Time for Action

- INTERVIEW: Peter Kraljič
- PEOPLE: Boštjan Šifrar
- OUR EXCELLENCE: Ivo Boscarol
- SPORTS: Farewell of a legend
- ART & CULTURE: Time for a good film
- SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS: Istria’s Gold
- HERITAGE: Pivka has a lot to offer
1 In focus  
Foreign investment  
Peter Kraljič  
10
2 Interview  
3 Before and after  
Culture: 20 Years Later  
4 Art & culture  
The Month of Design is back in town  
5 Society  
Slovenian humanitarian aid in 2011  
6 Heritage  
Prvka really has a lot to offer!  
MONTHLY COMMENTARY  
A Term in Office Marked by Many Achievements  
BUSINESS  
The largest companies in the Adriatic region  
A LETTER  
Joseph A. Mussomeli, Ivo Boscani  
ART & CULTURE  
Time for a good film, Adoption of Maribor 2012 Programme, Presentation of good architecture, Glitz in Austria, Cradle of Slovenian Studies  
OUR EXCELLENCE  
Ivo Boscani – Succeed or face defeat!  
GREEN CORNER  
European Week for Waste Reduction and Discarded Food  
PEOPLE  
Boštjan Šifrar  
SPORTS  
Bojan Tukić, Iztok Puc  
SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS  
Istria’s Gold

Sinfo – Slovenian information  
Editorial Communication and Information Office:  
Director: Darijan Košir, Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana, tel. +386 (0) 1 478 2630, fax + 386 (0) 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si  
Editor-in-Chief: Vesna Žarkovič, vesna.zarkovic@gov.si  
Editorial Board: Mateja Malnar Štembal, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, Executive Editor: Vesna Žarkovič, tel. +386 (0) 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si  
Editorial: Vesna Žarkovič, Hana Souček Morača, Nataša Marvin, Manja Kostevc  
Printed by: DZS, d.d., Slovenia, Number of copies: 4600  
Government Translation and Interpretation Division  
Production: Nuit d.o.o., Translation: Amidas, DZTPS, Hana Souček Morača, Nataša Marvin, Manja Kostevc  
Editorial Board: Mateja Malnar Štembal, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, Executive Editor: Vesna Žarkovič, vesna.zarkovic@gov.si  
Editor-in-Chief: Valerija Mencej  
tel. +386 (0) 1 478 2630, fax + 386 (0) 1 251 2312, Director: Darijan Košir, Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana, Sinfo – Slovenian information

To succeed or to be defeated  
According to Ivo Boscani, owner of Pipistrel, a person has only got one key di- lemma in life: both in private life or professionally – to succeed or to be de- feated. There is no alternative for him – he simply subjected his life to success and nothing but success. He is convinced that success should be our life goal. It should be reached through innovation and unwavering self-confidence. We should set ourselves goals so high that they exceed even global limits – and then be completely sure of ourselves, allowing us to reach them. There are no limits, he says, there are only obstacles in our minds. We should be better aware of our many and often exceptional abilities, our positive characteristics that can be well used in a small and medium businesses, encourages Dr Peter Kraljič, international advisor and long standing director of McKinsey advisory firm in this issue’s interview. A government’s task is to create conditions allowing companies to work as undisturbed as possible, he emphasizes, since companies drive the economy, and adds that we must be proud and realistic and as soon as possible start resolving the weaknesses dragging us down. At the end of the mandate of Borut Pahor’s government we examine and write of its achievements. All the time it reaped more criticism than praise in public and with that in mind it is worth stressing that most troubles of this govern- ment were caused by external factors, namely the largest economic and finan- cial crisis of the last 80 years and the blockage of institutional reforms through referendums. We also write about encouraging foreign investments, which shall be an im- portant factor of economic policy in future. During this dire economic situation, stability is looked for in business environment and business relations, while foreign direct investments are among the most stable international economic factors.

A high level of self discipline, a great deal of work, persistence and self belief were certainly mastered by Boštjan Šifrar, who at the age of thirty became the youngest award-winner of the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce for his out- standing economic and entrepreneurial achievements. The Podjetnik magazine and the Chamber of craft and small business of Slovenia awarded him the title of Entrepreneur of 2011 for his successful realization of a well-considered strat- egy through which he turned a small business workshop into a global company Šifrar had, according to the awarding committee’s opinion, the courage and vi- sion to develop, from a seemingly unglamorous business of injection moulding of plastic caps, tubes and containers, a company exporting its products into 41 countries of the world.

It is almost traditional that between mid-October and mid-November Ljubljana becomes a capital of design. This is namely the time of the Month of Design. And this year it put together unusual forms of co-operation, unexpected relations and boldness. The Month of Design is the largest and most varied design-related event in the region. In 30 days it has more than 70,000 visitors and it offers more than 100 attractive events which present the best achievements in design and create new unusual co-operations. Hidden in the soil of the Slovenian Istria, special, aromatic, mysterious mushrooms grow, namely white truffles. They are appreciated for their extraordinary quality and their prices reach almost incomprehensible heights, from 1,500 to several thousand euros per kilogram. And what is a truffle? It is the noblest mushroom in the world, Ivo Zaloka is convinced.
A Term in Office Marked by Many Achievements

Slovenia's present government, led by Prime Minister Borut Pahor, which was recently, in September, ousted in a parliament conference vote, and is now in the final month of its term of office before the early parliamentary elections to be held on 4 December 2011, has constantly received more criticism than praise from the public. In a way, such criticism is unfair, firstly, because most of the government's problems were caused by an external factor, i.e. the deepest economic and financial crisis to occur over the last 80 years, rather than by its alleged impotence or incompetence; secondly, because the government faced an institutional blockage, inherited from its predecessors, as its proposed reforms were repeatedly defeated in public referendums, and, third, because further evidence of the good work done by this government continues to come to light during the current pre-election campaign, in which few candidates are proposing different orientations and solutions to those advocated by the outgoing government. The passage of time will permit a more realistic assessment of how successful Pahor’s government has been, but we believe that its term of office was marked by many achievements. We will attempt to outline the most important of them.

As already mentioned, Borut Pahor’s government took office in circumstances marked by the worst global economic crisis since World War II. The situation called for swift action, forcing the new government to amend its coalition priorities in order to focus all its efforts on cushioning Slovenia’s citizens from the socially unfavourable effects of the crisis, while at the same time trying to preserve the vital parts of the country's economy. This work was much more difficult because the country had entered a period of economic slowdown with a high foreign debt (amounting to EUR 39 billion) and a weak fiscal position (marked by a structural budget deficit, a decrease in budget revenues of almost EUR 1 billion as a result of the previous government’s tax “reform”, and additional liabilities of EUR 0.5 billion arising from the “reform” of the public sector salary system). Also, the crisis highlighted the fact that Slovenia’s economy was quite unprepared, both structurally and in terms of development, for such a shock.

In the second part of its term, Prime Minister Pahor’s government, which was, in the modern Slovenian history to face such a challenge, had to lay down the essential groundwork for the much needed structural reforms in key areas. The government managed to implement a considerable part of these demanding tasks but was, unfortunately, unable to complete its proposed reforms due to the reluctance of society to embrace them, and because its term of office ended prematurely.

The key achievements of Prime Minister Boris Pahor’s government during its three years in office are:

First and immediately, the government introduced guarantee schemes to put a lid on the financial crisis in Slovenia. The state guarantee was expanded to cover bank deposits, loans from international bank loan markets (amounting to EUR 12 billion), loans to enterprises (totalling EUR 1.2 billion), and loans to individuals (EUR 300 million). In addition, the government agreed to a EUR 250 million capital increase of Nova Ljubljanska banka (NLB), Slovenia’s largest bank, to strengthen the bank’s finances.

It safeguarded and upheld the sustainability of public finances. Despite the rise in borrowing, driven by the need for funds to cushion the effects of the economic crisis, Slovenia, unlike most EU member states, managed to keep its public debt below 45 % of GDP; the third lowest in the EU and far below the EU average (87 % of GDP). Slovenia’s budget deficit, kept below 5 % of GDP in 2011, ranks in the middle of the EU family, and shows a clear tendency to narrow down to below 3 % in 2013. Committed to ensure the long-term sustainability of public finances, the government also proposed several structural reforms, for example the pension reform which, unfortunately, was rejected in one of the referendums.

It secured moderate economic growth and low inflation. After plunging by 9 % on a yearly basis in the crisis year of 2009, GDP growth was up to 1 %, again in 2010, is expected to touch at least 1.5 % in 2011, and should then push towards 2 % in 2012. The annual inflation rate is currently below 2 %. In the years 2009 to 2011 exports rose at an annual rate of 12 % to 14.5 %, dampening the slowdown in domestic economic activity, in particular in the construction and finance industries. Between 2008 and Slovenia’s current account deficit narrowed by EUR 2 billion.

It adopted a series of anti-crisis measures in order to strengthen the economy and its competitiveness. During the period from 2008 to 2010 the Ministry of the Economy alone supported 6 107 private and public projects with a total sum of EUR 876 million, of which EUR 650 million was allocated to support the investments of enterprises and to enhance the competitiveness of the economy. Another EUR 200 million was granted to small industry and trade in support of 2 500 investment projects, creating a total of more than 3 000 new jobs. The government also took other measures (e.g. by supplying fresh capital) to help large state-owned companies that were facing bankruptcy; the last such project was the 50 million capital boost for the country’s national carrier, Adria Airways.

It implemented sustainable social measures in order to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis, preserve social cohesion, and minimize inequality and social gaps. Funding was allocated to the social security of individuals was 43 % above the 2008 figure; the adoption of the Minimum Wages Act pushed the statutory minimum wage up by 22 % (from EUR 352 to EUR 724); and the legal measures taken helped to preserve more than 25 thousand jobs, placing Slovenia, despite its 107 thousand unemployed, in the top third of EU member states with the lowest unemployment rate.

It capped salaries in the public sector. Through certain legal acts which the government has adopted or amended and the implementation of the previously agreed public sector salary system reform, the government cut public spending on salaries (i.e. labour costs) by much as EUR 900 million (or 4.5 % of GDP) in 2010, while also reducing the number of employees in the civil part of the public administration by 1 %, every year, pushing the total public administration headcount down to below 24 thousand.

It increased public investment in research and development, for the first time since Slovenia’s independence. In 2009 public investment in R&D projects shot up by 47 % on the year before, and, increased in 2010 (from EUR 487 million to EUR 661 million in just three years). Public funding for tertiary education also rose by 22 % during the government’s term of office.

It initiated the economic recovery and reorganization of Slovenian Railways by providing the legal groundwork required for the smooth operation of the railway system, as well as by supplying the company with EUR 134 million of fresh capital, and investing EUR 84.3 million in the modernisation of the railway infrastructure.

It completed the construction of the Slovenian cross-country motorway network and enhanced traffic safety (70 kilometres of new roads were constructed through investments totalling EUR 124 million). It also proposed several changes to facilitate the position of DARS, the Motorway Company in Slovenia (e.g. with a capital boost of EUR 2.13 billion).

It introduced a new system for the recruitment and appointment of managers in state-owned companies, agencies, and public institutes. The system, which is implemented by recruitment and accreditation committees, marks the first step in abandoning the practice of politically motivated appointments. These committees were later replaced in their role by the Capital Assets Management Agency, which is nominated by the National Assembly in order to ensure that its operations remain politically independent.

It endorsed the issue of persons who had been erased from the register of permanent residents, which constituted a mass violation of human rights in the newly independent Slovenia and was, undoubtedly, one of the country's most regrettable failings. The government adopted an act regulating the status of these erased persons, and has already issued 6 400 decisions to the persons concerned.

It strengthened the institutions of the judiciary, police, and state prosecution, and provided the legal structures which are needed to increase the efficiency of combat against organized crime and other crimes. The government achieved this by adopting or amending the relevant acts, and by establishing a National Investigation Bureau, which ensures more effective investigation of the most serious forms of white-collar crime.

It tied the necessary groundwork and launched a broad public debate about the reformation of Slovenia’s health sector, summarized in the Health Care System Upgrade by 2020, which proposes several changes to the financing of the health care system, introduces organisational changes, and creates an appropriate division between public and private providers.

It made a positive breakthrough in relations with neighbouring countries and strengthened its position in international politics. The conclusion of the Agreement on the Enterprise Property has put an end to the 20 years of tension in the bilateral relations between the two countries, and opened the door for Slovenia’s participation in the regional cooperation of the neighbours. The economic value is the agreement on bilingual town and village limit signs in the Austrian province of Koroška (Carinthia). Under Pahor’s government, Slovenia also signed strategic treaties with France, Germany, Russia, and Turkey, as well as concluding negotiations and signing the OECD Accesion Treaty.

