

**PROGRAMME STATEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
2023 - 2027**

“BETTER, CALMER AND SAFER LIVING”

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“BETTER, CALMER AND SAFER LIVING”

In the democratic parliamentary elections on 30 September 2023, Slovak men and women, members of national minorities and other citizens of the Slovak Republic decided to put an end to a period of chaos and amateurish decisions that threatened the country's economy, the social cohesion of society and the quality of life of its inhabitants. The new Government of the Slovak Republic was formed by political parties that have consistently drawn attention to the actions of the previous government grouping since April 2020, which were detrimental to the Slovak Republic and its citizens.

According to Article 113 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, the Government is obliged to appear before the National Council of the Slovak Republic within thirty days of its appointment, to present its programme and to request a vote of confidence.

The Government of the Slovak Republic submits to the National Council of the Slovak Republic the Programme Statement for 2023-2027 entitled "Better, Calmer and Safer Living" and asks for a vote of confidence.

The Programme Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic aims to respond to circumstances and events that significantly affect the political, economic, financial, social and legal situation and the position of the Slovak Republic in the world:

1. The Slovak Republic has fallen among the poorest countries in the European Union since 2020. The standard of living of the population is deteriorating not only in comparison with the European average, but also in comparison with neighbouring countries.
2. The Slovak Republic's public finances are in disarray compared to the beginning of 2020, with the country facing a high deficit and record-rising debt. The drawdown of vital financial resources from the European Union funds and the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan is also at risk.
3. The new Government of the Slovak Republic prefers a robust social state based on the rule of law, founded on the principles of a well-functioning and regulated market economy, rather than an ill-considered radical consolidation of public finances, which would further worsen the unfavourable state of the Slovak Republic.
4. Ignoring inflationary pressures from previous governments operating between 2020 and 2023, Slovakia's price growth is the highest in the euro area and even dramatically higher in the case of food. The new Government of the Slovak Republic is also facing a battle to secure energy supplies at affordable prices.
5. Social dialogue is virtually non-existent, as the previous Government ignored the legitimate demands of the social partners and significantly damaged relations between the

state and local governments through ill-considered decisions. The Government of the Slovak Republic will resume partnership dialogue at all levels and will treat the legitimate demands of partners with respect.

6. Despite the challenging economic conditions and the poor state of public finances, the Government of the Slovak Republic will take the necessary steps to ensure that Slovakia becomes a modern and efficient state that emphasises social security, an excellent competitive business environment, improves the quality of education and health care and strengthens public confidence in justice and the rule of law. However, important national socio-economic objectives will not allow the new government of the Slovak Republic to increase defence spending further.
7. The Government of the Slovak Republic will stop the abuse of the law enforcement forces for political purposes. It will calm a polarised society in which, as a result of the previous government, manifestations of hatred, aggression and intolerance are more frequent than in other periods of modern Slovak history. The new Government of the Slovak Republic will pay attention to national self-confidence, strengthening sovereignty, statehood and healthy patriotism, respect for state symbols, and national and cultural traditions.
8. Illegal migration, ignored by the previous three governments, is leading the new Government of the Slovak Republic to react decisively in order to protect Slovak citizens from the negative impact of illegal migration on internal security.
9. Slovakia's extremely important membership in the European Union faces further challenges after joining Schengen and the euro area. Proposals to replace unanimity in adopting fundamental decisions with majority voting or attempts to introduce compulsory migration quotas do not correspond to the new Slovak Government's vision of sovereign membership in the European Union and the need to protect national interests.
10. The Government of the Slovak Republic will continue to support solutions to the conflict in Ukraine that are based on the principles of international law, including Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its inherent right to self-defence. The current situation in Ukraine shows that a military solution to the conflict is not in sight and is leading to enormous human tragedies. The Government will support the international community's initiatives leading to ceasefires and peace initiatives, particularly in the framework of the European Union. Any solution to the conflict in Ukraine must also contribute to strengthening pan-European stability and security.

The new Government of the Slovak Republic is meeting these challenges with respect. It will have a high work discipline and will use all its experience and lessons from the past so that Slovak men and women, members of national minorities and other citizens of the Slovak Republic can conclude that Slovakia is a better, calmer and safer place to live in after the Government's mandate is over.

The Government of the Slovak Republic, on the occasion of submitting its Programme Statement to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, declares that the primary source on which its programme is based and on which it will base its decisions and attitudes is the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

1. A RETURN TO A STANDARD DEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENT

Article 1(1) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the "Constitution") defines the Slovak Republic as a sovereign, democratic and legal state which is not bound by any ideology or religion.

Respect for constitutionality and legality is one of the fundamental prerequisites of the rule of law.

In accordance with Article 2 of the Constitution, the Government of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as "the Government") will consistently respect the fundamental constitutional principle that state power is derived from the citizens, the freedom of the individual is fundamentally unlimited, while the state and its organs are entitled to do only what the law permits them to do.

The second title of the Constitution regulates the issue of fundamental rights and freedoms. According to Article 12(1), human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights. Fundamental rights and freedoms are sanctioned, inalienable, imprescriptible and irreversible. Pursuant to Article 12(2) of the Constitution, fundamental rights and freedoms are guaranteed to everyone in the territory of the Slovak Republic, regardless of sex, race, colour, language, belief and religion, political affiliation or other conviction, national or social origin, nationality or ethnic origin, property, descent or any other status. No one shall be aggrieved, discriminated against or favoured on any of these grounds.

The Government is based on the constitutional injunction that public authorities govern the Slovak Republic on the basis of constitutional or statutory powers. The democratic, pluralist system of political parties forms an irreplaceable and inviolable basis for the formation of public authorities.

The Government is particularly concerned about the standardisation of the democratic political system and healthy competition between political parties. The Government also recognises the role of NGOs. However, it cannot accept that politically-oriented entities, often financed from abroad, influence democratic political competition in a non-transparent manner. The Government is ready to financially support NGOs carrying out activities for public benefit, for example, in the field of social, humanitarian, environmental, educational, educational, sports activities, etc.

The Government is looking with disfavour at the track record of previous governments in defending national interests. It, therefore, introduces the concept of a sovereign Slovak foreign policy while fully respecting the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union, NATO and other major international organisations (see chapter on Foreign and European Policy).

The government has to recognise that after the 2020 parliamentary elections, several failures in applying democracy and the rule of law have accumulated. For example, the mishandling of anti-pandemic measures unduly restricted democratic rights and freedoms, which the Government will subject to an additional review process. The greatest forced

concentration of people during the rounds of testing had an impact on the spread of disease and unnecessary loss of life.

The Government will push for a return to the standard political environment of a democratic society.

It will also work to further develop the functioning of constitutional institutions. For the above reasons in particular:

- It will encourage the return of the atmosphere and conditions typical of a democratic society.
- It will work to re-establish social dialogue at the national level, including strengthening its institutional framework. Implementation of key decisions will be preceded by a specific form of public consultation.
- It will enforce the protection of the inhabitants of the Slovak Republic against unreasonable interference in their privacy by public authorities.
- Through responsible personnel measures and appointments, it will contribute to improving the functioning of the constitutional institutions and the mechanics of the state.
- After analysing the decisions of the constitutional protection body on the violation of fundamental human rights in the context of criminal prosecutions, it will ensure that corrections are made to legislation and practice in the field of justice, criminal policy, prisons and the rule of law in general (see the chapter Justice and the Substantive Rule of Law).

After a problematic period, the Government will push to strengthen the application of the basic principles of the rule of law, which are:

- The following applies to natural persons and legal entities: what is not forbidden is allowed.
- For public -authorities, the following applies: what is not allowed is forbidden.

2. PROMOTING COMPETITIVENESS ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

According to Article 55(1) of the Constitution, the economy of the Slovak Republic is based on the principles of a socially and ecologically oriented market economy.

According to Article 55a of the Constitution, the Slovak Republic protects the long-term sustainability of its economy, which is based on transparency and efficiency in the use of public funds.

ECONOMIC POLICY

The economy of the Slovak Republic generates crucial resources for the creation of sustainable conditions for the harmonious development of the state, which ensures and develops the quality of life of its citizens, including decent work. Due to its size and lack of its own raw material resources, it needs to be open to global economic structures, their changes and development potentials. The strategic economic programme of the Slovak Republic is, therefore, to increase its competitiveness in the European and global dimension. All sub-sectors of the economy must, therefore, be measured by their competitive capability in a constantly changing world.

This goal cannot be achieved at the strategic level by relying on spontaneous market forces. The responsibility and task of a strong state is to guarantee, through economic policy, all the components necessary for economic growth. Only in an environment where these preconditions are secured can we expect to see sustainable and expanding private enterprise.

An accessible and secure supply of all types of energy and raw materials is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development and a competitive economy. Household energy prices will remain at a reasonable level. In the medium and long term, the challenge is to take major investment decisions towards increasing both electricity generation and transmission capacity. Economic growth will inevitably lead to an increase in the consumption of energy and strategic raw materials by the Slovak economy.

High innovation performance is essential for the long-term growth of the Slovak economy. Therefore, innovation needs to be promoted much more effectively. Linking research and development with the economic demand for innovation is the key to the future and to a new growth model for the Slovak economy. Economic diplomacy has an indispensable place in the development of promising economic sectors, including the provision of energy and strategic raw materials.

The business environment in Slovakia has to become more stable and predictable. This is not only about the need for legislative stability but also about removing unreasonable administrative burdens and simplifying the conditions for access to state support. This is an endeavour that requires sustained and intensive cooperation across ministries.

ENERGY POLICY

A well-functioning energy sector is a prerequisite for the viability and competitiveness of a national economy. The Government unequivocally declares that it sees the future of Slovakia's energy policy in the support and development of the current energy mix based on nuclear and renewable sources. At the same time, the Government declares its support for the indispensable role of natural gas as an important energy carrier, enabling the transition towards a low-carbon economy. In this context, it sees the need to ensure the diversification of transport routes, with the support of partners at the international level and with an emphasis on the development and cooperation in the construction of LNG terminals.

The Government considers it necessary to strengthen the role of the state in strategic energy enterprises and in enterprises that are part of critical infrastructure so that the negative impacts of energy instability on households, employers and public infrastructure can be effectively and operationally mitigated.

A serious problem is the projected shortage of available energy sources at affordable prices linked to global warming. The cheapest way to address energy scarcity is to improve energy use - namely, increasing energy efficiency. In parallel, this approach also contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing energy efficiency and energy savings is therefore a priority for the Government, and it will focus on promoting and implementing state-of-the-art ways of managing and controlling energy consumption in households and employers. The Government will also pay attention to the energy efficiency of buildings and appliances.

Streamlining the work of the national energy regulator is an essential step. To this end, the Government will create the personnel, material, organisational and legislative prerequisites for the revitalisation of its activities. Proper performance of regulatory activities must take precedence over remediation of impacts. There is a need for synergies between the instruments of energy price regulation and energy inspection aimed at creating an effective control mechanism in the energy sector, including combating speculative energy price increases, preventing the possibility of abuse of compensatory pricing mechanisms, etc. A return to international cooperation is also essential, promoting the authority of energy regulators, including curbing cross-border speculative energy trading. The renewal of cooperation between V4 energy regulators is of great importance. In the energy sector, the Government will therefore focus on:

- Security and resilience through diversification of transport routes and sources.
- Sustainable affordability of energy while maintaining a competitive business environment in the sector.
- Effectiveness in promoting modern consumption solutions and environmental innovation.
- Strengthening the export and import capabilities of the Slovak Republic by building new cross-border interconnections (interconnectors) in the electricity sector, especially towards Ukraine, and in the gas sector by developing opportunities for interconnectors to other diversified gas sources.
- Compliance with the requirements of sustainability and climate change, in particular to increase the energy security of the state and to accelerate the transformation of the national economy to a low-carbon economy, including the use of hydrogen and hydrogen technologies according to the current National Hydrogen Strategy and its Action Plan until 2026.

Short-term priorities

The primary objective of energy policy is to ensure a sustainable, stable, predictable and affordable supply of all types of energy for households, the economy and the public sector. However, the ongoing energy crisis affects the current energy comfort of households, the sustainability of public service provision by local authorities and the current competitiveness of employers in the European and global markets. That is why the Government of the Slovak Republic will:

- Implement a comprehensive and efficient system of price compensation for households and other vulnerable customers for electricity, gas and heat.

- Proceed to a clear legislative regulation of vulnerable energy consumers in order to provide specific and targeted assistance to the most vulnerable groups of the population and businesses.
- Use all available and effective instruments to reduce the charges that enter into the final prices of electricity, gas and heating.
- Introduce mechanisms to prevent electricity shortages in the Slovak Republic when there is sufficient generation capacity in Slovakia. The obligatory purchaser (state-owned) shall ensure sufficient electricity production on the Slovak Republic territory at affordable prices and in the required quality.
- Create the conditions for intensive use of dynamic tariffs and demand-side management.
- Ensure without delay that the resources of the Environmental Fund (at least 20%), and the Modernisation Fund are used to the maximum extent possible to support energy efficiency improvements and to support the implementation of decarbonisation investments for industrial enterprises and other employers.

The government is also aware that Slovakia is one of the countries in Europe with the highest share of natural gas usage and will therefore:

- Continue efforts to diversify natural gas sources, transportation routes, and transport routes through stable trading partners and appropriate use of existing long-term contracts. In this context, it is necessary to prepare for possible interruptions of gas transport through Ukrainian territory, which is a real threat in the near future. The implementation of the Solidarity Ring and the East Ring projects seems realistic.
- Encourage energy companies to use effective tools to stabilise natural gas prices and supply.
- Motivate households and businesses to consume efficiently.
- Motivate major improvements in unused gas connections in households and villages, thereby improving air quality in communities.

Medium-term priorities

The Government perceives that the fulfilment of Slovakia's climate commitments depends on increasing the efficiency of individual heat production systems, decarbonising central heat supply systems, using geothermal potential, and deploying heat pumps.

In the area of increasing the efficiency of individual heat production systems, the Government aims to create conditions for increasing the availability, simplification and substantial expansion of support options for the comprehensive renovation of family houses for low-income households. In the area of decarbonisation of district heating systems, the Government will promote combined heat and power generation with the integration of renewable energy sources, with an increase in the use of waste heat. In this context, the Government will also take measures to accelerate the energy and low-emission use of waste materials - as a potential raw material for the production of electricity and heat and its distribution to consumers.

The Government also sees the need, in cooperation with the concerned organisations operating in Slovakia, to update the rules for the introduction of transport with alternative propulsion and new impulses for the development of electromobility. The emphasis will be on developing infrastructure, legislation and simplifying related processes. The Government declares its fundamental support for battery research and development to promote electric mobility development. The government will also support research and development of new components suitable for modern energy-efficient charging systems.

To support the implementation of the medium-term priority solutions, the Government will make efforts to:

- Expand the domestic production and service capacity for constructing and operating new energy sources.
- Increase the capacity of secondary and higher technical education, including expanding the capacity for the necessary retraining, including the creation of conditions for the return of qualified citizens working abroad to business entities operating in the Slovak Republic.
- Strengthen regional cooperation and exchange of information and data in strategic economic areas at the level of the V4 countries and with other countries of the European Union.
- Streamline administrative and permitting processes (particularly the EIA and construction process) in cases of justified strategic economic interest.

Long-term priorities

It is the Government's intention to use existing resources for as long as possible, taking into account nuclear safety; with their further development, the Government is aware that despite the clear commitment to increase the rate of energy savings in the horizon of 25 to 30 years, the consumption of electricity will increase substantially, and will therefore create the conditions for:

- completion of the fourth unit of the Mochovce nuclear power plant,
- preparation for the construction of a new nuclear power source at the Jaslovské Bohunice site,
- seeking opportunities to diversify nuclear fuel supplies with an emphasis on optimising the cost of electricity generation and improving the reliability of the safety of nuclear power plant operations,
- development of a spent nuclear fuel management system,
- strengthening research, development and international cooperation on the use of small modular reactors in Slovakia, together with the identification of suitable pilot projects in Slovakia,
- preparing the construction of new controllable spinning sources for electricity generation and efficient use of existing ones to exploit their compensating potential to ensure the security and stability of the electricity system,

- creating conditions for the construction of renewable energy sources (especially photovoltaics and wind power plants), taking into account the potential and real possibilities of the Slovak Republic in accordance with the financial instruments of the European Union, including the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, with an emphasis on the use of brownfields and roof areas, especially in integrated parks, with the aim of having a positive impact on reducing electricity prices,
- explore the possibilities and promote the production of electricity and heat from geothermal sources, energy from waste processing with low-emission technologies (e.g. plasma technologies, etc.),
- construction of storage facilities, evaluating the potential for the construction of pumped storage hydropower plants, including hydrogen storage for better integration of intermittent renewables into the electricity grid, with an emphasis on minimising the impact on the price of electricity for all consumers,
- modernisation of existing hydropower plants, especially those that are part of the Váh River Cascade,
- the development and strengthening of the electricity transmission system, transmission lines and distribution systems at the main nodal points,
- streamlining administrative processes for connecting new sources to the electricity grid,
- maximising the use of smart elements and technologies in the management of distribution and distribution systems (smart grids, smart metering, credit metering systems, etc.),
- active use of big data to analyse, predict and share important market signals and to promote cross-border cooperation and joint projects in the development of energy projects using the European cross-border development finance mechanisms,
- creating the conditions for the permanent use of hydrogen in heavy transport and industry, with an emphasis on investment returns and a positive impact on energy prices.

STABLE AND MOTIVATING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The main objective of the economic policy is to create conditions for sustainable economic growth and a low unemployment rate with increasing employment, which will allow the restart of the real convergence of the Slovak economy to the average of the European Union.

