

Our education system needs fixing



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EMPLOYMENT

Since 1984

- Associate Professor, Technical University of Košice

Since 2009

- CISCO Networking Academy Program Manager

EDUCATION

- Technical University of Košice
- Saint Petersburg State Electrotechnical University

The vision of the AmCham FDI Strategy, presented to Slovak political parties in December 2011, urged AmCham members to focus on Education in 2012. Our aspiration is that Slovakia becomes the premium FDI destination in Europe for international companies by 2020. One of the recommended steps was to INVEST IN EDUCATION.

The highlight of the “2012: The Year of Education” initiative was a public discussion forum on the future of education in Slovakia. The year’s initiative was to find answers to questions on what should be changed and why, and how to make education society’s priority, to make teaching a prestigious profession, and to substantially improve graduates’ employment prospects. More than

The key objective of AmCham’s “2012: The Year of Education” initiative was to link education with the needs of employers in order to boost the employment prospects of graduates in the Slovak labor market. This initiative was conceived by the members of the AmCham Committee on Business-Academic Cooperation and a group of experts from schools and universities.

70 solutions grouped in 17 areas can be found at www.amcham.sk (past events / education conference 2012 / brochure). We also believe that R&D and support of innovation, start ups, and the university departments which produce quality graduations are also very important.

Why did you accept the request to be the AmCham Leader for “2012: The Year of Education”?

Perhaps it will sound like a “cliché,” but I agreed to become the leader of this initiative because I truly care about the future of this beautiful country. I have spent over 30 years in various positions in the academic sphere. I am convinced that the education system should prepare graduates for the expectations of society in the best way possible. It is necessary to critically admit that, according to general opinion, our educational system does not fulfill the expectations of our society; it is broken and needs to be fixed. That is why I decided to use my experience and contribute to this healing process – the reform of the Slovak education system and its effective connection with labor market requirements. That is why I welcomed this offer from AmCham.

What do you think this yearlong initiative has brought? What

changes in education have you seen as a result of this initiative?

I do not think it’s possible to name specific changes that this initiative has generated. But I dare say that the initiative has at least launched a public debate on important issues, such as the quality of teachers, the attractiveness of the teaching profession, the accreditation process, the creation of an inclusive education system, the establishing of an apolitical professional institute for analysis and forecast of the development of society and economy, the employability of university graduates, the monitoring of quality, the effective management of universities, the lack of motivation of university teaching staff, and the collaboration between business and universities. I am convinced that the solutions and recommendations we have proposed will more effectively link education with the needs of the labor market.

In your opinion, which of the proposed solutions should be addressed as priority?

In my opinion, the issues concerning people who provide education – the teachers – are priority. There is a crucial need to invest more in educating teachers, along with an improvement of their remuneration at every level, from educa-

tion in early childhood up to the university. At the same time it is necessary to rethink the system of remuneration, which will consider mainly the quality of work (that the credit system of education cannot capture). Without this investment, education reform will not be successful.

In terms of education reform, where do you see Slovakia heading at the moment?

Slovakia is “waking up,” but only slowly. This is something I do not understand: even though there is no need to convince anyone that education is the key to future development of our society, the changes are happening very slowly. State authorities need to move from declarative interest in education to the implementation of strategic reform objectives. This may be painful or detrimental to other areas of the national economy but it cannot be avoided. We cannot equally support and develop all areas; we do not have the means or capacity to do so. I highly commend the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic for their report on the state of the education system in Slovakia. The document outlines the specific steps necessary to improve the current situation, which include a sufficiently funded and effectively running education system with a system to support quality. However, despite the fact that this document is very well structured and truly covers most problematic areas, the majority of the proposed measures are too general. It lacks a clear definition of the necessary inputs, time schedules, and those responsible for the implementation of corrective actions. However it is clear that the first steps towards the reform have been made.

