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SK  EU2016

# The **EESC** priorities during the **Slovak presidency**

July – December 2016



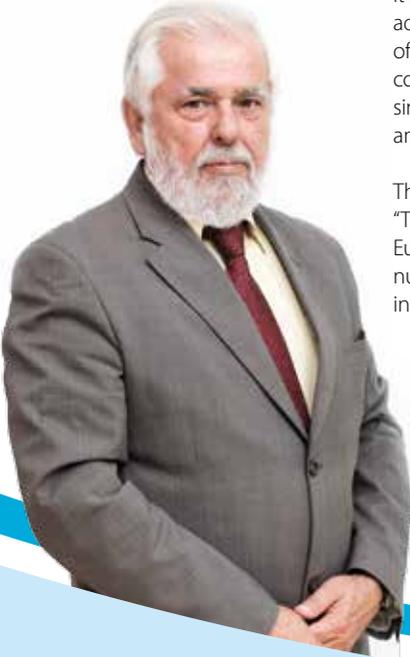
*European Economic and Social Committee*

# A word from the president

For the first time in the history of the European Union, twelve years after its accession, the Slovak Republic will take up the presidency of the Council on 1 July.

As we all know, the Member State holding the presidency has fairly limited powers. However, it is responsible for keeping the impetus going and coordinating meetings and their agendas and undertaking communication activities aimed at the media and general public – everywhere in the EU of course, but particularly in the Member State itself. The presidency is also a way of showing that the Union is not an external superpower that imposes itself on Member States “from above” or “from Brussels”: it is a union of States, where each has its role to play.

As I write these words, there is only one preparatory document on the future Slovak presidency and its priorities. This document stresses that the programme will only be adopted during the last few days of June and that it will take account of events that occur in the months leading up to its publication.



It is based on the *Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change*, adopted by the European Council in June 2014, and has the merit of highlighting that accession has had a positive impact on the country's development. It notes that the presidency presents a singular opportunity for Slovakia to enhance its success story as an EU Member State.

The same document – in its English version – points out that “The Slovak Republic will preside over the Council of the European Union at a time when the European Union is facing a number of challenges – migration, terrorism, hotbeds of tension in its neighbourhood, repercussions of the Eurozone crisis and a



referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. This often produces divisions within the EU and the questioning of joint and successful projects, including the common European currency and the Schengen Area. Such a climate contributes to the rise of radical political sentiments'. It goes on to say that "As holder of the presidency we stand ready to be a constructive broker working to the benefit of the entire EU. Whilst it is not always easy to cooperate and reach compromises, we are looking to address all pressing challenges in a manner that maintains cohesion in the European Union and reaffirms its fundamental principles and successful projects benefiting everyday life. This is vital for the sake of preserving the prosperity and security of all Member States. The United Kingdom within the EU. A Schengen Area strong from the outside and free from doubt inside. Regulated flows of migrants. A working Eurozone with efficient anti-crisis tools".

These are indeed some of the key challenges to be addressed and they are the rifts as well as extremist sentiments and talk that urgently need to be fought. This is also where the Committee will focus its attention, naturally without neglecting any other issues that the Council and the Slovak presidency might raise. I would add that it is determined to direct much of its work towards the "social rights pillar" during the Slovak presidency, in line with a recent request from the Commission. It is time to present the public with examples of progress and achievements in areas where they see too many setbacks and failures.

With regard to progress and success, I would be really pleased if the future presidency's final document provided for the effective presence of civil society, the social partners and dialogue, which the EU in general and each Member State in particular should cultivate if they want a peaceful, rational and coherent society with adequate citizen involvement.

**Georges Dassis**  
*President of the EESC*

# Strong and stable civil society as the basis for a strong and stable European Union

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Slovakia is taking over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2016. It has a great opportunity to use its potential to get results and to present its goals for a common Europe.

As a young country it has the chance to present its success story of accession to the European Union and monetary union. We shall be proposing tackling important issues in the areas of energy, digitalisation and social and income inequality.

Other tasks may arise in addressing challenges relating to the stability of the Schengen area or the outcome of the referendum in the United Kingdom. It is not important, however, how many tasks we accomplish: the important thing will be to implement solutions in such a way that they improve the quality of life of the greatest possible number of European Union inhabitants.

A stable civil society, which is the prerequisite for a successful economy, balanced industrial relations and stable democracy, can help to achieve these proposed tasks. Civil society representatives in the various countries must work to improve trust in a common Europe. If trust ceases to operate, nobody will find enough money to recover the losses.