It has reduced the number of Slovenian Army soldiers (from 14 009soldiers in 2008 to 9 557 in 2009) and, consequently, in 2010 (from EUR 566 million to EUR 489 million, i.e. from 1.69 % to 1.36 % of GDP in 2010). The Slovenian Army posted almost 300 soldiers to international operations and missions, which is the most important of which are to Afghanistan and Kosovo.
Foreign investment
a vital source of capital for future development

‘It is now the right time to consider how to encourage foreign investment as this will be a key factor in any future economic policy. At this time of crisis, the stability of the business environment and commercial relations is crucial, and foreign direct investment is one of the most stable international economic factors,’ explained President Danilo Türk, the patron of honour at the FDI Summit 2011 – the international conference on foreign investment and development strategies in Slovenia.

According to President Türk, this is the perfect time to address obstacles impeding direct foreign investment, and to examine the success stories and opportunities in this regard. Thus far, Slovenia has been quite conservative in terms of welcoming direct foreign investment; however, measures for promoting direct investment – both in terms of foreign investment in Slovenia and Slovenian investment abroad – must become an important part of the future government’s economic policy in the search for new options for the Slovenian economy. In his words, Slovenian investment in the countries of the former Yugoslavia – as well as investment by these countries in Slovenia – should be promoted. A good example, in his opinion, is the acquisition of Fructal by the Serbian company, Nectar. He is confident that a two-way investment is the right development decision. However, it is also necessary to search for investment opportunities in other, more distant parts of the world. He pointed out the small level of US investment in Slovenia, and underlined the need to promote Slovenia more aggressively as an investment opportunity.

Lastly, President Türk stressed that it is necessary to seriously consider how to make Slovenia a commercial hub in South East, Central and Eastern Europe. The main topic of the conference, which brought together businessmen, political leaders and current and potential investors in Slovenia, was how to make use of Slovenia’s potential as a regional centre or hub for doing business in South East and Central Europe. In this regard, the best practices of foreign investors in Slovenia, which have been steadily developing their platform for expanding their business in the region, were presented. Over 20 CEOs and economists from Slovenia and abroad participated in seven roundtable discussions.

FOREIGN INVESTORS APPRECIATE SLOVENIA’S SKILLED LABOUR FORCE, BUT DEMAND CONDITIONS CONducIVE FOR DOING BUSINESS

In the discussion focusing on the right concept for attracting strategic foreign direct

Marjan Hribar, Head of the Economy Ministry’s tourism directorate: The amount of capital available in Slovenia is limited; in order to acquire the capital necessary for the further development of the economy, it is necessary to look for new sources. He suggested foreign direct investment as being one potential source. ‘Everyone now agrees that additional capital is needed; our Ministry has drafted a proposal for measures to increase Slovenia’s attractiveness to foreign investors; however, these measures will probably be discussed by the new government after the elections in December. We have adopted a comprehensive approach, as the weaknesses that drive away foreign investors are present in several areas – from excessive taxation to lengthy procedures concerning, for example, the issuing of building permits. There are, of course, advantages for foreign investors, such as Slovenia’s well educated and skilled work force and geostategic location. Other possible sources of capital for our businesses are international financial institutions and venture capital funds, and, in this respect, our government has already adopted certain measures.’

Damir Kozirak, the Agrokor Group’s Executive Vice President for Export Markets: ‘The support of the EBRD increases the confidence of private banks. In these times of crisis, it has become clear that especially small- and medium-size businesses, and particularly those that are experiencing difficulties, have a hard time obtaining bank funding. It is for this reason that the government must address this issue. International investors are interested only in particular sectors in each country. In Croatia, for example, these sectors are tourism, energy and logistics, and particularly transport. In the past, Slovenia has been very cautious, perhaps overly so, in allowing foreign investors in, and this has proved, in the present crisis situation, to be problematic. It is also necessary to distinguish between investors from neighbouring regions, who are well acquainted with local markets, and investors from further afield.’

Thierry Villard, Managing Director of Goodyear Dunlop Central & South East Europe: ‘The government should ease the conditions for doing business and change the mindset concerning foreign direct investment. These are still, too often, considered as some sort of threat to the national interest. Our company will continue, despite the difficult situation, to invest in Sava Tires’ Kranj facility in the coming year; investments made during the crisis have proved to be the right decision in terms of increasing our market share.’

Ziga Debeljak, Chairman of the Board of Mercator Group: ‘It is impossible for Slovenia to be the regional hub for foreign investment for the whole of Central and Eastern Europe, as its ties with Bulgaria, for example, are not strong enough to be of assistance to potential investors in this country, but Slovenia may become such a hub for the Western Balkans, and in both directions as a starting point for EU countries expanding to the Western Balkans and vice-versa. Slovenia is well equipped to play such a role because of its knowledge of the region, its way of doing business, excellent infrastructure, geostategic position and highly skilled labour force. These countries are on the verge of accession to the EU, and Slovenia will lose its relative advantage once that occurs, so it is of the utmost importance that Slovenian businesses make the most of this situation over the next few years.’
investments with high added value, some representatives of foreign investors indicated that the quality of Slovenia’s workforce is a comparative advantage, most, however, stressed the need for an improvement in the conditions necessary for doing business. Slovenia must create an environment in which investors will be allowed to make profits,” explained Giusto Bonazzi, President & CEO of Aquafil Gruppo Bonazzi. He admitted, however, that such an environment is not in itself a guarantee that foreign investors would remain in Slovenia for a longer period of time. Aquafil owns Julon, a Slovenian company in which its Italian owners have invested almost EUR 150 million over the past fifteen years, of which EUR 17 million has been invested this year in the new Ecosyl production line, where materials will be recycled to obtain the basic substance for the production of polyamide 6.

Mr Bonazzi made assurances that, despite the harsh economic conditions, his company would continue to invest in Slovenia – between EUR 5 and 6 million next year, for example. Their objective is to preserve a long-term presence in Slovenia.

Slovenia offers the right mix of labour cost and skills, and continues to be competitive in this respect. This is the reason why, he continued, that his company has invested EUR 170 million in Savo Tires, transforming it into one of the most modern facilities in Europe. Nevertheless, the three speakers regarded Slovenia’s well educated and highly skilled workforce as being a great comparative advantage. Mr Villard said that Slovenia offers the right mix of labour cost and skills, and continues to be competitive in this respect. This is the reason why, he continued, that his company has invested EUR 170 million in Savo Tires, transforming it into one of the most modern facilities in Europe. All three speakers drew attention to the fact that the workforce in Slovenia is of a high quality, but that the number of engineering professionals produced by the Slovenian higher education system is insufficient. At the same time, Slovenia is not, irrespective of its high standard of living, an attractive proposition for foreign experts. They also addressed the current situation in the financial markets. They have no major problems obtaining funds, as their businesses are financially sound, and Knauf Insulation is actually able to self-finance its development. They are, however, aware that the credit crunch is still present in Slovenia, which prevents many good projects from being implemented.

Another point highlighted during the roundtable discussions held at the FDI Summit 2011 was that Slovenia has the potential to be a regional hub for investments from the EU in the Balkans and vice versa. It has not yet succeeded in fully exploiting its geopolitical potential, but its deep understanding of the region’s characteristics gives it a certain competitive advantage.
The international consultant, Peter Kraljič, PhD, a long-time director at the global consulting service, McKinsey – a company which has provided consulting services to governments across Europe and large companies around the world – is calling on Slovenians to realise their capabilities, their many positives, and make use of them at the entrepreneurial level in small and medium-sized companies. He emphasises that conditions are needed for the smooth operation of these companies, since this will take our economy forward, and adds that we need to be self-confident and realistic, and that we should commence with the elimination of the weaknesses that hold us back as soon as possible.

In your opinion, what is the largest obstacle to our development?

Among other things, the disputes between the political parties which I find to be extremely provincial. Slovenia needs a holistic concept and a national consensus about what needs to be done and what the priorities are. If the government fails, the problems will continue. We have enough capabilities but we are unable to use them for which I blame politicians who are too party-oriented and who fail to understand what is happening today in the globalised world. Before elections they promise a lot but later nothing is done. It should be like Slovenia very much but I am a bit appalled about how it is governed.

By this, do you mean the last government still in power?

No, no, this government took over the governing in the worst times and is also the first that tried to carry out structural reforms. I am appalled about how it was incapacitated. To me, the connection between syndicates and the right political option seems destructible. To destroy an act that has already been adopted with a referendum! Now everybody in Europe is reproaching us with that but the fact is we are not mature enough for democracy. We don’t want to be a nation that has already been adopted with a referendum! Now everybody in Europe is reproaching us with that but the fact is we are not mature enough for democracy. We don’t like how politicians and the media behave and I think that both are not mature enough for democracy.

The fact is that Slovenia has lately been losing position on the global competitive list; it is somehow stuck in the average which seems to be a multi-year erosion of the quality of Slovenian economy. Why is that so, how would you comment it and what needs to change?

We have become a third league instead of becoming the first one. And there is no reason why we shouldn’t be the first league! As a nation we are unable to reach a consensus, we are divided by political parties and we are constantly bringing up the conflicts from the past instead of grabbing the opportunity together. In the past we have been closer together where national interest is the most successful in the EU, you have two categories of unattractiveness for green-field investments and depressed entrepreneurial environment which is a consequence of chasing the tycoons. You know: 99% of business people are honest and starting a war against entrepreneurs because of two or three poisonous mushrooms is not a wise move. At the level of companies, the problems are at the management and supervisory boards in state companies are being replaced too often. I also see a large problem in the lack of natural values and the non-functional legal system which makes people frustrated, hence the lack of trust in the government and in the politics.

What would sober us up? Perhaps even worse conditions? The conditions will be worse anyway if we don’t undertake reforms, we can be soothed up only by an open dialogue and a consensus between principal factors. Currently there is no constructive dialogue such as for example in the Netherlands. There, they are able to step together where national interest is in question, social partners are able to reach an agreement in a single week, while here this is entirely impossible.

For Slovenia to become more penetrant it would be urgent to take advantage of our strengths and eliminate the weaknesses that have accumulated in recent years.

But for that a consensus of syndicates, employers and government and other institutions is required. If someone knows how to link all this, it will be for everybody’s benefit. In the EU you have two categories of countries – those who are doing well and those who are not doing so well and the factor of competitiveness is decisive here: I understand a wide spectrum of factors under this term. The most successful in the EU are small countries and Germany, among the new countries Poland and Estonia are doing quite well, while there are larger problems in southern countries that are also not so competitive. Italy also failed to carry out reforms and a question is how long successful countries will be willing to support the EU if other countries fail to seriously start introducing reforms. For now, situation in Slovenia is not critical but if we fail to carry out all reforms needed for the acceleration of growth and structural reforms, we will start sinking as well. I hope the new government will take it seriously.

What would you recommend to the new government?

To develop a holistic concept of economy which should be taken into consideration at four different levels: the government has little influence on the first, mega level since this is the EU; here we can adapt and use given opportunities. We can better influence the macro, i.e. the state level, where the government can introduce reforms, the meso level where we have our sectors, regions and clusters are the micro level where the companies are and the nano level where we can invest in individuals by educating and guiding them.

Should Slovenia look more for European, Chinese, Brazilian investors?

Yes, of course, but we have to understand that for them we are a small market, smaller than Hamburg. Unfortunately, we are unable to make use of our advantages, e.g. we have an excellent position for the logistics and we could be a jumping
board for these countries investing in Central Europe. Brazilian embassies tried to open up gates to Brazil but we were unable to take the opportunity. We also don’t understand the priorities of some countries we offer and are not using them, things are improving now with the economic diplomacy but we would have needed it a long time ago.

In all these tasks, the importance of “human capital” is enormous. In Slovenia we have a good workforce and foreigners are extremely satisfied with us. The question is, are we too small or too narrow-minded? The Bevco CEO even told me that what he did with our workers in two years couldn’t be achieved by French workers in five years which proves that under a good leadership our people can work very well. The problem is not our smallness. The problem is our narrow-mindedness! I have lived in Luxembourg which had a population of 300,000 in 1960. 40 years ago they started to prepare for a new wave by re- structuring the economy. No one knew they would have to abandon steel industry so they started to develop the economy and reoriented to financial services. Today, Luxembourg is one of the richest countries in the world which proves that smallness is not a problem, but narrow-mindedness is. Small economies are opening to foreign consultants and are inviting them to their markets. Slovenia is much too closed here. 30 years ago, Singapore was in a worse state than Slovenia is today but it became one of the most prominent countries because they developed a competitive system.

