conflict with the state-dominated monopoly. It’s almost a rule that they influence the politics in that particular country and they then exercise that regulatory power against us. That’s really the challenge: how to, on one hand, keep below the radar of the state monopolies and, on the other hand, to still be effective in terms of our business activities in each particular country.”

Robert states that customer relations are of high importance to GEN-I Group. The company is unique in that it wants to consistently be the first to develop new products or services that cater to the specific needs of its clientele. “We don’t just bring to our customers the lowest prices. That is easy enough to do, but we also bring them the most added value. This means we provide them with a service where they can lower the price as well as improve what they do in terms of lowering the costs of their operations. That is a real advantage when it comes to what we do compared to what our competition is doing.”

“We believe the real and most valuable asset that we have in this business is our employees.”

- Robert Golob



A strong relationship with its main supplier and partner has also contributed to GEN-I Group’s success. When it was founded, the executive leadership team quickly recognised the need to develop a strong and beneficial tie with GEN Energija, the second-largest producer of electricity in Slovenia. “The nurturing of this particular relationship is of crucial importance,” Robert explains.

“It was even more so in the past when we were still small and we wanted to grow. But in the past nine years we have already overgrown the production capacity of GEN Energija and now we are at almost 10 times the volume of what they produce. At the initial phase, it was really important to have this backup from our key supplier and parent company. Now it’s much easier, not just because we have GEN Energija on our side but also because we were able to develop a sound framework that we can apply to our other suppliers as well because GEN Energija still remains the 50-per-cent owner of GEN-I Group.”

Finally, Robert’s staff are an integral part of the progress GEN-I Group has experienced throughout its existence. What started as a team of five people back in 2004 has since grown to almost 300. “We believe the real and most

valuable asset that we have in this business is our employees. We do not just invest in them in terms of money; it’s mainly investing in them in terms of giving them the opportunity and the power to develop themselves. They are also given managerial support for whatever they propose to do.”

GEN-I Group offers a number of programs for all levels, from juniors right up to management, and tries to instil a great working culture. “That can sometimes be a challenge,” Robert says. “It’s easy to have one culture when it’s five of you and you have known each other for years but it’s another matter when you have 300 people and you want to keep the same culture, the bonding or friendship or collegiality when you grow instead of just staying the same as what you were in the beginning. This is what we are currently working on the most.

“We have registered substantial progress in the last few years but we definitely still have space to improve. And it is a twofold challenge. On one hand, how to improve the managerial skills of our team leaders and, on the other hand, we need to bring more focus on the junior level to be able to fully exploit the potential that the new employees could bring to the company.” •