

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AND CO-OPERATION

MANIFESTO OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
FOR THE PERIOD OF 2010 – 2014

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INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Article 113 of the Slovak Constitution, the Government of the Slovak Republic, which emerged from the parliamentary elections of 12 June 2010, hereby presents itself to the National Council of the Slovak Republic and to all citizens of the Slovak Republic with the following Government Manifesto.

In the recent past, the Slovak Republic adopted the euro and entered the Schengen area. The euro adoption represents an opportunity to grow faster and catch up with Western democracies. Yet, the experience shows that it is a process which takes time. Apart from having to put up with the objective impacts and consequences of the global economic downturn, Slovakia has gone through a period of decline in the credibility of its foreign policy, diminished competitiveness, rising corruption, ineffective spending and squandering of public funds, impaired quality of the business environment, feeble law enforcement, escalating social risks, rising unemployment and last, but not least, sinking political culture and mounting tensions.

Hence, the most important task of the Government is to take effective measures aimed at improving the quality of life and standard of living for all citizens. This goal can only be achieved if our economy is brought back on the path of growth and its competitiveness is restored. The creation of new jobs will be the most important indicator of success or failure of the Government's policies. The situation in this regard is bad, by no means solely as a consequence of the economic crisis. We need to resuscitate economic growth to be both robust and sustainable so as to create new jobs. To this end, it is of paramount importance for the Government:

- to make public finances sound and sustainable, halt the soaring government debt, and progressively reduce the public finance deficit;
- to improve the overall business environment, which has been steadily deteriorating in the past four years, in order to facilitate further inflow of investments into the economy and stimulate employment;
- to remove barriers which impede employment growth, for example by reducing the overall tax wedge, and to introduce flexible forms of employment in particular for less qualified workers and intermediate labour market;
- to address new social risks – the so-called ‘working poor’, ageing in poverty and the situation where education no longer provides sufficient protection against the threat of low pay or joblessness; the current welfare state is failing to address these acute social risks;
- to support education, science and research so as to improve their ebbing quality (the Government considers this area to be of key importance to ensuring sustainable economic growth and employment in the future);
- to significantly improve law enforcement and the fight against corruption, and rigorously respect the basic rights and freedoms of citizens, including those belonging to national minorities.

Naturally, any human activity and endeavour is primarily motivated by the satisfaction which they bring to our private lives, families and friends. People perceive and assess their country based on the conditions it creates, or enables them to create, to make their life better. Income from work, good family life, success of our children and good health bring composure to our minds. While the theme of European integration and the reform effort dominated in the past, the quality of our citizens' everyday life is now the key theme for the Government. We want the debate in society and our political endeavour to focus on the problems which an ordinary middle class citizen is confronted with every day. The time has come for those who work honestly and have patiently carried the burden of reforms to have the certainty of decent pay for work so that they can support their families, certainty of access to modern healthcare, certainty of access to quality education for their children, and no uncertainty about the future of their pensions. In other words, we need to make sure that all those things which are normally taken for granted are indeed granted.

The Government of the Slovak Republic takes the mandate it has received from the citizens in all seriousness. It is submitting a programme designed to help solve the problems of Slovakia and its citizens. The Government will welcome any economic and civic activity aimed at making Slovakia a better home for all.

Slovakia has a bitter experience from the totalitarian period when people were deprived of freedom and were forced to live under an undemocratic regime which disregarded their most fundamental human rights and freedoms and trampled their human dignity. The Government supports fair ways of coming to terms with this legacy. It will support awareness building and education of the civil society, the youth in particular, of our totalitarian past. It will support the institutions which study and analyse the causes and consequences of the loss of freedom, for memory and identity are intertwined.

1. DEMOCRATIC STATE

The Government understands that the confidence of citizens in politics and politicians is low. The objective of the Government is to restore public trust in politicians and the political system. The Government will therefore establish a new political culture and ethics and will insist that public institutions act at all times in the public interest and that any conduct in conflict with the public interest is minimised and sanctioned.

To this end, the Government will present a bill to significantly limit the degree of immunity enjoyed by members of parliament and other constitutional figures, including judges. Parliamentary immunity will be restricted solely to MPs' statements in parliament. All constitutional representatives, judges included, will thus enjoy equal status and protection. The Government will propose that immunity from sanctions for minor offences be abolished completely.

The Government will also propose a bill amending the constitutional act on the conflict of interests in order to enable effective control of its compliance; the personal financial disclosures filed by public officials have so far failed to provide an accurate picture of their personal finances. The objective of the Government is to enable the public to check whether the increments in the net worth of public officials are commensurate to their income from public office. The Government will seek full publication of such personal financial disclosures.

The Government will also consider the possibility of enacting a law on the financial liability of public officials.

The Government is aware of the fact that an open approach by public institutions towards citizens will be essential in the effort to build citizens' confidence in the state and its institutions. The Government will therefore pursue the policy of maximum transparency in the conduct of public authorities and institutions so that the "what is not classified is public" principle (based on which the 2001 law on free access to information was adopted) is respected in practice. The Government will put through a bill extending the scope of the Act on Free Access to Information in order to encompass all public sector entities.

The Government understands that an effective fight against corruption requires the thorough elimination of opportunities for corruption and, at the same time, enhanced effectiveness of sanctions.

Opportunities for corruption exist across all sectors of public administration, particularly those dealing, in one way or another, with the assets of the state, public institutions and local governments, with government subsidies, specifically subsidies and resources provided from EU funds, as well as in public procurement. The Government believes the following universal tools are capable of narrowing the opportunity for corruption:

- Clear rules communicated in advance;
- Decision-taking based on objective criteria (limitation of subjective decisions);
- Transparent decision-making processes enabling public scrutiny (access to information, publication of information).

In all transactions involving the assets of the state, public institutions or local governments, the Government will insist on competitive forms of bidding (public tenders,

auctions). Any transaction in public assets must be open to public scrutiny, regardless of whether the state sells or leases its assets or procures goods or services.

The Government will publicise, via the Internet, all contracts, invoices and financial transactions involving public funds as a precondition for such contracts and transactions to take effect. The Government will also publicise those commercial contracts from the past where the state, public authorities or companies wholly owned by the state act as parties.

The Government will also ensure that all subsidies and contributions (other than those disbursed to statutory beneficiaries) provided from public funds are publicised on the Internet and will introduce a competitive element into the process of their granting.

The Government will put through a fundamental reform of public procurement. The Government will mandate the use of competitive methods of public procurement, also in situations where it is not currently mandatory (non-priority services) and will introduce more stringent conditions for the below-threshold method of procurement. The Government will insist on the use of electronic auctions as a mandatory form of procurement wherever possible. The Government will abolish the possibility of disqualifying bidders on the grounds of formal deficiencies and will restrict or eliminate the use of the “unusually low price” criterion as a pretext for disqualification; the Government will put through a bill banning any possibility to sign addendums to contracts which materially alter the originally agreed contractual terms or price. In order to increase the transparency of public procurement, the Government will enhance the functionality of the central electronic journal of public procurement so as to enable anyone to look up all ‘live’ contracts based on various search criteria, and will instruct all public organisations to publish in the electronic journal all calls for tenders, all bids (including non-winning bids), and all opinions and decisions taken by tender commissions, including their substantiation. The Government will introduce the obligation to announce all public tenders sufficiently ahead the actual publication of the call for bids, as well as the obligation to publish final reports.

The Government will introduce an obligation to publicise economic analyses drawn up in respect of the procured goods and services in order to eliminate overpriced purchases from public funds.

The Government will revise the system of state administration in order to identify unnecessary components, and will audit and restructure central authorities and other bodies of state administration. The Government will transfer responsibility for public policy from other central authorities and public bodies directly onto ministries and will take measures designed to improve the quality of their performance. It will slim down its own processes and make Government sessions more efficient. The Government will introduce a principle based on which whenever a public authority fails to respect a particular time limit, the citizen will be entitled to recover the fees he or she has paid. The Government will consider the possibility of adopting a law on the financial responsibility of elected officials.

The Government is interested in creating conditions conducive to strengthening the independence of control at the local government level.

The Government will strive to reduce the degree of corporatism.

The Government will propose a constitutional act designed to quash the effects of the 1998 amnesties declared by the then-acting president, which foiled proper investigation and fair prosecution of the criminal offences committed in connection with the abduction of a Slovak citizen abroad.

2. PROSPEROUS STATE

2.1 ECONOMIC POLICY

The economic policy of the Government will be based on the principles of economic freedom and equal opportunities. It will also be based on such solidarity that does not stimulate dependence and abuse, but builds on targeted and efficient assistance to those who are at an objective disadvantage, unable to help themselves. The economic policy based on these principles will be able to gradually transform Slovakia into a modern, developed country building on positive values and traditions, yet open to new experiences and solutions tried and tested in other, successful countries. The Government will not copy any socio-economic model of another country; it will, however, look for inspiration in countries that were able to achieve fast and sustainable success in specific areas.

It is of key importance for the Government to create conditions to improve the quality of life. It will thus build a lean and modern state providing high quality services to its citizens. Further streamlining of the state will be combined with a restructuring of public administration, allowing for a higher quality of services to people while reducing the share of public expenditure of the GDP.

The economic policy will create conditions for faster and sustainable economic growth in stiffer global competition. Such growth is not an end in itself and is not the ultimate goal; however, it is necessary in order to improve the quality of life of Slovak citizens, to increase living standards and employment rates, to balance out regional differences and to deal with other pressing issues.

Within the EU, the Government will support measures that will speed up the creation and liberalisation of the European Single Market; however, it will act against growing European regulation and bureaucracy. The Government clearly supports the preservation of Member States' sovereignty in economic and social policies, where it does not clearly conflict with the needs of the single market. It will, however, fully support European policies and instruments promoting the long-term sustainability of public finance and responsible economic policies in EU Member States, such as the Stability and Growth Pact.

In order to achieve sustainable success, it is vital for Slovakia's economy to depend less on cheap labour and develop towards an economy based more and more on the skills and knowledge of our people. The concept-oriented development of a knowledge-based economy requires a systemic, coordinated and intertwined approach of all sectors directly involved in its formation. The main sectors concerned are the Ministry of Education (education, research and development), Ministry of Economy (research, development and innovation), Ministry of Finance (capital market and informatisation of public administration) and Ministry of Transport, Post and Telecommunications (information and communication infrastructure). The missing coordination of these efforts at the governmental level has been one of the main reasons for the slow progress in developing a knowledge-based economy in Slovakia.

Public finance

The Government considers a responsible budgetary policy and a significant reduction in the current public deficit as the main precondition for successful economic development and sustainable growth in the standard of living in Slovakia. This also applies to the obligation to address the consequences of an ageing population, which Slovakia is facing in the coming decades. The fundamental goal of the Government is to reduce the public deficit

to below 3% of GDP by 2013 in order to meet Slovakia's obligations resulting from the EU's Stability and Growth Pact. The Government will adopt most measures needed to reduce the public deficit to take effect as of 2011. The deficit will be reduced gradually and the Government will aim to achieve a balanced budget in the medium term. The Government will submit to the National Council a draft constitutional law stipulating a fiscal rule for the gross public deficit.

It is vital for Slovakia to stop incurring debts that will have to be repaid by generations to come. A significant reduction in the public deficit will allow the Government to begin reducing the share of the public deficit of the GDP at the end of its term in office. This is the only way towards preserving the credibility of Slovakia on the financial markets at present, as well as towards preparing our country for the period beyond 2020, when the number and share of older people in total population will grow sharply.

In order to reduce the deficit, the Government will implement measures on both the revenue and the expenditure sides of public finance. Revenue-side measures will focus on stabilising the share of revenue in the GDP, which is decreasing. Expenditure-side measures will focus on reducing their share. Reducing the share of public expenditure will be accompanied by an increased efficiency in the use of public funds and by stemming corruption.

The Government will reinstate order in public finance. It will submit to the National Council a draft constitutional law on budgetary responsibility (the so-called budgetary constitution), which will stipulate clear rules for budgetary discipline and transparency in public finance. The aim of this draft will be to prevent future Governments from misleading citizens about the real development of public finance. The Government will implement binding expenditure ceilings, thus forcing all Governments to decide on how the set amount of funds should be allocated to individual priority areas. It will create a lean independent institution that will monitor the development of public finance and inform the public at regular intervals. This institution will be headed by independent experts who will not succumb to the pressure of anyone, even the most popular government. At the EU level, the Government will seek significant reinforcement of European budgetary rules – the Stability and Growth Pact, while the changes must include a clear mechanism for the regulated bankruptcy of a country perpetuating irresponsible budgetary policies, and other mechanisms to efficiently enforce the approved rules.

The Government will substantially enhance the transparency of public finance. The state budget will include all relevant information in an accessible manner, in order for the people to be clearly informed about the use of public funds. The Government will stipulate by law what information related to the public budget and the state final financial statement will always have to be provided to the general public, regardless of whether the government likes it or not. The same will apply to information pertaining to the implementation of the budget in the course of the year and the publication of macroeconomic and tax projections. The Government will closely monitor the net wealth of the Slovak Republic, i.e., the difference between total assets and liabilities of the state. These and other steps will increase the participation and control by the general public in the process of public budget creation.

The Government will introduce rules restricting the adoption of legislative and other proposals whose impact on public finance is not covered. The Government and the Parliament should adopt proposals with a negative impact on public finance in a period where the budget has already been approved, but only if these are accompanied by compensatory measures of an at least equal extent.

The Government will adjust more precisely the budgetary rules of municipalities, towns and regions, which after extensive fiscal decentralisation have substantial financial resources available. The experience of several years shows that it is necessary to improve the

rules applicable to the local self-governments' possibilities to incur debt. The possibility of local self-governments to increase their indebtedness will be restricted and rules applicable to the bankruptcy of irresponsible local self-governments will also be adjusted.

The Government will abide by the rule that decisions on large investment projects will be taken only on the basis of clear and published analyses. The publication of economic analyses, comprehensible and accessible to the general public, will be a condition for the Government or the Parliament to approve proposals with significant financial impact.

The Government will enhance the efficient use of budget programming at the level of central government and local self-governments and will abide by it more strictly; it will finalise the system of public reporting and accounting using international standards.

The Government intends to improve the quality of work of the Debt and Liquidity Management Agency and the State Treasury. Both institutions have substantially contributed to an improvement in the process of public finance management.

The Government will use the experience with using EU funds in order to simplify the entire system, to make it more flexible and to speed up the drawing of EU funds, while intending to increase transparency and thus reducing the risk of abuse of these funds.

The Government will carry out a thorough stock-taking of state assets, and implement a system for asset management to increase efficiency and transparency. Excessive assets will be sold off by means of electronic auctions. The Government will establish rules to enhance the efficiency of companies with a stake held by the state and so-called institutions under public law, including instruments to ensure financial discipline and sanctions if it is not respected. It will substantially enhance the efficiency of collecting accounts receivables owed to the state by applying a coordinated procedure under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance.

The Government will thoroughly re-evaluate the admissibility of expenditures incurred by individual entities of public administration. The Fund of National Property will cease to exist.

Taxes and contributions

It is a priority of the Government to preserve an efficient, simple and neutral taxation system. Changes to the taxation system will be aimed at improving its efficiency and at stabilising the share of tax and contribution revenues of the GDP, while consideration will be given to the competitiveness and attractiveness of the taxation system in the European context.

The Government will preserve the flat income tax and will not increase the tax rate. A potential increase in the VAT rate must be accompanied by a cancellation or reduction of some contributions to social or health insurance. The Government will carry out an audit of existing exceptions in the Income Tax Law and other tax laws in order to substantially decrease their number.

The Government will not give its consent to European tax harmonisation in the area of income tax. It will consider the possibility of reducing tax on diesel fuel to the minimum rate required by the EU and the possibility of applying corporate income tax on holdings. It will review the possibilities of introducing further simplification in indirect taxation and customs duties and the collection thereof, as admissible according to EU legislation, in order to strengthen the competitiveness of Slovakia within the EU. The Government will adopt efficient measures to stem tax evasion and tax crimes, in particular related to VAT and excise duties.

The Government will implement a system of unequivocal, relevant and early interpretation of laws pertaining to tax and contribution obligations.

The Government will implement a fundamental reform and simplification of the contributions system in order to render the system more efficient. It will transfer the obligation to pay contributions upon the employee and will introduce the “super-gross” wage with the respective increase in the gross wage. It will introduce the contribution bonus, provided it respects fiscal neutrality and takes into account the impact on marginalised groups.

The Government will unify the collection of taxes and customs duties and also, in the follow up, the collection of contributions, to be covered by one-stop shops, reforming of current tax offices, and introduction of a unified annual settlement of taxes and contributions. It will simplify tax forms and other reporting forms and reduce the number of various forms and reports. It will evaluate the introduction of a registry of annual financial statements, so that accounting entities would not have to present their statements to several state authorities.