Do you think Europe should return to “values that made it big 500 years ago” in order not to run into difficulties we are facing nowadays?

Ethical values are the Ten Commandments, how do we respect them? Nobody even knows them any more. We need to focus on our natural values. The state should respond to the real needs of society and to the demand for education and our neglect of the importance of human dignity and also that the legal system is not functioning.

In this transitional period of capitalism, an excessive share of social property remains in state’s hands while the state also retains too much influence in the banking sector. Criticism can frequently be heard that until the situation remains unchanged there is no hope for any considerable progress. What is the state doing to solve this problem?

The state being the owner is not a problem in itself, especially if it is a good and responsible owner. There are many examples proving it, especially in cases where the state acts responsibly. Our problem is that our authorities are not responsible, that they do not understand the difference between the ownership and the management. The state has to stop dividing the company in localities and must not interfere with it. Unfortunately, the majority of our companies have little clue about the economy with which political parties interfere; they neglect the continuity and the quality of management in companies while we don’t have so many good managers to replace them just like that. In my opinion, the best human resources should be found in state owned companies. The French also have many state companies. Until the politicians were interfering with staffing it was a disaster, but after they allowed professionals to do their work some of the best companies in the world developed.

How would you shortly answer the question, why are we in a situation where growth is lagging?

In short, due to our failure to understand the economy under the influence of globalisation and our indifference in the implementation of changes, which has been under way since 2004 we are prescribing the EU, promising 3 % growth, and a year after when the crisis was fully on its way, we ended up with a 3.5% drop in GDP. If the Prime Minister speaks like this, it means he does not understand the economy under the influence of globalisation. We are in a crisis because we failed to carry out structural reforms earlier and because we failed to develop competitiveness. That is why our growth is slower while our dependence on export is our weakness – namely, if you want to have good export, you have to be competitive.

What are the branches where Slovenia can achieve competitive advantage?

Their number is decreasing – in 20 years we missed the opportunity to concentrate them and to create strong international companies. We crushed the rocks large successful companies that no longer exist (autouroutes: Tarn, Isla, etc.) and now we are building on sand. We failed to understand at the right time that successful companies have to be merged. The number of successful companies have to be reduced, e.g. the automotive industry has been very successful but one has to know how to use them; with a greater number of companies we would be more successful. Selling the remaining companies owned by the state would be a waste. It is wrong that national interest became a curse word in the society, as we invest a great deal of money in a nation that develops through successful economy is exactly the opposite. We need to re-examine the idea that the majority electoral system is a problem. It is wrong to understand that the number of political parties is a problem that we have to limit the number of political parties and decrease the small coalition parties are harmful, that is why we need to reform our electoral system. Today Slovenia has a three-party system in which the majority electoral system which would limit the number of political parties constitutes 50 seats in Parliament. Our political conclusions will start again. Our economic growth is much lower than in the rest of Europe; we need a mix of large successful companies and small companies. In a successful economy, you need a mix of large successful companies that are internationally competitive, that export, that are leading, while medium-sized and small companies should grow beside them. Such companies are among the main exporters in Germany, where medium-sized enterprises are of crucial importance in reaching the global peak. This does not exist in Slovenia because the majority electoral system is a problem in order to study and define our needs. This mix must be achieved by something like that also in Slovenia.

What is essential for good management of companies?

Two things high quality and efficient management and efficient corporate governance. Management is crucial – it must be capable of managing, it must know how to motivate employees, it must think strategically, it needs to understand what short term priorities are. Corporate governance is a chain beginning with the owners, followed by the supervisory board, the management and the company’s employees. This has to be developed in Russia. I am a member of the supervisory board of the largest steel company Severstal where they welcome foreign experts who help managing and accelerating the growth of the company. We should act like this to a larger degree also in Slovenia.

The crisis pushed many Slovenian businesses into bankruptcy. How have we already reached the bottom or can it still get deeper?

If we continue to act as in the past, there will be worse. To prevent that we need to prevent our best companies to sell and what not to sell. We should not sell the companies of the key national importance. The French, for example, do not sell their key companies. They sell a mixture of Ola-Geigy and Sanstar to Novartis, while we are merging Krka and Lek. These are the differences.

And how to strike a balance between keeping good companies and at the same time opening the door to foreign capital? Balance is a part of this concept. If we have it, we will know which sectors to attract capital to. Regarding the issue of foreign investment, Slovenia has some limited credit, medium-sized and small companies should grow beside them. Such companies are among the main exporters in Germany, where medium-sized enterprises are of crucial importance in reaching the global peak. This does not exist in Slovenia because the majority electoral system is a problem in order to study and define our needs. This mix must be achieved by something like that also in Slovenia.

companies could be our development and export-oriented companies. We have to prevent our best companies from being acquired. How can that be achieved?

The state is pushed forward by the European Union. The state acts responsibly. Our electoral system must not interfere with it. Unfortunately, the majority of our companies have little clue about the economy with which political parties interfere; they neglect the continuity and the quality of management in companies while we don’t have so many good managers to replace them just like that. In my opinion, the best human resources should be found by themselves. Be it the French, for example, do not sell their key companies. They sell a mixture of Ola-Geigy and Sanstar to Novartis, while we are merging Krka and Lek. These are the differences.

You have been retired for nine years but you still work in the McKinsey consultant company which consults European governments and large companies. What are you currently involved with?

I am still in the supervisory board of Geore, the SID Bank, and the IEDC Management School in Bled and I am also a member of the supervisory board of the largest Russian steel company Severstal. At McKinsey I still lead training programmes for employees, the most precious asset of every firm I have just returned from a two-week seminar in Kirchzab. In short, I am constantly active, mainly commuting between London, where I live, and Paris.
Ina petroleum group. Immediately following them, on the third and fourth place, are Slovenian companies Petrol and Mercator, while the fifth Delta Holding is holding the fifth place. Eight pharmaceutical companies were placed on the list, among them four from Slovenia. Thus, Slovenian Krka and Lek took 10th and 20th positions, respectively.

Last year, the highest net profit was generated by the Croatian group T-HT, while the Slovenian company Krka is also among the most successful in a long run. At the sixth gathering of Slovenian business people organised by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia which was attended by almost 500 directors of Slovenian companies, they characterised economic conditions in the country as bad. Numerous companies have recently been receiving fewer orders and are afraid of new decline in economic growth. However, since economy needs a new momentum, new investments and new bank loans, some suggested that the state should increase its debt by an additional EUR 1 billion which would be used exclusively for good development projects. They also suggested that new minister of economy should be someone who has run a large company over the last ten years. They also pointed out that added value per employee should increase by two percent over the next five years.

Every year, business people are drawing attention to the same obstacles. As the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia Samo Herbar mentioned, it is possible to talk positively primarily about Slovenian export, but 650 companies generate as much as 85 percent of annual export. As Dušan Semolič, president of free Syndicates of Slovenia pointed out, syndicates would like to see greater focus on reforms of the financial sector which caused the current crisis. Nobody also said anything about the social agreement which is coming to the forefront of the current activities of employers and syndicates and where there is a possibility to find a mutual agreement on goals and development policies.

**EURO 1 billion for good projects**

According to Bank of Slovene Arab, among all EU states, Slovenia plans most EUR 42 billion of financial investments last year. One third of them were kept in bank deposits, one fifth in shares and other securities, approximately 16 percent of savings, were in cash, while six percent were in investment funds and life insurances. According to surveys, however, Slovenians decide more and more openly to purchase gold while they also consider real estate as safe investment. With a 15 percent saving rate, Slovenia closely follows Germany, Belgium and France among the EU member states. Slovenian saving rate is above the EU average and also above the Euro area average.

According to a research conducted by the Marketing monitoring Institute to determine the size of the Slovenian market, the Slovenian market is 13.9 million people and the size of the market is approximately 36 percent of state property.

**Inflation**

With 0.8 % inflation in October, Slovenia saw one of the highest inflation rates of the year. In 2013, deflation was recorded in Slovenia in January, June and July; zero inflation in February, and the highest rate of inflation this year (0.6 %) in March.

Consumer prices increased year-on-year by 2.9 % in October. According to the Statistical Office, the rising prices of clothing and footwear contributed most (0.8 %) to this increase in inflation. Further, more data from the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development show that this October's increase represents a record-high spike in the past ten years. Prices have been rising fast and it seems that, despite very modest economic growth, manufacturers and traders are attempting to accumulate financial reserves for a potential second dip or simply to diminish their current losses. The Governor of the Bank of Slovenia, Marko Kranjec, has also predicted that October's increase in prices would continue until the end of the year.

**New acquisitions in Krka from Novo mesto**

Krka, the producer of pharmaceuticals from Novo mesto, opened a new facility for the production of new drugs - new work form and a new development control center. Thus, annual pharmaceutical orders in hard currency would be As planned by the Environmental Fund, the sales of these vehicles to individuals or natural persons are planned to be supported within the first tender, while the second tender will be intended for sales to legal entities and sole proprietors.
Culture: 20 YEARS LATER

The reason why culture features prominently in the national identity of Slovenes (after all, Slovenia declared its National Culture Day a public holiday and selected a poem of its greatest poet, Dr. France Prešeren, as its national anthem) is mainly due to the fact that Slovenes may quite possibly perceive culture in a broader sense than other nations: culture helped pave the way toward Slovenia’s independence and resistance within foreign economic and political systems, and at the same time served as a firm basis for the spiritual and material progress of the country’s inhabitants.

The position of Slovenian culture is specific, to say the least. In larger European nations, culture developed together with the nation’s political and economic power, and partially fed off this power. However, with Slovenes it has been the focus from the very beginning – the nation originated from its culture. More importantly, the Slovenian national identity has also manifested itself through culture after their independence, when the country built real political power – which it had been unable to develop previously due to historical limitations.

Twenty years ago, when Slovenia left the federation of multinational republics, it seemed that the loss of the broad Yugoslav frame of reference would drive the nation into isolation, or force it to adapt to the globalisation trends and matrices of the European Community to which it had just been admitted. However, the “cut” never came, for a variety of reasons: the idea and process of independence grew and developed, opened and matured with strong backing from intellec-tuals, creative minds, writers, and alternative movements, all of whom promoted a different social reality before the formal separation began. Besides this, culture found a sound basis in being a dynamic, provocative, and unrelenting spiritual force, as well as in its close con-nexions to the language and words. This basis saved Slovenia from becoming an inert, introvert, and lethargic society.

Accession to the EU did not only change Slovenia’s horizons, but also the foundations for principal discussion on the develop-ment of institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of cultural activities. It is true that these foundations were not new to us, since Slovenia has been – thanks also to its geo-graphic location – a constitu-ent part of the Central Europe-an and Mediterranean cultural space. Still, after accession Slovenia started paying more at-tention to its language, partly because it has become a public language equal to other EU languages, and partly because we saw that it was potentially endangered due to the low number of its native speakers. We have become even more determined to protect it. As Minister of Culture, I launched an EU initiative to introduce a zero VAT rate on books for small countries. I pointed out that the current practice was discriminatory since certain languages, and partly because Slovenia started paying more attention to its language, partly because it has become a public language equal to other EU languages, and partly because we saw that it was potentially endangered due to the low number of its native speakers. We have become even more determined to protect it. As Minister of Culture, I launched an EU initiative to introduce a zero VAT rate on books for small countries. I pointed out that the current practice was discriminatory since certain languages.

Slovenia’s small size – seen from the point of limited critical mass and economic potential – is definitely an important factor in determining the cultural beat of the country; but it is also an opportunity. On the one hand, it is harder to market cultural goods in a small country, but on the other, it forces us to look to foreign markets with more determination and strive to maintain a stable culture budget. Although Slovenia’s culture funding is below the European recommendation of 3 per cent of the state’s budget, artistic practices are engaged in, or accepted, by a huge percentage of Slovenia’s popula-tion, which is not limited to the elite but rather includes amateu-art lovers and alternative
Practically every region in Slovenia has its own museums, archives, and galleries. Naturally, the concentration of these is highest in Ljubljana, which boasts the world-known Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Architecture and Design, National Gallery, and a strong graphics tradition (International Biennial of Graphic Arts). However, the New Museum of Contemporary Art is of particular interest because it completes a multi-year, post-independence project of building cultural institutions in the place of former Yugoslav Army barracks. The project sends a symbolic message that after the retreat of the Yugoslav Army, the army complexes have passed into the hands of culture.