The Government's priority in the area of the business environment is to create conditions for its stability, predictability of the legislative environment, rationalisation of regulatory procedures and an effective and constructive professional dialogue with social partners. The Government will support investment activities in a transparent, non-discriminatory and predictable manner, pursuing economic policy objectives. The Government will seek to create an environment that stimulates economic activity by simplifying obligations and removing barriers. To this end, it will stimulate constructive inter-ministerial cooperation in the cross-cutting area of the business environment, as well as a functional and flexible social dialogue.

Short-term priorities

The Government will, therefore, review and update the approved strategic documents in the field of economic policy, on which there was consensus among the social partners in the tripartite at the time of their adoption, including but not limited to the approved "Economic Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030" with the subsequent 1st Action Plan for the implementation of the measures resulting from it.

A stable legislative environment is one of the main prerequisites for sustained economic growth and low unemployment. The Government aims to fundamentally increase the stability of the business environment by limiting the use of the shortened legislative procedure and by avoiding the circumvention of discussions with social partners in the form of special-purpose bills without a proper assessment of the impacts on the public administration budget, impacts on the business environment or social impacts. The Government considers it necessary to guarantee predictive legislation in the area of the business environment and to tighten up standardised ways of adopting it to ensure that legislative proposals:

- are subject to a single, standard legislative process, including adequate participation of local and regional self-government and social partnership participants, subsequent inter-ministerial comment procedure and discussion at the Economic and Social Council of the Slovak Republic, and are drawn up according to a uniform methodology, including the application of the Standard Methodology for the Assessment of Selected Impacts; and

- minimise gold-plating.

Medium-term priorities

The government aims to stimulate the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up the majority of the Slovak business environment, and will therefore consider:

- measures for a sufficient supply of human resources in the Slovak economy and the consequence of the unfavourable demographic development already manifested in the current labour market in the Slovak Republic,
- adjustment of the turnover limit for compulsory VAT registration,
- the possibility of adjusting the limit of flat-rate expenses for natural persons - entrepreneurs,
- creating conditions to facilitate generational change in family businesses,
- stimulating private investment by extending the possibilities for accelerated depreciation of tangible and intangible assets,
- expanding the possibilities and relaxing the limits for tax loss declaration,
- digitising processes and updating the Smart Industry Plan to reduce the bureaucratic burden and administrative complexity of setting up companies,
- the introduction of a one-stop-shop for the collection and provision of clear information on financing options for business activities,

- implementing measures and schemes to help SMEs, including start-ups, in particular, to facilitate the start-up of business activities, increase access to credit pre-financing for operational needs and facilitate the co-financing of projects from European programmes,
- simplifying the use of funding from European programmes, simplifying public procurement rules and making elements of social and green public procurement mandatory to the maximum extent possible.

Long-term priorities

The Government is aware that an important element of a stable and motivating business environment is a flexible and modern labour market that can use a full range of tools to strike a balance between labour supply and demand and will therefore support the implementation of effective tools to increase the ability of the Slovak labour market to respond flexibly to national economic priorities in the digital, data and green economy.

Specifically, the government:

- Will create constant pressure for wage growth in line with performance growth and improvement of working conditions, including social benefits. To this end, it will pay particular attention to the growth of overall productivity and not only labour productivity at the company but also at the national level. For this reason, it will function the current Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Competitiveness and Productivity.
- Support the tripartite body 'Alliance of Sectoral Councils' to provide, on a continuous basis through the Labour Price Information System, reliable data, analyses and forecasts on the status and development of wage, working and social conditions, equal opportunities and pay for women and men.
- In cooperation with the social partners associated in the Alliance of Sectoral Councils, ensure the elaboration of a comprehensive "Strategy for the Development of Human Resources in the New Demographic, Technological and Environmental Conditions up to 2050".
- Support the state's investment in continuous adult learning to create a coherent system of lifelong learning as a fully-fledged tool for meeting the priorities of an innovation-driven economy and its impact on the necessary new skills of employees for a competitive economy.
- Increase motivation and improve conditions for the long-term unemployed to re-enter employment.
- Address labour availability in objectively scarce occupations, adopt clear rules for obtaining work permits for foreigners, and remove existing obstacles to the recognition of qualifications and other administrative barriers.
- In order to ensure the continuous development of labour competences and skills, in cooperation with the social partners and other departments of the Government of the Slovak Republic, it will elaborate a comprehensive new Employment Policy until 2035 as a response to the current demographic situation on the labour market.

- It will develop a strategy for the development of the “silver economy” and support its implementation.

AN INNOVATION-DRIVEN ECONOMY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The key to launching a new modern growth model of the Slovak economy is the support of innovation, which is seen as a critical factor for sustainable economic growth and a parameter of state support for investment. Innovation performance is now becoming a critical factor for competitiveness in global world markets.

In view of this, the government considers the promotion of innovation and innovation processes as one of the most important factors for increasing the added value created and the social standard of employees. Cooperation between the academic and private spheres in the field of innovation development and its introduction into practice is insufficient despite relatively robust public investment in the development of research parks, science and research centres, centres of excellence and start-ups.

Short-term priorities

The Government aims to substantially increase the efficiency of public resources spent on innovation support and to link innovation creation to the needs of economic practice, and therefore, it will:

- Reconsider boosting business investment in research, development and innovation through tax breaks.
- Thoroughly evaluate the current wording of the law on significant investments and the experience with its implementation and propose changes to the law to strengthen the effectiveness of investment support.
- Support the expansion of the role of the Slovak Guarantee and Development Bank, the Slovak Investment Holding and the Export-Import Bank of the Slovak Republic in order to create a comprehensive and effective financial instrument of the state for the support of domestic entrepreneurial activities for innovative small, medium and large enterprises.

Medium-term priorities

The Government aims to re-accelerate the rate of catching up with the economic level of the developed countries of the European Union and will therefore:

- Increase support for projects carried out by scientific research entities, funded by partners from industry and other practices, thus demonstrating a high level of added value in the form of innovations applicable in practice.
- Support public-private partnerships and projects that have a credible and scalable business plan and a clearly defined path to monetising the results.
- Encourage private companies to engage in cross-border R&D projects (e.g. IPCEI) and provide information on the existence of such projects.

Long-term priorities

In view of the need for a major boost to overall productivity growth, and the related need for internationalization of private sector business activities, the Government:

- Will link and streamline domestic and foreign demand for innovation with areas supported by government R&D support.
- Will streamline the functioning of economic diplomacy in favour of the development of sectors and the economy of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with the countries where the diplomats in question are located and operate, while active communication with these diplomats and their factual and methodological management will be ensured by the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic and its organisations.

TOURISM

The main priorities in the field of tourism are to promote the growth of its share in the national economy and set up sustainable and, in particular, systemic financing of the infrastructure of this sector.

Short-term priorities

The Government will create the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Slovak Republic to strengthen and streamline public resources and potential use in the tourism sector. By creating a separate department, the Government will ensure a higher level of comprehensive support for tourism and sport. State policy instruments will create conditions for the promotion of sports culture among the entire population of Slovakia and for the purposeful support and continuous development of young talents. In the field of tourism, it will significantly support the recognition of the brand of Slovakia as a safe tourist destination and will create opportunities on foreign markets for the smooth growth of income in this important sector of the domestic economy.

The Government will adopt a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy 2035, which will identify specific strategic objectives, tools and tasks in the tourism sector in line with the objectives of the European Union's policy documents to transform tourism into a green and digital sector with an emphasis on social inclusion.

The Government will establish a Tourism Promotion Fund which, similarly to the Sports Promotion Fund, will be a transparent instrument for financing the sector, with an emphasis on promoting tourism sustainability and development of infrastructure.

The Government will provide a financial mechanism to support the introduction of new transport routes aimed at inbound international mobility.

The Government will create conditions for strengthening all forms of education in the tourism sector (e.g. by creating accredited courses for vocational school teachers) aimed at expanding vocational skills in the tourism sector as well as linking the activities of tourism organisations, professional associations and vocational secondary schools, including lifelong learning for teachers.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will focus on the development of health resort tourism. The unique potential of Slovakia's natural resources will be enhanced by adjusting the amount of insurance benefits provided to balneotherapy. At the same time, the government will support the rejuvenation of society by extending balneotherapy to include the possibility of voluntary preventive stays under favourable conditions for the local population.

Bicycle tourism is one of the main pillars of sustainable mobility. The Government will make every effort to transform bicycle tourism, from completing the basic infrastructure to creating a comprehensive tourism product, which will be communicated through marketing tools by tourism organisations and the Slovakia Travel agency. The aim of this activity will be to promote and increase the attractiveness of individual regions of Slovakia as a holiday destination and increase the awareness and availability of unique leisure and sports activities for visitors.

Ensure, through appropriate legislative instruments, that the quality of service provision in the tourism sector is improved. The Government will advocate the creation of a modern system of categorisation of accommodation facilities, thus ensuring the possibility of controlling and improving the quality of services provided, their standardisation and measurability. This will create a space with regard to client safety.

One of the Government's priorities is to strengthen all forms of rural and nature tourism, which belong to Slovakia's main forms of tourism transformation. In addition to the promotion and development of sport and the health of society, their essential contribution lies in developing regions with a low population density and avoiding over-tourism in cities or in highly exposed destinations. By making every effort to promote this form of tourism, the Government will create opportunities to maintain existing jobs as well as create new ones, thereby increasing the competitiveness of our country and its individual regions. At the same time, it will strengthen active inter-ministerial cooperation with the prerequisite of exploiting the cultural potential of the country and protecting the environment.

The Government considers the inflow of foreign tourists to be an important part of tourism development. To this end, it will promote international air links with major Slovak airports. The Government will support the development of the existing international airports in Slovakia.

Long-term priorities

The Government will develop a solution for a more efficient data-sharing system for accommodation services and also to support more efficient collection of direct and indirect taxes at local and state levels. At the same time, it will create the conditions for quality control of the services provided.

The Government will push for the completion of the missing tourism infrastructure, including the promotion of congress tourism, thus creating conditions for urban and congress tourism development.

Through the established Tourism Promotion Fund and with the help of public-private partnerships, the Government will push for the creation of special conditions aimed at building

tourist and leisure attractions to increase the attractiveness of locations in selected regions of Slovakia that have development potential and which are undergoing economic transformation.

TRANSPORT AND CONSTRUCTION

During recent years of economic development within the European Union environment, the Slovak Republic has been facing the problem of declining economic indicators. The decline in GDP growth directly impacts the standards of living and quality of life of Slovak citizens. The development of transport also directly impacts the development and growth rate of GDP. Transport is a complex system requiring resources for systemic, organisational, operational and investment measures, and at the same time, it is a key prerequisite for the development and sustainability of a country's economy. A secondary impact on regional development and GDP growth is achievable through the development of a multimodal transport system that reflects the needs of the regions and creates the conditions for economic development. Infrastructure development needs an optimal and rapid process of preparation and financing in order to deliver the necessary results for the citizens of the Slovak Republic.

It is a priority of the Government to prevent the impending economic damage and danger to citizens caused by the disastrous state of the current infrastructure while developing the transport network to reflect international commitments, national strategic plans and regional development plans.

The current geopolitical situation calls for the urgent completion of the overarching infrastructure in order to access our strategic partners and connect them to the national infrastructure. The conflict in Ukraine and the migration crisis require an innovative look at the use and importance of national strategic infrastructure towards the eastern border of the European Union. In the vision of Ukraine's subsequent post-war reconstruction, a developed infrastructure is a prerequisite for international trade.

Acceleration of preparatory and permitting processes is a key factor enabling Slovakia to build up. The legislative regulation of these processes at the level of today's wording is often beyond the scope of EU Community law, with a negative impact on their speed and thus on the GDP growth rate.

The Construction Act adopted under the previous Government is unenforceable in its current state of institutional readiness as of the effective date. Its introduction would lead to considerable difficulties in preparing and permitting construction processes. The application of this legislation is unprepared, not only in technical and organisational terms but also in terms of follow-up legislation. It is necessary to postpone the entry of this legislation into force and, in cooperation with local government representatives, to work on a more comprehensive review of the legislation in question, which will remedy the major shortcomings.

The Government will prepare an amendment to the currently effective Construction Act in order to ensure a significant acceleration of the processes of placement and permitting of constructions in the transitional period, using the institutes of the current construction legislation.

In the area of construction permits in relation to environmental impact assessment, the Government will push for harmonisation of legislation and processes in the field of spatial planning and landscape planning. In the field of environmental impact assessment, steps to simplify EIA processes at the national level while maintaining compliance with European legislation will be examined.

The Government will strive to maximise the use of resources from the 2014-2020 programming period and to launch the projects necessary for drawing on resources from the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Slovakia Programme and other available public resources. In the context of the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union, the Government will push for the provision of resources for the preparation and implementation of projects that will improve transport connectivity and help to remove bottlenecks in the transport infrastructure in the Prešov and Košice self-governing regions.

With the ultimate goal of averting the lapse of the Recovery and Resilience Plan funds, the Government will assess the performance and status of implementation and, for failing projects, propose reallocation to successful components with high absorption capacity or propose new reforms or investments with an emphasis on meeting climate goals.

The Government's priority is to set up a sustainable system of financing transport infrastructure and to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the European Union to finance the modernisation of the transport sector. The Government will complete the reform of public passenger transport implemented through the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, as well as other reforms needed to secure investments from this European Union instrument. Given the fact that the transport system requires resources that European Union resources cannot finance, and given the fact that there is a foreseeable reduction of European Union resources in the programming period after 2027, it is necessary to create the preconditions for a long-term transport financing instrument that will create a predictable planning instrument to finance maintenance, operation and investment in public transport. The Government will also make every effort to optimise the permitting process in the preparation of transport projects in order to speed up the implementation of strategic transport projects.

The Government will effectively use the resources of the Modernisation Fund, alternative sources of financing for the preparation and construction of transport infrastructure with the use of private capital, e.g. in the form of public-private partnerships, etc.

Cross-cutting short-term priorities

The present model of preparation, procurement and financing of investment projects in the transport sector delays the benefits and, due to inflation, makes these investments more expensive. Combined with an unenforceable construction law, it is likely to cause chaos in application practice and further delay the benefits to citizens and the economy stemming from infrastructure projects.

The Government will create legislative conditions in order to streamline the processes for the preparation, placement and permitting of transport infrastructure constructions, the acquisition of rights to land and buildings necessary for the implementation of these constructions and the commissioning of these constructions in order to accelerate their contractual preparation, placement, permitting and authorisation of their use, including the establishment of a stable and predictable system of transport infrastructure financing. This will

make a significant contribution in the areas of investment preparation, project implementation and financing of maintenance and repairs. This will increase the stability of the construction sector, for example, in terms of capacity planning, which will ultimately allow for more efficient financing of transport construction.

The Government will set up an inter-ministerial project team of the concerned ministries in order to accelerate the preparation and construction of the remaining sections on the D1, D3 and R4 road corridors. This working group will eliminate any time delays in the issuance of opinions and permits by the state authorities.

The Government will initiate the creation of a dedicated appeals unit in the Public Procurement Office to improve the efficiency of public procurement in the area of key investments and strategic infrastructure projects.

The Government will introduce clear conditions and timeframes for strategic, technical and economic evaluation of projects, assessment of project priorities from the level of individual authorities and public administration units, as well as the possibility of their input into the preparatory processes for strategic infrastructure projects in order to harmonise the procedures of the ministries in the preparation of their priorities.

The Government will ensure the creation of a procurement reservoir to streamline and accelerate the procurement and subsequent contracting processes for design documentation and construction works for strategic infrastructure projects.

Cross-cutting medium-term priorities

Due to the investment debt and the lack of a reservoir of ready transport investment projects, the Government will push for accelerating the preparation of transport infrastructure projects for the upcoming 2028-2034 programming period.

The Government will ensure that the Strategic Framework for Transport is updated. It will evaluate the implementation of the objectives and measures of the long-term strategic document Strategic Transport Development Plan 2030 and, following the outputs of the evaluation of the strategy will proceed to its updating with an overlap to the end of 2050.

ROAD TRANSPORT Vision

The missing sections of motorways and expressways have a negative impact on the population's quality of life and the competitiveness of the Slovak economy. As a result of neglected maintenance of the existing infrastructure, there is a risk of further economic damage and a potential risk to the health and life of the inhabitants of the Slovak Republic. Road infrastructure will continue to have an irreplaceable place in the transport mix of the Slovak Republic for decades to come, therefore, it is essential to continue to develop and maintain it in a serviceable condition.

The Government will ensure progress in the construction of international corridors through the territory of the Slovak Republic, in particular, D1, D3 and R4.

The Government will make every effort to significantly reduce the number of bridges on Class I roads that are in a very poor and dilapidated state of repair.

The Government will work to ensure that the slowdown in road construction preparation seen under recent governments is not repeated.

Short-term priorities

The Government will make every effort to accelerate the preparation, construction and upgrading of individual sections of road infrastructure.

The Government will ensure the creation of financial and legislative conditions for the implementation of the Bridge Programme projects.

The Government will complete the process of switching to the European Electronic Toll System (EETS) and launching a "national" toll system.

Medium-term priorities

In connection with the critical structural and technical condition and long-term systemic underfunding of repair, maintenance and reconstruction of bridge structures, the Government will ensure the implementation of the reconstruction of priority bridge structures.

