



AmCham's active presence in Košice and the entire region of Eastern Slovakia dates back to 2003 when it opened its Košice office. The recent 15th anniversary of this event served as an ideal opportunity to reflect on what has been accomplished during this period, but, above all, to focus on the future of this region.

Two roundtable discussions with all the relevant stakeholders were organized to discuss the specific issues the region of Eastern Slovakia faces. AmCham strongly believes that the key to unlocking the potential of this region lies in establishing meaningful collaborations and in focusing on innovations. This belief fueled the creation of a new conference entitled East Innovation, with the first installment taking place on November 14 in Košice's DoubleTree by Hilton.

After the conference was opened by AmCham's Executive Director Ronald Blaško, the first speakers on the stage were symbolically Milan Majerský, President of the Prešov Self-governing

Region, and Rastislav Trnka, President of the Košice Self-governing Region.

Why do Slovaks hesitate to return back home? It is the overall political atmosphere, lack of exciting work opportunities and services such as education or health that influence their decision.

BRANISLAV KLESKEŇ,
CEO, Leaf

Mr. Majerský pointed out that although as a whole the Slovak economy is performing excep-

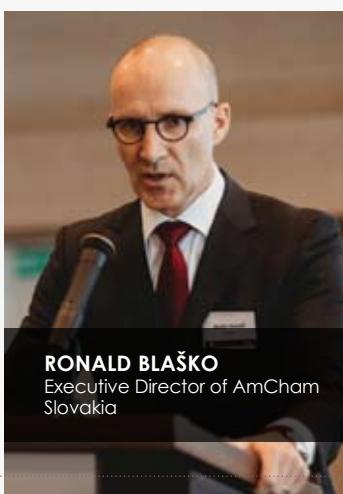


tionally well, the statistics at the country level cover up considerable regional differences. Mr. Trnka suggested that it would be a good idea to reconsider the philosophy of state aid to investors in the regions. A different strategy focusing more on smaller local businesses with bigger added value for the region could be more beneficial.

Both of the presidents agreed that the key to success lies in closer cooperation between various stakeholders. This is the vision they would like to see realized in their regions in the years to come. As a concrete example of this approach, Prešov and Košice

regions are already preparing a harmonized integrated transport infrastructure, which will include buses, trains and internal city transportation of both cities with the goal of improving mobility.

Two opening presentations which followed dealt with innovative disruptive business solutions from the perspective of big companies, but also with the question of how to finance them. Peter Kolesár, CEO, Neulogy, described the dramatic changes in various business sectors which disrupt the business models of established companies and create new opportunities for more flexible startups and smaller businesses



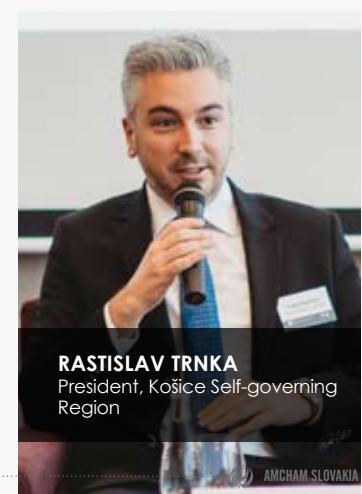
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Executive Director of AmCham Slovakia



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Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia



MILAN MAJERSKÝ
President, Prešov Self-governing Region



RASTISLAV TRNKA
President, Košice Self-governing Region

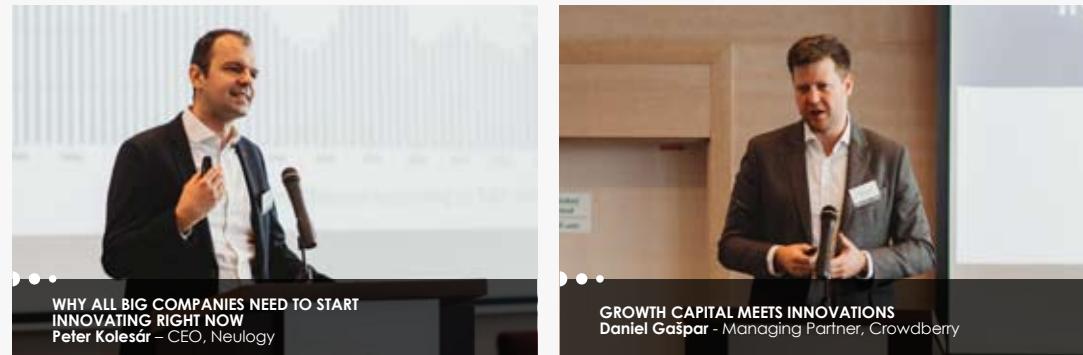


looking to fill the gaps with new innovations. Big companies need to understand these changes as soon as possible and focus more of their energy and resources on innovations in order to stay competitive.

In his presentation entitled "Growth Capital Meets Innovations" Daniel Gašpar, Managing Partner, Crowdberry, talked about the potential of crowdfunding when it comes to finding the capital necessary for further growth. This option presents a very interesting solution specifically for regional SMEs looking to finance their growth and gain some added value in the form of knowledgeable investors.

The first of two discussion panels moderated by Martin Mudrák, Director of AmCham's Košice Office, focused on smart solutions for regions, especially on the possibilities of successful cooperation between the public and the private sector. The panelists discussed the most meaningful improvements in the education field at various levels, for example the growing need of an international school in Košice. The concept of smart regions as discussed is above all about finding ways to improve the living conditions in the regions and making them more attractive especially for the younger generation. Michal Hladký, Director, Creative Industry Košice, stressed the importance of art and creativity for the overall quality of life in the city, as well as for less obvious overlaps into the business world.

After a short coffee break, Oto Pisoň, Senior Consultant, SARIO offered an overview of the services currently offered by SARIO to foreign investors as well as some interesting information about the added value of some of the bigger investment projects. The second discussion panel addressed perhaps the biggest issue currently troubling the business sector in the East of Slovakia - lack of qualified people. Whether you talk about brain drain, insuf-



ficiently prepared graduates, the inability to attract foreign workers or to motivate qualified Slovaks to return from abroad, it all boils down to this single issue - many businesses in the region cannot fulfill their growth potential because they are unable to find a sufficient number of qualified people to fill the new positions.

As Branislav Kleskeň, CEO, Leaf, pointed out, only specific interesting opportunities back at home can motivate those working abroad to come back. To achieve this, Leaf approached companies to create positions which are interesting for specific candidates at a personal level.

It was obvious that most of the discussed problems were linked and all the potential solutions seemed to revolve around the need to improve the quality of life in the region. Of course, this is a rather vague statement, but this conference generated numerous concrete steps which



pave the path to this ultimate goal. As Ronald Blaško, Executive Director of AmCham Slovakia stated at the very beginning of the conference, the fulfillment of this goal requires the coordination of all relevant stakeholders, who are able to agree on common priorities and a shared vision for the region. AmCham will do its best to contribute to this effort...

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