In November, Slovenia’s capital was again hosting the Ljubljana International Film Festival (LIFFE), which has earned immense popularity, selling out practically all screenings. We wish the festival could feature more Slovenian films, since the scope of Slovenia’s film production is lagging way behind the foreign film industry. Nevertheless, in 2018 Slovenian films received more than 300 awards abroad, and the Slovenian public has grown quite fond of the country’s domestic film production (Miha Hočevar’s teen film Going Our Way (“Gremo mi po svoje”) was seen by 200,000 people, which is a considerable number for a nation whose population totals only two million!). The domination of commercial films in movie theatres is shifting the taste of the public towards “colossal spectacles”, making it immensely important for Slovenia to maintain its art cinema network and carry out the digitalization of its film history. After independence, Slovenia was left with one of the smallest, and youngest, cinema archives, since practically all film material created in the former common state was left in Belgrade. We had to start from scratch, but today Slovenia has a beautiful Museum of Film Actors in Divaca, named after Slovenia’s first internationally acclaimed film star, Iza Rina, who achieved fame with her ethereal and erotic role in Gustav Machaty’s Enskron. The Kinoteka Cinema has established itself in the European and Slovenian area as a treasure trove of films, with particular emphasis placed to raising awareness of the young and creative people.

Slovenia, this safe, green, and vigorous country attracts more people who wish to come to this highly diverse area, rich in cultural heritage to see the outstanding creations of architect Jože Plečnik. He does not stand alone – the contemporary Slovenian architecture walks hand in hand with European trends. Although not backed by vast capital – the shortage of money is most evident in the (slow) renovation of many castles – Slovenian architecture has a delicate, environmentally-friendly, and daring creativity.

One of my efforts as Minister of Culture was to include architecture and landscape architecture as essential elements of the National Cultural Policy:

I admit that I find it hard to contain myself when talking about culture because I love it, live with it, co-create it, and because I know that without culture I would be less rich and less open. Before the space available forces me to stop, let me point out all the artistic practices which I have failed to mention – the theatre, music, new intermedia practices, and creative industries. You will soon have an opportunity to learn more about them: the Slovenian city of Maribor and its partner municipalities are preparing to open the European Culture Capital, which will definitely show all the good and exciting art practices in Slovenia. And you can take it from me: they are plentiful!
When asked about the business climate here in Slovenia, the only fair response is to say we are in the midst of a lengthy period of inclement weather. Forecasts of sunnier skies and a more open approach to business have turned out to be inaccurate. A downturn of reforms and the stormy divisions dividing the political elite on how to improve the business climate have caused Slovenia to risk losing its economic standing in this region.

Why do I care? Why is it any of my concern to worry about a business in Slovenia? Shouldn’t diplomats just sip cocktails and keep their mouths shut? That is certainly tempting, but the United States has a keen interest in supporting stability and prosperity among its allies. The stronger, freer, and more prosperous they are, the better it is for us too.

During my time here I have seen U.S. firms invest in Slovenia as a potential home for investment, only to become discouraged and go elsewhere. What is clear to me is that, despite plenty of nice-sounding public statements, there has been no genuine commitment to opening up the economy to foreign investment. Some people claim to be shocked at that pronouncement, but this is not my opinion. In multiple indices, Slovenia scores poorly in terms of openness to foreign investment. But you don’t need the analysts to figure that out, just talk to frustrated Slovenian businesspeople or read the newspaper.

Rather than repeat the expert recommendations, I will focus on the central blockages to U.S. investment: a lack of transparency in public procurement, red tape and bureaucracy, a lack of openness to outsiders, market labor rigidity, high government involvement in the private sector, a lack of an empowered foreign direct investment “one-stop shop,” high income tax and social contributions.

As regards foreign investment in Slovenia, let me say this much: first, there is not just my opinion. In multiple indices, Slovenia scores poorly in terms of openness to foreign investment. But you don’t need the analysts to figure that out, just talk to frustrated Slovenian businesspeople or read the newspaper.

Rather than repeat the expert recommendations, I will focus on the central blockages to U.S. investment: a lack of transparency in public procurement, red tape and bureaucracy, a lack of openness to outsiders, market labor rigidity, high government involvement in the private sector, a lack of an empowered foreign direct investment “one-stop shop,” high income tax and social contributions.

If I had to focus on just one of these problems, I would highlight my least favorite Slovenian phrase: “National Interest.” If it was a well-defined, focused policy preserving a handful of strategic Slovenian companies that do not employ disabled persons – would urgently need to be abolished since in this case the companies have to pay one additional gross wage to the Pension and Disability Insurance Institute for every 20 people they employ. Worldwide, such a system is only known by the Mafia which forces companies to add its people to their payroll lists without them being actually employed there. The gravest tragedy of all is, however, that this money never reaches the disabled for whom it is intended but ends up who knows where.

Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.

Permits, concessions, etc. have to be obtained to carry out any activity. All these administrative barriers need to be eliminated immediately. I cannot understand that banks have learnt nothing from this crisis. Administrative barriers are a very large impediment to development, preventing entrepreneurship from flourishing and hindering the improvement of its competitiveness. Ministries and agencies do not cooperate between each other. Entrepreneurs are forced to knock on the doors of state bureaucracy for months, even years, before they can obtain building, operating, land acquisition and other permits. While our competitors abroad already operate in built facilities, building procedures at home are not even initiated.
Let there be no doubt on the matter - this year's Slovenian Film Festival, which took place in the Auditorij in Portorož in early Oc-
tober, was the first in many years to rouse Slovenian culture. There are many reasons for this: the unprecedented number of Slovenian
films made this year; the fact that the number of films submitted resulted in never-seen-before levels of diversity and innovative ap-
proaches adopted; and the optimistic conclusion that the relative youth of the award-winning artists serves (almost) to ensure that the future of the Slovenian film industry is bright. This promise is the most difficult to believe as the Slovenian film industry has - in the past - often showed promising new faces and even new gen-
erations, but they were unable to deliver on the hopes entrusted in them. In this respect, the film industry does not differ from other areas of Slovenian society; such as sports, other arts, areas, and even science, where talent is all too often submerged and drowned in the maelstrom of mediocrity. This proves, for the umpteenth time, that something is terribly rotten in the system of promoting creativ-
ity.

Vesna awards: Best Short Film: Obisk (The Visit), directed by Miha Mazzini; Best Documentary Short Film: Aleksandrnik (the Alexandrians) directed by Metod Pavec; Best Picture: Ar-
ben, directed by Jan Cvitkovič; Best Director: Jan Cvitkovič for Arben; Best Screenplay: Nejc Gazvoda for Izlet (The Trip); Best Leading Actress: Nina Rakovec in Izlet (The Trip); Best Leading Actor: Jure Henigman in Izlet (The Trip); - Best Supporting Act-
ress: Sala Pavček in Krnja in iger (Circus) - Best Supporting Actor: Jonas Žuždareč in Krnja in iger (Circus); Best Production Design: Darko Milavec for Oki, a latho si lofreum (Ozd, may i drive the car?); Best Costume Design: Katja Hobat for Krnja in iger (Circus).

In recent years, however, even positive signs such as these were missing. Suffice it to say, there was a record number of films on show this October in Portorož: a total of 67 films over just three days, of which 17 were full length, 8 mid length, 17 feature and animated shorts, and 25 student films. But that’s not all: in response to its in-
vitation for submissions, the festival jury received 130 films, which resulted in only half of this year’s production being shown! One should not, of course, be fooled into thinking that this is a conse-
quence of the revamped organisation of the film industry, where the care for the public interest has been moved from the former Film
Fund to the Slovenian Film Centre. One must admit, however, that the Slovenian Film Centre has finally succeeded in finishing some of the productions from previous years which, at first, appeared to have been lost forever, together with the money earmarked for them. This increase in the levels of production is certainly the result of the fact that the use of digital techniques has considerably re-
duced film production costs - there is indeed some truth in the say-
ing that it is now possible to shoot a film with a mobile phone. This is one of the reasons why at least half of the films shown in Portorož were made with no public funding whatsoever: some money was made available, but only for expansion into the formats suitable to be shown at festivals.
But, we are more interested in the quality rather than the quantity of the films presented. Slovenian film only becomes interesting when the story is told in a special way - a way that is different from that told their colleagues, and when the story told is such as no one else is able to tell it. Film is an art form which must, literally, radiate the

identity of the environment from which it derives. This year a num-
ber of films fulfilled this criterion by reflecting the present state of Slovenian society, and this is a positive development, since the video culture
inhibit awareness, we welcome such progress!

LIFE – SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE – SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Slovenian film lovers are already looking forward to the Ljubljana International Film Festival which takes its visitors on a cinematic voyage around the world for eleven days every year. On 9 Novem-
ber, the curtain was lifted at Cankarjev dom for the debut showing of the film The Guard by John Michael McDonagh.

The locations of the festival are the same as usual, and the showings scheduled for the cult Kino V9, which has since closed, have been transferred to the recently reopened central Kino Komuna. Despite being an old cinema it is kitted out with state-of-the-art equip-
ment, and has a particular charm; it evokes memories of days when there were no multiplexes and popcorn - when going to the cinema
was a special cultural event.

As becomes a festival which shows films from around the world, focusing not just on famous names but on variety, it caters to the tastes of every film buff.

In the words of the festival director, Mr Simon Popelc, the festival offers ‘something for everyone’, adding that it is important that ‘this does not necessarily mean conforming to the popular majority or arbitrary indiscrimeness, but rather a tendency to select the finest works from as diverse parts of the world as possible'.

Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, photo: Slovenian Film Festival archive
THE MONTH OF DESIGN IS BACK IN TOWN

It has become a tradition that between mid-October and mid-November our capital, Ljubljana, also becomes the capital of design. Namely, during this period the Month of Design takes place, this year bringing together unusual modes of cooperation, unexpected relations and boldness under its auspices. The Month of Design is the largest and most diverse design event of its kind in the region. Over 30 days it is attended by more than 70,000 visitors, and hosts over 100 enticing events representing the best achievements in design and the creation of new, unusual methods of cooperation. A range of events, exhibitions, lectures and round tables in the areas of architecture, interior design, fashion, furniture and home-decorating products, electronics and telecommunications take place in various locations around Ljubljana.

“...The Month of Design is a month of cultural and economic potential, heralding integration, new beginnings and commercial breakthroughs. With this year’s theme ‘New Rules, Roles and Rulers’ creativity and its class were defined as a valuable category of local and global positioning of our capital and of our country in our region as well as globally, and as a key element of economic and cultural survival. Creativity is not a privilege; it is a positive tradition and a sign of a healthy society. Our mission is to become aware of it, evaluate it and harness it. The rediscovery of this tradition of knowledge and work will open the door to the future where we have to find ways not only to co-exist but above all to cooperate,” explained Zmago Novak, director of the BIG Institute.

The Month of Design awards those Slovenian creators and companies that contribute substantially to the improvement of design quality. With the Design of the Year, Interior of the Year, and Timeless and Perspective Design awards, they wish to evaluate the achievements of the profession by a jury of experts, draw attention to the effectiveness of Slovenian design, and point out the importance of creativity.

The awards were presented at the opening event. The Timeless Slovenian Design award was received by Janez Smerdelj for his Gorevc washing machine Simple & Logical. This washing machine represents a turning point in the design of household appliances. It is a decisive move from a technically (over)complicated to a user-friendly machine.

The jury presented the design award for 2011 to Tanja Pak for her Lake Series products. In support of their decision, they said that this is a series of high-quality glass products with an emphasis on creativity connected with natural forms. In terms of glass technology it is a top-quality thin blown glass, which has its origins in the ancient tradition of glass making. Design in the city will be on display until 11 November at various locations and unusual exhibition grounds in the centre of Ljubljana. Definitely worth a visit!

More information is available at www.monthofdesigns.com

ADOPTION OF MARIBOR 2012 PROGRAMME

In the last week of October 2011, the team responsible for preparing the European Capital of Culture Maribor 2012 project reached the first summit of its intensive endeavors. It prepared a detailed programme which was, upon its adoption by the project council, also adopted by the council of the Public Institute Maribor 2012, the main project holder. In this way, a formal basis has been established to enable the Maribor organisers to commence with operational activities, e.g. detailed planning preparations and the entering into agreements with contractors or project holders.