RAIL TRANSPORT Vision

The railway infrastructure represents the most efficient and environmentally friendly system for transporting goods and passengers; therefore, its development and maintenance is in the strategic interest of the Slovak Republic. The underfunding of the sector has been reflected in the degradation of the speed of transport of people and goods in recent years and, in the name of preserving safety itself, has caused a long-term restriction and reduction in the parameters of the transport route. It is, therefore, a priority of the government to create the conditions for the modernisation and reconstruction of railway lines and rolling stock.

The Government will actively promote such solutions for constructing the railway infrastructure that will enable trains to run at a speed of 160 km/h on selected sections of the Žilina - Košice line. At the same time, the Government will ensure a modern international train connection between Bratislava and Vienna and between Bratislava, Brno and Prague, as well as the same connection between Žilina and Ostrava.

The Government will push for a rationalisation and streamlining of the Transport Service Plan and the resulting better and higher quality distribution of trains in the timetable.

The Government will ensure that the slowdown in railway construction preparation of recent governments is not repeated.

Short-term priorities

The Government will make every effort to accelerate the preparation, construction and modernisation of individual sections of railway infrastructure.

As part of the process of liberalisation of the provision of rail passenger transport services, the Government will push for the creation of transparent tender conditions with an emphasis on improving the quality and efficiency of the services provided.

The Government will create the conditions to shift freight flows from road transport to more sustainable modes of transport (especially rail).

Modernisation of railway lines will be a priority for the use of funds in the Slovakia Programme.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will continue its efforts to modernise the railway infrastructure on the corridor lines as well as on the lines of regional importance. For this purpose, it will strive to maximise the use of resources from the 2014-2020 programming period and to launch projects necessary for drawing resources from the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, the Slovakia Programme and other available public resources.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT Vision

Public passenger transport will play a key role in improving the quality of life in cities and regions. Governments have not paid adequate attention to the promotion of public transport between 2020 and 2023, which has a negative impact on the supply and attractiveness of this form of passenger transport.

Short-term priorities

In cooperation with the local government, the Government will prepare the conditions for the full-fledged start and functioning of the National Transport Authority, which will form the basis for the unification and simplification of the conditions of travel by public passenger transport throughout the Slovak Republic.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will support the development of public passenger transport to reduce the use of individual car transport to ensure sustainability and quality of life in the population centres of the Slovak Republic. Measures to reform public passenger transport will focus primarily on the coordination and integration of transport, the building of interchange terminals, and the overall provision of improved quality of transport services. This reform will be implemented in close coordination with local government representatives.

The Government aims to ensure full integration of public passenger transport and enable travel within the territory of the Slovak Republic by different modes of public passenger transport on a single ticket by 2026.

The Government guarantees the maintenance of social benefits for vulnerable groups in the provision of public services in passenger rail transport.

The Government will create the conditions for the modernisation of the passenger transport vehicle fleet and related infrastructure through European Union funds, thereby contributing to achieving high standards in the context of decarbonising transport and meeting the Green Deal objectives.

The Government will support the reconstruction of the Slovak Republic's Recovery and Resilience Plan in order to compete for additional resources that will bring real benefits to citizens in the form of modern trains and public transport vehicles.

INTERMODAL TRANSPORT Vision

The Government's vision in the field of intermodal transport in Slovakia is to achieve a higher volume of rail transport at the expense of road transport, whereby the government wants to meet its international commitments in the environmental field but also to improve the quality of life of the population and safety on the roads. The previous government did not support the intermodal sector, which faced challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. It will, therefore, be the Government's effort to support this segment of transport, which can relieve the pressure on national and regional roads and take advantage of the opportunities that may arise from the reassessment of the European Union's budget.

Short-term priorities

The Government will identify and prepare measures for increasing the attractiveness of transporting selected commodities by rail in accordance with the concept of developing intermodal transport in the Slovak Republic.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will encourage the development of intermodal freight transport to reduce the share of road freight transport by shifting freight flows to more environmentally friendly modes of transport such as rail and water. Measures will be focused on the development of technical infrastructure facilities, the purchase of means of transport and the setting up of co-financing for the operation of intermodal transport.

CYCLING TRANSPORT Vision

The Government's vision is to actively support the construction of cycling paths in cooperation with local government, thereby increasing the proportion of safe cycling in those locations that are suitable for it.

Short-term priorities

The Government will support the construction of cycling paths from the Slovak Republic's Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will support the development of cycling as an integral part of sustainable transport to improve the quality of life in cities. The Government will ensure the elaboration of a conceptual document to support the development of cycling transport, which will revise and update the National Strategy for the Development of Cycling Transport and Cycling Tourism in the Slovak Republic.

CIVIL AVIATION Vision

The measures taken by the Slovak Republic concerning the communicable disease COVID19 had a negative impact on air transport. The lack of revenue and the underfunding of the sector is also gradually reflected in the deteriorating state of airport infrastructure,

worsening airport companies' position when negotiating new air routes. For this reason, as well as to meet environmental objectives, this sector needs to be given due attention.

Short-term priorities

The Government will create the conditions for the adaptation of national legislation in the field of civil aviation, taking into account new challenges and international as well as European Union requirements in the field of civil aviation.

The Government will support the creation of rules and new systems for the coordination of movements in Slovak airspace, taking into account the development of new technologies in the field of drones, digitisation and automation.

Medium-term priorities

Respecting the rules on State aid and minimum aid, the Government will make every effort to create the conditions for financial support for the activities carried out by airport companies to ensure safety and security at airports and to meet environmental requirements. At the same time, the Government will consider the possibility of a conceptual solution for the further development of commercial air transport and the services provided in the territory of the Slovak Republic, taking into account the existing infrastructure and economic development.

INLAND NAVIGATION Vision

Inland navigation has the potential to contribute to a more sustainable transport system despite Slovakia's geographical location. This mode of transport has long been underfunded and neglected, so it will be necessary to ensure synergy between the various authorities and to strike an appropriate balance between economic development and the intention to protect the environment. Ensuring year-round navigability on TEN-T waterways is a challenging task both in terms of preparation and financing. The Government is interested in settling property and legal relations for the development of public ports in the Slovak Republic.

Short-term priorities

The Government will ensure the improvement of legislation in the field of inland navigation, taking into account the knowledge resulting from the application practice and from the changes arising from the revision of the European Rules for Navigation on Inland Waterways.

Medium-term priorities

By adopting the Strategic Transport Development Plan of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a view to 2050, the Government will define the objectives for the development of inland waterway transport in the conditions of the Slovak Republic for this period. The development of waterway and port infrastructure in the Slovak Republic must be in synergy with the policy direction of the Ministry of the Environment aimed at protecting water and rivers, as well as with the affected entities in the vicinity of waterways (towns and municipalities).

Respecting state aid and minimum aid rules, the government will seek financial support for inland waterway vessel operators (carriers) for the re-motorisation and modernisation of

inland waterway vessels, taking into account the environmental and energy requirements of the European Union in the field of inland navigation.

Through the development of river information services, the Government will promote the improved integration of inland waterway transport into transport logistics chains.

MARITIME NAVIGATION Vision

In order to fulfil the obligations of the Slovak Republic, it is necessary to involve other state administration bodies in the harmonisation of the maritime system and to ensure the synergy of their mutual cooperation.

Medium-term priorities

In the field of maritime navigation, the Government will harmonise the national system with the main strategies of the European maritime system by creating a maritime register system of the Slovak Republic, which will be in line with the international conventions of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the European Union in the field of maritime navigation. The Government will promote increased labour mobility in the maritime industries and the implementation of a system of positive measures for maritime education.

CONSTRUCTION Short-term priorities

The Government will postpone the entry of the new construction legislation into force in order to allow time for the necessary adjustments and to create the preconditions for a smooth start of implementation.

The Government will prepare an amendment to the effective Construction Act using the institutes of the current construction legislation in order to speed up and streamline the processes of zoning and construction permits.

HOUSING POLICY AND CONSTRUCTION Short-term priorities

Recognising the importance of addressing housing for vulnerable groups, including in the context of rising interest rates and household living costs, the Government identifies barriers to the development of the sector of public rental housing. The Government will propose the integration of competences and legislation in this area, prepare accelerating measures to increase the number of rented housing units procured and, aware of the irreplaceable position of local government in this area, identify barriers reducing interest in the procurement of rented housing. The Government will create appropriate conditions for the sustainability of the conditions for the operation of affordable rental housing. It will also focus on the identification of surplus state properties suitable for construction or conversion into rental apartments while creating a guarantee of the permanent preservation of the rental character of the supported housing units and maintaining a stable financial framework for the provision of support.

Accelerating and deepening the rate of housing renewal using new incentives will be one of the priorities, also in view of rising energy prices and other household costs.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will work to remove the non-conceptual fragmentation in financing building renovation, which has deepened in recent years. The Government will integrate the delivery of public building renewal programmes through the lead ministry for transport so as to create a transparent funding system under harmonised technical conditions, irrespective of multi-source funding. The Government will create a clear and coordinated offer of resources for the renovation of buildings for both public and private owners.

Quality implementation of the decarbonisation targets will be supported by the approval of an investment strategy for the use of funds obtained from emission permits (Modernisation Fund, the forthcoming Social Climate Fund) so that the allocations for covering the individual priority areas of decarbonisation are set on the basis of departmental policies and in compliance with high environmental requirements. Implementation will be ensured through the responsible ministries.

The Government will analyse the appropriate scope for providing centralised management of the refurbishment of state buildings, emphasising the efficiency of their operation on the platform of the building energy performance data collection system.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND POSTAL SERVICES Vision

The Government is taking over the Slovak Post in a deplorable state. As we face massive economic losses, the Government will seek to consolidate the company as much as possible to maintain the scale of the postal network and the availability and quality of postal services.

The Government shall ensure that citizens have quality access to services of general interest in order to promote social and territorial cohesion, but also to build and strengthen confidence in public institutions and to improve the quality of life and well-being of the population, with particular attention to marginalised and vulnerable groups, especially in less developed regions. This approach will be ensured through a sustainable and universally accessible public postal network and its modernisation, taking into account the needs and requirements of the country.

AGRICULTURAL POLICY

In the area of agricultural policy, the Government will proceed from the understanding of this sector as a complex entity and, therefore, declares as its basic strategic objective in the area of agriculture the all-round support for the use of its potential so as to significantly increase the food security of Slovakia, consisting in ensuring the access of the population to quality, safe and affordable food, while strengthening the aspects of sustainable, environmentally friendly management of agricultural and forest land. The Government will therefore focus its support for this sector on ensuring that Slovakia, as a rural country, is able to fully exploit its agrarian and forestry potential, not only in the direction of increasing its share in GDP but also in the direction of fulfilling the social dimension of this sector in the rural area, with the aim of keeping people in the countryside and making work in this sector fundamentally more attractive.

The Government recognises that land is an irreplaceable national asset and will therefore seek further instruments to protect it as a non-renewable natural resource from the adverse effects of climate change, unsustainable management, unauthorised encroachment and speculative purchases that make it difficult for a large proportion of active farmers to access this essential means of production.

The Government will use all instruments supporting the rational arrangement of land ownership and the stabilization and transparency of land use relations to agricultural land, focusing its attention and support mechanisms in particular on the continuation of the process of comprehensive land adjustments aimed not only at creating appropriate land-use conditions for land management, but also at building common facilities as an important factor of ecological stability of the territory and a tool for anti-earthquake and water-protection measures.

The Government considers the Slovak Land Fund to be one of the decisive instruments of the state land policy and will therefore focus its attention and legislative initiative on this institution's rehabilitation and transformation process.

The Government, aware of the low level of competitiveness of Slovak primary producers and processors, will intensify the use of national and community financial resources, in particular European Union funds and funds from the Slovak Republic's Recovery and Resilience Plan, to support those sectors that will have the greatest benefit for the rural areas and food security to eliminate this negative reality. In addition to the continuation of systemic state aid in the form of environmental tax relief, particularly for speciality crop and livestock production, the Government will also support the wider use of financial instruments to support investment in the sector.

The Government will ensure close monitoring of the evolution of staple food prices. In the event of unreasonable price increases, it will take the necessary measures to remedy this situation.

The Government will use its legislative initiative to establish the legal framework for transforming the Agricultural Paying Agency into a modern agency for this century.

The Government is aware of the negative trend in the foreign trade balance in agricultural commodities and foodstuffs and will therefore make every effort to support the processing of agricultural production in Slovakia while seeking resources to eliminate the long-standing investment debt in the food processing sector. In order to eliminate this investment debt, the Government will promote the use of appropriate support instruments outside the agriculture sector, especially in the economic sector, which is responsible for supporting industry, including the food industry.

The Government will consistently ensure that only such legislation is adopted in the area of agricultural primary production and its processing and marketing that will not impose obligations or introduce restrictions beyond the harmonised legislation of the European Union and will fully support the sale of agricultural products and foodstuffs produced in Slovakia, as well as the export of these products to the internal market of the European Union and to the markets of third countries.

The Government will pay increased attention to forestry, hunting, and wood processing issues as it considers them to be integral and important parts of the rural way of life and major employment generators in the regions. To this end, it will develop a logging and final wood

processing policy that will prevent inappropriate export of unprocessed timber abroad, thereby creating a better starting situation for the Slovak wood processing industry. The Government also recognises the ever-increasing importance of forestry in delivering a wide range of ecosystem services to the wider community, taking into account the need to adapt forest management to climate change as a key tool for mitigating its adverse impacts.

In implementing the above-stated strategic objectives, the Government will focus on the following priorities:

Short-term priorities

Support measures to increase the water retention functions of the soil and eliminate soil erosion and degradation.

Consistent continuation of the process of comprehensive land consolidation.

Reducing the administrative burden causing disproportionately long administration times for agricultural aid, in particular by speeding up the introduction of single reference registers. Focus special attention and efforts on establishing a register of land use relations and improving the central livestock register as prerequisites for the full and transparent use of European support funds.

A thorough review of the legislation governing the agriculture and food businesses focuses on identifying obligations imposed beyond the harmonised European Union legislation and their subsequent adaptation.

Use all available legal and economic instruments to promote the direct sale of locally produced food “from the yard” to the final consumer while maintaining the necessary health safety and quality requirements.

Preparation and approval of the National Forestry Programme of the Slovak Republic for the period 2025-2030 and its follow-up action programme as the basis for the implementation of the state forestry policy.

Medium-term priorities

Elaboration of a comprehensive legal regulation of the agricultural land market in order not only to prevent excessive, speculative purchases and to create optimal conditions for its management by active farmers, but also to establish a system of pre-emptive rights for the state, municipalities and higher territorial units for the purpose of construction of buildings and infrastructure in the public interest.

Support for revitalising existing hydro-melioration systems with emphasis on rehabilitating irrigation infrastructure as an indispensable measure to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change.

Preparation of a separate law regulating the tasks and position of the Slovak Land Fund in the management of agricultural real estate owned by the state and the disposal of land of unknown owners in order to increase the transparency of its procedures, simplify decision-making processes and establish legal deadlines for the implementation of individual acts, so that the Slovak Land Fund will once again become a trusted partner for farmers, land owners, as well as for local and territorial self-government authorities.

Comprehensive revision of the legal regulation of the system of support and subsidies in agriculture and such a modification of the status and functioning of the Agricultural Payment Agency that will make it an institution that will administer the provision of all support in agriculture, whether national through notified state aid schemes or funds from the Common Agricultural Policy through calls for proposals.

The Government support for the use of financial instruments in supporting investment in the sector as another way of eliminating long-standing investment debt with a significant multiplier effect. Creation of appropriate support instruments to eliminate investment debt in the food industry using support funds administered by the Ministry of Economy.

Promoting the development of vertical farming as one of the new directions to increase the share of domestic food at affordable prices to the consumer.

Ensuring the means to eliminate the investment debt in the area of material and staffing capacities for the provision of official food controls.

The continued fight against unfair commercial practices in the food trade and the further improvement of its tools.

Creating the legislative conditions for the establishment of a risk management system (Risk Fund) as a tool for dealing with the consequences of large-scale damage caused by unforeseeable natural events or animal diseases.

Developing a logging and wood processing policy that prevents inappropriate export of unprocessed timber abroad and supports domestic timber producers, including local sawmills.

Long-term priorities

A rigorous analysis of the expected changes that will affect the preparation of the new Common Agricultural Policy after 2027, in particular taking into account the possible accession of Ukraine to the European Union, which would become the largest recipient of agricultural payments.

Legislative solution to the issue of land of insufficiently identified and land of undetected owners as an insurmountable barrier to investment development, including the construction and reconstruction of public infrastructure.

Consistent inter-ministerial cooperation in developing and implementing state forestry policy favouring nature-friendly forest management practices and nature and landscape protection policy ensuring the elimination of negative impacts on the Slovak rural areas.

FINANCIAL POLICY

Sustainable growth in the quality of life of Slovak citizens is closely linked to healthy public finances. Public financing of the state forms the basis for the competitive position of the Slovak Republic in a globalised world, and therefore, its role in the structures of government, as well as in the activities of the state as a whole, is a key strategic programme of the Slovak Republic. Its role lies in the sensitive exercise of its financial competences in public services

such as public health, education, science, defence, security, the social situation of citizens, demographic development, and the thoughtful development of the country's infrastructure. All this can only be competently achieved through the joint strategic efforts of all the executive branches of the state, the efficient and high-quality exercise of their competencies, coupled with close cooperation with local and regional governments and a purposeful and efficient social dialogue. The Government will pursue this strategic intent as a permanent style of its work in the creation and implementation of public finances not only in the short term but also as a basic premise for the medium and long-term creation of a better, more peaceful and safer life for the citizens of the Slovak Republic.