The Government will create an informatised tax administration based on electronic communication, thus reducing the administrative burden on taxpayers and substantially simplifying their obligations.

The Government considers fees paid for public TV and radio broadcasting an anti-social tax, because their rate does not depend on the income or social situation of citizens. Every citizen pays the same amount every month. The Government will therefore abolish these fees and replace them with direct funding from the state budget.

It will extend the eligibility for state bonuses granted on mortgage loans for young people. It will increase the tax bonus for each child up to the age of six years by 100%, depending on the capacity of public finance and the reform of contributions.

The Government will enhance the efficiency of local tax systems and will create preconditions to strengthen own revenues of local self-governments. Together with the strengthening of fiscal autonomy of local self-governments, the Government will strive to introduce measures preventing local self-governments from abusing their powers for the benefit of or to the disadvantage of certain people or companies. It will reduce the ceiling for a possible estate tax increase from twenty times to five times the lowest annual tax rate.

The Government will simplify the system of fees. It will abolish administrative stamps and will introduce the obligation for any office to accept smaller payments in cash and higher amounts by debit cards or bank transfers.

In the area of gambling, the legal status applicable before 2009 will be reinstated.

2.2 BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

In recent years, Slovakia witnessed clear signs of decreasing quality in the business environment, reflected, e.g. in the evaluation report of the World Bank or the World Economic Forum. Slovakia lost its leading position among the Visegrad Four countries. Thus, by improving the conditions for entrepreneurial activities, the Government will endeavour to return to the success achieved in 2005, when the World Bank marked Slovakia as a leader among the ten most reform-oriented countries. In reaction to the negative development, the Government will exercise pressure on public administration to create optimal conditions for business and to bring Slovakia back to the leading position.

The Government will thoroughly evaluate laws from the point of view of their impact on the business environment and employment growth and will thoroughly review the impact of laws and regulations to be adopted. In order to improve the business environment, the Government will promote the increase in analytical capacities of public administration through the Ministry of Economy and, in case of need, also through other

ministries. The Government will also carry out a review of existing legal rules in order to reduce the administrative and regulatory burden on enterprises by more than a quarter.

The Government will abolish laws that attempt to regulate the market environment in a non-systemic manner and to influence the outcomes of voluntary agreements, such as the law on chain stores, the law on strategic companies or selected provisions of the Commercial Code, etc. It will endeavour to render legal rules more transparent and to reduce their number and to stabilise the legal environment for businesses.

The Government will strive to make enterprise easier and to reduce the administrative burden at all stages – registration, entrepreneurial activity, and termination of business or transfer of entrepreneurial activities to another person. The Government will take steps towards reducing the time periods required for the administrative creation of a company, as required by the EU (i.e., a maximum of three days) and it will extend the scope of one-stop-shops (OSS) to include business entities operating on a different legal basis than the small business licence. It will allow entrepreneurs to carry out administrative procedures which are performed by courts of commerce at the one-stop-shops.

The informatisation of state and public administration will allow the Government to abolish multiple requirements to supply information, documentation and data from entrepreneurs. A speedy introduction of eGovernment services will enhance the efficiency of processes in all areas where public administration interacts with business entities. The Government will thus create incentives for businesses and public administration to broadly use electronic communication, including the system of electronic verification, in order to reduce the administrative burden on businesses.

In close cooperation and involving individual ministries, the Government will carry out an audit of permits and licences issued by the state. In order to reduce barriers to entry for start-up businesses and in order to speed up and enhance the transparency of proceedings in this area, it will (in justified cases) cancel or change the granting of licences or permits and be replaced by a notification obligation upon meeting explicitly-defined criteria to minimise the barriers to entry.

The Government will take steps to remove disproportionate sanctions imposed by state, local, public and other administrative bodies on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) when not meeting their obligations, especially non-monetary ones. For less serious deficiencies, it will implement the principle of obligatory notification before a sanction is imposed and, especially for small enterprises, prevention will precede repression, i.e., it will ensure better respect of rules by means of awareness-raising activities.

The Government will evaluate the implementation of the institute of a binding opinion, which will allow enterprises to verify a specific procedure of the authorities in case of unclear legal rules. It will be possible to appeal such an opinion in court. Hence, enterprises will not face the risk of administrative proceedings against them in case of violating vague or vaguely-interpreted laws.

The Government will place an emphasis on interlinking public registries – taxes, social affairs, health care, land register and others – and will analyse the possibility to allocate a unified identification for business entities in order to reduce the administrative burden.

The Government will review all possibilities to minimise state aid in areas where its provision unjustifiably distorts the competitive environment.

The Government will not privatise strategic companies. It will, however, support steps leading towards better efficiency in the working of selected companies with a government stake, including the denationalisation of heating plants or the remaining stakes in companies with government influence, e.g., in bus transport.

The Government will evaluate the possibilities of improving the efficiency in the work of the agencies of the Ministry of Economy, including their potential merger.

The Government will always apply the strict rule that, in transposing EU legislation into Slovak law, no administrative or regulatory barriers exceeding the level set by EU legal standards should be implemented, except in justified cases.

For Slovakia to be not only a passive recipient of European policies, the Government will present proposals to EU authorities related to the business environment and improving its quality and, at the same time, it will analyse ways and contents of EU legislation to be implemented into Slovak law.

In order to improve support to SMEs, it will be necessary to carry out an audit of the efficiency of SME programmes to modernise them and increase their efficiency using EU and OECD best practices.

In order to facilitate the funding of business plans, the Government will improve the availability of risk capital for start-up innovative businesses by creating a system based on involving private and public funds while respecting market principles.

Investment and regional development

The inflow of investment into Slovakia is uneven; moreover, it has slowed down due to the economic crisis and worsened business environment. In order to balance out regional differences within the EU, it is necessary to also continuously promote investment within Slovakia, mainly investment in less-affluent regions.

The Government will review the current model and create a functional model to promote the inflow of foreign direct investment, including efficient functioning of the supporting institutions.

The Government will make the rules for investment assistance more transparent, allowing the support of job creation in areas with high unemployment, the increase of value added in the industry, and the transfer of state-of-the-art knowledge into practice. When presenting proposals for the provision of investment assistance, it will also apply tried and tested experiences acquired before 2006, when the most efficient growth of investment was recorded.

The Government will place an emphasis on the active policy of attracting foreign investment, also by means of developing the brand “Slovakia“ (branding) in cooperation with all relevant entities of public administration.

To attract investment, the Government will, in cooperation with incoming or existing investors, implement pilot reference projects for regions lagging behind and regions with high unemployment.

Innovation

Compared with other countries, Slovakia is among those with the lowest innovation rate, achieving only 66% of the EU average. According to EU data and evaluations, Slovakia is among the so-called catching-up countries, together with Hungary, Poland, Romania, etc., and ranks 22nd out of the 27 Member States in terms of innovation performance. Reasons lie in the weak research base without specific goals, lack of research leaders – large companies, investment in research and inefficient support from the public sector, as well as low motivation for research workers to achieve results comparable with European or world standards.

Thus, increasing the innovation performance of Slovakia will be the answer to the issues mentioned – attracting investment into research or investment accompanied by research; including more practice and less theory into research, and increasing the motivation of research workers to grow and become top experts.

The Government will cooperate with the business sector in a review of the support and incentives for innovation in companies and strengthen the support of cooperation between

universities, research institutes and companies using EU best practices, including the implementation of indirect supporting instruments for innovations.

The Government will place an emphasis on the connection between the issue of innovation and foreign direct investment in order to achieve sustainable growth for the Slovak economy.

The Government will clearly define sector competencies in research and development and innovations in order to increase innovation activities in the business sector and the coordination of state authorities providing support.

The Government will closely and systematically monitor the efficiency of public funds invested in research, development and innovations.

Energy

In recent years, pressure has emerged in the energy sector of Slovakia to increase political influence and the unjustified influence of public administration and administrative burden. Therefore, the Government will undertake efforts to minimise political and public influence and will make sure that there are professional experts at the Office for the Regulation of Network Industries, as well as on the management boards and serving as state representatives in energy companies where the government owns a stake.

The Government will prepare an update of the Energy Policy of the Slovak Republic, the main goals of which will be security, competitiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The Government will create conditions for the diversification of energy resources, support the development of energy infrastructure with an emphasis on regional projects, ensuring a link between the electric, gas and oil grids of the Slovak Republic with the grids of neighbouring countries and to strengthen the energy security of the region. To this end, the Government will promote the cooperation and coordination of the countries in the region to obtain financial support from EU funds to implement projects of a common regional interest. In the area of energy supply security, the Government will place an emphasis on increasing the cross-border capacity of the electric grid connections with Hungary and support the process of deeper integration of the electricity markets in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. To increase gas supply security, the Government will promote the construction of the north-south connection linking the LNG terminals in Croatia and Poland and transiting all V4 countries, thus creating the possibility for Slovakia to be connected to important gas projects of the South corridor (Nabucco, South Stream, etc.). In terms of oil supply security, the Government will foster a coordinated approach of the countries in the region in the search for alternative ways of oil supply. The Government will ensure reduced dependence on the imports of fossil fuels by developing the use of forest and agricultural biomass.

The updated energy policy will mainly pursue the interest of customers and end users in order to fully be able to use the advantages of a liberalised and secure energy market. The Government will adjust the rules for the energy market in order to continue in the liberalisation of this market, to increase competition in the energy sector, to strengthen consumer protection and to enhance the quality of services. A qualified and professional regulation of monopoly industries in the energy sector, primarily in transfer and distribution, will result in adopting rules focused on higher and better consumer protection and on preventing the abuse of a dominant position.

The Government will adjust rules disproportionately interfering with the management of energy companies in order to create conditions for efficient development and safe and reliable operation of energy systems and grids, while allowing appropriate returns on their investment. In companies with a government stake, the Government will ensure the efficient and economical management of assets and transparent use of funds. In state-owned joint stock

companies, the Government will strictly apply the principles of transparent public procurement, especially in investment projects or in the purchasing of services.

When developing the energy infrastructure, the Government will ensure the protection of the environment and sources of drinking water, and the respect of strict safety instructions and environmental aspects. Thus, the Government will not allow the construction of an oil pipeline across the Žitný ostrov (Rye Island).

The Government will support the development of low-carbon technologies and energy resources. In the case of nuclear energy, it will place an emphasis on respecting the high standards of nuclear safety. The Government will support the project of constructing the nuclear source in Jaslovské Bohunice only on the condition that it will be based on private investments without any further participation of the state.

The Government will support the use of renewable and secondary energy resources, taking into account the expected life-cycle of a given installation and long-term return on investment. When projecting the use of renewable energy resources, it will take into account the principle of minimising costs applying the integrated approach in order to use renewable energy resources and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Priority will be given to technologies whose use allows achieving energy prices close to the prices on the market, with regard to an acceptable end-user price of energy. The Government will align the support to renewable energy resources from small water power plants with plans for flood protection.

The Government will support the implementation of the principles of increasing energy efficiency and reducing energy requirements on the production side, as well as on the consumption side, including the preparation and implementation of supporting mechanisms.

In negotiations at all levels of EU institutions, the Government will defend the interests of Slovakia in all energy subsectors. It will assess the impact of the EU directive on greenhouse gasses and the EU directive on industry emissions on the sectors of electric energy, heating and industry.

Trade, services and foreign trade

Slovakia is a small and open economy; it therefore must actively defend its trade policy interests within the common trade policy of the EU. It is necessary for this type of economy to promote further liberalisation of world trade, to remove barriers to trade, in order to enhance the access of Slovak exporters to markets in third countries. On the internal market, priority must be given to the balance between the seller and the consumer, with emphasis on consumer protection.

The Government will review strategic documents for the promotion of foreign trade against the background of real implementation of the measures proposed, while respecting EU legislation on the internal market.

The Government will actively participate in the creation of a new strategy for the EU internal market, since it also includes partial policies such as competition, industry, consumers, energy, transport, digital agenda, social affairs, environment, trade, taxation, and regional policies, but also justice and citizens.

The Government will create channels to communicate with the business sector when defending Slovak interests in international and multilateral organisations (WTO, EC, OECD, etc.).

In order to ensure the maximum efficiency in the use of public funds invested into the promotion of foreign trade, the Government will clearly define the tasks and goals and will closely monitor the performance of individual trade and economic departments abroad.

The Government will put through and implement an efficient policy of general product and service safety. To this end, it will create a just, comprehensive and well-structured

legislative framework to achieve equality between the seller and the consumer while preserving a high level of consumer protection.

2.3 TRANSPORT, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Transport

The Government will support the development of a high quality, accessible and integrated transport infrastructure, competitive transport services, user-friendly and environmentally-friendly and energy efficient and safe transport.

The Government will ensure the development of a transport infrastructure that will support social inclusion by connecting less-developed regions to the superior infrastructure and strengthen the international competitiveness of Slovakia, as well as the use of its geographic potential.

The Government will put through its interests when EU legislation is adopted and within other international organisations. The Government will support the completion of the EU internal market enforcing the rules of competition and applying the principle of subsidiarity.

The Government will ensure efficient use of funds in transport. It will carry out a thorough analysis of the use of EU funds in the programming period 2007 – 2013 in order to review its objectives and priorities in the National Strategic Reference Framework, and to achieve the highest possible added value for the development of Slovakia. The Government will reallocate available EU funds within the National Strategic Reference Framework into the Transport Operational Programme (TOP) and allow the use of funds from retirement pension savings for the construction of highways and expressways.

The Government will ensure conditions for the smooth use of EU funds in the programming period 2007 – 2013 in order for Slovakia to efficiently use the possibilities and the EU funding available for the benefit of all its citizens.

The Government will mandate the preparation of a sectoral operational programme within the new programming period of 2014 – 2020, which will take into account national priorities in the construction and modernisation of the transport infrastructure.

It is a priority of the Government to reduce the costs of transport construction to the average level of EU countries. The Government will provide for a transparent public procurement of transport projects. It will strengthen the role of state and sectoral expertise in evaluating technical solutions, economic efficiency and maximum price for the construction, and will make sure that every project funded from public budgets will be supported by a cost and benefits analysis.

The Government will stipulate the procedure on the basis of which strategic construction will begin only after the settlement of ownership rights to real estate, be it through dispossession or purchase of the real estate concerned or using the property of the Slovak Land Fund.

The Government will thoroughly analyse the priorities and preparation of the construction of infrastructure, with the main emphasis on the financial possibilities, technical transport requirements and needs of individual regions. The Government will modernise the key transit sections of road and rail infrastructure as a means for dynamic development of lagging regions, with a preferential use of EU funds.

The Government will reassess the further implementation of PPP projects in the area of transport infrastructure, with regard to the experience and results of projects already implemented, in order to enhance the efficiency of further construction. It will be a priority of

the Government to reduce the costs of PPP projects that have not yet been financially concluded.

It is a goal of the Government to ensure a superior road connection between Bratislava and Kosice by 2014 and to begin construction of sections of expressways in individual regions of Slovakia (among others, highway sections D1, D4, expressways R2, R4, R7, R9, new bridges).

In cooperation with neighbouring countries, the Government will comprehensively address the issue of cross-border integration and interoperability of transport infrastructure.

In terms of 1st class roads, the Government will place an emphasis on improving accident-prone areas, critical states of bridges, constructing city and municipality bypasses in order to reroute transit and address the insufficient transport performance of selected crossroads.

The Government will strictly exercise the rights of the National Highway Company (Národná diaľničná spoločnosť), a. s., and the state, resulting from the contract with the supplier of the electronic toll system, and will mandate the review of the project from the point of view of defending public interests. It will not introduce a toll for passenger cars and will keep the highway stickers.

The Government will ensure the merger of the National Highway Company (NDS, a. s.), and the Slovak Road Administration (SSC), since their activities complement each other.

In railway infrastructure, in order to preserve the share of rail transport in the transport market, the Government will make available more sections of interoperable railways modernised to run at 160 kph by 2014.

The Government will analyse the results of the feasibility study for the broad-gauge railway. The Government does not support this project.

In order to enhance the competitiveness of passenger railway transport and to provide higher comfort for passengers, the Government will ensure not only the modernisation of the current rolling stock, but also the introduction of new mobile means.

The Government will create conditions for the liberalisation of the national passenger rail transport.

The Government will adopt measures to revitalise the railway companies. In rail cargo, it will create conditions for the entry of a strong strategic investor into the Railway company Cargo Slovakia, a. s., in order to make it competitive on the liberalised EU market.

The Government will reduce the price for the use of railway infrastructure in order to increase the competitiveness of rail transport, covering fixed costs according to budget capacity.

The Government will support projects aimed at the use of transport-transfer processes between the EU and Asia and the north-south connection between EU countries, in which Slovakia can participate due to its convenient geographic location. The Government will make an effort to have the existing infrastructure (Košice - Žilina – Bratislava) included in the main TEN-T network.