Considering constant problems that accompanied the past preparations, this is a big success. The time of financial and economic crisis in which the preparations take place and which will obviously continue when the project itself is carried out, considerably reduced the possibilities and ambitions of the local community and also of the state to fund the project as initially planned. The programme director Mitja Cañer who has been engaged in the project only since the beginning of this year had no easy task: from an unclear and above all a very sizeable bundle of individual ideas, ambitious as well as trivial programme plans, he had to pull out what would give Maribor its unique character, an air of innovativeness, but also sustainability of at least some programmes which will remain after the end of the Capital. This is how he defined the essence of his work: A team had to be formed virtually from scratch and it had to be prepared to cope with relatively uncertain conditions. The first difficulty was the fact that this is a completely new institution which, by logic, would need its time to get tuned up. Initially, the attitude of the environment towards the programme plans was distrustful and sometimes also negative. For most, the ECC is an empty label under which very different ideas can be jammed. In line with the vision that we should somehow be able to entangle the whole city or its very diverse citizens in the European Capital of Culture, interaction between designers of the programme and institutions, initiatives and individuals was gradually established. Throughout the process, we connected the width of the programme with its compactness in its basic outlines, otherwise it could never be fully expressed: 412 projects were included in the programme scheme Maribor 2012. Of these, 238 projects come from the City of Maribor and 102 from partner towns, mostly Velenje and Ptuj (24 each). 19 from Murska Sobota, 18 from Novo mesto and 17 from Slovenj Gradec. The programmes are divided into four basic programme clusters: Terminal 12 brings top-class art with a special emphasis on new approaches, as well as on domestic creativity. Keys of the City establish dialogue between the city and art, searching for new forms of creative existence. Urban Furrrows point to the importance of co-existence through activist research of social and environmental issues, while Sinfonia creates an alternative space of reflection, from ECC events through the city and the region to the wider European area.

Unfortunately, infrastructure that would enable the implementation of especially larger, more spectacular project has not been agreed upon so far. There is no doubt that in the second half of the year, Maribor will receive the new Art Gallery which has been part of the cultural plans of the Slovenian state for decades. Everything else is somehow uncertain while for now it is agreed that large halls of the former railway car factory would be used for a central performance stage which means that for the time being, plans for the central performance stage named Max will remain in the drawers. A new Maribor library for which it has been known for decades that it can no longer serve its purpose is also finally planned to be built.
PRESENTATION OF GOOD ARCHITECTURE

Over the past two decades, Slovenian architecture has increasingly turned to the issue of the high-quality design and construction of smaller buildings which require a special, distinct identity due to the very nature of the activities that take place within their walls. Among these buildings are individual houses, special purpose facilities (e.g. mountain huts) - in other words, everything that is placed into certain environment or affects it as a creation of human hands.

In the past, this area has been somehow overlooked since under the socialist system the attention was given mostly to the construction of residential neighbourhoods with apartment blocks. Namely, the principle of that time according to which every citizen was entitled to an apartment demanded construction of many new apartments or huge infrastructure facilities which occupied the majority of civil engineers. Therefore, especially the construction of individual houses was left to self-initiative of individuals while the permissive attitude towards self-construction stimulated a lot of do-it-yourself design and construction which in many places in Slovenia caused a true disaster in land use and especially in the aesthetic appearance of built structures. Fortunately, things are not considerably better even today, but cultural consciousness lately somewhat contributed to the fact that the people largely leave building of their houses to architects and construction contractors. Therefore, individual construction has become an interesting market niche, where quite a few interesting, especially young, architects are appearing.

Especially over the past couple of years there have been a considerable number of good practice examples that largely follow suit from that time according to which every citizen was entitled to an apartment demanded construction of many new apartments or huge infrastructure facilities which occupied the majority of civil engineers. Therefore, especially the construction of individual houses was left to self-initiative of individuals while the permissive attitude towards self-construction stimulated a lot of do-it-yourself design and construction which in many places in Slovenia caused a true disaster in land use and especially in the aesthetic appearance of built structures. Unfortunately, things are not considerably better even today, but cultural consciousness lately somewhat contributed to the fact that the people largely leave building of their houses to architects and construction contractors. Therefore, individual construction has become an interesting market niche, where quite a few interesting, especially young, architects are appearing. Especially over the past couple of years there have been a considerable number of good practice examples that largely follow suit from that time according to which every citizen was entitled to an apartment demanded construction of many new apartments or huge infrastructure facilities which occupied the majority of civil engineers. Therefore, especially the construction of individual houses was left to self-initiative of individuals while the permissive attitude towards self-construction stimulated a lot of do-it-yourself design and construction which in many places in Slovenia caused a true disaster in land use and especially in the aesthetic appearance of built structures. Unfortunately, things are not considerably better even today, but cultural consciousness lately somewhat contributed to the fact that the people largely leave building of their houses to architects and construction contractors. Therefore, individual construction has become an interesting market niche, where quite a few interesting, especially young, architects are appearing.

The Slovenian course developed into Slavonic studies, taught until the Enlightenment period. Maksimir professors, such as Gregor Krek, Karel Štrekelj, Vatroslav Oblak, Matija Murko, and others. Moreover, professors of law, theology and medicine at Graz university lectured in Slovenian in the mid-19th century. With its 500 students, the contemporary department of Slavonic studies in Graz ranks among the top courses in Europe. However, the only lecturership of Slovenian in Austria has now about the same number of students (50) as in the times of Primic. With its 500 students, the contemporary department of Slavonic studies in Graz ranks among the top courses in Europe. However, the only lecturership of Slovenian in Austria has now about the same number of students (50) as in the times of Primic.

On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the first chair of Slovenian language studies in Europe (July 1811), celebrations were held in the Baroque Hall of the old university building in Graz in mid-October. Janez Nepomuk Primic, a 25-year-old writer, poet, translator and lawyer, launched the initiative to establish this chair, which played a pivotal role in the history of Slovenian culture. He was also appointed its first professor, by a decree from Vienna.

The decision to open this chair also stemmed from the need of the authorities to teach civil servants and clergy in Sajskija the Slovenian language, since 40% of the population in that region spoke Slovenian. Furthermore, in the Illyrian Provinces the French had already allowed the use of the Slovenian language in schools and public life. The authorities realised that it was in their interest to introduce a university course of the Slovenian language. In the first year, about 60 students enrolled for the course. Primic even wrote two textbooks for them and compiled a German-Slovenian dictionary. In order to enhance the culture of the Slovenian population and to promote their interest in Slovenian, he established a society named Societas Slovenica in 1810.

Unfortunately, illness forced Primic to give up teaching after a brief period of time. The concept of his linguistic course in the Enlightenment and Pre-Romantic tradition encouraged future generations of students at the Graz Slovenian chair to continue with it. The Slovenian course developed into Slavonic studies, taught until the end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy by excellent professors, such as Gregor Krek, Karel Štrekelj, Vatroslav Oblak, Manja Murko, and others. Moreover, professors of law, theology and medicine at Graz university lectured in Slovenian in the mid-19th century.
Succeed or face defeat!

IVO BOSCAROL, PIPISTREL’S DRIVING FORCE

Mr Boscarol was keen on amateur photography, aircraft model building and politics whilst at secondary school. During his studies, he worked as an art photographer and was the official photographer at Šentjakobsko Theatre for several years; he has also worked as a music journalist and band manager. He was involved in the printing business and was responsible for introducing badges to Yugoslavia. His involvement in aviation began when he first flew a glider and afterwards, in 1987, when he flew a powered hang glider. He obtained a powered hang gliding instructor’s licence in the following year and, in 1991, organised the first ultra-light aircraft meeting in Ajdovščina. In 1987, he founded the first private aircraft factory in Yugoslavia, now known as Pipistrel d.o.o. Back then, under the totalitarian Yugoslavian regime, it was almost inconceivable for a private person to make an aircraft at home. Alternative aviation really was alternative at that time: Being a private aircraft producer doesn’t seem like such a big deal nowadays, but 22 years ago, offering an alternative to military aviation and army-regulated sports airfields was what really opened flying up to the wider public. Therefore, Pipistrel can rightfully claim to be the pioneer of alternative flying in Slovenia.

Under the former Yugoslavia, alternative and ultra-light flying was all but illegal. It was because of these prohibitions that we named our company Pipistrel. The airfield where we began our first flying attempts belonged to the army; therefore, the ultra-light pilots, if they wanted to fly, had to do so in secret. They had to wait until the regular sports and army pilots finished flying for the day, locked up the hangars and left; it was only then that they could attempt to sneak in an hour or two of flying before darkness fell.

At first, the company produced only powered hang gliders; as they were flying late in the evening with triangular shaped hang-glider wings, and using lights on the front of their aircraft, the locals jokingly started to refer to them as bats. The Latin word for bat is pipistrellus – the rest, as they say, is history.

A SYMBOL OF VICTORY

Despite the fact that this is not the first time Pipistrel has received an award from NASA – Pipistrel has in fact already won three prizes – this latest accolade has met with a broad public response throughout Slovenia. The company was awarded USD 1.65 million, the biggest prize in the history of aviation competition. The Wall Street Journal estimates that the recognition brought about by this award is worth ten times that amount. It attracts the attention of potential investors who see a technically accomplished product worth investing in NASA has teamed up with Google and thus prompted a level of media attention that money just cannot buy. Without doubt, no Slovenian product to date has gained such popularity. Only the Nobel Prize would be more widely publicised.

By focusing their attention on the NASA award, many media, as well as the political and economic spheres, somewhat neglected another important award. Last November, Mr Boscarol was awarded the prestigious European Business Award for the most innovative European company, a contest which attracted entries from over 15 000 companies from various industries and all 27 EU Member States. Boscarol’s company became Europe’s innovation giant because of its innovative product and business model; Pipistrel received the prize as the leading global company in the design and production of ultra-light motor glider aircraft.

GOLDEN ORDER FOR SERVICES

On 20 October 2011, President of the Republic of Slovenia Dr Danilo Türk conferred the Golden Order on Boscarol’s company, Pipistrel, for the success it has
achieved through the work of its experts, all of whom keep abreast of the latest scientific advances and successfully transfer the latest knowledge into practice, enhancing it with their innovation, and who are responsible for creating new knowledge in order to advance the company in the world. Pipistrel’s achievement is a reflection of its business philosophy, which is based on a clear vision, social and environmental responsibility, social sensitivity, professional focus and business ethics, all of which are a prerequisite for long lasting success. This ranks Pipistrel among the Slovenian companies dedicated to excellence, a fact which is recognised by business partners and society at large.

CHALLENGING NASA AND GOOGLE
At the award ceremony, Pipistrel challenged NASA and Google, the contest’s organisers, and other giants to set even higher goals for the next competition. Pipistrel announced its readiness to contribute USD 100 000 towards the prize money awarded to the company that succeeds in building the first electric powered supersonic aircraft. The audience was stunned into silence and then burst into applause. Later on, during informal conversation, the company was described as bold and the challenge itself likened to science fiction. In response, Mr Boscarol pointed out that, only three year’s ago, today’s achievement was perceived in much the same way. Pipistrel believes that barriers only exist in the mind. So, if one does not fear them, boundaries do not exist. The above mentioned landmark is now occupying the thoughts of institutes, flight academies, laboratories and universities worldwide, and there are already teams pondering how this could be done.

NOT A STORY: A SERIES OF SUCCESSES
Mr Boscarol gives the impression of being a visionary driven by a desire to constantly innovate, rather than by an interest in the growth itself or generating profit. This is a formula for outstanding practice, and something which the company is willing to apply. The company could be considered a success story but, because of its constant growth, innovation and persistence, Pipistrel is better described as a series of successes. The constant flow of awards it has received throughout the world is testament to this. We can only hope such personalities and business practices become more prevalent in Slovenia.

SUCCEED OR FACE DEFEAT!
Mr Boscarol says that ‘marketing’ happens naturally, that sponsorships are not his cup of tea because they are expensive, and that he is more inclined to invest in development. He is a man who raises the benchmark and, at the same time, acts as a great motivator in the personal and business spheres of life. He offers a useful piece of advice to Sinfo’s readers. In his view, there is only one key dilemma in one’s personal or business life: Succeed or face defeat! Hence, there is no alternative – life must be dedicated to success. Success should be our life goal. We can achieve success by being innovative and self-assured. We have to set ambitious goals that go beyond borders in the global context and then we must possess complete self-confidence in order to achieve them. Because there are no borders – they only exist in the mind!
Every action counts and everyone needs to take part

European Week for Waste Reduction and Discarded Food

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Waste management represents one of the largest challenges of modern society, especially in densely populated urban areas. Waste generation is directly linked to trends in the areas of consumption, population growth and household composition, the rate of industrial and agricultural activity and, last but not least, with the economic power of the population. European and Slovenian waste management regulations demand a radical reduction in the quantity of disposed waste, and especially the reduction of organic matter in waste allowed for disposal.