After three and a half years of disruption of public finances, the Government's budgetary policy priority is to return to sustainable public finances with the aim of stabilising public debt-to-GDP development. The Government considers economic growth and stable macroeconomic development to be the primary sources of Slovakia's prosperity and financial situation. The Government will purposefully increase the effectiveness of financial policy instruments in socio-economic development, rejecting consumption taxation as the only source of increasing public budget revenues to achieve the goal of reducing the Government budget deficit.

Stabilising public finances is a key prerequisite for the sustainable development of Slovakia. In 2024, the reduction in the general public deficit will be 0.5% of GDP in order to ensure that the living standards of the population, which are among the lowest in the European Union, do not deteriorate any further.

In order to gradually reduce the general public deficit and stabilise debt developments, measures will need to be implemented on both the revenue and expenditure side of the general government budget. The Government will focus primarily on measures that do not disproportionately impact the most vulnerable segments of society and reduce their living standards. The Government will also take real steps to improve the efficiency of tax collection. It will also emphasise the stability and sustainability of public finances so that social standards can be maintained, especially for the most vulnerable groups in society.

On the expenditure side, the Government will increase the efficiency of the state. It will review the current structure of government bodies with a view to streamlining their operations and contributing to reducing expenditure on their activities.

Due to the extreme increase in public sector indebtedness over the last 3.5 years, the Government will make efforts to amend the Constitutional Law on Budgetary Responsibility in order to correct the misalignment of the law's mechanisms that have been identified in the application of this legislation. As part of the adjustment of the law, the Government will also consider a shift from gross to net public debt to allow for more efficient liquidity management of the public sector.

The Government will improve the quality of public decisions and value for money of public resources, taking into account the interests of Slovak citizens. At the same time, it will focus its attention on the quality of data, particularly related to its relevance, quality of collection, timeliness and comprehensive synthesis for effective decision-making in the public sector, whether at the level of ministries, central government, regional and local government or in parliament.

In order to increase the efficiency of public resources, achieve better results and contribute to the consolidation of public finances, the Government will continue to review public expenditure, subject to the condition of consensus at the level of ministries and the Government of the Slovak Republic.

INCREASING TAX SOLIDARITY

In the area of taxation, the Government will ensure horizontal equity by changing the ratio between the taxation of wealth and capital and the taxation of labour income, reflecting the higher taxation of negative externalities. In the short term, the Government intends to achieve the above-stated principles by following measures.

The Government proposes to introduce a bank tax to redistribute excessive profits of financial institutions (especially banks and branches of foreign banks operating in the Slovak Republic) within the economy and to ensure that they contribute to financing the basic public functions of the state. At the same time, the Government will make efforts to prevent the spillover effects of the introduction of this instrument on the clients of financial institutions.

The Government will propose to introduce solutions to reduce the interest burden on people with housing loans so that sharp increases in market interest rates on housing loans do not existentially threaten their standard of living.

The Government will promote the introduction of specific financial instruments that reflect the extraordinary profits and super-profits of sectors, corporations, legal entities or individuals in order to generate resources for the financing of targeted public policies.

In the area of personal income taxation, the Government proposes to introduce higher progressivity by adjusting the tax base bands without negatively impacting low-income groups and to make the child tax bonus more socially equitable.

In the area of property taxes, the government proposes to increase property taxation reflecting the social standard of the population without negatively affecting low-income groups while taxing owners of multiple residential properties more heavily in the case of the second and subsequent such properties.

By increasing taxes on tobacco and alcohol, the Government will combat negative externalities. In this context, it will also consider the introduction of a tax on sweetened beverages. With environmental sustainability in mind, the Government will increase the importance of environmental taxation.

The government will consider ways to increase the state budget revenue from gambling operations to cover the costs of ensuring social compensation for the negative externalities resulting from gambling and increase the participation of cities and municipalities in gambling revenue.

Medium-term priorities

On the basis of the analysis of current trends in the field of gambling in brick-and-mortar establishments as well as on the Internet, the Government will ensure the elaboration of a new concept of state policy in the field of gambling, in particular in order to respond to the dynamic

development in the field of digital technologies, the need for more consistent protection of vulnerable groups of persons and the need to introduce effective tools for preventing access to illegal gambling from the territory of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will, therefore, review and strengthen the legal instruments promoting the principles of safe and responsible gambling and the protection of vulnerable groups of the population, among other things, by introducing the regulation of advertising and promotional activities of gambling operators.

SIMPLIFY PAYMENT OF TAXES AND LEVIES Short-term priorities

The Government will continuously continue to modernise the state's communication in the areas of tax and levies and strengthen its pro-client approach by simplifying tax and levies administration, for example by expanding the portfolio of pre-filled tax returns and reducing the time needed to comply with tax and levies obligations. It will also support the issuance of binding opinions by the Financial Directorate of the Slovak Republic.

Medium-term priorities

The government will renew the reform plan to unify the collection of taxes, duties and levies so that the tax administration is the place of collection. One of the basic prerequisites for this reform is the introduction of an annual social contributions accounting.

In order to improve cash flows, develop the business activities of reliable economic operators, and increase Slovakia's attractiveness for the import of goods from third countries, the Government will consider introducing self-taxation on the import of goods into the country.

STRENGTHENING THE FIGHT AGAINST TAX AND CUSTOMS EVASION Short-term priorities

The Government will eliminate legislative loopholes that allow aggressive tax planning and encourage harmful tax practices.

The Government will focus on making the most effective use of existing and adopting new measures to minimise the number and volume of tax evasion and reduce the tax gap. To this end, in addition to the use of punitive measures, it will apply preventive instruments to the greatest extent possible.

The Government will influence the most effective application of risk management processes in the financial administration in relation to the performance of its tasks.

Medium-term priorities

In order to improve the detection of risky transactions and entities, eliminate potential tax arrears and illegal tax optimisation, while taking advantage of modern trends in digitisation that are beneficial to reducing the administrative burden, the Government will make efforts to introduce mandatory electronic invoicing and online reporting of data from it to the financial administration.

ENFORCEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS

The Government will review and modify the current legislation on the enforcement and implementation of international sanctions in the Slovak Republic in such a way that, on the one hand, it is fully in line with the international treaties and obligations to which the Slovak Republic is bound and, on the other hand, to minimise the negative impact of their enforcement and implementation on Slovak business entities and citizens of the Slovak Republic.

SUPPORT FOR INVESTMENT FINANCING

The Government will focus on promoting investments that have the potential to generate benefits for society as a whole. The future of the Slovak economy will depend on knowledge and human capital in the whole society. The investment promotion strategy needs to be adapted accordingly. Investment programmes are an essential tool to boost economic growth. In addition to European Union funds, the Recovery Plan and other European Union instruments, the Government will consider financing investment priorities through international non-commercial sources (resources from both international and national development banks), through public-private partnerships (PPPs), pension funds or by issuing government bonds to citizens. The framework for preparing and implementing PPP projects will be strengthened to take advantage of best practices while minimising risks to public finances.

The Government will consider strengthening the role of the Slovak Guarantee and Development Bank Group in financing domestic investment programmes in order to move closer to international best practices in the use of a national/state investment bank, which could make the bank a more effective channel for the use of international sources of financing as well as the allocation of private capital, and at the same time will prepare an audit of the possibilities of using private capital in projects initiated by the public sector in order to establish criteria for the effectiveness of this form of cooperation between the private and the public sector.

In the capital market area, the Government will put into practice measures from the Capital Markets Union in the medium term to strengthen the Slovak capital market. In this context, the Government considers it particularly important that the capital market sufficiently facilitates access to funding for SMEs outside the banking sector.

AUDIT AND CONTROL

The Government will analyse the internal control environment of the state with a view to eliminating duplication in the public internal control system. In order to effectively coordinate the control and audit activities of individual entities, to share experience, as well as to simplify and streamline the control system in the Slovak Republic, it is necessary to focus on deepening cooperation between individual entities performing control and audit, in particular the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic and the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic. We will further simplify the legislative regulation of the control environment to reduce the administrative burden on public authorities and controlled persons. By actively cooperating and communicating with the Member States of the European Union and international organisations, in particular with regard to the exchange of “know-how” and “best practice” in the field of audits and the application of the public internal control system, we will

improve the legislative rules for ensuring the effective and efficient functioning of the internal control system in public administration bodies. Emphasis will be placed on the preventive and advisory functions of the audit in order to detect systemic failures in the management and control system.

PRICING POLICY

The Government recognises that price is an important factor influencing the conversion of workers' incomes and pensioners' pensions into real cash resources. Price developments have a significant impact on living standards and social and economic development. The attitude towards the role of the state as a public authority in achieving greater price stability is important. There is a need to increase the responsiveness of public pricing policy and pricing authorities to extremely undesirable price developments for vital products. To this end, the Government will ensure the improvement of the institutional level and processes for the implementation of public policy in the area of prices.

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN, KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

The Government is committed to transforming Slovakia into a country with a competitive, knowledge-based economy with higher added value and a better quality of life. This goal cannot be achieved without bringing together the interventions and initiatives of several ministries, as the challenges Slovakia faces have long since surpassed the limits of the competencies and budget possibilities of a single ministry and require effective cross-ministerial coordination, including strengthening strategic planning, prioritisation and predictability of funding in line with the recommendations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Recovery and Resilience Plan was developed as a European response to the severe economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It represents an opportunity to transform the economy and prepare it for future crises, creating new jobs and opportunities for all regions of Slovakia. This is a package of reforms and investments, or milestones and targets, worth €6.4 billion, to be implemented by 2026.

The Government will build on the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic to date and will do its utmost to ensure that it is used as effectively as possible. Within the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, the Government is making necessary investments in the health sector, such as the construction and reconstruction of hospitals and support to the outpatient sector; in education, such as the construction of kindergartens and the reconstruction of primary schools and university premises; in research and innovation; in efficient public administration and digitisation, such as the renovation of court buildings or the digitisation of solutions for different living situations;

and it will take important steps in the green transformation, such as supporting the comprehensive renovation of houses and historical buildings or the reconstruction of railways.

The Government has reservations about the way in which the Recovery and Resilience Plan for the Slovak Republic has been developed, in particular, the lack of a participatory and inclusive approach to its development. The overemphasis on poorly prepared reforms is causing problems in their implementation and in the projects envisaged in the plan. Nevertheless, the Government will continue with implementation and will make every effort to ensure that the remaining payment requests are successfully implemented.

The Government guarantees the irreversibility of the milestones and targets already achieved in accordance with the valid commitments of the Slovak Republic, the violation of which would have financial consequences.

However, in cooperation with the European Commission, the Government will, in justified cases, examine the possibility of revising selected objectives in the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic whose benefits are lower than the risks and drawbacks from specific implementation and whose purpose of the objective remains unchanged.

The Government is committed to continuing the implementation of already agreed milestones and targets.

Short-term priorities

By the end of 2023, the Slovak Republic will submit the fourth payment request from the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic in the amount of EUR 924 million and will ensure the implementation and adoption of all the milestones and targets included in this instalment. The successful submission of this payment request implies the achievement of 15 binding milestones and targets in the key areas of education, health, transport, social and sustainability of public finances.

The Government will move ahead with their rapid implementation after an additional €403 million has been announced for green measures under the new REPowerEU chapter.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will continue to submit payment requests according to the set timetable in order to obtain all the funds available to Slovakia.

The Government will transparently disclose the status of the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic and is committed to preventing serious irregularities such as conflict of interest, fraud, and corruption that could damage the financial interests of the European Union during its implementation. The Government will strengthen oversight of the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic by strengthening monitoring at the level of those projects whose successful implementation is conditional on the achievement of the objectives forming the content of future payment requests. Enhanced monitoring will be aimed at ensuring that the Government avoids critical situations in the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic and, if necessary, is able to take timely corrective measures in relation to the implementation of investments from the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will adopt the Strategy for the Management and Administration of State Buildings (Reform 4 of Component 19 of the Slovak Republic Recovery and Resilience Plan), which will include mapping of state-owned buildings and defining tools and procedures for optimizing the building stock, increasing energy efficiency and effectiveness, as well as increasing the overall costs associated with the use of buildings. Based on the Strategy, an agency (or other appropriate type of institution) for the management of state-owned buildings will be established to ensure efficient management of state-owned buildings, optimising their use, occupancy, renovation and, where appropriate, new construction through the use of energy management, central procurement of energy and other services, and other professional practices. This agency will also oversee the cost-effective rental of premises and buildings from third parties. A change in legislation will be prepared so that unnecessary state-owned buildings can be transferred to local governments free of charge for public utility purposes.

CROSS-MINISTERIAL COORDINATION OF SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AND TALENT ATTRACTION

Slovakia is at a crucial time in its existence. We have to respond to unprecedented challenges in scale and frequency. We live in an era in which technological developments, such as the advent of robotics and artificial intelligence, can be instruments of progress but also a source of falling behind the rest of the world. The next decade will fundamentally change the economic and social conditions not only in Slovakia but also worldwide. Investment in research, development, innovation and talent will be key to ensuring our competitiveness. Given the fragmentation of competencies in the field of research, development and innovation across several ministries, strong coordination at the level of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic is essential, as well as the elimination of duplication of procedures and processes. Investing in research, development, innovation, and talent is the most effective way to increase the long-term competitiveness of the economy and the quality of life in Slovakia. In dialogue with private, state and public sector partners, the Government will implement the National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation 2030, the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation, as well as the reforms and investments resulting from Component 9 - More Effective Management and Strengthening of Science, Research and Innovation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic. The Government will deliver on its commitment to increase public investment in research and development by 2027.

Short-term priorities

The Government will prepare new, modern legislation to support research, development and innovation in order to create a clear and efficient system of support in this area in line with international best practice. The Government will strengthen the coordinating role of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic in defining priorities for support. It will continue the entrepreneurial discovery process as a continuous process of defining promising areas for support of research, development and innovation with the involvement of all relevant actors, considering their potential and respecting current international trends.

In order to strengthen the results-orientation of public funding for research, development and innovation as well as the predictability of funding in this area, the Government will introduce a preliminary funding plan, a binding methodology for the management, funding and evaluation of projects and initiatives, tools for technology transfer, and provide a cross-

ministerial "one-stop shop" where all information on financial and non-financial support for research and innovation can be found in a user-friendly environment.

The Government will proceed to consolidate the implementation capacity for the promotion of research, development and innovation, with the aim of creating only two agencies providing grants in these areas - one in the Department of Education and the other in the Department of Economy. The Government shall prepare a mechanism for institutional funding of any R&D entity that undergoes a periodic assessment of creative activity. The Government will invest heavily in building, renewing and sustaining research infrastructure to improve the quality of our research institutions and enable greater research collaboration with the private sector. The Government will create conditions for streamlining technology transfer offices that will successfully link research institutions and the private sector to transfer technology and knowledge from science to practice. The Government will support the removal of legislative and incentive barriers to the commercialisation of publicly supported intellectual property.

In close cooperation with the Public Procurement Authority and public procurement experts, the Government will create the conditions for increasing the volume of public contracts promoting innovative solutions.

Medium-term priorities

The government will confront the brain drain from the country. Under the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, a unit will be established to manage and coordinate the talent attraction and retention agenda, with a special emphasis on harnessing the potential of highly skilled Ukrainian citizens living temporarily in Slovakia.

The Government will support measures to increase the concentration of talent, such as an excellent interdisciplinary research institute, a government innovation centre and a positive narrative of Slovakia as a country interested in talent and cooperation with the diaspora.

The Government will ensure that the processes for obtaining residence and access to the labour market are simplified for highly skilled workers and their family members and will adopt measures to integrate them.

INFORMATISATION - DIGITAL DECADE OF SLOVAKIA

EUROPEAN STARTING POINTS

The European Commission assesses the success of countries in terms of the level of the digital economy and society through the DESI index. The current edition of DESI was published in July 2022. The Slovak Republic ranked 23rd out of 27 countries, where we fall below the European Union average in most of the indicators assessed. Compared to 2021, the Slovak Republic has deteriorated by one place.

The Commission has adapted the DESI to bring it into line with the four main points set out in its proposal establishing the "Political Agenda for the Digital Decade", which is being discussed by the European Parliament and the Council. The proposal sets targets at the European Union level to be achieved by 2030 to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable digital

transformation across all sectors of the economy. Eleven of the DESI 2022 indicators measure the goals set out in the Road to the Digital Decade. In the future, the DESI index will be further aligned with the programme to ensure that all programme objectives are addressed in DESI reports.

The main objectives of the Digital Decade can be summarised in 4 points:

- a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital workers;
- secure and sustainable digital infrastructures;
- digital transformation of businesses;
- digitisation of public services.

OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES TO WHICH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC SUBSCRIBES

Slovakia's Digital Transformation Strategy 2030 is a cross-cutting government strategy - a framework that defines Slovakia's policy priorities in the context of the ongoing digital transformation of the economy and society under the influence of innovative technologies and global megatrends of the digital age. By 2030, Slovakia aims to modernise its economy with innovative and green industrial solutions facilitated by a knowledge-based data economy. This includes increasing the ability of citizens to live an active digital life, whatever their age and whatever region they live in, and to take full advantage of the benefits of technology, as well as increasing the efficiency of public services.

The Action Plan for Digital Transformation of Slovakia 2023-2026 sets out the state's objectives in the field of digitisation. It focuses on supporting the digitisation of businesses and the wider economy, developing and deploying cutting-edge digital technologies and building a resilient society. It defines the basic framework for promoting productivity knowledge economy, focuses on segments with higher added value, more competitive economy, sustainable development. It also supports the successful development of businesses in the digital age and builds resilience to the negative impacts of digital technologies.