In order to increase road safety, eliminate congestion and make transport more environmentally friendly, given the ever-growing need of capacity, the Government will implement a National Traffic Information System.

The Government will focus its attention on road safety according to EU policies. In order to reduce the number of fatal and other severe accidents and to prevent damage to the economy, the Government will strengthen the activity of the Council of the Government for Road Safety.

The Government will support public passenger transport and will create conditions for the enlargement of integrated transport systems in larger Slovak cities. The Government will transfer competence in regional passenger rail transport to self-governing regions according to

Act No. 514/2009 Coll. By involving regional administrations into the development of transport services in the regions, the Government will promote the harmonisation of public passenger transport while respecting the principle that losses from the operation of public transport are settled only for one type of transport.

The Government will support further development of the Bratislava airport as the most significant air transport hub in Slovakia by involving a strategic partner and by creating conditions for air carriers to open regular passenger routes. The Government will support the creation of a functional airspace bloc in Central Europe, while preserving the provision of air navigation services by Slovakia and will ensure the implementation of the Single European Airspace.

In line with European transport policy, the Government will support the increasing of safety in air transport, safety and protection of civil aviation, the creation of transparent conditions for the regulation of air carriers as well as conditions for their liberal access to the Slovak market, while applying the principle of reciprocity.

The Government will, in line with the European Action Plan for the Development of Inland Navigation, support the efficient implementation of tasks in water transport to ensure its competitiveness and better position on the transport market (mainly in the area of developing new inland waterways), introducing a broader supply of river information services and increasing the safety levels in inland navigation.

Within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Government will promote the development of transport infrastructure, mainly the continuous Danube waterway and the navigability of the Danube in its original basin.

In sea transport, the Government will ensure the implementation of the EU strategy, mainly towards international organisations, by increasing the safety of navigation and by stabilising the position of Slovakia in rating analyses.

The Government will review the participation of the state in joint stock companies with government shares.

Post and telecommunications

The Government will ensure the creation of a legislative and regulatory environment for the provision of postal services on the fully liberalised postal market in the EU, guaranteeing the provision of universal postal service.

The Government will ensure a legislative and regulatory environment for the harmonisation of competition on the single market in electronic communications. In order to ensure the highest possible availability of electronic services, the Government will support the development of high-speed networks to get as close as possible to the EU average in terms of high-speed Internet coverage.

In the area of TV broadcasting, the Government will take all necessary steps towards the completion of the transition to digital terrestrial broadcasting by 2012. At the same time, the Government will create conditions for the efficient use of the frequency band gained through the transition to digital TV broadcasting, as well as conditions for further modernisation and additional services of TV broadcasting and digitalisation of radio broadcasting.

Regional development

The development of Slovakia as a whole and the development of its regions are intertwined, depending on and influencing each other. The same applies to the connection between the development of main, national infrastructure and local development.

In regional development, the Government will place an emphasis on reducing regional differences and on strengthening the cohesion among individual territorial units of Slovakia.

The Government will review the possibility of transferring decision-making pertaining to the allocation of funds from the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) to regional governments and adequately strengthen the support mechanism of funding regional development from EU resources.

The Government will introduce simplified and transparent access to EU funds; project documentation of approved projects (including the name of the author of the document and members of commissions) will be made public on the website of the respective ministry. The Government will strengthen the monitoring of the use of EU funds and will review the implementation of the projects to date. It will provide a more realistic picture of the costs in projects approved to date.

In the Agency for the Support of Regional Development, the Government will focus on the renewal and development of infrastructure and seats, even by means of potential changes in individual programmes.

The Government will actively participate in the creation of structural and cohesion policies at the EU level for the next programming period (as of 2014).

Housing construction and development

Dignified housing is a basic need but, at the same time, a costly affair that often exceeds the capacities of people. Good quality living space is a condition for a satisfied life of the people. The basic priorities will therefore focus on increasing the accessibility of housing for vulnerable population groups and on enhancing the quality of living space. The Government will strengthen the legislation for the barrier-free construction of buildings and the development of barrier-free communication and awareness of public institutions.

The energy consumption of buildings accounts for as much as 40% of total energy consumption. A reduction in energy consumption and the use of energy from renewable resources in the building sector are thus important measures necessary to reduce energy dependency and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Government will support the development of rental housing (start-up apartments for young people, housing for older citizens and marginalised groups).

The Government will support the revitalisation of living space with preference given to integrated strategies.

The Government will support the development of economic tools for the development of housing (mortgage loans, saving societies, State Fund for Housing Development) and their focus on priority areas, and integrating new instruments of financial engineering (e.g., JESSICA) in order to achieve through their interaction the broadest possible development in the area of housing and living space.

The Government will support the legislative settlement of the issues of private owners and tenants in apartments returned to these owners in the process of restitution.

The Government will support the creation of conditions for the establishment of a functioning and regularly updated registry with main indicators pertaining to existing housing stock.

The Government will support activities in the area of energy efficiency of buildings, the goal of which is to contribute in the long run to a reduced dependence on primary resources and thus to reduce the negative impact on the environment.

The Government will draft amendments to legal standards applicable to territorial planning, the construction code and to dispossessions. The goal will be to reduce the administrative burden in approval proceedings according to a new differentiation of buildings

in relation to the new approval procedures and to reinforce the instruments of monitoring construction sites with an emphasis on increased efficiency in the fight against illegal construction sites and the removal of detected deficiencies (including the strengthening of police competencies to act against illegal construction sites). The amendment will allow the Government to ensure a fair and efficient process of dispossession in the public interest.

The Government will draft an update to the Strategy of Territorial Development of Slovakia 2001 as a fundamental policy for the territorial development of the state.

Tourism

Geographic location, natural environment and cultural heritage sites create a basis for tourism to become an important industry for Slovakia's development. The Government will support the sustainability of tourism, mainly by amending Act No. 91/2010 Coll. On the Support of Tourism, using funds from the European Communities and by implementing Act No. 561/2007 Coll. on Investment Aid.

The Government will ensure the implementation of works related to the completion of a tourism satellite account, including selected statistical surveys, in order to continuously enhance the quality of input information on the actual share of tourism of the GDP.

The Government will enhance the quality and efficiency of promoting and presenting Slovakia abroad as a holiday destination through the Slovak Agency for Tourism, continued funding of activities by adopting and implementing a marketing strategy, revitalising the system for the administration of the national tourism portal *slovakia.travel*, better coordination through the Council of the Government for a unified presentation of Slovakia abroad, and by implementing a national project for the promotion and presentation of Slovakia supported with EU structural funds (Operational Programme Competitiveness and Economic Growth). The Government will support better coordination between ministries connected with tourism. It will support the project of the European Capital of Culture 2013 (Košice) as a strategically important project with ripple effects for the development of tourism.

The Government will create legislation to involve people with disabilities in tourism by amending the Decree of the Ministry of Environment No. 532/2002 Coll., which stipulates the details of general technical requirements for the construction of, and general technical requirements for buildings used by, people with reduced mobility and orientation in accommodation and food services.

The Government will support enterprises in tourism in order to enhance the quality of services provided by reducing the administrative burden and simplifying enterprises mainly in accommodation services by also introducing systems of quality, modernisation and innovation; in cooperation with the Slovak Guarantee and Development Bank, it will review the possibility of offering high-risk loans for small- and medium-sized enterprises in tourism.

The Government will regulate activities in tourism, in line with its social value and the capacity of the country and public interest, in order to reconcile the sustainable development of tourism with the protection of the environment.

The Government will get involved in the initiatives of the European Union in the area of tourism and support the development of local and regional associations in tourism in order to improve its competitiveness as a significant industry of the national economy.

2.4 AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Government is aware that 86% of Slovakia's territory is made up of rural areas; therefore, it will place great emphasis on rural and regional policies in order to preserve the settlements and to increase the standard of living of people in rural regions. The solutions provided by the Government will be based on a common and mutual interaction of several factors in order to efficiently use the production capacity of the rural areas, taking into account the diversification of agricultural activities, development of regions and rural tourism. In developing the rural areas, the Government will place an emphasis on the reduction of regional differences.

The Government will create conditions for the development of plant and animal production to fully use their economic potential. Appropriate attention will be devoted to areas such as apiculture, fisheries and hunting.

The Government will align legislation pertaining to the direct sale of farm products with the conditions applicable in other EU Member States by including all types of farming products and easing the criteria for production and direct sale while preserving their safety. The Government will support the production and sale of regional food specialties and the maintenance and development of regional specificities.

The Government will review the possibility of transferring decision-making pertaining to the allocation of funds from the Regional Operational Programme (ROP), the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the Operational Programme for Fisheries (OPF), to regional governments and will possibly re-evaluate the support mechanism of funding regional development from EU resources.

In agricultural and food production, the Government will support the maximum rate of final production and thus the creation of higher added value. It will promote the support of environmentally-friendly agriculture.

The Government will place an emphasis on the use of production capacities in rural areas, not only for the production of foodstuffs, but also for the support of production of renewable energy resources (biomass, dendromass, etc.).

The Government will ensure thorough and efficient control in the food chain and consumer protection from the point of view of food safety in order for inspectors not to be allocated to individual stores and to preserve impartiality and independence of the inspections. At the same time, it will implement an early and transparent system for the publication of inspection results.

The Government will further support the Quality Brand SK as a means of increasing the sale of high-quality local products.

The Government will reinstate the functionality and efficiency of the system of the Agricultural Paying Agency (APA). The Government will introduce a thorough and transparent monitoring of the use of EU funds and will review the implementation of the projects to date.

The Government will renew the publicly controllable and transparent system of providing support on the basis of strict control of efficiency in the use of funds based on clear criteria. It will create a level playing field for all types of enterprises.

The Government will prevent selective preferential treatment of foreign investors in agriculture.

Within the EU Common Agricultural Policy, the Government will promote a comprehensive abolition of agricultural subsidies. Until then, it will attempt to obtain non-discriminatory conditions in order to preserve the competitiveness of Slovak farmers.

The Government will abolish excessively strict rules and quotas limiting farmers and food producers, either European or those that go beyond EU legislation, and will balance out the scope of inspections of local foodstuffs and imported foodstuffs.

The Government will support such an approach to management that will increase water retention in the country.

The Government will address inequalities in the chain between primary producers – processors and stores – including at the EU level.

The Government will strengthen ownership rights to land. It will carry out a systemic change in the restitution process. Substitution land will be available only in the cadastral area where the initial claim originated and, in other cases, the issue will be settled financially.

The Government will improve the efficiency of ownership registers (one owner, one cadastral office, one deed of ownership). The Government will speed up the finalisation of the Registry of the renewed land database (ROEP) and the process of land adjustment (unification of land parcels and their space and functional setup), and within those it will focus on flood protection measures and measures improving territorial stability.

The Government will initiate a discussion on land rights in order to simplify the register of ownership and users' rights.

The Government will abolish the fee for exempting land from the agricultural land fund.

The Government will address the settlement of ownership rights to land and forests of known and unknown owners, including forests under the highest degree of protection.

The Government will regard the forests as an integral part of rural areas, where it is necessary to apply management methods in line with the principles of sustainable development, in order to provide citizens with an opportunity for active recreation. In this respect, it will abolish the restrictions applying to the entry of cyclists on forest roads.

The Government will ensure efficient management of state forest land in order to create a positive contribution for society, e.g., by using the method of public tendering and auctions in the activity of the company Lesy SR (Forests) to achieve the highest possible prices in the sale of wood.

In forest management, the Government will focus on increasing the capacity of forests to retain water in order to enhance their anti-flood function.

The enhancing of environmental friendliness of forest production will be supported from EU funds.

Increased attention will be given to the Slovak wood processing industry as a source of employment and added value.

The science and research capacity in this sector will be limited and restructured, allowing for the necessary expert and analytical activities to be preserved in the sector and for the separation of other activities. At the same time, the number of organisations in the sector will be reduced in order to avoid duplication and useless activities.

After a medium-term evaluation of the Rural Development Plan for 2007 – 2013, the Government will, in cooperation with the agricultural administration, local self-governments and the NGO sector, begin preparation of the Rural Development Plan for the years 2014 – 2020.

In the Agency for the Support of Regional Development, the Government will focus on the renewal and development of infrastructure and seats, even by means of potential changes in operational programmes. It will render the costs of the projects approved to date more realistic in order to reflect the actual costs.

In the rural development of regions, the Government will change and adjust the system of allocating EU funds in order to give preference to less-developed regions.

2.5 ENVIRONMENT

The Government acknowledges the right to a good environment guaranteed to every citizen by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and, at the same time, places an emphasis on our universal obligation and responsibility for the environment. The Government considers the protection of nature fundamental for the global development of society; thus, it will be rational and prudent in the use of natural resources, placing an emphasis on the protection of biodiversity and the principles of sustainable development.

In the interest of the transparent protection of nature, the Government will reinstate the Ministry of Environment to its original extent; it will enhance its authority in the area of environment protection as well as in the creation and implementation of environmental economic instruments.

The Government considers the sources of drinking water to be the biggest natural asset and will thus focus on their protection. To this end, it will stop the planned construction of the oil pipeline across the Žitný ostrov (Rye Island). The Government will establish clear rules and re-evaluate the competencies in the licensing of mining activities (mines, gravel fields), which have an impact on the quality of underground water sources.

It will be a priority for the Government to connect municipalities to public water pipelines and to create sewage systems and water purification plants in regions with high volumes of underground and surface waters. The construction of water pipelines and sewage systems will focus on regions where this infrastructure is missing.

The Government will review the scope of protected areas according to its international commitments, possibilities of society and economic situation of the country. It will stipulate rules for the limitation of ownership rights to land while setting clear rules governing the interaction between nature protection and the owners to be based on a dialogue of owners, environmentalists and scientists.

The Government will suggest flood protection measures that would allow the retention of water in nature and reduce the consequences of floods. It will prepare a strategy of flood protection measures in Slovakia. EU funds will primarily be used for the completion and commencement of operation of anti-flood systems. The Government will ensure the permanent maintenance of small water flows on territories threatened by floods and will appoint appropriate responsible persons for the job. Highest risk areas will be a priority.

The Government will restructure water management while focusing on the rationalisation of performance and services.

The Government will amend legislation in order to guarantee public participation in the decision-making process pertaining to environmental affairs according to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information. Self-governments will have co-decision powers pertaining to mining and landfills, and the Government will significantly increase the efficiency of the fight against illegal waste disposal.

The Government will review the environmental policy to be in line with EU membership and current environmental challenges. In national and international contexts, the Government will pursue a proactive environmental policy in the interest of its people and the environment and not in the interest of polluters, mainly when it comes to waste management, in order to store less and recover more. It will review the scope and rate of fees and levies in the area of environment.

The Government will introduce transparent criteria for the allocation of CO₂ quotas in the public interest and will ensure the transparent sale of available units.

In the zoning of protected areas, including the Tatra Mountains, the Government will support such zoning that allows the development of tourism but does not present a risk to protected biotopes.

After analysing the activities of the Recycling Fund, the Government will review its work and existence. In cooperation with local self-governments and the specialised public, the Government will prepare a proposal for transparent and efficient waste disposal and recovery.

The Government will focus particularly on the liquidation of old environmental damage. It will establish priorities and procedures to deal with old damages and will give a legislative guarantee of 10% of Environmental Fund revenues for this issue.

The Government will introduce thorough and transparent monitoring of the use of EU funds and will review the implementation of the projects to date.

The Government will support environmental education and awareness-raising in schools and in extra-curricular activities and will ensure the systematic strengthening of environmental responsibility of the people in Slovakia.

3. STATE FOR CITIZENS

3.1 PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The respect for fundamental rights and freedoms is the key requirement for the development of a modern democratic state and fair and just society. A failure to respect human rights undermines the very foundations of the rule of law. On that account, the Government will rigorously protect and promote human rights.

The Government will remedy restrictive legislative and political measures taken in the previous period that are inconsistent with human rights principles. In a short time, the Government will draft amendments to [the Act on periodical press and agency information service and on amendments to certain acts \(the Press Act\)](#), the State Language Act, the Act on Citizenship, the Legislative Rules of the Slovak Government, etc., so that they respect human and minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and international treaties and conventions binding upon the Slovak Republic. The Government will initiate remedying individual cases where the dignity of a citizen might have been infringed upon by the state.

The Government will endeavour to enhance the application of human rights principles in activities carried out by the Government and state authorities. A policy on the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms requires an active approach, and support from the Government and the state and must be reflected in the drafting of generally binding regulations and implementation of international standards.

The Government will pursue a more effective and flexible functioning of all institutions and mechanisms serving for the protection and promotion of human rights, such as the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights and the Centre for Legal Aid. It will strengthen existing and/or adopt new governmental programmes and institutional mechanisms to protect the human rights of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the population. In making, implementing and evaluating government policies and their impacts, the Government will enforce measures to eliminate gender-based discrimination.

