

## Interviews with leading minds

**Marko Bulc**, a man who twenty years ago had the idea of creating a modern business school in Slovenia

*In 1985 the Executive Board of the Slovene Chamber of Commerce adopted a new concept of management education. At the time the president of the Chamber was Marko Bulc, who had previously been vice-president of the Yugoslav Government. The following year Slovenia saw the start of a new center for top management training and Mr. Bulc asked Prof. Danica Purg to take the lead.*

*In an interview with Metka Šilar, Mr. Bulc (°1926) reflects on the circumstances that twenty years ago led to establishment of the now IEDC-Bled School of Management, and on how his initial expectations have been met by what happened since.*

**On 20 October, the IEDC-Bled School of Management is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. I heard from the Dean and Director of the School that you were the person who first had the idea that it would be good for Slovenia to establish a modern business school. What brought you to that idea?**

In Slovenia twenty years ago we lived and worked within a context of a relatively closed Yugoslav market. The Cold War that had been defining the behavior of the world economies was coming to an end and we began sharing the same views on the emergence of global market conditions. It was clear to some of us that there was only one way for the Slovenian and the Yugoslav economy: opening up and being included



in the world. The slogan at the time was "export to convertible markets." Courage alone was not enough. What was essential was the knowledge of the conditions in these markets, since otherwise it would have been impossible to adapt, not to mention be better and competitive. Most business people's knowledge at the time was limited to operating in a small, state-planned market, with socialist mutual relationships. I was convinced that if we would end up straggling behind, this would not just be a result of inadequate technology, but mostly of poor knowledge. With this argument I was able to persuade my colleagues from the Chamber leadership that we should establish a new modern business school for young business people. I was sure

that we were fighting with time and that this fight could only be won by younger unencumbered people and by a young leadership of the school.

**As I understand, even the word “management” was not part of the political and economic vocabulary in Yugoslavia of that time, which used a self-management system.**

That is true. The word *management* was not part of the vocabulary then. Everybody who dared to put forward a strong and decisive vision of doing and developing business was seen as a technocrat. The market of labor, goods and capital was not recognized; the economy was dominated by the endless so called self-management. However, there were more and more of us who were convinced that even in socialism it is impossible to be successful without considering market rules. At the Chamber of Commerce we prepared a proposal in order to change the Constitution in this sense. I have to say that most of our suggestions were accepted after a long process of persuading, so in the end also the last obstacles and scruples about a new school at the Chamber — especially about our demand to have more than a half of lecturers from the West — finally went away.

**Did you get support for your idea from the political side?**

At the beginning there was no support at all, but it came gradually once we were under way. The Slovenian Government (under the president Šinigoj) agreed to let us use the prestigious governmental guest and event site in Brdo.

**What were the main arguments that you used in convincing those key people?**

Some of the key people of the past were gone, while the others were becoming increasingly liberal due to the new conditions. They understood that it is impossible to enter international capital markets without the knowledge that is to be found there and also that Slovenia needed to know and develop business

systems that exist elsewhere in the world. Quality doesn't come for free. The knowledge and methods to reach quality (not only for products, but also for management systems) require serious commitment. The business conferences organized by Prof. Danica Purg with some of the world experts had a very positive influence on our politicians.

**Was there a special reason, why you asked or invited a woman, Prof. Danica Purg, to accept the task to build a modern management school?**

First we had to promote and then to remove the old management of the school. We invited Prof. Purg to become a director since we knew her as an excellent organizer, very determined to reach the goals, and a great communicator. We were convinced that she would accept the invitation, provided we assisted her with financial resources and helped her in the recruitment of the participants. Naturally, the invitation was a new challenge for her as well.

**Looking back, is IEDC the result you expected or hoped for?**

Firstly, we expected the School to give the participants the knowledge from the world treasury of business expertise. Even if you only want to buy something, you need to know how to do it. Further, we expected the School to provide a strong incentive to the development of domestic business, to stimulate creativity, innovation and self-esteem of the participants. Finally, we expected the participants to become fighters for more knowledge in their organizations, at all levels, from the janitor to the director, and to be our promoters – one swallow does not make a spring. And, if you ask to what extent our expectations were met, I can say that the IEDC has substantially exceeded our expectations. The number of participants who have educated themselves at the IEDC is impressive. The School has become internationally recognized, there are also master studies. Because of these successes, Prof. Purg has become a sought-after guest at prestigious international institutions.

**Do you have now, 20 years later, a message or a wish to express to IEDC and Prof. Purg?**

Nowadays almost any human action is oriented towards added value. It is true that it has to reflect in monetary terms – ever since the Phoenicians invented the money –; however it is not merely about profits. It is about a new value in products, relationships between people, personal satisfaction, environment, business methods and development, in

short: everywhere. This, particularly, is what the managers should be aware of: it is not all about profits – and the IEDC can help them at understanding this. I cheer to all past and present IEDC participants and to Prof. Purg: Be proud of the IEDC, this Slovenian Oxford or MIT. Through your contribution every single crisis of an individual manager, company, school or broader society will become a challenge for new creativity and for new advancement.