

# MEDIS – A Prescription for Growth

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Every year, the great and the good of Central and South East Europe's (CSEE) medical profession get together at the International Medis Awards for Medical Research. In the area these so-called 'Medical Oscars' are judged by a team of independent experts and are given to the doctors and pharmacists who have published the most outstanding examples of clinical research over the previous year.

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**T**he awards are the brainchild of Tone Strnad, owner and founder of the Slovenian firm Medis which is involved in the commercialization of innovative pharmaceutical and other medicinal products in the CSEE. The company celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this year and there is much for Strnad and his CEO Dr. Martina Perharič to celebrate. Analysis by Fitch Solutions recently predicted that the region's pharmaceutical market should grow at a CAGR of 8.7% for the next three years. As one of the CSEE's leading companies in the field, Medis can, therefore, look forward with confidence to many more years' impressive growth of its own.

The future did not always seem so promising. Strnad set up Medis to represent foreign pharmaceutical companies looking

to make inroads into what was then Yugoslavia in 1989, but that was just before war engulfed the region. Although the business initially shrank into confines of the Slovenian market, Strnad gradually rebuilt the Medis network to include first Croatia and then Serbia.

Today, Medis has a footprint that stretches from Austria to Bulgaria and which provides its partners with a single-entry point for ten CSEE countries and access to some 50 million potential customers. This alone has persuaded some of the world's largest and most respected pharmaceutical companies to enter into partnership with Strnad, and Medis is now the regional partner of choice for companies like Actelion, Biogen, B Braun, Glaxo Consumer Health, and UCB.

There is much more to Medis than its geographical reach. "We are unique in that we offer our partners a complete turnkey service that includes the registration, market access, marketing, medical support and distribution of new products in a complex and challenging - but also rewarding - part of Europe," says Strnad. "Anybody looking to access the various markets here faces numerous regulatory and cultural barriers as well as the combination of the cost of high-value medicines and the relative low GDP per capita. We have a track record in successfully navigating those barriers."

A major part of that success derives from the strength and depth of the relationships that the Medis team has built up over the past three decades with the region's healthcare professionals, authorities and other stakeholders. All of these have come to appreciate the company's integrity, reliability and dedication to quality, as well as something else that sets it apart from the competition – its business development skills.

With more than 100 successful and innovative product launches to its name, keeping abreast of and frequently anticipating market developments is second nature to Strnad and Perharič. It has also proved to be a highly lucrative trait, which saw the company's turnover surpass €100m (\$115 million) in 2018.

But the motivation is not purely financial. As the company's sponsorship of an awards ceremony celebrating medical research



Tone Strnad owner and founder,  
and Dr. Martina Perharič CEO of MEDIS

implies, Strnad and Perharič are particularly proud of their work in the growing field of 'orphan' drugs, those pharmaceutical agents now being developed to treat rare medical conditions which by their very nature have limited application.

"We are striving to find cures for these rare conditions, and we are happy to be able to help the pharmaceutical companies working in this field," Perharič says. "It can be very difficult for them even to find the sufferers, as rare illnesses are often hidden." The company's role in helping the US-based firm PTC Therapeutics save the lives of three boys with muscular dystrophy is a particular source of satisfaction. "It is almost as if we adopted these children ourselves," she says.

The quest for innovative medical solutions continues relentlessly and the company is currently working with Germany's Biotest to develop a range of products developed from human plasma for use in emergency intensive care and transplants. "Here, too we are helping doctors by developing innovative solutions for their patients."

While Strnad and Perharič are always on the look-out for new ideas, there is also a strong holistic element to their management style and the company culture they have nurtured over the years. There is an illuminating video clip on the company website that features a sequence of staff members (including the two principals) smiling and laughing. The laughter is, the caption says, the best medicine of all. Good advice from two people with good reason to be happy.

