



REGIONAL PILLAR  
CONFERENCE



# East Innovation Conference

## Driving Positive Change.

WEDNESDAY  
November 13, 2019

KOŠICE



TABAČKA  
KULTURFABRIK

SILVER  
PARTNER



BRONZE  
PARTNERS



GENERAL  
PARTNERS



MEDIA  
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AmCham's East Innovation conference brought together established companies, startups as well as academic institutions from the region to showcase the potential of Eastern Slovakia and to outline the steps that could help develop it further.

As AmCham's President Gabriel Galgóci stressed in his welcoming speech, this conference connects two of AmCham's key pillars - regional development and innovation. The goal of the conference was to demonstrate that it's possible to start successful projects in eastern Slovakia and then expand further. The ecosystem that has developed in Košice over time offers interesting conditions as bigger companies active in the region cooperate with local SMEs, startups and academic institutions. A lack of proper infrastructure connecting Košice to Bratislava and other bigger markets still presents a major issue, but as Mr. Galgóci

rightly pointed "the digital highway has been in place for a while".

It was a true honor to welcome former President of the Slovak Republic Rudolf Schuster, who delivered an inspiring keynote speech. He demonstrated a very good understanding of the region's main problems as well as the ability to put them into national or European context. It was also clearly visible that he is still very passionate about the city of Košice and its development. He repeatedly warned against betting everything on one card and called for more variety in the regional as well as national economy, hinting at Slovakia's dangerous reliance on the automotive industry. As he stated: "We should be selling brains instead of cars."

The first panel entitled "Future Leaders" featured a young and varied lineup of speakers who

decided to develop their talent, career or project in Košice. They talked about the limitations resulting from the conditions in their region but also the hidden advantages which can be exploited if one adopts the right perspective.



**We should be selling brains instead of cars.**

RUDOLF SCHUSTER,  
former President of the  
Slovak Republic

The second panel "R&D Made in Eastern Slovakia" shifted the attention to companies which have taken on the challenging task of basing their research and development activities in the region. Once again, the R&D challenges faced by companies in the Eastern Slovakia were put into European context thanks to the presence of Ludmila Majláthová, Economic Counselor, European Commission. R&D and innovation will be among EU's top priorities for the upcoming budgeting period, which still doesn't guarantee its success. Currently, Europe remains very strong in research but lags behind considerably when it comes to groundbreaking disruptive innovations. In Slovakia, a lack of

innovations is particularly evident in the SME sector. Financial support is available even now but its vast majority remains unused and thus wasted. One of the main reasons is a very weak link between research and its practical application in business.

"Start small, think big" was the subtitle of the last panel discussion which featured representatives of big corporations who stressed the importance of focusing on smaller steps to achieve real results in the long run. Ivan Radvák, Business Owner IT, T-Systems Slovakia, described their own hackathon experience and the lessons he has learned along the way. He also stressed that corporations must learn to use a different lens when evaluating innovative ideas. Zsuzsa Makara, Startup Team CEE, Microsoft, talked about how corporations can help startups in the most meaningful and useful way. In case of Microsoft this translates into providing contacts and opening doors to other businesses as well as expertise in specific domains such as sales or marketing.

A very inspiring presentation regarding Košice's potential to build a local innovation ecosystem was delivered by Peter Kolesár, CEO, CIVITTA. He used the example of two cities sharing many similarities with Košice - Brno in the Czech Republic and the Estonian city Tartu - to demonstrate the key factors of a functional innovative ecosystem. The story of Brno



