

In memoriam

*Dr.Sc. Srećko Jelenić, assistant professor
(1966–2008)*

On Saturday, 17 May 2008 our dear friend, Srećko Jelenić passed away. Srećko was born in Čakovec in 1966 and was assistant professor at the Faculty of Natural Sciences in Zagreb. He finished his undergraduate study of Biology at the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of Zagreb in 1990. Right after he was appointed assistant at the Division of Biology, Department for molecular biology and he accomplished his M.D. in 1993. He continued his studies at the Institute for Botany at the Vienna University (1995 to 1996), where he finished the experimental part of his doctoral dissertation and he obtained his Ph.D. at the Zagreb University in 1997.

His main scientific interests were the mechanisms of genetic recombination in plants, transpositional recombination and biology of transposones, and genetic manipulations of plant cells. He was immediately impressed by the potential this new technology offered for solving some of the most threatening problems we are facing: lack of food, energy and raw materials, as well as rising pollution. This was more than a scientific fascination and for Srećko the power of biotechnology became the question of responsibility *par excellence*. He identified the importance of scientific communication and developed his genuine talent to simplify and describe without distortion. At his Faculty he was involved in teaching molecular and cellular biology and genetics and was elected the most popular professor at the Biology Division, which he was very proud of. He followed enthusiastically the interdisciplinary area involving genetically modified organisms (GMO): from genetic background, which was the subject of his own research, to cultivation, commercialization and trade, ecology and health impact, legislation and public perception. We may say without hesitation that he was the best informed and most competent specialist we had in Croatia in this area. He contributed in building up the legislative framework for GMOs in Croatia both as a member of official bodies and committees and as independent specialist denying political compromises. As a member of editorial board of FTB he just started giving us what we had foreseen as a fruitful and long lasting collaboration... In order to promote critical and competent dialogue on modern biotechnology, Srećko was the founder and the first president (2001–2006) of Croatian Association of Genetic Engineers (HUGI). In numerous public debates he was inoffensive but steady, well prepared and supported by relevant data, gaining the respect even from his hard opponents; on his side, he never lost the sympathy and understanding for those that felt uncomfortable about incoming new technology.

His closest lost their father, husband and son and we lost a friend, scientist and specialist, but most of all we will miss his unique personality. A person with outstanding moral and professional integrity, Srećko emanated bright, but warm and human sense of humor and irony. He followed the progression of his illness without self-deception but has never left the hope and admiration for Life. For all of us who happened to know him, his premature departure is the irreparable loss that makes us reflect how privileged we were to be his colleagues, collaborators and friends.

Zoran Zgaga