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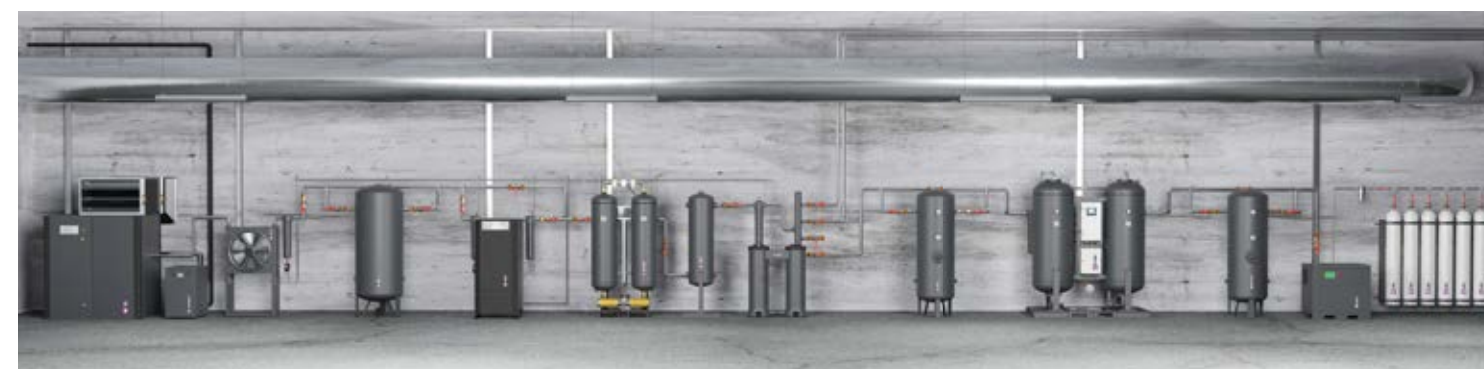
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GORAN NOVKOVIĆ, EDITOR

SloXportia

SloXportia is the name we might give Slovenia if we were being a little flip-pant. But it wouldn't be that far from the truth, first, because of Slovenia's historical economic development, and later, because of its rapid progress in tourism, sport, startups, culture, science and politics.

A. Business

Exports. Slovenia exports: products, champions, startups and the like. It started with its business activities in the former Yugoslavia, where it was the most export-oriented republic, and exported strongly to Western markets. But things have changed a lot since the days when Slovenia's exporters were more or less exclusively state-owned (officially socially owned) companies.

Entrepreneurs. One figure tells all: of the 600 largest enterprises in the country, almost a third are in the hands of private entrepreneurs. Private companies barely existed 35 years ago, although they might very well have just been starting up in garages and workshops around the country, or as a hobby or small craft business.

Today, almost 200 of them are among the largest companies in the country, which means that most of them are exporters as well. Slovenia is a small country. If a company doesn't export, it's almost impossible for them to be among the largest. This edition of the magazine contains articles on some of the rising stars of the export scene.

Pharmaceuticals. The other 400 companies have adjusted perfectly to conditions on foreign markets. Slovenia is even becoming a small tiger economy in the fields of pharmaceuticals and biopharmaceuticals. In terms of ownership structure, industry in particular is a proper reflection of the world in miniature, which shows just how open the Slovenian economy is.

Startups. There aren't quite as many startups challenging the big guns as you would expect, but they do have a high public profile – Talking Tom, for instance. Perhaps a few more will emerge in the future, as the latest news is that the international startup festival Podim has partnered with Silicon Gardens, which reinvests capital from successful regional startups into new startups in the SEE region.

Family-run businesses. There are considerably more family-run and other young Slovenian enterprise stories. That is one of the country's notable business features. Their products have even found their way into space, on the International Space Station and the European Ariane 6 rocket. It is perhaps no coincidence that Slovenia became a full member of the European Space Agency (ESA) this year.

These companies are overwhelmingly still in domestic hands, although they are frequently the target of takeovers by foreign investors. However, their owners, particularly when the business is family-run, rarely choose to sell. For Slovenian family entrepreneurs, their companies are not just about capital, but emotional connection. Any suitor has to make a real effort.

B. Sport

As this year's winter sports season comes to an end with championship victories for Nika and Domen Prevc, as well as for other Slovenian ski jumping stars, we remember with nostalgia that skiing has been the country's national sport for decades.

Back in the day, Slovenes were champions in a range of sports as members of the national Yugoslav basketball, football and handball teams.

Very few people would have thought, after the country became independent, that Slovenia would end up having two of the world's top cyclists in Tadej Pogačar and Primož Roglič. Nor would there have been many

people prepared to bet that the country would produce an NBA star like Luka Dončić.

I was playing football when Slovenia became independent in 1991. If anyone had said that Slovenia would appear at the European Championships or the World Cup, on two occasions in each competition no less, most of us would have laughed. That laughter would have got louder if anyone suggested that Slovenia might one day become European basketball champions – as they did in 2017 – or that the country's handball or volleyball players would bring home medals from European and world championships.

If Slovenia was turning its gaze outwards to the world even before independence, leading to success that has only got bigger since, then sport has allowed us to realise dreams that we would never dared to have had 35 years ago.

C. Tourism, science, art and politics

These successes have raised Slovenia's profile and standing in the world, which has made it easier to develop tourism, particularly boutique and food-based tourism. This edition of the magazine takes a look at some of the hidden jewels of our green country, and samples a few of the delicacies being cooked up by Slovenia's array of renowned chefs.

Meanwhile, Slovenia's science champions are making discoveries that are helping to change the world and its future,

from the discovery of quantum light to space research and groundbreaking medical innovations. This year, artists and cultural figures are organising the first cross-border European Capital of Culture project, which is taking place in Slovenian Nova Gorica and Italian Gorizia under the slogan "Borderless". Lastly, Bled Strategic Forum, one of the four largest events of its kind in Europe, celebrates its 20th birthday this year.

D. Slovenian champions at prestigious locations

Slovenia is currently a member of the United Nations Security Council. The events and achievements mentioned in this introduction are the reason why we have decided to enhance the content and expand the distribution of this edition of Enterprising Slovenia.

The first edition came out last year in time for the Paris Olympics, with stories of Slovenia's export and sporting champions. You'll be able to get hold of this edition in more places than before – like last year, at every Slovenian embassy and consulate, but also at Bled Strategic Forum, the Podim startup festival, the WTM London travel and tourism fair, and at European Capital of Culture GO2025! events. Many of Slovenia's exporters will also receive copies to distribute to their partners.

I hope you enjoy reading these stories of Slovenian champions.

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Slovenian Champions

Special edition of Podjetna Slovenija (Enterprising Slovenia) magazine for global readers.

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Publisher

Izziv X d.o.o.
Gorenjesavska 13b, 4000 Kranj
email: info@podjetnaslovenija.si

Editorial office

urednistvo@podjetnaslovenija.si

Editor-in-chief

Goran Novković

Executive editor

Petra Kovič

Design and layout

Mitja Pogorevc, Spotnet d.o.o.

Marketing of advertising space

marketing@podjetnaslovenija.si
01 5130 824
trzenje@podjetnaslovenija.si
01 5130 832

Translation

Amidas d.o.o.
email: amidas@amidas.si

Cover photos: Depositphotos,
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Podim, EPK/Jernej Humar

Analytical support:

AJPES
Tržaška cesta 16, 1000 Ljubljana
email: gp@ajpes.si

AJPES

Slovenian Champions magazine is aimed at global readers. It is dedicated to the biggest and latest achievements of individual Slovenian champions and Slovenian companies in business, sport, tourism, science and culture.

Copies will be available until the end of 2025 at Slovenian diplomatic and consular representations around the world, the Podim international startup festival, major tourism fairs, the European Capital of Culture GO! 2025, the Bled Strategic Forum and other locations where it can be read by global readers.

This is the second edition of the magazine. Last year's first edition was dedicated to sport and business champions. It was available at Slovenia House at the Olympic Games in Paris and at Slovenian diplomatic and consular representations throughout the world.

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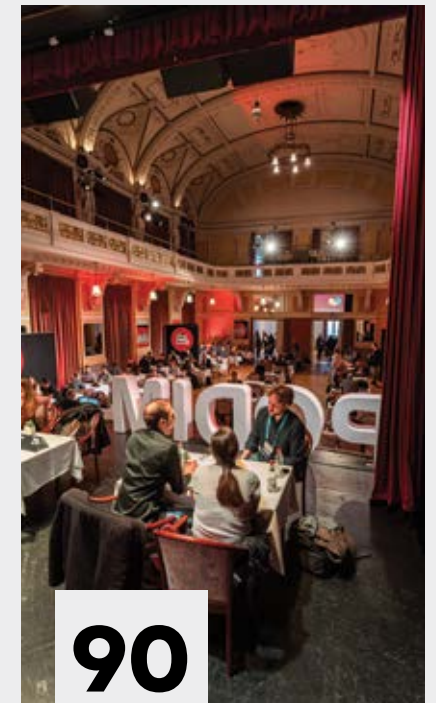
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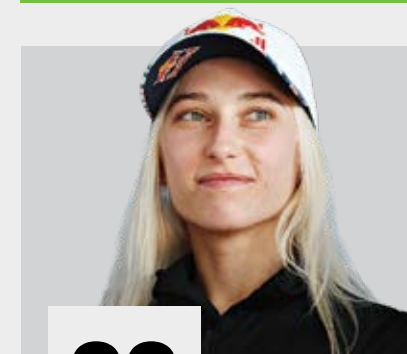
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TOP BOUTIQUE DESTINATIONS



The Widest Range of Services in One Place – A Winning Combination for Global Market Success

We live in an era of rapid change that demands continuous adaptation from both individuals and organisations. In recent years, we have witnessed a strong trend toward niche specialisation across various sectors, as well as within global corporations. Globally, dedicated development centres are emerging to focus on specific processes. The benefits of such specialisation are clear – focus, competitive advantage, and optimisation. However, this trend also comes at a cost: the gradual erosion of a holistic and systemic perspective on business operations and industry development.

Our journey began in a similarly focused way. Initially, our core expertise lay in measurements and metrological procedures aimed at ensuring compliance with standards, product repeatability, instrument calibration, and quality control. Over the decades, this field of work naturally expanded in response to the evolving needs of manufacturers, and through continuous development, SIQ grew into an institute with one of the most extensive portfolios of accredited methods and procedures in the region.

As our services evolved and expanded, so too did our role as a trusted partner across a wide range of industries and sectors. Today, SIQ provides a broad spectrum of activities, offering organisations essential support on their journey toward high-quality and compliant solutions.

What We Do – Comprehensive Support Across All Phases of Quality and Compliance

At the heart of SIQ's mission is the assurance of safety, quality, and regulatory compliance of products and processes in line with applicable standards and legislation. Our core



services include testing and certification of products for international markets, assessment of management systems according to international standards (such as ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO/IEC 27001), the development and delivery of professional training programmes, metrology services (including calibration, validation, and verification of measuring equipment), and testing and certification of equipment intended for potentially explosive atmospheres (explosion protection – Ex).

An important and growing area of our work lies in information security and cyber resilience, where we support organisations in establishing robust systems for data protection and the safeguarding of information assets.

With our comprehensive range of services, we support the full life cycle of products and systems – from

development through to market deployment. Rather than offering isolated niche services, we guide our clients through all stages of key processes related to quality assurance and regulatory compliance. This integrated approach enables our partners to meet international standards and maintain high levels of quality and competitiveness across the board.

At SIQ, we do more than issue certificates and reports – we actively contribute to process and system improvement and provide long-term support in maintaining compliance. Through continuous investment in knowledge, we also foster the competence and expertise of both our team members and those of our partners.

With a dedicated team of top experts, we have been delivering services of the highest value for over sixty years.

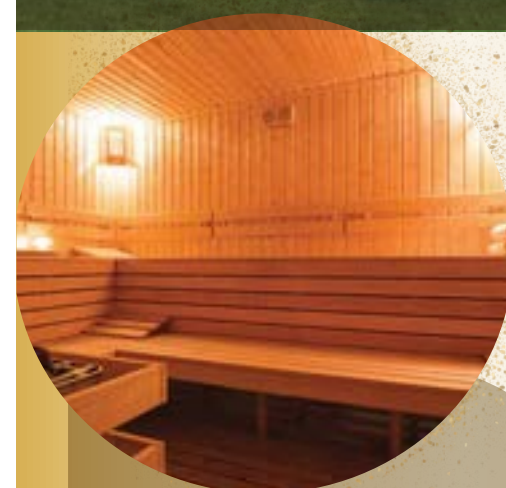
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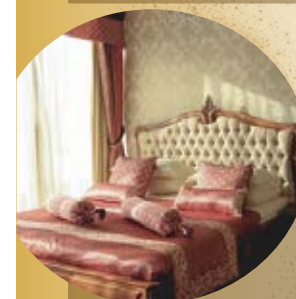
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Pricing pressure felt in European logistics

Logistics is a sector that is alive, that keeps adapting and changing, and at the same time it is highly dependent on geopolitical relations in the world. As Janez Merlak, Managing Director of Adria kombi d.o.o. says, these changes can be sudden (such as when a ship got stuck in the Suez Canal) or slower (such as political changes).

Europe is currently having to deal with dwindling exports and growing imports, and increasing pressure can be felt in terms of prices and the search for alternatives.

War impacting the quality of rail transport

The current picture of European intermodal transport is being noticeably impacted by nearby military clashes. The war in Ukraine has for instance altered certain established freight channels – during the war, grain especially has gravitated more towards Mediterranean ports which were not the first choice in the past. The increased volume of grain wagons has further burdened rail transport and reduced the capacities for intermodal trains, and consequently the quality of transports by rail has been seriously downgraded.

“Our greatest challenge at the moment is the quality of rail transport and the associated delays. Due to the reduced capacities while the European rail network is being upgraded, and due to the high cost of electricity, it is losing out in competitiveness compared to road transport for middle and long distances,” explains Janez Merlak.

Tariffs will entail a further drop in European exports

On the other hand the hot topic of the moment is the introduction

of American tariffs, from which we have yet to feel the impact. In the words of Mr Merlak there are three key reasons for this:

- Lately the European Union has seen very weak exports, with much greater freight imports than exports. The trend of the last few years since the EU was a strong exporter has been entirely turned around.

- The Port of Koper has no direct link with America, so goods being exported to the USA gravitate to the northern ports (Antwerp, Rotterdam, Hamburg, Bremerhaven, Wilhelmshaven).

- Each change takes time for the flow of goods to adjust.

The expectation at the Adria Kombi company is that due to the American tariffs, EU exports will further dwindle, which will lead to an additional import-export imbalance. “In the end this is one of the important factors that increase the need for single-direction transport and the raising of logistics costs,” adds Mr Merlak.

Flexible and reliable intermodal carrier

Adria Kombi is the largest independent intermodal operator in South East Europe, offering a wide range of combined transport solutions connecting over 70 industrial centres throughout Europe. They can carry out purely rail transport between terminals or deliver the



“The best metaphor is a river that flows around and modifies its stream around every obstacle,” explains Mr Merlak.

entire package to the door, including arranging the customs documentation. Thanks to their great flexibility they can also offer customers tailor-made services at extremely competitive prices.



Champions who are putting Slovenia on the map



- Are love and elite Slovenian athletes the reasons why our country is known around the world?
- Why and how does Slovenia's "incubator" of sporting excellence work?
- Slovenia's sports stars are the "glue" that binds people together, so they breathe as one, forget about their (political) divisions and unite in a common cause.

TOMI ŠUJDOVIČ / PHOTO: SPORTIDA

We Slovenes love to travel, there's no doubt about that, and the Slovene language can often be heard in the most remote and unexpected corners of the globe – not only in global metropolises. Perhaps the desire to explore the world is written in our genetic code, perhaps our own country's small size is what sends us out into the wide world, or perhaps there's another reason.

Until recently, our country's name recognition abroad was somewhat haphazard and unreliable, with various inaccurate variants of the name "Slovenia", but all that is in the past. It might be partly due to the power of love, hidden in the heart of the name (sLOVEnia), but there is no question that much of the credit for Slovenia's international profile goes to the sportsmen and sportswomen who have become global icons in

Luka Dončić



Nika Prevc

"When you're little and watch your brothers conquering the world, you say to yourself: maybe I can do it too!" – Nika Prevc after her final flight in Planica.



the international (and business-driven) world of sport.

These days foreigners are quick to link Slovenia to our sports stars and their achievements. There is no comparison between sport today and sport as it once was when it comes to profile, marketing and earnings. In Slovenia we know that our sporting aces are top-class, but we may not be fully aware of how popular they are in their club or competitive environments. The most prominent among them are truly global superstars: basketball player Luka Dončić, footballer Jan Oblak, cyclists Tadej Pogačar and Primož Roglič, ice hockey player Anže Kopitar, climber Janja Garnbret...

It's not easy to explain to people in other countries why and how Slovenia's "incubator" of sporting excellence actually works, especially if we consider that athletes elsewhere enjoy far better conditions for

training (and competition). Slovenia's national sporting heroes, each of them working tirelessly in their own competition venues for success and, of course, for medals and trophies – not to mention earnings – are often unaware of the significant impact they have on Slovenia's sense of self as a nation, self-confidence and pride.

Through their example, perseverance and determination, they weave a fine web of cooperation, understanding and mutual respect among their fellow citizens, while also serving as a great inspiration when it comes to overcoming the obstacles that face us in our daily lives.

At the same time, they promote Slovenia, giving back their share in the national colours. They are the "glue" that binds people together so that they forget about their (political) divisions and unite in a common cause.

Cannibal in the saddle

Tadej Pogačar did not compete in the Olympic Games in Paris, but there's no use dwelling on history, and in any case this meant that the Slovenian cycling ace was rested and "pumped up" for his appearance at the World Championships. There, he proved once again, this time with a stunning solo breakaway, why he is the current number one in world cycling. And as he has said several times since, the World Champion's rainbow jersey means more to him than his prestigious triumphs in the Tour and Giro.

To paraphrase Gary Lineker, who famously described football as "a simple game; twenty-two men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans always win," cycling is a global sport in which cyclists from all over the world compete and at the end, the Slovenes win. The proof of this can be seen in the results of the world's biggest races: Giro d'Italia, Tour de France, World Championships (Pogačar); Vuelta a España (Roglič) – victory in all these races remained firmly in Slovenian hands in 2024.

Last year Slovenian cyclists claimed victory in ten of the 35 UCI WorldTour events, making Slovenia the number one nation in this regard. "Last season was

special. Victories in the Slovenian jersey are particularly important to me because I know how much they mean to our fans," says "Pogi".

The Eagle of Zasavje no longer uses his wings, but he still flies far

As a child, Primož Roglič started off playing football. He then decided to swap the ball for a pair of skis and started ski jumping. He retired from ski jumping in 2012 and, at the age of 22, switched to cycling. With great perseverance, he overcame one obstacle after another and showed that he is indestructible. The number of falls and injuries he has endured would have stopped many competitors, but not Roglič.

Take last year, for example, when he suffered a bad fall during the Tour de France and fractured a vertebra in his lower back. It looked as though his season was over, but just over a month later he was back at the head of the team in the Vuelta a España, going on to win the event for the fourth time. "Life isn't only about successes, there are also falls. What matters is that you always pick yourself up again" – a sentiment that perfectly encapsulates this Slovenian cyclist's attitude to sport and to life.



Tadej Pogačar

Nika & Domen: The queen & the king, soaring on the wings of dreams

This year, the skies above the Alps crowned a new queen. Nika Prevc, just 20 years old, has quite literally soared into the ranks of legends – becoming the youngest overall World Cup champion and Ski Flying World Champion.

Her brother Domen set a new ski flying world record at the end of March in Planica – 254.5 metres. But before that, it was Nika who had made history by flying 236 metres in Vikersund. Both ski flying world records are now in the hands of the Prevc siblings.

Nika, who celebrated her 20th birthday in March, set numerous milestones this season in women's ski jumping and won the large crystal globe for the second time. In Slovenia, only Primož Peterka – the "Eagle from Moravče" – has achieved this feat. Among female jumpers, only Japan's Sara Takanashi (4) and Norway's Maren Lundby (3) have won more crystal globes.

What's truly impressive is how the champion from Dolenja Vas near Železniki claimed this year's title. She recorded an extraordinary 15 wins during the season and amassed the highest point total (1,933 points) in the history of women's ski jumping.

In doing so, she equalled two of Takanashi's records: for most consecutive wins (10) and most wins in a single season (15). She also matched Lundby's record for most podiums in a single season (19). In the overall standings, she beat second-place German Selina Freitag (1,293 points) by 640 points – the largest margin ever in the history of the Women's World Cup.

Interestingly, what matters most to her isn't the medals, but the world record in jump distance. Even before the season started, she said her biggest dream was to fly over 200 metres – and she fulfilled that dream on the world's largest ski flying hill in Vikersund (Oslo). It wasn't just a jump near the 200-metre mark; she flew far, setting a new world record of 236 metres. An Olympic medal is the only one missing from her already glittering collection.

In doing so, she has written a new chapter not only in ski jumping history but also in the legacy of Slovenia's famous Prevc family. The latest chapter was added at the end of March in Planica by Domen Prevc, who, in addition to the world record, also claimed the small crystal globe for the overall ski flying title.

Nika grew up with a ski jump almost in her backyard. With three older brothers – including the legendary Peter Prevc – she quickly learned that perseverance is what gives wings to dreams. Today, it is Nika who inspires younger generations to reach for the heights.

Humble yet determined, Nika – with her trademark smile and unwavering focus – has proven that heart and the resilient Slovenian spirit can triumph even in a sport where millimetres and the wind decide champions.

One word is enough: Lukaaaaa!!

Luka Dončić's story reads like the script of a Hollywood blockbuster. The young lad who used to shoot hoops during his father Saša's training sessions at Ljubljana club Slovan quickly outgrew his surroundings and, at the age of just 13, flew off to Madrid on his own. The rest is history. With Real Madrid, he won everything there was to win in the Spanish and European leagues. The only challenge left was the basketball they play in the USA.

Once notoriously cautious or even disparaging about European players (one example being the way the legendary Dražen Petrović was treated at Portland), in recent years the NBA has welcomed players from the old continent with open arms, and they are now among the biggest stars of a league that is considered the finest in the world. Dončić, of course, is already in his seventh season as part of this sporting spectacle.

For Luka, who also became a father last year, there are still plenty of challenges, especially now in the wake of his unexpected transfer from Dallas to Los Angeles. Luka looks playful and carefree when he's on court, explains former swimmer and Olympic silver medallist Sara Isaković: "Basketball is a game. The reason Luka is so successful is because he's having fun. You can see that." Dončić has always been available to wear the national team's colours, and that is another reason why Slovenian fans adore him – and stay up all night to watch his matches across the pond.

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Need more proof? Slovenian ski jumpers brought home a remarkable haul from this year's Nordic World Championships in Trondheim: four golds and one silver. Gold medals were won by: Domen Prevc (individual), Anže Lanišek, Domen Prevc, Lovro Kos, and Timi Zajc (team large hill), and Nika Prevc (on both normal and large hills). The silver went to the mixed team of Ema Klinec, Nika Prevc, Domen Prevc, and Anže Lanišek on the large hill.

Bottom line: this year, Nika and Domen brought home four gold and two silver medals from the World Championships, the big and small crystal globes and two ski flying world records. Unrepeatable.

Captain of the Kings making history

If we're talking about sport on the other side of the Atlantic, we cannot ignore the exploits of ice hockey player Anže Kopitar. Born in tiny Hrušica, Kopitar left the safety of his home environment at a very young age – just like Luka Dončić – and moved to Sweden. He was soon spotted by scouts from the NHL and, in 2006, played his first match for the Los Angeles Kings. After many years in the Kings uniform, today he leads the team as its captain. The arrival of the legendary Wayne Gretzky in Los Angeles in the autumn of his career generated a level of excitement about ice hockey never before seen in California. That was when Los Angeles officially went "hockey crazy".

Kings fans would have to wait a little longer for a title, however. The first Stanley Cup championships came in 2012 and 2014 under captain Dustin Brown – with Anže Kopitar as "co-captain" and one of the key players in the team. Now 37 years old and ageing like a fine wine, the Gorenjska-born player has been the Kings' captain since 2016.

The Škofja Loka octopus

Back in the days of Yugoslavia, we Slovenes were seen as a nation of skiers, something confirmed by the successes of our winter athletes, but this picture is slowly but surely changing. Football is perhaps the most global of all sports, and the number one Slovenian name abroad is that of Jan Oblak, one of the best goalkeepers in the world.

The goalkeeper carries more responsibility than any other player in the team. While a striker may miss several clear-cut chances without facing (too) much criticism, a single mistake by the keeper can cost the team the match. But Oblak believes in his mission: "We're not crazy. We're normal people. But we're special, we're different. I'm really happy I became a goalkeeper."

The Škofja Loka native has worn the Atlético Madrid jersey since 2014 and is considered a quiet and calm leader in the background. He began playing football at the age of six and joined Ljubljana team OL-

Anže Kopitar

impija at ten. He was well known for riding his bike to training, whatever the weather. It's no secret that his role model at the start of his career wasn't one of the legends of world football but his own father (himself a former goalkeeper).

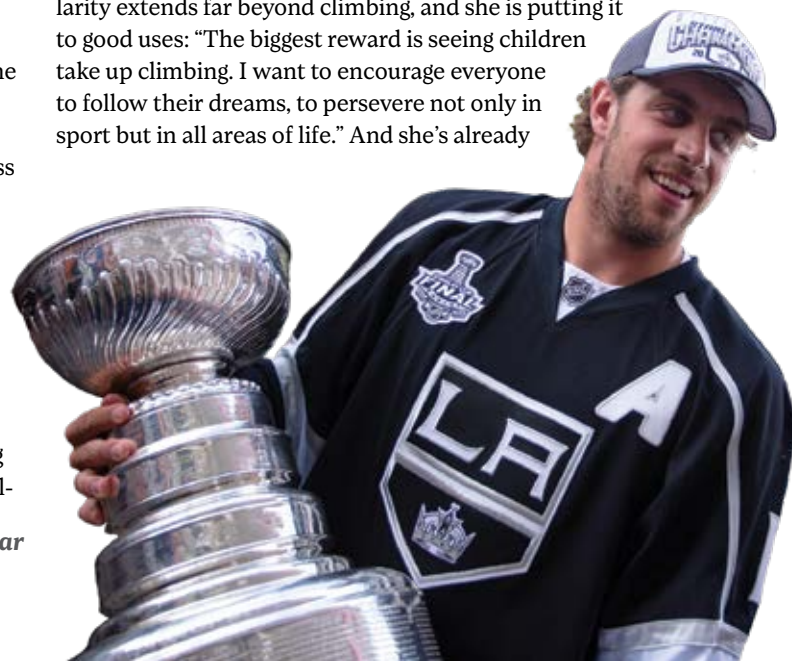
Tears of joy and relief from the world's queen of climbing

To see Paris, win and write herself into the history books. This was the goal that Janja Garnbret, the best climber in Slovenia and the world, set herself for the 2024 Olympic Games. She completed the task with flying colours, successfully defending her Olympic title in sport climbing. It's difficult to imagine what it must be like to set off for a competition with the weight of expectations of public and fans – not just in Slovenia but around the world – on your shoulders.

The fact is, there is no room for mistakes. The psychological pressure must be enormous. That is the cruel reality, but as people often say: it's at times like this that heroes are born. The Slovenian champion, with her graceful dance under the overhanging wall, where a millimetre can mean the difference between a secure hold and a fall, showed she possesses the stuff of champions.

"It's hard to put my feelings into words. On the one hand, it's as though a weight has been lifted from my heart. What I've been through today, it's not easy, especially when you're defending a title," she said when it was all over. Those moments as she completed her final climb and secured the gold will remain etched in the memory of Slovenes. Before that last climb she'd injured her finger, which could have meant disaster, but she didn't despair. She told herself: "It doesn't matter if I'm missing a hand or a finger. I'm going to go and climb that route."

The tears on her cheeks when it was all over were an outpouring of emotions – relief, happiness and sheer joy – and one of the most moving moments of the entire Games. Paris demonstrated that her popularity extends far beyond climbing, and she is putting it to good uses: "The biggest reward is seeing children take up climbing. I want to encourage everyone to follow their dreams, to persevere not only in sport but in all areas of life." And she's already



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looking to the future and the biggest goal of all: the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

A veteran in his fifth decade who is still counting on an Olympic appearance

The universally popular "heroes of mountain tea" (as they were known), in other words the most highly esteemed winter athletes in the history of Slovenian sporting successes, had always been the alpine skiers and ski jumpers. This meant that Slovenia's snowboarders, who only appeared on the international skiing "scene" in the late 1980s or 1990s, were very much in their shade.

For a long time snowboarding was considered an exotic sport, something for the freaks, the nonconformists who didn't care much for rigid traditions but instead loved freedom and expressed it in their mode of dress and their rebellious attitude. They were the alternative to traditional (alpine) skiing, and then in the early 1980s snowboarding began to establish itself as a serious sport, not just a bit of fun for youngsters. It became an official Olympic sport and part of the Olympic family at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan.

Žan Košir is the biggest name in Slovenian snowboarding. A native of the Gorenjska region who lives near Tržič, Žan turned 40 last year and has been a professional snowboarder for more than 20 years. Most of his biggest achievements came after he turned 30, which

is a rarity in professional sport. He is the most successful Slovenian snowboarder in history and the only one to have won more than one Olympic medal (he has three).

His victories include the overall Snowboard World Cup title (2014/15) and three Olympic medals (silver in 2014 and bronze in 2014 and 2018). Only the gold still eludes him. His next big challenge awaits him in a year's time, when Cortina d'Ampezzo becomes an Olympic venue (hosting the snow events of the 2026 Winter Olympics).

Youngsters waiting in the wings

If the focus so far has been on sporting names that are familiar to all, it is worth adding that there are plenty of youngsters waiting "in the wings" for their own chance to shine. The 21-year-old footballer Benjamin Šeško (who currently plays for Bundesliga team Leipzig) is expected to break transfer records, perhaps as early as this year.

Other youngsters waiting for their big opportunity include 24-year-old tennis player Kaja Juvan, 21-year-old golfer Pia Babnik, 25-year-old chess player Laura Vnuk, 25-year-old discus thrower Kristjan Čeh and 17-year-old climber Jennifer Buckley. A long list, which takes us back to the beginning of the story: Slovenia is a remarkable "incubator" of top athletes, transcending the country's small size and confirming that Slovenes are (or can be) a nation to be reckoned with. >>

Paralympic champions

Physical and psychological preparation are two important factors that affect the final result and success of every athlete. Just like their able-bodied colleagues, disabled athletes battle for the hundredths or thousandths of a second, the centimetres or millimetres that separate the successful from the less successful. But in the case of disabled athletes, or para athletes, there is another dimension as well. For them, every competition is proof that the (physical) limitations they have faced at various stages of their lives, and which they live with every day, are not an obstacle. There is no doubt that para athletes are also exceptional because they overcome the prejudices and barriers in people's minds. Not just their own, but those of the wider social environment too.

Para athletes have to adapt their techniques and strategies to their physical abilities, which requires additional creativity and psychological stability. In doing so, they are breaking down social stereotypes and prejudices, since they have had to adapt to life-changing circumstances that demand additional inner strength and a great deal of motivation and perseverance.

In almost every case, disabled athletes have a moving story to tell that simply cannot be ignored. Including

in Slovenia. Slovenia's para athletes won numerous medals at European and world championship events in 2024, and also at the Paralympic Games. For Paralympians, the latter are the climax of a four-year cycle of preparations. For many competitors, they represent the peak of their career. Given the strict rules and stiff competition, it is no easy matter to win a place at the Games under the five rings.

Slovenia sent a 14-member delegation to Paris. They returned home with two medals, courtesy of sport shooter Franček Gorazd Tiršek and archery duo Živa Lavrinc and Dejan Fabčič. The latter pair won bronze in the mixed team recurve event, while Tiršek took gold with his air rifle, his fifth Paralympic medal.

"Disabled athletes are just as engaged in elite sport as able-bodied athletes. You have to keep up with all the trends, watch your diet and ensure that everything you do is dedicated to your sport... I'm proud of myself because I've worked hard and built my achievements through sheer dedication," says Tiršek, with justifiable pride.

Franček Gorazd Tiršek



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"For some reason they really like me in Asia, so I'd say that's where I have most followers. In America too."

Interview: Janja Garnbret, olympic champion

"Perhaps I'll climb a skyscraper in Shanghai."

■ How has two-time Olympic champion Janja Garnbret built her brand on social media and also her business?

■ Where in the world is our Olympic champion most popular? Where does she have the most followers?

■ What does she think about fake news?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

Two-time Olympic sport climbing champion Janja Garnbret thrilled us again last summer in Paris. Perhaps less well known, however, is the fact that she could also serve as something of a model to many other athletes in Slovenia and around the world when it comes to business savvy.

In our conversation with her, we reveal how she is taking care of business away from the climbing wall. This is evident from, among other things, the A1++ credit rating of her company Garnbret d.o.o., which the year before last, according to official figures from Dun & Bradstreet, came very close to generating a million euros of revenue. Not bad for a company that was just four years old at the time.

You have won gold twice at the Olympic Games. More than six months have passed since you defended your Olympic title in Paris. Can you tell us what your next big goal is?

After the Olympics, I took a bit of a break and did some outdoor rock climbing. I don't have any big competitive goals at the moment. But I do want to climb one difficult outdoor route.

As a little girl, you used to like climbing up doorframes and on the furniture at home. You have also famously climbed Europe's tallest chimney. Are there any other unusual structures you would like to climb?

I think that chimney is the most unusual thing I've climbed so far. I'm really glad that project worked out. I was enthusiastic about the idea as soon as I heard it. It's true that as a little girl I liked climbing doorframes, trees, wardrobes... Anything that was higher than me. Now, of course, I love climbing on climbing walls, like those at competitions, but also on natural rock faces.

I hope some other interesting climbing project comes along, but for the moment I have nothing planned. Perhaps a skyscraper in Shanghai or somewhere. I wouldn't say no to that!



Sport isn't only about victories. There are also falls. You once said that falls are 99% of climbing. With that in mind: what has been the hardest moment in your career to date?

The hardest moment was the year before last when I got my first injury. I tore the tendon of the big toe on my left foot. That was one of the most difficult periods I've had to endure, because I'd never experienced anything like that. I didn't know how to react. I didn't know if I would ever get back to the top, if I would ever climb as well again.

There were lots of doubts, but I came out of that situation even stronger than before. I learnt a lot. It was another experience that will help me in my career. Something good comes out of everything.

It may be less well known in the business community that you are very active on social media. Was this a passion of yours even before your sporting successes or did it develop in parallel with them?

In the early days of social media, I liked the idea of sharing something about my life. I started using social media for fun. Of course, now that I'm a little better known, my posts are more professional and my social media activity is at a slightly higher level. I have people who help me with this.

But I still see social media as somewhere where I can show my good and bad sides; where people see me as I am. I don't want to embellish anything. I don't want everything to be perfect, because I'm not perfect myself.

In my opinion, social media is a good thing, but there are also times when I take a break from it. Especially in the months leading up to the Olympic Games.

"The growth of negative content on social media is, in a way, a reflection of the society we live in. And that should concern us more than it does."

In recent times social media has come in for a lot of criticism about the shallowness and inappropriateness of certain content, about fake news and so on. What do you think about that?

Just as with everything, you have to maintain a certain critical distance and not take everything as the gospel truth. It's important not to forget that anyone can publish anything they like on social media and call it the "truth". I think it would be better for them to say that it's just their opinion.



I absolutely believe that every individual or organisation should use social media responsibly; I'm thinking above all about the responsibility of not spreading fake news.

As far as shallow or inappropriate content is concerned – everyone presents themselves how they want to on social media. It's up to the rest of us to decide what we're going to follow and support, and what to ignore.