Nor can we be satisfied with only setting short-term, quick-fix goals. Today's world is dominated by the here and now. Everybody wants to have everything straight away. Many have no interest in long-term goals. To have long-term goals we need political will and courage. Civil society representatives must be capable of finding the right words in their pronouncements to convince politicians that they can trust us and can also push forward long-term and strategic goals.

We shall not solve the problems of the European Union's citizens straight away, but we can tell them that we shall be at their side in good times and bad. And this is the fundamental strength of civil society at the European Economic and Social Committee and in every European Union country.

**Emil Machyna**  
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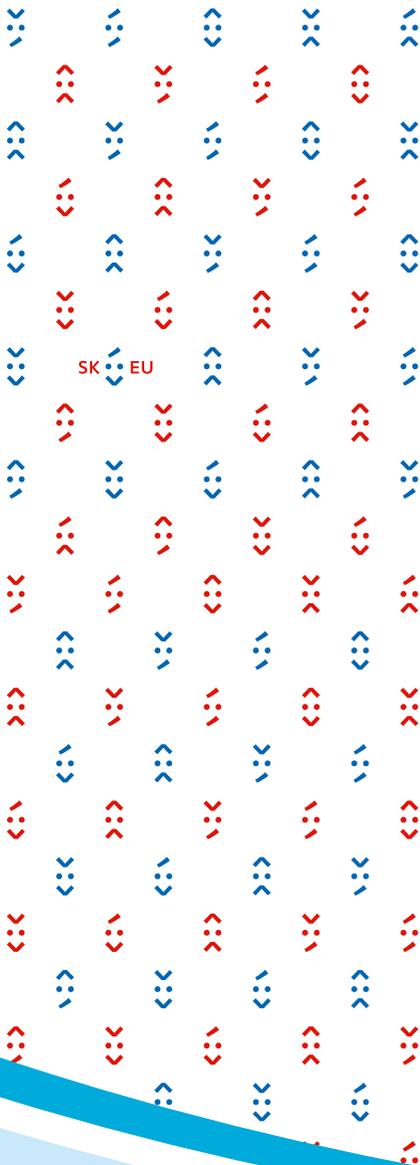
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# The priorities of European civil society during the Slovak Presidency



With poverty and social exclusion still on the rise, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) intends to continue to focus on the **European social model**, placing special emphasis on the elaboration of a European pillar of social rights, social investment as a productive factor, and efficient and reliable social benefit systems. Job creation is a top priority and the EESC will focus on innovative policies with a human dimension that strike the right balance between economic, social and environmental concerns. The European Semester and the Europe 2020 strategy are key elements in this. Special attention will be paid to measures that increase high-quality and stable employment, especially for young people, migrants, refugees and the long-term unemployed.

The EESC will also promote **decent work** and **fairer labour mobility**, especially as regards working conditions and wages. Research and innovation are essential to **improve competitiveness, create growth and jobs, and address societal challenges**. The Committee will look at the impact of the digital transition and the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy on employment and skills. More specifically, on the request of the Slovak Presidency, the EESC will analyse the impact of technological developments on the social security system and labour law.

Recognising the changing nature of industry, the EESC will closely monitor and analyse the developments related to **Industry 4.0**. In particular, the Committee will envisage how to implement a regulatory framework at a sustainable cost for businesses, keeping the right balance between industrial competitiveness and protection of consumers, workers and the environment.



The Committee will continue to support a **more open migration and truly common asylum policy** based on greater solidarity and shared responsibility in the European Union. It will work to ensure better recognition of the contribution that migrants make to Europe's economy and society, promote their **integration into the labour market and society at large**, advocate for the improvement of their education and training, and continue to call for full respect of their fundamental rights.

The EESC will actively contribute to the ongoing review of the **EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy** and also the main EU external policy areas, such as **trade, enlargement, neighbourhood, and development/post-Cotonou**, the external dimension of key EU policies, such as **the energy policy** of the EU and the **implementation of SDGs**, and the respect of **decent labour standards in international trade**.

The promotion of **legal migration**, more integrated Euro-Mediterranean and EU-Africa partnerships (including through trade), and a more cohesive civil society in the southern countries will also be a key topic in the activities related to **Euromed and African countries**. Regarding the **Eastern Neighbours**, the involvement of civil society in monitoring the implementation of association agreements will be the main priority. A Civil Society Platform with Georgia and a Domestic Advisory Group for Ukraine will be established.

