

To Promote and Foster Public-Private Partnerships

By Edvard Kobal

The future of Slovenia, as with other Member States of the European Union, resides in the transition from an existing society into a knowledge-based society. Education and research play a key role in this change. Independent investments into education and research are of strategic importance for developing the quality of human resources and for creating new knowledge, and with that knowledge, new products and services in the global market.

The Slovenian Science Foundation, the central national foundation that fosters and promotes science in Slovenia, is aware of its future responsibility – it finds in its work a challenge to provide an environment for high-level science in Slovenia as well as in Europe and the global environment.

The Slovenian Science Foundation in brief

The Slovenian Science Foundation was established in 1994 by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and 16 other

In May 2004 the SSF celebrated the 10th anniversary of its founding.

founders, including some of the most prominent Slovenian organisations in research, education, business, finance and the media, to provide the needed stimulus and financial support to the scientific, economic

and social development of Slovenia. The SSF is an independent, non-profit institution. It acts as a catalyser, mediator and promoter of science. It encourages the implementation of its own science policy by fostering development of human resources in scientific, research and technological fields by raising the level of intensity of research and development, applied technology and business activity and by implementing a knowledge-based society in Slovenia.

Trade and industrial enterprises have been part of the group of founders since the first year of operation as faithful donors to the Foundation. In the following years, new businesses and individuals have joined in a single common purpose: to foster and promote science, research and education. The Foundation strives for partnerships with the public sector. For the transition of Slovenian society into a knowledge-based society, the Foundation is devoted to implementing projects and programmes whose results help achieve this goal.



Three thematic areas: aims and actions

1. Independent investments in people

The SSF has developed several financial schemes for collecting financial resources and allocating independent grants to support the personal development and recognition of Slovenian researchers in the international community.

The SSF has named various funds, in the framework of which fundraising has been ongoing and grants allocated, after great Slovenian thinkers and researchers: Herman Potočnik Noordung (fund for natural and engineering sciences), Fran Miklošič (humanities), Martin Pegij (Pegius) (social sciences), Mark Geberc (medical sciences) and Ivan Regen (life and environmental sciences).

The SSF awards independent grants for scientific training, for active participation in scientific events, for the organisation of international science events in Slovenia, and for publishing scientific or popular science publications (the beneficiaries of which are existing researchers). The SSF also awards

Co-founders of the SSF

- Government of the Republic of Slovenia
- Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
- University of Ljubljana
- University of Maribor
- Jožef Stefan Institute, Ljubljana
- National Institute of Chemistry, Ljubljana
- Krka, d.d., Novo Mesto
- Lek, d.d., Ljubljana (a Sandoz company)
- Gorenje, d.d., Velenje
- Mercator, d.d., Ljubljana
- Petrol, d.d., Ljubljana
- SKB Banka, d.d., Ljubljana (Societe Generale Group)
- Nova Ljubljanska Banka, d.d., Ljubljana
- RTV Slovenia, Ljubljana
- Delo, d.d., Ljubljana
- Gospodarski Vestnik, d.d., Ljubljana (GV Group, d.d.)
- Open Society Institute Slovenia, Ljubljana

grants for education (for the benefit of undergraduate and graduate students) at Slovenian and foreign universities.

2. Slovenian science in the European and global environment

The SSF strives to promote Slovenian science in the European context and to foster a process of Europeanisation to give Slovenian researchers a sufficient level of compatibility with researchers from the European Union and Europe in general. It also encour-

Donors are strongly promoted by the SSF every year.

ages co-operation with researchers from non-European countries.

The SSF, with the help of the initiative called "Partnership 2020", acquires donations from different sources, especially from industrial/trade corporations and organisations in research and higher education, to support the participation of Slovenian researchers in framework programmes and pan-European research projects and programmes (European Science Foundation).

With the help of independent funds, the SSF encourages and fosters the co-operation of Slovenian researchers with researchers from non-European coun-



tries, mainly from those with signed memorandums of understanding.

3. Dialogue

The SSF strives to intensify communication and to establish permanent dialogue between researchers, innovators, science managers and the general public.

The SSF began with the organisation of the annual Slovenian Science Festival the year the Foundation was established, and with the organisation of the annual Conference for the Enhancement of Technological Development in 1995. In 2001 the latter was renamed the Noordung Forum (after Herman Potočnik Noordung, 1892-1929, the great visionary and pioneer in researching the possibility of extraterrestrial life).

To advance the ability of Slovenian researchers for communication, the SSF introduced science communication workshops in 2003 that have been implemented by top-level Slovenian researchers and journalists.

