

## Introduction

Slovenia is a land with good potential for economic growth, and is therefore a candidate to enter the EU among the first group of countries.

During the past few years the area has seen satisfactory growth trends both from the social and manufacturing point of view, which is above all, but not only, a result of the efforts made by the country's public institutions: it is also due to the determination of businesses and citizens to attain growth levels nearer and nearer to those of their European "cousins". In the circumstances, the results achieved so far may be considered to be the physiological outcome of the efforts that have been made. Now, however, the country has come to a crossroads: the question is whether to keep up growth at an average rate or to make a radical improvement, trying to support quantitative growth with growth of a more qualitative nature.

During the previous Interreg II Italy – Slovenia programme the Study Centre of the Mestre C.G.I.A. (Association of Craftsmen and Small Companies) did research to evaluate the possibilities of developing trade relations between the Province of Venice and Slovenia. Some Slovene opinion leaders were interviewed during the course of this study (Chamber of Commerce and Craft Chamber executives), and all agreed that their country needed to put cooperation policies into practice to open up new export markets. This was to be done not only as a result of inter-business cooperation but also by creating new professional skills in order to provide a better response to the requirements of foreign clients and to be in a position to meet the need for different quality and product standards.

The study showed that there was great potential for collaboration in this field: at the moment Slovenia accounts for 15% of the exports of Venetian firms that include this country among their customers, even 30% for trading firms. These contacts arise from requests by Slovene companies, which, however, are not always able to provide products with the desired characteristics. Another finding was that the greatest obstacle pointed out by Slovene businessmen is the lack of knowledge of the Venice area and of the Veneto Region in general (the survey was conducted with more than 100 Venetian and Slovene businesses).

These considerations are the grounds for believing that the fundamental task for this area is greater specification of the professional skills that have to be fostered further to intensify the existing collaboration.

In the preceding study the Venice area was only analysed from the point of view of its main economic characteristics, in order to understand the dynamics of import and export flows.

The aim of the new study will be to make a specific, detailed investigation of the economic structure that characterises homogeneous areas, if not single municipalities, in the Province of Venice. What we wish to bring out is the presence of manufacturing specialisations that, from a labour market angle, may point to specific job needs that mean the selection of personnel with the professional training necessary to do skilled work that is essential for the prevailing activity in the area.

In the Slovene areas the part of the previous study that described the individual regions will be integrated by sections that focus exclusively on the local labour market.