I would even go so far as to say that the growth of negative content is, in a way, a reflection of the society we live in. And that should perhaps concern us a little more than it does at the moment. At least that's my feeling.

You have more than 750,000 followers on Instagram and 110,000 on Facebook. Where are they all from?

You know, I don't really know! For some reason they really like me in Asia, so I'd say that's where I have most followers. In America too.

In an article we wrote last year about athletes' earnings, we mentioned that some websites

list you among those athletes who are also very successful in business. How have you managed this in a sport like climbing?

It's taken quite a long time. When I started out, climbing wasn't even an Olympic sport. Things started happening for sport climbing in Slovenia with Mina Markovič. That was when the sport started to become better known.

When I won my first World Championship in Paris in 2016, the popularity of sport climbing began to grow, and even more with the Olympic Games in Tokyo and, now, in Paris. Especially in Slovenia, but all around the world, too.

Sport climbing is now developing quickly, but it's taken quite a few years to get to the level I'm at today. I could probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of climbers in the World Cup who can make a living just from doing this.

What are your goals on social media, including in connection with your business activities, in the future?

I will continue to use social media above all to show my everyday life, my daily activities, my suc-



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cesses and also my failures to those who are interested. The business side of things is not the main focus. It's not the priority. I believe that it's important to maintain authenticity.

This is also how we connect with each other best. Without any pretence. If this leads to opportunities for business collaborations, then the basis for what is potentially a good cooperation based on shared values is already there.

How many climbers are there around the world who are so successful in climbing and at the same time on social media and in business, in other words who can make a living from this?

I'd probably be lying if I said there were more than ten of them; there may not even be as many as that. Maybe those who don't actually compete at all but are active on YouTube, for example. Or outdoor rock climbers.

Climbing is not yet at a stage where, say, the top 30 climbers could make a living from it. Most of the climbers who are competing and training also have a job. They are often coaches or route-setters in their local climbing centres.

But given how quickly the popularity of this sport is growing, I think that before long there'll be more money around, including as regards the prizes at World Cup competitions. With the current prize money you can't even cover the cost of flights, hotels and food if you're from Europe and the competition is in America.

How much is a World Cup victory worth in terms of prize money?

I think it's currently around 2,900 euros. Even if you win, that's not enough to cover your costs. That's really sad. Given that it's an Olympic sport, you would expect the prize money to reflect that.

Even so, you've managed to climb your way on to the Forbes 30 Under 30 Europe list – as probably the only climber on that list.

Yes, that was a great honour. I never dreamed I would end up on a list like that. The fact that I made it on to such a ranking from a sport that is still in its infancy has

motivated me even more to keep doing what I do, to help climbing continue to grow and to grow as a person myself.

Would you advise other athletes in niche sports, whether in Slovenia or elsewhere, to follow your path, in other words to find their feet in business as well and build their own brand through social media, in order to gain the financial security to continue competing?

Yes, absolutely. That is actually the only way to do it. You need to surround yourself with people you trust who have experience in this area. They can guide you and help you build your brand via social media.

I'm lucky to have people like that around me. There's no way I could have done it on my own: I would have to give up climbing and concentrate on the kind of things that an athlete shouldn't have to worry about.

I have an agent who has helped me put a team together. This team helps me build my brand and also achieve good business results. It would be a shame not to build my own brand, given all that I've achieved in climbing.

We started building the brand five years ago. We are growing along with climbing. This is a process that never ends. We also plan to continue like this in the future.

To what extent are you yourself involved in building your brand on social media?

I have people who help me with this, so I don't have to do everything myself. Of course, I am informed about everything that is going on. We exchange ideas, so I'm involved in all the processes. I think it's important for me to know what's going on. And I also have some good ideas of my own.

It's a team effort. I'm not fully involved in every last detail. But I'm not alone either.

You mentioned your popularity in Asia. According to Ayao Komatsu, the Japanese team principal of the Haas F1 Team, you are the most famous person in his phone. Does this mean that you are more popular in Japan than in Slovenia?



“You need to find people you trust who have experience in this area. They can help you build your brand via social media.”

Yes, I'm really popular in Japan. I'm not even sure why. They really respect me. They respect my achievements and the fact that I still have my feet on the ground. That I am the way I am. That I'm accessible. That I tell it like it is and don't try to sugarcoat things. That's the response I get all over the world, but especially in Asia.

Did Adidas and Red Bull approach you after you'd become popular on social media or before?

Adidas came before, in 2018. Red Bull arrived a year later. Adidas has been the team sponsor for around 15 years, so it seemed a logical step to have my own partnership with them.

As for Red Bull, I'd always wanted to be with them. They were sponsoring my ex boyfriend, Domen Škofic, when I was climbing my way up in my own career. Red Bull Slovenia noticed me first, then global Red Bull came along six months later.

Do you already have business plans for when your climbing career is over? Is it something connected to social media?

I think I'm already at an age when I need to start thinking about this. It's not like when you're 16 and the only important thing is to compete, train and climb. I definitely see myself on social media, but also elsewhere.

One day I would like to pass on everything I've learnt to younger generations. I'd like to be a coach and work with young people, because that makes me happy. I feel like I can help them achieve their dreams.

So putting social media and coaching together... Does this mean that in 10 years' time Janja Garnbret will be the most popular virtual sport climbing coach?

No, definitely not virtual!

I was thinking about the virtual nature of coaching content on social media.

Personally I hope that there won't only be one Janja Garnbret, but that in the future there will be others.

What advice would you give to young athletes with a strong desire to win? Can you list three pieces of advice, either about sport or about business?

The first thing I would say is that they have to have a vision. They have to know what they want to

achieve and make decisions that lead towards that goal. And stay true to themselves. They should always work towards what they want to achieve.

My second piece of advice is to build a team around them that they trust. That's because there are ups and downs in life. They need people around them they can rely on. The team shouldn't be too big. The important thing is that they trust these people absolutely.

The third piece of advice is to enjoy what they're doing. Even in my case, the reason I win is because I love what I'm doing. Winning is the way I express my passion for climbing.

Does this mean that we'll be seeing you again in four years' time at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles?

Yes, that's the plan.

And there it is: the next big goal we asked about at the start of this interview. >>

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Slovenia

Global Business in Miniature

- Where do all the owners of strong Slovenian exporters come from?
- Why do almost two-thirds of Slovenia's largest exporters come from industry?
- Why are Slovenian exporters the world in miniature twice over?



Photo: Alamy Stock Photo



Akrapovič is Slovenia's best-known B2C export brand.



GORAN NOVKOVIĆ

Slovenian exporters are the world in miniature twice over: because they produce niche components that can be found in many products by preeminent global brands, and because the ownership of these predominantly Slovenian industrial concerns is so varied and colourful. Investors come from all parts of the world.

But even more striking is the fact that there is almost no company on the list of the 300 top Slovenian exporters that emerged after independence and the collapse of socialism, or that did not start out from humble, small-business beginnings before that.

How is this possible? This question is particularly pertinent because, at first glance, the ownership structure of those exporters does not differ from what we see in other post-socialist EU countries.

1. State-owned energy dominates, with a few young enterprises knocking at the door

Of the ten largest Slovenian exporters, five come from the energy sector and five from industry. Slovenia's energy companies are generally in state ownership or under dominant state control, with the exception of Belektron in second place. Belektron, which is owned by one of the freshest faces on the enterprise scene in Slovenia, has risen to that enviable position through CO₂ emissions trading.

Dewesoft provided measurement equipment for the test bench of the Ariane 6 rocket, which was launched last year. Dewesoft's Sirius and Krypton measurement systems were used to test the rocket engine.



Photo: Arhiv Jure Knez

Jure Knez (Dewesoft)

Boštjan Bandelj has very specific views on his industry that set him apart from the rest. He caused a stir two years ago when he announced that "We do not need taxpayers' money or subsidies for the green transition." This was despite the fact that the green transition had helped him achieve business success through emissions trading.

He has been equally forthright on the subject of electric cars ("[They] will win out when they are better and cheaper than cars that run on fossil fuels") and in his criticism of the European car industry, which he accuses of having designed electric vehicles as premium products, which means that they are more expensive than their petrol-driven counterparts.

2. All the world is here

Once we get past tenth place on the list of Slovenia's top exporters, the dominance of industry begins to assert itself. Slovenia is one of the most industrial EU countries, although there are considerable differences with other Central and Eastern European members in this respect.

Household appliance manufacturer Gorenje is owned by the Chinese, Lek by the Swiss, SIJ by the Russians, Revoz by the French (as is Adria Mobil), Mahle Electric Drives, Hella and BSH by the Germans, Perutnina by the Ukrainians, Hidria by the Spanish, Goodyear by the Americans, Palfinger by the Austrians, Kansai Helios by the Japanese, AquafilSLO by the Italians, Iskrameco by the Egyptians and Danfoss Trata by the Danes, while Don Don was recently taken over by the Mexicans. The list could go on.

Chinese, Swiss, French, Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Americans, Austrians, Japanese, Italians, Egyptians, Croatians, Danes, Mexicans: it is as if the whole world has moved to Slovenia. But there are still quite a few large exporters that remain predominantly in domestic Slovenian ownership, including Impol, Tab, Talam, Unior, Kolektor, Iskra, TPV, Domel and a number of others.

Slovenia's top exporters therefore have a very international, diverse and healthy ownership structure. It is interesting to note that not one of the 17 companies in foreign ownership mentioned above saw foreign investment from nothing – that is, there was not one greenfield investment. All of them started by buying existing companies. The other eight (Slovenian-owned) companies have all been around for more than 35 years. This is a big difference in comparison with other EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

A deeper look shows us that Slovenia's export economy today rests on solid foundations (a result of the fact that Slovenia was Eastern Europe's most export-oriented economy even during socialist times) and that it therefore made more sense for the new owners to invest in good companies with expertise, staff and markets rather than embarking on greenfield investments. These have mainly arrived later, as the new owners sought to enhance the quality of the companies they had purchased.

To be clear, these are the 25 companies we picked out from the top 50 of the 100 biggest industrial companies. This does not mean that the other companies are completely new to the game, without historical roots stretching back before 1990. Of the

first 50, only Belektron, Carthago, ADK, Akrapovič, Cablex and Don Don (recently sold to a Mexican food manufacturer) were founded after that year, and there are other similarly young companies coming up on the rails. You can read more about them in the article on Slovenia's fastest-growing exporters in the pages that follow.

3. Industry attracting talents from Oxford and Cambridge

Slovenia's largest industrial exporters are extremely diverse when it comes to their product portfolios. Gorenje and BSH develop and sell household appliances, while Lek and Krka come from the traditionally strong pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical sectors. The interview with Lek CEO and Sandoz Slovenije president Gregor Makuc has a lot more information on this to pique your interest. What's more, talents from Oxford, Cambridge and the US East Coast are now showing an interest in working for the company.

The pharmaceutical sector in Slovenia is a particularly promising one, as recent new investments show. The interview with Mr Makuc contains more details on Lek's investments. Krka, which has a diverse

set of (predominantly domestic) owners, is also highly investment-active, and not only at home. This year it will invest around EUR 30 million in a new factory in India, its fifth abroad after Croatia, Poland, Germany and Russia.

Companies that manufacture "basic" advanced products, such as SIJ (steel), Impol (aluminium) and LTH Castings (aluminium) are particularly strong in Slovenia. Last year, LTH launched the production of technologically highly advanced castings for use in engine housings and stators for electric cars. Talum manufactures aluminium products, and announced that they will start operating a new factory at the end of this year for the manufacture of aluminium slugs, which is a semi-finished product in increasingly high demand on the global market. The slugs that Talum produces are a key raw material for the production of aluminium packaging products, such as cans, tubes and aerosol cans.

The country's automotive industry tradition means that the strong mobility arm is continuing to develop. Adria Mobil and Carthago make motorhomes and Revoz make cars. Next year is likely to see the arrival of the electric Twingo, slated for production at Revoz. Other very strong companies in the mobility



Talking Tom is originally a Slovenian invention.



Photo: Talking Tom

sector include Mahle Electric Drives, Hidria, Hella and Goodyear Slovenija. And this is far from all branches of industry.

The Tab Group develops energy storage systems, and opened a new production last year for the manufacture of lithium-ion batteries. The fact that fewer than 650 of its total workforce of 1,600 are employed in Slovenia shows just how global the company is. Perutnina and Atlantic Grupa are food manufacturers. The range of Slovenian export products stretches from highly engineered hi-tech products of the future to technologically state-of-the-art classic industrial factories.

4. A country of old hands and young guns

We can divide Slovenia's industrial exporters into two groups: the old hands, like Impol, the Kolektor Group, Tab, Unior, Iskra, Domel and Cinkarna, with several decades of experience and different ownership structures, and the young guns, such as Belektron (in second place), Adventura Investments, Akrapovič, Cablex, Calcit, Rastoder, Don Don, Plasta and Incom, all of whom emerged after independence in 1991 or developed from small businesses.

Of the first group, Kolektor have perhaps grown the most, having embarked on a number of new activities in the last decade or so. To the mobility industry from which they developed, Kolektor have added energy, water and digital technologies and construction in recent years, along with quite a few other things as well. Breakthroughs into new sectors or investments in new markets are typical of large Slovenian companies, who have never felt constrained by the borders of Slovenia or even those of Europe.

Despite rapid growth in exports from Slovenia, the Iskra Group, which is owned by the Šešok family, now generates more income in Croatia than in Slovenia, while Domel from Železniki have made a successful entry into the Chinese market. Why are we

highlighting Domel here? Because they have a specific ownership structure, made up mainly of employees. Their innovative motor-drive solutions are helping to reduce energy consumption in products manufactured by numerous world-renowned companies, from those producing small household appliances to large automotive concerns.

These are just some of the stories from Slovenia's most innovative companies. The most internationally renowned of the younger Slovenian exporters is Akrapovič, which develops the world's best vehicle exhaust systems. In December, owner Igor Akrapovič received a special award from the International Motorcycling Federation (FIM). Gold medals were presented to 62 world champions from various motorcycle racing disciplines, including 14 who won their titles on bikes fitted with Akrapovič exhaust systems.

FIM president Jorge Viegas awarded Igor Akrapovič the Nicolas Rodil del Valle Gold Medal, which is named after the late FIM honorary president and is given to key figures in the motorcycle industry. With this accolade, FIM recognised Igor Akrapovič's important contribution to motorcycle sport.

5. Energy companies lead the list of trade exporters

There are also more than 50 trade enterprises on the list of the 300 top Slovenian exporters. Together with industrial companies, they account for more than three quarters of the companies on the list.

Although energy companies (Petrol, Belektron and Geoplin) sit at the top of the list of trade exporters, the structure of trade companies is very varied: from the pharmaceutical company Sandoz and

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automotive company Avto Aktiva Intermercatus, to Izet Rastoder's banana-trading Rastoder Group, HS Plus (internet sales) and Intersport ISI (sports equipment).

6. Top logistics experts, young IT specialists

Slovenia operates one of the two most northerly Adriatic ports on the Barcelona-Kiev corridor. It is therefore no surprise that the Port of Koper, with the rail freight transport operations that serve it, is the number one logistics exporter. New logistics exporters can already be found in the second half of the Top 15, which shows how quickly this sector is growing.

At first glance, there are only few pure IT exporters on the list of the largest Slovenian exporters. However, the fact that only eight appear on the list does not mean that Slovenia's IT sector is undeveloped. These are truly pure IT firms, which are, by definition, often smaller in size and niche in nature; moreover, net exports by IT firms are often significantly higher than the average for other sectors.

Dewesoft is the biggest exporter in this sector, with its products finding their way into world-re-

nowned space programmes and even the International Space Station. In fact, they are not the only Slovenian company whose components have been installed in the station.

Another major IT exporter, Ekipa2, which started life under private company Outfit7, is now under Chinese ownership. Outfit7 is perhaps best known for launching the globally successful Talking Tom app several years ago.

Yes, Talking Tom is originally a Slovenian invention.

7. Slovenian products all around the world

Slovenia is not a big country, which makes it difficult to develop strong B2C brands with global power, as economies of scale are key to success in this segment. However, Slovenian enterprises have managed to develop a large number of strong niche B2B brands, many of whose components can be found in products manufactured by some of the world's biggest companies.

Slovenian components can be found in products manufactured by Airbus, Audi, Alstom, Bayer, Bom-

Photo: Domel



Domel, which is owned by its employees, helps reduce energy consumption in products manufactured by some of the world's best-known companies.

bardier, Bosch, Canon, Danfoss, Ducati, Electrolux, ESA, General Electric, Heineken, Honda, Lactalis, Mercedes Benz, NASA, Novartis, Pfizer, Philips, Renault, Samsung, Sandoz, Siemens, U.S. Steel, Volkswagen and Würth, although there are many more than we have the space to list here. This is exactly where Slovenian business's greatest strength lies. It has a strong engine, helping to turn the country's enterprises

into developmentally oriented niche champions in the B2B segment.

A few decades ago, companies like these were generally subordinate suppliers. Now we refer to them as "development suppliers". It is not computers that are most sensitive to market oscillations, but the semiconductors and other important innovative components they contain.

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One of the leading manufacturers of sheet-metal processing machines

Strojgradnja SAS are one of the four biggest manufacturers of long machines for bending, cutting and storing sheet metal in Europe.

A family-run business, Strojgradnja SAS are based in Krtince, near the town of Rogaška Slatina, and were founded in 1988 by Stanko Arzenšek. They develop and manufacture machines for bending, cutting and storing sheet metal destined mainly for companies involved in the metal roofing, ventilation and roller shutter systems. The company currently employ 20 people in development, production, sales and servicing.

Among the biggest in Europe

Strojgradnja SAS are one of the four biggest manufacturers of long sheet-metal bending machines in Europe. Proof of their success comes in the form of the comple-

tion of more than 1,000 bending machines with a working length of between 4 and 8 metres, as well as 2,000 other machines for the cutting, shaping and storing of sheet metal. With more than 3,000 customers and a strong brand, Strojgradnja SAS have built a profile for themselves across most of Europe.

"We have been able to do this through our own development efforts, high-quality manufacturing, direct sales to final customers and reliable post-sales support," they explain. "In addition to bending machines, we also develop and manufacture machines for the cutting and storing of sheet metal."

In more than 55 countries around the world

The company exports more than 90% of its production, 98% of which



goes directly to final customers. Their biggest export markets are in central, southern and eastern Europe, although they have a presence in more than 55 countries worldwide.

New products and automation

This year they are continuing to develop new products, improve their existing machines and bring new developments to the market. They are also investing in automating their production processes to improve quality and increase capacity.



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Branch: Prvomajska ul. 37, SI-5000 Nova Gorica
Office: Kidričeva ulica 9a, SI-5000 Nova Gorica, Slovenia, EU



TOP SLOVENIAN EXPORTERS*

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
1	Petrol Group	3,524.66	36	Novartis	239.93
2	Belektron	3,287.23	37	Palfinger proizvodnja	237.80
3	Gorenje gospodinjski aparati	2,453.94	38	Mol & Ina	237.15
4	HSE Group	2,422.39	39	Adventura Investments Group	236.11
5	Lek Group	1,964.19	40	Kolektor technologies Group	233.69
6	Gen Group	1,800.93	41	Kansai Helios Slovenija	232.65
7	Gen-I Group	1,799.88	42	Carthago proizvodnja Avtomodov	228.59
8	Krka Group	1,685.19	43	Kolektor Etra	216.41
9	Krka	1,383.65	44	ADK	214.53
10	Dilon Group	875.00	45	I.P.S. Group	213.49
11	Sij Group	848.48	46	Aquafile	212.65
12	Impol Group	821.09	47	Luka Koper Group	207.26
13	Revoz	819.20	48	Iskra Group	205.61
14	Impol	770.03	49	MMS Group	199.77
15	Adria Mobil Group	640.31	50	Elrad International Group	199.39
16	Kolektor Group	637.62	51	Slovenske Železnice Group	196.97
17	CT-Management Group	584.34	52	TPV Group	195.62
18	Geoplin Group	484.61	53	Akrapovič Group	193.70
19	Sandoz	439.33	54	Akrapovič	193.66
20	Sij Acroni	418.89	55	Kolektor mobility Group	192.39
21	Lior Invest Group	415.79	56	Cimos Group	186.15
22	LTH Castings Group	415.71	57	Knauf Insulation	185.54
23	Mahle electric drives Slovenija	397.11	58	Valiant	184.06
24	TAB Group	387.85	59	ETI Group	181.63
25	Perutnina Ptuj Group	375.83	60	Domel	181.02
26	Hidria Group	375.03	61	Odelo Slovenija	178.26
27	H & R Group	375.03	62	Cablex Group	177.65
28	Hella Saturnus Slovenija	345.09	63	TPV Automotive	176.38
29	Avto Aktiv Intermercatus Group	342.63	64	Domel Holding Group	176.36
30	BSH Hišni Aparati	320.72	65	SŽ EP Logistika Group	170.74
31	GA Adriatic	317.04	66	Fotona Group	163.80
32	Talum Group	292.29	67	SŽ - Tovorni Promet	161.79
33	Interenergo	269.85	68	Cinkarna	161.57
34	Unior Group	249.80	69	Calcit Group	161.37
35	Goodyear Slovenija	247.04	70	Sij Metal Ravne	160.80

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
71	Iskraemeco Group	156.86
72	Atlantic Droga Kolinska	155.15
73	Titus Group	153.61
74	Bidigital Group	152.41
75	Rastoder Group	151.27
76	Danfoss Trata	150.83
77	Električni Finančni Tim	149.95
78	Don Don Group	148.61
79	Amal naložbe Group	148.61
80	HS Plus	147.38
81	Elrad Electronics	143.52
82	Riko	141.56
83	EPS trgovanje	138.30
84	Bayer	136.43
85	Plasta Group	135.75
86	Odpad	135.34
87	MM Količevo	133.73
88	Interblock Group	132.21
89	Papirnica Vevče	127.74
90	Tastepoint Group	125.94
91	Trimo	125.91
92	Incom	125.53
93	Contitech Slovenija Group	119.56
94	Nuklearna elektrarna Krško	118.18
95	Elan Group	116.29
96	KJK Group	116.29
97	Kompas Group	114.60
98	Bravophone Adria	114.52
99	Filc	113.53
100	GKN Driveline Slovenija	113.20
101	Kovintrade Group	112.58
102	Toyota Adria Group	105.89
103	Paloma	105.50
104	Ljubljanske mlekarne	102.80
105	Msin Group	102.58
106	Štore Steel	102.31
107	Ayen Energija	102.18
108	Arcont Group	101.24
109	Dinos	101.15

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
110	Dewesoft Group	100.77
111	DP Jub Group	100.23
112	Telekom Group	98.10
113	Starkom	96.30
114	Titus Lama	95.06
115	Aegida Group	94.55
116	Novem Car Interior Design	93.27
117	Medis	92.97
118	Medis Group	92.83
119	Intersport Isi Group	92.65
120	Sigur Retail Group	92.56
121	G4 Group	92.43
122	Comtrade Distribucija Group	91.54
123	Siliko	91.48
124	Papirus Holding Group	88.36
125	Steklarna Hrastnik Group	87.62
126	Goričane	87.53
127	Continental Adria Pnevmatike	86.80
128	TKK	85.41
129	Iskra Mehanizmi	85.22
130	Inotherm	85.12
131	Iskra Mehanizmi Holding Group	83.22
132	EBM-Papst Slovenija	80.12
133	Trelleborg Slovenija	78.88
134	Preskok	78.41
135	Cetis Group	76.49
136	Vcag Group	76.00
137	Akton	75.60
138	Ledinek Engineering	75.52
139	Farmtech	75.18
140	Pošta Slovenija Group	73.68
141	Scania Slovenija	73.53
142	Bosch Rexroth	71.42
143	Brinox Group	71.25
144	Intersocks	71.10
145	TBP Group	69.85
146	Kovis	69.06
147	Weiler Abrasives Group	68.97

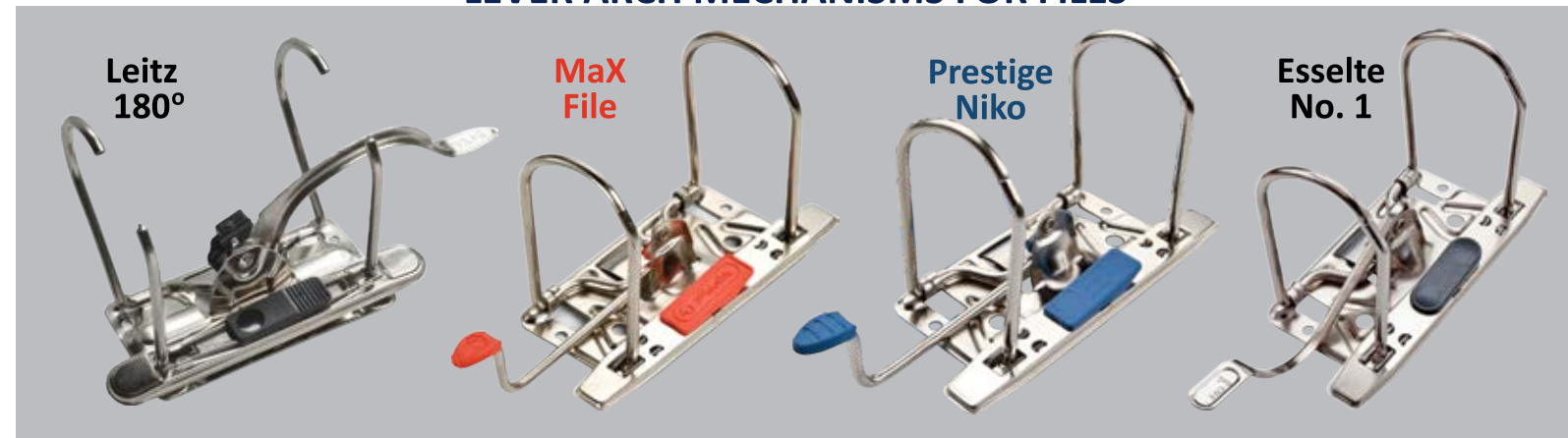
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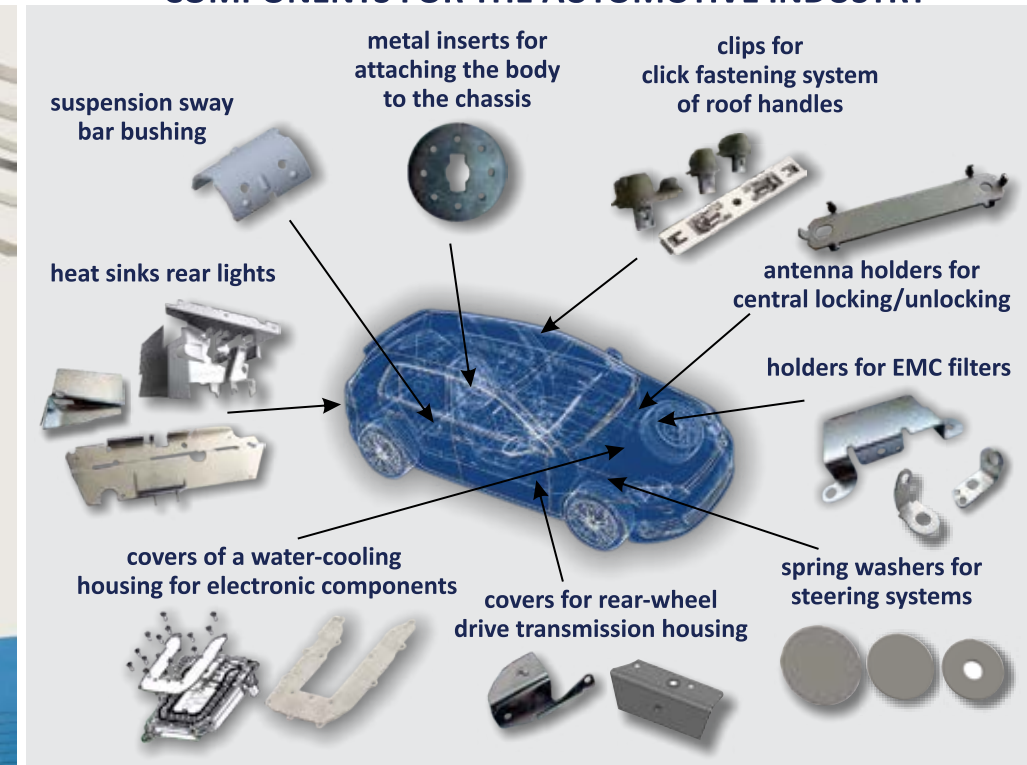
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COMPONENTS FOR THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY



Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
148	PJU Oglaševanje	67.83
149	Perspektiva Group	67.59
150	Boxmark Leather	67.41
151	Silkem Plus Group	66.99
152	Silkem	66.97
153	Purflux Filtration	66.95
154	Intereuropa Group	66.94
155	Cargox	65.60
156	Isokon	64.65
157	RHI Magnesita	64.38
158	Astellas Pharma	63.61
159	Tajfun Planina Group	62.79
160	Raycap	61.61
161	Lesonit	60.63
162	Juteks	60.10
163	Meltal Rado Snežič Group	56.79
164	Meltal IS	56.79
165	Mars Overseas Holdings	56.07
166	Alpos Metalurgija	55.60
167	GMT Group	55.10
168	TPG Express	54.73
169	Adria Dom	53.39
170	MDM Group	53.21
171	Pirnar	53.10
172	Salonit Anhovo Group	52.81

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
173	Sibo Group	52.23
174	Geberit Proizvodnja	51.95
175	Comcom Trading	51.70
176	Maksim Group	51.45
177	Belimed pomivalni Sistemi	50.99
178	Steklarna Rogaška	50.84
179	Albaugh	50.71
180	Cablex-M	50.15
181	Žibret laminati Group	50.02
182	Finiks Group	49.88
183	Uvecto	49.63
184	IMP Pumps	49.32
185	Emil Frey Group	49.06
186	Adrial	48.95
187	Pišek - Vitli Krpan Group	48.75
188	Bisol Group Group	48.70
189	Bisol proizvodnja	48.58
190	KLS Group	47.99
191	Kls Ljubno	47.94
192	Kontrola zračnega prometa Slovenije	47.79
193	Fenolit	47.67
194	Henkel Maribor	47.46
195	Eles	47.13
196	Sensilab	47.13
197	Radeče papir Group	47.07

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
198	Herz	46.92
199	Polycom	46.78
200	Livar	46.19
201.	ITW Appliance Components	46.17
202.	Rondal	45.33
203.	Salloum Logistics.	45.13
204.	Vipap Group	44.82
205.	Grammer Automotive Slovenija	44.58
206.	Plama-Pur	44.25
207.	JUB kemična Industrija	43.97
208.	Tomplast	43.22
209.	Isosport investicije Group	43.22
210.	Boxline UCL	43.08
211.	Eta Cerkno	42.49
212.	RLS merilna tehnika	41.98
213.	Salus Group	41.74

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
214.	Atotech Slovenija	41.69
215.	Anticus Group	41.61
216.	Iskra ISD Group	41.59
217.	Mobik Telekomunikacije	41.48
218.	Sumida Slovenija	41.39
219.	Poclain Hydraulics	41.30
220.	Yaskawa Europe Robotics	41.16
221.	Simpos	41.01
222.	Kontron	40.76
223.	Adria Tehnika	40.67
224.	Melamin	40.63
225.	Unitimber	40.38
226.	Alkaloid - Int	40.28
227.	Surovina	40.24
228.	Yokohama TWS Slovenija	39.99
229.	KJK Investicije 5 Group	39.71

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Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
230.	Kovinoplastika Lož Group	39.71
231.	Metrel Group	39.29
232.	Milšped	39.19
233.	Nektar natura Group	38.93
234.	Predilnica Litija Holding Group	38.37
235.	Predilnica Litija	38.37
236.	Baumuller Dravinja	38.23
237.	Cablex-T	37.72
238.	Pivovarna Laško Union	37.29
239.	Avto Triglav	37.22
240.	Litostroj power Group	37.17
241.	Omega air inženiring	36.98
242.	Gostol-Gopan	36.71
243.	Silkem Trading	36.43
244.	Plastika Skaza	36.39
245.	Geberit	36.38
246.	Planika Turnišče	36.29
247.	Container	36.25
248.	Niko	36.24
249.	Ekipa2	36.23
250.	Preis Sevnica	36.07
251.	Frikus Špedicija	35.79
252.	Heads Adriatic Group	35.40
253.	Amomont	35.07
254.	Zikas	34.99
255.	Fluidmaster	34.90
256.	Slowatch	34.49
257.	Willy Stadler	34.35
258.	Adriaforest	34.28
259.	Kolektor construction Group	34.19
260.	Lisca Group	34.14
261.	SIP Group	34.12
262.	AK Automotive	33.91
263.	EKWB	33.88
264.	Comtrade Programske Rešitve	33.64
265.	Walstead Leykam Tiskarna	33.25
266.	Bioprod biomedicinski Produkti	32.96
267.	Kolpa Group	32.91
268.	Ursa Slovenija	32.77

Ranking	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)
269.	Megasplet	32.70
270.	CGP Group	32.68
271.	Uni&Forma	32.66
272.	Rosenbauer	31.87
273.	Metrel	31.79
274.	Dani AFC	31.74
275.	Aluminium Kety Emmi	31.47
276.	Jata Emona Group	31.27
277.	Sij Ravne Systems	31.12
278.	Tovarna kemičnih izdelkov	31.07
279.	Kovis-Livarna	31.06
280.	Porsche Inter Auto	30.86
281.	KMAG Kia Motors Group	30.46
282.	Fraport Slovenija	30.17
283.	Žito	30.13
284.	Tosama	29.69
285.	Cargo-Partner	29.65
286.	Mass	29.15
287.	MBS list	29.11
288.	Tekstilna tovarna Okroglica	29.06
289.	DFVU	29.03
290.	Adria kombi	28.96
291.	Nutrisslim	28.96
292.	Providio	28.80
293.	Mahle electric drives Bovec	28.50
294.	Alpina Group	28.33
295.	Robeta	28.21
296.	Izoteh	28.20
297.	Morganti oil	27.98
298.	Salus	27.96
299.	Mimovrste	27.94
300.	Metropolitana Group	27.80

Condition: Net revenues in foreign markets of groups and companies
Data sources: AJPES, examined financial statements, audited and consolidated annual reports for 2023 (as published up to 6 January 2025); Krka d.d.

Note: The list of exporters includes those companies that have provided data on revenues in foreign markets in their statements.

Processed by: Podjetna Slovenija

* Biggest groups and companies by net sales revenue in foreign markets

** Leading company in the group



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- Wood processing industry
- Electro industry
- Forklift renovation

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x:	3500	3500	4000	4000	2000	5000	5000	2500	4000	11000	2500	11000	8000
y:	2000	2000	3000	3000	1600	3000	3000	1600	3000	4500	1600	4500	3000
z:	1250	1250	1600	1600	1250	1600	1600	1250	1600	1200	1250	1200	1600
Maximum load	12.000 kg	12.000 kg	20.000 kg	20.000 kg	8000 kg	25.000 kg	25.000 kg	8000 kg	25.000 kg	80.000 kg	8000 kg	80.000 kg	65.000 kg
Spindle diameter:	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 125	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 130 / ISO 50	DIA 125	DIA 130 / ISO 50		DIA 125		DIA 160 / ISO 50

Company in numbers:

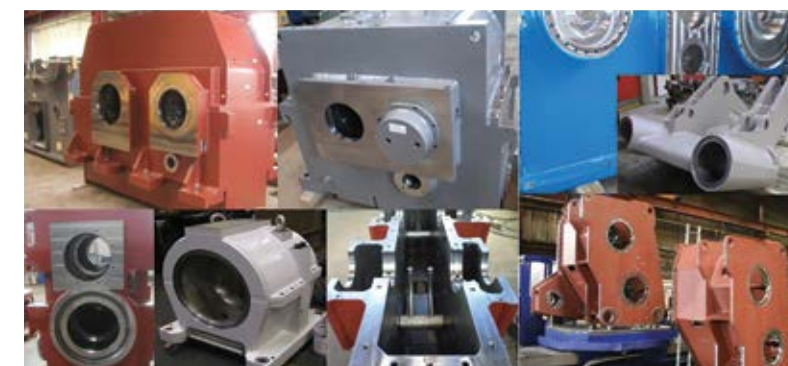
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- In year 2022 a solar power plant with a rated power of 1MW was installed on the roofs of the production halls. In 2024 we installed additional 0,5MW with battery. Now we have solar power plant in total 1,5MW.



