

## **Welcome address**

### **by Professor Boštjan Žekš, President of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts**

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Participants in the 44<sup>th</sup> meeting of the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists,

It is an honour to be able to speak to you at the beginning of this meeting, and to welcome you personally and on behalf of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts. It gives me great pleasure for a number of reasons. First, the general reason that in Slovenia we are always happy to play host to important international gatherings of scientists and specialists. Slovenia gained its independence 15 years ago, at the same time as it made the move to a democratic government, and we are still in a transition from a more closed system to one that is much more open and more integrated with the world. Politically, this transition took place very quickly and very successfully, but the transition within our minds takes place at a slower pace. This makes it very important for us to establish new links with the world and strengthen existing ones, and that is just one of the benefits this meeting will bring.

The second reason for my satisfaction at your presence here today is that Slovenia – though a small and relatively young country – has a rather lengthy tradition in the field of forensic toxicology, with the first toxicological research in Slovenia being carried out in 1946 at the University of Ljubljana's Institute of Forensic Medicine. The father of Slovenian forensic toxicology was Professor Janez Milčinski, who was also a member of our Academy and indeed our president from 1976 to 1992. He led the Institute of Forensic Medicine for many years, and even after he left the institute he continued to develop its activity and is responsible for organising this meeting.

Above all, I am extremely pleased that your meeting will include a discussion on scopolamine, as well as a trip to Idrija, where Joannes Antonius Scopoli, the doctor and natural scientist after whom the drug is named, worked from 1754 to 1769. Idrija is a town surrounded by hills and pristine countryside, where living conditions have always been difficult. After the discovery of mercury at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Idrija developed into an important mining town, attracting numerous top experts in the technical and natural sciences, as well as encouraging the development of education, as Slovenia's first-ever grammar school was founded in that town. The case of Idrija indicates the importance of having an educated population. In 1995, when the exploitation of mercury was no longer commercially viable, they started to close down the mine, which could have been a disaster for the town, which depended on the mine for its livelihood. But that was not the case. Instead, they developed new, modern industries, and the Idrija region today is home to some of Slovenia's top-ten companies, which operate successfully both on the domestic market and abroad. It is examples like Idrija that makes us realise here in Slovenia – which does not have a great wealth of natural resources – just how important knowledge is, because only knowledge can provide the basis for our development.

I wish all of you every success in your work, and an enjoyable stay in Slovenia.

Boštjan Žekš, Academy Membe, President of SASA