The Committee will follow up on **EU trade negotiations** and civil society monitoring of EU agreements. Special attention will be paid to the DCFTA agreements with **Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia**, as well as to the negotiations with the

**USA, Japan, Morocco and Tunisia**. The issue of **global supply chains** and sustainable development in trade agreements will be addressed through an opinion, which is also a contribution to the ILO annual conference in June 2016. The Committee will deliver its opinion on the impact on key industrial sectors (and on jobs and growth) entailed by the possible granting of market economy status to China (for the purpose of trade defence instruments).

The Slovak Presidency will be associated with the work of the EESC in two areas: **enlargement**, more specifically the empowerment of civil society organisations in western Balkan countries as a key factor for stability and democracy, and **Latin America**, where the Presidency will play a role in the contribution of the **EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table** at the 2016 EU-Brazil Summit.

Following the adoption of the **UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, the Committee expects the EU and its Member States to implement the new agenda internally and in its external policies, involving civil society both from the EU and from third countries. In July 2016, therefore, the EESC will organise an event to push the Commission to lay the groundwork for a long-term strategic framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The EESC will further promote the creation of a **European Sustainable Development Forum** which should provide a regular, stable, structured and independent framework for civil society involvement in the implementation, monitoring and review of the Sustainable Development Goals at EU level. In addition, the EESC will closely follow the **coordination of social security systems** as part of the development policy.

Following the Paris Agreement, it is necessary to maintain the momentum and strong political determination to secure the transition to a resilient and low-carbon future. In a new opinion, the EESC will propose specific means for civil society to participate in the **implementation of the Paris Agreement**, in particular by promoting a new global multi-stakeholder governance framework. Emphasis will also be placed on the land use sector (land use, land-use change and forestry, or LULUCF) in view of the proposal on integrating this sector into the **2030 framework for climate and energy**. The EESC will collect the viewpoints of civil society ahead of COP22 in Marrakesh by organising a large event in October, with a special focus on the role of renewable energy and sustainable agriculture in the transition towards a low-carbon economy.

The EESC's overall objective is to ensure the increased attractiveness of **rural and remote areas**, especially for young people. It will promote the main recommendations of its exploratory opinion on CAP simplification, which will be DG AGRI's main political priority in 2016. In an own-initiative opinion, the Committee will also reflect on factors influencing the CAP post-2020. The EESC has been increasingly concerned about the environmental and social impacts of food production and consumption in the context of **global food security**. It will continue to tackle the issue of sustainable food systems in a comprehensive and cross-sectoral manner. It will prepare an opinion on "Promoting a fairer agro-food supply chain", analysing the detrimental economic, social and environmental effects of unfair trading practices in the food chain and recommending action at EU level.

The Committee will continue its critical assessment of the implementation of the **Europe 2020 strategy**, in close cooperation with the network of national economic and social councils and other stakeholders. It considers the future relationship between the strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals to be a unique opportunity to create a single, horizontal, integrated strategy to guide policies until 2030 and beyond.

Work in the area of **social enterprise and the social economy** will continue. In response to requests from civil society, the EESC will continue to monitor and evaluate political developments at EU and Member State level. It will identify specific measures to improve the general environment of social economy enterprises, disseminate best practices in the Member States, and raise the profile of the sector. **New forms of production and consumption** such as the collaborative and the sharing economy will be on the EESC's agenda. The Committee has been at the forefront of dealing with these trends and will be preparing an own-initiative opinion on the functional economy.

Promoting its opinion on the Circular Economy package adopted in April 2016, the EESC will contribute to channelling civil society's views, possibly by creating an ad hoc European platform gathering together a large number of stakeholders. It will seek to keep up pressure on policy-makers to ensure **the Commission's action plan for the circular economy** leads to specific measures in favour of a resource-efficient economy. A new opinion on the "nudge" concept and possible ways of applying it to European policies will further develop the EESC's contribution on greening the economy.



The EESC will issue an opinion on **the mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity strategy** in the second half of 2016 with the principal aim of putting a great deal of pressure on the Commission and EU Member States to respect their earlier commitments. The Commission has also invited the EESC to contribute to the mid-term review of the LIFE programme in the second half of 2016.

Better regulation is a topic that is high on the EESC's agenda. The Committee is following the implementation of the **Better Regulation package** very closely and will prepare, at the request of the Slovak Presidency, an exploratory opinion on this topic aiming to find a balance between minimising regulatory costs for businesses while at the same time achieving social, societal and environmental objectives.