Since 2003, the SSF has been awarding the Prometheus in Science Award for Excellence in Science Communication. As of the end of 2005, the prize had been awarded to the group of journalists responsible for the science supplement of the newspaper Delo (2003), Marijan Prosen (2004), Dr Sandi Sitar,

The SSF began organising the annual Slovenian Science Festival the year it was founded.

Dr Bojan Sedmak, Dr Miha Jeršek, Kvarakadabra/Society for Explaining Science, and the Annales Publishing House in Koper (2005).

Key competencies of the Slovenian Science Foundation are:

1. Co-ordinating larger projects (e.g. funded by European Commission, United Nations Development Programme).
2. Developing and managing national schemes for financial support.
3. Planning and implementing programmes for training scientists (e.g. science communication workshops, project writing workshops...).
4. Publishing activities (in its own publications).
5. Organising scientific meetings of national, European and global importance and dimension.
6. Planning and implementing the national science festival since 1994, which is financed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia.

The SSF is the member of the European Science Foundation, European Foundation Centre and European Science Events Association.

The SSF is implementing the National Scholarship Programme of the World Federation of Scientists in Slovenia. It also co-operates with the United Nations, particularly UNESCO and the UNDP. In collaboration with similar organisations it promotes science in Central, South and South-Eastern Europe, as well as on other continents.

Attention is given to establishing and maintaining public-private partnerships in science and innovation

The SSF is the result of the interests and needs of the Slovenian public and private sectors to jointly make investments in science. Consequently, it is understandable for the Foundation to promote and foster mainly public-private partnerships. These partnerships enable investments that help to surpass the role that science has had in Slovenia for several decades. They also enable the gradual integration of members of the Slovenian scientific community into the European context (e.g. framework programmes of the European Union, European Science Foundation).

With the aim of successfully promoting public-private partnerships in science, the SSF is developing communication strategies that will enable synchronized communication with strategic public entities. This type of communication is necessary since the Foundation is striving to establish public-private partnerships in science as an important source



of support for developing human resources in the scientific research area, for excellent alternative research projects, for the Europeanisation of Slovenian science, and for the Slovenian "Science and Society" programme. The private sector (business corporations, citizens) is becoming a more and more active and important partner in the framework of public-private partnerships in science. The representatives of businesses and citizens participate in the creation and development of policies, strategic goals and financial schemes. Organisations and citizens involved in politics are also responsible for providing the needed financial means for independent investments. The SSF fosters the development and functioning of lasting partnerships between researchers that are mainly financed from the state budget and from businesses. In the establishment and operation of these partnerships, the SSF recognises the future prevailing form of co-operation between the users and implementers of research. The SSF also realises that trust and solidarity in interpersonal and inter-institutional relations are the result of the exchange of ideas, mutual identification of problems and finding optimal solutions. The SSF has the goal of developing permanent partnerships between industrial corporations and schools (primary and secondary) with the aim of discov-

ering and developing the capabilities of young people for later professional work in research and development in the industrial sector and providing additional training of teachers to enable successful implementation of school curricula and mentoring when introducing students to research work. Such partnerships can enhance the motivation of young people for studying the natural sciences and contemporary technologies. They also encourage teachers to take additional training and mentoring, and to promote a better understanding of the role of science, technology and industry by teachers and students. To strengthen public-private partnerships in science in Slovenia, it is particularly important to have good co-operation between the SSF's founders and the media. It is also important to co-operate with media organizations in the form of public campaigns that aim to educate people on the importance of science in society. Public-private partnerships, together with the media, promote and foster the developmental role of science in Slovenian society; the SSF therefore organizes roundtable discussions, presents examples of best practices, and encourages businesses and citizens to join partnerships. In the first years of the 21st century, the SSF, in co-operation with the media, has supported and fostered the presen-

tation of key Slovenian researchers, developers and innovators. Together with journalists, it has enabled the presentation of their achievements (as well as reasoning) in the form of articles and published roundtable summaries. Hence, the SSF, along with the media, gave researchers and innovators the attention they merited. At the same time, it subtly raised the interest level of readers of specialised newspapers and magazines in issues close to science, key technologies and capital, as well as the connections among them. In the period 2003-2005, the SSF, in co-operation with the first Slovenian business newspaper Finance, organised several roundtables and published articles about them in the monthly supplement "Science with a Vision":

- 25 November 2003: on university incubators;
- 30 April 2004: on the future of Slovenia in industrial products and services;
- 11 October 2004: on the types and extent of help that Slovenian innovators need;
- 13 June 2005: on public-private partnerships in science and innovation;
- 14 November 2005: on presenting research achievements to the public.

In October the SSF organised the international round table "Women in Science: the connecting and discriminating role of science."