In addition to first-generation human rights, the Government will also facilitate application of second and third-generation human rights. The concept of human dignity entails not only protection against unacceptable and needless interventions by the state in the life of individuals, but, equally, the need for their spiritual and intellectual development and befitting social and economic conditions. Rights to education, dignified housing and a healthy environment are rights that require an active approach from the state in the form of creating basic frameworks and conditions for their accomplishment.

The Government will consistently fulfil its international obligations with respect to human and minority rights, including its reporting duties towards treaty and monitoring bodies of international organisations and building on international human rights treaties and conventions to which the Slovak Republic is a State party. In the implementation of its human rights obligations, the Government will strengthen mutual cooperation and coordination among individual central government bodies and other relevant bodies and institutions.

With respect to this task, as well as with respect to the implementation of other segments of the state human rights policy, the Government will closely cooperate with non-governmental not-for-profit human rights organisations and bodies of international organisations operating in the Slovak Republic.

The Government will create conditions for citizens, including minority members and individuals with permanent residence in the territory of the Slovak Republic, to exercise their right to effective participation in public governance. This right must include their right to

access information and the right to effectively influence decision-making processes that substantially affect them.

The cooperation between the Government and civic society actors will therefore be based on the principle of partnership between the non-governmental sector and public authorities. It will require that adequate mechanisms be created to strengthen the sustainability of non-governmental organisations, as well as independent analytical centres and advocacy organisations.

The Government sees large room for improvement in the area of human rights education and training. It will improve human rights education at schools of all levels. It will support human rights education of employees in all sectors of the state and public administration who are in direct contact with citizens. In addition, it will strengthen awareness-raising activities on human rights and freedoms and support projects aimed at increasing citizens' knowledge of their rights, freedoms and duties. It will introduce a modern concept of citizenship and human rights into the preparation of school curricula.

The Government recognises and appreciates the importance and contribution of cultures of traditional national minorities living in Slovakia to its cultural heritage, spiritual values and cultural diversity. On that account, the Government will create the best possible conditions for national minority members to exercise their right of expression, preservation and development of their own identity. This principle will also be strictly taken into account during methodological and organisational preparations for a population census to be carried out in May 2011.

The state must actively support preservation and further development of culture and knowledge of its national minorities. In order to accomplish this task and to enhance social cohesion in Slovakia, the Government will prepare a long-term policy on the protection and promotion of culture and school systems of national minorities, including the Roma minority, as well as a long-term policy on inter-ethnic cooperation, inter-ethnic dialogue and intercultural training and education, including necessary institutional and financial mechanisms. The Government will promote creating appropriate room for an intercultural dialogue and exchange of positive information content in the work of public media and, if possible, of other media, too. The Government will mainly focus on improving intra-state Slovak-Hungarian relations and relations between the majority population and the Roma community, and will seek inclusive understanding and practicing of citizenship.

As its priority, the Government will draft a bill on the protection of and support for the preservation and development of national minority cultures which will enact their integral position in the context of cultural wealth and diversity of the state and set out the rules for their financing. In managing and financing national minority schools, in methodological assistance and preparation of curricula, the Government will pay increased attention to the actual needs and interests of national minority members.

The Government has established the post of a Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities, with stronger managing and decision-making powers in the area of national minority culture and education.

When performing his/her tasks, the Deputy Prime Minister will closely cooperate and consult with national minority representatives. In order to ensure the exercise of co-decision making powers of the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities, the Government will restructure the education ministry so that the co-decision making powers could be exercised in the inspection of national minority schools and in their research and development activities within the system of a methodology and pedagogical centre, utilising the capacities of the universities in Komárno, Nitra and Prešov.

With respect to the education system, the Government will encourage improvements in the quality of teaching mother languages of national minorities, as well as the quality and

effectiveness of teaching the Slovak language at schools that have a minority language as their teaching language. The Government will support innovation in teaching methods at minority schools, including the supply of up-to-date and modern textbooks, and strengthen cooperation among schools having Slovak as their teaching language and schools teaching in minority languages. The Government will continue supporting Ukrainian minority schools. In regions with a Ruthenian minority population, the Government will ensure that Ruthenian language and culture classes are taught at elementary and secondary schools. The Government intends to also address the aforementioned systemic issues concerning the development of the minority school system by amending the existing School Act.

The Government will support consistent implementation of a constitutional right of national minority members to address the issues related to the identity of national minorities.

The Government will amend the statute of the Government Council for National Minorities so as to make this body a representative and functioning forum for the national minorities living in the Slovak Republic that will give them room for effective participation in governing their own affairs.

In addition to amending the State Language Act, adopting a new act on the protection of and support for the preservation and development of national minority cultures and amending the School Act, the Government will also implement the principle of effective equality of all Slovak citizens through an amendment to the Act on the Use of Minority Languages, the Act on Geodesy and Cartography and the Act on Displaying Names of Municipalities in Minority Languages, and other related regulations. The Government will consistently apply recommendations under the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; in doing so, it will focus on addressing the problems identified in evaluation reports.

The Government will set up a group of experts in order to prepare a background paper for the Government concerning the possibilities of, and alternatives to, drafting an act on the position and rights of national minorities, which could possibly be adopted during its current term.

The Government will ensure and assign necessary personnel capacities and financial resources to the office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities in order to accomplish the objectives set out under the human and minority rights policy.

Special attention will be given to the status, integration and development of the Roma community, which represents a cross-cutting issue. In order to accomplish the said objective, the Government will strengthen the position and powers of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and of the Plenipotentiary's office.

A large population of the Slovak Roma remain one of the weakest and most vulnerable social and economic groups, affected by poverty and social exclusion which they are unable to overcome on their own. Social exclusion is a crucial, society-wide problem because, in addition to its negative impact on the development potential of regions, it also undermines relations among citizens, escalates tensions with the majority population, and increases the risk of rising extremism.

The Government will endorse full participation of Roma in social, cultural and political life on the basis of their national minority status, as well as with respect to addressing key problems related to socially-excluded Roma communities. Necessary measures will be implemented by the Government through targeted long-term and coordinated policies, whose impact could be measured objectively and designed to accomplish the effective equality of all citizens.

Approaches to be adopted by the Government will respond to actual needs and priorities of municipalities, regions and the Roma themselves; they will be comprehensive and balanced with respect to addressing the social situation of the Roma and respect for human

rights on the one hand, and to strengthening the principle of individual responsibility of the Roma on the other. Social inclusion measures will be designed in such a way that they lead to the observance of social standards and values. The Government will particularly focus on the application of the following principles:

- effective application of antidiscrimination laws, combating racial and ethnic discrimination in education, employment, housing, health and social services;
- increased engagement of self-governing units and affected municipalities to make special temporary measures more effective and better targeted;
- support to the participation of Roma in public and political life and increasing their individual responsibility;
- enforcing comprehensive approaches in the utilisation of EU funds for the development of municipalities with Roma communities and preserving the continuity of proven and successful programmes.

Implementing the aforementioned principles, the Government wishes to contribute to a higher level of social cohesion among the citizens of the Slovak Republic, members of the majority Slovak population and all minorities. The Government wishes that cultural and ethnical diversity is not seen as a burden but, quite the contrary, as an element enriching the state, an impetus to make minorities feel at home in Slovakia, and augmenting the human, civic, cultural and economic capital which will reinforce the quality of democracy and strengthen Slovak society as an active component of the European democratic community embodied by the EU.

3.2 LABOUR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND FAMILY

In its social policies, the Government will focus on supporting the growth of the living standard of the population, even amidst the complications stemming from the ongoing economic crisis. To that end, the Government's utmost priority in the area of social policy will be increasing employment and related support to creation of new jobs as the most effective means to ensure the growth of citizens' income.

Creation of new, and preservation of existing, jobs is hampered by several factors, including an extremely high social security contribution burden and inflexible labour market. In this context, the Government deems the reform of the social security contribution system and changes in employment law standards a substantial component of its programme for the current term.

In its family policy, the Government will concentrate on supporting the family in critical stages of its existence, in particular with respect to births and in ensuring a work-family balance, either through directly subsidising services for parents, or by supporting more flexible forms of work and employment, including support to care services.

The Government will revise the current setup of the social insurance system, mainly in terms of inter-generation and generational solidarity, fairness in the benefit policy, and reasonable setup of premium rates, as well as in terms of the personal scope of social insurance. The Government will pay special attention to the financial consolidation of the pay-as-you-go pension insurance system and adopt measures, in this context, to increase the success rate of premiums collection and rigorously recover claims.

In order to stabilise the old-age pension savings system, the Government will speedily take measures to remove restrictions on investing savers' assets and, at the same time, ensure their sufficient protection.

The Government considers it necessary to define anew the priorities in solving problems of marginalised social groups in order to increase their motivation to work, raise and educate children, and care for dignified housing.

The Government will take measures to enhance the integration of persons with disabilities into society, and endeavour to remove barriers impeding communication of such persons with their surrounding community. The Government will also address the unequal position of providers of social services and their funding.

Support to increasing employment

The total number of unemployed has exceeded the 400,000 level this year, with more than 200,000 of them being long-term unemployed. The plan to support the creation of new jobs through active labour market measures is failing. Approximately a quarter of the existing subsidies and benefits are not used, others are misused, and the aim of decreasing unemployment by these means is far from being met.

The system of providing assistance in material need is complicated and discouraging. Therefore, the Government will propose bills to better encourage the unemployed to take jobs, namely by introducing a combination of work and benefits for the long-term unemployed (intermediate labour market). The Government will engage employers in creating new jobs for the long-term unemployed by granting them allowances on social and health insurance premiums and through other measures that will create a motivating environment for both domestic and foreign businesses. The Government will also introduce competition to state-provided employment services.

The Government will put an end to the squandering of financial resources in social enterprises, thoroughly investigate their financial management thus far, and decide on the reasonableness of their further existence.

The Government will seek to enforce changes in the Labour Code and other employment law regulations in order to introduce more flexible employment relations and encourage employers to create a working environment supportive to the balancing of work and family commitments. With the aim of reducing indirect costs for employers, the Government will cancel the concurrence of a notice period and severance pay. The Government considers the privileges enjoyed by trade unions unfounded; therefore, it will extend the possibility to conclude mutual agreements between employers and employees to solve day-to-day changes in working conditions. The Government will abolish the existing legislative framework under which the application of higher-level collective agreements may be extended even without consent by an affected employer, while respecting applicable international conventions. The Government will make the conditions for the provision of an occupational health service more flexible and leave the decision on the determination of conditions for the provision of healthcare to employees to individual agreements. The Government will limit the possibilities for civil servants, employees performing work in the public interest and public officials to concurrently receive an old-age pension and salary.

Social insurance

High social insurance premiums are not the only obstacle to the creation of new jobs. Employers must spend significant financial resources on the administration of the social insurance agenda due to a multitude of different statuses of insurees, which result in differences in personal scopes of individual types of social and health insurance, different structure of assessment bases, different periods deemed decisive for the determination of

maximum assessment bases and, ultimately, different maximum assessment bases used in the determination of the amount of insurance premiums. Complicated procedural aspects of compulsory insurance contributions on top of that make the reform of the contribution system an extremely topical issue, also from the perspective of new job creation.

With respect to the social insurance policy, the contribution system reform will be linked to revising the current setup of insurance premium rates. The Government will strictly require a more stringent financial discipline from employers and a rigid recovery of claims.

The Government will revise the existing system of social security benefits and strengthen solidarity within the system, while preserving the insurance nature of the social security system. With respect to sickness insurance, it will adopt measures to reduce the misuse of the system, and introduce more consistent control of treatment regimen of patients. The Government will extend the duration of maternity leave while, at the same time, increasing maternity benefits, depending on the possibilities of public finance and the contribution system reform.

In order to enhance solidarity in the pension system, the Government will revise the system of pension indexation. The Government will consider preserving the current solidarity elements and remove disproportions in determining amounts of old-age and disability pensions. The Government will introduce a minimum pension as a means of increasing solidarity in the pension system in order to ensure that no insured person who has been insured for the defined period of time would find themselves in material need.

Old-age pension savings scheme

The Government will submit to the National Council of the Slovak Republic a draft constitutional act on the protection of the 2nd pillar, which will uphold the current percentage of contributions paid to the 2nd pillar and, at the same time, stipulate that any privatisation revenues may only be used to cover related pension reform costs.

The Government will urgently adopt measures to stabilise the old-age pension savings scheme. The Government will amend the commencement and termination of participation in the old-age pension savings scheme. The Government will remove distortions in the legal framework governing the pension funds – constraints and risk allocation, placement of investments, remuneration to asset management companies, comparing performance of pension funds and participation of policy holders in individual funds. The Government will adopt legislation regulating the payment of pensions under the old-age pension savings scheme.

Social assistance and social support

The Government will prepare more stringent and better-targeted legislation defining the conditions for entitlement to assistance in material need, making a material need benefit more conditional upon a recipient's activity. The Government will introduce a pilot project of E-pay cards for benefit recipients.

The Government considers it necessary to continue supporting families, especially while raising minor children when family income decreases. To improve the current situation, the Government will remove legislative barriers to performing gainful activities concurrently with receiving family allowances, and, at the same time, eliminate discrimination in family allowance payments with a fiscally neutral impact. The Government will introduce more flexible parental leaves.

The Government will reinstate social scholarships for children at elementary schools, differentiated by their school results. The Government will support development of services for parents with children, for example, by supporting micro-kindergartens and care givers

from the intermediate labour market. On the other hand, the Government deems it necessary to make family allowances conditional upon care for children and, in this context, will revise the concept of personal recipient wherever it does not serve its purpose.

The Government will pursue changes in the social and legal protection of children and social custody in order to make their use more effective and improve conditions of children living outside parental care. The Government will define penalties for non-compliance with the Act on Social and Legal Protection. The Government will increase the age limit for children who must solely be placed in a family environment to six years. The Government will support all forms of substitute family care. It will unify conditions governing the performance of professional parents and introduce higher specialisation of professional families. The Government will complete a network of social field workers (including from EU funds) and encourage them to work with the biological family of a child with the aim of family rehabilitation.

The Government will complete the process of unifying the enforcement of court decisions under a single ministry by transferring re-education facilities to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The Government will improve conditions for international adoptions. The Government will make reviewing transfers of minor children between children's homes more stringent. The Government will introduce more effective assistance to victims of violence.

The Government will change the system of funding social services providers in order to put all legal forms of providers on equal terms, and introduce a right for clients to have a social services provider of their choice.

The Government will increase the level of social integration and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The Government will ensure access to interpreting services. The Government will establish a network of integrated care for children.

The Government will thoroughly revise the system of compensation to persons with disabilities under ministries of health and social affairs.

The Government will support creating barrier-free communication and provision of information by public institutions.

Roma settlements and marginalised communities

The Government will prepare a draft act on socially excluded communities (SECs), which will define SECs and set out priorities and practices for addressing problems of SEC members.

The Government will prepare a project of zero grades at elementary schools, enhance involvement of SEC children in pre-school and secondary education, and give more powers to assistants. The Government will implement measures to remove segregation in the school system and prevent unreasonable inclusion of SEC children into special schools, and introduce maturity testing in the Roma language. The Government will revise the system of pedagogical and psychological and special pedagogical consultancy.

The Government will propose a method for the settlement of ownership titles to lands in SECs and encourage investments in basic infrastructure. The Government will define the concept of social housing and support a system of interchange multi-level social housing based on the merit principle.

In order to ensure more effective protection against crime, the Government will reinforce operation of the police force. The Government will create conditions for the integration of Roma into the police force, introduction of so-called SEC "patrolmen" and cooperation between the police and field workers.

The Government will complete a network of community centres with defined standards they must meet (for example, equipment, social field workers, medical assistants).

The Government will support activities carried out by local governments, churches, charities and third-sector organisations which deliver demonstrable results in addressing SEC problems.

The Government will introduce analyses and continuous SEC surveys (e.g., on education, employment, health conditions, crime, etc.) which will serve for the assessment of impacts of public policies and effectiveness of implemented programmes. Reporting units will be communities defined as groups of people subjectively defined by the majority population as SEC members.

3.3 HEALTHCARE

Value of health and health policy principles

A quality healthcare system that ensures good health conditions of the population is essential for a functioning society and the future of Slovakia. Health is a priority in the life of an individual and a fundamental pillar of a strong economy.

The underlying values in the healthcare system are solidarity and responsibility, along with preserving availability and equal access to healthcare services for all citizens of the Slovak Republic. The said principles represent the basis of the Government's health policy, which builds on a deep respect for every human being and their dignity, while ensuring protection of life until the natural death of an individual. The Government will emphasise compliance with ethical principles in the provision of healthcare services.