During the Slovak Presidency, the EESC will continue its priority work within the inter-institutional debate on deepening and completing **Europe's Economic and Monetary Union**, notably by taking into account the positions of all relevant civil society stakeholders. A number of economic, social, political and institutional measures to ensure better governance and more convergence within the euro area and the EU as a whole have already been examined in the Committee's recent opinions on **the Commission's Deepening EMU package** and the corresponding Stage 1 of completing EMU (2015-2017) as set out in the Five Presidents' Report. The EESC will now follow up on these proposals by organising various debates and meetings with institutional representatives and stakeholders from Brussels and the Member States. In addition, before the end of the Slovak Presidency, the Committee intends to focus on the preparatory work for **Stage 2 of completing**

**EMU (2017-2025)**, in which more far-reaching changes to euro area arrangements are to be expected. In particular, the EESC is planning to hold a **high-level conference on EMU** that will look at the various elements that should be put in place over the next decade to ensure the prosperity and sustainability of the European social market economy.

The Committee will contribute its position to the compulsory mid-term review of the **multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2014-2020**. In preparation for this, the Committee is drawing up an own-initiative opinion with proposals for a performance-based EU budget focused on real results.

As regards indirect taxation, the Presidency will be marked by the endeavour to substantially reform and **modernise the European VAT system**. The EESC will present its findings and recommendations on this topic at the beginning of the Presidency. In the field of direct taxation, specific measures to prevent aggressive tax planning, boost tax transparency, and create a level playing field for all businesses in the EU will be the priority. The Committee will contribute to this ambitious agenda in particular by means of its opinions on the revision of the Administrative Cooperation Directive and on the Anti Tax Avoidance Directive. In an opinion on further transparency of listed companies, the Committee will examine an important initiative for a legislative act to increase corporate tax transparency to the public with a view to ensuring that enterprises pay tax where they actually make profits. As regards the long-standing issue of a **common consolidated corporate tax base (CCCTB)**, a proposal for a

directive with a somewhat modified approach will bring new momentum in this field during the Slovak Presidency.

As regards financial markets and the financing of the economy, the upcoming period will be marked by the **action plan on building a Capital Markets Union (CMU)** and its implementation with legislative and non-legislative instruments. The EESC will be working on legislative initiatives such as on the recovery and resolution of central counterparties, on the review of the European Venture Capital (EuVECA) and European Social Entrepreneurship (EuSEF) Fund regulations, and on the possible legislative proposal amending the Capital Requirements Regulation (CRR) to incorporate modifications to the Basel framework. The EESC will also comment on the overall **EU regulatory framework for financial services**, where the Commission is seeking to identify possible inconsistencies, incoherence and gaps in financial rules, as well as unnecessary regulatory burdens and factors negatively affecting long-term investment and growth. Furthermore, the Committee will be examining the envisaged initiative on an integrated covered bond framework to enhance transparency and comparability between different Member States' covered bonds. The EESC's own-initiative opinion on "Limits for companies' transparency requirements" will provide a timely contribution to the Commission's initiative concerning non-binding guidelines on methodology for reporting non-financial information, foreseen for the fourth quarter of 2016. In a quest to contribute to **generating growth and employment**, the

EESC will come up with an own-initiative opinion with recommendations for policy-makers on measures and actions needed to create an environment that is supportive of the creation of start-ups and of their subsequent scaling-up. Successful policies focusing on start-ups would contribute towards boosting growth, lowering unemployment, attracting foreign investment and retaining talent in Europe.

During the Slovak Presidency, the EESC will continue to work on the **development of urban areas**, supporting the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda and focusing on the refinement of this European project. At the same time, it will work on gathering recommendations from a broad range of civil society organisations – the beneficiaries/end-consumers of the European Structural and Investment Funds – concerning usage of the funds, in order to feed their experience into the mid-term evaluations which serve as the basis of **cohesion policy beyond 2020**. Finally, the EESC will continue its active participation in the implementation of macro-regional strategies as well as other European programmes.