OUR REFERENCES:



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MALI-E-TIKO

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Mali-E-Tiko is recognized as a reliable and trusted supplier of metal semi-finished products, with the majority of its business conducted across European markets. As a family-owned company, it has been operating successfully for over 35 years, consistently marked by stable and reliable growth. The company is known for its high-quality workmanship, satisfied clients, and dedicated team members.

Mali-E-Tiko manufactures metal semi-finished products for companies across various industries, with more than 70% of its business coming from international clients. The company primarily exports to EU markets, especially Germany, Austria, and Italy. Their components are integrated into a wide range of products, from medical and automotive industries to electrical and other sectors. For many of their clients, they provide metal housings and structural parts. Thanks to the specific requirements and precision involved in producing some components, Mali-E-Tiko is often the only manufacturer in the world capable of delivering them. Their clients frequently include companies involved in the production of road machinery, traffic signaling equipment, and electronics.

Proven and Reliable Quality

Among its clients, Mali-E-Tiko is known as a trustworthy partner with top-quality products – a reputation that often spreads through word of mouth, something the company takes great pride in. Their level of service is further confirmed by internationally recognized quality certifications: ISO 1090, ISO 3834, and ISO 9001.



“Our products are manufactured with high precision using modern processing machines. We offer full support throughout the process. We are also known for strictly respecting agreed timelines – a commitment we take seriously even before a project starts. We never promise what we know we cannot deliver,” says company director Marjan Mali.

Cutting-Edge Metalworking Technologies

Mali-E-Tiko is equipped with state-of-the-art metalworking technology, including robotic and

laser processing machines, and they also offer printing on sheet metal. Their service portfolio is constantly evolving and expanding, with the aim of providing as much as possible under one roof. In the near future, they plan to expand their offering with assembly services, allowing them to deliver high-end final products with reduced costs and shorter lead times.

In addition to advanced machinery, the company also boasts a highly skilled team with extensive experience in professional metal processing.

“We are proud to be considered a highly desirable employer in our local environment. We place strong emphasis on the well-being and professional development of our employees and maintain regular and open communication,” adds director Marjan Mali.

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Interview, Gregor Makuc, Sandoz & Lek

“A lot is happening in Slovenian biopharmacy”

- Why are people from Oxford, Cambridge and the US East Coast interested in working in Slovenia?
- What are the brands that will help Slovenia attract biotech investors?
- Will we really soon be able to live to 150?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

Gregor Makuc is the CEO of the pharmaceutical company Lek and president of Sandoz Slovenia. The Lek Group are the fifth biggest Slovenian and the second biggest industrial exporter, while Sandoz occupies 19th place on the list of top exporters, and is Slovenia's fourth biggest trade exporter. Despite its size, the Lek Group's exports have jumped 48% in the last five years, while Sandoz's exports have grown by 42%.

But this is not the main reason why we wanted to talk to Gregor Makuc. We were more interested in finding out about the large-scale investments that Sandoz and Lek are making in Slovenia, and the reasons behind them. Since Sandoz left the Novartis Group, the Lek Group has become a very highly sought-after generics company with two strings to its bow: classic generics and biosimilars. As a whole, the Group employs around 3,200 people in Slovenia, with a further 500 employed abroad. Its strongest markets are the EU and the US.

What are Slovenia's main advantages as a local destination for global pharmaceutical and biotech companies?

First of all, it's the long-term, long-standing pharmaceutical tradition we have in this country, which started in 1946, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia. With the help of other strong companies, the Slovenian pharmaceutical industry is competitive at a global level.

Alongside this is the wealth of knowledge and experience that has accumulated in Slovenia over the years. We have proved ourselves through our innovation and the high quality of our products.

Why have these activities been possible in Slovenia specifically?

They have been possible because we have a very highly qualified workforce in Slovenia, along with good infrastructure that is constantly developing – the motorway system, for example, and the upgrades to the rail network that are currently taking place. We are also strategically situated at the heart of Europe. We stand at the meeting point of the markets we do busi-

ness with, which enables us to exploit links with regional and global markets.

Slovenia's regulatory stability is also an important factor. Our political system is democratic and transparent. There are pluses and minuses, of course, but our strong administrative system works along predictable lines. Although it sometimes seems a little slow to us, it does proceed in line with international standards.

This stability is, of course, connected with Slovenia's membership of the EU, Nato and the eurozone. In geopolitical terms, we live and work in a predictable and relatively secure environment. Lek's latest investment in Lendava is worth around EUR 500 million. That's a considerable amount of money. One of the main reasons for deciding to invest there is that the location is secure for the next 30 years.

What's your collaboration with educational institutions like?

That is one of our key successes. If we look at the wider ecosystem, we have very strong links with local communities, the academic world and research institutions, as well as with the government and civil society. We

are particularly focused on developing young talent and academic staff.

How do you do that?

We do it in a very specific and practical way. We have signed long-term strategic cooperation agreements with all three public universities in Slovenia in a range of areas. In practice this means that we help develop curricula and propose the creation of new study programmes. I like the fact that we listen to each other.

A new study programme in pharmacy at the University of Maribor has been created at our initiative, and we were very happy and proud to have been able to reach agreement on it very quickly. The university were very quick to certify the programme, which will accept its first cohort of students this year.

We also work regularly with the University of Ljubljana. We work with teaching staff at the faculties to continuously upgrade the study programmes, and carry out joint projects. Many of our staff also lecture at the faculties.

What are the main investments you have made recently?

“The research centre in Slovenia is one of Sandoz's biggest, and generates around a third of all the company's development solutions.”





“Our aim is to consolidate the entire biopharmaceutical chain within Slovenia.”

How many foreign employees do you have?

Their numbers keep growing, and they are among Sandoz's key global investments. A lot is happening in the Slovenian biopharmaceutical sector at the moment, which is why talent from abroad has started coming to the country in greater numbers.

We have been getting applications for the Ljubljana development centre from Oxford and Cambridge graduates, and from graduates of East Coast universities in the US, for example. That was unimaginable a few years ago.

What are they most interested in? Is it the work, or also Slovenia's natural wonders?

Both. We are seeing a great deal of interest from the younger and middle-aged generations, but less from the youngest talents. These are people who have already been successful abroad. On the one hand, they prioritise optimal, high-quality working conditions. They're not just interested in infrastructure, but the wider aspect: the culture within the company, the corporate mindset, the dynamism, the opportunities for promotion, etc. But they're also attracted by the safety and calmness, the geographical location and stable social environment of Slovenia.

Are they coming for fixed periods or staying on in the country?

Both. The younger generations are more dynamic. Our advantage is that we are part of a multinational, and can offer a great career path across different locations and different countries.

What are your experiences with incorporating local knowledge and researchers into global flows within a multinational?

This is a very strong aspect of the way we work. Up to now we have enjoyed a very well-developed academic sphere. All three public universities have developed quite a few different study programmes in the fields of pharmacy, chemistry and so on from which we have obtained key staff.

The country also has three strong, internationally recognised research institutions: the National Institute of Biology, the Institute of Chemistry and the Jožef Stefan Institute. We are able to test applied solutions, share knowledge and so on at these institutions.

Are you saying that you don't have that usual chasm between the business and academic worlds at your company?

We have invested around EUR 100 million in a new research centre for biosimilars in Ljubljana, which will provide new jobs for approximately 200 scientists. It will be completed by the end of next year.

We are investing an even bigger amount in Lendava in the north-east of the country: more than EUR 400 million for a new factory for producing active ingredients for biosimilars. We are expecting the factory, which will create 300 new jobs, to start operating by the end of next year.

This investment involves the use of the very latest technology, with minimal environmental emissions and a very highly qualified workforce. This means that more than half the employees will have educational qualifications at Level VI or higher.

Will you be able to attract that many highly educated staff to Lendava?

Lendava is handily located close to Croatia and Hungary. These two countries, like Slovenia, have a very strong pharmaceutical tradition. The Balkan staff pool contains a wealth of top talent.

We have had good experiences with academic exchanges – people who want to move from theoretical to practical work and vice versa. With their help we are achieving groundbreaking and innovative solutions – solutions we would not be able to create with our own internal resources alone.

When you're abroad, does anyone ask you why Sandoz invests so much money in Slovenia?

I get asked that question a lot. Our aim is to consolidate the entire biopharmaceutical chain within Slovenia. This means that everything will happen in Slovenia, from the initial development of an active ingredient, through the manufacture of that ingredient and the final product, to the packaging of the final product and its distribution outside the country. This is for reasons of sustainability, the internal synergies and value added we are able to create, and the desire to pay tax in Slovenia. When we conducted due diligence of the possible risks of our business in Slovenia, the only risk we could identify was the concentration of activities within a relatively small geographical area.

How are Slovenian knowledge and innovation integrated into the whole group (previously Novartis, now Sandoz)?

The advantage we have is that we have been here for many years. Lek has been developing its capacities continuously since it was founded in 1946, initially in the field of classic generics. Then, with Novartis, we were

able to see just what could be achieved by research. Now, with Sandoz, we are focusing on biosimilars.

We already have key small-molecule knowledge at our research centre. The research centre in Slovenia is one of Sandoz's biggest, and generates around a third of all the company's development solutions.

Do you have any further plans to expand or upgrade your capacities?

I have the impression at the moment that there is an appetite on the part of civil society, regulators and the government to present Slovenia as a country with excellent biotech development potential.

This is evident from the Biotech Hills initiative, which was launched by our former management board president. It is designed to bring major stakeholders together, such as Novartis, Krka and Lek, and encourage smaller medium-sized companies, research institutions and the government to create and institutionalise the “ecosystem” we like talking about so much.

How is this project developing?

The institute has been set up and the strategy is in its final phase.

What will Biotech Hills mean for Slovenia?

Following the example of other countries that have already done something similar, like Canada and Belgium, Slovenia will create a brand to attract biotech investors.



A new research centre for biosimilars in Ljubljana will provide jobs for 200 scientists. It will be completed by the end of next year.

What's in it for the companies that join the project?

Collaboration, the sharing of experiences, the circulation of staff. An education system has already been put in place, we have the understanding and support of government, the investments already been placed, and so on. The aim is to have a brand through which these activities can be carried out and best practices shared, enabling the whole country to take a new step forward.

What are the trends in the pharmaceutical industry and biotechnology that you see as providing Slovenia with the biggest opportunities in the coming years?

We know that Slovenia is very strong in this area relative to the size of its population, and that it's the most flourishing sector in the country. We also know how trends are unfolding in the developed world. The population is ageing and the need for medical treatment is growing.

For as long as we have the system we have and the western world has sufficient economic strength to finance this treatment, it will remain a highly promising sector with prospects for further growth over the long term. We are trying to catch this trend in order to provide affordable but also high-quality drugs and treatments for patients, in generics as well as biosimilars.

I particularly like the fact that we have a clear biosimilars strategy. We launched our first biosimilar in 2006, followed by a new biosimilar two years later developed by our colleagues in Mengeš and Ljubljana. Today, Sandoz already markets 11 biosimilars and has 28 in development. Slovenia makes a key contribution to these numbers, and has the right knowledge and expertise – hence the investments that are being made. We are important for Sandoz because we release new biosimilars onto the market.

I recently saw a documentary where people were saying that we could soon expect to live to 150 because of breakthroughs in drug development. Is that realistic?

If we look at groundbreaking solutions such as penicillin for treating infections, it's clear how drugs can help people live longer. There are new groundbreaking solutions for the treatment of cancer, cardiovascular diseases and the like. So we can expect a further increase in life expectancy. Not forever, but 150 years is an interesting prediction.

"WE ARE IMPORTANT FOR SANDOZ BECAUSE WE RELEASE NEW BIOSIMILARS ONTO THE MARKET."

The number of centenarians is on the rise in Slovenia. Not just women but men too. Modern treatments are contributing to this, as are modern lifestyles.

Will these drugs and therapies be accessible to a wider circle of people in the future?

I expect countries to be able to put systems in place that enable a wider circle of people to have access to these treatments.

For us, two things are important here. The first is a predictable regulatory environment that encourages innovators to develop new treatments. Without them, there would be no generics companies. A strongly innovative environment must encourage companies to invest large amounts of money in the development of drugs and treatments in those areas in which they don't yet exist, or to improve existing treatments.

At the same time, we must have a smart system that enables health insurers or markets where treatments are paid for to ensure that the system is sustainable in the long term. That is where things stand currently in the western world.

Is Slovenia sufficiently visible on the global investment map?

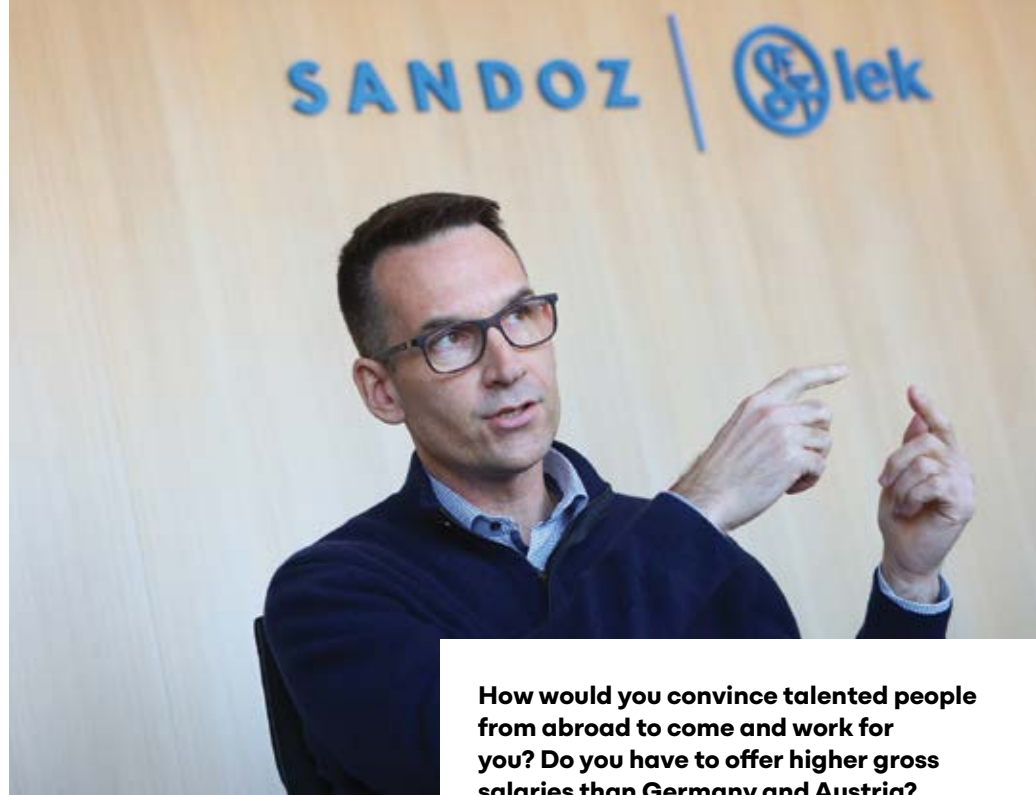
We like to boast that Slovenia has the second highest number of robots per capita in

Europe. This figure was a surprise to me as well, as we don't employ a lot of robots in our manufacturing process. So Slovenia stands out from other countries in this respect.

How would you improve Slovenia's investment profile?

Profile is a perennial topic of labour and tax law. It is noticeable that work permits can now be obtained relatively quickly for foreign workers. One very useful development has been the removal of the requirement for local administrative units to only issue work permits for their own local area. That has helped a lot because we have a very good network of administrative units throughout the country, and has shown that administrative units outside the urban centres can be put to good use.

In the tax legislation, it would be a good move to relieve the burden from the fourth income bracket, which is where most developers are. The difference to the benefit of Austria and Germany is still too large, however, and not enough to make Slovenia a more attractive destination than those two countries.



How would you convince talented people from abroad to come and work for you? Do you have to offer higher gross salaries than Germany and Austria?

No, we can't do that. The whole Sandoz Group is part of a network that provides greater flexibility when it comes to people moving from one country to another.

Are people persuaded by the mountains, coast, countryside and other environmental advantages of this part of the world?

We are working very hard on our company culture. We try to enable individuals to make the most of their potential and acquire additional skills. The emphasis is on the individual's personal development, their motivation, career opportunities and so on.

How does Lek manage to retain its identity in the large Sandoz Group?

Like Novartis before it, Sandoz has retained the Lek brand name. We like that. We use a joint logo for Sandoz and Lek on all markets we cover with our own drugs – that is, more than 50 markets around the world.

Sandoz is one of the oldest Swiss pharmaceutical companies. It was founded in 1886. That makes it 60 years older than Lek, which will soon celebrate its 80th birthday. They know what being around for so long means and how powerful a brand can be.

How was Switzerland able to become the country to which Slovenia exports the most?

That's the story of Novartis, which took Lek over at the beginning of the millennium and is also headquartered in Switzerland. Slovenia therefore now has two major pharmaceutical multinationals.

Both companies, Lek (part of Sandoz) and Novartis, have a big impact on the country through their development, manufacturing and logistics capacities. There is also the Kuehne + Nagel global logistics centre at Brnik airport. All the raw materials that come from the parent country to Slovenia pass through this logistics centre, and all our finished products, except for some of our direct exports, go to Switzerland.

What message would you like to send to foreign investors?

There are numerous examples that confirm that a stable and predictable environment is a big plus for Slovenia – and not just for us. A good example is the investment made by the Japanese company Yaskawa in a robot plant in Kočevje. The new development centre was created in Slovenia, not Japan. This is one of many examples.

The second aspect is that we still have a single European market. We should not forget that we are one of the world's strongest regions in financial terms, with 500 million inhabitants. The third aspect is Slovenia's good infrastructure and geographical location at the centre of Europe, which is vital to our import-export operations. ➤➤



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Slovenian economy in 2025

Slovenia is a diverse country that offers the world a unique treasury of natural wonders, cutting-edge knowledge and expertise, a rich cultural heritage, top athletes and exceptional business success. Our innovativeness, creativity, commitment to quality, and ability to produce groundbreaking products and solutions have secured us a place alongside the very best. We have taken a look at the areas (apart from sport, obviously) in which Slovenia can stand comparison with the best, using economic and a number of other interesting indicators.

MAJA VIRANT



Photo: STO/Vid Pomikvar

1. Unemployment rate

3.3%: one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU

This compares to an average unemployment rate across the EU of 6% in April last year (6.4% in the eurozone according to Eurostat). Only the Czech Republic (2.7%), Poland (3%) and Malta (3.1%) had lower unemployment rates. The highest rates were in Spain (11.7%) and Greece (10.8%).

2. Share of goods and services

80% of Slovenia's GDP come from goods and services exports

The EU average is lower, at around 50–55%. This high export orientation fosters higher growth when demand on foreign markets is favourable.

3. Growth in exports exceeds the EU average

11.3% growth in value of exports in first 11 months of 2024

The value of exports in the first 11 months of 2024 grew by 11.3% in comparison with the same period in 2023 (figures supplied by the Slovenian Statistical Office (SURSO)). In 2024 Slovenia achieved growth in exports above the EU average.

According to forecasts by the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (UMAR), export growth in 2025 and 2026 will mainly be driven by high-tech and medium high-tech products. Growth of 2.7% and 3.7% is expected in 2025 and 2026, respectively. 3.7% is expected in 2025 and 2026, respectively.

4. Slovenia outpacing the EU in terms of growth

1 percentage point higher growth than the EU average

According to European Commission forecasts from November 2024, Slovenia should achieve economic growth of 2.5% in 2025, which is significantly higher than the growth prediction for the EU as a whole (1.5%).

This suggests that the economic dynamics are stronger in Slovenia than in the EU as a whole.

5. Remarkable growth of large entrepreneurs

1/3 of the country's 600 largest companies are owned by entrepreneurs

According to Podjetna Slovenija magazine, more and more of the largest companies in the country are owned by entrepreneurs (191 of the 600 largest companies).

This means that almost a third of the 600 largest companies are owned by people who, when Slovenia became independent in 1991, had a small business, were running a business from a garage somewhere, and may or may not have been pursuing their activity as a hobby. Slovenia has therefore been able to develop a strong economic backbone.

6. Tourist records continue to fall

6.3% more tourists in 2024 in comparison with 2023

The number of foreign tourists rose by 7.5%, say the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport (MGTŠ). Slovenia saw 6.58 million visitors last year. The average for the EU was around 5%.

There were 4.5 million overnight stays from domestic tourists (27% of the total) and almost 12.4 million from foreign tourists (73%). Germans accounted for the highest number of foreign tourists (almost 2 million overnight stays), followed by Italians, Austrians, Croatians and Czechs.

Maja Pak Olaj, director of the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO), points out that Slovenian tourism remains in a healthy position, and that they are expecting a rise in numbers this year as well.

7. Excellent economic resilience

9th place according to the Economic Resilience Index

Slovenia occupies a relatively high 9th place in the Economic Resilience Index for the EU. According to the Productivity Report 2023 published by the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (UMAR), this is a result of its high level of social cohesion, economic independence and financial resilience.

8. Growing economic complexity

From 12th to 5th place in 20 years

By enhancing its areas of specialisation in functional and technological terms, the economy is successfully integrating into global value chains. Slovenia is moving up the production chain and supplementing the production function with other functions more successfully than other competing countries, with R&D being particularly important.

One positive aspect of these efforts is that knowledge from a growing number of fields is being used to develop new products, reflected in Slovenia's growing economic complexity. According to the Productivity Report, the country has risen from 12th to 5th place over the last two decades, and is also ranked 5th in the EU in terms of share of exports of medium- and high-technology-intensive products.

9. Highest level of satisfaction so far

94% of Slovenes satisfied with their lives according to a Eurobarometer survey

This is the highest level of general satisfaction with life in the 20 years since Slovenia became a full member of the EU and joined the Standard Eurobarometer survey.

This result also places Slovenia above the EU average of 86%.

12. Nation of beekeepers

5 beekeepers per 1,000 Slovenian inhabitants

These are the figures from the Statistical Office (SURS) and, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, make Slovenia the EU's top beekeeping country. In 2020 we had 11,293 beekeepers, 15,420 beehives and more than 210,000 bee colonies, which was a rise of 42% on the 2010 figure.

In 2020 we produced 1,293 tonnes of honey. Fascinating, isn't it? There's more: to produce a kilo of honey, a bee must visit four million flowers and fly the equivalent of four times round the world.

13. Low fear of poverty

12.7% of Slovenes are afraid of poverty

According to a Eurostat survey, this is among the lowest percentages in the EU. Eurostat defines poverty as the daily struggle to meet basic needs for a decent standard of living.

Fear of poverty is lower only among the Finns and the Czechs (12.2% and 9.8%, respectively). The EU average is 16.4%. Fear of poverty is highest in Latvia (21.6%), Lithuania (20.6%) and Bulgaria (20.6%).

10. Among the ten safest countries in the world

9th safest country according to the latest Global Peace Index for 2024

While this is an excellent result, it is one place lower than the year before. A safe country makes for a more positive living environment, and attracts tourists and businesspeople.

11. Slovenia in space

1 January 2025: full membership of the European Space Agency (ESA)

A space sector has been created that already consists of more than 40 small and medium-sized companies, as well as R&D institutions, with an emphasis on collaboration with the R&D and university sectors.

They have successfully taken a leading role in a range of niche aerospace fields, chiefly Earth observation, the development of innovative technologies and new materials, and the launching of three Slovenian satellites, including the Skylabs Trisat-R satellite, which the Space Office say is an important achievement at the European level and is currently orbiting 6,000 km above the Earth.

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Since 2017, Mitol has been a member of the Soudal Group – Europe's largest independent manufacturer of sealants, PU foams, and adhesives – providing the company with solid backing, technological support, and access to global markets.

Sustainability is another key focus area. Mitol's VISION LINE adhesive range is developed with environmental responsibility in mind, offering lower energy consumption during application, enhanced safety, and better recyclability of final products.

Mitol continues to be a reliable partner to industries requiring high-performance, innovative, and environmentally friendly adhesive solutions – both at home and across the globe.



www.mitol.si

14. Green corporates with green measures

97% of enterprises in Slovenia reducing their emissions

This is according to the European Investment Bank's (EIB) annual Investment Report. The share of companies that are attempting to reduce their carbon footprint is the second highest in the EU. Only Finland has a higher figure (99%). The EU average is 91%. Slovenia is therefore a green country not only because of its forests, but because of its "green mindset".

In addition, as many as 80% of Slovenian companies have already introduced advanced digital technologies. The EU average is 74%.

"Slovenian companies are leading the way in green and digital investments, which shows their strong commitment to sustainability and innovation," said EIB vice-president Kiriakos Kakuris. "However, for them to continue to grow, some challenges need to be addressed, including regulatory uncertainty and labour shortages. The EIB Group will continue to support Slovenian companies in overcoming these challenges and strengthening their competitiveness."

15. Endless water supply network

15 metres of water supply network per inhabitant

This is according to the Governance of Water Services in Europe report, which was published by EurEau, the European federation of national associations of water and wastewater management services.

Slovenia therefore stands out from other European countries when it comes to the length of its water supply network. It is twice as long per inhabitant than in Germany (6.94 m) and three times longer per inhabitant than in Estonia (4.73 m). Only Finland has more water supply network per inhabitant, at 19.4 m.

Slovenia is also one of the few countries to enshrine the right to drinking water in the Constitution. Since 2017, the Constitution has provided that drinking water is a fundamental right of all citizens and that water resources are a public asset managed by the state.



Photo: STG/Tomo Jesenčnik

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Efficient launch systems

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Slovenian teams on the world sports map

■ Who were yesterday's Slovenian sporting heroes, who are they today and who will they be tomorrow?

■ Which successes by Slovenian teams have placed Slovenia among the (major) powers on the world sports map?



Slovenia is a sporting phenomenon. With two million inhabitants and an area of 20,000 square kilometres, it competes with the best in all the biggest team sports in Europe.

GREGOR LISEC / PHOTO: SPORTIDA

It happened in Kyiv that historic 13 November 1999. And in Zagreb a few weeks later, on 29 January 2000. That was when Slovenia broke down the wall and began to take its place alongside the best in the world in team sports. Respectively beating Ukraine to qualify for Euro 2000 and overcoming Croatia to qualify for the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Srečko Katanec's football team and Leopold Jeras's handball squad laid the solid foundations for the palace of successes that Slovenia's footballers, handball players, basketball players, volleyball players and ice hockey players have been building ever since.

Luka Dončić, the biggest ambassador for Slovenian sport around the world, was just a few months old when the streets of Ljubljana and other cities around the country filled with euphoric Slovenes and traffic jams blocked the roads to Brnik Airport, where Katanec's heroes had just landed after qualifying for UEFA Euro 2000. It was Katanec's men who first showed that Slovenia might be a small country but it had great teams who were capable of overcoming global giants. Not long after Zlatko Zahovič and his teammates shocked the great Andriy Shevchenko, Serhiy Rebrov and their countrymen, Jeras's squad repeated the feat at the 2000



European Men's Handball Championship in Croatia (thereby securing a slot at the Olympic Games later that year).

Aleš Pajovič, Zoran Jovičić, Iztok Puc and their teammates showed the Croatians – the reigning Olympic champions – that we Slovenes are not just a bunch of "Janezes" who are good at skiing, when they put an end to the hosts' Olympic title defence at Zagreb's House of Sports. Few cars with Slovenian number plates made it back from the Croatian capital undamaged that evening, and there were a few broken Slovenian heads too. But it was worth it...

Little Slovenia – big in team sports

Today Slovenia has a football team that is capable of qualifying for a major competition, holding mighty England to a draw and almost bringing Portugal to its knees, with Jan Oblak

heroically saving a penalty and reducing Cristiano Ronaldo – one of the greatest players of all time – to tears at the 2024 UEFA European Football Championship in Germany. At 40, having already experienced everything in his illustrious career, Ronaldo was visibly distraught.

Slovenia has a basketball team that, with new Los Angeles Lakers star Luka Dončić, is capable of competing for medals, whatever the competition. It has a handball team that was a whisker away from the finals at the last Olympic Games. A volleyball team that wins one medal after another. An ice hockey team that, with or without Los Angeles Kings captain Anže Kopitar, defies all unwritten rules and has edged its way into elite company, rubbing shoulders with the big hockey nations. All this despite the fact that there are only seven hockey rinks in the whole country, only six towns with ice hockey teams, only eight clubs...

The volleyball team – serial (silver) medallists

The team that has given Slovenian sports fans the most satisfaction in recent years has been the national volleyball team, which, since winning silver at the Men's European Championship in Bulgaria and Italy a decade ago under the incomparable Andrea Giani, has continued to rack up medals, including two more European silvers and, most recently, a set of bronze medals under Gheorghe Crețu in 2023.

Despite all their successes, the golden volleyball generation under captain Tine Urnaut will probably always regret falling to Poland in the medal fight at the 2022 World Championship, following a magnificent campaign as one of the two host nations, and ending the competition in fourth place. And perhaps even more so, their exit in the quarterfinals at the 2024 Paris Olympics, where a very convincing Slovenia had to settle for fifth place.

Despite this, their energy, connection and teamwork can serve as an inspiration for the younger generation – not just athletes but everyone, and in every sense. What mother-in-law wouldn't be proud to have a son-in-law like any of the members of the Slovenian volleyball team?

The handball team – pioneers in so many ways

Slovenia's handball team have long had a knack of raising the national spirits. That victory against Croatia in the middle of Zagreb, when other emotions from the days of federal Yugoslavia also made themselves felt, will go down in history as a turning point for Slovenian team sports. At the 2004 European Men's Handball Championship, hosted by Slovenia, the partisan song "Na juriš, na juriš, na juriš..." [At the charge!] and other patriotic tunes echoed from the loudspeakers in Tivoli Hall as Vid Kavtičnik, Aleš Pajovič, Uroš Zorman and comrades charged their way to the first medal (silver) for Slovenian team sport at a major competition.

With their incredible comeback against Croatia in the decisive battle for the bronze medal at the 2017 World Championship in Paris, Slovenia, under popular Montenegrin head coach Veselin Vujović, showed that they never give up. "Never write off Slovenia", thought Marko Bezjak, Jure Dolenc, Borut Mačkovšek and the rest of Vujović's men, as they set about making up an eight-goal deficit in the final twenty minutes.

This was an epic recovery that earned immortality for the beloved "Vuja" – or "Janez Vujović" as Slovenian fans rechristened him. And there is no denying that under his leadership we Slovenes began to believe in bigger things.

Guided by Vuja's former protégé Uroš Zorman, Slovenia's handball team have become a serious threat to the biggest teams in the world. The traditionally unbeatable Denmark were forced to sweat until the



final second in their semi-final against Slovenia at the 2024 Paris Olympics. After another narrow defeat to Spain in the bronze medal match, Zorman's men left the tournament in tears.

Slovenian handball still offers plenty of bang for your buck, even if the fat years are long gone. But the expertise still remains, as does the country's handball tradition. And on the sunny side of the Alps, ace handball players are still springing up like mushrooms after rain and feeding some of Europe's biggest clubs.

The basketball team – eternal golden heroes

One of the best basketball players in the world grew up in Slovenia and came of age in Spain. A player whose transfer from Dallas to Los Angeles at the start of this year had the whole world talking. No exaggeration. Europe first got to know him in 2017 when, still a fresh-faced youth, he led Slovenia to the European title alongside another basketball giant, Goran Dragić.

Istanbul 2017 will forever be etched in golden letters in the history of Slovenian sport. That journey to the final against Serbia was unforgettable. As for the performances of Slovenia coach Igor Kokoškov's team throughout the tournament... what can we say?

International superstar Goran Dragić and rising star Luka Dončić truly shone, while simultaneously forging a team of talented individual players, most of them selfless workers, into an unbeatable whole. That Slovenia was more than just Dragić and Dončić became apparent in the final. Luka was soon on the bench with an injured ankle, while Goran, after one of the best individual performances in the history of European finals, ran out of steam in the final quarter. And together they watched from the bench as the "backroom boys" finished the job and dotted the "i"s on a historic victory for the annals.

The football team – players on the big stage

It may be, after all the successes listed above, that someone might accuse Slovenia of being weak at football. Unlike the national basketball, handball or volleyball teams, Slovenia's footballers aren't even regular qualifiers at the biggest competitions. To date, they've "only" made it to two FIFA World Cups (2002, 2010) and two UEFA European Cups (2000, 2024). But football is by far the most competitive sport in the world. That makes it a lot harder for small countries to qualify for the finals.

But Slovenia's journeys to the European Championships in Belgium at the start of the millennium and in Germany last year are proof that football still maintains its status as the globally most popular sport, even in Slovenia. A total of 344,000 Slovenes applied to UEFA for tickets to the Euros in the land of beer and sausages! That's 17 per cent of the entire population of Slovenia.

Around 50,000 lucky fans then set off for Stuttgart, Munich, Cologne and Frankfurt to cheer on coach Matjaž Kek's men captained by Atlético Madrid goalkeeper Jan Oblak. Through selfless play, they fought their way to the knockout stage and left Germany with their heads held high. Despondent, having been forced to concede to Portugal after a penalty shootout, but proud.

This was only the most recent example of generalised sports fever to grip Slovenia. The first time it happened was also the fault of the national football team. That epic baptism at a major competition, the thrilling match against FR Yugoslavia at Charleroi in the group stage of UEFA Euro 2000, was like something out of a film. From the euphoria of a 3–0 lead masterminded by Zlatko Zahovič, to the suffering and nail-biting tension as they hung on for a point and a final score of 3–3.

"Football is a miracle," its fans like to say, and a miracle is what Slovenia achieved with Srečko Katanec, who, before famously falling out with Zahovič, also led his team to the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Korea/Japan, and with Matjaž Kek, who led the next generation to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. Miraculous.

The ice hockey team – like a storm, even across America

Slovenia's ice hockey players also did their bit in putting Slovenia's name on the map at the start of the millennium, when Ivo Jan and other legends (in 2001) wrote the first fairy tale in Ljubljana's Tivoli Hall in 2001 by winning promotion to the elite division of the Men's Ice Hockey World Championships alongside the likes of Canada, Russia, America, Sweden and Finland... Back in the days before Anže Kopitar had become a giant of world ice hockey.

With LA Kings star Anže Kopitar, Slovenia shone at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, after Slovenia's top hockey players had made history – without Kopitar – at the qualifying tournament in Vojens (Denmark) in February 2013, giving well-known commentator Andrej Stare the opportunity to sing, on live television, the refrain of the old song "Kakor vihar..." (Like a storm...) after a goal from Jan Muršak, as Slovenia eliminated their great rivals Austria from the Games.