The healthcare system must ensure that reasonable healthcare services are available in adequate quality and at the lowest possible cost. The financial burden of the healthcare system – including in the form of individual payments – should be distributed fairly. It must not constrain the availability of reasonable healthcare services or significantly worsen the financial situation of socially vulnerable patients. On the other hand, it should contribute to the effective utilisation of healthcare services funded from the mandatory health insurance scheme. The healthcare system must be funded in a sustainable way, without incurring debts adversely affecting its further development.

In view of the fact that health is not a political category and that the healthcare system should not reflect the political situation, the Government will endorse a “Healthcare 2020” initiative that will enable discussion and a subsequent agreement of political parties, professional organisations and other stakeholders and set out priorities concerning the system, organisation and funding of healthcare services in Slovakia for a ten year period.

Public healthcare and prevention

The Government will strengthen and encourage health prevention practices, including through supporting and financing existing nationwide programmes such as the National Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Programme, the National Mental Health Programme, and the National Programme for Child and Adolescent Health, and will prepare other programmes focusing on senior citizens and oncologic patients with no additional requirements for budgetary funds. The Ministry of Health will revise existing nationwide health prevention programmes from the aspects of evidence-based medicine and economic effectiveness. Subsequently, the Ministry of Health will set out anew their purpose, objectives, scope, monitoring, control and evaluation. The revised programmes will be defined in detail and consistently implemented, supported by the thorough control of health determinants and effective health supervision performed by the state. Basic criteria of public health conditions will be defined to be used for its monitoring and evaluation.

The Government will introduce a bonus for adults who do not use up the entire portion of healthcare services covered from the public health insurance in a given year. The Government will set out uniform conditions for the provision of said bonus in order to prevent health insurance companies from taking a selective approach to patients.

The Government will discuss the scope of mandatory and recommended vaccination of children in line with WHO and ECDC recommendations.

Quality healthcare and patient security

The Government will support and strengthen the role of standard diagnostic and treatment practices in the provision of healthcare. These standards will protect patients from unreasonable diagnostics and treatment while saving resources.

The Government will endorse a health policy based on a consistent analysis of medical evidence and evidence on cost-effectiveness, with the focus on a positive influence on public health conditions.

The Government will support quality improvements in the healthcare system through the introduction of a comprehensible quality measurement system and accreditation of healthcare providers, including hospitals. An indicator-based evaluation will be published at least once a year.

Following an in-depth analysis, the Government will further develop and deliver the eHealth Implementation Programme in line with the needs of the Slovak healthcare system and EU strategy. The Government will introduce into practice electronic medical records, a National Health Portal and other eHealth applications within the National Health Information System as tools to improve the quality, effectiveness and availability of healthcare services.

The Government will restore the independence of the Health Care Surveillance Authority

The Government will regularly provide financial support to a health research and development grant system.

The Government will support completion of the system of urgent healthcare service and revise its funding so as to ensure that patients transported in by a rescue service receive subsequent care. A healthcare facility network must also be able to respond to events affecting large numbers of population, epidemics and pandemics. The Government will pay necessary attention to the financing of this area within the scope of existing resources.

Patient rights

The Government will improve access of low income groups of population to medicinal drugs. In addition, the Government will introduce such a payment system into the drug policy that will minimise growth in drug expenditures. The Government will introduce drug prescriptions on the basis of an active substance and support other funding mechanisms for financially demanding treatments. The Government will introduce a degressive margin on all types of drugs and consider introducing a degressive margin for all medical aids and dietetic food.

The Government will improve conditions for the provision of nursery care services to patients in their home or natural environment and ensure coordination with the nursery care funded from the social sector budget.

The Government will remove the requirement to have a GP referral before visiting a specialist. With the view to patient security, reasons for a GP recommendation to place a patient into a special outpatient or inpatient care will be given in a patient's medical records in a prescribed form.

The Government will improve the provision of information to citizens concerning the used-up portion of healthcare services and its costs by simplifying the existing conditions for access to insuree account statements.

The Government will introduce an upper limit on drug co-payments for selected groups of insurees. At the same time, the Government will create such conditions in the area of basic healthcare services so that they could be fully covered from the public health insurance.

Provision of healthcare services, funding of the healthcare sector

The Government will define a legal entitlement to a scope of healthcare services covered from the public health insurance. The scope of healthcare services covered from the public health insurance will be determined by taking into account developments in public health insurance resources and social and economic conditions in the Slovak Republic; it will be the same for all, and each health insurance company on the market will be required to provide it.

The Government will revise and restructure the minimum network of healthcare providers with the focus on equalising all providers, regardless of their owner and legal form.

The Government will introduce a fair system of healthcare financing with all providers. The Government will support the implementation of innovative, transparent and more objective payment mechanisms, in particular diagnosis-related group payments (a DRG system).

The Government will transform hospitals into commercial undertakings and will also enable transformation of non-profit organisations in order to increase transparency in the healthcare industry. The Government will thoroughly oversee compliance with the principles of effective management in state-owned hospitals, including disclosure of their contracts and transparent procurement of goods and services necessary for their operation.

Founders, owners and regulatory authorities will prevent any cartel agreements among providers, as well as health insurance companies, in price negotiations. Transparent dispute, mediation and arbitration procedures will be introduced into price negotiations, which the public health insurance companies will actively use if negotiations fail.

Selection and operation of emergency medical service providers will be ensured through an in-depth overhaul of tendering procedures by means of amendments to the statutory provisions governing the issuance of authorisations/licences. The changes will involve more stringent conditions for their specification and deadlines for a gradual selection of providers in order to avoid that all providers are chosen at the same time. Emergency medical service licences will be granted through electronic auctions.

Health insurance

The Government will encourage development of supplementary health insurance schemes to cover treatments beyond the scope of healthcare covered by public health insurance, as well as other healthcare-related services.

The Government will permit health insurance companies to generate profits under precisely defined conditions. The Government will insist that health insurance companies, when concluding contracts with providers, pay priority attention to ensuring quality, effective and accessible healthcare services for their insurees in order to improve public health parameters.

The Government will consider increasing the percentage portion of health insurance premiums to be excluded from re-allocation and revise the mechanism for the determination of this premium percentage.

The Government will enlarge the system of compensation of the risk structure of insurees with the aim of ensuring a more fair system of solidarity redistribution of insurance premiums, which will reflect the individual risk of an insuree. The Government will reduce barriers preventing the entry of new health insurance providers to the market.

3.4 EDUCATION SYSTEM, SCIENCE, YOUTH AND SPORT

Slovakia's capability of effectively utilising and fostering its human potential is a precondition for its economic and social, as well as moral and cultural, success. A state policy on education, as well as science, sport and youth, plays a crucial role in this respect, provided that it leads to quality schools, excellent education, cutting-edge inventions and superb performances in sports.

The current situation lags behind both Slovakia's possibilities and needs, and calls for substantial improvements. The problem lies in the lack of financial resources; however, their increase does not automatically guarantee better results. Rules of the game are often set in such a way that they do not encourage excellent performance and award those who strive for it.

Individual areas falling within the remit of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, in particular elementary and secondary education segments, have gone through a number of changes in the past, which, however, often failed to deliver as expected. The Government does not intend to put teachers, students and parents under stress, nor does it wish to carry out a reform for reform's sake without any tangible impacts, but it wants to elevate Slovak education, science and sports to a considerably higher level. The success should not be measured against the quantity of laws adopted, but rather against actual improvements in the work of teachers, students, pupils, scientists, athletes and young people, and against their achievements.

To that end, the Government will increase the amount of financial resources for schools, science and sports during its office term. The provision of such funds will be conditional upon changes in the rules and motivation at all levels so that they encourage higher quality, transparency in financial flows and increased effectiveness in their use.

The Government considers equal opportunities for all young people, irrespective of social background, region, or ethnicity, and the focus on the needs of children, students and youth the main principle of its education policy. The Government also wants to promote international aspects at all levels of the education system in order for educational and research institutions to communicate, compete and be competitive not only within Slovakia but internationally as well; further, the Government will encourage transparency and changes involving all stakeholders starting from parents and students up to teachers, founders and employers. The Government understands that the level of success of the education system also needs to be measured against the degree of integration and inclusion of disadvantaged individuals, including people with disabilities. The Government will support educational standards that strengthen new skills, intercultural dialogue, and moral and ethic standards generally accepted in society.

With respect to the current demographic development, the concept of lifelong learning is the only possible response that a responsible political representation may provide. The Government will ensure equal access to quality lifelong learning to all citizens following the completion of their education, during employment, as well as in retirement.

The Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport will co-decide, along with the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities, on addressing the issues pertaining to the minority school system, including its institutional base.

Elementary and secondary schools

The main aim of the Government with respect to elementary and secondary schools is to change the system and content of educational activities. The main criterion the Government will follow when changing the compulsory curriculum is the development of an active citizen capable of succeeding in an international labour market and satisfy his/her social and intellectual needs. To that end, the Government will prepare an amendment to the state educational programme to encourage education towards self-reliance, responsibility for own actions, thoughtfulness and consideration, critical and contextual thinking, civil participation, defending one's own opinions and respecting the opinions of others. The Government will also use all other available means in order to encourage a shift away from simple memorising to capability formation and the ability to collect, use and critically review information. Such means include giving more autonomy to schools in deciding on the content of their own curricula, linked with strengthening independent external testing guaranteed by the state. In addition, the Government wants to change the subject of testing - from knowledge to skills, and from measuring outcome to measuring added value of schools in educating students. The testing will not be the only means of quality assessment. The Government will introduce a new system of compulsory internal and external quality assessments of education provided at elementary and secondary schools with the aim of providing these schools with a real picture of their performance and increasing public access to information about results and performance of schools.

The Government will eliminate unnecessary red tape within schools and towards schools so that teachers may fully concentrate on delivering the best teaching performance. It will harmonise legislation governing schools regardless of their founder.

The Government will make the last year in kindergarten compulsory, with alternative solutions for children who prove to have good prospects of success in school even without participating in a pre-school education programme, and ensure improvements in pre-school diagnostic practices. The Government will support establishment of kindergartens in regions where they are insufficient.

The Government will revise the purpose of special schools, take measures to prevent segregation on grounds of ethnic background (including school maturity tests in the Roma language), and support the greatest possible integration of children with special needs and improve conditions for children whose integration is impossible or detrimental. Such an integration process must be accompanied with creating conditions to increase the number of special teachers, pedagogical and psychological advisors and assistants at schools. The Government will initiate a discussion on the codification of sign language and extend assistance services for people with disabilities.

The Government will gradually introduce English as a compulsory foreign language so that all secondary school graduates are fluent in English. At the same time, it will support teaching of other foreign languages and prepare a strategy towards improving foreign language skills, which will include not only purposeful and continuous teaching in a foreign language but also effective tools to support a better command of foreign languages. Through a change in methodology, the Government will improve the quality of teaching of the Slovak language at schools having a minority language as their teaching language.

The Government will abolish a state monopoly on textbooks and open the market for textbooks, while retaining the right to review and confirm compliance of their content with the State Educational Programme. A public National Textbook Register of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport will be established. The Government will create conditions for placing textbooks on the Internet and will help schools to effectively purchase textbooks that will lead to cost savings, while respecting the will of and voluntary decision-

making by schools. In addition to addressing the problem of the lack of textbooks, the competitive environment will also increase their quality. The Government will ensure more efficient utilisation of digital educational content and eLearning at all levels of the education system.

The Government considers better remuneration of pedagogical staff in the education system one of its major objectives. Based on an analysis and in consultations with all involved stakeholders, the Government will take measures to equalise the quality of teachers regardless of teaching subject and region. The Government will support further training of teachers with the focus on developing new and improving existing school curricula (educational programmes). The Government will improve the system of teacher professional career development so as to rid it of its formalist character and put an emphasis on working with pupils and students.

The Government will introduce equal conditions for the financing of schools and school facilities, regardless of their founder. It will strengthen financial and moral motivation to encourage founders to provide quality educational programmes in the most effective way, and ensure that comprehensible information is made publicly available on how the financial resources are redistributed at individual levels of the system. The Government will enhance freedom and transparency in financial management of income of schools and school facilities. The Government will introduce a financing mechanism in the form of leisure vouchers to fund children's school clubs, school hobby centres and children's leisure facilities, and introduce a central register so that resources are provided on the basis of children and youth participating in leisure activities, and their misuse and/or just formal reporting of activities is prevented. With the aim of promoting equal opportunities, the Government will provide funds to make schools barrier-free and improve their hygienic standards. The Government will create positive incentive tools to allow children from extremely poor families to continue studying at secondary schools (scholarships covering all related expenses). The Government will promote competitiveness among schools and more effective use of resources in the educational system by supporting physical mobility of students, including in the form of "school buses".

The Government is aware that the existing financing system in the secondary school sector discourages quality; therefore, it will pay special attention to this issue when implementing changes in the financing of schools. The Government will encourage admissions to secondary schools without entrance exams, based on an objective assessment of children's abilities, and introduce a uniform system of state school leaving exams at secondary schools. Based on a labour market analysis and in consultations with employers' associations, the Government will simplify the structure of study programmes at vocational secondary schools and support further development of the vocational school sector towards strengthening generic skills and its linkage with practice.

The Government will create conditions for increasing the total volume of sports activities of pupils and students during classes and in their free time. Schools will be open all day long and the Government will remove barriers to using schools for sports and artistic activities after classes. The Government will reinforce foundations of a healthy lifestyle at schools and adopt measures to improve the quality of school meals. The Government will promote measures to increase safety at schools.

Tertiary schools and science

The Slovak tertiary school and science sectors have been losing competitiveness over recent years. The situation is improving in some areas, but our neighbours and other advanced countries are moving forward at a much greater pace. Slovakia is now facing a crucial question: how to change this trend. The Government will adopt a comprehensive set of

measures to enhance the quality of Slovak tertiary schools and other research facilities and improve their position in international competition.

The Government will revise the most recent amendments to the University Act which have “conserved” shortcomings in the tertiary education system and curbed its qualitative development. In addition to legislative amendments, the Government will use the entire range of public policy means, including financial and information, to ensure a higher quality of tertiary education.

The Government will implement international quality standards in accreditation procedures for tertiary schools, including majority participation by foreign evaluators, and change accreditation criteria to ensure stricter requirements for, and more accurate assessment of, the quality of education and research. The Government deems it necessary to ensure more administrative and expert support for the activities of the Accreditation Commission as a main guarantor of the quality of tertiary study programmes, and protect the Commission’s independence from any political and lobbyist pressures. The aim is to give the Accreditation Commission room for more intensive and frequent examination of the actual state of play instead of one-off checks of submitted documents.

The Government will take steps to reduce the administrative burden of the accreditation procedure, though the participation of foreign experts in the procedure will require that documents necessary for accreditation be presented in English. The Government will ensure that the accreditation procedure examines processes through which tertiary schools ensure the same level of quality and study requirements in the case of external study programmes.

The Government will actively combat deceptive practices and ills that have taken root in the Slovak tertiary school system - not only at the level of individuals, but entire institutions. The Government will set up a mechanism to withdraw academic and scientific titles and degrees obtained by deceit, which will address both individual and system failures. At the same time, it will restrict artificial incentives for obtaining them.

The Government will set up a financial instrument to encourage tertiary schools that have ambitions and capacities to significantly improve their quality and international competitiveness and become a “workhorse” and driving an overall improvement in the performance of Slovak tertiary schools. On a competitive basis, this instrument will support projects carried out by tertiary schools and, subsequently, award their accomplishments. The Government will support qualitative improvements in the existing tertiary school financing system, using a smaller number of output- and, in particular, result-oriented indicators, with the weight of scientific outputs corresponding to the mission of a particular tertiary school. At the same time, it will more effectively encourage tertiary schools to cooperate with the private sector, including through obtaining non-public funds.

The Government will eliminate barriers preventing the entry of branches of top-ranking international universities and research institutions to Slovakia and provide financial incentives for their entry. In addition, the Government will, by means of competition programmes in particular, encourage and finance an inflow of internationally renowned scientists and academics to Slovakia, both individually and in small teams. The Government will introduce legislative amendments that will provide room for quick professional career growth for excellent academics and researchers; this is also supposed to encourage the return of Slovak expert capacities to Slovakia.

The problem of the Slovak science sector is not narrowed down to the limited volume of available funds only; it also concerns the way they are used, which currently does not ensure that they are provided to the best research teams and institutions. On that account, the Government will increase the volume of financial resources for scientific activities, but only for the best performing teams and institutions. To accomplish this commitment, a deliberate

concentration of financial resources in exacting and competition-based instruments is required, and renowned foreign evaluators will have to necessarily be involved in decision-making on the utilisation of such instruments. The Government will use these instruments to support excellent nationwide Ph.D. programmes built on the principle of bringing together the best domestic capacities and their international cooperation.