With regard to the **information society**, the Committee will continue its work on following up activities with the aim of implementing the Digital Single Market strategy, with a particular focus on key issues such as the new e-Government action plan, geo-blocking and the review of the regulatory framework for electronic communications, networks and services. With the organisation of a conference, special attention will also be devoted to the digital economy and the

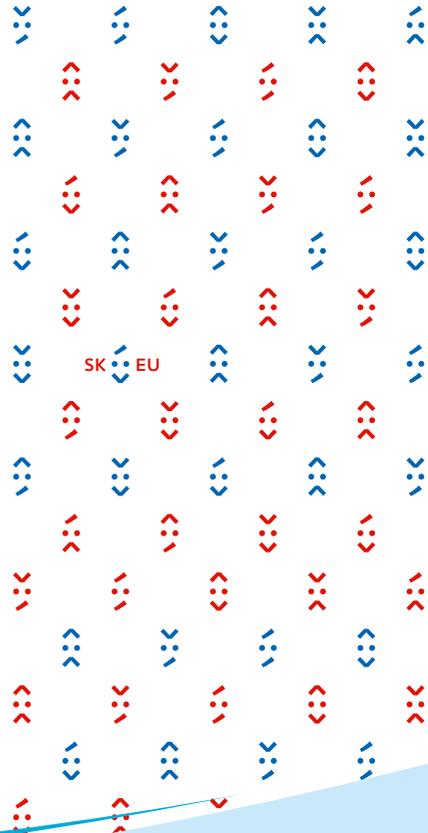


role of public policy as a tool for fostering economic growth and new business models.

The EESC will build on its previous opinions on the **European Energy Union** to engage with more specific legislative proposals. The Committee will stress the need to meet energy end users' needs, empower energy consumers to become active market participants (with a particular interest in the phenomenon of "prosumers"), and ensure that citizens and organised civil society have a strong voice with regard to their "energy future". The idea of a **European Energy Dialogue (EED)** will be further promoted as a parallel process running alongside the Energy Union. The EED will provide an independent framework for civil society dialogue, linked to national energy plans.

The Committee will continue its work to promote the creation of a single European transport area. There will be a particular focus on **EU civil aviation**, promoting a truly European aviation strategy that will improve the competitiveness of the aviation value chain so that this sector continues to be a key driver of economic growth. The EESC will also expand the participatory dialogue between authorities and civil society on selected core corridors of the TEN-T network. Furthermore, emphasis will be placed on topical matters such as the **decarbonisation of transport** and COP21's impact on European transport policy, self-driving cars, big data and its societal impacts, regulation of sharing economy activities in the area of transport, as well as market access and the social dimension of the sector.

As the underlying theme for many EESC communication events in 2016, the subject of **migration** will continue to be prominent in EESC communication activities during the Slovak Presidency. Notably, it will be the focus of the **Civil Society Media Seminar** in Vienna in November 2016, as well as of the **Civil Society Prize** in December 2016. Different cultural events will be organised in Brussels, while members will continue to communicate locally about the EESC and its work via **Going Local activities**, engaging them in dialogue both "back home" and in Brussels.



# A word from the Slovak presidency



**Ivan Korčok**

*State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Government Plenipotentiary for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union*

The first Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union takes place at a moment when Europe is confronted with various challenges that need to be addressed. In the past year, we witnessed an unprecedented migration and refugee crisis, instability in our immediate neighbourhood as well as the rise of nationalism and Euroscepticism throughout the continent. With regard to the economic and social area, the picture remains complex. The European economy is experiencing a moderate recovery while economic performance and social conditions remain uneven across the EU. Therefore, many Member States still have to face the challenges of high long-term and youth unemployment as well as lack of investment.

In these challenging times, the Slovak presidency is committed to substantially contributing to a joint search for European solutions. Our priorities have an overarching ambition to make Europe more resilient and better equipped both to face the contemporary challenges and to provide for a strategic vision for the future. To this end, the presidency intends to focus on a positive agenda and sustainable solutions that will help Europe regain the trust of its citizens. In this effort, we will seek to work closely with the European Economic and Social Committee, which has a crucial role in bridging Europe and organised civil society.

Slovakia has defined the presidency priorities on the basis of three mutually reinforcing principles: to bring tangible results in areas where action is most needed, to help Europe overcome fragmentation by focusing on solutions that unite and to put citizens in the forefront of our effort by finding answers to the challenges of everyday life.



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The economic and social agenda is one of the core pillars of our presidency. Re-launching investment as well as pursuing structural reforms and responsible fiscal policies is crucial to strengthening the economic recovery and fostering convergence in the European Union. The European Fund for Strategic Investment has successfully become operational; on the other hand, the Economic and Monetary Union is still incomplete. Thus, Europe now faces the task of consolidating and complementing its parts, including the social dimension and democratic accountability. The presidency believes that national actors, such as social partners, should play an important role in this process.