Digital transformation is one of the main components of the Slovak Republic's Recovery and Resilience Plan. Measures in the plan that contribute to digital transformation account for 21% (around €1.33 billion), exceeding the 20% target. In particular, Component 17 - Digital Slovakia (mobile state, cyber security, fast internet for everyone, digital economy) contributes to the digital goal, followed by digital investments in education, research and innovation and sustainable transport.

It includes reforms in the areas of eGovernment, connectivity, digital transformation of the economy and society, improving education and ensuring IT cybersecurity and information security capacities in public administrations, and a strategic approach to digital skills education in partnership with key stakeholders. The plan will support participation in cross-border European projects leading to the building of the digital economy, projects aimed at developing and applying cutting-edge digital technologies and hackathons. It will also focus on improving the digital skills of seniors and the distribution of digital devices for seniors.

The National Concept of Informatisation of Public Administration for 2021-2026 continues to develop the concept of strategic priorities as a driving force to achieve the desired objectives. The strategic priorities represent cross-cutting themes in which specific initiatives will be developed to achieve the objectives of the concept. The strategic priorities describe the future state and the main initiatives to achieve it: government cloud, user-centric e-services, data transformation, digital transformation and digital office, government procurement, cyber and information security, and IT human resources support. An important aspect of all strategic priorities will be the prioritisation of efforts based on priority public services and priority life situations.

The main objective of the Strategy and Action Plan to improve Slovakia's position in the DESI index by 2025 is to move Slovakia from the last third of the DESI ranking to the middle of the DESI index within a few years and thus reach at least the EU average. Specifically, the strategy includes five strategic objectives/priorities based on the DESI domains/dimensions. These objectives/priorities relate to the areas of connectivity, human capital, use of internet services, integration of digital technologies and digital public services.

Priorities of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the years 2023-2027 in the field of informatisation and digitisation

1. Poverty or social exclusion threatened 16.5% of the population in Slovakia in 2022, which is almost 890 thousand people. The number and proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022 increased by 47 thousand people on a year-on-year basis.
2. At the same time, the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family pointed out that 143,163 inhabitants of Slovakia, including household members, are currently living in material need. This shows that there are more than one million people living in poverty in Slovakia, which represents more than 300,000 families/households that are unable to provide for the basic necessities of life, much less internet services, from their own incomes. In the context of access to adequate internet connectivity, the number of families suffering from poverty also suffers from digital poverty.
3. In the area of combating digital poverty, the Government considers it a strategic priority to ensure that citizens and families at risk have access to adequate internet connectivity to ensure their access to constitutionally guaranteed rights such as access to education or work. The Government will therefore propose a measure to reimburse internet services to enable these families to access online education services, teleworking, e-gov services, help reduce the digital divide, and develop digital skills through digital technologies and services.
4. In the area of digitalisation, the Government will support the implementation of proven solutions, encourage standardisation, learn and take inspiration from the best in the EU space, and buy the most effective solutions based on its own value-for-money analyses. It will prioritise the use of local IT providers, European IT products and services wherever possible.
5. In the area of connectivity, the Government will support projects to extend fixed broadband to all primary and secondary schools to 1Gbit/s. It will further support projects to extend mobile broadband coverage on major road and rail corridors. In this area, the Government

will promote and support policies that will improve the quality, affordability and diversity of use of broadband internet access services, both mobile and fixed, for both residential and business users, in line with the European Union's strategy. It will also aim to promote competition and non-discrimination in the electronic communications sector. Government interventions will be targeted at areas of market failure, both for the provision of high-speed internet access and for ensuring affordable prices for both mobile services and fixed broadband services for low-income groups of citizens.

6. In the area of infrastructure, the government will encourage the further development of the use of central shared blocks, centralisation and redundancy of state data centres for critical state systems, but will also allow the public sector to use commercial data centre services for less critical applications and services.
7. In the area of living situations, the Government will support the completion of the implementation of as many priority life situations as possible, which will make life easier for citizens and entrepreneurs and relieve them of unnecessary bureaucracy (principles: once and enough, one-stop-shop facilities, multi-channel access to services, proactive, automated services, pre-populated forms, etc.). Priority life situations include: Loss of Employment, Purchase and Ownership of Residential Property, Starting a Business, Purchase and Ownership of a Motor Vehicle, Administrative Operation of a Business, Relocation, Birth of a Child, I'm Sick, I Have a Sick Family Member, I'm Dependent, I Have a Dependent Family Member, Material Hardship, Studies, Retirement, Marriage, Death and Inheritance Proceedings, and Justice.
8. In the area of mobile identity, the Government will support the completion of the implementation of a mobile digital identity based on the European Digital Identity, for a secure and trusted way of logging in and signing as an alternative to physical identity, in cooperation with the private sector, so that citizens and businesses can use this identity securely across the widest possible range of public and commercial services.
9. In the area of accessibility of digital services, the Government will support the improvement of accessibility and friendliness of the digital services of the state by simplifying them for the general public, through assisted services aimed at the target group at risk of digital exclusion (alignment of state websites, a common call centre, a network of support service centres within district offices) and improving the accessibility of cross-border services in the life of a citizen of the European Union by providing information and digital services for foreigners in addition to the official language also in English. Measuring satisfaction with such services will also be part of digital services.
10. In the area of streamlining management, the Government will support the completion of the digital transformation of internal public administration processes - the introduction of shared service centres in the area of support/cross-cutting services, data sharing between departmental information systems without unnecessary restrictions, professionalisation and improvement of IT qualifications of officials, etc.
11. In the area of building digital skills, the Government will support such investments to substantially increase the number of new IT specialists, who are currently missing from the Slovak IT market. Furthermore, the Government will support the development of systematic formal and non-formal lifelong learning to increase the population's

opportunities to enter the labour market or retain employment. The development of digital skills must be accessible to all inhabitants of Slovakia, regardless of age, education or region, in order to prevent the emergence of a new marginalised group of the population and to enable every citizen of the Slovak Republic to reap the benefits of the digital transformation. The Government will also support the organisation of awareness-raising campaigns or participation in international networking platforms dedicated to the development of digital competences in the whole population.

12. In the area of cybersecurity, the Government will support information and operational security and the protection of critical infrastructure. The Government will continue to support the early response system in the area of public administration cybersecurity. Investments will follow the incorporation of new technical solutions of the early response system into the cyber security incident management infrastructure. Regular vulnerability assessments will be conducted, as well as penetration testing in the overall cybersecurity architecture. Investments will support the increasing of maturity of the sectoral surveillance centres of the ministries and their interconnection into centrally managed cyber security systems.
13. In the area of digital transformation and digital innovation, the Government of the Slovak Republic will work with the IT sector as an important driver of economic growth in the Slovak Republic, and will support a strong IT sector and a community of technology start-ups. It will not unduly seek to substitute activities offered by the commercial sector but will instead effectively purchase them. In particular, the Government will support the involvement of small and medium-sized innovative enterprises by integrating their solutions and services into the public sector IT ecosystem.

3. MAINTAINING THE WELFARE STATE AND STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND TERRITORIAL COHESION OF SOCIETY

In the second title's fifth section, the Slovak Republic's Constitution guarantees economic and social rights to the extent typical of a welfare state. At the same time, only the economy of the Slovak Republic, which is based on the principles of socially and ecologically oriented market economy according to Article 55(1), is under the protection of the Constitution.

The Government's main objectives in maintaining the welfare state are, in particular:

1. Stopping the further decline in the standard of living of Slovak citizens compared to the average standard of living in the European Union and restoring the growth of the standard of living in Slovakia.
2. Effective fight against price increases.
3. Stopping the spread of poverty and restoring dignity to the lives of low-income groups of Slovak citizens by eliminating abysmal social inequalities.

4. Stabilising the tense situation in the health sector, progressively modernising the health system and facilitating people's access to healthcare.
5. Professionalism and common sense in the educational process at all levels, promotion of cultural heritage.

EDUCATION POLICY

According to Article 42(1) of the Constitution, everyone has the right to education. School attendance is compulsory. Its length up to the age limit shall be laid down by law.

According to Article 42(2) of the Constitution, citizens have the right to free education in primary and secondary schools and, according to the abilities of the citizen and the possibilities of society, in higher education.

High-quality education, research, and development are prerequisites for the further development of society, economic growth, and the improvement of the quality of life of all citizens. The Government is aware that Slovakia cannot afford further neglect of investment in education and science.

Slovakia is facing a significant brain drain and cannot compete in the growing international competition in attracting domestic and foreign talent. The stagnant education system is unable to provide every child in Slovakia with sufficient knowledge, skills and abilities to be able to fully participate in the labour market and ensure a quality life in adulthood.

For years, the education system has suffered from a lack of money, resulting in high investment debt, delayed digitisation and modernisation of the education system, and the low attractiveness of the teaching profession, for which Slovakia is already facing a shortage of teachers and professional staff in the regional education system in the near future.

The Government will adopt measures to improve the financing of education, research, and development in line with the intention of bringing Slovakia closer to the European Union average in key parameters. The stabilisation of the financial situation will be accompanied by an emphasis on inclusion and better educational outcomes for pupils and students at all levels of schooling, a push for higher quality and societal benefits from research and development, and efforts to change the culture of the educational and scientific environment. This is in order for the pupils and students, on the one hand, and teachers, scientists, and other workers in education, research, and development, on the other, to feel real support from the state.

CHILDREN, PUPILS, STUDENTS Short-term priorities

The Government will increase the rate of early childhood education. The aim will be to improve the readiness of all children for the next levels of education. The effort will include measures to realistically secure a place in pre-primary education in kindergarten.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic will prepare tools to transfer the new objectives, form and content of education from official

documents to the pupils in primary schools. Implementation will involve thoughtful fine-tuning of the new national curriculum based on feedback from teachers and practitioners.

As part of the drive for better education for pupils in primary schools, there will be new national continuous testing and assessment of results. It will be based on internationally comparable and publicly accessible standards so that the state, founding institutions, teachers, and the professional public have continuous feedback on the development of the quality of education in Slovakia.

All children in Slovakia must have the opportunity to find employment in adulthood, to lead a dignified and happy life. The Government will improve the quality of education for children from backgrounds of generational poverty, with disabilities, or otherwise disadvantaged students. The implementation of inclusive measures will also respect the needs of the national education system. The Ministry will introduce order, transparency and better rules for the creation of textbooks.

The new system will be based on a clear approval process, a comprehensible funding system and support for the use of digital technologies.

The Ministry will work with other ministries to support the creation of safe and healthy environments in schools. The measures will include a state-of-the-art specialist mental health programme. The promotion of physical activity, sports and healthy lifestyles for children and young people will include better physical and sports education, clubs and sports competitions. The Ministry will develop and implement a strategic communication concept for the Department of Education to combat hybrid threats in education more effectively.

The aims, content and forms of education in secondary schools must be linked to the new way of education in primary schools and, at the same time, respond flexibly to the demands of the labour market. The Government will propose changes to the Education Act and prepare a new curriculum for secondary schools. At the same time, it will support the quality and attractiveness of vocational training programmes by amending the Vocational Education and Training Act.

The Ministry will strengthen the counselling and prevention system, increase the availability of counselling and prevention facilities, and extend them to all school levels. It will support programmes to remove physical barriers in schools and educational establishments. At the same time, it will effectively support the educational and career pathways of pupils and students at all school levels.

The Government will strongly support the education and upbringing of children and youth through extracurricular activities, competitions and Olympiads, and outreach activities in line with the Government's current strategy. The Ministry will focus on ensuring that school educational facilities, leisure centres and secondary boarding schools are functioning in a quality and meaningful way.

The Government will create conditions for continuous improvement of the quality and attractiveness of Slovak higher education. The quality of university premises and infrastructure also influences the attractiveness of higher education in Slovakia. The Government will launch a programme of targeted support to help create a cultivated, inclusive and attractive learning, accommodation and social environment for students and staff in higher education.

The Government will secure a state order to increase the number of students from Slovakia in selected study programmes and fields of higher education (e.g., medicine).

By encouraging an increase in the number of students in vocational study programmes, the Government will create a more favourable environment for linking education with practice and the needs of the labour market. The state will promote better employability of graduates with a bachelor's degree by changing qualification requirements and remuneration rules for state and public service workers.

The Government will enact laws to create the conditions for a modern, practical and effective lifelong learning system. It will also include the introduction of individual learning accounts. The system will take into account the role of universities as important providers of lifelong learning, helping students adapt to a changing social, economic, and technological environment.

By amending the School Act, the Government will consider introducing compulsory school attendance for children of foreigners and will improve the conditions for the education of adult foreigners who use services and benefits financed from public sources in Slovakia. It will include the possibility for foreigners to learn Slovak as a second language.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will increase the international comparability of secondary school leaving examinations as one of the prerequisites for improving the quality of secondary school graduates for employment in the labour market or for the successful continuation and completion of higher education and retention of talent in Slovakia.

The attractiveness of Slovak universities and science also depends on their internationalisation. The Government will take measures to increase the number of foreign teachers, researchers and students, especially at the second and third levels. They will include the promotion of cooperation, joint projects and study programmes with quality foreign schools and the simplification of the recognition regime for qualifications and education.

TEACHERS, LEADERS, SCHOOLS Short-term priorities

The Ministry will replace the State's instructions and orders with help and support for teachers, professional staff and schools. Part of the change in approach will include the preparation of quality support materials, the operationalization of the catalogue of innovations in education, and the minimization of the administrative burden in the development of pedagogical documents.

In collaboration with professional and educational institutions, the Ministry will improve the quality, meaningfulness and sustainability of funding for lifelong learning for teachers and professional staff. It will support the development of teachers' professional pride, values and skills to enhance their status and prestige in society.

The Government will work with universities to change the content of education and support applied pedagogical research in universities and faculties that prepare future teachers.

The aim is to attract new talent into the teaching profession and prevent a future critical shortage of teachers in the regional education system.

Efficient and safe use of technology is necessary for sustainable modernisation of education in Slovakia. The Government will support the comprehensive digital transformation of the educational environment of primary, secondary and higher education schools, school facilities and counselling and prevention facilities. The use of technology will also be a key tool for reducing bureaucracy and improving the collection of useful data and information on the real state of education.

The Government will ensure annual salary increases for teaching and professional staff and improve the remuneration of non-teaching staff in schools. It will create financial and non-financial instruments to address teacher shortages in regions or specialisation gaps and support measures to make education more attractive as a career.

Higher education in Slovakia must be focused on quality, and this cannot be ensured without better management of schools and support of top experts. The Ministry will adjust the framework conditions for filling the posts of professors and associate professors so that these positions are filled by people with the highest qualities in the field.

The Government will improve the quality of the functioning of research grants to make them as close as possible to Horizon Europe in terms of process, structure and administration. The changes will include the creation of a single point of contact for submitting and processing projects for all grant agencies and funding sources. International authorities will regularly evaluate the functioning of the Agency for Research and Development.

The Ministry will prepare a strategy for the development of doctoral studies to make them more attractive to talent. The aim is to improve the status of doctoral students and the conditions for young researchers, including support for the development of their academic and practical skills.

The Government will ensure long-term and consistent support for Slovak scientists in obtaining projects from Horizon Europe schemes. It will also strive to establish a permanent programme of support for centres of excellence in academic research.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will improve the economic functioning, management and quality assessment rules of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. The adopted changes will include, for example, the definition of a school and an educational facility as a legal entity, legislative support for establishing regional associations of schools and other tools for streamlining the network of primary and secondary schools.

SYSTEMIC MEASURES Short-term priorities

In line with the commitments under the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, the Government will introduce normative funding for kindergartens. As part of the funding change, the prerequisites for developing a modern early childhood education and care system will be put in place, including setting quality standards and unifying educational programmes.

The Government will create space for a review of the norms for financing primary and secondary schools and their adequate increase. Resource growth is necessary to reduce investment debt in regional education, increase the energy efficiency of school operations, and meet the need to improve the quality of digital equipment, supplies, textbooks and teacher skills.

The Ministry will put into practice the approved system of support measures for the full involvement of children in education and training and the development of their knowledge, skills and abilities. A sustainable system of funding for support measures will be an essential part of ensuring inclusive education for pupils and students.

The Government will ensure the growth of funding for universities, research and development so that Slovakia approaches the European Union average. Increased support will be accompanied by pressure for quality and results according to international criteria and impact on society. The emphasis will be put on modernisation, diversification, and quality of education, which will be supported by increasing the share of performance contracts in funding, including the new Higher Education Act.

The Ministry, in cooperation with other ministries, will streamline the use of European Union funds in the field of education and research and ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the objectives and projects of the Recovery and Resilience Plan. Better use of European funds will include directing them towards the development of quality education science and linking universities and research institutions to the needs of society.

The Government will develop a cross-ministerial collaborative programme to create the ecosystem needed to transform the economy through innovation and support the creation of public-private partnerships for independent research.

The Ministry will transform itself into a modern institution with better project management, efficient management of subordinate organisations and regional education administration offices, and data-driven policy-making.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will adopt a new law on state administration in education and school self-government, which will help to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of education in regional education. It will include transparent criteria for the founders of schools and school establishments, as well as rules for including schools and school establishments in the network and removing them from it. The law will regulate the status of the State School Inspectorate and strengthen the emphasis on support for schools and teachers.

The Ministry will submit for expert discussion a concept for the further development of the objectives, content, method and duration of education in primary and secondary schools after 2030.

SOCIAL POLICY

According to Article 35(1) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, everyone has the right to free choice of profession and training for it, as well as the right to engage in business and other gainful activity.

Under Article 36(1) of the Constitution, employees have the right to just and satisfactory conditions of work, the right to remuneration for work done sufficient to enable them to enjoy a decent standard of living, and a range of other social rights.