In this context, the Government will set up a new, transparent system of institutional and grant financing of research activities to ensure a level playing field for all research facilities regardless of their founder, which will be detached from the financing of the educational system and encourage more intensive cooperation among individual facilities within tertiary schools and other research institutions. The Government will increase the share of competitive financing of the science sector, including through competitive salaries. Under this system, the Government will promote competitive and transparent means of the transfer of technology and knowledge into practice with support from EU funds, as well as development of European-quality research facilities and scientific and technology parks.

The Government will transform the Research and Development Support Agency into an independent organisation and enhance its growing importance in research and development financing in Slovakia. The Government will develop system measures to make Slovak entities more successful in Community programmes, and simplify the system of using Structural Funds for research and development purposes. The Government will encourage the introduction of a prestigious national scientific award to be granted by a committee of internationally recognised scientists.

The Government will encourage as many Slovak tertiary students as possible to spend at least one semester at a tertiary school abroad. It will reinforce the role of foreign languages in the educational process at tertiary schools, with the focus on the English language, support study programmes taught bilingually or solely in a foreign language, and encourage tertiary schools to accept thesis papers written in a foreign language. The Government will also make use of other means to encourage a greater inflow of foreign students.

The Government will prepare an analysis of the current system of tuition fees and implement more effective practices to combat their unlawful and unfair collection.

The Government will promote increased diversity in the internal structure and powers of tertiary schools so that responsibility is brought into compliance with powers and the schools may better accomplish their diverse missions. The Government will reform the funding of social support for tertiary students and their sports and cultural activities in such a way that the funds are linked to a student, enabling him/her a free choice of a service provider, and reflect the student's dependence on social support. The Government will support the establishment and development of assistance centres for tertiary students with disabilities.

Youth and sport

The Government will introduce changes in the financing of sport so that more emphasis is put on youth, talent and national representations, clear rules for infrastructure building are established, and financial resources support concrete activities rather than the existence of umbrella organisations. The government will substantially increase the proportion of sport subsidies allocated in line with clearly set rules and introduce a system to measure the effectiveness and effect of subsidies. Investments of national importance will be funded on a competitive basis.

The Government will put an emphasis on sports activities and competitions financed from public funds being intended not only for talented but, thanks to an appropriate structure, to all people. The Government will promote awareness-raising of sports and ensure more publicity for successful youth coaches.

With respect to the work with youth, the Government will support projects that increase the social commitment and activity of young people. State support will combine, in a balanced way, support to sports, cultural and other leisure activities.

3.5 CULTURE

The Government considers culture a spiritual pillar of society which measures its maturity and forms part of a nation's identity. At the same time, the Government also understands the importance of its economic potential, which has so far not been given the credit in our country it deserves. In 2003, cultural sectors had a larger turnover in the EU than the automotive manufacturing sector, and contributed more to the EU's GDP than the food, clothing or chemical industries. It is the cultural sector that may play a major role in the economic, social and environmental development of our country and increase its competitiveness in the coming years.

Partial changes made in the cultural sector so far were significant in many cases, but have not led to the establishment of a comprehensive functional model. They lacked any clearly defined economic instruments of a cultural policy, links between state and regional culture, and failed to specify powers of the Culture Ministry in relation to other ministries and the political system as a whole. The volume of public funds earmarked for culture also declined in recent years, adversely affecting the entire cultural sector. The Government will pursue a modern, transparent and well-structured cultural policy; build on all positive principles established in the previous periods; support optimum relations between the cultural and other sectors; create a good cultural climate based on freedom, openness, tolerance and creativity; promote creation and origination of new values and works, as well as preservation of cultural values of the past; and intensify international links and cooperation in terms of cultural diversity and pluralism.

The Government will prepare Long-term Strategic Priorities for Slovakia's Cultural Policy which will provide a framework for cultural development in the upcoming period.

Economic and institutional instruments and system solutions

The main objective of the Government is to improve the effectiveness of and extend a multi-source culture financing system, with the aim of achieving cooperation between public funds and other resources.

The Government will create conditions for a more effective use of financial resources for the cultural sector through Structural Funds and Community programmes. Post-2013 operational programmes will include more cultural priorities (restoration of cultural heritage, modernisation and development of new cultural infrastructure, support for education and professional training in the cultural sector, support to partnerships between the cultural sector and other industries). Successful projects implemented under Community programmes will be guaranteed to receive co-funding from a Culture Ministry grant scheme.

The Government will support initiatives focused on creativity and establishing synergies between culture, education and the industry, and set up a special cross-cutting state aid programme.

The Government will revise decentralisation efforts in the cultural sector.

The Government will strengthen the legal status of national cultural institutions and enhance their autonomous position and professional independence from politics.

The Government will create conditions for effective and transparent support of unofficial culture by restructuring the existing grant scheme of the Culture Ministry. The Government will rid the grant system of the non-transparent influence of lobbyist groups and

implement simplified grant application procedures and more transparent administration. Under the restructured grant system, the Government will introduce continuous funding of selected cultural projects with Europe-wide and international impacts.

The Government will put forward a legislative amendment to change a two percent additional tax to a voluntary contribution, and propose the transformation of artistic funds into foundations. At the same time, the Government will seek effective legislative and other means to support original works in all areas of the arts.

Cultural heritage protection

The Government will improve the legislative environment concerning cultural heritage and prepare medium-term strategy papers which will define priorities and goals for the development of museums, galleries, libraries and national heritage.

The Government will carry out cultural heritage digitalisation projects and implement relevant programmes. It will strengthen the position of libraries as centres of knowledge and information, using all available information technology options. At the same time, it will support the use of cultural services provided by repository institutions, museums and galleries in order to facilitate tourism development.

The Government will also preserve and restore cultural heritage sites through the effective use of Structural Funds in a new programming period.

Art and state language

The Government will create conditions for consolidation of heraldic institutions in the area of arts and cultural heritage, and carry on with the reconstruction of headquarters buildings and the modernization and completion of their technical equipment.

The Government will take measures to amend the scope of activities of state institutions so that these institutions may deliver their mission towards experts and the general public more effectively. At the same time, it will seek possibilities to restore the missing links in the current institutional structure of the cultural sector in Slovakia.

The Government will seek effective tools to enhance access to arts as a special means of lifelong personality development and cultivation, with a special focus on young people (free admission days for children, students and pensioners).

The Government will ensure the protection and development of the state language and see to the strengthening of its role as a means of communication and social integration in compliance with the principles of non-discrimination so that national minority rights are ensured at the 2006 level. The Government will remove senseless restrictions and constraints in legislation concerning national minorities.

Media and audio-visual works

The Government will abolish license fees paid to public TV and radio broadcasters and create a new legislative framework for the financing, organisation and functioning of public media with the aim of increasing their effective operation and reinforcing their public character. The Government will comprehensively address a uniform system of marking television programmes, with the focus on human dignity and protection of minor children.

The Government will revise the application of the Press Act and make necessary legislative changes, especially the cancellation of the right to response, in particular for public officials. The Government will restructure the Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR). At the international level, it will endorse better protection of children against the dangers of the Internet (bullying, violence, harassment, pornography).

The Government will continue creating conditions to save and restore audio-visual heritage, preserve it for the next generations, and make it systematically available for cultural, educational, promotional and commercial purposes.

Disadvantaged groups, churches and religious communities

The Government will create conditions to facilitate access by disadvantaged groups of the population to culture and information, and assist them in satisfying their cultural needs and equalising opportunities in the area of culture.

The Government will further develop the existing successful cooperation and fair dialogue with representatives of churches and religious communities and initiate a public discussion on the issue of church financing.

International cooperation

The Government will set up an effective system to finance state priorities in international cultural cooperation and presentation of Slovak culture and arts as part of a comprehensive promotion of the Slovak Republic abroad. At the same time, the Government will create conditions to intensify international mobility of artists, cultural staff and arts and culture students by means of a special grant scheme. The Government will support the preparation and implementation of the *European Capital of Culture Košice 2013* project.

4. SECURE AND EFFECTIVE STATE

4.1 THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The rule of law

The quality of legal regulations, the level of enforceability of the law, the style of work of the public authorities (including the courts) – all this has an impact on the life of each and every citizen. The current situation in the justice system, the low level of enforceability of the law, corruption and cronyism, and the style and methods of governance in Slovakia have created a climate of general mistrust in the institutions of the state, the courts, the judges, and the rule of law.

Trust is the mainstay of the relationship of citizens to the institutions of the state, including the courts. The state has the means to build and maintain the trust and confidence of its own citizens, for by laying down the rules, the state can create the environment that helps people enforce their rights.

To revive the trust in justice, in the state and its institutions, it is necessary to change the day-to-day functioning of these institutions. The aim is to give people access to effective and speedy administration of justice and, moreover, make them feel that this is the way the state can and does function.

The Government wants to restore the trust of the citizens in the rule of law. To this end, the Government will spearhead consistent application of the principle according to which the state authorities can act only within the boundaries of the law, and will create the space and mechanisms for the effective exercise of citizens' rights and respect for human rights, including effective access to justice.

The Government considers public control by the citizens to be an effective instrument for the control of democratic institutions. The Government therefore wants to create the preconditions for the participation of citizens in the running of public affairs, including in the legislative process, especially through expanding access to information.

In Slovakia, the legal and judicial system has the trust of less than one in three citizens.

The aim of the Government is to increase the long-term trust in the democratic institutions, including trust in the justice system, and to strengthen enforceability of the law. To this end, the Government endorses sustainable changes in the justice system and will endeavour to garner the broader support of society for its proposals and measures in this area.

The prerequisites guaranteeing impartiality of judicial decision-making

In relation to the court system, the Government's objective is to create the necessary prerequisites enabling the courts to issue decisions impartially, in compliance with the law, within a reasonable time, and to increase people's trust in the courts and in the legal system in general. The Government recognises that the achievement of this goal is conditional on setting up a balanced relationship between court administration bodies, including court presidents on the one hand, and the courts and judges on the other hand. It should, on the one side, ensure the effective functioning and administration of courts and, on the other side, prevent the direct or indirect influence of court administration bodies on judicial decision-making.

To this end, the Government will propose and implement the changes in the system of administration of judicial bodies that will ensure that the allocation of resources to individual courts through the management information system be transparent, easily controllable by the public and complying with the predetermined criteria, in order to eliminate the space for internal corruption in the courts. For the same reason, the Government will reconsider the

types, amounts and modalities of the remuneration of judges and prosecutors paid on top of the standard judicial salary derived from the salary of a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

The Government does not support overlaps between the executive and the judiciary that occur when the judges appointed to government and other state administration positions are entitled to resuming the performance of the judicial office immediately after the termination of their appointment. The Government will therefore propose an amendment to the existing legislation whereby judges would be prevented from alternating the performance of the judicial office with an executive position without any time period in between and, moreover, the minister of justice would be prevented from running for the presidency of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as “the Supreme Court”).

For the same reasons, the Government will carry through the objective of preventing the presidents and vice-presidents of courts, acting as the representatives of the executive branch at courts, from being elected members of the Judicial Council of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as “the Judicial Council”), and will propose that the Judicial Council be separated from the Supreme Court; it will also put forward a constitutional proposal preventing the president of the Supreme Court to simultaneously hold the post of the president of the Judicial Council.

To increase the credibility of the Judicial Council, the Government will demand that the key criteria in the selection of its members be the professional competence and moral integrity of candidates. Pursuing the aim of greater openness of the excessively closed judicial system, the Government will advocate also the inclusion of candidates from among non-judges; public sessions of the Judicial Council; and the obligation of the Judicial Council to justify its decisions. The Government will propose a constitutional amendment opening up membership in the Judicial Council to non-lawyers.

The Government will propose amendments to the provisions governing disciplinary proceedings against judges and to the system of setting up disciplinary panels, which should create the necessary preconditions enabling disciplinary courts to act, where appropriate, as effective bodies for cleaning up the judicial community, while minimising the risk of their misuse. To this end, the Government will make an effort to introduce the system of random *ad hoc* appointments of dedicated disciplinary panels for individual disciplinary proceedings, and to enable citizens’ control over disciplinary panels and disciplinary proceedings. The Government will simultaneously propose that, since disciplinary panels are set up by the Judicial Council, the Judicial Council be deprived of the power to initiate disciplinary proceedings against judges.

In the Government’s view, random assignment of cases using the electronic filing room is an important tool for reducing the space for corruption in the allocation of cases at all courts, including the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as “the Constitutional Court”).

The Government will propose legislation aimed at strengthening the status of the collective bodies of the Supreme Court in order to enhance the quality and transparency of the decision-making processes that are important for the proper functioning of the Supreme Court; more specifically, the Government will propose the strengthening of powers of the full Supreme Court and of its divisions in the taking of decisions at the Supreme Court, especially those related to the Court’s work schedule.

The Government will propose that the administration of the budget chapter of the Supreme Court, the Judicial Council and the General Prosecution Office be shifted to the ministry of justice.

The Government will propose a constitutional amendment changing the term of office of the Constitutional Court's judges in order to prevent a situation where a majority of judges would get elected within a single election term.

Openness and public control of the justice system

The Government promotes the principle of openness and transparency that underlies/supports the work of court administration bodies and of individual courts and enables public control of their work. The Government believes that public control of judicial decisions in a democratic society is the most effective means of ensuring protection of the rights of citizens – parties to the proceedings – within a reasonable time, and protection of judicial decision-making against undue influence.

To this end, the Government will carry through the proposal to introduce the legal obligation of courts to publish all judicial decisions on the Internet and will gradually create conditions for the electronic recording of all hearings. For this reason, the Government will also support the implementation of e-Justice applications that will enable the parties to the proceedings to communicate with the courts by electronic means and to use the Internet to monitor the actual procedural status of their case, so as to enable everybody to gain Internet access to an overview of court proceedings. The Government will make sure that all courts have their own websites with basic information (address, contact telephone numbers, list of judges, office hours, judges' schedule of work, etc.) in an easily accessible and intelligible form, and with statistics on court decisions.

The Government will support the introduction of independent monitoring of courts by the citizens.

Trust in the judiciary

To strengthen trust in the judiciary, the Government will push for enactment of legislation ensuring transparent and open selection proceedings for the positions of judges, head prosecutors, prosecutors and trainee prosecutors for all the candidates who meet the criteria set by law. The Government will propose a legal mechanism for conducting selection proceedings and for setting up selection committees, which will ensure the selection of the most suitable candidates, including court presidents, and equal chances for all candidates. In order to break away from the excessively closed justice system, judicial institutions will no longer have the right to appoint the majority of members of selection committees.

For the same reasons, the Government will propose legislation on assessing judicial performance, which will specify detailed criteria, procedures and consequences of the assessment of judge's work, including the possibility of recalling the judge if it is proven that he or she no longer has the professional or moral competence for performing the judicial office. The Government will promote openness and transparency of the evaluation of judges, including the publication of its results as a means of public control over the performance of the judicial office.

The Government will propose the introduction of compulsory security screening for judges and judicial candidates.

The Government will propose legislation that will create conditions for transparent appointment of court presidents and vice-presidents – the representatives of the executive power at courts – in order to ensure effective functioning and administration of courts.

To effectively fight corruption in the field of justice, the Government will propose that personal property declarations be published not only in the case of judges, but also in the case of prosecutors, and will reconsider the elements of criminal offences of influencing judicial decisions. In order to introduce transparent disciplinary proceedings against prosecutors, the

Government will propose legislation on disciplinary proceedings against prosecutors, analogical to that applicable to judges.

The Government will also set up a hotline for reporting cases of corruption in the justice system and in the prison system.

Effective justice system

The Government supports the court management system as a tool for making the work of courts more effective; it will gradually create conditions for setting up competent professional support teams for judges. To this end, the Government will propose abolishing the category of judicial candidates, while simultaneously creating the legal preconditions for stabilising the category of higher court officials with the possible strengthening of their competences.

The Government supports the specialisation of judges and will create the preconditions for quality education and training of judges, court clerks and prosecutors (the Judicial Academy).

The Government will start work on drafting and adopting modern and effective rules of procedure for the conduct of judicial proceedings in civil cases, introducing effective tools to prevent delays in the proceedings.

The Government will simplify access to the court by expanding the possibility of using forms and simplified procedures. The Government will propose new legislation on the service of process in the case of court documents, inspired by the Czech model.

The Government will initiate a public expert discussion concerning the creation of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Slovak Republic, which would ensure a more effective protection of the rights of citizens infringed upon by the decisions and procedures of public administration authorities. The creation of the Supreme Administrative Court would also mean splitting the administrative agenda from the Supreme Court and the related reconstruction of the Supreme Court, and a revision of the scope of competence of the Constitutional Court.