More specifically, the Framework Directive 2008/98/EC introduces a new approach to waste management. The Directive’s objective is for the EU to approach the ‘recycling society’ which tries to avoid waste generation while it uses generated waste as a source (in this way, waste represents a material source and not only something that has to be disposed off with as little costs as possible). Therefore, member states have to adopt measures to separate waste at source and to collect and recycle priority waste flows (e.g. paper, metals, glass, plastic, organic waste). The Directive defines the following 5-level hierarchy of waste management which is taken into consideration as the order of priority in policy planning and preparation of legislation in the area of waste: prevention of waste generation, preparation for reuse, recycling, processing, other types of reuse (e.g. energy recovery) and removal (here, disposal is the last option).

The Directive is mainly directed in prevention of waste generation. Prevention of waste generation means implementation of any measures before a certain substance, material or product becomes waste. In the times of consumer society, the whole society needs to be stimulated to pursue sustainable consumption as well as to use recycled materials and products from such materials through the awareness raising actions. Only with appropriate public awareness raising is it possible to reach a shift in understanding the issue of waste and the inevitability of certain ways of dealing with it in the present time.

EUROPEAN WEEK FOR WASTE REDUCTION

In accordance with the Waste Directive and supported by the LIFE - financial mechanism, the European Commission initiated the awareness raising action European Week for Waste Reduction (EWWR) in 2009 which will take place between 19 and 27 November this year. The purpose of EWWR, which was organised in Slovenia also this year, is to raise awareness about waste reduction. EWWR is important especially for familiarising the citizens of the European Union with simple measures we can carry out in our everyday lives as our contribution to waste reduction. The EWWR message is: every measure counts and everyone has to cooperate! This year’s week, however, also devotes special attention to the issue of discarded food. The largest share of waste food is generated by households, which could be reduced by implementing certain measures. Namely, every household can take care, by means of simple measures, that food doesn’t turn to waste (e.g. by making smart choices when purchasing food, by correctly storing food, by checking expiry dates, by cooking appropriate food quantities, etc.) For public awareness raising and reflection on food not becoming waste, we will organise a round table at the Ministry of Environment where such practice from Austria will be presented among other things.

ESTIMATED QUANTITIES AND COSTS OF DISCARDED FOOD

Within biologically degradable waste, discarded food represents a relatively important share; therefore, it has been given much attention globally in recent times. The comparison between the four main sources/generators of waste food (retail and wholesale trade, catering, protein and households) shows that approximately 42 % of all discarded food comes from households, averaging 76 kilograms per capita (Preparatory study on food waste across EU 27, 2010). The estimated figure of 5.3 million tons annually for the United Kingdom represents about 14 % of the total weight of food and drinks purchased and brought to a household (Household Food and Drink Waste in UK, 2009). According to the WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) report on food and drinks waste, discarded food in households for 2009, as much as 25 % of annually purchased food is discarded (in terms of weight). A similar study in the USA shows that, on average, 14 % of food purchased by households ends up as discarded food.

Most of generated discarded food and drink could be avoided, which amounts to approximately 5.3 million tons per year or about 65 % of all food and drink waste. In the large majority of cases, this waste could be avoided by more appropriate planning, purchasing, storage and preparation.

The lack of awareness and knowledge about preventive measures increases the quantities of waste food generated by households. For instance, old bread used to be an ingredient of an array of traditional dishes: panzanella in Italy; pain perdu in France; bread pudding in the United Kingdom; in this way, every bit of food was used.

Information on nutrition techniques to prevent generation of waste can help households understand how to be a smarter buyer and how to use what is more efficient (Preparatory study on food waste across EU 27, 2010).

CAUSES FOR DISCARDED FOOD GENERATION

Causes for generation of such quantities of discarded food are predominantly:

- Purchasing of excessive quantities of food in general, especially as a consequence of special offers.
- Purchasing of larger quantities of perishable food (e.g. fruit or vegetables) as part of a healthy nutrition pattern and experimenting.
- Food that would have to be consumed first remains on the shelves because the consumer decides what will be eaten on a certain day.
- Spring cleaning of cabinets, refrigerators and freezers by removing older, forgotten or unwanted food products.
- High sensitivity to foodstuffs’ hygiene and dates marked on foodstuffs.
- Excessive preparation of food in general.
- Dissatisfaction with the taste of food – mostly the food tasted by children (food Behaviour Consumer Research: Quantitative Phase, 2006).

IMPACTS ON GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

When comparing causes of greenhouse gas emissions, household sector is the largest contributor per ton of waste food (2.07 t of CO2 equivalent per ton) and also at the European level (78 million tons of CO2 equivalent annually which represents 46 % of estimated annual greenhouse gas emissions due to waste food) (Preparatory study on food waste across EU 27, 2010).

In cooperation with the University of Maribor, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning prepared a survey on discarded food in order to estimate the situation in Slovenia and to raise awareness. Unfortunately, the wider public regarding the issue of discarded food in households. The survey is available on the following web site:

http://swqlab.fov.uni-mb.si/limesurvey/index.php?sid=3148888637

You are kindly invited to participate!

Tanja Gomšiček, Miren Janeček, Barbara Šubic, Boštjan Gomšiček
BOŠTJAN ŠIFRAR

“Entrepreneurship requires a high degree of self-discipline and a lot of work and perseverance.”

The foundations of the company were laid in 1967, when Franc Šifrar started a small business processing thermoplastics. In 1976 he expanded the business to include tool manufacturing, and in 1993 his son, Boštjan Šifrar, took over the management of the company. At that time 10 employees manufactured plastic products on 5 machines, today the company has a working area covering some 20,000 m² and 200 employees, and exports its products to 41 countries all over the world.

THE FOUNDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMPANY

As Boštjan Šifrar tells us, his father Franc first opened a workshop where he manufactured plastic closures for the cosmetics industry. Almost 10 years later he expanded his activities to tool making. "After completing my studies at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in 1988, I started working in his company. Four years later I suggested that I take over the company management." His father agreed. He gave him free reign and didn’t interfere with his decisions or management, but said to him: “Now you are responsible for everything, both the good and the bad.”

In 2004 the company moved to new premises and in 2008 a new production plant for pharmaceutical products was added. Today the company has its own development team and tool shop. “We manufacture products for the pharmaceutical industry, such as closures for aluminium, laminate and plastic tubes and packaging for pharmaceuticals.” The company prides itself on manufacturing high-quality plastic products for globally oriented companies in the field of medicine and technical products for the electrotechnical, household appliances, telecommunications, sanitary, cosmetics, chemical and aircraft industries. Several factors have contributed to the expansion of the company’s business, says Šifrar, above all hard work and perseverance, appropriate education, the right strategy and a focus on the right products with the right markets outside Slovenia, and innovations. The company does business mostly with Great Britain, followed by Poland and the domestic market, then Slovakia, France, Turkey, Italy, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. It sells its products to 100 buyers, the largest being GlaxoSmithKlein. Among its customers are also Procter&Gamble, Sandoz and Henkel.

PERSEVERANCE AND BUSINESS ACUMEN

"After I took over the company from my father and had struggled in the domestic market for two years, I realised that we should expand and search for buyers outside Slovenia.” The firm promised potential buyers to deliver products of the same quality under the same or even more favourable conditions than their current suppliers offered, thus acquiring 76 new buyers from 29 countries. The company’s market has been expanding in line with its development and rise in revenue. The need for its products has grown, and the company has been steadily pulling away.
from its German competitor. It has also widened its product range, which has in turn contributed to gaining an ever larger market.

Owing to his perseverance, business acumen and general knowledge, at the age of 33 Boštjan Šifrar became the youngest recipient of the Award of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia for exemplary business and entrepreneurial achievements. The Podjetnik magazine and the Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia conferred on him the Entrepreneur of the Year 2011 award for the successful re-organisation of a well-thought-out strategy, which is one of the most demanding customers. Šifrar has been proving for a number of years that a manufacturing company can compete successfully on the global stage. He was also ‘entrepreneur face of Slovenia’, representing his country at the SME Week in Brussels in October 2011, where the European Commission promotes small and medium-sized enterprises.

ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW

For Boštjan Šifrar, a challenge of being an entrepreneur is to increase productivity and to develop demanding products with higher added value which can be offered to both old and new customers, and that, according to the Entrepreneur of the Year, automatically generates growth in all respects. A higher added value can be achieved in niches that are demanding from the technical and technological point of view in the medicine, pharmacy and cosmetics industries, and this can be realised only with highly developed equipment and highly educated people. The company makes substantial investments in the optimisation of machinery work, but Šifrar emphasises that his employees must compete with people educated at top universities. That is why Sibo Group devotes a lot of attention to recruitment and scholarships.

In the company, there is no lack of innovativeness or desire to surpass oneself and achieve ever higher goals. ‘We always have a new product – or rather more than just one – in development.’ According to Boštjan Šifrar, the firm is primarily working at the moment on QTAC for one of the 5 largest generic drugs in the world they have developed a special cap and shoulder that are lighter and therefore cheaper. They are different, unique and easy to use. The result is the production of more than billion caps and shoulders a year.

AUTOTRANSFUSION KIT: they have accepted the challenge of producing components for a device that cleans blood during surgery. They transferred the complete set of tools from the US, set up production in a clean room and proved that they are up to the challenge. The best proof of this is the satisfied customer, which sells the product to hospitals in more than hundred countries and has a 45% market share.

BREAST BIOPSY DEVICE: a high level of knowledge, reliability and manufacturing conditions has brought the company a new job, the manufacture of components for a breast biopsy device, which is yet another proof of the recognition of the company’s efforts and success in the last years and an important additional reference.

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

Sibo Group remains a family company, with Šifrar’s wife Špela responsible for procurement and his sister Martina in charge of marketing. ‘My children are 12, 16 and 19 years old but we are not yet thinking of handing the company over to the next generation. I think we will have to wait for another 5 to 10 years,’ says Šifrar playfully. In raising his children he always puts the emphasis on knowledge, work and perseverance. ‘I want to teach them to follow the right order: first to finish school, then university, and simultaneously to learn at least three languages and travel to broaden their horizons.’ The combination of such knowledge and experience, together with the maturity and the maturity people generally reach sometime by the age of 30, will maybe raise in them a desire to become entrepreneurs. ‘This may seem a nice way of life, but it requires from a person a high degree of self-discipline and a lot of hard work and perseverance.’

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The company for Šifrar is both a job and a challenge, a place he is always happy to return to after holidays or on Mondays. ‘I spend the weekends with my family and that is time that means a lot to me. It means that I recharge my batteries for a new working week.’ He is convinced that an entrepreneur has a great responsibility to offer to his working environment vision, safety and quality employment. The quality of the company is also reflected in its social responsibility and environmental protection.

In the future, he plans to maintain the established position while improving the company’s processes through innovations and thus realising even higher added value, part of which, he stresses, can be reinvested in modern technological equipment in order to meet the highest standards of the medical and pharmaceutical sector.
BOJAN TOKIĆ – EXPRESSING HIS GRATITUDE WITH MEDALS

The bronze medal won by Tokić is the first medal Slovenia has won in singles table tennis. By winning bronze medal in Gdansk, Bojan Tokić, one of the best table tennis players in the world, also met the qualification criteria to compete in the Olympic Games, which will be held next year in London. At 31 years of age he will then doubtlessly be at the peak of his powers.

Iztok Puc, the legend of Slovenian and world handball, departed quietly in Florida, USA, where he had lived for the last couple of years. A treacherous disease that destroyed his internal organs was too strong even for such a sportsman who, during his sports career, endured all manner of physical pressures. He departed silently and left behind a magnificent collection of handball creations, such as no one in the world possesses.

Iztok Puc was born on 14 September, 1966 in Slovenj Gradec. He soon realized that handball was his sport. In the Salekova valley he found his first two clubs in Solinja and Velence. As a junior he became one of the top young handball players in the world. In 1987 he was the best player of a junior team of the former Yugoslavia at the World Junior Championship and was among the most credited for winning the gold medal. A year before he was drawn to the club Borac from Banja Luka as an 18-year old young man. At that time they were national champions and their team was trained by Hrvoje Horvát, one of the legends of the world handball and once the best player in the world. Later, his daughter also became the life compan.

