


Why regions matter or how to make (East) Slovakia thrive again

by  **Marek Hrubčo**,
Policy Officer
(Košice Office),
AmCham Slovakia



The global economic environment has experienced a seismic shift caused by a tiny virus. A paradox in itself, demonstrating the complexities of the world we live in. Anybody still doubts that minor things can have a major impact? What are the key lessons from this crisis from regional perspective? And why regions matter, in the first place?

Slovak men and women have shown strength and determination in successfully weathering the pandemic. We saw businesses cooperating with their competitors, bold decisions taken by political leaders, remarkable mobilization of communities, teachers and students quickly embracing the online environment and heroic determination of health care workers on the front line. Together we were able to do things that we thought were never possible. All of this has brought great results: our country has been showcased by political leaders and global media as a model for success. This is something we can be proud of. But on top of that, a major takeaway for the difficult times ahead – together we are stronger.

Regional Capital: Cooperation is the key

The Košice branch of AmCham Slovakia is proud to have catalyzed a number of regional cooperative frameworks and initiatives over the past fifteen years of its presence in the region. Networking businesses with academia and the public sector, shaping clever policies as well as sharing knowledge among business leaders across multiple industries, is an integral part of AmCham's DNA. Thanks to our dedicated partners active in East Slovakia, we were able to become a platform of cooperation in four major areas – all of which constitute AmCham's Regional Pillar:

- Innovation Ecosystem
- Skill and Talent
- Mobility and Accessibility and
- Investment Potential

Future is bright: Focus on silver linings

But what does the future hold? What will East Slovakia look like in fifteen years? A simple answer would be: depends on what we – people who live and work in this part of the country – are going to make of it. The time has come to make East Slovakia thrive again. It is time for a fresh start. This is an opportunity to draw a line and start anew. We need new enthusiasm. We need to be realistic but at the same time focus on silver linings. As part of our NEXT 15 initiative, we will seek to work with stakeholders based in East Slovakia to make this region more competitive.

People of this country know they are good at making the most out of an array of rather coincidental circumstances to achieve one-off victories. Take a look at our past ice-hockey achievements, for instance. But how can we work towards a systemic transformation of mindsets to make this 'enthusiasm for cooperation' a standard so as to cope with what appears to be a long-term economic recession? Or, more importantly, how can we understand the difficult months ahead as an opportunity?

Academia: Knowledge is power

One can never overestimate the importance of academia in creating an innovative ecosystem. We have some big names on board already and we are eager to meet academic enthusiasts and clever students to develop intelligent visions and strategies for their cities and regions. We will also be looking into how we can

identify synergies between the regions of Košice and Prešov. East Slovakia needs an evolutionary leap toward knowledge economy and we need you – knowledgeable local men and women from the academic sector – to enable this region to take that leap.



The time has come to make East Slovakia thrive again. It is time for a fresh start.

Competitive regions: Business leaders sought

We are looking for engaged senior executives who understand long-term strategies and needs of their companies. We need their high-level strategic perspective on their businesses and the industry. Their contribution toward competitiveness of the region is crucial. We need leaders able to look beyond the walls of their individual firms to see how they impact and how they are impacted by the circumstances of the region. AmCham is proud to have some of these leaders on board.

Central government: New impetus

We need central and local governments to understand why regions matter. Regions matter

because that is the place to make economic decisions. It is the place where stakeholders have a very strong stake in the outcome. It is the place where they know what they are best at and how they can work together. When policy makers focus on regions and people who live there, they will end up with natural economic growth policies that will result in the wise use of those resources. Policies which will lead toward developed regions that provide interesting alternatives for those who may be living in the capital, but looking for alternatives.

Local governments: Town hall leaders sought

We seek regional and town hall leaders who think outside of the box. Leaders who are eager to go an extra mile for their cities and for the people they serve. Local government leaders are crucial to unleashing the immense potential of their regions. Our major cities need to have a vision. They should show imminent interest in exploiting the talents available in their regions. Cities have a huge stake in trying to reverse brain drain into brain gain. We need interactive town halls not afraid to team up with academia and socially responsible businesses.

What about AmCham's role in all of this? First of all, one personal remark. It is great to be on board of a ship with such a noble cause. I am sure AmCham's team will work hard to help regions address all the challenges they are facing. The vision of AmCham has, in a sense, materialized in the way our country handled the initial phase of the crisis. Now it is time to make things happen. And, more importantly, make them last long enough to weather the economic crisis and come out of it stronger.