The Government will carry out the restructuring of the Centre for Legal Assistance with the aim of enhancing its accessibility, professionalism and scope of services for indigent persons. The Government will push for strengthening the prevention role of the Centre for Legal Assistance in a situation of escalating legal problems of indigent persons, and for enhancing overall legal awareness in society as a tool for protecting the rights of all. Moreover, the Government will pursue the objective of creating a network of the existing institutions for the protection of human rights.

The Government will perform its supervision over executors, notaries, trustees, mediators, experts, interpreters and translators in a manner that will enable using its results to improve services for citizens.

The Government will settle outstanding payments to lawyers, experts, interpreters and translators for their services.

Penal policy of the state and the penitentiary system

In the area of criminal proceedings, the Government will propose changes aimed at preventing obstructions on the part of the accused and, at the same time, expanding the authority of the minister of justice to file appeals for review in criminal matters, also with regard to the facts of the case.

To effectively punish serious organised crime, the Government will consider the introduction of the compulsory penalty of property forfeiture in case of such serious crime. The Government will push for enactment of the legislation instituting effective criminal liability of legal persons.

The Government will propose and push for strengthening the status of the Specialised Criminal Court and of the Special Prosecution Office through a constitutional statute.

The Government will strengthen the procedural independence of prosecutors and will change the status of the ministry of justice vis-à-vis the prosecution office in relation to the issuance of generally binding opinions of the minister of justice.

The Government will take account of the needs of the prison system and, in this connection, will ensure appropriate staffing of the Corps of Prison and Court Guards; depending on the budget, it will expand the capacity of prisons and make an effort at strengthening the instruments for the genuine re-education of sentenced persons in the framework of care for sentenced persons during the service of custodial sentences and after their release.

While respecting the human dignity of mentally ill and dangerous sexual crime offenders and repeat offenders, the Government will take steps to expeditiously build a special facility for the provision of care to these offenders who require special conditions for their own protection and for the protection of the public.

4.2 INTERNAL ORDER AND SECURITY

Law and order in the state and security of its citizens are permanent prerequisites for the sound development of each society. The rule of law and respect for the law are the foundations of a free society. Key institutions for public safety, law and order are the police and other law enforcement agencies of the state. The Government will vigorously demand them to fulfil their basic mission, i.e., to be tough on crime and decent towards citizens. However, the function of the protection of internal order and security cannot be solely the responsibility of these institutions. The Government will push for also making other state entities with competences in the area of internal order and security take their share of responsibility much more seriously. Moreover, it also expects local government bodies of municipalities and towns to show greater commitment to the protection of lives, health, property, rights and freedoms of citizens.

It is, in particular, the Police Force that must employ its powers, personnel potential, resources and means more consistently and effectively in order to enhance the feeling of security and safety of the citizens. The Government will demand greater openness of the police towards citizens, improvement of mutual communication, and more effective use of submissions from citizens. The Government will incorporate the Railway Police into the organisational structure of the Police Force, and the Ministry of Interior's Office of Border and Alien Police into the organisational structure of the Police Force Presidium.

The Government is firmly committed to intervening more vigorously against and imposing harsher punishments for organised crime. It will adopt the system for the protection of persons reporting serious crimes and will increase the effectiveness of the institution of cooperating accused. By amending the criminal legislation, it will improve the use of operational and investigative activities and of electronic surveillance.

The Government will also focus attention on petty crime with which citizens come across most frequently. It will, *inter alia*, increase the number of police officers on patrol duty, especially in problem areas. It will strengthen the protection of property of the citizens living near socially marginalised communities. It will take steps to build trust in state institutions within the Roma community (by recruiting Roma police officers for the Police Force and municipal police), including through strengthening protection against usury. The Government will put forward a new draft legislation governing the status and activities of the municipal police. It will provide financial assistance for prevention programmes and projects

of building camera monitoring systems in municipalities with the aim of enhancing the safety of persons and property and pushing vandalism and hooliganism out of public areas and town centres that report increased incidences of crime and public order violations.

In case of minor offences of the petty theft type, the Government will consider the possibility of introducing the obligation of damage compensation representing double the damage that was sustained, having the form of community service or financial compensation. In case of minors, this obligation would fall to their parents or legal guardians.

The Government will adopt a new society-wide strategic plan of the Slovak Republic for crime prevention in the upcoming years. It attaches importance to completing the development and stabilising the already existing structures of the crime prevention system at national and local levels, and to applying a systems approach to financing crime prevention and prevention-related training activities.

One of the Government's key priorities will be the fight against corruption. The Government will take measures to strengthen and improve links between the police, the prosecution service and the courts aimed at speeding up and increasing the effectiveness of proceedings in serious corruption matters during the entire chain of procedural steps, i. e., from the detection, investigation, and indictment to the sentencing of the offender. By making effective use of police capabilities, legislative and technical means and tools, it wants to achieve a higher success rate in detecting cases of corruption. The Government will take steps to increase the quality of setting up specialised police forces, especially by applying stricter selection criteria for service in the police and by attracting top specialists from the private sector for work in the Police Force Presidium's office for the fight against corruption and the office for the fight against organised crime. The Government supports the initiatives to create the European anti-corruption network. It will conclude the drafting of the criminal legislation to punish corruption and will draw up new legislation aimed at increasing the transparency of the financing of political parties and movements and of election campaigns for all types of elections in conformity with the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). The Government pledges to also step up the efforts at enhancing the legal awareness of citizens, and at overcoming entrenched and deep-rooted attitudes and mental models underlying the perception of this negative phenomenon in today's society.

The Government will create the necessary conditions, especially within the financial police of the Police Force, for a consistent application of the law on the proof of origin of property, in order to make the law effectively discourage the acquisition of property from illegal proceeds and become an effective instrument for seizing the property thus acquired.

The Government declares that there is no place for expressions of extremism in our society. It will use all its lawful powers and tools to combat extremism, including through strengthening and increasing the quality of the structures for the fight against extremism in terms of their staffing and professional competence. By using all available means, the Government will prevent extremists from taking the initiative to address the problems of the Roma community. The Government will enforce a zero tolerance policy against perpetrators of individual, group or institutional violence committed in conflict with the principles of human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and international treaties. After it has carried out the analysis of the current situation, it will approve a new concept of the fight against extremism.

The Government will support the completion of the analysis and coordination centre for the fight against organised crime. It will strengthen the measures for the fight against terrorism with an emphasis on the commitments of the Slovak Republic taken at the level of the bodies of the European Union. It will adopt additional legal instruments and means for eliminating the threats of money laundering and the financing of terrorism. It will continue in

the transposition of basic international standards into the legal system of the Slovak Republic in the area of the fight against money laundering, the financing of terrorism and members of terrorist groups, and against other forms of assistance for their unlawful activities.

The basic framework for the anti-drug policy of the Government in the upcoming period will continue to be the European Union Drug Strategy for 2005 – 2012, applied to the conditions of the Slovak Republic in its National Anti-Drug Strategy. The Government will devote special attention to the fight against the distribution and consumption of drugs both as regards drug control and drug prevention. It will strengthen the legal and executive competences of the Police Force for the fight against drugs.

The Government will prepare a new comprehensive national strategy for the fight against trafficking in people and for the protection of victims of such criminal activity. It will strengthen the fight against trafficking in people both as regards the number of staff and professional competence. It will pursue the imposition of stricter penalties for criminal offences of trafficking in people, child pornography, violence against children, sexual abuse and torture.

In 2009, the Slovak Republic got close to meeting the undertaking towards the European Union to reduce the number of road traffic victims by one-half by 2010. The Government will take measures aimed at keeping the number of road fatalities at the lowest possible level. It will take steps to make the exercise of police powers even better-gearred to protecting all law-abiding drivers and to imposing uncompromising punishment for gross conduct, arrogance and dangerous driving behaviour. The Government will adopt clear rules for narrowing down the margin of discretion in deciding on the imposition of fines for road traffic violations. The Police Force will not be motivated to maximise the revenues from fines for traffic violations. The Government will introduce objective responsibility for traffic violations.

In the e-Government framework, the Government will ensure the issuance of electronic identification cards and adjust the issuance of documents in a manner enabling the secure identification of citizens in e-Government information systems and the use of a certified electronic signature, with a view to enabling the use of documents and information systems for the purposes of secure identification for using services also within the private sector.

The quality of work and good results of the Police Force are conditional on the quality of the human factor and on raising the social standing of police officers. Certain corrections that are needed in the system of police education and training include the creation of prerequisites for providing basic police training in the form of setting up permanent public order units. These units will serve to enable police officers to acquire and reinforce requisite practical habits and service discipline before entering active duty.

The risks connected with the work of policemen, the dangerous and demanding character of their tasks, and high degree of their responsibility will have to be balanced out by applying and improving the elements of effective protection of police officers. In addition, the Government will lay emphasis on internal control within the police force by strengthening the capacity of and technical support for control and inspection mechanisms, and by strengthening the system of independence of inspection bodies. In relation to the ministry of the interior, the Government will demand the ministry enact its own measures and/or present proposals for removing the obstacles hindering or preventing the disclosure and effective investigation of corruption, unlawful cooperation of the police with criminal elements, and other criminal activities. The Government will support the implementation of the project of “smart police officers” (cashless collection of fines, use of technical means to control the handling of violations), which is intended to increase the transparency of handling traffic violations and prevent police corruption.

The Government will maintain the system of social security for the armed services, Fire and Rescue Corps, and Mountain Rescue Service. To secure the sustainability and equality of the system, it will propose certain changes that will apply to new officers admitted to these services after the entry into effect of these changes. The Government is well aware of the fact that the worsening of the status and working conditions of police officers increases the risk of crime, thus weakening the security of citizens. Following the already-implemented changes in the remuneration and social security of police officers and members of the Fire and Rescue Corps and Mountain Rescue Service, it will focus on housing policy as an additional employee retention element. In the area of material and technical support for policemen, further necessary replacement and modernisation of police armament and equipment and modernisation of police facilities will be carried out in line with the financial possibilities of the sector, also drawing on funds and financial instruments of the European Union and other international assistance instruments. Priority will be given to specialised police units. The Government will ensure the rearming of police officers, especially those in direct operational positions.

The Government will draw up a new concept of the security system of the Slovak Republic with the objective of ensuring uniform crisis management in the face of military and non-military threats and its more effective functioning at all levels. The implementation of the new concept will also include the drafting of generally binding legal provisions reflecting the need to expediently adopt and implement necessary measures in and outside crisis situations. The Government will simplify the structure of the security system and create the necessary prerequisites for its transformation in line with the approved Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic and with the international commitments of the Slovak Republic. In the Government's opinion, an important task is the achievement of a qualitatively higher degree of guaranteeing the security of citizens and of the state.

In connection with addressing the consequences of emergency situations (such as natural disasters, industrial accidents and catastrophes), the Government will place increasingly higher demands on guaranteeing the constitutional right of citizens to the protection of their lives, health, property and of the environment. The Government will create the necessary prerequisites for the development of a system of civil protection by 2015, and for the fulfilment of Slovakia's commitments arising from the strategic documents of the EU, NATO and the United Nations. It will ensure more rapid and effective assistance to the population during emergencies and in crisis situations by means of joint deployment of personnel and equipment of all rescue services concerned.

The Government will build a better functioning integrated rescue system by integrating and restructuring the system of operational management of crisis management bodies and of basic rescue services, especially by expanding the services provided by means of the single European emergency number, 112. It will prepare a new concept of organisation, functioning and development of the integrated rescue system for the years 2010 – 2015 accompanied by an action plan, and a new law on the integrated rescue system.

The Government recognises that the standard of equipment of the Fire and Rescue Corps and conditions for its deployment are still lagging behind the standard of the developed countries of the EU. Depending on the possibilities of the state budget, EU funds and financial instruments and other international assistance instruments, it will allocate additional resources in order to gradually increase the number of firemen, improve their material and technical standards and replace outdated equipment, and to finance the ongoing upgrading of fire stations. It will support the renewal of material and technical equipment of municipal fire departments with the aim of improving their capability for action and effectiveness in fighting fires, providing assistance, and carrying out rescue and maintenance operations in cases of natural disasters, especially floods. The Government will take comprehensive steps to address

the existing problems in the performance of mountain rescue operations in order to create better conditions for the provision of adequate help by members of the Mountain Rescue Service.

Two and a half years after accession to the Schengen area, the Slovak Republic is a fully valuable member. The upcoming repeat evaluation of the Slovak Republic in 2012 or 2013 creates the commitment for the Government not to relent in its efforts to implement the Schengen acquis. Finalisation of relevant measures concerning internal borders, including the update of projects on a temporary re-introduction of checks at internal borders, quality improvement of physical and technical equipment for securing the external state border with Ukraine and of Schengen-type international airports, completion of the 2nd generation Schengen information system and of the visa information system – these are the Slovak Republic's priorities for increasing the level of security and protection of the Schengen area, to be co-financed from EU funds.

The Government will take steps to improve the quality of mechanisms for managing the migration and integration of aliens, placing emphasis on the alignment and harmonisation of relevant procedures and policies with the developments and trends in other EU Member States. In connection with sharing the migration burden, the Slovak Republic will participate in the resettlement process and accept migrants from those EU countries that experience large inflows of migrants, and/or from the countries covered by the EU decision on the provision of humanitarian assistance based on the solidarity principle. In the field of asylum, the Government will focus on completing stage two of the establishment of the common European asylum system. It will support the harmonisation of asylum policies and cooperation with other EU Member States, especially as regards the quality of decision-making procedures, and will foster a high level of protection against the misuse of the asylum institution. The system of readmission agreements with Russia and Ukraine will be completed. The Government will prepare policy concepts for the migration policy of the Slovak Republic in the period of 2011 – 2015.

Public administration

Modern and advanced society is epitomised by a stable and rationally organised public administration that provides quality service to citizens. The criteria for this kind of public administration are transparency, economy, accessibility, performance financing, decentralisation and application of market elements. The Government aspires to step up the dynamics of the processes of modernisation, economisation and computerisation of public administration.

The modernisation of public administration is a long-term and complex process. It must be accompanied by the de-bureaucratisation of its structures and apparatus. The Government will take steps to streamline and increase the effectiveness of public administration. It will ensure the screening of all public authorities with the aim of revealing potential redundancies and the implementation of audits and restructuring of ministries and other central state administration authorities. The Government will foster the streamlining of the procedures and the de-bureaucratisation of the handling of information by public authorities. It will make the necessary efforts to avoid the need to request information from citizens where the relevant authority already possesses such information, or where it can obtain such information otherwise. The Government will introduce the principle according to which the failure of a public authority to respect the time limit will mean that the citizen will be entitled to be reimbursed the administration fee.

The Government will re-assess the results of the decentralisation of competences at all levels of public administration. It will re-assess the exercise of competences at the level of

territorial self-governments with the objective of setting out clear rules governing the respective roles of regional and local self-governing authorities.

The Government will carry out a local government reform that will motivate the municipalities to voluntary cooperation, pooling of administrative capacities and municipality mergers. It will support the creation of joint municipal offices that should improve the possibilities for citizens' contacts with public authorities, and streamline and improve the work of local self-governing authorities. The Government will take steps to strengthen the independent control of territorial self-governing authorities.

In the framework of economisation of public administration, the Government will consider the possibilities of further financial decentralisation. It will adjust the system of re-allocation of public finance between individual levels of state administration and self-governing authorities to ensure its more equitable use and to make the amount of allocated financial means correspond to the scope of performed activities and to the financial demands on various types of administration.

Computerisation plays a decisive role in addressing all public administration problems. It is based on the modernisation of all existing systems, introduction of new systems, their harmonisation and integration, achievement of compatibility and interoperability in all areas of public administration. This is the basic prerequisite for providing good-quality, timely and accessible services to citizens. By the same token, the Government will support the implementation of strategic tasks in the field of information security.

To increase the transparency of the decision-making processes in the allocation of budgetary funds for the areas of internal order and security and of public administration, the Government will develop and utilise the possibilities offered by the integrated information system in the budget chapter of the ministry of the interior, especially as regards project management and analyses of the effectiveness of budgetary performance of individual entities.

The Government will make wider use of and develop the potential for cooperation between public administration authorities and the non-profit sector. It will create the necessary legislative framework to enable non-profit organisations to play a more effective role in satisfying the needs of citizens and in improving the quality of people's lives and quality of the governance of society and democracy by strengthening people's participation in the decision-making processes. The Government will create the preconditions for the development of volunteering, including the definition of the concept of a volunteer. The Government will support the activities of charitable organisations, non-governmental organisations and Christian communities that reach the best results, especially from EU funds.

In the area of entrepreneurial activities performed under a trade licence, the Government will assess the scope of competence of trade licence authorities providing "one-stop-shop" services connected with authorising the entry of foreign and Slovak natural and legal persons to doing business in the territory of the Slovak Republic. It will examine the possibility of simplifying the process of granting trade licences for those trades that only require notification, and the particulars needed for business registration of natural and legal persons.