Together with building solid foundations for jobs and growth, the European Union should focus on measures that further deepen the Single Market. To unleash its full potential, the presidency

believes Europe should reflect today's realities and support innovative ideas and business models which break down barriers between the Member States and foster social cohesion in the Union. The presidency is therefore committed to putting an emphasis on projects such as the Capital Markets Union, Energy Union or the Digital Single Market, which have the potential to create new opportunities for consumers, professionals and businesses.

To achieve these ambitious goals, the Slovak presidency is looking forward to cooperating with the European Economic and Social Committee as Europe's leading platform for a sustainable participation of organised civil society in the political process. By involving all relevant stakeholders, the presidency aspires to a participatory dialogue through which Europe will be able to win back the trust of its citizens.

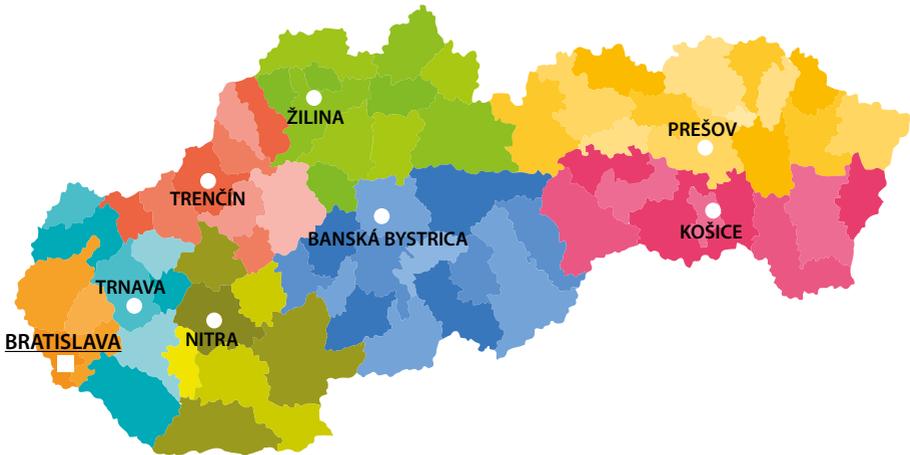
# Some basic facts about Slovakia

<b>Official name</b>	Slovak Republic
<b>Capital</b>	Bratislava
<b>Area</b>	49 035 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Other main towns (in terms of population)</b>	Košice, Prešov, Žilina
<b>National language</b>	Slovak
<b>Official language</b>	Slovak
<b>Currency</b>	Euro
<b>Population (1/1/2015)<sup>1</sup></b>	5 421 349
<b>Foreign population (1/1/2015)<sup>1</sup></b>	177 624
<b>GDP in current prices (in millions of euro, 2015)<sup>1</sup></b>	78 070.8
<b>GDP per capita (in Purchasing Power Standards [PPS], EU-28 = 100, 2014)<sup>2</sup></b>	77
<b>Domestic employment (2015)<sup>2</sup></b>	2 450 800
<b>Employment rate (persons aged 20-64 years, 2014)<sup>2</sup></b>	68.4%
<b>Unemployment rate (as defined by the ILO, 2015)<sup>2</sup></b>	11.0%
<b>Life expectancy at birth (2014)<sup>1</sup></b>	Women: 80.5 years / Men: 73.3 years
<b>Main exports (% of total exports, 2014)<sup>3</sup></b>	Vehicles other than railway, tramway (24.93%) Electrical, electronic equipment (21.12%) Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers, etc. (12.23%)
<b>Main imports (% of total imports, 2014)<sup>3</sup></b>	Electrical, electronic equipment (19.10%) Vehicles other than railway, tramway (13.02%) Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers, etc. (12.03%)

1 Eurostat

2 Statistical office of the Slovak republic

3 Trademap



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## For your diary

### 13 July 2016

**Yaro M. Kupčo: Reflections from Slovakia - photo exhibition:** Opening event of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union at the EESC. The exhibition will be in the EESC's premises from 13 July 2016 until 16 September 2016.

### 13-14 July 2016

**Plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee:** The programme of the Slovak presidency will be presented by Mr Ivan Korčok, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Government Plenipotentiary for the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union.

### 14 December 2016

**Slovak cultural evening:** Closing event of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union at the EESC.



## ***European Economic and Social Committee***

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