Unfortunately, life of one of the greatest handball players of all times has come to an end but behind Iztok Puc remains his son who is one of the most perspective young tennis players in the world. Let’s hope that the young man will achieve at least a fraction of sport success and fame commenced by his father Iztok Puc.
Istria’s Gold

“TRUFFLES OF THE SLOVENIAN ISTRIA ARE THE BEST IN THE WORLD”

Hidden in the soil of the Slovenian Istria grow special, aromatic, mysterious mushrooms – white truffles. They are appreciated for their extraordinary quality and their prices reach almost incomprehensible heights. I spoke with Ivan Ratoša, one of the people who know most about them in our area. He is a man who loves truffles with all his heart and speaks of them with special a glow. He is a person from the coastal region who you enjoy talking to, regardless of whether it is the middle of the truffle season or not and regardless of the topic of the discussion. About truffles or casually.

There is always a truffle season, the only question is which truffle is in season at what specific time. Namely, there are nine edible species and their harvesting seasons differ from one species to another. Truffle harvesting is thus spread out over the whole year. At the moment, it is the high season for harvesting truffles in the Slovenian Istria. Between September and January is the time when white truffles, which are a sort of crème-de-la-crème among truffles, grow. Actually, it is white truffles that gave truffles their glory and mystery. And this species is the most widespread in the Slovenian Istria. Although it is best used raw, it is also suitable for various truffle sauces and for preserves.

Anybody may now harvest truffles in Slovenia, as they are no longer protected. Until this changes, the same rules apply as for other mushrooms - anybody may harvest two kilograms at most for personal use. As a professional harvester of truffles he is of the opinion that the state ought to regulate this as soon as possible. For now, however, there are no longer such strict regulations. Truffles would be a lot easier to find if there was a registry of growers and experts.

There is always a truffle season, the only question is which truffle is in season at what specific time. Namely, there are nine edible species and their harvesting seasons differ from one species to another. Truffle harvesting is thus spread out over the whole year. At the moment, it is the high season for harvesting truffles in the Slovenian Istria. Between September and January is the time when white truffles, which are a sort of crème-de-la-crème among truffles, grow. Actually, it is white truffles that gave truffles their glory and mystery. And this species is the most widespread in the Slovenian Istria. Although it is best used raw, it is also suitable for various truffle sauces and for preserves.

A truffle is an underground mushroom, which has to be used with moderation, as a spice, on account of its extremely strong aroma. It grows under the surface and in its underground world it links itself with a tree or a bush, fastens to its roots and in this way obtains nutrients. This allows it access to chlorophyll which would otherwise be completely unobtainable underground. In Europe there are nine edible species, while there are also non-edible ones. Their fame is supported by various substitutes which are quite numerous in the market, since similar mushrooms grow also in other parts of the world, for example in Asia, but their qualities are far from comparable to the European and Slovenian ones and also considerably different.

It is primarily in truffle sauces that we have to read ingredients carefully, as they may contain many other mushrooms, warns Ratoša. “In our country we still lack proper consumer protection in this respect. In the Beli tartuf (white truffle) society, due to the draught and slightly changed climate, this year’s season was worse than usual.” High buying prices also testify to the lower number of tubers. At the moment, the prices in the market span from 1,500 euros to several thousand euros for a kilogram of these mushrooms, he explains. If we consider the current market price of gold, we can’t help but think of the truffle season as a golden one.

A truffle is an underground mushroom, which has to be used with moderation, as a spice, on account of its extremely strong aroma. This can be compared with the influence of the soil structure on the quality and flavour of wine. In surrounding regions we cannot find truffles of such quality, says Ratoša.

He has been harvesting them since his childhood, when he obtained his basic knowledge. A sort of institutionalization of his expertise is proved by diplomas from Zagreb and Italy, where he passed an examination in harvesting truffles. He hopes that such a procedure will also be required in Slovenia.

“What is this year’s truffle season like?” I ask Ivan Ratoša, a keen “prospector” and harvester of truffles as well as founder of the Beli tartuf (white truffle) society. “Due to the draught and slightly changed climate, this year’s season was worse than usual.” High buying prices also testify to the lower number of tubers. At the moment, the prices in the market span from 1,500 euros to several thousand euros for a kilogram of these mushrooms, he explains. If we consider the current market price of gold, we can’t help but think of the truffle season as a golden one.

I wonder, considering that they grow underground and so the classical collecting method probably doesn’t prove effective. Truffles are harvested with a specially trained dog. Using a dog for harvesting is the most practical, as they can be guided and are easy to train, he explains. Then you go to the area where truffles grow. The dog smells them under the earth and you simply dig them out. But dogs have to be a special breed, a more gluttonous one, such as Labradors and retrievers. Of course it is important that they are well trained, he explains. For example, you use them to dig up the truffles. Nowadays, finding something so hidden to sight is a very special joy. With me it is more of a personal satisfaction which gives me a lot of determination and energy.

A truffle is an underground mushroom, which has to be used with moderation, as a spice, on account of its extremely strong aroma. This can be compared with the influence of the soil structure on the quality and flavour of wine. In surrounding regions we cannot find truffles of such quality, says Ratoša.

He has been harvesting them since his childhood, when he obtained his basic knowledge. A sort of institutionalization of his expertise is proved by diplomas from Zagreb and Italy, where he passed an examination in harvesting truffles. He hopes that such a procedure will also be required in Slovenia.

HOW DOES TRUFFLE HARVESTING TAKE PLACE?

I wonder, considering that they grow underground and so the classical collecting method probably doesn’t prove effective. Truffles are harvested with a specially trained dog. Using a dog for harvesting is the most practical, as they can be guided and are easy to train, he explains. Then you go to the area where truffles grow. The dog smells them under the earth and you simply dig them out. But dogs have to be a special breed, a more gluttonous one, such as Labradors and retrievers. Of course it is important that they are well trained, he explains. For example, you use them to dig up the truffles. Nowadays, finding something so hidden to sight is a very special joy. With me it is more of a personal satisfaction which gives me a lot of determination and energy.

Anybody may now harvest truffles in Slovenia, as they are no longer protected. Until this changes, the same rules apply as for other mushrooms - anybody may harvest two kilograms at most for personal use. As a professional harvester of truffles he is of the opinion that the state ought to regulate this as soon as possible. This is a small sector in which, however, a lot of money circulates.

There is always a truffle season, the only question is which truffle is in season at what specific time. Namely, there are nine edible species and their harvesting seasons differ from one species to another. Truffle harvesting is thus spread out over the whole year. At the moment, it is the high season for harvesting truffles in the Slovenian Istria. Between September and January is the time when white truffles, which are a sort of crème-de-la-crème among truffles, grow. Actually, it is white truffles that gave truffles their glory and mystery. And this species is the most widespread in the Slovenian Istria. Although it is best used raw, it is also suitable for various truffle sauces and for preserves.

A truffle is an underground mushroom, which has to be used with moderation, as a spice, on account of its extremely strong aroma. This can be compared with the influence of the soil structure on the quality and flavour of wine. In surrounding regions we cannot find truffles of such quality, says Ratoša.

He has been harvesting them since his childhood, when he obtained his basic knowledge. A sort of institutionalization of his expertise is proved by diplomas from Zagreb and Italy, where he passed an examination in harvesting truffles. He hopes that such a procedure will also be required in Slovenia.

HOW DOES TRUFFLE HARVESTING TAKE PLACE?

I wonder, considering that they grow underground and so the classical collecting method probably doesn’t prove effective. Truffles are harvested with a specially trained dog. Using a dog for harvesting is the most practical, as they can be guided and are easy to train, he explains. Then you go to the area where truffles grow. The dog smells them under the earth and you simply dig them out. But dogs have to be a special breed, a more gluttonous one, such as Labradors and retrievers. Of course it is important that they are well trained, he explains. For example, you use them to dig up the truffles. Nowadays, finding something so hidden to sight is a very special joy. With me it is more of a personal satisfaction which gives me a lot of determination and energy.

Anybody may now harvest truffles in Slovenia, as they are no longer protected. Until this changes, the same rules apply as for other mushrooms - anybody may harvest two kilograms at most for personal use. As a professional harvester of truffles he is of the opinion that the state ought to regulate this as soon as possible. This is a small sector in which, however, a lot of money circulates.
Just look at Slovenian inns, they are all offering some truffle dishes. This must be regulated. And most of all, people have to become aware of what the real thing is. Many sellers cheat consumers and thus reap huge profits selling inferior goods as high quality and in this way take advantage of the veil of mystery which truffles are shrouded in.

Yes, truffles have from old stirred spirits and imagination, instigated through that cover of excitement connected to their harvesting. Each ground is also not proper, although it is the most important part. It seemed to me that Ratoša preferred to avoid my question when I asked him where his grounds were. After all, in Slovenia, where people like all sorts of mushrooms, even a random picker will not confide in you where they were picked. As Ratoša says, some features at the grounds can be noticed by the naked eye, and a lot depends on the feeling, but experience is most important. That is why all this seems a little bit mysterious.

Otherwise, there are many cheaters who try, in their lust for profit, selling inferior specimens as top quality. Especially problematic are oils, which mostly have truffle aroma and not much more. That's why consumers have to be educated. Namely, only few people know where truffles come from and what they are. Our domestic ones are certainly among the best in the world. Yet tastes differ, you know, everybody prides himself on his own goods. But those who know the ropes, know what is of value in the world.

Truffles as food

Truffles are used as spices, since they are highly valued and also very aromatic. There are several hundreds of recipes and each chef has something of his own. Personally, I prefer noodles with truffles, eggs with truffles or polenta with poached eggs and white truffles on top, says the truffle harvester. They are best freshly grated on a dish. They are grated in a similar way as carrots. They have a distinctive and typical flavour and aroma. This is something where we cannot be cheated.

The person I speak with is a true expert on truffles. He spent most of his life as an inn keeper and they always had dishes with truffles on the menu. You certainly get to know sooner or later, which are better and which worse, the value of individual specimens. Since his retirement, he has harvested them sometimes with more zeal and sometimes with less. I consider picking truffles as a form of recreation and exercising in nature. I prefer to go picking truffles than to go to the gym or tennis grounds. And the underground conditions allow their harvesting practically all year round. Truffles as underground mushrooms have a different life than those growing on the surface.

He says that he is completely in love with the Istrian truffle and devoted to it wholeheartedly. That’s why he works hard for its protection and primarily for the protection of its good name.

Additional information: www.istratartufi.com
Ivan.ratosa@istratartufi.com
International civil protection exercise

Between 19 and 22 October, Slovenia staged the largest international civil protection exercise ever, referred to as the “IP A-QUAKE 2011” exercise. Eight urban search and rescue (USAR) teams arrived in specialized vehicles and with associated equipment. The participating teams were coming from Albania, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey. The exercise also involved observers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The teams and other exercise participants were accommodated at the Base of Operations in Logatec, to be more specific at the Training Centre for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief. Approximately 170 rescuers were accommodated in heated tents of the Emergency Temporary Shelter Module. This module has been set up by the German-Swedish team and has been tested for the first time during this exercise. The exercise included around 450 persons, such as members of USAR teams, trainers, evaluators, observers and members of the Civil Protection.

EXERCISE SCENARIO

A magnitude 8 earthquake had hit Slovenia on 18 October 2011. The epicentre was 30 km SE of Ljubljana. According to first estimates, approximately 50,000 persons were at risk, 10,000 buildings were destroyed and 25,000 buildings were heavily damaged. A large number of persons were trapped under debris. Furthermore, roads and railway lines were damaged, communication and electrical infrastructure and water supply were obstructed. Most affected areas were located in one of the most seismically vulnerable area, namely central Slovenia. These locations included Ljubljana and the towns Logatec, Ig and Kranj. Due to the scope of the earthquake, Slovenia had to launch a request for international assistance in the form of USAR teams and technical assistance teams.

SEVEN EXERCISE LOCATIONS

Seven exercise locations with debris and abandoned facilities had been prepared for the rescuers to practice search, rescue and support operations. The locations included a destroyed fictional village and a wood-processing factory in Logatec, a heavily damaged psychiatric hospital in Postojna, various industrial facilities in Kranj, and a destroyed railway infrastructure and farm building in Ljubljana and its surrounding area. Each exercise location was based on a detailed rescue scenario. USAR teams exercised rescue from rubble and high altitudes. They employed various techniques, such as search operations with rescue dogs and search techniques involving audio and video devices. The exercise situation was as realistic as possible, including around 90 dummies buried under debris and 100 simulated victims posing as injured and panicking persons.