The Government will draw up the election code with the aim of bringing clarity, unification of terminology, and uniform wording of certain provisions of the electoral legislation in force. The Government will propose the rule that will provide for a single mandate for members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and members of the European Parliament. It will introduce the possibility of citizens using the Internet to vote, along with the introduction of single electronic identifiers.

In line with the National Concept of Computerisation of Public Administration, the Government will continue linking up all registry offices with the central information system and building a central database of registry events for the country as a whole, which will provide services to the registry offices and to the public.

In the area of acquisition of citizenship of the Slovak Republic, the Government will introduce strict rules and control over the granting of citizenship. It will amend the legislation adopted by the Slovak Republic in response to the dual citizenship law of the Republic of Hungary in order to eliminate the undesirable negative effects of the law for the citizens of the Slovak Republic. The Government will improve the services provided to Slovak citizens who are staying abroad for longer periods to work or study, primarily by accelerating and simplifying registry and other administrative procedures.

4.3 SECURITY POLICY AND DEFENCE

The security of the Slovak Republic forms an integral part of the North Atlantic Community security. NATO's collective defence system and the EU Common Security and Defence Policy provide the Slovak Republic with crucial security guarantees. They represent primary instruments for defending and advancing the security interests of the Slovak Republic, along with other international organisations in which Slovakia is a member. For that reason, the Government will contribute to enhancing their action readiness and credibility.

The Government will implement its security and defence policy in such a way that the Slovak Republic can adequately and in time respond to situations threatening the security of its citizens, the State and allies. It will make an active contribution towards ensuring security and protecting the values which Slovakia shares with its allies and partners.

Considering the need to ensure security for our citizens and the defence of the State, while taking into consideration the strategic documents of NATO and the EU, including the Alliance's new Strategic Concept, the Government will carry out a strategic review of the defence of the Slovak Republic with a view to defining a political-and-strategic framework for long-term defence capability of the Slovak Republic and its Armed Forces, including a stable resource perspective. During that process, the principal security policy and defence documents will be reviewed in order to reflect the current international arrangements and global security environment as well as the objectives identified in the latest NATO and EU strategic documents.

Within the defence-related strategic review process the Government will provide for a broader dialogue with the expert community as well as the public in order to achieve a nation-wide consensus on security policy and defence of the State, priorities, objectives, responsibilities and needs of the Armed Forces. The findings and recommendations of the defence strategic review will be subject to a public consultation that will be launched before the end of 2012 and incorporated into principal strategic and concept document and related legislation.

The Government will adopt systemic measures aimed at streamlining and increasing effectiveness of resource management, enhancing transparency and effective use of funds budgeted for defence.

The Government will continue addressing the property restitution issues concerning the Javorina military district in order to restore legitimate property rights.

The Government will put through changes in the system of classified information protection in order to simplify handling with such documents and reduce their number, while ensuring the minimum security standard of NATO and the EU.

The Government will put through a system of regular, unbiased and transparent performance assessment of the defence sector by means of public reporting.

The Government will maintain a high engagement of our Armed Forces in international crisis management operations of international organisations and High Readiness Forces of NATO and the EU. In line with the priorities of Slovakia's foreign and defence policy, our efforts will focus on deploying in few operations compact contingents built on the basis of organic troops. The Government will review the engagement of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic in international crisis management operations with a view to further strengthening their contribution in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan in line with the international community's strategy for gradual handing over responsibility for the country to Afghan authorities.

The Government will use the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group, as well as the Hungarian and Polish Presidencies of the EU, to intensify Central-European cooperation in the field of security policy and to actively pursue and advance Slovakia's interests in NATO and the EU.

The Government will introduce a system of comprehensive approach of public authorities to creating and deploying military and civil capabilities in international crisis management operations.

The Government will support international cooperation in the field of capability sharing in order to use the existing resources in an effective manner.

To ensure that the transformation of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic can proceed in accordance with the conclusions of the defence strategic review, the Government will put in place conditions providing for long-run, stable and appropriate resources. Human resource development and Armed Forces modernisation are considered to be the fundamental pillars of the transformation.

Experiences gained from operations and international military formations will be intensively and consistently used in the training and education of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will maintain the social security system of the Armed Forces. With a view to ensuring the sustainability and fairness of that system, the Government will prepare modifications to that system that will apply to those who join the Armed Forces after coming of those modifications into force.

The Government will focus on the targeted modernisation of the Armed Forces, concentrating limited resources on the gradual, comprehensive modernisation of organic troops in order to achieve the required capabilities. Consideration will be given to the introduction of an active reserve system.

The Government will support the involvement of Slovakia's defence industry in the international arena, in particular in the framework of the modernisation and security projects of NATO and the European Defence Agency. The Government will create conducive conditions for defence research and development with a view to providing for the needs of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and developing capabilities in the areas where the Slovak Republic can provide value added within the international community.

The Government will ensure the readiness of the Armed Forces to adequately, quickly and effectively support the components of the integrated rescue system in preventing and addressing the consequences of natural disasters, industrial, traffic or other operational accidents threatening the lives, health and security of citizens and causing major material damage.

The Government will enhance the civilian aspects of the security policy and defence of the State by means of a regular and open dialogue with the professional community and civil associations with professional links with the Armed Forces.

The Government will support an efficient and effective public diplomacy aimed at providing citizens with objective information on the objectives, responsibilities and needs of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. It will make efforts to maintain the high confidence level of citizens in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will cultivate national and military traditions that strengthen patriotism, and give adequate support to war veterans.

4.4 FOREIGN POLICY

The foreign policy of the Slovak Republic will be intelligible and trustworthy, and will reflect the values adhered to by Slovakia and shared by the Euro-Atlantic community. It will honour and respect our allied commitments. As a member of the EU and NATO, Slovakia will take an active part in the creation of the system of international relations with the central role of the UN, based on fundamental democratic values, rights and freedoms, international law and effective multilateralism. The foreign policy will serve the citizens of the Slovak Republic and will protect their interests. It will be creative, actively looking for new opportunities, coordinated and capable of achieving its objectives in cooperation with the various actors at home and abroad. It will be characterised by communication, openness and mutual dialogue, and by cooperation with civil society in the formulation and evaluation of foreign policy.

Value-based foreign policy

The Government will consistently defend the interests of the Slovak Republic and of its citizens. The Government will assert the foreign policy interests of Slovakia based on such values as the right to life, personal freedom, respect for human dignity and other values that make up the democratic system of fundamental human rights and freedoms of Slovakia. It will promote sober patriotism and awareness of European affiliation. It will condemn nationalism, totalitarian ideologies and ethical relativism, which weakens respect for values. At multilateral and bilateral forums, it will promote the principles of plural democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights and freedoms, and combat expressions of extremism, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. It will restrict official contacts with countries committing gross and flagrant violations of human rights and freedoms on their own citizens and, on the other hand, will step up support for and intensify relations with their civil societies and human rights activists. In interstate relations, it will honour and respect the principles and norms of international law and commitments of the Slovak Republic under international law. It will strongly denounce any interference with the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic, including in the form of creating institutional links between a foreign state and the citizens of the Slovak Republic without prior agreement with the Slovak Republic, and will reject the practice of adopting extraterritorial legal standards. It will assert the idea that the activity and decisions of the Council of Europe and of the European Court of Human Rights should respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and, at the same time, should steer clear of judicial activism.

Good neighbourly relations, regional security and cooperation

Through its domestic and foreign policy geared towards good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, the Government will actively contribute to the stability and development of the central European region. It will maintain traditional, historically-formed

privileged relations with the Czech Republic, expand relations with Poland, which are of particular significance for Slovakia and transcend the regional dimension, and relations with Austria, especially as regards the use of our common potential for growth and regional development.

The Government wants, in particular, to improve relations with the Republic of Hungary. In the Government's opinion, the basis for the development of bilateral relations with the Republic of Hungary is represented by the Treaty on Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation of 1995, and by the EU and NATO membership of the two countries. It is in this framework that the Government will identify the points of convergence of common interests and promote a positive and forward-looking agenda in mutual relations for the benefit of the citizens of both countries.

It will build greater confidence in and improve the effectiveness of the V4 Group, and use its potential to build stability in the region and to increase the prestige and weight of its member states in the EU. Within the expanded V4 plus format, it will focus mainly on promoting cooperation in priority sectors (infrastructure, energy, funds) and supporting the EU enlargement process.

A secure, economically advancing, democratic and free Ukraine represents an important component of pan-European stability. The Government will continue to actively support the integration and modernisation prospects of Ukraine, which bring the country closer to the area of security and prosperity, in which Slovakia is firmly established. To this end, the Government will conduct an intensive dialogue with the representatives of the government and of civil society in Ukraine. Modernisation of Ukraine, improvement in the functioning of its internal market, and promotion of its economic growth can also create more opportunities for the east of Slovakia.

Active European policy

The Government wants to conduct an active European policy corresponding to the fact that Slovakia not only belongs to but also contributes to shaping the EU. As a member of the EU, the Slovak Republic will assert its interests using the instruments that are available under the Lisbon Treaty. It will consistently apply the principle of subsidiarity, especially in such areas as civil rights, social policy, education and culture. It will advocate a substantial strengthening of EU-level mechanisms, especially the Stability and Growth Pact (including its sanctions), in order to achieve sustainable stabilisation of public finance in eurozone countries. As regards the areas falling under qualified majority voting, Slovakia will seek suitable solutions in cooperation with other countries with similar interests. It will apply the principle of unanimity – the main pillar of cooperation based on trust and equality between countries – in the adoption of decisions at the EU level in the area of direct taxation, criminal law, family policy, foreign policy, and defence. It will monitor all legislative and non-legislative proposals of the European Commission with a view to enabling the National Council of the Slovak Republic to exercise its rights emanating from the Lisbon Treaty.

The Government perceives the Europe 2020 Strategy and the resulting initiatives as a common instrument for implementing EU reforms which are needed, in the short term, for the recovery from the crisis and, in the medium term, for achieving sustainable and sound economic growth in the EU and strengthening the Union in the process of globalisation.

In the debate concerning the post-2013 budget (the multiannual financial framework), the Government will strive to achieve an optimum budget position. In particular, it will emphasise the preservation of the largest possible share of the cohesion policy in EU budget expenditures, and the shifting of EU budget expenditures to higher value-added areas (increase of EU competitiveness, education, research and innovation).

The Government will support steps aimed at increasing the energy security of the EU – a key issue for internal prosperity and the security of Slovakia.

The Government will take part in the implementation of the EU's objectives of cutting emissions, expanding renewable resources, and improving energy efficiency. It will foster policies and instruments that will ensure cost efficiency in implementing these goals and minimise the negative impact on the competitiveness of the Slovak economy.

The Government will support the continued enlargement of the European Union. It expects accelerated accession negotiations between Iceland and the EU, and an early conclusion of accession negotiations with Croatia. It will provide active assistance within the integration process of the Western Balkans countries by sharing its experience of European integration and implementation of internal reforms.

It will support the development of cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership and the concrete offer of integration prospects to Ukraine. Slovak foreign policy will actively contribute to shaping the Eastern Partnership and the policies of the European Union vis-à-vis the post-Soviet area.

Guarantees of security, transatlantic relations, relations with the United States

NATO is the main guarantor of security for the Slovak Republic. The Government will make efforts at strengthening the links between the Allies within the organisation and at its successful transformation aimed at enabling it to respond to new challenges and threats. It will take a proactive stance in the areas of combating terrorism and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, both within the UN and in the framework of institutions and bodies of the EU, NATO and the OSCE. It will stress the prevention and strengthening of global, European and regional security. It will encourage closer mutual cooperation between NATO and the EU so as to make the best possible use of the strengths of the two organisations in the interest of peace, security and prosperity in Europe and the world.

The Government will strengthen all aspects of the transatlantic link. In bilateral relations with the United States, the Government will focus, besides security issues, on the development of economic cooperation and on cooperation in the area of research and development with the aim of creating better conditions for economic growth in Slovakia and for the development of a knowledge-based society.

Russia, countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Southern Caucasus

The Government has a vested interest in good political, economic and cultural relations with Russia. The depth of these relations will be determined by the values to which it adheres and by the clearly defined interests of Slovakia. In the bilateral field, it will pursue the pragmatic objective of developing mutually beneficial economic relations, the deepening of cultural relations and learning about one another. Slovakia has a natural interest in a modern, plural and democratic Russia respecting the freedom of individuals, and will support Russia on this road both bilaterally and within the EU, NATO and in other international organisations. It will support strong and transparent relations between the EU and Russia (including in the energy field), and will endorse the membership of Russia in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In relation to other countries, it will lay emphasis on economic cooperation, democratic development, support for their independence, building of their state capacities and on regional cooperation, drawing on the transformation experience of Slovakia.

Economic policy abroad

Foreign policy will contribute to promoting economic growth, inflow of foreign investment, and job creation. To this end, the Government will create a functioning model of single foreign-service management with the objective of making the best possible use of the capacities of the network of Slovak diplomatic missions, including full integration of trade and economic departments abroad into the structure of the ministry of foreign affairs. The

geographical distribution of representative offices will reflect the key economic interests of Slovakia.

Development assistance

As a member of the EU and OECD, the Slovak Republic respects the principle of international solidarity with the poor and less-developed countries of the world. Development assistance is the expression of the character and of the ability of Slovakia and its citizens to help others. In line with European principles and with the interests of our country, the Government will strive to make official development assistance (ODA) more transparent and effective. It will make certain that the ODA be consistently based on the knowledge of the needs of the target countries and of the international donor environment, and be capable of providing a flexible response to current global challenges while, at the same time, preserving its pragmatic dimension (the use of the transformation experience of Slovakia). In the bilateral programme, it will reduce the number of target countries, improve management by programmes, and introduce a system of independent monitoring and project success rating. It will better communicate the results achieved to the domestic and international audience. It will conduct a dialogue with non-governmental organisations and seek a synergy with relevant international actors. It will promote development education at schools and education of the young generation in the spirit of solidarity and togetherness.

Assistance and services to Slovak citizens abroad, Slovak compatriots

The citizens of the Slovak Republic experiencing emergency situations abroad have the right to ask their homeland for assistance. The Government will make sure that assistance provided to the citizens of the Slovak Republic in the protection of their interests and rights is of high quality, expedient, effective and accessible. In those countries where the Slovak Republic does not have a representative office, the Government will conclude agreements with our closest partners concerning the representation of our citizens. It will improve services for Slovak citizens who are staying abroad for longer periods to work or study, especially by accelerating and simplifying registry procedures and other administrative procedures.

The Government wishes that the citizens can be proud of their country abroad. It will create a functioning mechanism of coordinated global presentation of Slovakia. It will invite a broader expert community to participate in the process of developing the presentation identity of Slovakia, and will also cooperate with the academic and business sector.

It will strengthen the development of compatriot communities abroad, and foster the preservation and development of their cultural identity and links with Slovakia.

New challenges

Given the high dynamics of changes in the security environment, the Government will devote increased attention to global challenges that may have a direct impact on the Slovak Republic (climate change, poverty, drinking water resources, migration, failing states, cyber attacks). In these areas, it will take an active part in the formulation of EU and NATO policies with a view to making their positions on the global scene also reflect the long-term interests of the Slovak Republic and its citizens. It will formulate an intelligible and balanced position of the Slovak Republic on the issue of climate change. It supports the creation of crisis management and preventive diplomacy structures within the European External Service. In light of the recent surge of cyber attacks in the neighbouring region, the Government will assert the consolidation of cyber protection capabilities in the framework of NATO strategic planning.

Openness and public control of foreign policy

To better serve the citizens, foreign policy must be effective, financially viable and legitimate. The Government will place an emphasis on strategic planning of foreign policy. In view of changes in the broader foreign policy environment, Slovak diplomats must be capable of cooperating, in a flexible manner, with local and foreign partners in asserting the interests of the Slovak Republic, and to be deployed to the European diplomatic service. A high qualification level and professional competence of the staff of the ministry of foreign affairs will create a more effective foreign service. The Government will review the network of diplomatic missions with the objective of ensuring the protection of the interests and rights of the Slovak Republic and of its citizens, while making better use of public finance. It will further develop the basis of programme budgeting and project management. It will review the effectiveness and the legal form of the Diplomatic Corps Service Management.

It will increase the legitimacy of the formulation of foreign policy and of its implementation. It will conduct an active discussion on foreign policy with civil society. Interactions with civil society will be based on communication, coordination and cooperation.

The Government will improve the foreign ministry's training system with a view to reaching the objective of increasing the quality of staff members of the ministry of foreign affairs and of increasing their involvement in the training of local officials on foreign policy. In line with foreign policy objectives, it will support project-based links between Slovak and foreign universities, research centres, academic institutions and other non-state organisations.