

The Rule of Law Initiative: on the right path but still a long way to go

One of AmCham's key initiatives of 2015 focused on strengthening the rule of law in Slovakia, with the aim of making the local business environment more transparent, predictable and competitive, and to positively impact Slovakia's image abroad. The Initiative introduced its proposal to leading public officials in February 2015. To summarize the Initiative's yearly progress, Igor Kottman, AmCham's President, talked to us about its recent achievements as well as further plans.

What were the reasons for AmCham to launch the Rule of Law Initiative?

The business community associated in AmCham is concerned about Slovakia's image of a country with a legislative process that lacks transparency and predictability; a high level of corruption and its tolerance, as documented by various rankings; and the worsening state of the judiciary. All of these areas have a negative impact on Slovakia's competitiveness and economy, and thereby also on the standard of living. As a result, AmCham felt a need to reach out to other relevant stakeholders and suggested creating a grand coalition of key actors from the business community for strengthening the rule of law in Slovakia.

What are the main issues that this Initiative aims to address?

Our activities focus on three main areas: Transparency and Predictability of the Legislative Process, Corruption as a Negative and Harmful Feature for "Brand Slovakia", and Transparent and Efficient Judiciary as a Key Feature for Potential Investors.

What has the Initiative achieved since its establishment?

Earlier in 2014, we established three working groups with experts from the member organizations of the Initiative, each focused on one of the previously mentioned key areas of our activities. They developed recommendations which we presented to the Prime Minister and the government as

well as the National Council and the President in February of 2015. We welcomed the government's intention to adopt an Action plan on strengthening the rule of law in Slovakia, which was, to a certain extent, a response to our Initiative. Since February we've held several discussions on both executive and expert level with relevant public institutions and we've addressed our feedback to several draft versions of the Action plan. The government finally approved the Action Plan on July 8. It includes several useful steps that might improve the legislative process and reduce inefficiencies in the judiciary system. However, many of the recommendations are rather general and still require identification of specific steps and measures that need to be taken as well as clear objectives and measurable indicators for their evaluation.

As you said, the governmental Action Plan is just the first step. What is the current role of the business community associated in the Initiative?

We welcome the declaration of the government but what is more important is the actual implementation. During the preparation process we urged the government not to postpone the adoption of the plan due to the upcoming election year which obviously means shortened time for implementing the adopted measures. Once the Action plan has been adopted we should closely monitor and regularly evaluate its implementation. The government

plans to present the first results achieved since the adoption of the Action plan in February 2015. Our role now is just as important as before, because strengthening the rule of law and improving the business environment are of paramount importance for all of the involved stakeholders.

The parliamentary elections are approaching. What are the expectations of the wider business community associated in the Initiative?

We realize strengthening the rule of law is not a simple process and it is definitely not a short-term activity. We hope the new government will acknowledge that issues such as eliminating corruption or making the judiciary more effective should be among its priorities. Therefore, in December 2015, we addressed an open call to all relevant political parties that are most likely to be represented in the National Council after the upcoming elections. We sent them a letter asking them three direct questions:

1. What measures are you going to adopt to make the legislative process more inclusive and transparent?
2. How are you going to decrease the level of corruption?
3. What are you going to do to make the judiciary more efficient?

We want to know from parties across the political spectrum what their plans are for improving the rule of law in Slovakia. What we would like to hear from



IGOR KOTTMAN
President of AmCham
Slovakia (2010 - 2015)



them are concrete but realistic measures they would be willing to adopt should they be part of the new government. The Initiative also invited representatives of the relevant political parties for a public event taking place on February 4, 2016. This will give our member companies the chance to ask questions and discuss their views directly with politicians. Professional and open dialogue between the business community and political leaders is the key to a stable business environment.

What are your expectations of the new government?

No matter which parties will be part of the newly formed government, we would like to see strengthening the rule of law as one of its main priorities and also incorporated in the official government program. Slovakia needs to improve its business environment and the business community supporting the Initiative is willing to continue in a constructive dialogue with the new government in order to ensure much needed improvements.



More information about
Rule of Law initiative
can be found at
www.vladazakona.sk