According to Article 38(1) of the Constitution, women, adolescents and persons with disabilities have the right to enhanced occupational health protection and special working conditions.

Under Article 39(1) of the Constitution, citizens have the right to adequate material security in old age and in the event of incapacity for work, as well as in the event of the loss of a breadwinner.

The Government is taking over the Slovak Republic, which is characterised by deepening poverty, social exclusion of disadvantaged groups, uneven labour market development, and weakening protection for employees, agency workers, freelancers, and other forms of employment. The system of protection of the poorest is failing to respond adequately to the soaring prices of the basic necessities of life. Regional disparities in the labour market have increased dramatically, widening the gap between the knowledge, skills, needs, and qualifications of the unemployed and many workers. Working conditions, including remuneration, do not allow them to maintain an adequate level of quality of life. Social dialogue does not fulfil the role of a platform for partnership communication between the state, employers and trade unions on key policies. Care for the elderly and the disabled requires strategic changes to meet their needs.

The strategic priority of the Government programme is the active and comprehensive creation, maintenance and development of a comprehensive system of harmonisation of social and economic activities so that the human potential of the Slovak Republic is effectively utilised. Sustainable growth in the quality of life of all citizens depends on the level of solidarity and motivation within families, between different groups of people, and between regions. An improved system of social protection, social assistance, and decent work for all must serve this purpose. This is the only way to deliver on the priority of this Government's programme: "Better, calmer and safer living."

In line with the goals of this Government and the civilizational European and global trends, is the Government's framework commitment to build a strong and socially just state in Slovakia, with the human being at its centre from birth to dignified old age. A state that motivates and encourages personal and collective initiative to benefit individuals and society as a whole. At the same time, a state that guarantees and provides assistance to people and communities who need it and are objectively dependent on it so that their living situations do not lead to social exclusion, poverty and subsistence. A strong state that intervenes promptly in crisis situations and does not ignore the needs of people, families and communities in need.

Short-term priorities

The Government will introduce the payment of the 13th pension equal to the average pension for the previous year. It will make the pension system fairer and more responsive to

sudden fluctuations in inflation. It will also rigorously enforce full supplementary pension insurance for workers performing hazardous work. It will also improve the quality of life of seniors by systematically supporting their associations and other measures for active and healthy ageing.

The Government will take measures to increase the salaries of employed citizens. The minimum wage will be guaranteed at 60% of the average wage in the national economy if the social partners fail to agree on its level. The six steps of the minimum wage must fairly reflect the difficulty of the work performed. At the same time, the Government will renew and increase the effectiveness of the expansion of sectoral collective agreements so that firms do not compete with low wages at the expense of workers.

The Government will increase its activity in the tripartite Alliance of Sector Councils in order to anticipate new employers' needs for knowledge, skills and competencies and to raise the quality standards and accessibility of lifelong guidance and education for workers as well as formal vocational training. The Alliance of Sector Councils must actively promote its analyses and studies into real economic and social practice. The modernisation of the world of work leads through stronger and more active social dialogue and collective bargaining, so the government will promote its quality, employee participation in decision-making and the role of trade unions.

High-quality information systems on the real state, especially the structure of social groups of business and organisational entities of the society in comparison with foreign countries, must serve as a high-quality, timely basis for decision-making. Through the Alliance of Sector Councils, we will, therefore, purposefully and systematically modernise and develop high-quality labour market information datasets. The Government will also improve labour law, occupational health and safety regulations and strengthen labour inspection.

Work, carried out under fair conditions and remunerated fairly, must be available to everyone who wants it. The Government will support all forms of social economy and social entrepreneurship in particular so that no disadvantaged person is deprived of the opportunity to work. This will be achieved through advice and accompaniment, investment and compensatory assistance, and by strengthening indirect forms, such as appropriate financial instruments or advantages in public procurement, in line with binding European rules.

The Government will pay particular attention to helping and supporting families.

The Government honours and will protect the provision of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, according to which marriage is a unique union of a man and a woman. It recognises the family as the basic unit of society. Marriage, parenthood and the family will be protected by law.

The Government respects opposite-sex cohabitation outside the institution of marriage as defined by the Constitution, as well as same-sex cohabitation, and is prepared to address practical issues related to cohabitation.

The Government recognises that the parent is the main authority for the values education of the child. At the same time, the Government will create space for professional and social agreement on the content of sex and relationship education, including parenting education, as

well as topics that are not part of the national curriculum, which will respect the value beliefs of pupils and their parents.

The Slovak Republic is a state committed to the protection of life. The aim of social policy is to provide women and mothers with sufficient support so that they feel fully supported by society when making decisions about their children's lives during pregnancy and understand the alternatives available, including the possibility of an anonymous birth and adoption.

The Government honours the provision of the Constitution that human life is worthy of protection even before birth. The Government equally respects that the subject of decision-making on the life of a child during pregnancy is associated with a wide range of different opinions influenced by many factors. The Government does not claim the authority to give orders to support or reject any kind of legislation regulating issues related to a woman's decision about the life of her child during pregnancy.

In addition to social benefits, it will ensure preferential access to goods and services that help parents care for their children. Also using European funds from the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, it will expand the capacity of pre-school facilities with the ultimate goal of guaranteeing a place in kindergarten for every child. During the transitional period, parents of children who have not been placed will be entitled to parental allowance.

The Government will make it easier for young people to enter working age and start a family after leaving school by providing a one-off earmarked state contribution or by using funds from a savings account set up from a certain age of the child. The aim is for young people to settle and stay in Slovakia.

To eradicate poverty, the Government will introduce a new concept of a minimum subsistence figure so that the amount actually corresponds to the minimum expenditure on the basic necessities of life in modern European society. In this context, it will set out which instruments and parameters will be linked to the minimum subsistence level.

The Government will modernise the way it funds support for people in need. This will enable them to make effective choices about the types of services that will support them in remaining in their natural home environment and leading an active life, including social and work life.

Medium- and long-term priorities

By updating the employment policy, the Government will respond rapidly to the civilizational megatrends that also affect the competitiveness of the Slovak Republic in the global and European environment. Such are the technological changes, manifested as innovations in green and digital transformations, which are expressed in the economic policy of the Slovak Republic. Furthermore, demographic changes, as quantitative and qualitative elements influencing the labour market at present and in the future, are expressed in the social policy of the Slovak Republic. Such a strategic priority must result in the elaboration of a cross-cutting supra-ministerial strategic document, the Employment Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2035.

The Government will strengthen the pension system so that all its components contribute to a stable guarantee of a decent standard of living for the people who depend on it. By reassessing the effectiveness of all three pillars of the pension system, the Government will

strengthen its long-term sustainability and maximise the benefits for policyholders. It will revise the retirement age to take people's health and ability to work into account. Social insurance will cover all workers fairly, regardless of the form of their work.

The Government will improve working conditions to meet 21st century European standards. The Government starts from the premise that the quality of life of citizens is closely linked to their decent work. The Slovak Republic is one of the countries with the highest proportion of overnight work and overtime (known as “non-standard hours”). It will therefore focus on reducing work during these non-standard times and in damaging forms, including so-called involuntary freelance licences and 'one-person' companies. For jobs where it cannot be done otherwise, wage advantages will fairly compensate for this necessity. New legislative rules and more active labour inspections will prevent the abuse of so-called agency workers, as well as migrants from third countries, from worsening working conditions. The entry of foreigners into our labour market must take into account the objective needs of the economy and society.

Foreign platforms and similar companies with workers in the form of commercial contracts will be subject to increased scrutiny for compliance with labour and related standards.

The Government will contribute to the modernisation and higher dynamism of the labour market by effectively drawing on resources from the European Union. It will implement measures to ensure that digitisation and computerisation, as well as the green transformation of the economy, do not pose a threat to employment but an opportunity to create better quality and better-paid jobs. Investments will be directed towards strengthening workers' ability to make real use of modern job opportunities.

After years of stagnation, the Government will begin to harness the potential of the social economy beyond labour integration. It will consistently implement the measures of the European Action Plan, making the social economy a useful tool for regional development social integration and making life more attractive, even in less developed regions. By engaging social economy actors, the Government will systematically increase value for money from public resources. The Government will ensure that working conditions do not prevent parents from caring for their children. Special attention will be paid to children at risk and their families. It is necessary to continue the deinstitutionalisation of the foster care system, to strengthen social protection of children and social welfare and to improve their quality. Keeping children in their families is a priority. The Government will ensure the conditions for the coordination of all state and non-state partners in preventing and addressing situations of violence against children, women and other vulnerable groups.

In the context of the new concept of the subsistence minimum, the Government will propose to adjust the housing allowance as a separate benefit. It will provide assistance in material need on the basis of the principle of targeting, subsidiarity, protective and motivational elements, not only in financial form but also through a comprehensive range of services that will protect individuals and families from the risk of poverty. The new concept of a subsistence minimum level and material hardship will support active people and families in their efforts to lift themselves out of poverty and live with dignity and fulfilment.

Changing funding and subsequent support for building new capacity will be part of a community-based social health care system. Modern comprehensive long-term care services, as well as the valorisation of the cash allowance for care and the hourly rate of personal

assistance in relation to the minimum wage increase, will strengthen the social integration of people in need, especially the disabled. Through a series of concrete measures, the Government will remove physical and mental barriers to access to employment opportunities or other forms of social activity for the disabled. Quality social services must be available to all those in need, with local governments and the state able to influence the effectiveness of their funding. The Government will also contribute to fairness and transparency of support and assistance to people in need by reforming the expert assessment activity.

A strong and socially just state can only function on the basis of honest social dialogue. The Government will make the tripartite function because it does not see social dialogue as merely a formal activity of the state power. Policies in the field of labour and social affairs will be developed and implemented on the basis of the principle of partnership and subsidiarity, involving social partners, local authorities and organisations representing different target groups in co-decision-making. It will provide solutions based on the analysis of facts, relevant data and real practical experience and will support social innovations that will increase resilience to shocks and contribute to a modern and socially just Slovakia. Such permanent cooperation with non-governmental partners is an essential part of the democratic development of the state's natural culture, where the goal is the quality of life of all its citizens, their better, more peaceful and safer life in their homeland, the Slovak Republic.

HEALTH POLICY

According to Article 40 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, everyone has the right to health protection. Under health insurance, citizens have the right to free healthcare and medical devices under conditions laid down by law.

Healthcare has been talked about as a priority for years. The Government's ambition is to depoliticise the provision of health services. Health knows no ideology, and the demand for the best possible healthcare is a common wish of voters of all political parties. The Government will, therefore, prepare a long-term strategy for the development of the health sector, which will be the result of a constructive dialogue on the planned actions with the entire political and professional spectrum and each of the relevant entities operating in the health sector, in order to ensure the stability and continuity of the processes initiated across several electoral periods.

The Government is committed to managing the Ministry in a professional, transparent and strictly non-discriminatory manner. The patient will be at the centre of all efforts to improve healthcare.

Health is the highest human value. A functional, accessible and high-quality healthcare system for all Slovak citizens is, therefore, an absolute priority of the Government.

The Slovak healthcare sector faces serious challenges. Healthcare worker shortages limit the availability of services on a daily basis and contribute to regional disparities in the quality of health care provided. The current level of funding for the sector is forcing providers to rationalise services and is negatively contributing to the increase in waiting times. The poor

state of the health infrastructure negatively affects the quality of care provided and exacerbates the problem of inadequate staffing and financial capacity in the sector. Non-transparently drafted legislation adopted without the necessary professional and patient consensus causes chaos and puts the patient on the "side-lines". Lack of vision, unpreparedness of projects and absence of targeted regulation hampers development and causes instability and inefficiency in the sector.

The Government's aim is to halt the decline of our healthcare system and bring back the stability that is missing in the sector, to return the patient to the centre of healthcare provision, and to bring the health system's results closer to the Western European standard in key indicators. The main pillars of the measures will be the determination of the patient pathway, stabilisation of the legislative and financial environment, modernisation of the healthcare infrastructure, predictability and targeted regulation.

The patient pathway cannot be addressed without a clear definition of the patient's entitlement, an audit of co-payments and charges in line with legislation, setting waiting times or updating minimum provider networks that clearly define the patient's entitlement in terms of substance, time frames and geography. These steps will be implemented within the framework of close cooperation between the actors of the health system itself, i.e. patients, healthcare providers and health insurers.

We are convinced that accessible and quality care for the health and lives of citizens will only work if it is built on a solid foundation and constructive dialogue with all relevant partners in healthcare, especially between the patient and the healthcare professional.

Transparency in policy-making, predictability of financing and stabilisation of legislative processes will be the basis for restoring the confidence of healthcare professionals and patients in the functioning of the healthcare system. Updating key legislative standards will ensure that the legislative framework is addressed and that the state is in a strong regulatory position.

Only a strong state as a regulator can ensure that healthcare is a service to the people and not a luxury for a select few.

Short-term priorities

The first task will be stabilising the Ministry of Health in terms of its personnel and processes to restore transparent and efficient management of the ministry. A national health strategy will be developed, and a list of projects to be implemented over the next 4 years will be published. As the time horizon for some of the measures extends beyond the electoral period, a broad expert and political consensus will be sought to ensure the continuity of projects beyond 2027. This list will have a clearly defined timetable and its implementation will be regularly updated and monitored with a view to implementing it as quickly as possible. The intention is to ensure that the new project management is characterised by accountability, efficiency and transparency, using innovative approaches in healthcare. These efforts will include a review and optimization of the organizational structure of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, as well as the reintroduction of processes for publishing price maps and the implementation of central procurement of hospital purchases with an emphasis on adherence to the principles of value for money.

Priority emphasis is placed on stabilising the healthcare workforce. Our human resources strategy will primarily address shortages in the health professions, particularly nurses and doctors. We will conduct an audit of the implementation of staffing standards and subsequently revise the legislation defining staffing requirements for outpatient and inpatient healthcare facilities. In line with international trends, we will shift, update and adjust the competencies of the different healthcare professions. Our goal is to create working conditions that will be attractive for graduates and support them in their decision to work in Slovakia while stopping the exodus of experienced health professionals abroad.

In the field of education, in cooperation with the ministries of education and finance, we will develop a process of innovation in the education of health professional competence in secondary medical schools, medical faculties, as well as faculties of healthcare while also focusing on a substantial increase in the current insufficient capacity of these institutions. Our intention is to increase communication about the needs of the health system and funding for training students and healthcare professionals. We will set adequate conditions for financing medical education so that medical faculties will be motivated to recruit more Slovak students, and at the same time we will make residency studies more attractive for young doctors and nurses.

The stability and predictability of healthcare financing are priorities for the Government. We will define the level of total resources, including reimbursement for the state-insured patients, based on qualitative and quantitative expectations, based primarily on demand for health care, planned reforms, hospital debt, and capital needs. At the same time, we will set rules for the efficient management of public health insurance resources. To this end, we will establish a Public Health Insurance Budget Board to monitor and propose measures for sustainability and predictability of financing in line with current macroeconomic forecasts. We will ensure that the Health Care Supervisory Authority can carry out targeted supervision and control over the economy, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of using public health insurance resources.

Among the short-term priorities of the Government is the adoption of a decision on the National University Hospital in Bratislava. In the context of educating a new generation of healthcare professionals, it is necessary to provide modern and innovative facilities not only for the treatment of patients but also for the education of medics, nurses and other healthcare professionals. After taking into account all the expert comments, the audit of the bed stock and staff resources, we will take the necessary steps to enable the Government to decide on the final form of the National University Hospital in Bratislava as soon as possible.

Medium-term priorities

The Government will ensure the development, protection and promotion of the public health of the whole of society in Slovakia, under the auspices of the public health service, through effective prevention and targeted programmes. We will focus on the prevention and minimization of risky behaviours as a supra-ministerial and multidisciplinary topic that is key to improving the health status of citizens as well as the sustainability of the health system. Addressing the determinants of health and addictions will be part of a comprehensive approach to public health, with policies based on a data-driven and balanced combination of prevention and minimising the impact of risk factors and behaviours. We will expand screening programs to include lung, stomach and prostate screening.

To strengthen outpatient health care as a main pillar of efficient and quality health care, we will prepare an update of the catalogue of health services and set a plan for its gradual implementation. Together with the municipalities, we will carry out an audit of fees and surcharges to make reimbursement rules more transparent, improve access to care and prepare a support mechanism for the establishment of outpatient clinics in deficit areas. At the same time, we will prepare the reform of specialised outpatient care and implement the approved concept of general outpatient care. A key measure in these segments will also be the transfer of competencies between medical and non-medical staff.

With full responsibility, we will proceed with the optimization of the hospital network to achieve safe, quality and accessible healthcare for all patients. As soon as possible, we will start collecting and evaluating waiting times and indicators of the quality of inpatient care and prepare rules for their claimability in practice.

We will prepare a pipeline of major infrastructure projects for each hospital, in accordance with the approved hospital network optimization, the specifics of the region and the predicted evolution of healthcare needs.

Following the effective use of financial resources from the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, we will continuously monitor the fulfilment of milestones so that these resources are used to the greatest extent possible for the construction of new state-of-the-art hospitals in Martin and Banská Bystrica. We will do the same for modernising and reconstructing other hospitals supported by the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan. At the same time, we will look for alternative sources of financing for the construction and modernisation of hospitals across Slovakia in the form of PPP or other financial schemes outside the state budget and European funds.

In order to optimize and unify processes to ensure the sustainable functioning of inpatient health facilities, we will introduce central purchasing of medicines, special medical supplies and medical equipment. We will support the further development of the DRG system and its use in practice. In line with the commitments of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, we will continue the gradual centralisation of the management of state hospitals and the optimisation of the network and processes of the ambulance and transport health services.

