

Franjo Bobinac receives a lifetime achievement award, Samo Kumar from IBM Slovenia is the Young Manager of 2024, and six Artemis recipients were announced

- At the January Gathering of the Managers' Association of Slovenia (MAS) held at the Grand Hotel Union in Ljubljana, a lifetime achievement award in management for 2024 was presented on 22 January 2025. The award was received by Franjo Bobinac, former CEO of Gorenje and current president of the Olympic Committee of Slovenia.
- Samo Kumar, the General Manager (Country Leader) of IBM Slovenia, has been named the Young Manager of 2024.
- A total of six Artemis 2024 awards were presented this year. The recipients were: Maja Brelih Lotrič of Lotrič Meroslovje, Maja Strnad Cestar of Medis, Melita Rajgelj Ozebek of Generali Investments, Meta Lahne of Merkur Zavarovalnica, Saška Rihtaršič of Danfoss Trata, and Tatjana Vogrinec Burgar of Elektro Maribor.
- Iztok Seljak, MAS president: *"By focusing on key sectors and industries, such as pharmaceuticals, digital technologies and artificial intelligence, we can achieve a 5% annual GDP growth, transition from the current 50,000 to 100,000 euros of added value per employee within five years, and ensure a decent living for all."*
- MAS continues with its initiative *"Endeavor: Us today. Us tomorrow. Us together."*, with which they want to make a breakthrough to a society of greater prosperity for all.
- Deputy Prime Minister of Slovenia and Minister of Finance Klemen Boštjančič in an address to Slovenian managers: *"With the active development of the capital market, we can provide the necessary funds to support breakthroughs in various industries, which will enable a more dynamic and innovative economy in the long term."*
- The President of the State Council of the Republic of Slovenia Marko Lotrič, the Minister of Economy, Tourism and Sport Matjaž Han and the Minister of Digital Transformation Ksenija Klampfer also attended the event.

At the annual MAS' January Gathering, attended by members, political leaders, and other key stakeholders, the association sets the course for the year ahead.

In their opening remarks, MAS Executive Director, **Petra Juvančič**, and MAS President, **Iztok Seljak**, emphasized the crucial role of ambition, self-confidence, and collaboration in driving Slovenia's economic growth. They highlighted the numerous innovative and ambitious leaders who, despite adverse conditions and global challenges, continue to invest in development and set new benchmarks. By fostering a mindset of ambition across society, they aim to achieve the national goal of increasing the standard of living for all citizens. Seljak stressed that this can be achieved through a targeted focus on key sectors such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, electric mobility, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and space technologies. This strategy, he argued, could lead to a 5% annual GDP growth, double the value added per employee within five years, and ensure a decent standard of living for all.

Juvančič highlighted three key challenges, facing the economy: *"How to reduce bureaucracy, create a tax environment that is as conducive to growth as possible, and address demographic challenges, as the already low birth rate declined again last year. Regardless of the sector, we all want progress and a stable future, and the economy must co-create policies for competitiveness and innovation."*

Boštjančič highlighted opportunities in the active development of the capital market

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Klemen Boštjančič, emphasized the importance of cooperation between the private sector and the government in creating a supportive environment for a competitive and innovative Slovenian economy. This, he argued, would also lead to increased productivity, a prerequisite for growing prosperity. He identified the promotion of the capital market as a significant opportunity. *"By actively developing the capital market, we can secure the necessary funds to support breakthroughs in various industries, ultimately enabling a more dynamic and innovative economy."*

Endeavor: Us today. Us tomorrow. Us together.

In 2023, MAS launched the initiative *"Endeavor: Us today. Us tomorrow. Us together."* in response to the economic situation. Its goal is to raise expectations and demands of society towards business, political, and other leaders. It aims to demonstrate that the Slovenian economy, and society as a whole, can make a breakthrough towards a more prosperous future for all. *"The projects that have emerged from this initiative, involving 25 groups and nearly 200 members, are clear evidence that Slovenia has the ability to unite forces and push the boundaries of what is possible,"* emphasizes Seljak. Some inspiring thoughts and stories are also compiled in the book "Stories for Courage and Inspiration," in which 44 leaders share their lessons and experiences.

Franjo Bobinac Wins Lifetime Achievement Award in Management

Franjo Bobinac began his career at Emo Celje, before joining Gorenje where he held various roles. As director of the French subsidiary, he led his team in increasing sales in France by 65% following the breakup of the Yugoslav market, while also significantly increasing market share in Belgium, Spain, and Portugal. During his tenure as head of sales from 1998 to 2003, Gorenje's revenue increased by 93%. Under his leadership, the Velenje-based company became a trendsetter in design, expanded its brands, and found a strategic partner in Chinese company Hisense, contributing to further growth in revenue and profitability. He subsequently assumed the role of Vice President of Hisense International. Last year, Gorenje generated over 2.5 billion euros in net revenue.

Bobinac served on several supervisory boards and as MAS President. He established himself as a business leader committed to multicultural management, respect for diversity, and the pursuit of synergies. He was President of the Slovenian Handball Federation and currently leads the Olympic Committee of Slovenia. He advocates for the modernization of sports and the promotion of Olympic values. He has received numerous awards and was the first Slovenian to become a member of the International Olympic Committee's marketing commission.

In his acceptance speech, he emphasized: *"Just as we are building the most sports-oriented nation, as a businessman I want to build the most business-oriented nation in the world. I know that the Slovenian economy is in good shape, but it is rarely mentioned that Slovenian managers are responsible for this."*

However, to break into the top tier, this may not be enough. We need to be even faster, better, and more collaborative – not only among managers but also more broadly – between politics and business, unions and management, left and right, old and young. It is precisely because of the latter that we remain optimistic that we will finally succeed in making a lasting and sustainable breakthrough among the best economies in the world."

Samo Kumar, the General Manager of IBM Slovenia, has been named the Young Manager of 2024

Samo Kumar, a former multiple-time national volleyball champion, received a Prešeren Award for his university thesis. His greatest achievement, however, is becoming the General Manager (Country Leader) of IBM Slovenia, the largest IT multinational in Slovenia, at the age of 33. He has distinguished himself in the company through his open, direct, ethical, and empathetic leadership, achieving remarkable financial success. His colleagues describe him as decisive, strategic, and a master of interpersonal skills, who fosters a positive and supportive work environment where everyone feels valued and motivated. "We need to look more to young people in the Slovenian business world and trust them. I believe we will not betray that trust," he said upon receiving the award.

Six recipients of the Artemis 2024 Award

MAS has recognized six women leaders with the 2024 Artemis Award. These women have successfully broken through the glass ceiling and reached the highest positions in their organizations. The Artemis Award recognizes their contribution to creating added value in the companies or organizations they lead. This year's recipients are: Maja Brelih Lotrič, Lotrič Meroslovje; Maja Strnad Cestar, Medis; Melita Rajgelj Ozebek, Generali Investments; Meta Lahne, Merkur Zavarovalnica; Saška Rihtaršič, Danfoss Trata; and Tatjana Vogrinec Bugar, Elektro Maribor.

Foto: Borut Cvetko in Sandi Fišer (Mediaspeed) for MAS