The extraordinary team spirit of Slovenia's hockey players has also been apparent in the years since then,

Benjamin Šeško

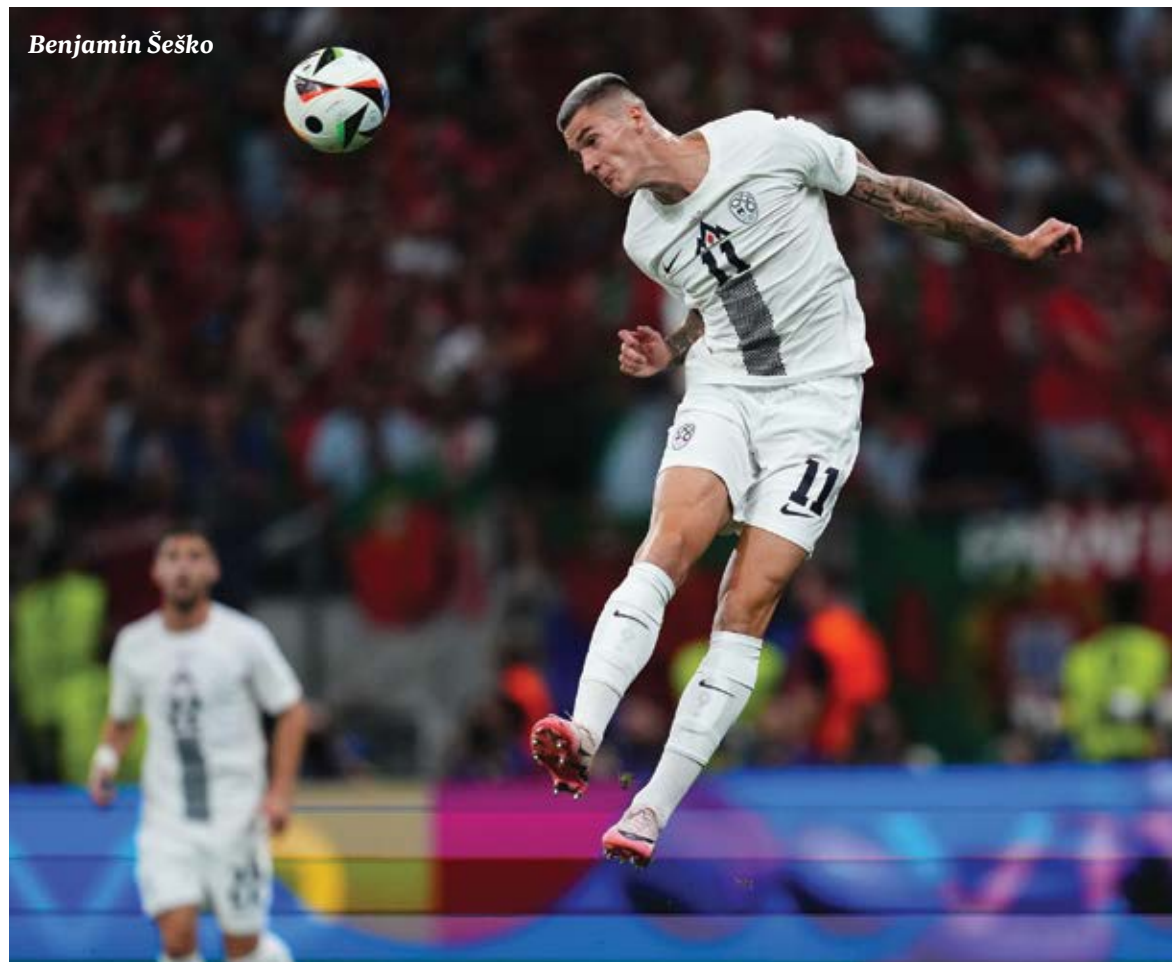


Photo: Alamy Stock Photo

for example at the Winter Olympics four years later, when the USA was among the teams that succumbed to Slovenia in PyeongChang. Incredible, actually, when you think who, what and where Slovenia is with its ice hockey compared to North America.

Slovenia's story is by no means a given

Slovenia is a sporting phenomenon. With a little over two million inhabitants and an area of a little over 20,000 square kilometres, it competes with the best in all the biggest team sports in Europe. At 26 years old, Dončić still has a long career ahead of him. And new hopes for the future are already lining up behind him. Last year the under-20s took silver at EuroBasket, while the under-18s took bronze. Which means that the future is in safe hands.

National football team player Benjamin Šeško (born 2003), who plays for Bundesliga club Leipzig and is barely at the start of what promises to be a brilliant career, will soon be able to count on the help of members of the supremely talented under-21s squad, who last year qualified for the European Championship. Our junior national handball teams may not have achieved the same successes in recent years as the

youngsters from 2018, who won the European title, but the country on the sunny side of the Alps is still supplying handball players to the biggest clubs in Europe, such as Mitja Janc, the younger brother of Barcelona star Blaž Janc.

Something similar applies to volleyball. Two good examples are Rok Možič, who at 23 is considered one of the best players in Europe, and 20-year-old Nik Mujanović. The prospects for ice hockey are a little harder to predict, but this sport too, with its two dominant centres in Ljubljana and Jesenice, has always found a way.

None of the above is a given, of course. Without investment in sport, both from the state and from the business enterprise sector, it will not work. Medals only come when sufficient attention is paid to sports programmes and infrastructure. The latter, of course, pays dividends, since investment in sport brings a host of other benefits.

Our team sports create champions who do not only win medals. Their successes in competition have a proven effect of raising the profile of Slovenian brands, attracting investors and promoting the development of the sports industry. >>



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Slovenia = Exportland

- Where have all these fast-growing Slovenian exporters come from?
- Why are Slovenian exporters so reluctant to sell their businesses?
- What are the two key groups of fast-growing exporters?

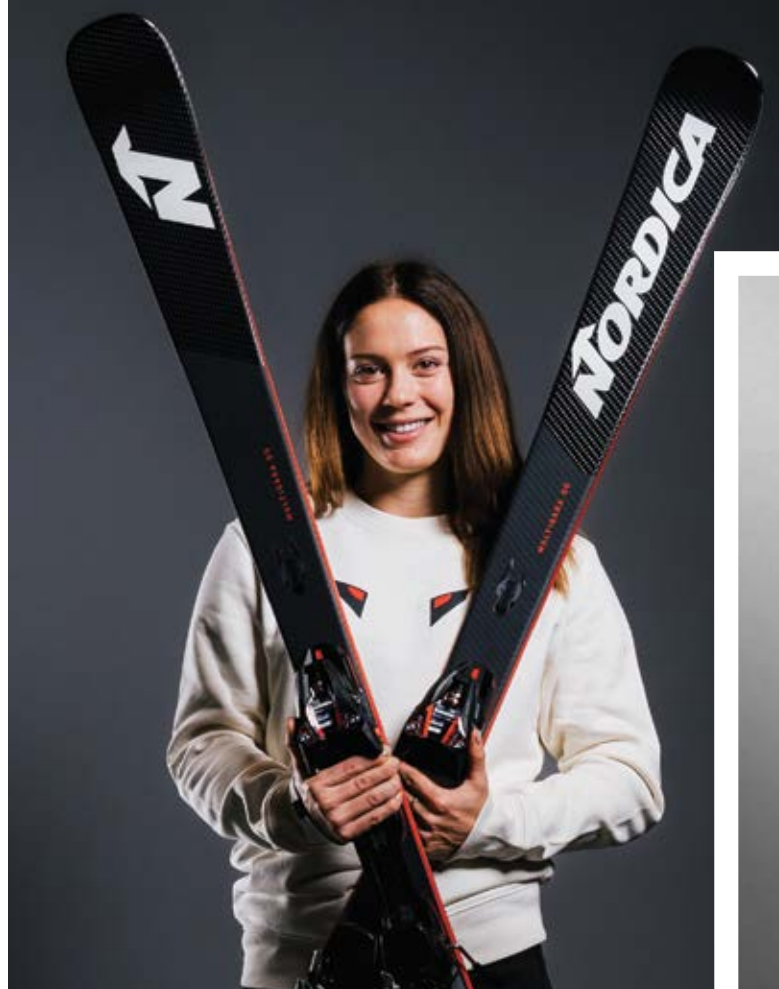


Photo: Riccardo De Conti

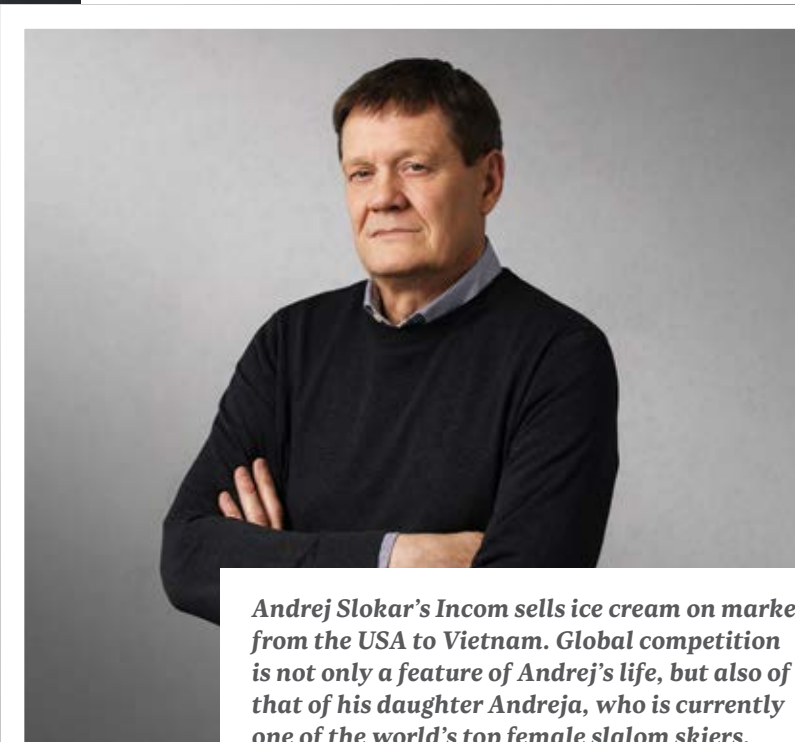


Photo: Incom

Andrej Slokar's Incom sells ice cream on markets from the USA to Vietnam. Global competition is not only a feature of Andrej's life, but also of that of his daughter Andreja, who is currently one of the world's top female slalom skiers.

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ

There is a good case for calling Slovenia "Exportland". There are two main reasons for this – aside from the fact that its diminutive size means that it is naturally oriented towards exports. The first is that a group of fast-growing exporters has emerged in the last few years, signalling a new generation of future global players. The second is that these are generally exporters of niche, development-oriented and often hi-tech products and services.

1. A new entrepreneurial generation of exporters is on the rise

A quick glance at the top of the table of fastest-growing exporters between 2018 and 2023 clearly shows that many more of them are owned by a new generation of Slovenian entrepreneurs than is the case when we look at the table of the biggest Slovenian exporters. The two highest-ranking companies, the Adventura Investments Group and Anticus, are part of a portfolio controlled by Darko Martin and Tilen Klarič, with partners. HS Plus is a young online

retailer owned by Rok Slapar. Uni & Forma, a manufacturer of special-purpose garments, has been sold to a German majority owner, although Nejc Zavrl retains a minority holding in the company, which emerged from a fresh, enterprise-driven, post-socialist background. Dat-Con, which offers advanced mobile surveillance systems, used to be fully owned by the Plaskan family, but is now majority Arab-owned. Raycap, a manufacturer of electrical engineering products, was once owned by Otmar Zorn, but is now under Greek ownership.

Why have so many business stories at the top been taken over by foreign investors? The answer is fairly straightforward: because their takeover has added wind to these businesses' export sails. However, all this has to some extent created a slightly false impression. The fact remains that the Slovenian owners of fast-developing new companies actually rarely sell their businesses, simply because they still regard them as their "babies"; and although several of the enterprises taken over by foreign investors are at the top of this year's table of fastest-growing exporters, this is the exception rather than the rule. If we look more closely at the table, Slovenian-owned businesses comprise an extremely strong group of fast-growing exporters: IMP Pumps, Izoteh, Dewesoft, Palma, MDM, Brinox, Inea, Incom, Sensum, Gabrijel Aluminium, Tehnos and Cosylab, to name just a few of the businesses occupying coveted places in the Top 50.

As we glance further down the list, towards 300th place, we encounter even more such stories. This is a new generation of emerging major Slovenian exporters that began decades ago in garages, developed into enterprise giants from humble business beginnings, or did not even exist before 1990.

In simple terms, Slovenia has managed to produce new niche exporters on a yearly basis.

2. A startup nation – but with few big startups

Startups emerge differently here than they do in other countries. Although Slovenia has a highly developed startup environment, it is the more unusual, non-classic forms of startup that tend to be more successful – family companies and partner enterprises.

This might seem somewhat counter-intuitive, but if we look at the best-known and most celebrated classic startups in Slovenia, for example, Ekipa 2 is only 65th. Above them is a whole raft of family startups that did not emerge from a classic startup environment at all. This is not to say, of course, that startups are not important in Slovenia. On the contrary: as we try to show in the pages that follow, a number of Slovenian startups, particularly in the hi-tech sector, are enjoying exceptional global success, and we can also boast a series of strong development centres. Ekipa 2 and Sportradar are two such startups.

But it remains the case that startups usually tend to be sold quickly, while classic entrepreneurs are often so attached to their businesses that they find it incredibly difficult to give them up. There are positive and negative sides to this, of course. The positive is that they continue to employ a Slovenian workforce and keep their head offices within the country. And the negative? They fail to make use of the strong levers available for further growing the business that can come from an injection of capital from new owners and co-owners.

3. What do these Slovenian export stars actually do?

The product portfolio of enterprising, fast-growing Slovenian companies is more varied than that of the country's largest exporters. Most of them are niche, development-oriented enterprises than have often emerged from classic Slovenian industrial backgrounds.

Many of their owners (or their owners' parents) used to work for large-scale Slovenian companies, mainly in the industrial sector. After leaving them, they set out to develop niche products and services that the large industrial systems did not recognise as offering enough potential.

What are they developing? A typical example is IMP Pumps, Slovenia's 12th fastest-growing exporter, which develops and manufactures water pumps. Owner Damir Popović took over the company with his wife just before it became bankrupt, and has since made a success story out of it by bringing considerable experience from the automotive industry, where he worked before embarking on his own enterprise journey.

Slovenia's export-oriented entrepreneurs offer a very wide range of products and services. Dewesoft, which is owned by Dr Jure Knez and partners, designs high-tech testing and measuring equipment that, in their words, "simplifies the advancement of humanity". Their data-acquisition systems are the ultimate tools for test engineers, which has led to close collaboration with the space industry. They are not the only

company in Slovenia to have become a full member organisation of the European Space Agency this year. You can read much more about this and about Slovenia's other space industry companies later on in this publication.

Palma, a tourist agency owned by Matej Knaus and partners, is gradually shifting its focus from being an importer to an exporter of tourist services, meaning that it is bringing ever greater numbers of tourists to Slovenia. MDM, owned by former Olympic cyclist Rok Drašler and his wife, has become a very strong supplier of stainless steel and aluminium, while Igor Berce's engineering company Brinox specialises in premium process equipment, mainly in the pharmaceutical, biopharmaceutical and cleaning industries (almost 200 of its 600 employees spread across several countries are engineers).

Inea is helping to creating the industry of the future through production automation, energy management and smart control technologies. In a matter of a few decades, Incom, owned by Andrej Slokar (whose daughter is a top Slovenian Alpine skier), has become Slovenia's top exporter of ice cream. Only 10% of their product is sold in Slovenia, with most going overseas to countries as close as the UK and as far away as the United States and Vietnam. They manufacture around three million pieces of ice cream every working day.

Photo: Dewesoft



Dr. Jure Knez, Dewesoft,
on employee co-ownership:
**“The aim is to build an ownership
structure that will help the business
thrive for the next 100 years.”**

Gabrijel Aluminium, owned by Andrej Gabrijel and partners, specialises in manufacturing technical and decorative components from aluminium, while Anton Kisovar's Tehnos is a major player in the forestry and farming machinery sector. This is a sector in which Slovenia is extremely strong, with a number of other companies also making the list (Interexport, Mebor, Uniforest, Pišek – Vitli Krpan, Tajfun Planina and SIP Strojna oprema, to name just a few).

Cosylab (Dr Mark Pleško and partners) is also one of the 50 fastest-growing enterprises in the country. It offers top-level expertise, software and electronics for some of the world's most advanced systems and devices: particle accelerators, large array telescopes, fusion reactors, innovative medical devices and cancer therapy systems. And of course, no list of fast-growing technology exporters would be complete without Akrapovič, a world-leader in car and motorcycle exhaust systems.

4. Co-ownership models bring new growth

You might have noticed how many of these majority owners have partners. This is a strong development ownership model, and one that is becoming extremely popular in Slovenia. Company founders are opting for various models of employee co-ownership, with the aim of motivating those employees to improve their operating results still further and help grow the company.

The pioneer of this system is Dr Jure Knez, who in addition to running Dewesoft, has helped develop Slovenia's best private business incubator, Katapult, which is based in Trbovlje. He will not sell Dewesoft under any circumstance, but wishes to continue to develop it independently. As he said last year: “The aim is to build an ownership structure that will help the business thrive for the next 100 years.”

Photo: Tehnos



Slovenia is an extremely strong exporter of forestry and farming machinery. The Kisovar family's Tehnos company is the fastest-growing exporter in this niche. Anton Kisovar, wife Vera, daughter-in-law Veronika and son Urban.



5. Large and fast-growing

Several of Slovenia's largest exporters are also among its fastest-growing. Chief among them is the household appliance manufacturer Gorenje, which gained major export impetus following its takeover by the Chinese company Hisense.

Others include the state-owned energy company HSE, which is mainly responsible for operating Slovenia's hydroelectric power stations and generates 60% of the country's electricity, Geoplin, the Adria Mobil Group (motorhomes and vans), food producer Perutnina, Hidria (automotive solutions), the Lek Group, Sandoz and the Krka Group (pharmaceuticals), LTH Castings (aluminium) and the energy company Petrol, which owns nearly 100% of the shares in Geoplin.

We should also not neglect to mention the raft of foreign-owned companies that also make the list. They include (but are not limited to) Albaugh TKI, Emil Frey Holding and Tastepoint (Swiss-owned), Milšped (Serbian-owned), Palfinger and Wienerberger (Austrian-owned), Fotona (owned by a London investment fund), Inter-socks (Italian-owned), Bosch Rexroth and Bayer (German-owned), Ljubljanske Mlekarne (French-owned), Eti (owned by an international group), Elrad International (majority German-owned) and Paloma (Slovakian-owned).

6. An excellent combination for even greater export volumes

To conclude, then: Slovenia's fastest-growing exporters are:

- at home in a very wide variety of niches;
- owned by a very wide range of domestic and foreign owners;
- operate the latest models of employee co-ownership.

It would be difficult to find a better combination if you wanted to increase your export volumes and improve the quality of your exports still further. >>

Photo: Barbara Reya



Matej Knaus, majority owner of Palma, is developing the company from a classic outgoing to a strong incoming tourist agency.



An experienced and reliable manufacturer of plastic components

SEP d.o.o. is a company specialised in the manufacture of plastic components using injection and blow moulding techniques. Its products are indispensable, above all in the automotive industry, for which it produces complete solutions for windscreen washer and headlamp washer systems.



Founded in 1994, SEP has grown from a small team of three partners into a group with more than 300 employees, operating both at its headquarters in Mokronog and in Bosnia. The company's ISO 14001 and IATF 16949:2016 quality certificates are proof that it meets the high standards of car and white goods manufacturers and consumers.

Working with the biggest carmakers

While SEP products also play an important role in Gorenje home appliances, the company's principal focus is its collaboration with vehicle manufacturers. It has been present in the automotive industry for 30 years as a direct supplier to Europe's biggest carmakers. This means that it is strongly export-oriented, with foreign markets, primarily France and Germany, accounting for more than 95% of its business. It is constantly looking for new opportunities to demonstrate its expertise.

SEP products are found in vehicles of the following leading makes:

- Renault
- Volkswagen
- BMW
- Ford
- Volvo
- Nissan
- Jaguar
- Peugeot
- Citroën
- Fiat
- Land Rover
- Kia
- Toyota

Pragmatic and comprehensive problem-solving

SEP's key virtues are agility and in-house expertise that is exclusive to the company. Its innovative solutions are created as responses to practical, everyday challenges and provide customers with highly useful, functional and efficient services that take into account the integrated nature of broader systems.

"Our continued presence in the windscreen washer system field is the fruit of many years of experience.

We are one of the few companies that can produce the entire washer system at a single location, from the reservoir and pipework (PP, EPDM, TPV) to camera and screen washer nozzles," the company explains.

Numerous product design options

With moderate and sustained growth over the years, SEP has also successfully introduced several new technologies such as vacuum blowing and extrusion of various pipe profiles, which take their place alongside traditional injection and blow moulding to provide an even wider range of product design options. This also broadens opportunities to gain a foothold in other markets.

"We have already introduced some alternatives, such as our collaboration on vacuum cleaner technology with the Slovenian company Hyla, a leader in this segment, where SEP contributes its blow moulding technology for the production of the water reservoir. This is also where we see the greatest opportunities to expand our business."



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FASTEST-GROWING SLOVENIAN EXPORTERS*

Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)	Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
1	Adventura Investments Group	236.11	1,707	15	Gorenje Gospodinjski Aparati	2,453.94	324
2	Anticus Group	41.61	724	16	Dewesoft	58.66	323
3	Hs Plus	147.38	620	17	Slovenski državni gozdovi Group	21.47	322
4	Uni&Forma	32.66	487	18	Albaugh	50.71	313
5	Pošta Slovenije Group	73.68	421	19	Emil Frey Automobil Holding Group	49.06	305
6	Amomont	35.07	420	20	Milšped	39.19	297
7	Gh Holding	24.40	385	21	Cetis Group	76.49	287
8	Dat - Con	20.28	384	22	Palma	16.19	287
9	Mbs List	29.11	366	23	Mdm	53.04	283
10	Raycap	61.61	363	24	Brinox Inženiring	74.92	270
11	Iskra Group	205.61	352	25	General Logistics Systems	17.63	260
12	Imp Pumps	49.32	341	26	Holding Slovenske Elektrane Group	2422.39	260
13	Hidroinženiring	27.63	339	27	Inea	18.58	253
14	Izoteh	28.20	328	28	Incom	125.53	251

Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)	Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
29	Sensum	14.73	251	71	Hidro Mat	22.34	212
30	Tegometall Oprema Trgovin	12.90	248	72	Riedl Cnc	14.52	211
31	Kolektor Etra	216.41	248	73	Nektar Natura	27.40	207
32	Geoplin	578.05	246	74	Uniforest	24.96	206
33	Odpad	135.34	245	75	Perutnina Ptuj Group	375.83	205
34	Istrabenz Plini Group	23.77	245	76	Simpos	41.01	204
35	Rz Pellets	16.83	244	77	Ino Grafično Podjetje	10.81	201
36	Alpos Metalurgija	55.60	242	78	Cargo-Partner	29.65	200
37	Euro Plus	27.66	242	79	Intersocks	71.10	198
38	Sensilab	47.13	241	80	Rondal	45.33	198
39	Mobik Telekomunikacije	41.48	241	81	Bolton Adriatic	16.58	198
40	Tpv Automotive	176.38	240	82	Amgen Zdravila	15.94	198
41	Kolektor Cp Nova Gorica	21.74	239	83	Tdr Legure	18.91	197
42	Pivka Perutninarstvo Group	20.67	238	84	Klas Metal	10.95	197
43	Akton	75.60	237	85	Florjančič Tisk	11.49	196
44	Riko	141.56	234	86	Mitol	20.35	196
45	Gabrijel Aluminium	20.75	232	87	Roletarstvo Medle	14.52	195
46	Tehnos	27.34	231	88	Metrel	31.79	194
47	Adria Dom	53.39	231	89	Egp	12.08	191
48	Palfinger Proizvodnja	237.80	231	90	Jata Emona Group	31.27	189
49	Cosylab	23.27	230	91	Gebruder Weiss	21.81	187
50	Salus Group	41.74	229	92	Kovis	69.06	186
51	Tesnila Gk	15.39	228	93	Knauf Insulation	185.54	186
52	Fotona	119.26	228	94	Bartog	20.99	184
53	Amal Naložbe Group	148.61	227	95	Reflex	13.15	183
54	Don Don Group	148.61	227	96	Siliko	91.48	183
55	Wienerberger	13.45	226	97	Ledinek Engineering	75.52	183
56	Adria Tehnika	40.67	226	98	Kovis-Livarna	31.06	183
57	Kolektor Ascom	15.93	226	99	Fraport Slovenija	30.17	183
58	Omega Air Inženiring	36.98	226	100	Farmtech	75.18	182
59	Interexport	29.69	225	101	Pišek - Vitli Krpan	48.50	181
60	Tpv Group	195.62	225	102	Tajfun Planina Group	62.79	181
61	Surovina	40.24	224	103	Intec Mkd	17.25	180
62	Pekarna Pečjak Group	12.37	222	104	Kopur	14.96	180
63	Nomago Group	23.33	221	105	Lidl Slovenija	10.01	180
64	Eles	47.13	220	106	Geberit	36.38	179
65	Ekipaz	36.23	219	107	Armature	26.97	179
66	Mebor	27.10	219	108	Adventura Group	18.19	178
67	Pirnar	53.10	217	109	Cablex Plastik	9.78	177
68	Adria Mobil Group	640.31	216	110	Pfeifer	11.51	177
69	Perspektiva Ft Group	67.59	214	111	Eurel	17.81	177
70	Rosenbauer	31.87	214	112	Systemair	21.92	177

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Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
113	Datalab Tehnologije Group	11.07	176
114	Akrapovič Group	193.70	176
115	Akrapovič	193.66	176
116	Ekolat	19.77	176
117	Koto	16.13	176
118	Container	36.25	175
119	Tastepoint Group	125.94	174
120	Swisspearl Slovenija	11.99	174
121	Bosch Rexroth	71.42	172
122	Interblock Group	132.21	172
123	Herz	46.92	172
124	G3 Spirits	12.52	172
125	Isokon	64.65	171
126	Tramper	10.59	171
127	Campagnolo Koper	14.66	171
128	Tekstilna Tovarna Okroglica	29.06	171
129	Polycom	46.78	170
130	I.P.S. Group	213.49	170

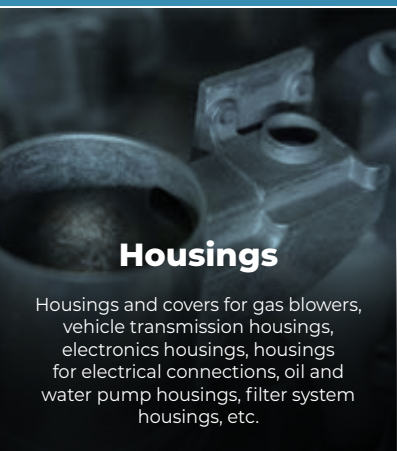
Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
131	Adk	214.53	170
132	Radeče Papir Nova Group	47.07	170
133	Titus Lama	95.06	169
134	Merkscha Furnirnica	19.94	169
135	Ljubljanske Mlekarnе	102.80	168
136	Eurosol	23.46	168
137	S E P	21.51	168
138	Tpg Express	54.73	168
139	Dana	8.73	168
140	Preis Sevnica	36.07	167
141	Rls Merilna Tehnika	41.98	167
142	Wire	23.02	167
143	Soško Gozdno Gospodarstvo Tolmin	14.48	167
144	Tovarna Kemičnih Izdelkov	31.07	167
145	Ksb Črpalke In Armature	19.36	166
146	Rastoder Group	151.27	166
147	Ipros	8.86	164
148	Tovarna Elektromateriala Čatež	15.41	164

Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
149	Fragmat Group	22.72	164
150	Medis	92.97	164
151	Msin Group	102.58	163
152	Hidria	322.40	163
153	Tinex	11.17	163
154	Nimrod	22.09	162
155	Ekwb	33.88	162
156	Medis Group	92.83	162
157	Tro - Rezalna Orodja	19.62	161
158	M Sora	8.59	161
159	Oro Met	22.15	161
160	Bayer	136.43	161
161	Eti Elektroelement Group	181.63	160
162	Sip Strojna Industrija	34.10	160
163	Elrad International Group	199.39	159
164	Jmw Fire	14.88	159
165	Lp Mycron Strojgradnja	12.98	159
166	Strip'S	11.75	159

Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
167	Smm Proizvodni Sistemi	15.21	159
168	Interdent	13.32	158
169	Seven Refractories	64.38	158
170	Stampal Sb	20.40	158
171	Scania Slovenija	73.53	157
172	Gostol-Gopan	36.71	157
173	Metrel Dus Group	39.29	157
174	Athos Elektrosistemi	23.87	157
175	Mtd Bio	16.88	156
176	Juteks	60.10	156
177	Mlino Group	20.64	156
178	Sibo Group	52.23	156
179	Sorbit Valji	15.37	156
180	Mlinotest Group	20.61	156
181	Unichem	14.28	155
182	Paloma	105.50	155
183	H & R Group	375.03	154
184	Steklarna Hrastnik Group	87.62	154



THE INNOVATIVE POWER OF OPTIMAL CASTING SOLUTIONS



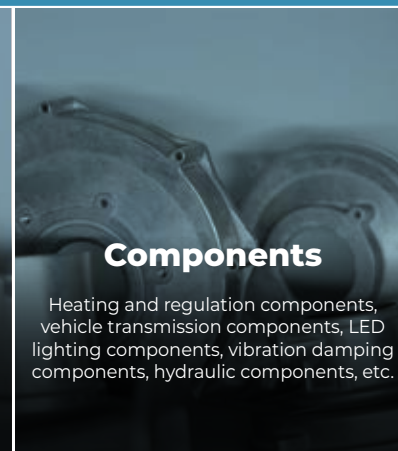
Housings

Housings and covers for gas blowers, vehicle transmission housings, electronics housings, housings for electrical connections, oil and water pump housings, filter system housings, etc.



Heat sinks

We manufacture a variety of custom-made heat sinks, which are an integral part of the technologies used in air conditioning, refrigerators, freezers, the automotive industry, electronics, medical equipment, etc.



Components

Heating and regulation components, vehicle transmission components, LED lighting components, vibration damping components, hydraulic components, etc.

Technical expertise and competence

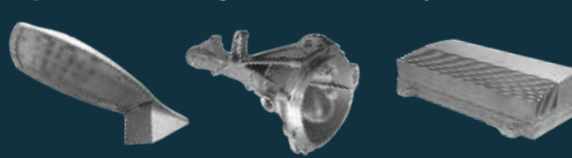
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Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)	Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
185	Izoterm Plama	10.82	154	203.	Mercis	19.67	150
186	Špedicija Goja	10.89	154	204.	Intectiv	10.59	149
187	Optotek	10.11	153	205.	Mersteel Ssc	12.24	149
188	Nexi Slovenija	18.43	153	206.	Les-Mms Group	199.77	149
189	Inotherm	85.12	153	207.	Elan Group	116.29	149
190	Salus	27.96	153	208.	Lek Group	1,964.19	148
191	Iskra Isd Group	41.59	153	209.	Intersport Isi Group	92.65	148
192	Tps Imp	14.08	153	210.	Sigur Retail Group	92.56	148
193	Liv Systems	20.37	152	211.	Maksim Group	51.45	148
194	Plutal 2000	21.56	152	212.	Bioprod	32.96	147
195	Nuklearna Elektrarna Krško	118.18	152	213.	Eho	22.90	147
196	SŽ - Vleka In Tehnika	15.10	152	214.	Codex	21.59	146
197	Alumero	11.31	151	215.	Polident	7.98	146
198	Sogefi Filtration	66.95	151	216.	Mass	29.15	146
199	Continental Adria Pnevmatike	86.80	151	217.	Jurčič & Co.	16.16	146
200	G4 Group	92.43	150	218.	Frikus Špedicija	35.79	146
201.	Calcit Group	161.37	150	219.	Fluidmaster	34.90	146
202.	Tkk	85.41	150	220.	Trimo	125.91	145



Outstanding systems partner for advanced welding solutions

The company Virs is known as a specialised supplier of professional equipment for welding and cutting, including the automation and robotisation of production processes. With over 20 years of experience and a wide range of references, both in Slovenia and internationally, the company has become a recognised and respected systems partner for numerous companies in the metal processing sector.

The Virs product range centres around specialised systems for the automation of welding, cutting and grinding. There has therefore been increasing interest in their state-of-the-art robotic welding systems, which are based on laser technology and MIG/MAG robotic welding. These technologically advanced systems enable high precision, faster processing and an outstanding mechanical and aesthetic quality of welds.

The company has a presence in numerous markets internationally – covering Austria, Germany, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Switzerland and elsewhere. And its ambitions stretch even further.

“Looking ahead, we are striving for continued growth, principally in the markets of Western Europe, where we see increasing interest in technologically advanced automation and robotisation systems based on high reliability, energy-efficiency and adaptability to the industrial challenges of the future,” explains Managing Director Renato Pahor.

Every customer is a valued partner

At Virs they believe that relations with partners are the key to lasting success. Cooperation with



clients is therefore based first and foremost on trust, open communication and mutual understanding. Each project is addressed individually and the needs of the client are accommodated with complete dedication, covering technical analysis, planning and execution, service support and continuous process optimisation.

“It is precisely this commitment, consistency and reliability that persuade numerous customers to keep coming back to collaborate with us – not just because of the quality of our systems, but because of the sense that with Virs they are valued partners. We are aware that technology is only as strong as the solidity of the embedded trust that supports it,” notes Mr Pahor.

An integrated approach leading to long-term growth

Another important factor for long-term success is social responsibility, which constitutes the cornerstone of operations at Virs. Their commitment is implemented on multiple levels, both in relations with employees and the local community and with the environment, and the Code of Conduct for Suppliers is a significant part of this. This Code clearly sets out the expectations regarding an ethical, environmental and socially responsible approach in the entire supply chain and in all cooperating organisations. This kind of integrated approach contributes significantly to dependable and long-term relations, a prominent presence and stable and sustainable company growth.

Radio Communications System for Air Traffic Control

Tactical Communications Vehicles

Radio frequency spectrum control vehicles

MORS-URSZR – Communications vehicles and vehicles for the rapid response units of the Slovenian civil protection administration for work in the field

S-TMM Sistemi
Supporting limits

COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS THAT CREATE VALUE ADDED

Our references:
Ministry of Defence, air traffic and airport control, police, frequency spectrum control agency.

The company are primarily involved in the construction, integration and maintenance of radio communications for professional use. This enables our customers to achieve the best results.

We install and measure mobile and stationary radio communication systems for our customers.

Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)	Rank.	Name of the company	Exports 2023 (in € millions)	Export growth ind. (2023/2018)
221.	Spintec	10.83	145	263.	Papirus Holding Group	88.36	134
222.	Cva	12.11	145	264.	Habjan Transport	6.79	134
223.	Omco Metals Slovenia	25.19	145	265.	Wsl Refrigeration	8.87	134
224.	SŽ - Potniški Promet	9.28	144	266.	Goričane	87.53	134
225.	Meltal Is	56.79	144	267.	Anton Blaj	11.01	134
226.	Sumida Slovenija	41.39	143	268.	M&M Intercom	7.45	134
227.	Meltal-Rado Snežič Group	56.79	143	269.	Luka Koper Group	207.26	133
228.	Global Sistem	21.10	143	270.	Belimed Pomivalni Sistemi	50.99	133
229.	Atotech Slovenija	41.69	142	271.	Daihen Varstroj	11.00	133
230.	Sandoz Pharmaceuticals	439.33	142	272.	Lesonit	60.63	133
231.	Filc	113.53	142	273.	Lior Invest Naložbe Group	415.79	133
232.	Acryform	18.53	141	274.	Lth Castings Group	415.71	132
233.	Arcont Group	101.24	141	275.	Eurotas Hoteli	7.28	132
234.	Dorninger Hytronics	8.12	141	276.	Fenolit	47.67	132
235.	Ecom Ruše	9.54	140	277.	Willy Stadler	34.35	132
236.	Novak	7.22	140	278.	Siemens	11.44	132
237.	C Automobil	9.91	140	279.	Atlantic Droga Kolinska	155.15	132
238.	Ursa Slovenija	32.77	140	280.	Petrol Group	3,524.66	132
239.	Mlekarna Celeia	19.09	140	281.	Blažič. Robni Trakovi	8.42	131
240.	Domel	181.02	140	282.	Imp Armature	9.30	131
241.	Podkrižnik	9.45	139	283.	Danfoss Trata	150.83	131
242.	Bisol Group	48.70	139	284.	Solchem	17.67	131
243.	Belinka Perkemija	18.45	139	285.	Xal Svetila	9.90	131
244.	Fructal Group	25.00	139	286.	Plasta Group	135.75	130
245.	Orodjarna & Inženiring Alba	13.81	139	287.	Mercator-Emba	19.87	130
246.	Metalna Senovo	25.25	138	288.	Mars Overseas Holdings	56.07	130
247.	Metro	14.54	138	289.	Domel Holding Group	176.36	130
248.	Goodyear Slovenija	247.04	138	290.	Var	11.93	130
249.	Monter Dravograd	27.11	137	291.	Jelovica Hiše	6.90	130
250.	Cablex Group	177.65	137	292.	Makoter	19.74	130
251.	Kozmetika Afrodita	11.73	137	293.	Makita	26.44	130
252.	Aluminium Kety Emmi	31.47	137	294.	Oplast	19.63	129
253.	Skupina Krka	1,685.19	136	295.	Dp Jub Group	100.23	129
254.	Krebe-Tippo	7.64	136	296.	Adriaing	7.63	129
255.	Seltron	8.07	136	297.	Alcu	13.55	129
256.	Tomplast	43.22	136	298.	Finiks Group	49.88	129
257.	Ko-Si	12.73	136	299.	Iskraemeco Group	156.86	128
258.	Pfizer	11.04	135	300.	Pomurske Mlekarnе	6.70	128
259.	Olma	9.40	135				
260.	Krka	1,383.65	135				
261.	Kolding	8.41	135				
262.	Helios	232.65	134				

Source: AJPES, examined financial statements, audited and consolidated annual reports for 2023 (as published up to 6 January 2025); Krka d.d. / Processed by: Podjetna Slovenija
 * Biggest groups and companies by net sales revenue in foreign markets /
 ** Leading company in the group

STROJEGRADNJA HORVAT



Strojgradnja Horvat d.o.o. is a family firm with more than 40 years of tradition and experience, which have given us a leading position on the markets for metals processing, the machining of materials, and the manufacture of metal structures and machines to order. Our partners are mostly manufacturers of machinery and industrial appliances across the EU, for whom we make various machine components.

50+ employees **More than 7,000 m² of commercial floorspace** **More than 50 machine sets**

All our processes comply with the ISO 9001:2015 standard. We also hold ISO 3834-2 and EN 1090-2 certification for welding.

FROM IDEA TO PRODUCT:

We take care of the entire project process for the client, from the idea, to final delivery of the product, taking account of the client's specific needs and wishes. Each product tackled by our team of experts is precisely tailored to the client's specific requirements.

OUR CAPACITY:

- 1x Tube laser with area of operation round tubes –max. Fi 230mm and square tube– max. Fi 230 x 230mm, max length – 6000mm
- 3 x Trumpf laser cutters up to 1500 x 3000 mm
- 3 x Trumpf bending machines up to 3000 mm
- 9 x CNC grinding machines up to 10 tonnes and 3200 x 1600 x 900 mm
- 8 x CNC lathe up to Fi 1600 mm
- 1 x CNC lathe (5 axial lathe/grinders up to Fi 460)
- MIG/MAG welding
- TIG welding
- Robot MIG/MAG welding
- Powder coating (4 x 2 x 2 m)
- Wet lacquering (7 x 3 x 2.5 m)
- Deburring tools
- Assembly



Strojgradnja Horvat d. o. o., Na prehodu 32, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia



+386 (0)2 23 48 387



info@horvat-sp.com



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Interview: Damir Popović, IMP Pumps

“Slovenia is a country of engineers”

■ How has it been possible to turn a company on the verge of bankruptcy to one of the country's fastest-growing exporters in 20 years?

■ Who has the greatest opportunities on the car market: the Americans or the Chinese?

■ Who are Damir Popović's favourite writer, psychologist and philosopher?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

IMP Pumps occupies an excellent 12th place on the list of Slovenia's fastest-growing exporters, and remains under the ownership of entrepreneur Damir Popović, who decided to take over the company with his wife 21 years ago when it was on the verge of bankruptcy.

Together with his team, Popović, whose favourite writer is Dostoevsky, psychologist Jung and philosopher Plato, managed to turn things around. His experience in the automotive industry, where he trained, was enormously helpful here, and makes him the perfect person to talk to about current conditions in that industry.



“The European automotive industry, and industry generally, urgently needs to get its act together and work at a slightly smaller scale.”

How did you embark on your career as an entrepreneur and what inspired you to take over IMP Pumps?

I began my business career at the leather factory [Tovarna Usnja] in Slovenj Gradec, which was part of the Prevent Group, an automotive supplier. My wife was employed there as well. I then worked for sports equipment manufacturer Elan, before taking over IMP Pumps with my wife in September 2004.

Why did you decide to take it over?

I saw an opportunity. The company had a product that could be marketed globally, although there were also many things that had to be improved.

After 20 years, you are now one of the country's fastest-growing exporters. What are the factors that have contributed most to that success?

The most important has been a solid and continuing reliance on the brand, on our own development efforts, and a fanatical emphasis on quality and on rapid response to the market. Every new product arises from a new patent we ourselves have filed, and we are proud of the fact that our products rarely break down. Our customers value our speed and flexibility.

These are the values we promote as well, although you also need a little luck.

Before taking over IMP Pumps, you worked in the automotive industry. Did you bring a lot of that experience to the new venture?

Yes. The automotive industry is an incubator of knowledge, and one that prizes a systematic, consistent and precise approach above all else. That's something you learn when you work for an automotive enterprise. We have transferred a lot of methods from the automotive industry into the way we organise and manage IMP Pumps.

Is it true that you also have standing tables and chairs so that people can stand and talk to each other quickly? Is this something you took from the automotive industry?

No, that wasn't taken from the automotive industry. My wife came up with the idea when we were sketching out ideas about where to put equipment in an office that had no walls. The only office in the administrative section of the company is mine. Its doors are always open.

We have horizontal surfaces in the open-plan area of the administrative section. Thirty of them have been set up so that people can get together quickly and discuss various challenges while standing up. Within the company, it is forbidden to send emails to each other with questions. I believe that slows things down. Results are much quicker if people meet face to face, discuss things and move on. This enables us to work swiftly and innovatively.

What does the future hold for the energy-efficiency industry?

Our products (pumps) are the best in class for energy efficiency anywhere in the world. Energy efficiency is crucial because it reduces energy consumption. Energy has become a strategic asset. We must do everything we can to balance our consumption.

Where do you see IMP Pumps in the next five to ten years? What are your strategic objectives?

We see a continuously growing company. In the next ten years, we would like to break the income barrier of EUR 100 million a year. The year before last, we passed the EUR 50 million barrier. We have expanded our product range with a new series of water pumps.

A few years ago you also purchased a stake in Tovarna bovdenov in plastike (TBP), which is closely tied to the automotive industry. It seems as if you can't stay away from the automotive industry.

It does look that way. But to be honest, I purchased that stake because the current owners of TBP, who I've known for more than 30 years, invited me to do so, although I should say that I also saw an opportunity to improve the business.

Along the lines of IMP Pumps?

In a similar but not identical way. When we took over IMP Pumps, it was a few months away from bankruptcy. Things weren't going well at TBP either. Now, things are improving from year to year.



We can see what's happening with the car industry globally. What does the future hold, particularly in Europe?

The European automotive industry, and industry generally, urgently needs to get its act together and work at a slightly smaller scale. Everything points towards this.

Was this not expected, given how expansive the European car industry has been over the last 30 years? It's difficult to remain at the top for so long.

That is definitely the case. All the analyses point to a shock coming mainly for mid-range car makers like Renault, Peugeot, Fiat, Volkswagen, Seat and Škoda. Prestige European car makers will be more difficult to dislodge from the market.

Who do you think has the most opportunity to make a big breakthrough here? The Americans or the Chinese?

The Chinese, absolutely, mainly because of their ability to adapt and to come up with products suitable for the global market. The Americans still make lots of cars that use up to 20 litres of fuel per 100 km. They're not so bothered about the environment.

What opportunities do you see for foreign companies to work with the Slovenian automotive industry of today? Because it

will surely have to adapt. Are there also options for doing business in other sectors?

Slovenia's automotive industry is excellent, with huge amounts of knowledge and expertise. Opportunities like that will definitely arise.

Slovenia is actually a country of engineers. In the future we are going to have to develop and manufacture products under our own brands. These will have to be complex and exacting. An industry such as the one Slovenia has will enjoy considerable opportunities on the global market, as the big players are neither able nor willing to be as responsive as Slovenian industrial companies can be.

If we're talking about potential, the best thing for us to do would be to build up our own brands. This will lead to increased revenues and greater value added. The current reality in Slovenia is that we have a large number of companies that make components for customers in the B2B sector, where value added can never be that high.

What impact can geopolitical uncertainty have on the future of industry at home and globally?

In the 40 years that I've been working, geopolitics has never had the impact on companies that it is currently having. We are all monitoring it. But the only thing we can do is adapt. We can adapt by seeking out new markets that are more stable and offer more opportunities.



"A lot of things in Europe are going to need to be redefined, including the green transition. The idea behind it is fine, the execution very poor."

China has grown really strongly in recent decades, but that growth is now slowing. Does it remain the most promising market, or is there perhaps another market that will see significant demographic growth in the next 20 to 30 years? India, South-East Asia ...

One of the reasons growth has slowed in China is that it has also slowed considerably in Europe. We are all asking ourselves at the moment whether Europe has stalled, or whether something more serious is happening. A lot of things in Europe are going to need to be redefined, including the green transition. The idea behind it is fine, the execution very poor.

With its growing population, India is now beginning to come up behind China. But India is a puzzle for all of us, because the culture there is completely different to the culture in China.

Whether the Indians will be able to do what the Japanese were able to do 70 years ago, the Koreans 40 years ago and the Chinese more recently is the big question. We have suppliers from China because the components we buy from them are well made. We have begun seeking out partners in India as well precisely because of the risky geopolitical situation that is currently putting distance between China and Europe.

I'd like to ask some more personal questions if I may. What advice would you give to young entrepreneurs wanting to start a globally successful company?

Follow your dreams. Realise that it will be tough, but that you shouldn't be afraid. The slogan we use in our family and company is: "Never, never, never give up".

What personally motivates you the most when managing the company, and what inspires you for the future?

Creative work is the thing that motivates me the most – creative work in all processes. I see the potential for creativity at every turn. I support crazy ideas because crazy solutions satisfy my creative spirit. I'm happy when I'm able to convince people of some crazy idea or other.

The market east of the EU, in Russia, is currently closed, while there is great political uncertainty in the West. At the same time, we're seeing exceptional growth in some countries of the Global South: some of the Brics countries, South-East Asia, a few African countries, etc. Would it be wise to turn attention as quickly as possible to those markets in the Global South that are growing quickly?

Theoretically, yes. Brics is not an insignificant organisation. It reminds me a little of the Non-Aligned Movement, in which former Yugoslav president Tito played such an important role. We might have thought it somewhat funny back then, but now it's actually quite a powerful economic grouping.

Theoretically there are a great many opportunities in the Global South, although the market potential differs from product to product. We have already increased our sales activities in China, where we see opportunities. We are still in the early stages there, but it's an important market for us and one we will therefore persist with.

You claim that you have the best product in the world in your sector. How strong are the Chinese in that sector?

A lot of places already know how to make very good products, but they still haven't reached our level in terms of energy efficiency or quality.

Are you talking about creative work that is akin to development, or creativity that enables the company to perform better?

Both. I'm motivated by creativity in all areas. Creativity is everywhere: in production, sales, development ...

My alter ego is, by nature, connected to art, music, literature.

Whose work do you enjoy the most?

Dostoevsky is my favourite. I'm currently reading Harari and Varoufakis.

You're reading Varoufakis?

Yes. I like his ideas very much, even though he comes from the far left. I find that interesting. I have five or six of his books. Of the classics, I finally managed to reread Joyce's Ulysses after 45 years. I didn't understand it the first time, nor indeed this time, but I managed to battle on through to the end.

I'm currently reading a book by the great Nobel prizewinning novelist Saul Bellow. I'm also a fan of Knut Hamsun. The next book I would like to reread is The Will To Power by Friedrich Nietzsche. My favourite psychologist is Carl Jung and my favourite philosopher is Plato.

"I LIKE VAROUFAKIS'S IDEAS VERY MUCH, DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE'S ON THE FAR LEFT. I FIND THAT INTERESTING. I HAVE FIVE OR SIX OF HIS BOOKS."

What are the most important lessons you've learned from life?

The first, as I mentioned earlier, is: "Never give up". The second is: "Always act". "Ukrepanje" [action] is a great Slovenian word. I don't find a proper translation for it in that many languages. I've tried in German, English, Croatian ... It's not just about "doing something". "Ukrep" means changing something very strongly. The third lesson is something I've been saying for years: "Grow or die".

So stagnation is not an option for you?

No. >>



Outstanding electronics, driven by innovation

The Elrad Group is an established provider of electronic assemblies and control systems, supporting customers worldwide with development, manufacturing, and sales services. With a dedicated team of skilled professionals, Elrad offers complete or co-development solutions – from planning to the production of custom hardware and software – tailored to meet the specific needs of each customer.

In 1996 in Gornja Radgona, the company Elrad International started out as a small operation. Through gradual growth in sales, it evolved into the Elrad Group. Today, it has production units around the world, and in partnership with its affiliates, the overall product range is enhanced through vertical integration.

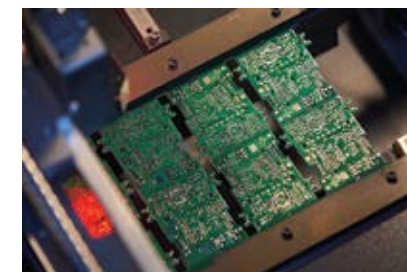
The key virtue at Elrad is innovation. Through the constant introduction of new ideas and improvements, they are not just optimizing their processes and reducing costs – they are also developing unique solutions that distinguish them from the competition. This makes them more adaptable and quicker to respond to market changes, allowing them to retain and consolidate their strong position.

Why Elrad?

■ **Highly professional and strong corporate culture** – Cooperation with customers is based on the principles of transparency, honesty, and openness, including open types of offers.

■ **Comprehensive EMS (Electronic Manufacturing Services) solutions** – Proprietary manufacturing of electronics, mechanical components, and final assembly (box build).

■ **Wide selection of services** – Plastic injection moulding, tool shop for making moulds, stamping and



bending contacts, and manufacturing of wire harnesses.

■ **Global presence** – Headquarters in Europe (Slovenia), with additional production locations in Serbia, China, the Philippines, and Mexico, ensuring global coverage and adaptability. Sales offices are also located in Germany, the Netherlands, the USA, and Switzerland.

■ **Adaptability** – Neither too small nor too large; with an annual turnover of more than 200 million euros, Elrad can support any customer project.

Supplying the most prominent customers from all industrial sectors

Elrad is a prioritized and strategic supplier for many well-established global customers. Its largest segment is electronics for hand tools, supplied to customers such as Bosch PT, Hilti, Metabo, Gesipa, Fromm, and others. The company is also active in the gardening tool market, supplying electronics for Husqvarna robotic lawnmowers and for garden

tools and equipment produced by firms such as Stihl and Bosch.

Other key areas include electronics for small household appliances (BSH), white goods (Miele, Liebherr, Gorenje), automotive manufacturers (Hella, Cabin Air), and other industrial sectors (Rexroth).

Elrad is increasingly establishing itself in the green energy sector, where it develops and manufactures electronics for stationary or portable Energy Storage Systems (ESS) and electric vehicle charging stations. The company is also expanding its presence in other sectors where electronics are increasingly in demand – including medical devices, leisure products, special industries, and more.

WEB SITE



SCAN ME

DIRECT SALES



SCAN ME

Promo

TAB E.STORAGE BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS



TAB
Li-ion batteries

Top Slovenian startups

“Small country, big ideas, global breakthroughs”

- Who are the most celebrated Slovenian startups?
- What successful products have they brought to global markets?
- What does the Slovenian startup environment offer?

MAJA VIRANT

With just over two million people, Slovenia is but a sprinkling of seasoning at the banquet of nations. But as we all know, seasoning is what can turn an average dish into something spectacular. That's us.

We have some of the best athletes in the world: Luka Dončić, Janja Garnbret and Tadej Pogačar (with a host of others who are the best in the world at their disciplines). Yes, you read that right: the world! All from just a tiny pool of two million people.

But sport is far from the only field in which we know how to be and beat the best. Slovenia's cutting-edge ideas and innovations are recognised around the world. The best Slovenian startups build bridges between local talent and global impact. Who are the innovators putting Slovenia on the global technology map? Who are the names, and what are the ideas that are changing the rules of the game? Let's get to know a few of them.



Maja Tomanič Vidovič

Photo: Barbara Reya

Top Slovenian startups

What are the most successful Slovenian startups – those that have burst beyond the borders of the country and created a major global impact? How did they start? What were the challenges and complications, what has been the key to their success, and what plans do they have for the future?



Photo: Podim

3fs: Innovative technological solutions for top global players

Beginnings

3fs was founded by four students back in 2005. One of the co-founders, Andraž Logar, is also the director of the company. As he says, they began in a microcosm, where exaggerated self-confidence and luck met: “We were very young, we had no access to capital and the only option going forward was to provide a service for someone who valued our abilities.”

3fs focuses on the development of digital products in highly regulated sectors, and helps customers make the most of the potential of the Internet of Things (IoT) and cloud solutions. Its services include the transformation of ideas into intuitive, attractive and scalable software products that customers love using.

The company employs elements of design management and agile development principles, and cover all phases of product development, from market research and ideation to design, engineering and launch.

One of the founders' aims at the outset was to work with animation, 3D cartoons and games. They began by developing these products in the parent company before forming entirely new companies co-owned by 3fs, with the remaining ownership in the hands of the employees. The first spin-off company was Toshl, which created a personal finance tracking app that was taken up by a Silicon Valley incubator in 2012. Subsequent spin-offs have included Lake Coloring, which develops online colouring books, and Tricky Tribe, a mobile games developer. Both companies are already generating annual revenues of around one million euros. The most recent spin-off company is IRYO, which produces software for the comprehensive management of health clinics and is currently used by 35 medical centres in Slovenia.

The company has developed a long-term partnership with a number of famous firms, including Ericsson, Nokia, Polarium, Edmund, Getinge and Latch.

Ekipa2: A startup built on a talking cat

Beginnings

One of the guiding principles of Outfit7 was (and remains) to set trends rather than follow them. To look for opportunities, “sniff out” what's going on, what's cooking somewhere and then shape the idea into a product – as Jernej Česen, senior VP of distribution and business intelligence at Outfit7 says: “That is the basis of the way we work, and is in the



Andraž Logar

Photo: Barbara Reya

blood of the founders of the company and of all of us involved in creating this story.”

In 2009, Samo and Iza Login and Rok Zorko started with a simple idea: to create something fun and interactive for mobile devices. Why? At that time the smartphone market was in its infancy, no one was really talking about apps for users. That was the motivation that started everything, explains Česen: “There simply weren’t any mobile games that users could carry around in their pocket. We wanted to create

The fact that Slovenia’s human resource potential is the key to even more investment has been proven in recent years by Swiss pharmaceutical investors.

something that would attract the user, hold them, and make them smile again and again.”

That is how the Talking Tom Cat app we all know and love came about. From those beginnings they began building the Talking Tom & Friends world, gradually adding new characters, games, toys, video content, theme parks and more. An integrated approach is always at the forefront of the way they work; this allows them to cover all direct and complementary channels through which the user encounters the brand, explains Česen.

Obstacles on the way up

One major challenge is how to stand out from the flood of mobile games, he adds. “The competition is fierce and it’s not easy to get users on board. Our secret? A complete focus on the gaming experience, and the fact that our games are not merely games but proper small worlds that users love coming back to. Technology is developing so quickly, so we are constantly looking for new ways of remaining interesting and innovative.”

Their breakthrough product was undoubtedly Talking Tom Cat, but they made an even more important breakthrough when they realised that it was not merely a one-hit wonder, but a franchise with enormous potential, says Česen. “Today we have more than 20 games that have been downloaded more than 25 billion times, and our community numbers up to 470 million players every month.”

What now?

The company is one of the biggest mobile game brands in the world. Its games are popular everywhere, from North America and Europe, to Asia and



Photo: Podim



Photo: Osební arhiv

Andraž Tori

Latin America. They remain ambitious, says Česen. “We are building the Talking Tom & Friends brand with the aim of making it one of the most recognisable in the entertainment world. Outfit7 is much more than games. The company is built on a huge amount of knowledge and expertise in the fields of technology, algorithms and innovation, which we want to share and expand.”

In addition to developing mobile games, they are also investing in complementary segments, and

supporting new ideas through investment. They are keen to help shape the future of the industry, and build a community in which knowledge and experience can be passed on, adds Česen. “At the same time, we are giving back to the community. Our goal is to create unforgettable moments for users in all areas, regardless of whether we’re talking about games, interactive content or entirely new projects. Our world is expanding and this is just the start.”

Zemanta: From startup to Outbrain, a billion-dollar Israeli-American company

Beginnings

It all began 18 years ago when Andraž Tori and Boštjan Špetič launched a startup without any particular business knowledge. Zemanta started life and gained fame as a blogging tool; then, in the middle of the last decade, it achieved a new breakthrough by becoming a platform for the “programmatic leasing of native advertising”.

Breakthrough

Zemanta really began to shine in 2016, when Outbrain identified it as an important strategic partner. “That was the ideal outcome – it couldn’t have gone any better,” explained Špetič in an interview with the 24ur website.

Within Outbrain, Zemanta remains the name of one of the products, while the Ljubljana branch is an important Outbrain development centre.

Outbrain has developed technology that enables publishers to recommend what a user of their website should read. The commercial side is made up of recommendations about which ads the user might be interested in. The company works with some of the world’s biggest outlets, as well as with smaller ones. “Our system knows how to identify what a user might be most interested in from the articles they read. This obviously benefits advertisers as well. And we are really good at forecasting to whom, when, why and how,” explained Tori, Outbrain’s executive product director, to 24ur.

Medius: From 250+ Projects to an AI Revolution

A Story of Slovenian Business Excellence

Medius, a UN-awarded provider of advanced software solutions for large enterprises, focuses on AI and big data. With over 250 completed projects in 23 years and a 100% client return rate, the company operates across nine industries—from pharma to energy—while achieving strong annual growth. Clients include Volvo Group, SKF, Sandoz, Hisense, and other global leaders. Their success is also driven by the visionary leadership of co-founder and CEO Estera Brajak, who was honored this year with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia **Award for outstanding business achievements**.

Medius stands out not only for its business results but also for its innovative products, powered by its exceptional IT team. At the core is **GamayunAI**, a platform for real-time machine learning that solves industry-specific challenges. This solution earned them the title of Slovenia’s Most Innovative Tech Company in the **Deloitte Technology Fast 50 CE** program.



From renewable energy forecasting, to incident management for rail transport, to migration data insights in road mobility—**GamayunAI** delivers value. In telecom, it boosts observability; in manufacturing, it enables anomaly detection, predictive maintenance, and downtime prevention. In today’s data-driven world, real-time intelligence is a competitive edge.

Medius isn’t just building tech—it’s engineering the future of business.



Five most promising

We have a lot of successful startups for a small country. Here are a few details about some of the most promising:

Agilicity

Agilicity develop tools for algorithmic and AI-supported urban planning that help property developers and architects optimise projects for greater profitability and sustainability. Their main product, Modelur, enables feasibility studies to be produced more quickly using the SketchUp and Rhino3D programs. They use generative technologies to improve urban comfort and reduce environmental impact.

Bird Buddy

This company uses AI technology to develop smart bird feeders that enable users to capture high-quality photographs and video of birds, and receive instant alerts on their smartphones. The app identifies bird species, organises observations into a digital database and brings bird lovers together. Using a sustainable approach, the company works with nature conservation organisations and uses recycled materials.

Confiva

Confiva offers a comprehensive platform for managing hybrid and online events that make it easier for organisers to hold interactive conferences. Their solution includes event planning, live feeds and virtual exhibition spaces.

FoodIQ

FoodIQ are developing food technology that enables manufacturers to create nutrient-rich foods with natural ingredients and without additives. Its gentle manufacturing methods retain the nutritional value and taste of the ingredients, support dairy as well as plant formulations, and make local production and product testing easier.

Juicefast

Juicefast offers detox programmes, healthy meal plans and cold-pressed juices to support weight loss, energy renewal and well-being. Its nutritionally proven meals and juices make it easier for customers to improve their diet, with an emphasis on pristine ingredients and scientifically supported dietary benefits.

Source: eu-startups.com

A Slovenian startup ecosystem for new startup stars

The Slovenian startup environment has developed considerably in recent years, and is becoming increasingly integrated into international trends. According to figures from the Slovene Enterprise Fund, several hundred startups are active in Slovenia, working in areas ranging from IT to biotech to advanced materials.

Slovenia is actively working to improve its startup ecosystem. In 2024 a strategy was adopted that included concrete proposals in five areas: a support environment for startups and fast-growing enterprises, the introduction of a new legal/organisational form for startups, the introduction of a startup visa, the development of the venture capital market, and solutions for the introduction of share options. These measures are designed to increase Slovenia's attractiveness to domestic and foreign entrepreneurs and investors.

Five biggest incubators

Slovenian startups are well-supported by incubators, which help them at their earliest stages of development. They are aimed at entrepreneurs with an idea or prototype who require support when they are starting out. Incubators provide startups with an area to work, infrastructure, mentoring and support to develop their business model and links to industry experts, and occasionally also initial funding or help in obtaining it.

The biggest incubators are:

- **Ljubljana University Incubator (LUI)**
- **Sežana Incubator**
- **Primorska Technology Park**
- **Ljubljana Technology Park**
- **Podbreznik Business Incubator (Novo Mesto)**

Three strong accelerators

Accelerators are aimed at startups that already have a working product or service, and are looking for rapid growth and access to the market. They offer short-term and intensive programmes, equity financing, mentoring and access to investors.

Slovenia has several business accelerators:

- **ABC Accelerator** ABC was founded in 2015 by BTC and partners. It aims to create a sophisticated business environment in Slovenia, and provide innovative entrepreneurs with access to international investors and accelerate their breakthrough onto the global market.
- **Katapult** This business incubator in the Zasavje region was set up by the Dewesoft company. It is aimed at promising startups involved in manufacturing physical products, and offers them support to develop and grow.

- **CAB (Crossborder Acceleration Bridge)** CAB aims to help technology startups and SMEs break through onto the Italian and Slovenian cross-border market, offering support in transferring technologies and research results to companies and improving innovation capacities in cross-border areas.

The Slovene Enterprise Fund programme contains several accelerator programmes, such as Push2Start, SK Growth Camp and NextRound, and is designed for recipients of startup incentives and investments. It also provides substantive support to enable startups to develop and grow more quickly led by Maja Tomanič Vidovič.

The Slovene Enterprise Fund carries out a variety of accelerator programmes, and organises promotional and educational events, training programmes, networking events and other activities to support innovative startups.

Investors are obviously a key pillar in Slovenia's enterprise environment, supporting startups through various forms of financing. They play a key role in developing the Slovenian startup ecosystem, providing entrepreneurs with funds, mentoring and business connections.

They include business angels, who are individuals or groups of experienced entrepreneurs that invest their own funds in the early stages of startup development. In addition to financial support, they often also provide mentoring and business connections. The Business Angels of Slovenia was founded in 2007, and is the country's first and largest business angels club. Experienced investors help ambitious entrepreneurs obtain initial capital.

Strong role of venture capital funds

Venture capital funds invest in companies with high growth potential, usually in exchange for an ownership share. Several such funds operate in Slovenia.

- **Fil Rouge Capital:** a venture capital fund from Croatia that provides startups with an incubator and accelerator programme and equity investments.
- **Silicon Gardens:** the first and leading "Founders for Founders" venture capital fund in the Adria region, which supports promising startups in their early stages of development.
- **South Central Ventures:** a venture capital fund with a strong Balkan arm that mainly invests in hi-tech companies. >>

MONTPRO – A Reliable Assembly Partner for the Industry of the Future

MONTPRO is an indispensable partner for industries seeking reliable, professional, and flexible assembly services. Their comprehensive approach includes precise planning, adherence to deadlines, and a deep understanding of clients' needs – all aimed at delivering top-tier execution and customer satisfaction.

They specialize in the installation of mechanical and piping systems, as well as the complete assembly of industrial equipment and technological systems. Their clients primarily come from the energy, pharmaceutical, chemical, paper, food, and automotive industries.

Key services include pipeline assembly, steel structures, and industrial components. There is also growing interest in projects related to energy efficiency and renewable energy. "Clients are increasingly focused on sustainability and energy savings. That's why we're often involved already in the planning phase, where we work together to



find solutions with lower environmental impact," the company explains.

MONTPRO is also active on international markets – in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden – and is planning further expansion in Scandinavia and the Benelux countries.

What sets them apart is their responsiveness, reliability, and flexibility. "We always keep our word – both in terms of deadlines and quality," they emphasize. MONTPRO remains a trusted constant for companies building the future.



Top Slovenian startups

Partnership for startups in the Adria region

■ What benefits does this partnership bring for startups in the Adria region?

■ How many powerful international investors are they aiming to bring to Podim over the next two years?

■ How will Podim attract more startups, scaleups and blue chips?

MAJA VIRANT

This year is an especially important one for Podim, the Slovenian startup festival, as this internationally important event will embark on a new chapter in its development in collaboration with Silicon Gardens, a venture capital fund for the Adria region that supports promising startups in their early stages of development.

Who are the innovators putting Slovenia on the global technology map? We talked to two key figures, Matej Rus, director of the Venture Factory business incubator, and Gregor Rebolj, founder of the Silicon Gardens fund, which supports startups in their early development phase in Central and Eastern Europe, about why they have embarked on this alliance and what we can expect from it.

But first, a few words about Podim. Podim is a leading startup and technology conference in Central and Eastern Europe with a rich tradition and a very strong profile. It was founded in 1980 with the aim of supporting the innovative potential of employees in

successful companies in Maribor and more widely in Slovenia. Since then it has developed into the main event for bringing startups, investors and corporations in the region together, and had organised an impressive 44 conferences by 2024.

Podim is extremely important for Slovenia and the wider region because it connects innovations with business opportunities and capital, and provides a forum for the exchange of knowledge and ideas. The event secures access for startups to a global network of investors and established companies, which promotes economic development and strengthens the enterprise ecosystem.

In addition to the main conference, Podim organises a number of year-round activities, such as bootcamps, demo days and networking events that foster the continuous development and integration of the enterprise community in Slovenia.

Why this partnership between Podim and Silicon Gardens?

If the partnership between Podim and Silicon Gardens was a scene from an American romcom, it

20

The number of top international investors they would like to bring to Podim over the next two years

50%

The increase they would like to see in the number of high-quality startups from the region coming to the Podim conference in Maribor



Gregor Rebolj:

“The SEE region has an exceptional pool of talent and many successful startup stories, such as Outfit7, Sportradar, Photomath, Infobip, Rimac and Nordeus, among others, but it is still insufficiently well-known as a hotspot for global venture capital funds”

would be the wedding of the year. These are two top players in the startup field, both with an exceptional vision of how to move forward. Although the partnership was unexpected, it is logical.

Silicon Gardens has collaborated actively with the region's ecosystem for several years, while Podim is recognised as the most important startup conference in this part of Europe, says Gregor Rebolj: “Up to now we have acted as supporters, investors and mentors. Now we are keen to take a step forward and play a stronger joint organisational role to help raise the conference to another level. Together we can bring regional startups and larger or elite venture capital funds more effectively, and raise the profile of the startup ecosystem across the whole region.”

Rebolj says that the idea developed naturally, and proceeded from a view of the region both parties shared: “We honestly believe in the great potential that this region has. Podim will become a platform that presents this potential to the rest of the world.”

Venture capital funds are investing more and more money in startups and improving the image of the venture capital market, which has shifted strongly in favour of private capital. This creates the right conditions for the development of a successful startup ecosystem, where success breeds new success, says Rus.

What differences will we see?

The partnership with Silicon Gardens has put fresh wind into Podim's sails. Together they believe that the partnership will further strengthen and enhance Podim's impact on the regional startup ecosystem, explains Rus:

“The partnership follows the pattern established by the most successful conferences, such as Slush, WebSummit and others. These have developed successfully as a result of cooperation within the entire startup ecosystem, and are yielding excellent results. They attract the best international investors and companies, and are an excellent tool for promoting the startup ecosystem globally. This is something that Slovenia and the wider region deserve as well.”



Ambitious goals

They have set themselves ambitious and measurable targets that will maximise the impact of the partnership. Matej Rus has the target numbers to hand:

- to increase the number of participating investors by at least 50% over the next two years, and attracting 20 top international investors with a strong reputation in the ecosystem;
- to increase the number of high-quality regional startup registrations by at least 50%;
- to invite 20 regional scaleups that are looking for the next round of investments and are of interest to leading global venture capital investors;
- to strengthen the presence of directors of established regional blue-chip companies so as to bolster cooperation between corporations and startups.

As Rebolj adds, they obviously want this marriage to create stronger links between startups, investors and scaleups, which will in turn help speed up development and provide more investment opportunities. "Our aim is not only to improve Podim as an event, but to aid the wider transformation of the startup eco-

system in Slovenia, the Adria region as a whole, and South-Eastern Europe."

Podim offers a great many more opportunities. Its biggest potential lies in becoming a bridge between regional startups and global investors, explains Rebolj: "The SEE region has an exceptional pool of talent and many successful startup stories, such as Outfit7, Sportradar, Photomath, Infobip, Rimac and Nordeus, among others, but it is still insufficiently well-known as a hotspot for global venture capital funds."



Photo: Podim

The keynote speakers are a secret for now, but ...

We still don't know exactly who will be appearing at the event of the year, as agreement was still being reached on several very well-known names at the time we went to press. We do know, however, that the following have signed up to appear:

Nenad Milanović, CAKE.com

CAKE.com is a Serbian bootstrapped unicorn with a value of EUR 2 billion. Its success is phenomenal, involving development of a globally recognised tool and the creation of several successful products, all without external funding. The number of users has grown to over 7 million, without reliance on venture capital.

Bernhard Niesner, Busuu

The Busuu language-learning platform's success led to it being sold to Chegg for EUR 385 million.

Under Niesner's leadership, Busuu has become one of the biggest language-learning communities in the world. It offers AI-supported language courses and has over 100 million users.

Sabine Herlitschka, Infineon

Sabine Herlitschka is president of the management board of the Austrian branch of international corporation Infineon, which is one of the world's leading chip manufacturers. It promotes the develop-

ment of power electronics, security and the Internet of Things (IoT), and has an important influence on, for example, the automotive industry and renewable energy sources. The company cooperates very actively with the startup ecosystem.

Roland Waldner

A very experienced corporate innovations manager and currently director of KWF from Klagenfurt, Roland Waldner has for many years been head of R&D for user interfaces at Philips spin-off Versuni.

At Podim he will share his views on the art of managing groundbreaking innovations and striking a balance between current core company programmes and development innovation projects.

Nabila Moumen, member of the Hubspot management team

Nabila Moumen has extensive knowledge of multi-channel marketing, sales strategies and case studies of the use of AI in company operations.