**GABRIEL GALGÓCI**  
President of AmCham Slovakia

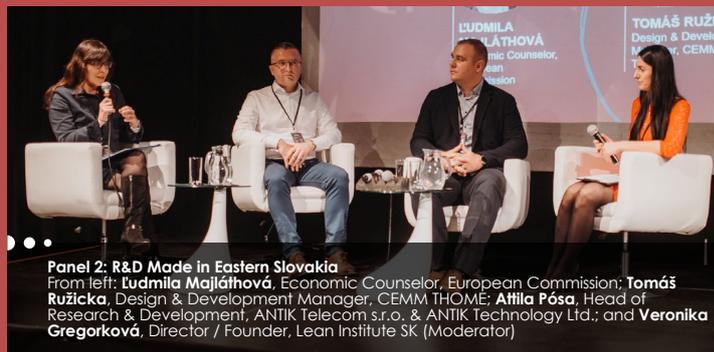


**RUDOLF SCHUSTER**  
President



**Panel 1: FUTURE LEADERS**

From left: **Zuzana Eperješiová** (Skyva), PhD. Student, UPJŠ / Singer, Song-writer, Pianist; **Adam Nedoroščík**, Representative, Youth council of Košice region; **Patrik Čizmadia**, Student, Co-owner of Zlatý štrapeč; **Erik Kajati**, Co-founder, CHECKUP & PhD. Candidate, Technical University of Košice; and **Martin Mudrák**, Director of Košice Office, AmCham Slovakia (Moderator)



**Panel 2: R&D Made in Eastern Slovakia**

From left: **Ludmila Majláthová**, Economic Counselor, European Commission; **Tomáš Ružička**, Design & Development Manager, CEMM THOME; **Ahilia Pósa**, Head of Research & Development, ANTIK Telecom s.r.o. & ANTIK Technology Ltd.; and **Veronika Gregorková**, Director / Founder, Lean Institute SK (Moderator)

showed how a decision made at a time when the city was in a difficult situation has led to the creation of an interconnected innovative ecosystem and an economy resilient to shocks coming from the outside. JIC - the core of this ecosystem - is a public institution, which provides an efficient platform for consulting, connecting, financing and infrastructure.

destination not only to do business but also to live. Several positive examples present or mentioned at the conference serve as good examples. It is now up to the participants and all the relevant stakeholders to join forces and help create conditions which could turn these positive examples from rare exceptions to the building blocks of a functional innovation ecosystem.

It is the local university which is at the heart of the innovative ecosystem in Tartu. A strong community built around it with several inspirational success stories created conditions and the drive which enable innovation to thrive. As Peter Kolesár pointed out, Košice can and should look to these cities for inspiration, but ultimately it needs to find its own path. He hinted at the city's potential to build on its existing strengths - the possibility to connect the creative industry developed during 2013 when the city was the European Capital of Culture with its traditionally strong heavy industry as well as the recently developed IT sector. However, a successful transformation towards an innovative ecosystem of the region is not possible without active support from the local and regional government.

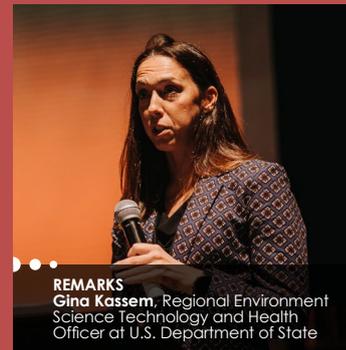
The East Innovation conference clearly showed that Eastern Slovakia has all the ingredients necessary to vastly increase its innovation potential and become an attractive



**REMARKS**  
**Július Oboril**, Cognitive Process Transformation Leader, IBM Slovakia



**TED TALK**  
**Peter Kolesár**, CEO, CIVITTA



**REMARKS**  
**Gina Kassem**, Regional Environment Science Technology and Health Officer at U.S. Department of State



**Panel 3: START Small - THINK Big - INNOVATE Fast**

From left: **Ivan Radvák**, Business Owner IT, T-Systems Slovakia; **Zsuzsa Makara**, Startup Team CEE, Microsoft; **Matúš Kirchmayer**, Founder / CEO, Matsuko; and **Mary MacPherson**, President & CEO, Slovak-American Foundation (Moderator)

The conference was followed by a special **pre-election debate** featuring representatives of the main political parties in Slovakia who came to share their visions for the region of Eastern Slovakia. Before the upcoming elections, it was very interesting to listen to their proposals regarding the possible solutions to regional brain drain, or a closer cooperation between regional authorities and businesses.



**Pre-Election Debate in Košice**

From left: **Richard Sulík**, SaS; **Adrianna Gergely Papp**, SMK; **Michal Goriščák**, Most-Híd; **Edvard Heger**, OĽaNO; **Stefan Holy**, Sme rodina; **Milan Majerský**, KDH; **Miroslav Beblavý**, PS / Spolu; **Vladimír Ledecký**, Za ľudí; and **Zuzana Podracká**, Research Fellow, GLOBSEC (Moderator)