We will create the conditions for transparent and, in particular, faster entry of innovative medicines with proven added value for the patient, taking into account budgetary constraints. We will put in place incentive mechanisms for new generic and biosimilar medicines to enter the market. We will streamline the system for reviewing and categorising prices and reimbursement of medicines, medical devices, special medical supplies and dietetic foods. We will initiate negotiations at the level of the European Union on the rules for re-exporting medicines which, if re-exported, will put the country in a situation where it cannot provide treatment for its patients. Free trade rules cannot result in a threat to the health of patients in Slovakia.

Mental health is a long-neglected and undervalued area. We will therefore propose solutions to increase access to mental health services, an integrated and supra-ministerial approach, the prevention of mental disorders and the promotion of mental wellbeing.

After taking short-term measures in the field of education, the Ministry will focus on more time-demanding projects such as the implementation of dual education in health education. We will improve the quality of undergraduate medical education, especially the scope of practical teaching, and support the changes already initiated in the further education of healthcare professionals. At the same time, we will adjust educational standards and support the preparation of the institute of national accreditation and the status of university staff. The Government will focus on reviewing and optimising the quality of the comprehensive system of education of healthcare professionals at all levels of education and in line with the needs of Slovakia.

Up-to-date, good quality and accessible data are the basis for setting the right health policy objectives. We will prepare and launch a data reform that will primarily relieve healthcare professionals from unnecessary reporting and improve data availability and quality. The reform will streamline the process of creating national registers and add to the list of diagnoses to be monitored. The new leadership of the Ministry will continue to develop electronic services and modules such as e-lab, e-change ticket, and electronic appointment (e-appointment) and other key projects as part of the ongoing digitalisation in the health sector. At the same time, we will actively participate in the creation and processes of the European Health Data Space, as well as maximise its potential for use.

Long-term priorities

Slovakia ranks among the countries with the fastest ageing population in the European Union. We, therefore, expect an increased demand for health and social care services. Increased demand will be matched by the way we fund this type of care. In practice, we are also seeing an increasing number of citizens who are medically disadvantaged. The situation is complicated by the limited capacity of facilities providing aftercare, long-term care and rehabilitation. We will continue to implement the adopted Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic in community-social, follow-up nursing and palliative care. Efficient use of the capacities of thermal spa facilities will also contribute to solving this problem. In the area of providing health and social services, we will actively cooperate with all stakeholders, especially with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic.

The most effective tool for improving the population's health status is education and awareness, but this requires years of organised and targeted work. When it comes to education and awareness, our aim is to make citizens more responsible and informed about their health. The government will introduce systematic awareness and targeted health science education for citizens. It integrates these foundations and principles into the education system, including through cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. The Government will ensure that this information is part of the primary school curriculum so that responsible attitudes to health can be shaped from a young age.

CULTURAL POLICY

The Government is keen to keep national culture at the forefront of societal interest and will therefore provide adequate support for its development. We will continue to engage in

dialogue with the cultural community, local government representatives, and relevant public and private sector entities in the preparation and implementation of systemic changes and measures.

The Government is interested in protecting and developing the qualitative level of the Slovak language, including the support of scientific linguistic institutions with the aim of preserving the diversity and original words of the standardized language in society and in the official communication of public institutions. Every citizen of the Slovak Republic has the right to be taught and master the standardized language. At the same time, the Government will support the teaching of the Slovak language to foreigners living in Slovakia. At the same time, the Government fully respects the need to develop minority languages in Slovakia.

The Government will ensure that there is systemic and long-term support for all forms of Slovak folk culture. To this end, the Government will review the institutional framework of financial support for Slovak culture so that the widest possible range of entities active in culture receives support.

The Government will ensure that there is effective and efficient protection of the rights and dignity of the individual against false and derogatory statements in the public domain. We will ensure that the principles of objectivity and the presumption of innocence are upheld in factual allegations in the public domain.

The Government will engage to improve systemic support and development of local and regional culture. We will advocate for the creation of a public subsidy system for regional cultural and social organisations in close cooperation with local governments.

The Government will guarantee that after many years, systemic and state-guaranteed support for original Slovak literature will be ensured, especially in the area of author grants, publishing and distribution of Slovak literary works. Slovak classical and modern literary works have an irreplaceable role in national culture. The Government will cooperate with writers' organisations and Matica Slovenská in the promotion of original Slovak literature.

The Government will prepare the legislative environment for the institutional reform of Matica Slovenská as a public national and cultural institution, whose future it sees in the implementation of several sectoral policies in the public interest.

The Government will create conditions for the equal functioning of all media while preventing unjustified interference with freedom of speech, broadcasting, and the right to disseminate information. The Government will protect freedom of speech, including on social media, and will ensure that regulation of this right is appropriate only to the extent that it interferes with the dignity of human rights and in the interest of protecting the security of the Slovak Republic.

The Government recognises that the quota system is an effective channel to support Slovak's artistic creations. It will, therefore, prepare a more comprehensive proposal for their application to the whole range of Slovak cultural production, including the presentation of Slovak artists in state institutions and public spaces.

The Government will ensure that support for Slovak audiovisual culture is at an appropriate qualitative and quantitative level. The Government will continue to support Slovak

audiovisual culture, with an emphasis on the production of audiovisual programmes that objectively and artistically capture significant events and important personalities of Slovak national history. Such works of art can also be used, for example, as an optional supplement to the educational process of children and young people.

The Government will make the most efficient and effective use of the financial resources from the EU funds under the Slovakia Programme and the Recovery and Resilience Plan, which aim at the restoration of cultural monuments, with particular emphasis on the establishment of a mechanism for the systematic restoration and management of castles, chateaux and manor houses in Slovakia. In addition to the importance of preserving cultural heritage and promoting tourism, the restoration of cultural monuments has an important social element in the form of social enterprises, which employ a significant number of members of marginalised Roma communities in the restoration of cultural heritage. The Government will take the necessary steps to ensure that the heritage protection authorities work effectively.

Public service media must ensure independent and objective journalism. At the same time, they must support quality original Slovak television and radio production. To this end, the Government will push through the legal and economic framework for the separation of Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS) into two independent public media institutions - Slovak Television and Slovak Radio, or consider other solutions to strengthen the public service dimension of RTVS.

The Government will develop a strategy to support major cultural events in Slovakia, which are an important attraction for domestic and foreign visitors. In addition to cultural development, major cultural events provide a significant boost to tourism. The list of major cultural events, including the scheme for their financial support, will be determined by the Ministry in dialogue with the cultural community.

The Government will ensure systemic steps, projects and activities that will support the increase of national awareness and patriotism of the citizens of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will also pay attention to activities that cater for the cultural needs of national minorities, marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

The Government will look for new sources of funding for culture beyond public sources, through increased solidarity and economic involvement of the private sector. The Government will propose measures to increase the contribution of private companies, especially those operating in the creative industries, to the promotion of domestic cultural production.

The Government will create conditions for reducing the investment debt towards state arts institutions by ensuring the modernisation of stage, audio-visual and lighting equipment using the latest technology and low-energy technologies.

The Government shall ensure a strategy for the medium- and long-term development of culture, including passporting works of art owned by the Slovak Republic.

The Government will present the new statutes of the Fund for the Support of Arts, Audiovisual Fund and Fund for the Support of Culture of National Minorities to increase support for original Slovak works and increasing control over the use of public resources.

The Government will adopt new standards for museums, galleries and libraries, with an emphasis on promoting culture and tourism development.

The Government considers cultural vouchers to be an effective and efficient tool for raising cultural and social awareness. Cultural vouchers facilitate cooperation between state and non-state artistic entities, support the young generation's relationship to culture and increase its promotion.

The Government considers it important to systematically improve the social status of cultural workers in society, with particular emphasis on local cultural workers.

The Government will create conditions for linking art education with vocational training and practice in state art institutions so that talented students and graduates have the opportunity for quality training and subsequent employment in professional conditions.

The Government will support programmes to raise awareness of Slovak culture among young people and, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, will support programmes to increase the reading of Slovak literary works.

The Government recognises the importance of the social status of churches, religious societies and will support their involvement in matters of public interest, including their adequate financial remuneration.

The Government, in cooperation with the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, will support the dissemination of culture among Slovaks living abroad and maintain their close connection to the Slovak nation.

The Government will support the strengthening of the state presentation of Slovak culture and art abroad, which it considers to be an important instrument of the Slovak Republic's foreign policy. The Government considers the cultural presentation of the Slovak Republic abroad as one of its priorities, especially during official visits of the highest representatives of the Slovak Republic to important international events.

The Government will assume official patronage of the most important anniversaries and public holidays of the Slovak Republic and will support their dignified conduct.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

According to Article 44 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, everyone has the right to a favourable environment. Everyone has a duty to protect and enhance the environment and cultural heritage. The State shall ensure the prudent use of natural resources, the protection of agricultural land and forest land, the ecological balance and effective care of the environment, and shall ensure the protection of designated species of wild plants and wild animals. As non-renewable natural resources, agricultural land and forest land enjoy special protection from the state and society.

Natural wealth, biodiversity, healthy water, soil, and air are the unique assets of Slovakia, which the Government is committed to protecting and making available to every citizen of Slovakia.

The quality of human life and of society as a whole depends on the environment in which it develops. Only a wealthy country can invest sufficiently and in the long term in environmental protection and development. It is, therefore, in the interest of environmental protection itself to pursue a socio-economic model of social and industrial development that is in harmony with a sustainable model of environmental protection while at the same time generating sufficient value for the state to have the capacity to effectively finance measures related to environmental protection and the green transition of the national economy.

Short-term priorities

The Government will hold a dialogue with municipal representatives and stakeholders regarding the implementation of mechanical-biological treatment of municipal waste, its start-up and modification. The Government will adopt a decision on the regulation of active landfills in order to eliminate the scope for legal action by the European Commission and to ensure the efficient treatment of waste in accordance with the obligations of the Slovak Republic.

The Government supports the zoning of national parks, which shall take into account the legitimate requirements of local life. Zoning of national parks is an opportunity to redefine broader social relations, particularly in the vicinity of national parks and protected areas. The Government is committed to an open dialogue with the general public affected by national park zoning and is committed to taking into account the legitimate interests of citizens, local governments and other affected rural stakeholders. The Government is committed to following the method applied in European Union countries in the zoning of national parks and recognises the principle that restrictions on property rights can only be implemented in return for adequate compensation and compensation for damages. The Government recognises the milestones of the Slovak Republic's Recovery and Resilience Plan and will introduce reform of national parks and zoning to ensure that these milestones are met and that funding is not jeopardised.

The Government will review the commitments made by the previous Government on the timeframe for the implementation of the various environmental measures, in particular, whether the targets are realistic and whether sufficient funding is allocated to achieve them.

The Government identifies a significant failure in the removal of old environmental burdens in Slovakia. The problem for the effective use of funds and for the practical implementation of the removal of environmental burdens in Slovakia is also the Environmental Burdens Act itself, the amendment of which from 2022 is being reviewed by the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic. The Government is amending the law in an accelerated procedure so that it does not create legal and financial uncertainty for those landowners who did not cause the environmental burden in question.

The technical renewal of the Gabčíkovo Reservoir and Power Plant is a prerequisite for the stability of the electricity supply from the hydroelectric power source and represents a significant source of revenue for the Slovak Republic. The Government will make an urgent decision to upgrade and replace turbines that are beyond their projected end-of-life.

At the same time, the Government will apply the principle of zero tolerance for the presence of brown bears and predatory wolves in the vicinity of towns and villages and will issue timely permits for the intervention teams to control them.

Medium-term priorities

The Government recognises that humanity is facing the global phenomenon of climate change and is ready to meet Slovakia's commitments to eliminate it. The Government subscribes to the basic international agreements to which the Slovak Republic is a signatory, in particular the Paris Agreement, and undertakes to conduct an active international dialogue in the interest of effective implementation of its objectives so that the economic costs of low-carbon transformation are borne equally by all countries in the world according to their economic strength and the extent to which they contribute to global warming pollution. In order to meet the transformation goals, the Government is ready to adopt a new law on climate change and low-carbon transformation.

The Government does not regard humans as a threat to the environment, but as an integral part of it. Every human being has the right to personal, social and economic development that is not restricted by a higher level of regulation and restrictions than those defined by the European Union directives. The Government is committed to reviewing the current environmental protection laws to determine whether Slovakia is applying stricter standards than those approved by the European Union and whether this degree of over-regulation is leading to a loss of Slovakia's competitiveness.

The Government will make a strategic decision to build sufficient incineration plants as the best solution for treating municipal waste and meeting the obligations of closing municipal waste and toxic waste landfills.

In order to accelerate the construction of priority infrastructure, the Government will review the possibility of establishing a national construction authority for strategic investments and priority infrastructure, where construction and EIA would be combined. The EIA process itself will be simplified to the extent that there will be no duplication of environmental impact assessments in municipalities for projects that meet the parameters defined in the zoning plans.

In implementing environmental policy, the Government will focus on those solutions that can deliver the most effective outcomes with the widest range of positive externalities. The priority in relation to municipalities will be, in particular, the sewage infrastructure of towns and villages, the construction of water supply systems, and support for transforming municipal lighting to LED technology. In zones bordering national parks and protected areas, the Government will pay increased attention to removing environmental burdens and establishing effective solutions in managing municipal waste.

In order to prevent the creation of new environmental burdens, the Government will complete and operationalize the waste management information system so that there is a transparent and auditable overview of waste management. In handling and storing toxic material, the Government will introduce a new registration, documentation and reimbursement mechanism to speed up the system for detecting illegal dumping and fraudulent fictitious waste disposal.

The Government emphasises the green transformation of the Slovak economy. The transformation of industry must be sufficiently ambitious to the extent that Slovakia does not fall behind the European trend and does not lose competitiveness. To this end, the Government is committed to directing financial resources from the Environmental Fund and the Modernisation Fund primarily to the green transformation of the economy and to support those projects that have a significant contribution to the competitiveness of enterprises and the development of environmentally friendly infrastructure.

The Government will review the level of social values of plants and animals, as well as the level of penalties and offences for environmental crimes. The Government will also decide to revise the bureaucratic and institutional complexity of the environmental governance system in order to increase its efficiency and contribution.

The Government is committed to an intensive dialogue with industrial enterprises and the business sector in order to identify sufficiently the interests of the Slovak economy, which it will subsequently promote and defend in the voting bodies of the European Union. The Government's aim is not to expose Slovak industry to higher regulations, not to apply stricter restrictions and not to implement more costly solutions than the European Union directives foresee.

The Government recognises the need for and benefits of recycling. The bottle deposit scheme is a significant contribution to reducing the incidence of PET bottles and cans out of the circular economy. The parameters of the deposit system will be adjusted to avoid the arbitrary elimination of market operators, to reduce the bureaucratic burden and to give the state a stronger position in the system.

The Government considers it a priority to stabilise the country's water management and water retention system. The state and economic situation of the Slovak Water Management Company, responsible for the maintenance of river flows, the condition of dams and flood protection measures, is unsustainable in the current permanent deficit economic form and must transform in order to eliminate the operational and investment debt. The Government will also support the development of PPP projects in the field of shipping and the use of Slovak ports.

Long-term priorities

The Government is committed to protecting the interests of environmental protection, including in the context of the development of Slovak agriculture, tourism and the accelerated construction of superior infrastructure. For effective nature protection, the Government will re-evaluate the entire system of protected areas in Slovakia also in terms of socio-economic impacts on rural inhabitants and their municipalities. The Government will prepare a new concept of nature conservation that will not be a threat but an opportunity for the rural population, the people who care for the land in the countryside and, not least, for the ecological dimension of tourism.

To link the interests of nature conservation, agricultural and forestry activities and the interests of recreational, natural and cultural tourism, the Government will operationalise the Government Council for the European Green Deal and establish an intersectoral platform FOREST - SPORTS - RECREATION - HEALTH.

The Government will ensure transparent and non-discriminatory access to support for all actors providing and ensuring ecosystem services, with strong involvement of forest owners and managers for sustainable forest management closer to nature.

Protecting the life and health of citizens is a priority. The Government will map the real state of the number of the protected carnivore - the brown bear in Slovakia and will start a substantive dialogue with the European Commission on reclassification of the protection level of this carnivore in case the results show its overpopulation.

As part of the country's water management reform, a national project to retain water from springs in the country will be implemented without delay and will be funded by the Slovak Republic's Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The Government will remove contradictory provisions in laws that impose a different form of behaviour on the citizens in terms of environmental protection and care of agricultural land and forests. To this end, a new fast-track procedure will be introduced for the maintenance of agricultural land and vineyards in the case of the removal of self-seeding shrubs and trees and landscape maintenance. To this end, the Nature and Landscape Protection Act will be adopted in a way that is logically coherent with the laws on forests, agricultural land protection and hunting.

Interference with the right to own property as a result of the Nature and Landscape Protection Act will be proportionate and balanced in accordance with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. No protected areas will be declared without thorough discussion with affected members of the public and stakeholders.

The Government recognises the need to protect the interests of private forest owners and will recognise the need for dialogue on financial compensation where regulations that interfere with this right are enforced.

SPORT POLICY

The Government will raise Slovak sports to a new level. Every child has the right to find a way to exercise, and therefore the strategic intention of the executive will be to build a system so that in synergy with schools, parents, the sports movement, municipalities and the state, generations of physically fit and healthy children can grow up and so that Slovakia does not miss out on any sporting talent.