Marius Lordache, Bible Chat

Bible Chat, which has developed the app of the same name, was the fastest-growing startup in Europe in 2024. It is a dynamic, AI-supported app for researching and understanding the Bible. Bible Chat is one of the 15 most popular iOS apps worldwide, overtaking Amazon, Facebook and Snapchat on popularity.



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Grega Rebolj in Matej Rus

Photo: Podim

Ariane 6 and the International Space Station also partly Slovenian

■ Slovenia became a full member of the ESA on 1 January 2025

■ Small on Earth, big in space

■ Which Slovenian companies are already in space?

MAJA VIRANT

Slovenia has flown to the stars – literally. Joining the European Space Agency (ESA) has opened a new chapter in Slovenia's science and technology story, one that goes beyond the boundaries of our home planet. From the development of key space technologies to taking part in major European missions, Slovenia has become part of an elite group of nations engaged in shaping the future of space research.

The European Space Agency, founded in 1975 and made up of 23 countries, including Slovenia, is Europe's gateway to space. Its job is to design and carry out a European space programme by developing European aerospace capacities for missions, and ensuring that investments in space continue to bring benefits to the citizens of Europe and the rest of the world.

The ESA is therefore dedicated to peaceful research and the use of space for the benefit of humanity. Everyone involved in its work, directly or indirectly, is united in the belief that the agency can push the boundaries of science and technology and, with its ambitious space programme, give further impetus to economic and industrial development in Europe.

Do you know what a human centrifuge is?

The Slovenian Space Office was established last year at the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport. Its central aim is to provide assistance in incorporating Slovenian companies into the space sector.

A space sector has been created that already consists of more than 40 small and medium-sized companies, as well as research and development institutions, with an emphasis on collaboration with the R&D and university sectors. These companies have successfully taken a leading role in various niche space fields, particularly Earth observation, the development of innovative technologies and new materials, and the launching of three Slovenian satellites. They include the SkyLabs Trisat-R satellite, which the Space Office say is an important achievement at the European level and is currently orbiting 6,000 km above the Earth.

Several Slovenian space technology companies made an appearance at the International Astronautical Congress (IAC) in Milan for the first time. "Slovenian companies are involved in all sectors," say the Space Office. Dewesoft helped to build the new European Ariane 6 rocket, and its products can also be found at the ESA launch site in French Guiana, as well as on NASA's most recent Artemis 1 mission, which was launched in November 2022.

Planica Nordic Centre It is no less important to note that cooperation with the ESA provides companies and institutions with an important reference when it comes to other commercial ventures. These include the "bed rest" studies carried out in the hypoxic environment of the Planica Nordic Centre, which were instrumental in bringing ESA's human centrifuge to Slovenia.

Dewesoft's products can also be found at the ESA launch site in French Guiana, as well as on Nasa's most recent Artemis 1 mission.

Planica therefore became one of three ESA research centres with this equipment in Europe as a result of Jože Stefan Institute's research simulating the adaptation of physiological systems to weightless environments, or "bed rest" studies.

"Moving knowledge deeper into space"

Slovenian companies involved in the space sector have therefore managed to take a leading role in individual niche areas of space research, particularly Earth observation, the development of innovative technologies and new materials, and the launching of three Slovenian satellites, including the SkyLabs Trisat-R.

SkyLabs As one of the most important companies engaged in the space sector, SkyLabs have an international profile in the satellite (upstream) segment, and are the Slovenian company with the most experience in satellite technologies.

"The ESA has been a huge help here, enabling us to take innovative ideas to a higher level of technological maturity," says SkyLabs director Dr Tomaž Rotovnik.

"Over the last decade, SkyLabs have developed several key technologies that also contribute to European technological independence. They include the PicoSkyFT fault-tolerant core processor, and the first Slovenian aerospace chip, SKY-IC-RHCL-A1, which shields other electronic systems from the radiation impacts of space."

He adds that it is no secret that the space industry is changing radically. Where it used to be led by a small handful of large corporations or national institutions, it is now populated by new, smaller-scale, fast-growing companies with considerable amounts of back-end capital. Their fresh ideas are helping to reshape the space industry.

"We are currently equipping nine satellite constellations with more than 290 high-value-added electronic systems," says Rotovnik, who points out that the expertise of a highly qualified workforce is necessary for the innovative development and management of new technologies. They are therefore investing in staff, and in acquiring knowledge and expertise that will enable them to innovate further and remain competitive. As Rotovnik says, the company's ambition is to "move our knowledge deeper into space."

While Slovenia might occupy only a small portion of Earth, we should not engage in any false modesty here: it is becoming an important and large part of space – even more so since it joined the ESA's famous "space family", taking its place alongside Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary,



Photo: Alamy Stock Photo



Photo: NASA/ESA

Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

“Brains” for a device that regulates air quality

Instrumentation Technologies Our next story is another important part of the Slovenian aerospace mosaic. “It started in 2015, when NASA came across some products made by our subsidiary Red Pitaya – specifically, a product the size of a credit card that replaces an array of larger measuring instruments. Today, NASA uses Red Pitaya as a measuring instrument in laboratories that are developing other Earth-based electronic equipment,” say Instrumentation Technologies.

They are also responsible for developing an instrument for the real-time capture of air quality data for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which is run by the California Institute of Technology (CalTech), financially supported by NASA and responsible for developing a range of technological projects, including advanced systems for atmospheric entry, advanced detectors for a wide range of atmospheric and aerospace instruments, laser communications and robot technologies for autonomous operation.

“Our device is part of a larger Spacecraft Atmosphere Monitor (S.A.M). Its main function is to monitor air quality on a continuous basis.” It is a small autonomous gas chromatograph mass spectrometer (GC/MS) instrument that detects traces of gas pollution in real time. It provides data on whether the air is safe for astronauts, thereby providing the basis for regulating air quality.

Their role in the project was to produce a processing unit, or the “brains” of the device, which was trialled in the International Space Station (ISS) in 2019.

We will also soon know more about their participation in the project to develop a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) on the Moon.

*Almost a century ago,
Slovenian engineer*

*Herman Potočnik Noordung
wrote a visionary book titled
The Problem of Space Travel
– The Rocket Motor.*

From Noordung to the International Space Station

Slovenia is not new to space technology and research. Almost a century ago, Herman Potočnik Noordung, Slovenian engineer, pioneer astronaut and the first space architect, wrote a visionary book titled *The Problem of Space Travel – The Rocket Motor*, which inspired subsequent space discovery and the development of space technologies.

The **Dewesoft** company is without doubt an important part of the drive to bring the visionary ideas of Herman Potočnik Noordung to life. They are proud of the fact that Slovenian knowledge can be found in space. “*Minitaur, our measurement instrument, measures the impact of micro-particles from orbit on the International Space Station, helping to make astronauts safer.*”

Dewesoft’s measurement systems can be found at every space agency in the world, as well as at large, world-beating, privately owned companies such as NASA, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, ESA, IABG, Jaxa, Honeywell, SpaceX, Clemessy, Boeing, Airbus, Thales, Bombardier, the Sierra Nevada Corporation, Raytheon

and COMAC, among many others. They have been working with NASA since 2003,

and have recently stepped up their collaboration with the European Space Agency and other companies within their ecosystem as a result of their successful completion of a research project in 2022.

The fact that Slovenia is one of 49 countries in the world with a satellite in space should not go unremarked, nor should we ignore the statement made by Karol Brzostowski, country officer for Slovenia at the ESA, to mark Slovenia’s admission into the agency: that 165 contracts have been signed with Slovenian companies and institutions in the 15 years since the associate membership charter was signed in 2010.

“It has been a long and very successful collaboration with Slovenian industry, academia and the Sloveni-

an Space Office. Now we are welcoming Slovenia as the 23rd ESA Member State. I would like to congratulate all Slovenian stakeholders for this great achievement. Let us begin a new chapter of cooperation between Slovenia and the ESA, with new opportunities and challenges, particularly in relation to the agency’s major scientific missions and scientific research programme.” >>

Slovenian space knowledge

The Slovenian Aerospace Cluster is ready to accept new clusters at any time. After all, there is still enough space at 6,000 kilometres (and even higher). As SkyLabs director Dr Tomaž Rotovnik likes to say: “We are no longer afraid to move our knowledge deeper into space.”

*Instrumentation Technologies’ product provides data on whether
the air is safe for astronauts, thereby providing
the basis for regulating air quality.*

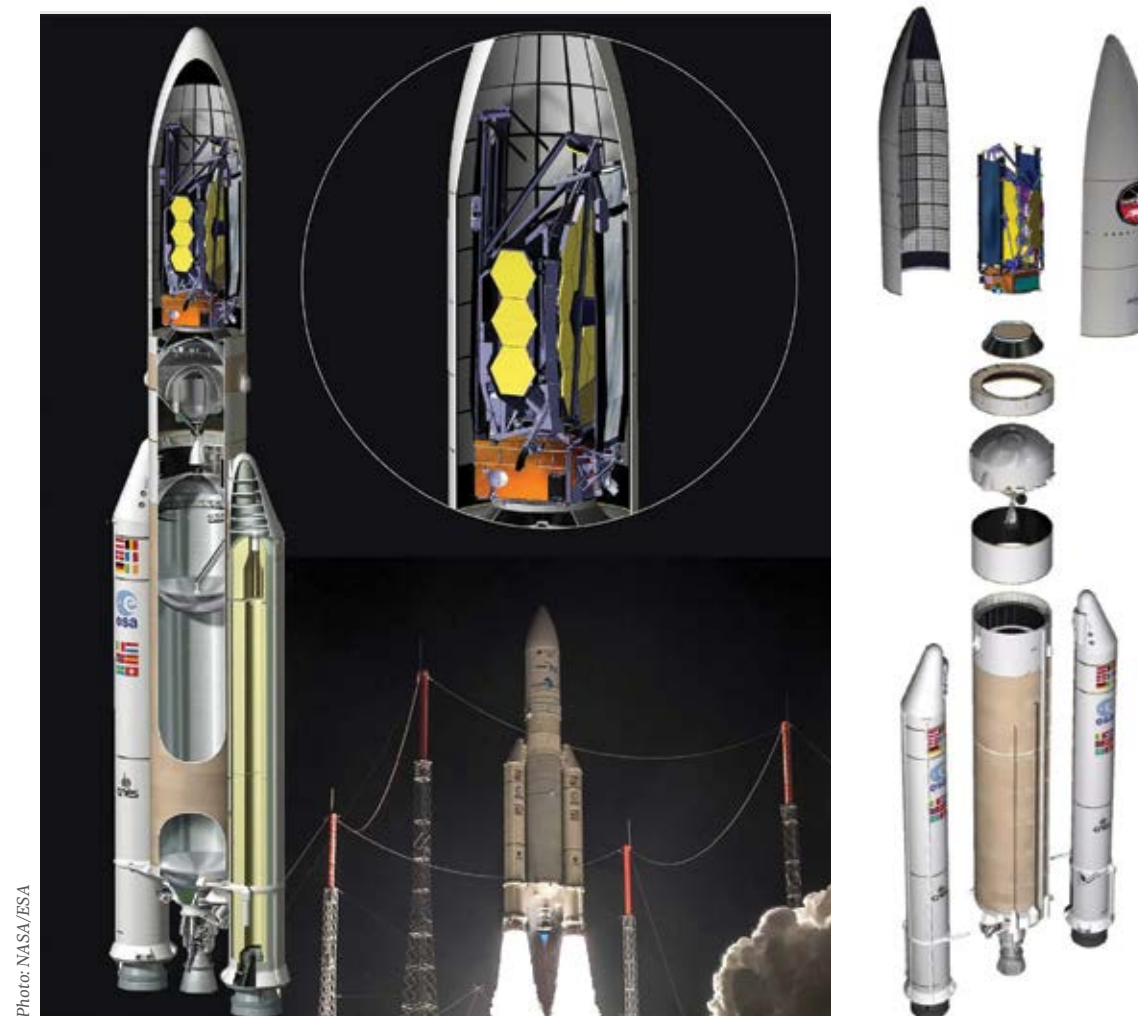


Photo: NASA/ESA

Interview: Matjaž Han

“It’s time to find opportunities on other continents as well”

■ In this new geopolitical reality, where do the opportunities lie for working with Slovenian companies?

■ What are the hidden but highly successful Slovenian companies?

■ Why are foreign investors in Slovenia more keen on investing in companies than in greenfield investments?

GORAN NOVKOVIČ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

“**T**here are lots of successful family companies that seem to fly under the radar, but are nevertheless extremely successful and export-oriented.” Matjaž

Han, Slovenia’s minister for the economy, tourism and sport, is keen to highlight that segment of the Slovenian economy populated by successful, export-oriented enterprises. We talked to him about the possibilities and opportunities for doing business in today’s new geostrategic environment.



“I get the impression that the owners of European automotive companies have been paying themselves big dividends instead of investing, which is why the Chinese have overtaken us.”

Slovenia became a full member of the European Space Agency (ESA) this year. In your experience, are foreign business figures and politicians aware that the International Space Station also carries Slovenian components?

Becoming a full member of the ESA is a very great achievement for Slovenia. The doors of the space economy are opening for us. We have strengthened our presence in the global space sector. We currently have around 40 companies and institutions involved in the sector, in the fields of Earth observation, materials development, artificial intelligence and so on. I believe that membership will open up even more opportunities for us to work on these programmes.

Of course, foreign business figures and politicians are aware of this, especially those who are also involved in the sector. Slovenia has also launched three satellites, Trisat, NEMO-HD and Trisat-R, which are the fruit of homegrown knowledge, and have developed a number of highly advanced technologies. The international business community is therefore well aware of Slovenia’s activities in this area and sees us as a good partner.

In which niches or sectors are Slovenian companies currently achieving the quickest growth on global markets?

I have to start by mentioning the pharmaceutical industry. There is serious growth, particularly in investments, at Sandoz, Novartis, Krka and others. Hi-tech industry, robotics, electrical engineering – this is another prominent niche. Yaskawa in Kočevje is an excellent example. Then we have the automotive

industry, which continues to enhance its technology. We are already linking up with the Chinese. With the help of space technology and the ESA, we can move towards having a stronger advanced technology industry.

How many Slovenian companies are already linking up with the Chinese?

After our recent vote in the EU in favour of not imposing tariffs on Chinese car imports, I have to say that there has been quite a bit of interest in the two countries working together. We recently held a suppliers’ conference in Slovenia with Chinese companies and a strong Chinese political delegation.

Before that, we hosted delegations from Chinese companies, including Geely in February. I believe they are very serious.

Why is Slovenia interesting to foreign investors?

Slovenia lies at the heart of Europe. European Corridor V passes through the country, and we have the Port of Koper. That’s a double advantage that’s difficult to ignore. Slovenia’s other advantage is the knowledge and expertise of its people. We have enormous amounts of accumulated knowledge. And, last but not least, the political situation in Slovenia is stable.

Industry continues to dominate the list of top Slovenian exporters. How quickly is Slovenian industry digitally transforming and modernising itself?

Industry is the bedrock of our economy. We have built successful enterprise and other forms of business around industry in this country. Through calls for applications and subsidies, we try to help industrial companies upgrade their technology in the field of digital transformation and the green transition.

There is still a fair amount to be done in both areas, especially given the changes that will be made in the EU to make us more competitive with the US and China.

Where are Slovenia's most groundbreaking innovations taking place and helping to shape global trends?

Slovenian space technology, which is otherwise still in its infancy, is already producing groundbreaking results. Dewesoft from Trbovlje, which is working wonders, is one of the standout companies, as is Pipistrel from Ajdovščina, which makes ultra-light aerial vehicles. Numerous small startups are involved with advanced technologies.

The challenge here in Slovenia is that we do not have enough venture capital to foster the further development of the knowledge we have accumulated so far.

When we were drawing up a list of the biggest and fastest-growing exporters for this edition of the magazine, we encountered many more classic enterprises and family companies than startups. Do we perhaps pay too little attention to the former in comparison with the latter?

Yes, we do. They're a little bit in the shadows. There are loads of successful family companies that seem to fly under the radar, but are nevertheless extremely successful and export-oriented. They export up to 95% of their knowledge, services and products. They employ 200, 300 people, and generate value added of more than EUR 100,000 per employee.

There is a huge number of companies like this. The Slovenian economy still rests on small and medium-sized companies, entrepreneurs and artisans. Indeed, they employ 70% of the total workforce in the country. It is our duty as a country to provide them with a predictable tax and business environment.

The two exporter lists in this edition show that the ownership structure of Slovenian exporters is very healthy and diverse. Some are state-owned companies, particularly those in the energy sector. The list even contains companies that are co-owned by their employees. There is a whole bunch of successful companies owned by entrepreneurs who struggle to sell their businesses, while the range of foreign investors is very wide, from the Japanese and the Egyptians, to the Americans, Europeans and the Chinese ... Has your ministry analysed the ownership structure of Slovenia's best exporters?

No. And thank you for this information. The Slovenian public still mistakenly believes that business is controlled by the state and that this is the reason why it is badly managed.

There is also a perception on the public's part that we have sold all our important companies ...

Exactly. But if we look at Krka, a pharmaceutical company in which the state holds more than 25% of shares, that company is achieving exceptional results of which we should be proud. They generated profits of almost EUR 400 million last year, and revenues will reach EUR 2 billion this year. Since Krka was founded in 1946, it has had only three managing directors – a truly amazing statistic.

We can learn a lot from this story. If a company has good management that knows where to take it and secures good successors, then it can achieve excellent results. The state cannot get involved too much or make political appointments.

You mentioned employee co-ownership. Domel was privatised and its employees became the owners. Its results are good, but if it weren't for the crisis in the automotive industry, the sky would be the limit for them. We also have top-level family firms. Igor Akrapovič started off in his own workshop before developing into a world-renowned vehicle exhaust manufacturer.

Quite a few foreign investors that arrived in Slovenia some time ago are making new investments – for example Palfinger, which manufactures lifting and transport equipment. The story is similar at motorhome manufacturer Adria Mobil. Carthago, another motorhome manufacturer, had only ten employees in 2008. Now it employs almost 1,500 people.

And I should not neglect to mention the investment by Chinese company Hisense in household appliance manufacturer Gorenje. There were concerns when Gorenje was sold to the Chinese a few years ago. Today it is clear that this was an excellent move. More than 1,500 new jobs were created in the television development centre, which is one of the best-known centres of its type in the world.

When we compare foreign investments in Slovenia with those in other more easterly countries in the EU, one thing stands out: the volume of classic greenfield investment in Slovenia is very low. Instead, we see a lot of company takeovers followed by business expansion. Why is that?

I agree with your observation. Most of the takeovers have been of high quality, although there have, of course, also been instances of investment funds coming in, streamlining a business and then selling it on.

Is the reason for this perhaps that the foreign investors that come to Slovenia see that it's not worth going for greenfield investment when they can buy a good company and lay a more solid foundation for future growth?

That is absolutely the case. They get a market, and they get knowledge and expertise. Slovenia went through a privatisation phase 30 years ago. At home we did not have enough financial resources or enough knowledge to compete with foreign companies. But I think we made just one mistake. It might have been better to have kept one or two more food companies in domestic hands.

What projects or sectors are foreign investors currently most interested in?

Many major companies are currently keen to invest in Slovenian pharmaceuticals and set up development centres. The automotive industry is another sector of interest. The third sector is logistics, where

investors see major opportunities because of Slovenia's geostrategic position.

Will Slovenian automotive suppliers become development suppliers for Chinese factories in Europe, or also development suppliers for factories in China?

I would like to see the first scenario happen. Europe has already set up automotive companies in China, which has enabled the Chinese to accumulate knowledge from Europe.

There has been a problem because these automotive companies in China and at home have generated huge profits that they have then failed to invest in sufficient amounts in further development. This means that the parent companies have not progressed enough in technological terms. I get the impression that the owners of European automotive companies have been paying themselves big dividends instead of investing, which is why the Chinese have overtaken us.

Slovenia has had a number of excellent startups – Sportradar, Zemanta, Outfit7 and so on. What will Slovenia offer in the future to ensure that we see more startup stories here?

Breakthrough Technology for Valve Testing

The Legatest device, developed in 1996 and patented in 1998 by the company L-plan, represents a milestone in the field of safety and pilot valve testing. Today, the third generation of the device is available on the market, impressing users with its precision and reliability

Legatest's methodology for On-line safety valve testing and in-service inspection is based on overcoming and measuring the spring force of the valve. Due to the high force required, Legatest uses an electric motor for actuation, which offers numerous advantages compared to faster testing methods – including minimal leakage of the working medium, a variety of safety features, autonomous battery-powered operation, and user-friendly handling.

Exceptional Measurement Accuracy

High-quality materials and innovative Legatest technology



enable highly accurate measurements under various conditions. The device detects even the slightest deviations in the functionality of safety valves during operation, helping optimize production and prevent potential accidents and downtimes. The device can be used by testing laboratories, inspection bodies, as well as certified maintenance personnel.

Annual calibration in an accredited laboratory ensures long-term measurement accuracy.

Reliable Devices for Demanding Environments

L-plan's testing devices are designed for accredited inspection bodies, calibration laboratories, and the entire industrial services sector – including use in potentially explosive areas. Their main users include the Oil & Gas sector (refineries, petrochemical plants) and energy sector (nuclear, ...).



We are preparing some new legislation that will help startups. The main challenge is how to find venture capital for them.

Slovenia shares Europe's demographic trends. How can we attract more foreign talent?

Slovenia has the advantage of being one of the safest countries in Europe – and indeed the world. In today's geopolitical climate, safety is the number one priority in the world. What's more, Slovenia is a green destination, with a high quality of life. The tax environment is also important. It has to encourage talent to come to Slovenia in greater numbers.

"India, which has great prospects, is a good example. Krka, a Slovenian company, are also building a factory there. Africa is also important, and Slovenia has become close to that continent in recent years."

When will the tax reforms happen?

I wouldn't presume to predict when they will happen, given that we are currently only talking about a property tax. Everyone here in Slovenia has to sit around the table – government, opposition, business, trade unions, civil society – and agree on the kind of tax policy we want in order to retain the welfare state we have, with all its pluses and minuses, and see future growth in economic prospects.

That shouldn't be so difficult if we put political point-scoring and our ideological constraints to one side.

Europe is currently a little squeezed between the US and China. Is it perhaps time for Slovenian companies to turn its attention more to new, fast-growing markets in the Global South?

Absolutely. The job of the Slovenian political sphere is to find opportunities for companies on other continents – alongside Europe, of course, which remains an extremely important market for Slovenia. Trade wars will make each day more difficult than the last. There are economically very fast-growing countries in the Global South.

India, which has great prospects, is a good example. Krka, a Slovenian company, are also building a factory there. Africa is also important, and Slovenia

has become close to that continent in recent years. I think this will help us forge new business links there.

That is the job of Slovenian economic diplomacy: to make Slovenia interesting to the rest of the world.

What will Slovenia's role be in the next five years?

I believe that Slovenia, with its knowledge and experience, will have a very positive impact on the decision-making of the European Commission over the next five years. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that the Commission and the EU work in tandem, and that we begin to respond decisively to the various ideas that President Trump and others are producing.

If the EU begins to recognise that not everything is about regulation, I believe Slovenia will continue to be one of those countries in Europe with good social policy and a well-developed economy. >>



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Discoveries that are changing the world and the future

- Slovenian scientists are changing the world – from the discovery of quantum light to space research and breakthrough medical innovations.
- How can research by Slovenian geographers in the Australian desert help us understand climate change?
- Controlling cells via magnetic nanoparticles opens up new horizons in medicine.



Photo: Archive GJAM ZRC SAZU

ROK POGELŠEK

Slovenian scientists are proving that innovation and dedication know no borders, regardless of geographical limitations. The discovery of the earliest galaxies, the study of climate change in karst landscapes, revolutionary methods to control cells and advances in quantum optics – in recent years Slovenian scientists have once again placed Slovenia on the world science map.

Quantum light: discovering the future of technologies

Jožef Stefan Institute. Researchers from the Jožef Stefan Institute recently became the first in the world to create quantum light in liquid crystals, a breakthrough that opens the door to new technologies. Their contribution could lead to energy-efficient screens and the optical communication solutions of the future.

“With quantum light, we are able for the first time to change its properties inside liquid crystals, in a similar way to how light and colour adapt in screens,” explain the researchers. Dr Matjaž Humar, who heads a bio-integrated and soft photonics lab in the Jožef Stefan Institute’s Condensed Matter Physics Department, explains that these are breakthrough achievements in quantum optics that could lead to a revolution in the technologies of the future.

Photo: Aljaž Kavčič

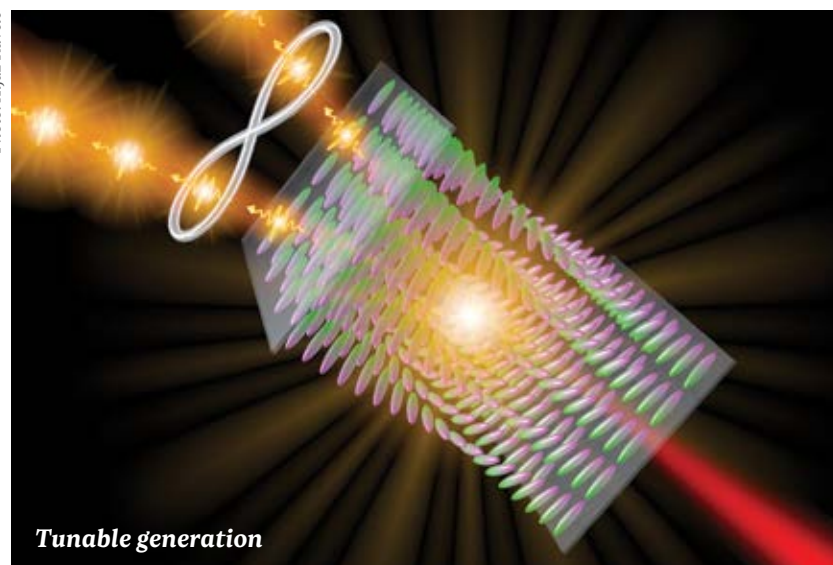
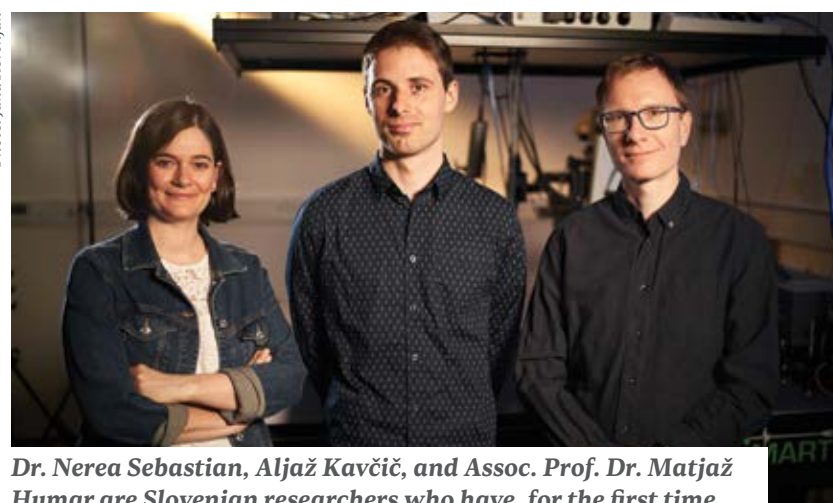


Photo: Jaka Korenjak



Dr. Nerea Sebastian, Aljaž Kavčič, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Matjaž Humar are Slovenian researchers who have, for the first time, demonstrated that entangled photons can be generated within a liquid crystal.

Research in the Australian desert and Slovenia’s Karst region reveals stories about climate change that help us understand the future of our planet.



The discovery of quantum light could potentially lead to advances in quantum communications, where, using the same technology, we could transfer information via several channels simultaneously, which would improve the speed and efficiency of communication systems. This research opens new paths in the technologies of the future, where we can expect developments in the field of optical communications and quantum computing.

The Australian desert and the Slovenian karst: uncovering climate change

Anton Melik Geographical Institute. Slovenian geographers have discovered how and when the Australian desert formed, using a revolutionary method for dating iron nodules that function like a geological clock.

“We have proved that western Australia was a lot rainier around 100,000 years ago than it is today, which helps us understand how climate change transforms a landscape,” explains Dr Matej Lipar, a research fellow at the Anton Melik Geographical Institute, part of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His team is studying karstification processes in various climate conditions – work that is producing important findings for the study of the impact of climate change.

Their study of Slovenia’s Karst region is similarly important: they have discovered that understanding past climate change can help predict future changes in dry regions around the world. These discoveries are of key importance, not only for scientists, but for everyone involved in the management and protection of vulnerable karst landscapes.

Remote control of cells: a revolution in medicine

National Institute of Chemistry. Researchers at the National Institute of Chemistry have developed a technique that enables them to control cells in deep tissue using magnetic nanoparticles.

“This technique opens up entirely new possibilities for the treatment of diseases such as cancer and neurological disorders, since it enables targeted therapies,” explain the scientists working on the project. The discovery also has promising possibilities for the medicine of the future, in that it will enable treatments that are more precise and less invasive.

The research is the fruit of interdisciplinary cooperation, which underscores the importance of combining knowledge from different fields. The discovery could lead to greater success in treating complex diseases, where treatment will be precisely targeted to the damaged cells. This will reduce side effects and increase the effectiveness of treatment.

“We have proved that western Australia was a lot rainier around 100,000 years ago than it is today,” explains Dr Matej Lipar.

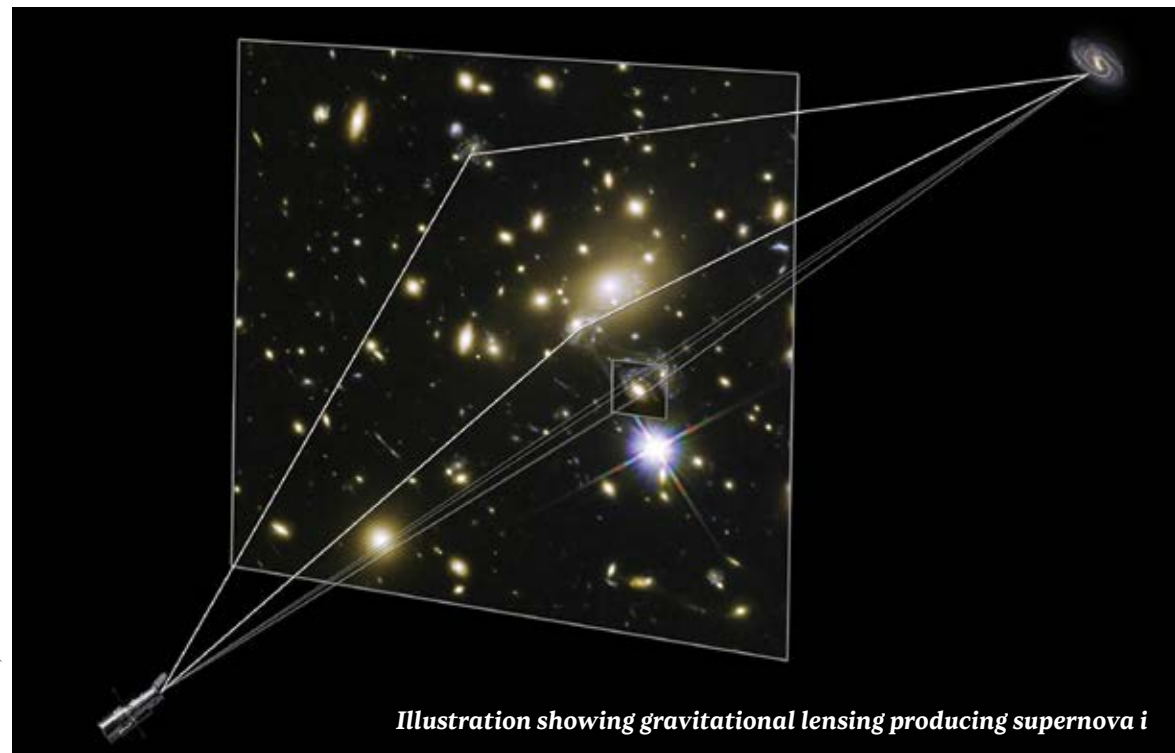


Photo: NASA, ESA

Gazing into the past of the universe: the discovery of one of the earliest galaxies

Faculty of Mathematics and Physics. Slovenian astronomers were part of a team that discovered one of the earliest galaxies in the universe, something that offers us an insight into the first moments following the Big Bang. Gregor Rihtaršič, a research assistant at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Mathematics and Physics (FMF), explains: "Although my colleagues at the FMF and I contributed to the result, it is a collective achievement for which the greatest credit goes to our colleagues in the USA." This discovery is important for understanding the development of the universe, since it enables scientists to answer questions about how the universe developed and what was present in the earliest phases of its development.

Understanding these early galaxies also helps us understand the development of stars, galaxies and other structures in space. The team's work is important for the development of astrophysics and understanding the universe, something that connects us to our origin and at the same time encourages the development of new technologies.

Slovenian science knows no borders – with innovations in quantum optics, space research and medicine, it is placing Slovenia on the world science map.

Why are these discoveries important for us?

Discoveries by Slovenian scientists are more than just examples of cutting-edge research, they also have practical consequences that affect our daily lives. Space research encourages the development of technologies that have become an indispensable part of our everyday reality, from communication systems to satellite navigation. Developments in quantum optics promise progress in fields such as energy and optical communications, which can contribute to more efficient energy management and faster connections.

Geographical studies looking at landscape changes can give us a better understanding of climate change and how to manage it, which is of key importance for sustainable development. Innovations in medicine, such as targeted treatments, directly improve people's health and quality of life.

Slovenian scientists as ambassadors of knowledge

Slovenian scientists continue to prove that they are among the most dynamic in the world. Their discoveries bring prestige not only to Slovenian science but also more widely, since they help address the biggest challenges facing humanity – from climate change to progress in medicine and our understanding of the universe. Their hard work and their passion for research remind us how important it is to support science for the future of our society.

Slovenian scientific achievements prove that innovation, dedication and cooperation know no borders. These are success stories that inspire us and position Slovenia as an important player on the world scientific stage. >>



Professional industrial knives for the most demanding users

TRO Cutting Tools is a state-of-the-art company with a 100-year tradition and extensive experience in the area of cutting tools. Many years of know-how and an understanding of industry requirements enable it to deliver reliable and tailor-made solutions to its partners, and to carry out the entire manufacturing process on-site.



The company's origins date to 1926, when a workshop for the manufacture of files was set up in Prevalje. Thanks to the high quality of its products, demand quickly exceeded production and the quality of the Prevalje files was recognised even by the imperial workshops in Vienna. The company grew over the years, and its production range also evolved along with the changing market and industry.

Today, TRO Cutting Tools is a state-of-the-art company producing a wide range of industrial knives, wood-cutting tools, circular saws, and other machine parts. It is an established strategic supplier of industrial knives to some of the most demanding European machinery manufacturers who require the best quality at a competitive price and within agreed delivery times.

Superior quality at every step

TRO's products are distinguished by their superior quality, which is achieved through the use of

proven materials and collaboration with trusted suppliers. The company uses high-alloy tool steels of European origin and its production is computer-aided, ensuring high productivity and quality control at all stages of production. With an in-house design and development department, each product can be precisely designed and tailored to meet specific customer requirements. The quality of TRO's products is certified by ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 14001:2015.

In addition to its technical and technological strengths, the company is also characterised by its professionalism, dedication and an honest, trustworthy attitude – as reflected in the fact that it has been doing business with some of its customers for more than 20 years.

A leading manufacturer at a global level

TRO cooperates with many other companies, mainly those involved in the production, processing and recycling of various materials. As a tier 1 supplier of industrial knives and other machine parts, TRO works

with machine manufacturers in the recycling, materials processing and waste management industries.

