

## 25 years in the glass industry

*For a company, 25 years on the market is already a long time. If, during this period, the same company is also able to grow from a local player into a distribution network for the whole of Eastern Europe, it is a real achievement. Co-founder of IMSA, Giovanni Miklus, spoke to Glass-Technology International about the company from its founding in 1978, to the “logical step” of distribution.*

**Benjamin Zagar, Pierluigi Cavarai**



Giovanni Miklus,  
co-founder of IMSA



**G**iovanni Miklus and his brother Eugenio founded IMSA in 1978, when they bought a small facility for the production of glazier's putty. In 2003, IMSA Impex, now a distributor of glass, machines and equipment for the production of glass, celebrates its 25th anniversary. IMSA operates through its branches *Glas-mik* and *Kristal Maribor* in Slovenia, *Promglas* in Croatia, *Imsar* in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Imglas* in Serbia and Monte Negro, *Glascom* in Hungary, *Sklo-mat* in Slovakia, *Impra* in the Czech republic and *Vetrim* in Poland as a distribution network for the whole of Eastern Europe. These companies are joined under the name IMSA Group, and employ over 300 people. Besides direct presence

in the already mentioned countries, IMSA is indirectly present also in Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Russia.

✓ *First of all, congratulations for the 25th anniversary of IMSA. From a local company you expanded into a distribution network for all of Eastern Europe. Tell us something about the foundation and early years of the company.*

Giovanni Miklus: Thank you. 25 years is indeed a long time. We experienced both pleasant and a few less enjoyable moments. Nevertheless, I am happy to look back on the beginnings of our company, which was founded in 1978, when we bought a small facility for the production of glazier's putty.

✓ *When did you turn to distribution?*

Giovanni Miklus: As a producer of glazier's putty, we came into contact with glass workers and merchants. In this way, we found out that, besides putty, they also needed other tools and products for their work. We searched suppliers of such goods and, when we visited the *Vitrum* fair in Milan in 1979, we made our first contacts with producers of tools and other accessories for the shaping and processing of glass. This is where our business turned to distribution. At first, we operated at the local level, mainly in the regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia, in north-east Italy.

✓ *Today, IMSA is known in the glass industry as one of the major suppliers for the Eastern European markets. When did you start expanding your business to those areas?*

Giovanni Miklus: The head office of the company IMSA was located near the border with former Yugoslavia. Due to the vicinity and the

IMSA Impex headquarters, near  
Gorizia, north-east Italy



25 years  
in the glass industry

204



familiarity with the situation in the industry, we became interested in these markets. After first contacts with glass workers and merchants we found out that they did not yet have a direct distributor and thus had to import most of the products. This encouraged us to take the next step – direct distribution.

✓ **Language and market vicinity. Are these two factors your main advantage in accessing these markets?**

Giovanni Miklus: Absolutely. They were especially important when we tried to penetrate the neighbouring markets, although this is not enough in a competitive business world. What you need is persistency and regular visits to your clients, as well as careful and prudent selection of materials you decide to include in your product range. Besides all this, we also represented a kind of connection between the east and the west. To be able to get to the market even faster and be even more recognizable by our clients we presented ourselves to a broader public in 1980 at the Zagreb fair and also one year after that at a fair in Belgrade.

✓ **How would you assess your presence at these fairs?**

Giovanni Miklus: All beginnings are difficult and our company was no exception. Since we were new to the business, we had to learn the rules of the game first and establish new contacts. The former state companies already had their per-

↑  
**Imssa's first plant in Gorizia, which produced glass sealant**

manent suppliers. It was a specific market and it was up to us to adapt to it. We also established contacts with some private companies, with which we also concluded our first deals.

✓ **At the beginning you mostly supplied tools and equipment. When did you start supplying glass?**

Giovanni Miklus: The glassmaking companies to which we supplied tools and equipment soon started asking about the raw material, that is, glass. The then Yugoslav glass producers in Pancevo and Lipik had a very limited range of glass types. Their quality was also poorer than that of the competitive western manufacturers, primarily due to the obsolete production technology they used. The Slovene market was most of all in need of a greater diversity and better quality of glass. We started to actively search a reliable and long-term partner. Thus, in 1982 we entered into partnership with the manufacturer *Saint-Gobain*. Constantly increasing sales and our professional attitude convinced this manufacturer and in the years that followed we obtained exclusive representation for the entire Yugoslav market. We still maintain successful and professional partnership with this company.

✓ **What about cooperation with other suppliers?**

Giovanni Miklus: Markets demand state-of-the-art technologies for glass shaping and pro-

cessing, which made it necessary for us to start cooperating with other suppliers. We always tried to find reliable and quality manufacturers to represent. Among the first of these were *Schiatti, For.El, Duezeta, Bohle, Ceca, Fenzi* and others. Today, we represent about 20 manufacturers.



Imsa's first trade fair, Zagreb, Croatia, 1980

✓ ***How did you get the idea of establishing branches in the former Yugoslavia?***

Giovanni Miklus: This was a perfectly logical thing to do as the volume of our sales kept increasing. Therefore, the Glasmik branch was founded in 1988 to directly supply the entire Yugoslav market at that time. It enabled us to be directly present on the market, which resulted in easier, faster and more efficient operations. As Yugoslavia fell apart and new independent states were formed, the need for establishing new branches and distribution offices appeared. The unstable political and economical situation was the primary reason why we went on and opened all the other branches. In 1992, Promglas was founded in Croatia. When the critical situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was over in 1996, we established the branch Imsar in Sarajevo. Among the territories that were most difficult to access, were Serbia and Monte Negro, mainly due to the embargo and unfavourable economic situation. We waited and kept postponing our decision for ten years when the situation finally changed also in this area of former Yugoslavia and we were able to open a branch in Belgrade, called Imglas.

