

»BANKING WORLD FASCINATES ME AS OUR WORK HAS AN IMPORTANT IMPACT ON DAILY LIVES OF OUR CLIENTS. WE SUPPORT THEIR INVESTMENT INITIATIVES, PROVIDE THEM WITH FINANCIAL ADVICE FOR THEIR FINANCIAL WELL-BEING AND WITH THE BROAD SPECTRUM OF BANKING AND PAYMENT SERVICES WE OFFER. WITH THAT, WE CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.«

ANTONIO ARGIR, MEMBER OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD, NLB D.D.

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Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova, photos by Urša Premik and Boris Pretnar

Congratulations for the IEDC alumni achievement award, first of all! Well-deserved! When one looks at your professional career, your steady and constant progress, a question immediately pops up – what kind of qualities must a person possess and cultivate in oneself and how much hard work is behind all that?

Thank you very much for

the congratulations. Each individual is unique, but I believe you cannot be successful without a personal vision, willingness to learn and eagerness to step out of your comfort zone. I always say that everyone should always have a vision to adhere to but at the same time beware not to be obsessed with it. Once you are motivated to accomplish something, you have to work hard and go the extra mile to achieve it. Talent is not enough; hard work and braveness

makes the difference and is a precondition to realizing your full potential.

On the other hand, I would also like to emphasize that professional success is much easier to achieve if



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you have the support of the organization you work for and their understanding of how important it is for people to grow and excel, to be brave, dedicated and proactive. I must emphasize that NLB is such an organization, and I am very grateful for that. Last but not least, I am grateful to my colleagues. I believe that only teamwork can lead to extraordinary achievements. For me, a dream job is teamwork!

When your sons learnt you are getting an award, what was their reaction?

In general, I am not overwhelming my family with news about my achievements. We are an ordinary family and I try to be an ordinary father. Nevertheless, I am happy to share my achievements with my sons and wife, as their support is a vital for my success.

Family means a lot to me, so I was especially happy that my two sons and wife attended the Alumni Achievement Award ceremony. They also attended my MBA graduation ceremony at IEDC seven years ago.

Did you always imagine yourself working in a financial sector, in a bank?



Banks are an important pillar of society as they can contribute to better business conditions, higher employment, and, most importantly, to the financial literacy.

It was in mid-high school when I decided to study Economics. During the study of Macroeconomics, I enrolled into Finance and Banking. Today, after I've been working for more than 20 years in banking, I am still very passionate about my work. Banking world fascinates me as our work has an important impact on daily lives of our clients. We support their investment initiatives, provide them with financial advice for their financial well-being and with the broad spectrum of banking and payment services we offer. With that, we contribute to our society as a whole. Banks are an important pillar of society as they can contribute to better business conditions, higher employment, and most importantly, to the financial literacy. At NLB Group we are focused on our home region – Southeastern Europe. We want to take care of our region to the fullest we can and thus improve the quality of life.

In 2022, with your promotion within NLB came also the relocation from Macedonia to Slovenia, to Ljubljana. How do you find the change and living here so far? How is your family adapting? How often do you manage to go home? Anything you miss here in particular or don't have time to think about it?

I do not perceive this relocation as a move from one country to another. I am a member of the NLB family, and we do not perceive our region as a sum of several countries, but we treat the entire region as our home. In addition to that Slovenia is

not so foreign to us, as me and my wife have worked for Slovenian companies and visited Slovenia quite often in the past, and we also have good Slovenian friends. On the other hand, Slovenia is one of the best countries to live in, as it has untouched nature, an excellent geostrategic location and great cuisine. Despite Slovenia not being our home country, we feel welcomed here and it feels like home.

From a professional perspective, I work for a different entity here in Ljubljana, even though still working within the NLB Group. My current position also has a different primary focus as I am dealing mostly with Group management, payments and innovation. Thus I went out of my comfort zone and hopefully I'm now in the learning phase.



However, relocation is a big change from a private perspective as I moved to Ljubljana together with my family. Both my wife and I are 47 years old and we already have our priorities fixed, we are used to a certain way of life and have a rich social life back in Macedonia, so, I think, the adaptation is more

challenging for us than for our two sons. Children adapt faster and easier, the difference with them is that they show their satisfaction or dissatisfaction immediately and directly.

My sons are studying at school in Slovenia, so we do not go to Macedonia that often (probably once every two to three months). I enjoy and really like life in Slovenia, but I definitely miss the people from Macedonia, where I've lived my entire life. I miss the most my parents, my brother and his family, friends, colleagues, and also our customers there.

Is this your first time of living abroad?

This is my first time living abroad with my family. When I was in my fourth year at the university, I worked in the United States for 5 months. At that time, I gained great experience in independence and client relationship.

In 2015 you enrolled into EMBA. Would you recall if you had clear expectations on what it would be like? What was your main motivation to enroll?

Having 15 years of work experience by then, I felt that I needed to enrich my knowledge, especially in executive management and leadership. At that time I was in a transitional period, moving from a tactical to an executive level, and I perceived enrolling in the EMBA program as part of this transition. I was looking for a program where I would study with people who would have different backgrounds,



nationalities, professional fields and educational backgrounds. I was looking for a program where I would learn, share and grow together with my classmates. The IEDC EMBA not only fulfilled my expectations but exceeded them.

I will remember the IEDC EMBA as one of the best experiences of my life. I will remember the professors, lectures, challenging tasks and challenging discussions, as well as the feedback you get from brilliant people, including professors and students, and opportunities to experiment and use approaches you have not tried before.

If you recall that year at the IEDC, what was the best takeaway for you? Do you still keep in touch with your group and meet up?

The IEDC experience had a great impact on my career development, and I believe that it also had a great impact on a great performance of NLB and the NLB Group. We have already applied many of the methodologies, practices, and approaches that we gained at IEDC into our everyday work at NLB.

I am very glad that we stay in touch with former classmates,

but unfortunately due to work obligations and geographical distance, we do not meet as often as we would like to. I was very happy when my classmates came to the award ceremony. Unfortunately, last year our interaction was burdened with the war in Ukraine which none of us believed was possible and I still cannot accept that this is happening today in Europe. I have excellent colleagues both in Ukraine and Russia and, unfortunately, they are more and more separated. Many of our colleagues and friends stayed in Ukraine and they are supporting and defending Ukraine.

Being a successful manager usually means a busy schedule, what are you support mechanisms? How do you manage work/family time?

I usually try not to bring work home physically and mentally. If necessary, I stay in the office until late in the evening, but I try to avoid work when I'm at home and try to avoid mails or business calls while I am not working. I want to spend quality time with my family when we are together.



EMBA 2015

Antonio Argir

Member of the Management Board
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My favorite free time activity is...it's hard to choose just one activity, but overall, I enjoy walking in nature and having good time with friends. I also enjoy reading good books and watching movies.

A song I'd sign along while driving in my car if I hear it on a radio/Spotify...I am a big fan of all quality music. I enjoy different genres, so I would say, any good song.

Last TV series/movie I watched was... maybe not the last ones, but one of my best series I ever watched is Breaking Bad. If you exclude the criminal part, you will learn all about product management, brand management, distribution, negotiation, power play and marketing strategies.

An advice I'd give to my sons is... I believe my advice to my children is no different from an advice of any other father. I wish my sons to be diligent, hardworking, good men and to have their own vision, which will guide them through their life. At the same time, I advise them also to dream big, to have fun and enjoy every moment of life.

My last travel was... a family ski trip in Italy. Along the excellent skiing conditions and the beautiful scenery, it was very nice, as we had a great family time together.

If I could turn back time and choose another career, I'd become ... a banker 😊