

Slovak Presidency: a View from Brussels

by **Karl Cox**, Chair of the Board, American Chamber of Commerce to the European Union (AmCham EU)



BIOGRAPHY

Karl Cox is Oracle's Vice-President, Global Public Affairs. He leads Oracle's international public policy team engaging with governments and stakeholders across the globe. Before joining Oracle, he held a number of public affairs positions in the information technology industry over a period of 30 years in both Brussels and Paris. He holds many leadership positions in various industry and trade bodies at European level and is currently the Chairman of the Board of the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU. He's also a vice-chair of the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Migration. Mr. Cox is a graduate of the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium and the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

When Slovakia takes on the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 July, it will be doing so for the first time, just twelve years after its accession to the EU.

Slovakia will take the reins of the Council at a time when the EU is facing a number of critical challenges, notably on migration which remains a complex and difficult issue, and yet constitutes just one element of a wider issue of fragmentation in the Single Market. The Presidency also commences just days after the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership in the EU. The resulting modifications in the UK's relationship with the rest of the EU as a result of the referendum will need to be addressed under the Slovak presidency. Strong leadership and close cooperation among the Council members is needed.

I was delighted to join a delegation from the American Chamber of Commerce to the European Union (AmCham EU) who visited Bratislava from 25-27 May, during which we held a series of extremely constructive meetings with senior government officials, as well as local businesses and our colleagues at AmCham Slovakia. AmCham EU has also held a series of meetings with representatives of the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU in Brussels, and despite the difficult circumstances, we have all been greatly impressed by the professional preparations that have been underway for many months in both Bratislava and Brussels. I am very confident Slovakia can rise to the

challenges it will face during its six months of Presidency.

We have also been delighted to see that Slovakia intends to pursue a positive agenda which is extremely well-aligned with that of AmCham EU. A Single Market is of utmost importance to businesses of all sizes operating across borders in Europe, and it will be our key priority in the coming months to ensure the current challenges do not lead to its unraveling. We believe Slovakia's pledge to modernize and deepen the internal market is a crucial step towards greater competitiveness and prosperity by the end of 2016.

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In particular, we warmly welcome the Presidency's focus on the Energy Union and the Digital Single Market in their "year of delivery". Both

will be busy projects during the second half of the year, with a number of files already on the table and several still to come, and both have the potential to add billions of Euros to the European economy. We also share the Presidency's view that the European Commission's proposal for "Smart Borders" is a key dossier, especially in light of the issues on Europe's external borders.

At times like these, consumers and businesses need strong leadership, unity, and as Miroslav Lajčák, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, recently said, "European common sense and a joint European response." We look to the Slovak Presidency of the EU to broker this response in an effective and conciliatory way, and we are extremely confident that they will be able to do so.

As American businesses committed to and invested in Europe, we look forward to continuing to work and cooperate closely with the Slovak Presidency, as well as our colleagues at AmCham Slovakia, throughout the next six months and beyond.