Its products are exported to partners in 61 countries around the world, mainly in Europe, but also with a growing presence in the USA, Africa and Asia. In the future, TRO aims to further strengthen its presence in key global markets where the recycling and materials processing industries are on the rise. Through investments in new technologies, increased capacity and a strengthened presence in key industrial regions, the company hopes to consolidate its position as a leading supplier of cutting tools.

TRO in figures

- Over 6,200 different products
- Nearly 100 years of tradition and experience
- Delivery to 61 countries
- Direct supplier to 57 machinery manufacturers

Slovenian art: Quiet power that echoes around the world

■ GO! 2025 is a landmark cultural event linking Slovenia and Italy for the first time.

■ Art transcends borders, which is why the ECC 2025 slogan is “borderless”.

■ GO! 2025 brings changes and artistic innovations that will leave a lasting impression in the region.

Through spectacular events,
GO! 2025 will show
how art transcends borders and
connects communities.

KAJA KOVIČ

When the famous American music critic Alex Ross wrote in 2017 that composer Nina Šenk was one of the most exciting contemporary musical artists in Europe, he (once again) placed Slovenia on the global cultural map. Five years later, the poet and writer Ana Marwan won the prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann Prize and reminded us that while Slovenia may be a small country, often overlooked in the global cultural arena, it proves itself time and again to be a place of remarkable artistic power.

She has drawn the attention of the global public to the role of Slovenian literature in contemporary Europe, where although we must fight hard for recognition, we are nevertheless succeeding in maintaining our uniqueness and a deep connection with our nation's identity. These are not isolated cases – for centuries Slovenian art has been leaving traces that resonate far beyond the country's borders.

We could actually compare Slovenian culture to Nina Šenk's music – subtle but at the same time

powerful, deeply rooted in its own cultural tradition while boldly gazing at the future. Slovenia is small, but burns with a creative tenacity that doesn't need mass audiences to be powerful.

From Prešeren to Marwan, from the Impressionists to contemporary visual artists, from avant-garde composers to top filmmakers – Slovenian art is proof that quality doesn't depend on the size of the country. Artists such as Impressionist painters, avant-garde theatre directors, visionary filmmakers and literary masters do not create in order to compete with big nations, they do so because they carry within themselves a voice that must be heard.

How is it possible that this voice reaches so many people around the world? How is it that we so regularly take centre stage in the global arts scene? The answer lies in a unique combination of history, culture and unstoppable energy. This uniqueness is also demonstrated by a very special event taking place throughout 2025 in Nova Gorica.

ECC – a unique example of cross-border connection through culture

Every year the European Union bestows the title of European Capital of Culture (ECC) on selected cities in Europe, for the purpose of promoting culture, art and international cooperation. In 2025, Nova Gorica (Slovenia) and Gorizia (Italy) are the European Capital of Culture, the first time that two cities in different countries have held this title jointly.

This choice symbolises connection and the transcending of borders, since these two cities are historically separated by the national border between Slovenia and Italy yet at the same time closely inter-

GO! 2025 brings long-term changes and artistic innovations that will leave a lasting impression in the region and raise its profile around the world.

woven in their everyday life, culture and history. Their joint candidature under the slogan "GO! Borderless" emphasises precisely this – open borders, cooperation and a shared European identity. This is also one of the reasons why the project was chosen as ECC, since it represents a unique example of cross-border connection through culture.

The project brings with it numerous cultural events, projects and investments in cultural infrastructure and raises the profile of the selected cities in the European context. The event will be a dynamic cultural hub connecting the entire country and presenting it to the world in the best light. "It is much more than a national project, it is a message to the world that it is essential to connect and strengthen coexistence and peace," says GO! 2025 programme manager Stojan Pelko.

Mirrored duality

Slovenia will present itself to the general public at GO! 2025 as the home of numerous artists who, through their work, go beyond the borders of their own country's cultural scene and take their place on the world stage.

The official programme is based on the cross-border concept and borderlessness, as expressed by the slogan "GO! Borderless". The opening ceremony, with performances by two pianists, an acrobatic basketball show and the alternating Slovene and Italian lyrics of the song "Insieme/Skupaj" [Together], illustrated how borders can become a source of experiential energy. The feeling that a rich, mixed community can inspire and transcend borders is palpable on the stages of theatres, at film screenings and concerts, and even in school classrooms. Including DJ Brina from the cover page of this magazine.

Prominent artists

ECC Gorizia/Nova Gorica 2025 will be a stage for top artists who, through their work, will leave an indelible mark on the cultural map of Europe. Their projects not only connect Slovenia and Italy, they are redrawing the boundaries of artistic expression.

Alexander Gadjević. One such artist is the internationally acclaimed Gorizia-born pianist Alexander

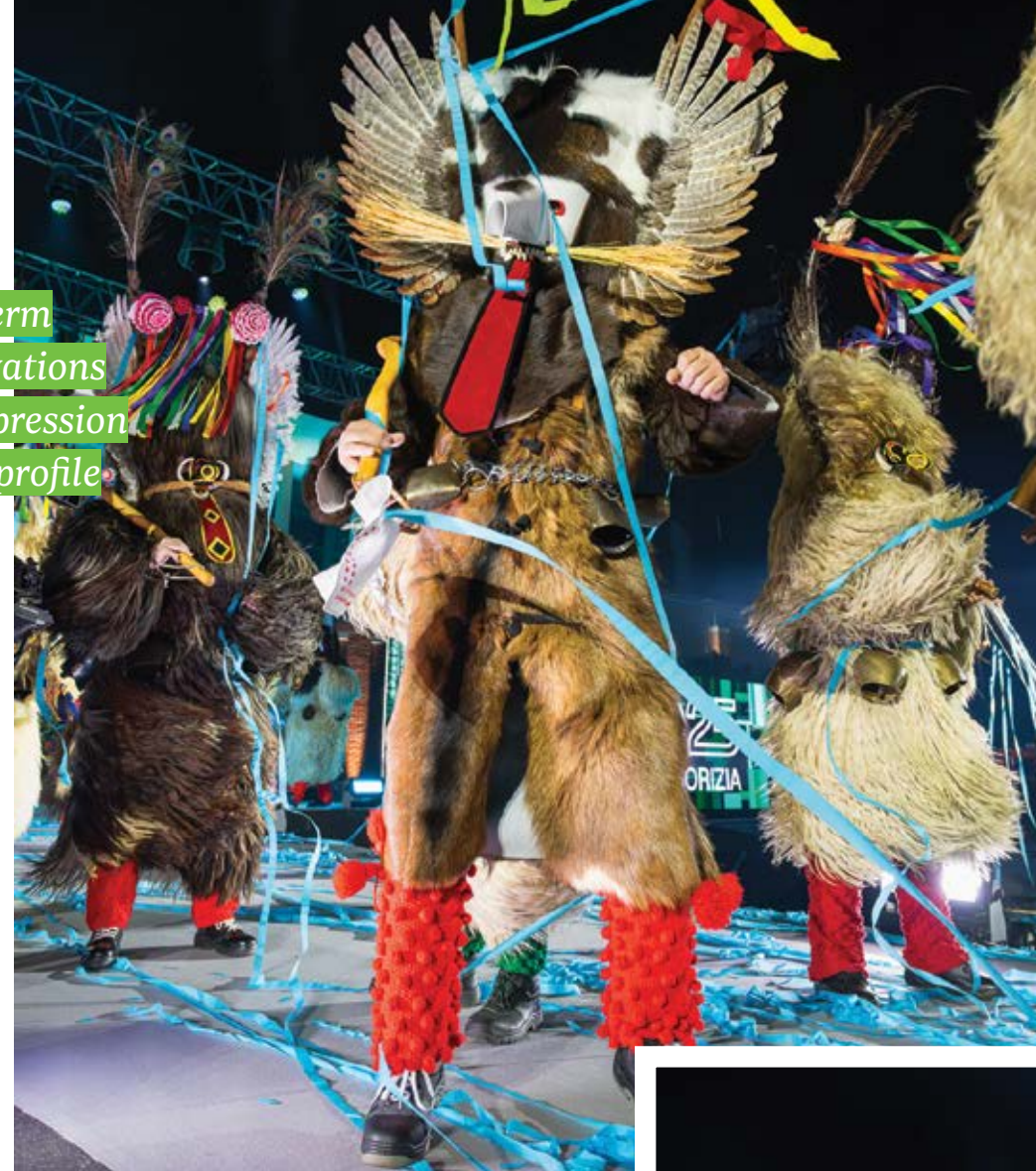


Photo: EPK/Jernej Humar

Gadjević, whose unique project "Meeting Point" (17 and 20 July 2025) will bring the two cities together at a spectacular concert on the Solkan Bridge. The organisers promise that this piano recital high above the Soča/Isonzo will become a symbol of connection and of transcending borders. Gadjević will also lead a masterclass for young musicians, which will be one of the lasting legacies of the ECC project.

Gregor Božič. Director and cinematographer Gregor Božič combines memory, nature and visual poetry in his work. In the context of the ECC he will present the "Atlas of Forgotten Orchards" project, the heart of which is represented by an orchard in the village of Kojško – the largest gene bank of old fruit varieties in the region and a unique place dedicated to the systematic maintenance and research of old fruit varieties from the local area and the cultural heritage connected to them.

During the European Capital of Culture year, the orchard will be open to visitors and will host several events. Selected international artists will revive abandoned orchard areas in various parts of the world through specific creative processes and place them on a virtual map. The result will be an open atlas of forgotten orchards that will function as a library of documentary or fictional accounts of places



Photo: EPK/Jernej Humar

where people and trees once coexisted. Related to this project, Božič will also present the short film *Navadna hruška* (The Common Pear) as part of the ECC Premieres event.

Urška Djukić. This is not the only Slovenian film made with the support of GO! 2025. Alongside Božič's film, the programme of events in Gorizia/Nova Gorica will also include Urška Djukić's debut feature *Kaj ti je deklica* (Little Trouble Girls), which will also be the opening film of the new competition section Perspectives at the Berlin International Film Festival (Djukić is a former student of the University of Nova Gorica Academy of Arts); and the animated feature *Tales from the Magic Garden*, a co-production involving four countries (Czechia, Slovakia, France and Slovenia) directed by four animators, including Leon Vidmar (who lives in the Soča Valley) and will be shown in the Generation Kplus competition section at the Berlinale.

Marko Peljhan & Jasmina Cibic. This year's ECC will not ignore one of the most important topics of our current age: sustainability. ISOLabs is one of the major GO! 2025 projects, prepared by Marko Peljhan, a leading Slovenian and international researcher in new media arts. His work is focused on research and teaching at the intersection of art, technology and media.

Currently a full professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, he has returned to Slovenia specifically for the ECC project. The ISOLabs project will explore how art, science and ecology intertwine along the Soča/Isonzo on its journey from source to mouth. The project will also feature the collaboration of acclaimed visual artist Jasmina Cibic, a former Jarman Award winner, who will be filming a new, original project in the area around the Dobljar hydropower plant.

In July 2025 the MN Dance Company will perform *Borderless Body*, a piece combining contemporary dance, robotics and artificial intelligence, in the Solkan quarry. The performers will show how powerfully people, movement and technology can be connected.

BridA. This Šempas-based art collective has also announced a major project that will take the form of spectacular video mapping projections as part of the R.o.R. Festival. Towards the end of 2025 they will illuminate the cities of Nova Gorica and Gorizia with a joint art installation.

Nonument. The Nonument group's "Shining Invisible City" project will shed light on the legacy of architect Edvard Ravnikar through special architectural interventions and installations at the Eda Centre and other locations in Nova Gorica.



The city will also appear in a completely new light through the museum project EPIC (European Platform for the Interpretation of the 20th Century). A former warehouse near the railway station will house a museum of contemporary history, which will use personal testimonies, films and exhibitions to explore the history of the Gorizia region. It will be connected to the city centre via a railway underpass, which will symbolically and physically open up this new cultural centre.

The organisers promise a great many crossings of borders – in art, culture and thinking. In a place where two countries meet, a new shared cultural space will be born and will resonate far beyond its geographical contexts.

Slovenian art at the global level

GO! 2025 is a great opportunity for Slovenian artists to showcase their talent and skill in a prestigious international forum. The event will once again place Slovenia alongside the “big” nations, strengthen its identity and build bridges between different artistic practices and cultures.

“We are placing the masters of the past, such as Mušič and Ravnikar, in a European context at the same time as shining a light on their roots. We are also presenting contemporary masters such as Tomi Janežič, Gregor Božič, Anja Medved and Mateja Benedetti through ambitious projects that will resonate across Europe. Art collectives such as MN Dance Company and BridA are actively involved in international co-productions, in this way expanding their network and creative reach,” says Pelko. >>

Key ECC projects

- **Cross-border theatre festival:** theatre groups from Slovenia and Italy join forces with innovative productions addressing relevant social issues.
- **Interactive art spaces:** digital and multimedia installations that allow visitors to participate actively in the artistic process.
- **Urban art projects:** reviving the urban space through art interventions that will permanently change the appearance of Nova Gorica.
- **International platform for young artists:** exchange programmes, collaborations and young artist development in conjunction with European academies and residency programmes.

ECC 2025 promises to transcend borders in art, culture and mentality. In a place where two countries meet, a new shared cultural space will be born and will resonate far beyond its geographical contexts. “This is a year in which we will show that social co-creation is more important than going it alone,” concludes the GO! 2025 programme manager.

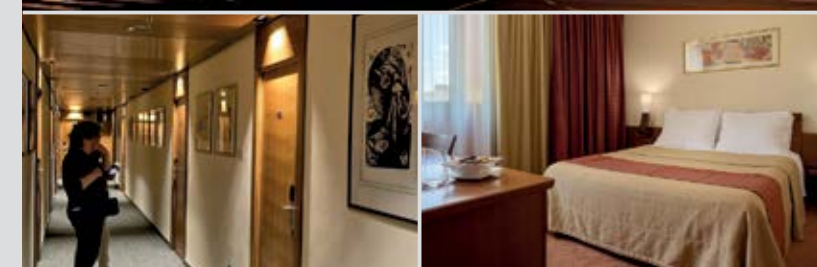
Photo: EPK/ZOSO

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Interview: Peter Grk, Bled Strategic Forum

“Many voices are calling for a more sovereign and independent Europe”

- Why is the main theme of this year's BSF “Competitive Europe”?
- How has BSF managed to become one of the best forums of its type in the EU over the last 20 years?
- Is Europe about to become politically and economically non-aligned?

GORAN NOVKOVIĆ / PHOTO: BARBARA REYA

Peter Grk is secretary-general of the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF), which celebrates its 20th birthday this year. It is now one of the three or four biggest events of its kind in Europe, along with the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Munich Security Conference and the GLOBSEC Forum in Slovakia. The BSF welcomes 2,500 guests from almost 100 countries around the world.

Why is the Bled Strategic Forum special?

It takes place by the lake in Bled, which is a unique venue for a strategic conference of this kind. It embodies the very inclusivity that the forum promotes. We provide a space for representatives of the political world, business and civil society to meet, and try to maintain dialogue between different levels of society. We can only

properly tackle the challenges of today's world by engaging in inclusive dialogue.

How has Slovenia, this small country, been able to grab the attention of leaders from around the world and influence global economic policy?

BSF is also an instrument of the soft power that small countries such as Slovenia have when dealing with geostrategic realities. A small country is able to exert influence mainly through ideas. Through the Bled Strategic Forum and its current membership of the UN Security Council, Slovenia is trying to help shape the society of the present and the future through ideas and proposals.

What has been the best idea or proposal put forward at the forum so far?

BSF

European Council president Charles Michel attended the forum two years ago, where he announced the “Bled Commitment”; this was for at least one or more countries from the Western Balkans to become an EU member by 2030. Slovenia is now promoting this commitment within the EU and beyond.

If the European Union wants to be a responsible global player, it has to meet this commitment. EU expansion is a key priority. If we don't know how to resolve the challenges on our own doorstep, we won't be able to resolve them anywhere else.

Which speaker has attracted the most attention in the 20 years' of the forum's existence?

We have hosted an unbelievably rich array of speakers, from the late Colin Powell, former US secretary of state, to world-renowned Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek.

More and more business figures have been coming to Bled in recent years. Last year's edition was attended by representatives of the Novartis and Sandoz management boards.

What role do businesspeople play in the forum's discussions? Have their proposals had any influence on politicians' decisions?

Since we are living in an era of globalisation, no discussion about how to meet the challenges simply can take place without input from business leaders and industry.

“Europe is at a crossroads. We will have to find a way of adapting to and navigating through this new reality.”

Businesspeople have had an increasingly important voice at the forum in the last few years. We are very happy to see that they recognise the BSF as a platform where their ideas or voices can be heard;

they also see it as a place where they can present their proposals to other segments of society, particularly the political elites. This is one of the added values the forum brings to business leaders as well.

What economic topics are likely to be at the forefront of this year's BSF?

I think the key topic this year will be Europe's position within the new geostrategic and geopolitical reality. On the one side, the beginning of the year saw the arrival of a new administration at the White House; on the other, we are facing the challenges being posed by the increasing power of China.

Europe is at a crossroads. We will have to find a way of adapting to and navigating through this new reality.

Let's be flippant for a second: Is Europe about to become politically and economically non-aligned?

That's an interesting question. You're not being flippant: it's an important question. There are quite a few voices being raised in favour of the European Union beginning to stand on its own two feet to a greater extent, in defence as well as energy and the economy. If we want to do that, we have to embark on a series of wide-ranging and highly necessary reforms.

Up to now the EU has been something of a mastodon, able to turn only with very great difficulty. The world is probably turning much more quickly than we would like. We therefore have to start thinking and acting a little more quickly. As far as the economy goes, it is vital that we increase the European Union's competitiveness, and invest in science and technology.

Investing in those things increases countries' competitiveness. If we look at the US and China, we can see that Europe is lagging quite a bit behind. It is crucial to make breakthroughs in this area. Mario Draghi's report showed us the direction in which Europe must

"Bled Strategic Forum is a meeting point for firms that invest in Slovenia. I hope they consider investing still further in the future."

head. Whether we are capable of doing this depends on political will. BSF is one of the platforms through which we will try to bolster this political will. That is the main topic of this year's forum: competitiveness.

Will the forum also address the challenges of energy security and green technologies?

One of the panels will definitely be dedicated to energy and the EU's energy independence, including in relation to green technologies. These challenges are clearly visible and important to the EU, to Germany and to other countries ... The challenges of green technologies are not linked only to EU competitiveness, but to the wider issue of the fight against climate change. Ten years after the Paris Agreement, one large country has again withdrawn from it. This brings a new dynamic into play.

Slovenia still believes that climate change is one of the main geostrategic challenges we face. Every year we see new climate-related disasters. Some island



countries are sinking into the sea. We have to continue with measures to mitigate the effects of climate change.

How important is the BSF for promoting Slovenia as a destination for foreign investment?

We definitely do touch upon this topic. We are expecting a good response again this year from foreign firms that invest in Slovenia. We are expecting delegations from Novartis and Sandoz, as well as our partners Microsoft and Google. In the past, we have hosted representatives of Yaskawa, among others.

The Bled Strategic Forum is a meeting point for firms that invest in Slovenia. I hope they consider investing still further in the future.

What role will BSF play in the future?

We like the fact that the forum is developing organically. We want to continue to improve its quality. The BSF is already not simply a two-day event in Bled, but a year-round platform. We have forged partnerships with similar institutions in Europe and around the world. We work with the Munich Security Conference and the BMW Foundation, and with the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, the Jeju Forum in South Korea, the Atlantic Council, and several others. >>

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EXCELLENCE IS
IN OUR NATURE

Slovenia's top chefs

■ Which Slovenian was named the best female chef in the world?

■ How did Netflix discover Slovenia and show the world that visionary cuisine exists here?

■ Where in Slovenia is food not just food, but an adventure?

NINA SIMIĆ

From Michelin-starred maestros to visionary creators of unique culinary experiences, here's our list of the five individuals whose innovation and dedication to world-class quality are setting new standards in tourism. These five are synonymous with the quality and excellence of Slovenian tourism.

Top players on the Slovenian food scene

1. Ana Roš Stojan and Netflix

One of the best-known female chefs in the world, this self-taught icon of Slovenian gastronomy has brought Slovenian food to the attention of the world through her work at the three-Michelin-starred restaurant Hiša Franko in Kobarid. Hers is a philosophy of sustainability, her cooking a reflection of a deep connection with local ingredients, such as milk from the Alps, wild herbs and locally caught fish.



Photo: STO/ Matevž Kostanjšek



She loves creating dishes using fermented albumin curd, and Soča trout and trout roe are often to be found on her menus. Wild herbs, mushrooms and other locally grown ingredients make everything even more delicious.

She continues to put Slovenia on the world culinary map. In 2016 she appeared in the Netflix production Chef's Table, which brought her to the attention of a wider public. In the same year, she received an Apple of Inspiration award from the Slovenian president, and was awarded the title of world's best female chef by the World's 50 Best Restaurants academy in 2017.

She has been listed among the world's top 100 chefs at the Best Chef Awards for several years in a row. She works regularly with the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) on the @turizemjezakon TikTok channel, where she talks about careers in tourism and hospitality.

Ana Roš Stojan helps organise events in Slovenia and abroad at which she presents Slovenia to foreign media through the prism of fine dining, as well as study trips for foreign media. She also posts regularly on social media.

Fun fact: Before becoming a chef, Ana was a professional skier, recreational dancer and student of diplomacy.

2. Tomaž Kavčič and the Best Chef Awards

Tomaž is a pioneer of the slow-food movement in Slovenia, highly adept at melding traditional flavours with modern techniques. Among his signature dishes is warm carpaccio, which he first created 20 years ago – way before it became a global trend. It is well known that he loves showmanship in the kitchen, creating an unforgettable experience by often preparing dishes in front of his guests.

He is a Michelin-starred chef and master of hospitality whose creativity delights connoisseurs from around the world, many of whom visit Slovenia for the sole reason of eating at his restaurant. His interpreta-

tions of tradition and modernity are a perfect example of the Slovenian culinary experience.

He works wonders with the familiar home-cooked tastes of beef broth, jota, potica and strudel, which he composes into works of art. He says that soul is the only seasoning he could not do without.

Tomaž is a member of the international Chaîne des Rôtisseurs and Le Soste gastronomic associations, and the first and longest-serving president of the Slovenian branch of Jeunes Restaurateurs d'Europe. He has also appeared on the list of the world's 100 best chefs (Best Chef Awards).

3. Gregor Vračko – Quiet rebel

Gregor is an innovator and master of surprise whose unpredictable and playful cooking delights food fans, and has earned him a Michelin star.

He is not a fan of competitions or of appearing in the media, preferring to spend his time experimenting with ingredients in the kitchen and on his own spontaneous creations – which is why he is regarded as something of a culinary rebel, one who challenges traditional norms and is shifting the boundaries of gastronomy in Slovenia.

He experiments with unexpected ingredients, unconventional techniques and bold combinations of flavours, frequently going against classic culinary rules. His approach is based on a philosophy of sustainability and zero waste, making his cooking both innovative and environmentally friendly.

He doesn't do typical or "characteristic" dishes, as he uses whatever is fresh at the time, from fish to game. He sets no rules when it comes to which wine or drink should go with which dish. Guests are often surprised to see him working in his own restaurant.

After learning his trade at his family's restaurant, Gregor refined his skills around the world, from Austria to the USA.

Now his guests come to Zgornja Kungota from all over the world to sample the good things he has to offer.

Jože Prah – Ambassador of sustainable tourism and rural development

Slovenia is quickly establishing itself as a leading sustainable tourism destination, mainly thanks to visionaries bent on creating unique, environmentally friendly experiences. One of these pioneers is **Jože Prah**, dedicated forester and passionate advocate of green tourism, whose work has made a vital contribution to the development of the Slovenian countryside.

With more than 23 years' experience in tourism and natural heritage conservation, Jože has played a key role in promoting sustainable travel and preserving traditional crafts. His dedication was recently acknowledged with a special award for exceptional voluntary work in the field of tourism and rural development.

In addition to his work as a forester at the **Brežice unit of the Forest Service of Slovenia**, Jože occupies several leading positions elsewhere: **chair of the Committee for European Footpaths in Slovenia**, **chair of the Slovenian Society of Charcoal Burners** and Slovenian representative at the **European Charcoal Burners Association**.

Through his committed work in all these fields, Jože Prah continues to create an image of Slovenia as a top destination for nature-lovers, adventurers, and indeed anyone who values authentic and sustainable tourist experiences.

Rising stars: Who will be next?

Who are the individuals who are just beginning to gain recognition, or whose talent and passion for innovation have already revealed themselves? They are mainly the younger generations of top chefs, creators of boutique tourist products and services, and pioneers of sustainable practices.

1. Nina Bratovž and brother Tomaž

Nina Bratovž took over JB Restaurant from her father, acclaimed Slovenian chef Janez Bratovž. She was named **Sommelier of the Year** at the **Jeunes Restaurateurs d'Europe (JRE)** congress in 2024.

She is currently researching French wines, although the restaurant focuses more on Slovenian production. She loves seeking out wines that are not available elsewhere.

2. Bruno Šulman

Bruno showed just how good he is by winning the Slovenian Masterchef competition. He has worked with the Slovenian Tourist Board and studied at the renowned **Cordon Bleu** culinary academy in France, where he now works.

He is the author of a book, *Od osnov do Masteršefa* (From the Basics to Masterchef), and most enjoys making his own pasta.

3. David Žefran

Heading up the kitchen at two-Michelin-starred Milka in Kranjska Gora is David Žefran, one of Slovenia's most enterprising young chefs.

He is most at home using seasonal ingredients, and loves to challenge himself by creating delicious dishes from kitchen leftovers.

4. Irena Fonda

Irena is a molecular biologist and winner of numerous awards for the academic achievements. She heads the Fonda fish farm, and also works on international research projects in the field of marine biology.

Her focus is on sustainability, and she is also the creator of the **YouSea Institute**, which works on preserving and renewing the biodiversity of the sea and the seabed.

These Slovenian tourism ambassadors are helping to raise the country's profile abroad, and building their reputation on the global tourist market. Their authenticity, close connection to their homeland and creative successes enable Slovenia to present itself in a way that stimulates interest and enthusiasm on social and other media.

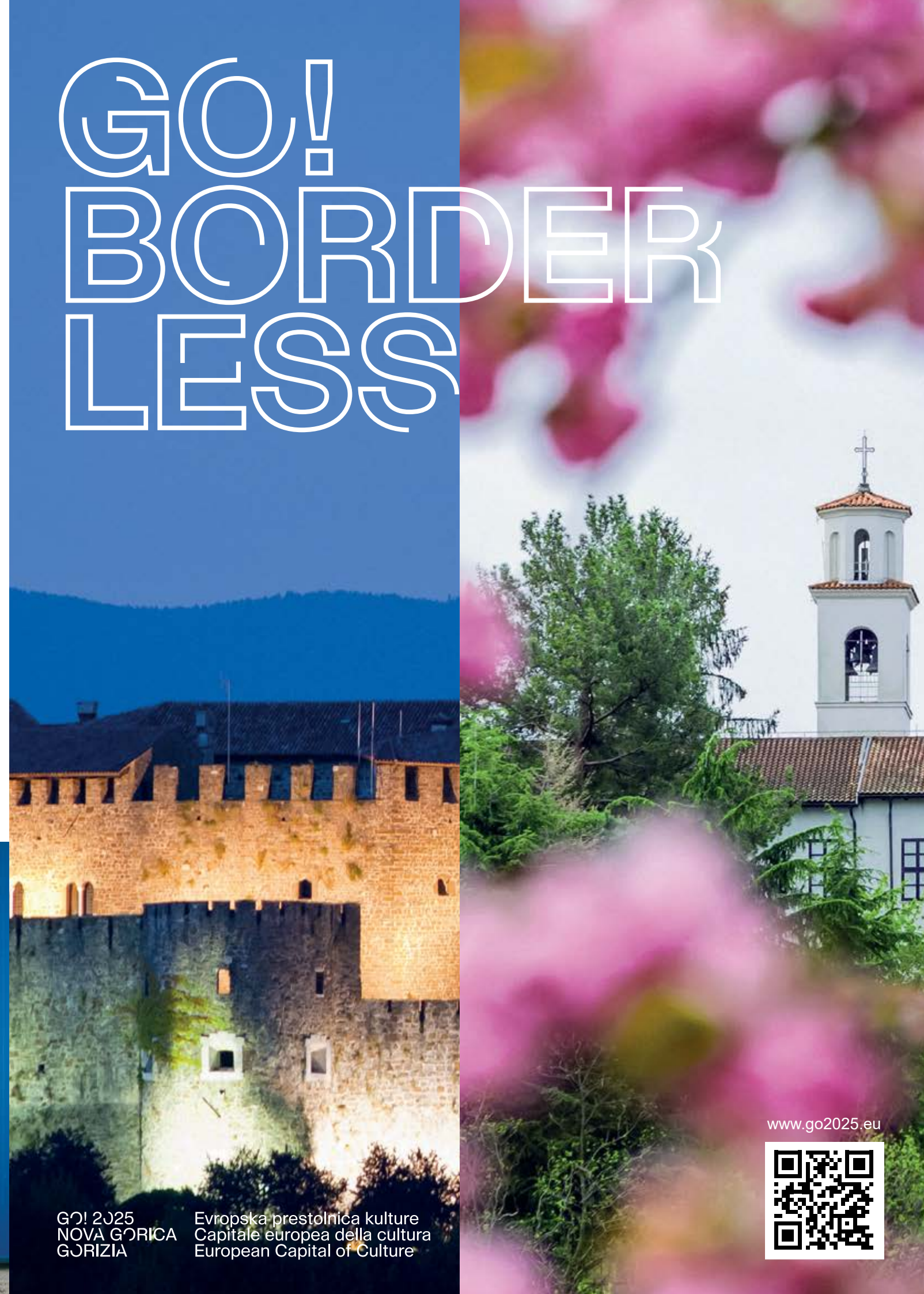
The increased reach that these individuals are helping to create is bringing tourists to the country in greater numbers, and building Slovenia's image over the long term as a unique, authentic and sustainable destination.

Michelin-starred chefs are raising Slovenian gastronomy to a level comparable with the best in the world, while the pioneers of sustainable tourism are showing that Slovenia is not just following trends but setting them.



Photo: SITO/Mantikra Kranjčec

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Photo: grad-otocec.com

Pick your own vegetables and let the chef prepare your dinner

You can enjoy culinary specialties in the garden cottage of Otočec Castle, part of Terme Krka, in the Dolenjska region. There, a castle garden is open to guests. Flowers and herbs planted among the vegetables help to repel pests or attract beneficial insects that destroy them, so no chemical pesticides are used.

The garden cottage is also a pleasant space for tastings. Guests staying at Hotel Šport can visit the garden with the chef, pick their own vegetables and herbs, and have the chef prepare a dinner from what they've gathered. >>

Chefs, athletes and singers – Joker Out – Slovenian Tourism Ambassadors

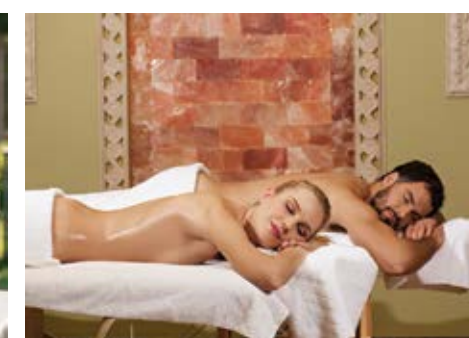
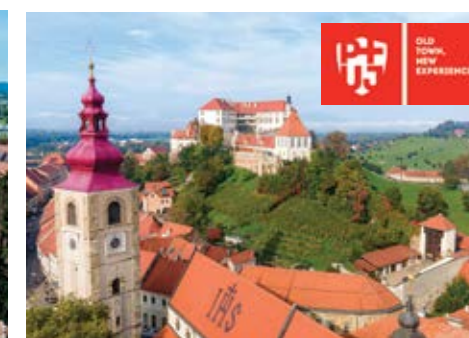
Famous Slovenes, those who work in Slovenia as well as those who have found work abroad, play an important role in promoting the country, and reach a wide global audience through their international successes.

"The Slovenian Tourist Board works with Slovenian Tourism Ambassadors in a number of ways. With athletes or the pop group Joker Out, for example, we create social media posts and video content inviting people to explore Slovenia and its towns and cities. This video has become the third most watched video, entirely organically, with over 134,000 views and almost 10,000 likes. This helps us build relationships with followers through our own as well as our ambassadors' channels," explain STO.

The stars of Slovenian tourism are not only those creating exceptional experiences, but ambassadors such as the popular group Joker Out, who took part in Eurovision in 2023. Together with other Slovenian Tourism Ambassadors, they are putting Slovenia on the world map of top-quality tourism through their passion and innovation.

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Looking ahead, they see significant opportunities in Central Europe and in specialized domains such as energy tech, smart manufacturing, and retail analytics — areas where digital transformation continues to accelerate.

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Slovenia's hidden jewels

- Thrill-seekers can enjoy a unique kayaking adventure in the underground tunnels at Peca, and dine 160 metres underground
- The virgin forests of Kočevje are ideal for those looking for a digital detox (and wouldn't mind seeing a bear or two)
- You can travel across four countries by bike along the long-distance Drava Cycle Route, or enjoy some real aromatherapy in a peaceful herb garden in Miren Kras



Photo: STO/ Ciril Jazbec

Bear watching in Kočevje Forest



NINA SIMIĆ / PHOTO: STO

Magical and authentic Slovenian destinations, with their unique boutique offerings and personal approach, are proving ever more attractive to tourists, and strengthening the country's reputation as a green and sustainable place to visit.

While Bled, Piran and Ljubljana are now internationally recognised tourist destinations, Slovenia boasts a host of less well-known but equally enticing spots. These hidden jewels, with their authenticity and wealth of boutique products and services, are attracting visitors in ever-greater numbers. We turned to the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) and its Slovenia.info website for help in selecting and presenting these wonderful places.

Top five emerging destinations and the boutique experiences they offer

We detail a few of the most attractive Slovenian tourist destinations – places whose unique boutique experiences, sustainable practices and local authenticity are proving to be attractive to domestic and foreign visitors alike.



Bela Krajina

Photo: STO/ Jošt Gantar

Šalek Valley (Velenje, Šoštanj)

This is the only destination in Slovenia which has three entries on the Slovenia Unique Experiences list:

- Flight to the Tannery of Europe – a panoramic flight over the Šalek Valley and a visit to the leather-making town of Šoštanj
- Mysteries of Submerged Villages – a visit to a mineshaft and a digital presentation of the subsidence that has so shaped the area
- Velenje Underground – a culinary experience 160 metres below ground
- Štekna Cycle Route – from Velenje to Koroška Velenje, which has an attractive lakeside location and organises the largest children's festival in Slovenia, also places heavy focus on sustainability (it holds the Slovenia Green Gold certificate awarded under the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism project).

Velenje also hosts Slovenia's largest children's festival and focuses on sustainability and family-friendly tourism.

Kočevje

Kočevje's virgin Krokav forest, which is on the UNESCO World Natural Heritage List, is a wonderful hidden Slovenian forest full of fascinating wildlife. Europe's most continuously forested area is home to bears, with miles of hiking and cycling trails running through its exceptional landscape. This makes Kočevje the perfect place for today's holidaymaker, whether they're interested in active pursuits or digital detox (or indeed both). The terrain is interesting to cyclists and those looking to learn nature survival skills. Kočevje also holds the Slovenia Green Gold certificate awarded under the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism project, with bear-watching included on the Slovenia Unique Experiences list.