EMERGENCY TEMPORARY SHELTER (ETS) MODULE

The German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) launched the development of the ETS module in January 2010. The module is intended to accommodate displaced persons in the event of natural disasters and was tested for the first time during this exercise. The sheltering includes 200 tents and offers temporary accommodation to approximately 1000 persons, with one tent accommodating five persons. The tented camp is fully self-contained for emergency situations: it is equipped with generators, provides heating, water supply, adequate hygiene conditions and medical care. The manager of the module, Martin Sjöholm from the Swedish MSB described it as first experience: “Overall, we are satisfied with the results, but we will change a few details. It took us 24 hours to set up 25 percent of the total capacity.” The sheltered camp was used for accommodating rescuers during this exercise. However, during real operations, they need to provide their own tents and equipment.

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE

The exercise participants, coming from the Western Balkans and Turkey, exercised under the guidance of Slovenian instructors and support operations. The exercise participants, coming from the Western Balkans and Turkey, exercised under the guidance of Slovenian instructors and support operations. The exercise situation was as realistic as possible, including around 90 dummies buried under debris and 100 simulated victims posing as injured and panicking persons.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

The IP A is financed by the European Union. It is carried out by a consortium of states, which is headed by the Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief and including the Croatian National Protection and Rescue Directorate, the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB). IP A comprises the preparation, performance, and evaluation of two regional exercises. The first exercise “IP A-Quake” was successfully accomplished. The second exercise, “IP A-CRO-Floods” will be conducted next spring by the Croatian National Protection and Rescue Directorate.

EARTHQUAKE IN SLOVENIA, FLOODS IN CROATIA

The IP A is financed by the European Union. It is carried out by a consortium of states, which is headed by the Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief and including the Croatian National Protection and Rescue Directorate, the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB). IP A comprises the preparation, performance, and evaluation of two regional exercises. The first exercise “IP A-Quake” was successfully accomplished. The second exercise, “IP A-CRO-Floods” will be conducted next spring by the Croatian National Protection and Rescue Directorate.
Slovenian humanitarian aid in 2011

The Republic of Slovenia continued to give humanitarian aid to numerous countries around the world in 2011. Despite the financial and economic crisis, the values of all humanitarian projects and donations will exceed one million euros. We are aware of the responsibility we bear as a donor country when it comes to environmental disasters, armed conflicts and other disastrous events so large in scale that they cannot be handled by the affected countries themselves. The coordination of Slovenia’s humanitarian aid projects is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This year, several humanitarian projects were carried out, of which the following are the most prominent:

HAITI: In cooperation with non-governmental organisations and Slovenian business sector, the Republic of Slovenia built a primary school in the city of Carrefour in Haiti which started operating on 5 October this year. For almost 300 children who lost their homes in a disastrous earthquake more than a year and a half ago and had to forget children's play for some time, a new period is thus beginning where they will acquire knowledge and discover new horizons in a new school together with their peers. For the construction of the school which was named after Slovenia «Ecole Communale de la Republique de Slovenie», Slovenia donated EUR 240,000. With this contribution, the total humanitarian aid of the Republic of Slovenia for the reconstruction of Haiti amounted to EUR 600,000.

LIBYA: In this year, Slovenia donated humanitarian aid in the amount of almost EUR 100,000 to Libya and the neighbouring countries where a larger number of Libya’s population seeked shelter. In the first weeks, humanitarian aid for accommodation and supply of displaced persons and refugees from Libya was donated through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) while later in July medicines and sanitary material were donated to a hospital in Benghazi. Psychosocial rehabilitation was provided to children from the areas of armed conflicts that spent two weeks in Slovenia in July. Slovenian companies also joined by contributing humanitarian aid for the affected Libyan population in a form of medicines and sanitary material and rehabilitation of children.

TUNISIA: We contributed donation of medicines and sanitary material to the Regional hospital in Tataouine region in southern Tunisia where a considerable number of refugees from Libya was given shelter. Besides the medicines, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared a donation of drawing sketch books, paint brushes, and tempera colours in cooperation with Slovenian companies Aero, Papirnica Radeče, and Mercator. In June, the Government also decided to grant up to three post-graduate scholarships to Tunisian students for studying in Slovenia next year.

PALESTINE: At the initiative of the President of the Republic of Slovenia Danilo Türk, Ph. D., Slovenian Government supports humanitarian action of rehabilitation and health care provided to Palestinian children injured in armed conflicts. In the project carried out by the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) and the Šola University Rehabilitation Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, more than 90 children have participated so far.

Again, the aid was donated for the Abu Ray rehabilitation centre on the West Bank and the UNRWA education programs.

HORN OF AFRICA: Slovenia responded to the current famine crisis in the countries of the Horn of Africa with the contribution of food rations, while Slovenian non-governmental organisations are also taking part in the collection of aid for the affected population of these countries. Among others, they collect funds in the action «Against Hunger For the Children of Somalia» for the project of purchasing milk powder for 5,500 families or at least 9,800 people in the area of three villages in Somalia.

CHILDREN: Slovenia devotes special attention to children and adolescents. Aid to children in post-conflict situations is one of the most important goals of Slovenian humanitarian and conflict aid since children in grave humanitarian and conflict conditions are especially vulnerable. Also this year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-financed projects of rehabilitation and medical aid to children living in post-conflict conditions in the Western Balkans, Iraq and the Transcaucasus region.

We dedicated support to several humanitarian development projects carried out by non-governmental organisations, mostly in Africa, which include especially children and women. Through the UN World Food Programme, the support was also aimed at ensuring daily meals to children attending a school in Herat, Afghanistan.

Slovenia also donated humanitarian aid to the affected population of Japan and Turkey in the aftermath of natural disasters as well as other countries in need of humanitarian aid. The aim of humanitarian aid remains to save lives, to prevent or alleviate human suffering and to preserve human dignity.
Our country is certainly located in an interesting geographical position. It is situated at the junction of one of Europe’s largest crossroads: where the paths that link South West and East Europe are at their most concentrated, and on the edge of the natural Alpine barrier which blocks or at least seriously hinders access from the European north to the warm south, which is where many important ports are located. Owing to the forces of nature, this barrier is relatively low in our territory (the Karawanken and the westernmost section of Alps – the Julian Alps – are a much lower barrier than the peaks of the High Tauern in Austria, let alone the Swiss mountain ranges), a substantial part of the most convenient thoroughfares have led through our country since ancient times. Many traffic flows have congested to the south of Ljubljana in Postojna Gate, a part of the country named after its largest town, which also serves as a sort of regional centre. The Postojna Gate represents the largest part of the Slovenian region named Notranjska (Inner Carniola).

Although this area seems a bit inhospitable due to its harsh climate and frequent weather changes typical of the transition between the warm Mediterranean and the cold continent, which is also the reason why it is sparsely populated and rich in forests, we can notice that the first great Slovenian monograph, The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola (Slava vojvodine Kranjske) by Valvasor, already devoted exceptional attention to it. Its geographical position brought it an interesting history in which military aspect is also strongly represented. Already in Roman times, Roman legions rolled towards the north through the region; they were later replaced by Napoleon’s troops, the thundering of the Isonzo Front echoed here during World War I, while during World War II the region was the scene of fierce battles between the Partisan resistance on one side and Italian occupation troops (later followed by German troops) and domestic collaborationists on the other. During Slovenia’s independence war in 1991, the tanks of the Yugoslav People’s Army from the barracks in this area were the first to begin the aggression against the independent Slovenia – in short, as regards the history of military events, this is by far the most “intensive” area of Slovenia. Also today, the tradition is kept by the only, but rather extensive, training grounds of the Slovenian army located near the town of Pivka, approximately 10 kilometres to the southeast of Postojna.

The town and its surroundings

A traveller will doubtlessly not regret visiting this area. His/her attention will first be drawn by the fact that in Postojna and Škocjan, there are two famous tourist attractions, karst caves. While the Postojna cave has been for centuries the most visited tourist attraction in Slovenia, the Škocjan caves have been listed as UNESCO world heritage due to their extraordinary beauty and geological value. However, the fame of both caves shouldn’t be the only motive of visiting the landscape which is truly something special, primordial, a mixture of a typical karst landscape with forests, steep karst escarpments and clearly visible rock falls, rocky slopes and beautiful tranquil dolines where no ‘ad-
judgments” can be seen that are usually enforced upon nature by human activi-

ties.

The town of Pivka, once one of those sleepy places where everything was re-
volving around the important railway junction which used to be its main char-
acteristic, (the railway lines from Rijeka, the largest port of former Yugoslavia, and the city of Trieste in Italy intersected here), is today a town with well-developed industry and tourism and a relatively bust-
ing local centre. Although today it has almost no importance in terms of railway traffic after the main traffic flows were re-
directed to the port of Koper, its position on the main Slovenian corridor leading to the Gulf of Kvarner brings it a lot of traf-
cic and tourists. The fact that it became a town with the newest Slovenian museum, the Military History Park, is becoming in-
creasingly important to Pivka. The muse-
um unites a local and a regional collection and is a kind of a coordinator of the ac-

tivities related to the offer of cultural and natural heritage and tourism in the area.

PARK OF MILITARY HISTORY

In 2006, three huge buildings of former Italian barracks, built around 1930, which later hosted armoured units of the Yu-
goslav Army because this was one of the most important strategic points along the western borders of the former state (which has always seen larger threat in the West than in the East), became home of the museum-tourist centre named the Park of Military History. The project is a result of a felicitous synergy between the Minis-
try of Defence and the Pivka municipality. The project is a result of a felicitous synergy between the Minis-
try of Defence and the Pivka municipality. The result is formidable, even astonish-
ing for Slovenian conditions. When ap-
proaching Pivka, one is surprised by the monumentality of the buildings them-
selves, a nice layout of the surroundings and a pleasant arrangement of the col-
lection which is tuned to individual visi-
tors’ tastes. Unlike in most museums, the bustling of visitors here is quite surpris-
ing. Young families prevail, with children curiously inspecting the collection. There is no doubt that arms are a challenge for little children, but instead of glorifying the arms and their interesting technological aspects, the Pivka collection directly links them to related historical stories which are predominantly a chronology of free-
dom fighting. In this perspective, robust appearance of cannons and silhouettes of famous tanks such as the American Sherm-
an or the Russian T-34 are not paying tribute to the history of technology that was able to manufacture such sophisti-
cated killing weapons 60 years ago, but rather to the victors who used them to free Europe from the Nazi menace. The famous Yugoslav tank T 55 which used to be regarded as one of the most modern weapons of its kind, is a hero of the col-
lection because a few days after it left the barracks to prevent Slovenia from gaining independence, it was seized by Slovenian soldiers and used by the forces that suc-
cessfully defended Slovenia. Beautiful and interesting stories are also linked to other items thanks to them, the Park is a place that warns how important it is for the arms – if there is no other option but to use them – to be in the right hands.

COMPLIMENTS TO OUR SCIENCE

However, the weapons in the collection are in many respects also a tribute to Slo-
venian experts and scientists. My kind guide Boštjan Kurent showed special af-
fection and pride when presenting me the pocket submarine P 913, the museum’s newest and currently the most attractive item, donated to the Slovenian Ministry of Defence by Montenegro. One is sur-
prised by the fact how the term pocket submarine is an approximately 20 metres long and at least 5 metres high steel vessel which could take some 20 people, includ-
ing their submarine “scooters,” to carry out their commando missions. It is espe-
cially surprising that so much propelling, navigational and optical technology can be congested in a relatively small place. The majority of components come from Slovenian companies. Besides, subma-
rine crews which are a kind of elite within the navy, were composed mostly of Slo-
venians. That much for those who have been dismissing Slovenian military capa-
bilities! It is also similar with the tank T 55 which is based on the Russian model but was considerably improved, parts from Slovenian factories representing as much as 70 %, of all installed elements. The arm-

cour came from the Jesenice ironworks, the gun barrel from the Kvarne ironworks, optical elements from the Iskra company – all this testifies about the quality of Slo-
venian industry at that time.

Of course, all this writing can by no means adequately present everything offered to a visitor by the Pivka collection. One has to go there and see things in person! The mu-

seum team, however, is also involved in other activities: every year they organise their festival with various reconstructions of historic events that took place in the area. They started with a reconstruction of a typical World War II battle, in 2008 they focused on a World War I battle, in 2009 Napoleon’s and Austrian soldiers fought there at the occasion of the anniversary of the Illyrian Provinces, while last year bad weather prevented them from fully presenting the theme of Turkish raids. The park also set up a circular walking trail of military history where at a several hour hike visitors can see numerous forti-

cations and other structures abounding in this area. They also cooperate with a local tourist farm, maintain several cultural at-

tractions and do many other things which can be checked in detail on the excellent web site http://www.parkvojaskezgo-
divnine.si/Default.aspx.