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Wolfgang H. Fischer is a German citizen – born in Munich who studied law in Germany and Austria. He has qualified as FCII, PMP, and MBCI and gained many skills and experience over 32 years across 7 European countries he worked in. Since June 2016 he is CEO of Zurich Bratislava Competence Center with a demonstrated history of working in the (re-)insurance industry and insurance related fields. His passion for insurance and project work led him to obtain an additional degree in Insurance Management from Germany Insurance Academy as well as a certification as project manager. He came and stayed in Slovakia because he sees the potential in people in the labor market on the professional side – and he loves the country because of its nature, historical landmarks, people and last but not least local food.

WHAT ACHIEVEMENT FROM 2025 ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF, AND WHY?

Alongside many core business-related achievements, I am most proud that our local CSR team convinced the Zurich Foundation to support IPčko, a Slovak-wide NGO focused on the mental health of young people in crisis situations. With a grant securing their operations for the next three years, IPčko can continue their vital support work.

IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE, WHAT SHOULD SLOVAKIA PRIORITIZE REMAIN COMPETITIVE WITHIN THE EU AND GLOBALLY?

Economic Diversification & Innovation

- Reduce reliance on single sectors (e.g., automotive) by encouraging growth in Business Service Centers, IT, green technologies, and advanced manufacturing.
- Invest in R&D and support start-ups and innovation ecosystems to boost value-added exports.

Sustainable Energy Transition

- Accelerate investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency to decrease dependency on imported fuels, enhance energy security, and meet EU climate targets.
- Encourage public and private sector cooperation in green initiatives.

Digital Transformation

- Prioritize digital infrastructure and digital skills to improve productivity and attract high-tech investments.
- Promote e-government and digital services for efficiency and transparency – and cost reduction on employer side

Tax Policy & Investment Climate

- Maintain stable and predictable tax policies to attract foreign direct investment
- Simplify tax administration and reduce bureaucracy for businesses
- Align incentives with EU funds and sustainability targets.

Labour Market & Education

- Invest in upskilling and reskilling, focusing on digital, technical, and green competencies.
- Strengthen links between education, vocational training, and industry needs to address workforce shortages.

Regional Integration & EU Collaboration

- Actively engage in EU policymaking, especially on energy, trade, and digital regulation.
- Leverage EU funding and cross-border cooperation to support infrastructure and innovation.

Resilience to Geopolitical Risks

- Build robust supply chains and contingency plans for potential disruptions due to global tensions.
- Strengthen cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IS RESHAPING LABOUR MARKETS ACROSS EUROPE. HOW SHOULD SLOVAKIA RESPOND TO AGING, TALENT SHORTAGES, AND WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION?

There is not just one measure, but a set of measures that need to be considered and wisely applied: avoiding brain drain, encouraging the return of experienced Slovaks to the country, making use of flexible pension age, upskilling the existing workforce, and using technologies like AI to increase efficiency and reduce the need for human labour in certain aspects of processes.

Brain drain, which often begins during the search for a university, and mainly after obtaining a degree or in the early years of a career before settling down with a family, can be managed to the desired extent – “desired extent” because some brain drain is beneficial when it results in a brain carousel, where people recognize they are working in an attractive job market with ample opportunities for development in a stable and predictable environment. While AmCham and BSCF member companies provide such an environment, promote opportunities, and increasingly collaborate with local academia, there is one element that requires much attention: a stable and predictable environment.

Before the boom of service centers around 2005, a significant number of well-educated Slovaks left Slovakia to seek job opportunities in Europe or overseas. Additionally, talents hired by international companies in Slovakia often continued their careers abroad. Now it is time to encourage specialists and managers with international experience to **return to Slovakia**, as the market is much more mature – and several international companies have even relocated Group roles to Slovakia. The only obstacle I see at the moment, as already mentioned above, is that such talents expect a stable and predictable environment.

Slovakia provides a flexible **pension age**, allowing staff to continue working after reaching the legal pension age without any obstacles. A mindset change is required here – instead of focusing solely on a specific retirement date, employees should be encouraged to consider their health status, opportunities to increase their pension, and mental health benefits if they remain engaged. Of course, it depends on individuals and the type of work performed, but given the increased life expectancy, voluntary full or part-time work by those who can and want to help minimize the impact of a shrinking workforce.

Finally, upskilling and the use of technologies like AI can free employees from repetitive tasks and less productive administrative work, allowing them to focus on parts of the job that require higher qualifications or human skills – thus enabling the existing workforce to deliver more.