Bela Krajina – Cultural and natural heritage

Bela Krajina has a rich cultural heritage, led by its famous decorated Easter eggs, as well as the natural beauties of the Kolpa river area. Although it holds a Bronze Slovenia Green certificate, the region remains something of a hidden corner – one that guests love returning to off-season as well. It focuses on the quality rather than the quantity of its tourist offerings, with boutique accommodation on the Kolpa river and unique experiences, such as beekeeping tours and cookery workshops that teach you how to make local delicacies. The involvement of the local community makes both visitors and local residents happy, at the same time helping to preserve nature, particularly the Kolpa and its surroundings.

The Kolpa and Lahinja nature parks, the second of which contains the source of the Krupa, offers a wealth of water-based adventures. Bela Krajina appears on last year's list of the best sustainable experiences as chosen by the Green Destinations organisation (Green Destinations Top 100 Stories). The "Break Your Bela Krajina Flatbread with Friends" experience, which teaches you how to make the local culinary delicacy, was made one of the Slovenia Unique Experiences last year. To summarise: Bela Krajina is paradise for lovers of authentic local stories.

Miren Kras (Municipality of Miren Kostanjevica)

This destination appears on the Green Destinations Top 100 stories list. Its highlights include the monument to peace and harmony between nations, and the viewing tower, which offers wonderful views over the Adriatic on the one side and the Alps on the other (both in Cerje).

Two neighbouring regions, Miren Kras (which has been awarded a Slovenia Green certificate) and Prolocco



Miren Castle

Fogliano-Redipuglia, on the Italian side of the border, have joined forces to create the international Sounds of Peace project. It involves a two-day hike along the Walk of Peace, which stretches from the Alps to the Adriatic and passes monuments to the First World War, with two concerts by world-renowned musicians from both sides of the border, literature readings and visits to several Karst caves. Other adventures include walks along the Isonzo Front, various activities at the Cerje tower, guided cycle tours, the chance to relax at a herb farm and wildlife photography.

Photo: STO/Tomo Jeseničnik



Kayaking adventure in Peca

Koroška – Green paradise for nature- and adventure-lovers

Koroška boasts a wide variety of nature-based activities, a rich cultural heritage, delicious homemade food, natural sights and, above all, home-from-home hospitality, all of which go to make up an authentic and attractive tourist destination. Little wonder, then, that it has been dubbed the “Treasure Trove of Experiences”, with its wealth of things to do and see – and with more than enough to keep the adrenalin sports fanatic happy. Visitors love its unspoilt forests, glorious valleys and innovative boutique accommodation, with eco-glamping a particular highlight. The most interesting adventures include:

- an underground kayaking adventure in Peca
- the thrilling “Black Hole” downhill mountain bike trail, also in the tunnels at Peca
- at 1,200 m, Olimpline, located in the town of Ravne na Koroškem, is one of the world’s longest ziplines
- the Drava Cycle Trail, which links four countries (Slovenia, Austria, Croatia and Italy).

Photo: STO/Ciri Jazbec



Glamping Garden Village Bled: Where nature meets innovation

Glamping Garden Village Bled is situated in the Slovenian Alps, just a stone’s throw from the famous lake at Bled. Tourists can sleep in a glamping tent or an eco-house by a stream or nestled in the tree tops.

One of the tents has a particularly romantic feature: a transparent roof through which you can observe the stars without be-

ing disturbed by light pollution. Glamping and exclusivity usually mean luxury; here they mean contact with nature. At the restaurant, you can take a seat behind a grass-top table and pick the herbs you would like to add to your meal yourself. Guests at the Garden Village can enjoy everything from guided morning exercises by the water to a night hike to Ojstrica, which is one of the best vantage points from which to view the lake.

For those who want a little more excitement, there’s canyoning at the Vintgar falls, a zipline across the Radovna Valley or cycling excursions to Bohinj.

Garden Village is a good example of what the sustainable tourism of the future could look like, as well as being one of the best holiday ideas for those looking to escape the stresses and strains of the city, get in contact with nature, and enjoy typical and authentic local experiences.

Fun fact: Although it’s known as a peaceful oasis, celebrities (as well as influencers on the look-out for unique experiences for their social media content) can often be found there in glamping season.

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Northern Primorska: Try your hand at smuggling

One of the stars of 2025 is expected to be the Nova Gorica and Vipava Valley destination, with interest mounting as a result of the fact that Nova Gorica and Gorizia are this year's joint European Capital of Culture (GO! 2025).

"International studies and analyses indicate a growing interest among today's tourists in culture and art," explain STO. "Alongside the many cultural and artistic events taking place, you can add in a visit to Rihemberk Castle and Rafutski Park, and take part in the new Smuggling Tour [Šverc tura]. It's therefore ideal for adventure-seekers and families looking for a sustainable tourist experience," they add.

A unique new experience awaits visitors in Nova Gorica, located on Slovenia's far western border. The "Šverc Tour," or Smugglers' Tour, is an interactive adventure that lets participants step into the shoes of former smugglers.

The inspiration for this experience comes from the period after World War II, when residents of the border areas between Italy and Yugoslavia smuggled goods to improve their standard of living. Participants embark on a journey between Nova Gorica and Gorizia, testing their smuggling skills through a series of engaging challenges.

Part of the experience includes a visit to the Smuggling Museum, where participants learn about the historical background of smuggling in the region.

For those whose interests lie in boutique wine experiences, Brda is emerging as a star player, alongside the Kozjansko and Bizeljsko wine regions. All of them offer wine-tasting at small-scale wineries set among stunning vineyards. Jezersko attracts visitors with its pristine natural surroundings, mountain trails and thermal springs – all of which provide a welcome break from the hustle and bustle.

Why choose boutique destinations?

"Boutique products and services are based on quality, authenticity and respect for the environment, which are the main principles of sustainable tourism," say STO. Less popular and well-known destinations have certain advantages over those that attract larger numbers of tourists:

- They offer the kind of **unique and authentic experience**.
- They **bring visitors into closer contact with the local culture, nature and community**, and help to make tourism more sustainable and responsible.
- They provide a better travel experience, leading to **greater visitor satisfaction**.
- By choosing less well-known places to visit, tourists not only relieve pressure on popular



Rihemberk Castle

Photo: STO/Jož Gantar

destinations, but also **discover hidden treasures** for themselves. This allows them to enjoy authenticity without the crowds.

- Sustainable tourism brings **benefits to the local community**, as it promotes smaller-scale providers, local producers and small craft businesses. Instead of tourist chains that cater to masses of people, visitors can choose to stay with smaller accommodation providers, sample locally produced food, and seek out authentic local experiences created by local people themselves.
- They offer greater **peace and quiet**, space to relax and opportunities to connect more deeply with the environment – and these are precisely the experiences that today's holidaymakers are looking for. They also promote slow, thoughtful travel, where tourists can take time to explore, get to know local cultures and leave a positive mark on the places they visit. A model of tourism is therefore developed that does not deplete resources, but creates long-term benefits for everyone – guests and hosts alike.

Tourists appreciate the personal approach and uniqueness of the offering

"At a time when mass tourism is becoming more frequently associated with one-dimensional experiences and large crowds, increasing numbers of visitors are looking for something different – something authentic, personal and unforgettable. That is exactly what bou-

tique destinations offer: a tailored approach, exclusive experiences and a feeling of uniqueness. These are things that cannot be found in the large tourist centres," say STO.

Visitors to Slovenia value the personal touch provided by their hosts, which helps deepen their understanding of local cultures, traditions and ways of life. Sincere and honest hospitality is important to them. Instead of one-size-fits-all services, they are able to enjoy experiences tailored to their interests, which in turn creates a stronger emotional bond with the destination.

Sustainability and the future of Slovenian tourism

"Slovenia is a leading destination in the world of sustainable tourism, and has become one because of a clear, long-term vision around which all stakeholders



have gathered. Our main sustainable tourism tool is the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism, which incorporates all leading Slovenian tourist destinations, along with many other destinations and providers. In total, there are 285 holders of Slovenia Green certificates. This year will be ten years since the first call for applications to the scheme," say STO.

"Destinations and providers in Slovenia are adapting to modern trends with a personal approach and unique experiences that reflect local particularities – from sustainable accommodation and boutique 'vinous narratives', to active relaxation in unspoilt surroundings. More and more providers are partnering with local producers, including traditional craft businesses, and promoting 'slow travel' that provides visitors with a more in-depth connection with the destination."

Slovenia is a treasure trove of undiscovered jewels, offering visitors a magical trio of nature, culture and authenticity. Boutique destinations are the perfect way of getting to know Slovenia in a different, more personal way. Each one attracts visitors in its own way, whether they are looking for relaxation, fun or adrenalin-pumping thrills, or simply wish to spend time in the countryside or in good company. >>

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Reliable and high-quality electrical installation services

EUROLUX Ltd. is a proven and reliable company with more than 25 years of experience in electrical installations. The company's team includes experts in various fields of electrical engineering, enabling them to deliver projects from planning to execution in an integrated manner. As explained by CEO Aleš Pirc, EUROLUX provides expertise, experience and reliability in electrical installation projects of any size – from residential buildings to complex industrial and commercial complexes.



What would you say EUROLUX is most known for?

The company is known for our strict adherence to deadlines and a proactive approach to finding solutions, while our team of highly skilled technicians ensures good communication and transparency throughout the project. **Each project is tackled individually, with the aim of providing the best solution for the specific needs of the client.** The demand is highest for complete electrical installations for new constructions, industrial halls and commercial buildings, where clients look for a reliable contractor providing clear organisation and timely delivery.

What are the main services your company provides?

EUROLUX carries out all types of electrical installation work, including:

- low-voltage installations (lighting, sockets, security systems),

- installations of smart systems (KNX systems, automation),
- industrial electrical installations and power supply systems,
- lightning protection and earthing installations,
- energy-efficient renovation of facilities and optimisation of energy consumption.

What types of clients do you usually work with and which industries do they come from?

EUROLUX mostly collaborates with investors, construction companies, architectural firms, and industrial companies, as well as with the public sector on energy-efficient renovation projects and new constructions. We see great potential in the segment of smart buildings and energy efficiency, where demand for sustainable solutions, automation, and optimisation of electricity consumption is increasing.

What would you say are some of your most prominent references?

Our portfolio includes electrical installations for important buildings of all types, from schools and sports facilities to industrial halls and shopping centres. Some notable projects are the **Stožice Arena, the Palace Hotel in Portorož, the Supernova Rudnik shopping centre, Ilirija Sports Center** and even the presidential palace in Equatorial Guinea.

What about your plans for the future?

In the future we want to focus even more on smart electrical installations, energy efficiency, and projects related to renewable energy sources, as well as on our in-house expertise. **Our goal is clear: to remain a reliable partner for all electrical installations and build long-term relationships with clients who value quality and professionalism.**

Slovenes who have changed the course of human history

- Did you know that Slovenia has produced a Nobel Prize winning chemist?
- Or that Slovenia produced one of the world's greatest architects, who also left his mark on Prague?
- Or that a Slovene scientist sped the development of mathematics and astronomy with his books of logarithm tables?

MARIJA MICA KOTNIK

In various periods of a turbulent history that, for the most part, was spent under the yoke of foreign rulers, numerous highly notable individuals were born in, grew up in or lived in the territory of present-day Slovenia, which has been settled since prehistoric times, while written evidence of the use of Slovene, the language of today's Slovenes, dates back to the ninth and tenth centuries.

Some of these individuals even changed the course of human history. Visionary inventors, gifted composers, charming ladies of dazzling beauty and brilliance. Through their personal and professional stories, their life and their work, they transcended the period they lived in.

Jože Plečnik (1872–1957), architect

Jože Plečnik, a world-renowned Slovene architect with a unique style of his own, left his mark on both Prague and Ljubljana, renovating Prague Castle in the former and giving the latter its distinctive appearance, with works such as the Triple Bridge and the National and University Library. Jože Plečnik's works in Ljubljana were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2021. Jože Plečnik strove for a sunny form of architecture; he was an exceptional draughtsman, a



Jože Plečnik,
Central Market, Ljubljana

Photo: STO/Miran Kambič



Leon Štukelj,
Olympic gymnast

Photo: Javna raba

cultivator of form unparalleled in Europe, a remarkable sculptor – the last knight of the Renaissance, not in the sense of some neo-style, but as a man who experiences things personally and tragically.

His pupil Edvard Ravnikar, the most important Slovene architect since Plečnik, said of his former master: "He was an idealist who measured the present with the criteria of the past. . . . He also demonstrated the right way to place stone upon stone, which is the essence of the architect's knowledge." Many of the world's great architects have learnt from Jože Plečnik.

Leon Štukelj (1898–1999), Olympic gymnast

Leon Štukelj is a legend – a global sporting legend, in fact, as was brought home to him when he travelled to the USA on the occasion of the 1996 Olympic Games. As the oldest living Olympic gold medallist, the Slovene former gymnast Leon Štukelj was one of the guests of honour at the opening ceremony at the Olympic Stadium in Atlanta. The unforgettable sight of the 97-year-old Štukelj striding towards the stage in the middle of the stadium captivated television viewers all over the world, as the crowd in the stadium greeted him with a standing ovation and tumultuous applause.

Leon Štukelj was also the first winner of an Olympic gold medal in the history of Slovenian sport. After dominating the all-around competition at the Games of the VIII Olympiad in Paris in 1924, he went on to win gold on the horizontal bar as well.

At one stage his Olympic appearance in the French capital was in doubt, after he injured his right wrist in a fall from the parallel bars during the qualifying competition in Ljubljana two weeks before he was due to leave for Paris.



Jurij Vega,
mathematician

Photo: Javna raba

Yet despite his injury, his elegance and his skilful use of his physical strength was enough to convince the Olympic judges. And he entered the exclusive circle of global sporting legends.

Leon Štukelj competed in seven major international competitions, winning a total of 20 medals: eight golds, six silvers and six bronzes. He won six medals at the Olympic Games alone: two golds in Paris in 1924, a gold and two bronzes in Amsterdam in 1928 and a silver in Berlin in 1936.

Jurij Vega (1754–1802), mathematician

Jurij Vega was a Slovene mathematician, physicist, artillery officer and astronomer, best known for his logarithm tables and his military career in the Habsburg Imperial Army. He was born in a small peasant cottage in rural Zasavje. His talents were soon noticed and, with the help of Baron Erberg, he was enrolled at the Jesuit College in Ljubljana. He went on to serve as an artillery instructor in Vienna and quickly rose through the ranks, eventually becoming the chief artillery officer in the Habsburg monarchy. He devised an improvement for military mortars that increased their range several times over. This invention proved to be extremely effective in battles against the French Revolutionaries. Vega was a very well known figure in his own lifetime. In recognition of his discoveries and

his services on European battlefields, he was made a hereditary baron.

He is chiefly remembered today, however, for his books of logarithm tables, which were still in use more than a hundred years after his death.



Fritz Pregl, chemist

Fritz Pregl (1869–1930), chemist

This December sees the 95th anniversary of the death of Slovenia's first Nobel laureate: the Slovene-Austrian physician and chemist Fritz Pregl, who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1923.

He was honoured for his development of an extremely precise method of quantitative organic microanalysis. In conjunction with the French chemical company Kuhlmann, he developed a precision balance that was accurate to a millionth of a gram, an invention that facilitated the rapid progress of organic chemistry in the twentieth century.

Fritz Pregl was born in Ljubljana. His grandfather, a farmer's son from Ustje near Litija, spelt his surname "Pregelj". Fritz's father Raimund was a cashier at a savings bank. His mother Fredericka, née Schlaker, was German.

On 12 December 1973, the Austrian post office issued a jubilee stamp with a portrait of Fritz Pregl to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his Nobel Prize victory.

Alma Karlin (1889–1950), world traveller and polymath

The city of Celje is famous above all as the seat of the Counts of Celje, in their day one of the most powerful families in Europe. Yet there is someone else who has left her mark on the princely city, as it is known: an unassuming woman, small in stature, who travelled around the world by herself in the late 1920s.

This was the writer, researcher, polyglot and theosophist Alma M. Karlin. She is remembered as one of the few women in history to have travelled a great part of the world entirely alone. Karlin set off on her travels with just a typewriter, a suitcase and 130 dollars, yet nevertheless succeeded in journeying around the world.

To begin with, she went to London, where she studied as many as eight languages (English, French, Latin, Italian, Norwegian, Danish, Russian and Spanish). Her journey then took her to Norway and Sweden, from where she was forced to return to her native Celje following the outbreak of the First World War.

Once back in Celje, she opened a language school, where she earned enough to pay for her travels and publish her books. She published a total of 24 books and more than 40 short stories. Her most notable works are her ethnological writings. Her trilogy of books about her travels ran to 80,000 copies, an aston-



Pedro Opeka, humanitarian

Photo: Osební arhiv P. O.

Pedro Opeka (b. 1948), humanitarian

Padre Pedro Opeka is a well-known humanitarian and Catholic priest who has been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize. He is one of the most famous missionaries in the world.

He was ordained priest in Luján (Argentina) in 1975. He first visited Madagascar as a seminarian in 1970, remaining there until 1972. He returned in 1976, following his ordination, and has remained there ever since.

After encountering people living on the edge of a rubbish dump outside the capital, Antananarivo, he was shocked by their terrible poverty. In 1989, together with some like-minded companions, he founded the humanitarian association Akamasoa (meaning "good friends" in the local language) in order to help people escape the vicious cycle of poverty.

He and his colleagues built several Akamasoa villages and centres. Akamasoa provided employment in stone quarrying, brickmaking, construction, carpentry and agriculture, giving people the opportunity to earn a living and provide for their children. He succeeded in bringing the rubbish dump dwellers together and gave them back their self-confidence.

Over the years, Akamasoa has helped more than 500,000 Malagasy and built more than 4,000 houses. More than 25,000 people live in Akamasoa communities. Each village has a school, a doctor's surgery and various opportunities for employment. Padre Opeka's work is supported by numerous donors from Slovenia, whose regular donations help provide a daily hot meal to 11,000 children.

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We share success stories



ishing number. Written in German, they were translated into English, French and Finnish.

Tina Maze (b. 1983), champion skier

Tina Maze is the most successful Slovenian alpine skier in World Cup history.

She is one of only six female skiers to have won in all five disciplines and one of just three to have achieved this feat in a single season.

She won a total of 26 World Cup races during her career, along with Olympic gold medals in downhill and giant slalom. She was world champion in giant slalom in 2011 and won the World Cup overall title in 2013.

In her record-breaking 2012/13 season she won 11 races and tallied a record number of World Cup points (2,414), beating the 13-year-old record previously held by Hermann Maier (2,000 points). That season she won the super-G and giant slalom titles, finished first in the combined event and finished second in downhill and slalom. And sealed her place in the pantheon of the greatest athletes of all time.

In 2015 the Slovenian biologist Matjaž Gregorič discovered a new species of bark spider in South Africa and named it *Caerostris tinamaze* in her honour.

Franja Bojc Bidovec (1913–1985), doctor

The humanitarian and doctor after whom the Franja Partisan Hospital – a symbol of humanity and solidarity – is named, is known to many around the world.

Franja Bojc Bidovec was born in Ribnica on 26 November 1913 and died in Ljubljana on 26 November 1985. She completed her medical studies in Zagreb in 1939. She worked as a doctor in Ribnica from 1941, when she joined the National Liberation Struggle against the occupying forces, until 1943. She completed a specialisation in gynaecology and obstetrics in 1953 and postgraduate studies in genital tuberculosis in 1963.

After the war she worked in military hospitals in Trieste and Gorizia and in maternity and gynaecological clinics in Belgrade and Ljubljana. From 1967 until 1973 she headed the gynaecological department at the military hospital in Ljubljana. Her memoir *Ni neskončnih poti* (There are no endless paths) was published in 1984.

Even today, there are many who say that the “manager and doctor of the Franja Partisan Hospital in the gorge of the Pasica stream near Dolenji Novaki from January 1944 until the end of the Second World War, Franja Bojc Bidovec, was a sensitive,

kindhearted, selfless, determined and inventive woman.” And a symbol of humanity and solidarity.

Ivana Kobilca (1861–1926), painter



Ivana Kobilca undoubtedly occupies a place among those women whose work changed the prevailing culture and public opinion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in her own country, Slovenia.

Born in Ljubljana, she received her primary and lower secondary education at the Ursuline convent school, where she also learnt Italian and French. She was taught to draw by Ida Künl, the daughter of the painter Pavel Künl.

At the age of 16 she visited Vienna with her father and was greatly

impressed by the city. She decided that she wanted to become a painter. She returned to Vienna a few years later and spent much time copying the paintings of the Old Masters in the gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. After two years, she continued her studies in Munich. It was then that she truly entered the limitless yet colourful world of painting.

Ivana Kobilca is one of the most important painters that Slovenia has produced. In stylistic terms, her works belong to the generation of Slovene realists. She exhibited in Slovenia and, even more frequently, abroad, where she also won numerous accolades. Her preferred subjects were portraits and depictions of rural and bourgeois life.

Ita Rina (1907–1979), film actress

An undisputed queen of cinema in the 1920s and 1930s, Ita Rina was



Photo: Javna raba

born in Divača, on the Karst plateau. Many have compared her to Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich.

At the age of 20 she left Ljubljana for Berlin, at that time the film capital of Europe. She was immediately

engaged to make a children's film entitled *Was die Kinder ihren Eltern verschweigen* (What children keep from their parents), after which her career took off rapidly. Her most notable film successes were *Erotikon* (1929) and *Tonka of the Gallows* (1930).

She received numerous offers from Hollywood film studios to continue her career in the USA, but she turned all of them down. Instead, she married a doctor from Belgrade and moved to Serbia just before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Her last role was in the 1960 film *Atomic War*, where she played the mother of the heroine.

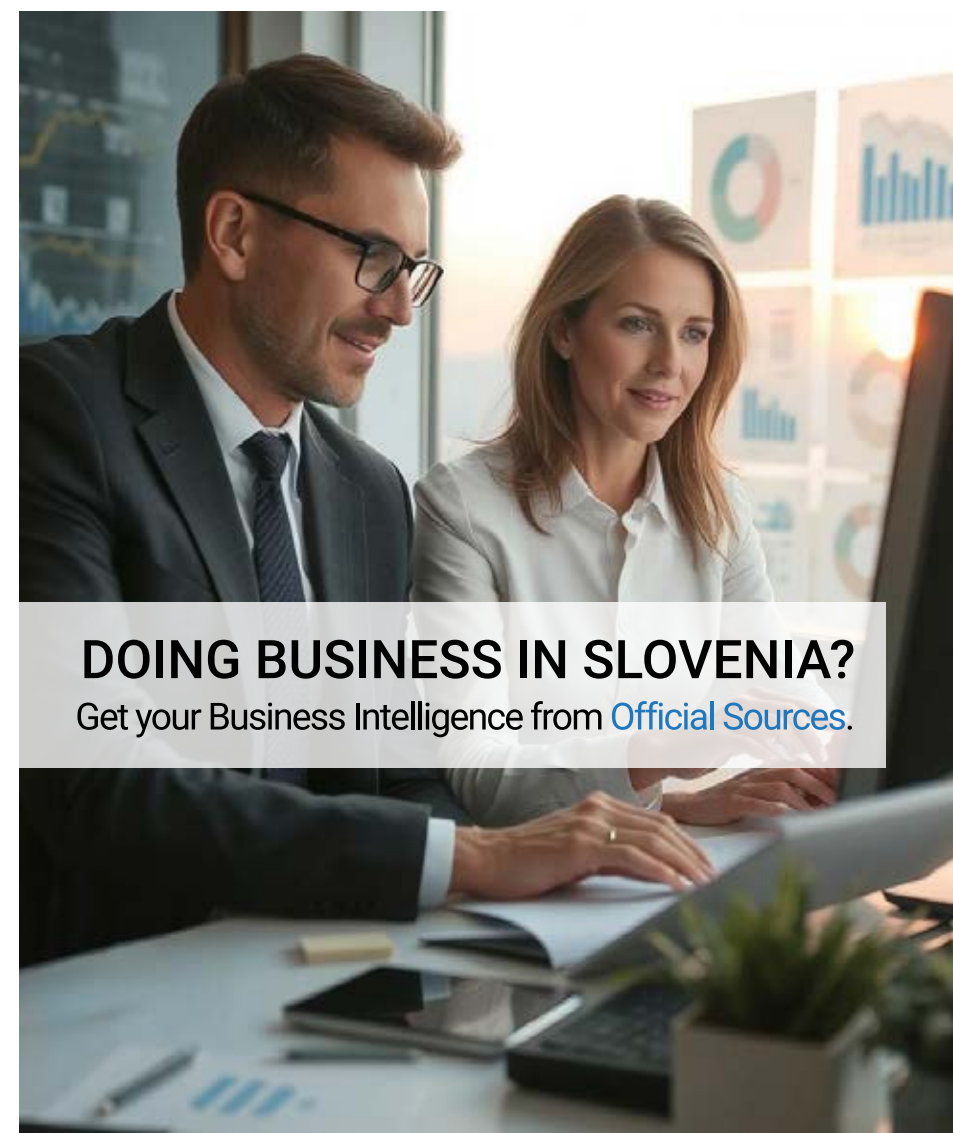
Ida Kravanja, her real name, is one of the few Slovene actresses to have achieved success abroad. Under her stage name Ita Rina, she was famous throughout Europe and beyond and was one of the best known Slovene film actresses of the twentieth century. ➡



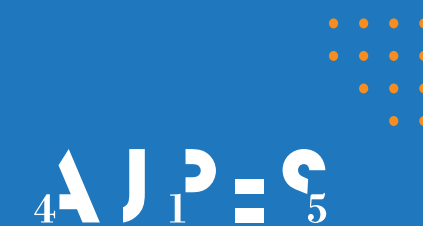
LED Luks Expands into New Lighting Markets

Over the past twelve years, LED Luks has grown into one of Slovenia's fastest-growing companies, with a presence in over 40 countries. Specializing in technical indoor lighting for offices, public spaces, and commercial buildings, the company continues to strengthen its global position. Now, as part of its strategic vision, LED Luks is expanding into technical ambient lighting address the needs also for hospitality projects—blending advanced technology, sustainable design, and international insight to set new standards in the lighting industry.

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What do Napoleon, Tesla and Slovenia have in common?

“God’s blessing on all nations
Who long and work for that bright day
When o’er earth’s habitations
No war, no strife shall hold its sway,
Who long to see
That all men free
No more shall foes, but neighbours be!”

(France Prešeren: A Toast – Slovenia’s national anthem)



VIDA PETROVČIČ

Slovenia’s greatest poet inspired by Napoleon

The story of Slovenia is best summed up by the words of its national anthem, into which the poet France Prešeren (1800–1849) wove a message of peace, friendship and freedom, values that still define the Slovenian character today.

The young Prešeren, who was a schoolboy at the time of the Illyrian Provinces (1809–1813), naturally grew up with the ideas of liberté, égalité and fraternité, introduced to what is today Slovenia by Napoleon Bonaparte, who established the Illyrian Provinces in an area extending from Tyrol to Dubrovnik and the Bay of Kotor, with their capital in Ljubljana. Ljubljana thus took its place on the map of Europe as the capital of the largest territory in its history.

Napoleon introduced equal taxation and equality before the law with the Civil Code of the French, also known as the Code Napoléon. He abolished the privileges of the nobility and introduced economic freedom. He instituted a four-year primary school followed by a lyceum or gymnasium and, briefly, a university with five faculties, and made Slovene the official language of instruction in schools.

The Slovene language as the foundation of national identity

The two things that define the Slovenes as a nation, even today, are their language and culture. Slavs first came to the area of present-day Slovenia in the sixth century when they settled the eastern Alpine region, which also includes eastern Friuli (in present-day Italy) and Carinthia, Styria, East Tyrol, and Lower and Upper Austria (in present-day Austria).

The oldest document in Slovene and, at the same time, the oldest Latin-script document in any Slavic language are the Freising manuscripts, written between 972 and 1039. They are thought to be a pastoral manual by Bishop Abraham of Freising. Although Charlemagne insisted that Latin was the only language of culture and worship, he instructed his bishops to explain God’s truth and prayers, in particular the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, to the faithful in a language they could understand.

This injunction led, 500 years later, to the first printed books in Slovene, the *Catechismus* and *Abecedarium* (1550) by Primož Trubar (1508–1586), who is therefore considered the father of standard or literary Slovene, which in this way became the foundation of Slovene identity. It was with the help of the *Abecedarium* that people learned to read and write Slovene.

73 years from kingdom to independent country, EU member state and NATO member

Following the end of the First World War and the dissolution of Austria-Hungary in October 1918, the three South Slav nations of the former Empire united to form the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, a confederation that existed for just over a month, before uniting with the Kingdom of Serbia to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, from 1929 onwards known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

For the Slovene nation, this represented an important new chapter of statehood, in that within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the Slovenes were part of an autonomous administrative unit called the Drava Banovina. After the Second World War, Slovenia formed part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as an independent republic with the constitutional right to secede, which it attempted to do on 25 June 1991. Seventy-three years passed from the end of the First World War to Slovenia’s war of independence, after which the Slovene nation gained its own independent state for the first time in history.

The achievement of independence was of key importance for the development of Slovenian national identity and allowed Slovenia to develop as a sovereign and independent state within the European Union and NATO.



Photo:Depositphotos

Milestones of Slovenian independence

- **25 June 1991** – Slovenia promulgates the Basic Constitutional Charter on Sovereignty and Independence.
- **29 March 2004** – Slovenia becomes a member of NATO.
- **1 May 2004** – Slovenia becomes a full member of the EU. Slovene becomes an official EU language. Slovenian businesses gain access to the EU single market.
- **1 January 2007** – Slovenia adopts the European single currency (the euro).
- **21 December 2007** – Slovenia becomes a member of the Schengen Area.
- Do you know what else you can find in Slovenia?

Nature & Cuisine

- **Wine and beer.** Slovenia’s national anthem, which began this article, is actually a toast. We drink your health with it. How could we not, given that Slovenia is a country of wines, beer and excellent cuisine. Slovenia’s winegrowers cultivate 45 grape varieties, and 70% of Slovenian wines (reds, whites) come under the “quality wine” classification. Slovenia produces on average 100 million litres of wine a year.
- **The town of Žalec,** a traditional centre of hop growing, boasts the world’s first beer fountain. The Green Gold Beer Fountain takes its name from the old nickname for hops.

- **Potica, gibanica and žlikrofi.** Visitors to Slovenia can taste 27 protected dishes and products including: 3 types of honey, 9 meat products and 4 cheeses. Protected dishes can have a protected designation of origin (PDO) or protected geographical indication (PGI), or be designated a traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG) – such as *potica* (a festive rolled pastry), *prekmurska gibanica* (a type of millefeuille or layer cake) or *idrijski žlikrofi* (a type of stuffed pasta or dumplings). Every year, at Christmas and Easter, Slovenia gives a *potica* to the Pope.



- **European Green Capital.** Thanks in part to its 72 public parks (including four nature parks), Ljubljana was named European Green Capital in 2016. Green areas account for around 75% of the total city area, with around 100 hectares of new green spaces created in recent years. Ljubljana boasts an impressive 542 m² of public green space per inhabitant.
- **1,200 bears.** Slovenia is one of the most forested countries in Europe. Its 1.2 million hectares of forest represent 58.2% of the total area of the country. That amounts to 0.6 hectares of forest per inhabitant. Up to 1,200 bears live in the wild in Slovenia's forests.
- **Triglav (2,864 m).** The highest mountain in Slovenia and a symbol of the country. In Slavic mythology Triglav is a three-headed god ruling over the sky, the earth and the underworld.

History

- **The oldest flute in the world.** The world's oldest known flute was found in the Divje Babe cave in Slovenia. It is made from the bone of a juvenile cave bear into which tone holes have been bored and is approximately 60,000 years old. It was discovered in 1995 during archaeological excavations and is thought to be of Neanderthal origin, making it the oldest known musical instrument.
- **Prehistoric pile dwellings.** The Ljubljansko Barje is a very important natural and cultural area that was proclaimed a protected landscape and nature park in 2008. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2011 because of the prehistoric pile dwellings discovered there. The nature park covers an area of around 135 square kilometres and includes diverse habitats such as wetland, peat bog, meadow and forest.
- **The oldest wooden wheel with an axle.** In the world. It was discovered in the Ljubljansko Barje wetland in Slovenia. The wheel is approximately 5,150 years old and made of ash wood, while its axle is made of oak. It was discovered by a group of archaeologists in 2002.
- **Emona.** Originally known as Colonia Iulia Aemona, Emona was a Roman settlement that existed from the first century BC to the sixth century AD on the site of present-day Ljubljana. It was founded by the Romans, who settled it with colonists from northern Italy and Gaul. Emona was an important trading post and military stronghold that served to protect the borders of the Roman Empire.
- **Stars on the Slovenian coat of arms.** These are the stars of the Counts, later Princes of Celje. One member of their family, Barbara of Celje (c. 1392–1451) was Queen of Hungary, Queen of Germany, Queen of Bohemia and Holy Roman Empress by virtue of her marriage to Sigismund of Luxembourg, who was King of Hungary, King of Bohemia and King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor. Through her, Slovenia's

Princes of Celje are related to the British royal family. She was instrumental in creating the famous Order of the Dragon and served as regent of Hungary four times during her husband's absence.

Tourism

- **Bled and its millions of visitors.** Bled is among the most popular tourist destinations in Slovenia. A total of 441,738 tourist arrivals and 1,082,546 overnight stays were recorded in the municipality of Bled in 2023.
- **The human fish.** Extending for 24.34 kilometres, Postojna Cave is one of the longest caves in the world and an extremely popular tourist attraction. In 2023 it recorded a total of 1,200,000 visitors. This means that, on average, the cave welcomed nearly 3,300 visitors every day. The cave is also home to an endemic aquatic salamander called the olm (*Proteus anguinus*), the largest troglodytic (cave-dwelling) amphibian in the world, affectionately known as the human fish. Postojna Cave has attracted numerous famous guests over the course of its history. Among the most famous are:
 - **Francis I**, the first Emperor of Austria, who visited the cave in 1818;
 - **Tito and Sukarno**, two heads of state, who visited the cave in 1960;
 - **Nikola Tesla**, the world-famous electrical engineer and inventor, who visited the cave in 1894.

Notable individuals



- **Nikola Tesla.** Lived in Maribor from 1878 to 1879, during which time he was employed as a technical draughtsman in a local engineering workshop. His stay in Maribor was cut short in March 1879 when the local authorities deported him to Gospić (Croatia) over irregularities regarding the registration of his residence.
- **Mihajlo Pupin.** This Serbian-American scientist, mathematician and inventor performed an important service for Bled and Slovenia. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, he was instrumental in ensuring that Bled and its surroundings were assigned to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) rather than to Italy. In a mark of gratitude, the Municipality of Bled erected a monument to him in 2015.
- **Rudolf Maister.** Also known by the pen name Vojanov, Maister was a Slovene general, poet and painter. He was an important military and political leader of the Slovene national movement, famous above all for taking control of the city of Maribor on 23 November 1918, in a move that marked the start of Slovene administration in lower Styria. >>



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Ankaranska cesta 5b,
6000 Koper - Slovenia
Phone: +386 (0) 59 020 253
Mobile: +386 (0) 51 618 777
info@vv-log.com
www.vv-log.com



EXPO

VIPAVA VALLEY

The Municipality of Ajdovščina in Slovenia invites interested investors to participate in the development of individual parts of the project.

The project is designed as an entry point to the Vipava Valley, providing visitors with a range of experiences from the diverse attractions of this paradise-like valley, all in one excellent location.

- RESTAURANT
- BOUTIQUE HOTEL
- CONFERENCE HALL
- EXPERIENCE CENTER
- VIPAVA VALLEY FLAVOURS MARKET
- WINE SHOP
- TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER
- EXHIBITION SPACE FOR LOCAL PRODUCTS

Bogdan Česnik
Director of the Regional Development
Agency ROD Ajdovščina in Slovenia

✉ bogdan.cesnik@rra-rod.si

☎ +386 70 952 893

