
SLOVAK PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

SK  EU2016





GENERAL INFORMATION

The Slovak Republic was established in 1993, after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Since 2004, the Slovak Republic, mostly known as Slovakia, is a member of the EU. Together with Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic it constitutes the Visegrád Group. Slovakia is the only country in the group that has introduced the Euro as official currency. Additionally, Slovakia is member of the OECD, WTO and NATO. The highest legislative body of the parliamentary republic is the *Národná rada Slovenskej republiky*, the single chamber parliament. Its 150 members are elected every four years. The head of state is the President – currently Andrej Kiska –, who is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. However, his functions are mainly representative. The head of government is the Prime Minister, since spring 2016 Robert Fico. This relatively small country with 5.4 million inhabitants is divided into eight *krajov*, which serve as administrative divisions and are subdivided into smaller districts, called *okresy*.

ECONOMY

Since the fall of the communist regime, Slovakia has developed into a flexible and competitive market-based economy. After the 2008-9 recession, Slovakia was one of the first economies in Europe to recover. Nowadays, Slovakia is ranked 6th among the fastest growing countries in Europe with a projected annual growth rate of more than 3%. With a GDP of 78.1 bn € in 2015, Slovakia is the 63th largest economy in the world reaching the 39th highest GDP per capita with 14.394€. The current economic expansion is mainly driven by a strong domestic demand. Main accelerators of the private consumption are the decreasing unemployment rate – currently 10.3%, i.e. its lowest rate for the last seven years – low credit costs, a steady real wage growth and deflationary tendencies. Whereas public investments could decline soon, due to the outgoing EU funding period, the economy benefits from large foreign direct investments.

Foreign investors, especially the automotive sector, take advantage of Slovakia's strategic position, its cost-competitiveness and the highest labour productivity in the CEE region. Automotive is the most important industrial sector in Slovakia and accounts for 13% of the GDP. In 2015, Volkswagen, PSA Peugeot Citroën and KIA Motors manufactured nearly one million cars in Slovakia. According to this figure, the small country is the global leader in car production per capita. Because of gains in its export share, Slovakia's trade balance has been in surplus since 2012. The most important trading partner for both exports and imports is Germany. As a result of the recession, government debts have risen to 52.5% in 2015. It is expected that this figure will decline gradually. The public budget deficit is expected to decrease from -2.4% in 2016 to -1.6% in 2016. The major rating agencies currently give Slovakia an 'A'-ranking with stable outlooks.



PRIORITIES

ECONOMICALLY STRONG EUROPE

Throughout its Presidency, the Slovak Republic will strive to foster economic growth by incentivising investments. For this purpose, the Presidency will mainly focus on deepening the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), on increasing the potential of the European Fund for Strategic Investments, as well as on a sufficient and flexible EU budget for 2017. In order to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), progress in the field of the Capital Market Union (CMU) shall be made. The aim is to gradually eliminate current barriers to cross-border flows of capital, in order to open up alternative investment sources for SMEs.

MODERN SINGLE MARKET

The Slovak Presidency recognises the benefits of the European Single Market and wants to extend the fundamental freedoms of the internal market to energy and digital in order to exploit its full potential.

Concerning the Digital Single Market (DSM), the free movement of citizens and business in the digital area as well as the free movement of data across the EU's common market feature high on the Presidency's agenda. By promoting a competitive integrated energy market, the Presidency wants to work towards a secure and clean energy supply. The Slovak Presidency acknowledges the 2015 Paris climate agreement and will therefore pursue discussions on a European Emissions Trading System.

SUSTAINABLE MIGRATION AND ASYLUM POLICIES

In the area of migration, the Slovak Presidency will aim particularly at the protection of the EU's external borders. In order to improve Europe's internal security and to return irregular migrants more efficiently, Slovakia will use its rotating term to improve the functioning of the European Border Guard, as well as the information exchange between Member States. Beside the protection of the external

borders, the Slovak Presidency will strive to restore the Schengen area and will continue the discussions on the abolishment of the temporarily introduced inner-European border controls. The Slovak Presidency will foster cooperation with migrants' countries of origin, in order to tackle migration causes.

GLOBALLY ENGAGED EUROPE

An active Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is seen as a key instrument to face the significant changes in the geopolitical reality. Hence, the Slovak Presidency will promote an effective European neighbourhood policy. On a global level, the Slovak Presidency supports free, fair and balanced trade based on bilateral trade agreements with third countries. The strengthening of the transatlantic relationship will also be an important item on the agenda. In the field of development cooperation, the Presidency will focus on the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and on the future of relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.



