

A consistent voice of the Slovak business community

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The main mission of AmCham Slovakia is to serve as the voice of the local business community and to work relentlessly on improving the business environment in Slovakia. In order to represent the business community, one must know its concerns and struggles, and be familiar with the conditions it exists in, as well as with its dreams and ambitions. In short, it is necessary to be part of that community.

By being in touch with our member companies through the vast variety of our activities on a regular basis for over two decades, we hope that we are not too assumptive in considering AmCham a stable part of this community. In order to maintain this position, each year we do our best to pay special attention and focus to topics which are most likely to shape the business environment in Slovakia.

AmCham's goals for 2016 reflect the most important events awaiting Slovakia during the year, as well as trends and topics which we have identified as crucial in the long-term. These considerations resulted in AmCham's 2016 "e-Year", about which you can read in more detail on page 7 of this issue.

Of course, the most important event awaiting Slovakia in the second half of the year is the opportunity to preside over the Council of the European Union. The EU presidency puts Slovakia in the spotlight for six months. The way this responsibility will be handled is of critical importance. The first version of the strategic priorities of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU was approved by the

Slovak Government on February 26, 2016. These priorities are in line with the Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change, which identifies EU's key priorities on a larger scale.

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AmCham is already active in several areas identified by this document and we hope to increase our involvement over the upcoming months. This is especially true when it comes to goals grouped in the first (A Union of Jobs, Growth and Competitiveness) and third (Towards an Energy Union with a Forward-looking Climate Policy) pillars of EU's Strategic Agenda. Several of AmCham's events and activities from last year addressed issues related to the Digital Single Market, tax evasion, energy efficiency and competitiveness, or were directed at providing support for local SMEs and startups.

All of these topics are covered and closely followed by respective AmCham Committees, groups of experts from member companies working together to improve the conditions in their field of

business. The AmCham Digital Committee is a good example of AmCham's efforts to be involved in areas which matter the most. Launched in 2015, it was established in reaction to the growing importance of the digital agenda in Slovakia and at the European level.

The topics which currently shape the European agenda are traditionally addressed at AmCham's annual EU Conference, organized in cooperation with the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia. The two main panels of last year's conference were dedicated to the concept of the Energy Union and the Digital Agenda, and our members had the opportunity to receive first-hand information on the latest developments and plans from EU officials as well as representatives of the Slovak government and the business community.

At the domestic level, the Rule of Law Initiative remains AmCham's flagship activity. Several relevant milestones were achieved last year. In February of 2015, the recommendations developed by the Initiative were presented to the Prime Minister and the government, as well as the National Council and the President. The Action Plan on strengthening the rule of law in Slovakia, adopted by the government in July, was to a large degree inspired by these recommendations. The Initiative has attained the status of a relevant partner to the government and its representatives were invited by Prime Minister Fico to discuss the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan in January of this year.

In an effort to increase the pressure on the political elites, the Initiative's activities culminated in the 2016 Pre-Election Debate, which took place on February 4. The event featured representatives of all major political parties which accepted AmCham's invitation, who presented their opinions on how to increase the transparency and predictability of the legislative process, eliminate corruption and improve the efficiency and transparency of the judiciary.

It remains to be seen to what extent will the Initiative's recommendations be reflected in the program and activities of the new government. No matter what the result, AmCham will remain committed to advancing the rule of law in Slovakia and further steps are already planned for the upcoming months.

We value the confidence our members place in AmCham very much and we are fully committed to retaining the position of the "the voice of the business community" during 2016 as well.