✓ ***And when did IMSA become more visible in other Eastern European markets?***

Giovanni Miklus: There were several factors that convinced us to invest in the eastern markets. First of all, there is the strategic position and business orientation and flexibility of IMSA, in which we saw further development possibilities and believed in continuous expansion of the company. It was also our suppliers who encouraged us to expand our business to these markets. At the same time, the events that took place in 1988 already implied that some drastic changes were about to occur in Yugoslavia and we did not want to depend solely on this market. For

these reasons, we visited a Hungarian fair in 1989. Already in 1991, we associated with a local partner and opened a distribution company, which was later followed by the company Glascom. Other branches followed: Impra in Prague, Sklomat in Slovakia and Vetrim in Poland.

✓ ***Does that mean that your presence in other Eastern European markets helped you get over the political changes in former Yugoslavia?***

Giovanni Miklus: It was without doubt a clever decision not to depend on one market alone. I must nevertheless emphasise that we never completely abandoned the former Yugoslav market. We maintained certain relationships and as soon as we spotted the opportunity, we were back again. Besides opening branches, we took part in all major fairs and in time started organizing seminars and presenting new technological achievements ourselves.

✓ ***Could you say that the year 1999 was a turning point for your company since that was the year you started to carry out the glass processing activity through the company Kristal, from Maribor?***

Giovanni Miklus: Yes, indeed. In 1999, we established a business relationship with Kristal. The company used highly developed glass processing technology and was one of the leading companies in its line of business in this part of Europe. With our assistance and joint efforts in overcoming and eliminating Kristal's difficulties, we managed to get the company back on its feet. It would be a shame to let a company with 80 years of tradition, which set standards and trends in Slovenia as regards glass processing, peter out.

✓ ***Is this company from Maribor the only production company you worked with?***

Giovanni Miklus: No, it is not. In our Polish branch Vetrim, we produce spacers for insulating glass in cooperation with the Italian company *Alu Pro*. We supply products of this factory not only to the Polish market but also to the markets of the neighbouring countries such as the

# 25 years in the glass industry

206

Czech Republic, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and others. Let me point out that our investment in Poland developed quickly and successfully and that there already exists a need to increase our production capacities. We plan to do it this year.

✓ *Let's move out of business and production orientations of the company for a while to talk about IMSA's presence and participation in sports and other events organized in Gorizia.*

Giovanni Miklus: Of course. For more than 15 years, IMSA has been actively participating in all major sports events in Gorizia where we support several sports teams in the form of sponsorships and other types of contributions. We are primarily interested in volleyball which is quite important here. The teams competing at both local and national levels use the IMSA sign. With various contributions we also support the publishing of books, brochures and other publications. In short, IMSA has always wanted to support those initiatives whose aim was to foster growth and development of the most diversified range of activities.

✓ *A quick look at the company's personnel structure.*

Giovanni Miklus: The staff that the IMSA Group employs, comprises both older and more experienced employees as well as young and ambitious people. Training of our young employees and investment in new technologies and working methods have always been IMSA Group's priorities, since we are perfectly aware that only young people who have the necessary interest in new technologies and market changes can guarantee success also in the future.

✓ *What are IMSA's plans for the future?*

Giovanni Miklus: Our short-term plans are focused on strengthening our position in the existing markets. This includes increasing our volume of operations and quality of sales and especially expanding our range of products and services offered. We also intend to organize professional seminars in which we could directly present new technologies. Increased



Inauguration  
of Vetrim's  
aluminium  
spacer  
production  
centre  
in Opole,  
Poland, 2000

demand in the Russian market and in the markets of former Soviet republics also urges us to invest heavily and to become even more visible in the all these areas.

✓ *Mr. Miklus, you have founded this company and have been running it with your brother for the past 25 years. There is no doubt that you have experienced a lot in a quarter of a*

*century. As time passes, new challenges appear on the horizon. What are your personal plans and perspectives for the future?*

Giovanni Miklus: A lot of things have happened in the business world in more than two decades, some are good and some are bad. I guess I could write a book about it. When I think about the bad things that have happened, the first one to mention is the violent and tragic developments that took place in the former Yugoslavia. A company like ours, which directed all its potentials into this market, was extremely concerned about the disintegration and aggravated situation in that area. We had to make enormous sacrifices and brave decisions in order to get over the difficult situation. But we made it. Among the positive aspects of my job there is the fact that I am working with my brother Eugenio, without whom IMSA could never become what it is today. My wife Darinka, who has always been there for me in the company as well as in private life, deserves a special place too. I am more than glad that my son Robert decided to become part of our company too, which gives me satisfaction as I know that IMSA will be able to develop further. I can only wish and hope that my daughter and Eugenio's children will join us soon and help us build and expand IMSA's business. From time to time, I find myself wanting to gradually give the reins over to the young and retire, although I know this is not going to be easy. After being in business for 25 years you develop a certain attachment to it and it literally gets into your blood. ■

**Information Service no. 109**

See Contents for Info Service page