WHO IS WHO

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INFORMATION,
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Independent

ANDREJ
KISKA
President



Smer SD

ROBERT
FICO
Prime Minister



Smer SD

PETER
PELLEGRINI
*Deputy Prime Minister
for Investments and
Information Society*



Smer SD

ROBERT
KALIŇÁK
*Minister of
the Interior*



Smer SD

PETER
KAŽIMÍR
*Minister of
Finance*



Independent

MIROSLAV
LAJČÁK
*Minister of Foreign
and European Affairs*



Smer SD

PETER
ŽIGA
*Minister of
Economy*



Siet

ROMAN
BREČELY
*Minister of Transport,
Construction and
Regional Development*



SNS

GABRIELA
MATEČNÁ
*Minister of Agriculture
and Rural Development*



SNS

PETER
GAJDOŠ
*Minister of
Defense*



>> WHO IS WHO



Most-Híd

LUCIA
ŽITŇANSKÁ

*Minister of
Justice*



Smer SD

JÁN
RICHTER

*Minister of Labour,
Social Affairs and Family*



Most-Híd

LÁSZLÓ
SOLY MOS

*Minister of
Environment*



SNS

PETER
PLAVČAN

*Minister of Education,
Science, Research
and Sport*



Smer SD

MAREK
MAĎARIČ

*Minister of
Culture*



Smer SD

TOMÁŠ
DRUCKER

*Minister of
Health*



PETER
JAVORČÍK

*Permanent Representative
of the Slovak Republic
to the EU*



ALEXANDER
MICOVČÍN

*Deputy Permanent
Representative of the
Slovak Republic to the EU*



IVAN
KORČOK

*Government Plenipotentiary
for the Slovak Presidency
of the Council of the EU*



MILAN
ZACHAR

*Director General,
Secretariat of the Slovak
EU Council Presidency*



POLICY FIELDS

GENERAL AFFAIRS

The Slovak Presidency will continue the implementation of the Inter-Institutional Agreement on Better Regulation, in particular regarding the (multi-) annual planning. A major task will be the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020 and the first assessment of the implementation of the rule of law mechanism. The Presidency intends to adopt Council Conclusions on the further simplification and streamlining of the EU cohesion policy. Moreover, the Presidency considers enlargement policy contributes to strengthening security and will promote an individual approach to each candidate country, in order to encourage internal reforms. Further, the Presidency will continue to support macro-regional cooperation. Other topics to be tackled are cyber resilience and safety in industry.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Slovak Presidency aims to contribute to a coherent external policy focusing on the principles laid down in the European Union Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) and strengthening the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). A major task will be the work on a coordinated approach to migration governance while focusing

on the root causes. Regarding development policy, the Presidency will focus on the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and propose suggestions for improvement of the EU humanitarian aid system. Further, the Presidency will support the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and encourage a deepened cooperation with NATO. Moreover, the Presidency will promote a balanced trade policy and contribute to the EU's strategic goal of strengthening the multilateral trading system, primarily focusing on TTIP and CETA negotiations.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

In the field of economic and financial affairs, the Slovak Presidency aims to contribute to the completion of the Economic and Monetary Union, in particular the Capital Markets Union and the Banking Union. The Presidency will continue discussions on the European Semester process and macroeconomic stabilisation, including a common European unemployment insurance. Further, the Presidency aims to strengthen the potential of the European Fund for Strategic Investments. A major task will be the fight against terrorist financing as well as against tax evasion and tax avoidance by means of a comprehensive

European approach. The Presidency will promote fair and efficient corporate taxation, an upgraded common system of value added tax (VAT) and a common consolidated tax base for corporate income tax. Moreover, the Presidency will strive for an agreement on the 2017-EU budget.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

In the field of justice and home affairs, the Slovak Presidency aims to contribute to the further development of EU policies, in particular in the fields of migration, asylum, border control and visas. A major task will be the work on new European laws on asylum and overcoming the divisions in the Council. Further, the Presidency intends to adopt Council Conclusions on the already adopted Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. The Presidency will continue negotiations on the draft of the EU Blue Card Directive and support solutions and initiatives for the improvement and integrity of the Schengen area. Moreover, the Presidency will focus on the protection of external borders and the fight against terrorism. Other topics to be tackled are the supply of digital content and the online sale of goods as well as more efficient cross-border judicial cooperation.



>> POLICY FIELDS

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

In this area, the Slovak Presidency will work to advance the negotiations on the rules concerning free movement of workers, coordination of social security systems and posting of workers. The Presidency will focus on discussions on legislative changes in the internal market with regards to social policy and the employment sector and aims at making progress in the legislation on improving the protection of workers. Further, the Presidency will focus on the European pillar of social rights and debate the Commission's package on skills. Concerning Roma integration, the Presidency intends to prepare draft Council Conclusions. In the health sector, the Presidency will continue negotiations on the revision of the Framework for Medical Devices. Other topics will be tobacco control, antimicrobial resistance and non-communicable diseases.

COMPETITIVENESS

With view to competitiveness, the Slovak Presidency will focus on building the single market, modernising industry and better regulation. The Presidency aims at reaching an approach

on the proposal for a Regulation on addressing unjustified geo-blocking and at debating proposals on the services passport and the notification procedure for the Services Directive. Further, the Presidency intends to continue negotiations on the proposal for the revision of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation (CPC). With regards to industrial policy, the Presidency will pursue the implementation of the smart industry concept and promote the creation of appropriate framework conditions for boosting competitiveness. Moreover, the Presidency will continue the debate on the efficient use of better regulation tools. Other topics to be addressed will be the copyright reform and support for young researchers.

ENERGY

In the field of Energy, the Slovak Presidency will give priority to building a secure and competitive Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy. The Presidency will continue work on the review of the Regulation concerning measures to safeguard Security of Gas Supply and further encourage regional cooperation. It will continue negotiations with the European Parliament on the revision of the Energy Efficiency Directive and the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. At their informal meeting in July, EU

energy and environment ministers will discuss the framework of EU Climate and Energy objectives, as well as energy prices and costs in Europe and the Storage Strategy. The Energy Council on 5 December will review the state of play and progress on the different dossiers and the developments in the external dimension of the EU energy policy.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

In the area of telecommunications, the Slovak Presidency will continue the intensive work on the implementation of the Digital Single Market Strategy. The Presidency intends to start negotiations with the European Parliament on the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band and to ensure progress in negotiations on the wholesale roaming review. Further, the Presidency aims at advancing in the negotiations on the Regulation on cross-border parcel delivery services. Moreover, the Presidency will lead a political debate on the new regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services during the Telecom Council which will be held on 2 December 2016. Finally, it will seek to reach an agreement to swiftly adopt Council Conclusions on the e-Government Action Plan put forward by the Commission.



>> POLICY FIELDS

TRANSPORT

In the field of transport, the Slovak Presidency aims to take forward the debate on the proposals in different transport areas, aiming to contribute to the realisation of the Single European Transport Area. With regards to air transport, the Presidency aims at facilitating innovation and competitiveness in the field of drone production through a revision of the regulation on the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). In the field of inland waterway transport, the Presidency will focus on a proposal for a Directive on the mutual recognition of qualification of workers. With view to maritime transport, it will conduct an initial discussion on the package of proposals on passenger ship safety. In rail transport, the Slovak Presidency will approve the EU's position by means of a Council decision on the preparation of a new Convention of the Organisation for Cooperation between Railways.

ENVIRONMENT

In the field of environmental affairs, the Slovak Presidency aims to make the European economy more competitive, resource-efficient and low-carbon by fostering the transition towards a green and circular economy. A major task will be

reaching an agreement on the revision of Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) and related proposals on sectors not included in the scheme and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Further, the Presidency will continue the Netherlands' work regarding waste management, mercury and emission ceilings. Moreover, the Presidency intends to prepare the ratification of the Paris Agreement, as well as the EU's negotiation positions for the next conferences on climate change, trade in endangered species, protection of biological diversity and the ozone layer. Other topics to be tackled are the protection of water resources and the evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directive.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

In the area of agriculture and fisheries, the Slovak Presidency will look at ways to strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain and focus on annual fishing quotas. Concerning the crisis in the agricultural market, the Presidency plans to monitor the situation and propose further measures for stabilisation. Further, the Presidency intends to make the EU the global leader in promoting sustainable global forest management and to advance the

negotiations on the proposal for a Regulation on organic farming and labelling of organic products. Another focus will be the simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). With regards to fishing policies, the Presidency's ambition is to reach a political agreement on individual regulations on the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, deep-seas species and other stocks.

EDUCATION, CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORT

In the field of education, the Slovak Presidency will focus on talent development, developing life and digital skills within the framework of the New Skills Agenda. It will also support the development of more dynamic and attractive youth work and competences for a successful life. Sport diplomacy and education through sport will also be present on the agenda. The Presidency will also continue the work on the modernisation of higher education. In the field of culture the Presidency will review the Council's Work Plan for Culture for the period 2015-2018, as well as the work on the decision concerning the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Furthermore, it will follow up the work on the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.



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