Every citizen, the general public from youth to seniors, has the right to access to exercise and sport, both in an active and passive form. The fulfilment of these rights is only possible with the help of long-term and continuous action by the state to support the construction and reconstruction of sports infrastructure, especially in localities where such infrastructure is insufficient in relation to the needs of the population. The Government will also provide support for the organisation of sporting events in the Slovak Republic.

The Government, through its policies, will regard sports in such a way that the national sports teams, as the pinnacle of the entire sporting movement, will be the showcase of our

country. The Government will create the conditions for this to the extent necessary. At the same time, sport is an important factor for economic growth.

The Government will also see investment in this area as a means of economic development of the country and a tool for balancing regional disparities.

Essential measures to achieve the above objectives and intentions are:

- Creation of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Slovak Republic, which will highlight and confirm the position of sport as a priority area in the objectives of the Government and will allow to systematize the state policy in this sector.
- The Government will also explore the possibility of funding sport from gambling taxes and consider further legislative changes to encourage the private sector to support sport to a higher extent. The Government will propose legislative changes to state funding of sport to make it fairer and less bureaucratically demanding, while providing more resources to the sector overall. This includes an increase in funding for the Sports Promotion Fund. The Government will focus its efforts on changing the status quo so that building sports infrastructure with the help of EU funds becomes a success story. Sports entities and local government will have excellent and simple conditions created for their use for this purpose.
- Building new sports infrastructure and reconstructing existing infrastructure is a fundamental commitment of this Government. In cooperation with local authorities, sports organisations, and the private sector, the state will strive for legislative adjustments to facilitate more efficient and faster preparation of plans and project documentation, substantially reduce legislative and administrative barriers, and ensure co-financing of the implementation itself. Support for the construction and reconstruction of sports infrastructure will be distributed according to the regions of the country and types of sports so that it fairly reflects the needs of all parts of Slovakia and sports sectors and, at the same time, serves synergically as a tool for balancing regional disparities and improving the quality of life in the regions.
- Adoption of clear rules for all-round support and co-financing of major competitions of international level in both adult and youth categories with the aim not only to support the development of sport but also to systematically and in the long term develop the brand of the Slovak Republic as a globally recognised sports and tourist destination.
- Paying special attention to coaches, their preparation, education, training and professionalisation at all levels of sport. Coaching is the backbone of the sports movement, and the Government will propose financial and other mechanisms to support it.
- The definition of a special line in the state policy in the field of sport for athletes with impairments and their organisations in such a way that in every state activity and in every support mechanism their adequate share is directed to the needs of impaired athletes and their organisations.
- In cooperation with the sports movement and other entities, elaboration and approval of the National Programme for the Development of Sport with the subtitle: Slovakia - Country of champions. In it, with a long-term view for two decades ahead, to determine the legislative tasks and investment priorities of the state and the needs, plans and goals of sports

associations, the Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee, local governments and schools, with the unifying goal of achieving world-class quality of sport in all its forms and to provide the national sports teams with an optimal financial, technical, material and personnel base, which will enable it to bring the highest medal placements and be competitive at the world and Olympic level in the long term.

POLICY TO TACKLE REGIONAL DISPARITIES

Promoting regional development is a necessity, and modernising local government is a legitimate need. That is why the Government will approach regional development and the modernisation of local self-government on the basis of two principles: no decisions without debate and no competencies without money. The Government will, therefore, introduce a so-called 'Clause of Compatibility with the European Charter of Local Self-Government' into the legislative process.

The establishment of a permanent dialogue between the Government and the local self-government will create a model of cooperation and coordination for the all-round development of the territory, taking into account the serviceability of the territory and the availability of public services, which we consider to be the key parameters for a happy life of the people in each region. This approach is a necessary step in repairing the damage caused by the irresponsible decisions of previous governments, which replaced dialogue with an announcement phrase and responsible decisions with a trial-and-error approach. A permanent dialogue between the Government and local self-government will create conditions for successful decisions that will be accompanied by reducing regional disparities, increasing the development potential of the territory, eliminating the modernization debt and multiplying the quality of life of the people.

Slovakia needs strong regions that can form strong local self-governments, which we perceive through vibrant countryside, dynamic cities and promising regions. Their ultimate beneficiary is the citizen and the community. We will adjust activities, expectations and results accordingly.

In order to deepen the territorial cohesion of society, the Government will build on the positive experience of its negotiations directly in the regions in the period up to 2020. The Government intends to hold Cabinet meetings in the regions at regular bimonthly intervals.

The Government will push through major changes to the European Investment and Structural Funds, which will be more widely devolved to the regions to fund their investment needs. At the same time, it will carry out a review of the current Operational Programme Slovakia in parallel with possible adjustments in the settings of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic. In parallel, it will adopt useful changes in the area of public procurement in response to significant problems in application practice. In parallel with these activities, a Public Investment Map will be developed to contribute to a transparent, efficient and predictable model for the coordinated development of the territory, including its financing.

The Government will immediately set up a supra-ministerial commission to assess options for significantly simplifying public procurement processes.

In the area of regional development, the Government will adopt legislative changes that will improve the possibilities of drawing on EU funds, resources from the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, and other financial mechanisms in order to speed up the processes of project implementation, increase the revenue possibilities of local self-governments, and improve systemic assistance in regions that are among the least developed. Priority attention will be given to these regions, accompanied by a new approach to support and development.

The Government will introduce mechanisms for sustainable alternative financing of municipal development beyond the state budget, the EU funds and the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic. Consequently, it will postpone the entry of the current construction legislation into force until the new legislative framework is adopted. The maximum period of postponement will be two years.

The Government will introduce a system of gradual steps with emphasis on the removal of bureaucracy and other administrative and technical obstacles so that it will be possible to transfer land in the administration of the Slovak Land Fund in the inner area of municipalities and land under roads outside the inner boundaries of municipalities to their ownership free of charge. At the same time, it will support land development processes that are directly related to managed territorial development.

The Government will revisit the Development Plan for Public Water Supply and Public Sewerage Systems for the territory of the Slovak Republic, as after 2020 governments have also abandoned these plans, which are extremely important for the development of the regions.

The Government will establish an Agency for the Management of State Surplus Property and prepare a change in legislation so that unnecessary state buildings can be transferred to local self-governments free of charge for public utility purposes.

The Government will legislate to anchor the definition of rural areas and the availability of food in rural areas as a public service, which will contribute to an improved quality of life in rural areas of the country.

The Government will push for comprehensive solutions for 'safe local self-government', reflecting improved health and property protection, effective flood prevention measures, prevention and development activities.

In the area of regional development and modernisation of local self-governments, the Government will promote the establishment of Shared Service Centres for the joint execution of the local self-government agenda and will put in place support mechanisms to systematically promote inter-municipal cooperation, including the development of the Smart Agenda. The Government will support the dissemination of good practice examples, know-how transfer and the use of benchmarking tools to improve the performance and efficiency of local self-government. Following the above, the Government accepts the differences and specificities of municipalities and towns and will take these factors into account when promoting solutions that will contribute to the use of their growth potential and will also support the development plans of border areas of Slovakia. For the Government, the border region is not a periphery but a gateway to Slovakia.

The Government will support the fulfilment of the mission of the higher territorial units as its natural partner and also as a partner of the municipalities and towns, in relation to the development of the regions, the reduction of regional disparities and the improvement of the quality of life of the inhabitants.

In the area of local self-government, the Government will create the conditions for the elaboration of a comprehensive concept for the modernisation of local self-government and local administration, including the expansion of revenue opportunities for local self-governments, the definition of an economic minimum for municipalities, the graduation of competences and a comprehensive new municipal management. These steps will respond to changes in the field of regional development in order to increase the efficiency of local self-government, establish the concept of local economic policy and develop the social economy in the environment of the regions. These activities will include expanding broadband internet in the regions and continuing to develop eGovernment services.

The Government will consider the creation of a Pre-Project Preparation Fund. Its aim will be to finance the pre-project preparation and initial implementation phase of strategic projects of national or regional importance.

With the evaluation of the absorption capacity of the regions, the Government will create conditions for increasing the amount of investments from the EU funds, which are decided by the local and regional self-government. The Government respects that changing the electoral system, in particular the number of electoral districts, requires amending the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. The Government is ready to set up an expert group to evaluate alternatives for legislative changes to the electoral legislation for the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic with a view to changing the number of electoral districts.

POLICY ON SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL MINORITIES

According to Article 34(1) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, citizens belonging to national minorities or ethnic groups in the Slovak Republic shall be guaranteed their universal development, particularly the rights to promote their culture together with other members of the minority or group, to disseminate and receive information in their mother tongues, to associate in national minority associations, to establish and maintain educational and cultural institutions.

Under Article 34(2) of the Constitution, the citizens belonging to national minorities or ethnic groups shall, under the conditions laid down by law, also be guaranteed: a) the right to be educated in their language, b) the right to use their language in official communications, c) the right to participate in the decision making in matters affecting the national minorities and ethnic groups.

The current government is made up of political parties that formed the government between 2016 and 2020, together with a party that also represents the citizens of the most numerous national minority. During this period, the standardisation of relations was achieved,

which meant a significant improvement in relations between the majority population and national minorities and the development of the territories inhabited by citizens of the Slovak Republic belonging to national minorities. The Government will build on the methods and organisation of support for the development of national minorities that were practically proven during the previous period of government. It is committed to improving and refining them.

The Government considers the care for the development of national minorities as a cross-cutting task that affects all areas of the life of citizens of the Slovak Republic of nationalities other than the majority. This affects the whole fabric of their economic, social and cultural rights, both regionally and nationally. To achieve these objectives, the Government will work closely with regional self-government structures, including municipalities. It is also related to the development of employment in the regions, especially in the sectors of modern agriculture, food industry, forestry and wood processing industry, as well as tourism. Integrated programmes for territories inhabited by citizens of national minorities will be an important element of the regional development of the Slovak Republic.

Particular attention will be paid to education systems from pre-school to vocational education. These programmes will aim to increase the quality of life achieved through decent work, adding value to the development of the Slovak Republic. This is the only way to achieve a better, more peaceful and safer life for citizens of national minorities.

The Government considers the protection and promotion of the development of national minorities as its natural mission in the formation of a modern society. It will provide effective protection for national minorities and the rights and freedoms belonging to them under the rule of law, respecting states' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Government guarantees the rights of citizens belonging to national minorities or ethnic groups enshrined in the Constitution and international treaties and conventions while maintaining balanced relations between the majority and national minorities through tolerant dialogue in Slovak society. National minorities are an important part of our society with great cultural wealth and an important historical heritage.

The protection of national minorities is important for stability, democratic security and peace across the continent. The Government will create conditions for the development of national minorities in preserving and enhancing their identity, language, culture and traditions.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AND MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

The Government is fully aware that marginalised communities, especially Roma communities, are exposed to manifestations and attitudes that have no place in modern democratic society and rejects these manifestations and attitudes.

The Government notes the scale of assistance from European, national and other sources for the social inclusion of the Roma community, often without results and without effective control of the misuse of resources. Therefore, the Government cannot accept a strategy of assistance to the marginalised Roma community without a relevant assessment of the effectiveness of the personnel, institutional and financial capacities spent. Of particular interest

to the Government will be especially the possibility of engaging members of marginalised groups in the labour market, which today is marked by labour shortages.

The Government is determined to continue only those projects and strategies to support the marginalised Roma community that have proven to have a measurable effect. Taking into account all the specificities of the marginalised Roma community, the Government is prepared to implement a philosophy of balance between the rights and obligations of the persons concerned in its policy towards marginalised groups.

4. STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC STATE

The Government subscribes to the constitutional definition that the Slovak Republic is a sovereign, democratic state governed by the rule of law. The substantive rule of law is not value-neutral; on the contrary, it is based on the constitutive values of a democratic society, such as respect for human rights, freedom, equality, protection of human dignity, justice, the principle of proportionality, the prohibition of abuse of power, the democratic nature of governance, and the sovereignty of the Constitution and the law.

These values constitute the value basis of this Government's action, which means that the Government will ensure that it and all other public authorities act only on the basis of the Constitution and the law, exercise their power with respect for these values, and neither abuse nor overuse this power, but exercise it in an appropriate manner in every situation, always looking in particular to the preservation of human rights and the dignity of every citizen and human being.

The political change brought about by the parliamentary elections was a logical and inevitable consequence of the growing social polarisation in 2020-2023, to which the electorate responded in a spirit of yearning for normality and stability. A society can only tolerate a certain degree of internal conflict, otherwise its cohesion is in danger.

The Slovak Republic has been governed for more than three years, often not thanks to the three incumbent governments, but rather in spite of them. The new government has the democratic legitimacy to restore law, justice and order in areas where these values have been most neglected in recent years. It must not only take over from the outgoing government, but stop tolerating the division of society into good and bad and start running this country again. Key policy decisions must be taken and enforced by the political representation of the state, not by unelected individuals and groups. Within the appropriate legal framework and political culture, of course.

This Government wants to give priority to returning the state to the citizens and to ensure the performance of the basic functions of the state in their interest. The state cannot be a toy in the hands of irresponsible politicians; such a state is weak and undemocratic. In a democratic state governed by the rule of law, the authorities respect the rules of the game, law enforcement agencies are not an independent political power, and the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals is the guiding principle of all activities of public institutions. Only such a state can ensure justice, order and prosperity for all.

JUSTICE AND THE SUBSTANTIVE RULE OF LAW

According to Article 50(1) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, the court alone shall decide about the guilt and punishment for criminal offences.

According to Article 50(2) of the Constitution, everyone, who is being prosecuted shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty by a final judgement of the court.

The Government will strive to restore public and citizen confidence in the democratic institutions and legal order of the Slovak Republic. It will work to strengthen and maintain trust in law enforcement, the judiciary, prosecution, police and public administration.

The past three years, in terms of the justice deficit, have been characterised in particular by the failure to protect fundamental rights and freedoms during the COVID-19 pandemic and by the excesses of criminal policy. It is the Government's responsibility to ensure that similar state failures do not happen again.

During the two years of the pandemic, the design of the anti-pandemic measures and the control of their legality escaped standard scrutiny: they were outside the proper legislative processes and judicial control.

In the criminal sphere, these were arbitrary manifestations of state power, which, under the slogan of untying hands, turned the area of pre-trial criminal proceedings in particular into a war zone: in it, a battle was then to be fought with the "enemies of society", who had been identified directly by the government officials in advance and who were subsequently charged.

Political proclamations violating the principle of the presumption of innocence, together with the absence of effective and legal control over the police forces, have thus led to a number of excesses over the past three years, as is also evident from several decisions of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic and the European Court of Human Rights. At the same time, it can be reasonably assumed that it was the quest for a power revanche under the last government that led to the spectacular actions in apprehending the accused, which were more a public spectacle than a proper exercise of official powers. This was confirmed by another experience, namely that the police's power intervention (often accompanied by subsequent pre-trial detention) was interpreted by the government politicians of the time as evidence of guilt. This has created an unacceptable situation where the political leadership of the country has dishonoured and dehumanised the accused in violation of the constitutional right to the presumption of innocence.

The former governments of 2020-2023 have undermined the confidence of much of the public in justice in precisely the way they have fought pandemics and misused the criminal justice system.

Another form of failure of justice and the rule of law has been a number of institutional "wars", i.e. conflicts between state authorities, which by their nature have gone beyond the principles of cooperation that should prevail between the different branches of state power. A state of affairs characterised by one branch of the State branding another as a violator of the law and using means of coercive power against it is a state of pathological failure of the rule of law. This Government will, therefore, also put an end to all such institutional wars.

The current Government will not be a revanchist government in reverse. It will be a Government of the law, favouring systemic solutions over expedient ones, to correct the institutions' functioning in a way whose effectiveness will not be compromised even by later personnel changes in their leadership.

Recognising that a state without liberty and justice makes no sense for its citizens, the Government of the Slovak Republic sets itself the following tasks:

STATE CRIMINAL POLICY

Background

The Government will eliminate the negative consequences of the 2005 recodification of criminal law by adopting a modern regulation that will correspond to European standards and current trends in criminal policy in the most advanced countries of the European Union. The adoption of this legislation will be accomplished by pushing through an acute amendment of the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, followed by a comprehensive recodification of the Criminal Codes.

The recodification of substantive criminal law in 2005 was intended to create the conditions for depenalisation, decriminalisation and the introduction of alternative punishments, with penalties to be imposed more proportionately than in the past. In reality, however, both the penal rates and the number of offences have increased significantly and the effective conditions for the imposition of the newly introduced alternative penalties have not really been created. In addition, the penal rates under the new Criminal Code were disproportionate not only in themselves (two to three times higher rates in some cases), but also when compared to each other in terms of the importance of the values protected by the offences (stricter punishment of property and economic offences compared to offences against life, health or human dignity).

It must be admitted that it has been a failure of several previous governments to ensure that at least the most glaring shortcomings of this law have been corrected long ago. At the moment, however, the abuse and overuse of criminal law resources under the previous government has led to these shortcomings being laid bare before the public, and the resistance of the public and legal practitioners to the existing legal framework has intensified.

Despite the decline in the number of registered crimes, the number of imprisoned persons in the Slovak Republic has not been decreasing over the last 10 years, on the contrary, it has been slightly increasing, and Slovakia is the country with the second highest number of imprisoned persons per 100,000 inhabitants in the European Union. The accommodation capacity of prisons is insufficient in relation to the internationally acceptable minimum accommodation area, and prison facilities are overcrowded in the long term. We are unable to consistently implement the recommendations of international institutions such as the CPT Committee, and so, in addition to the economic and social consequences of removing a significant proportion of the population from active life, we may also suffer serious legal consequences in connection with the state of our prisons because of the violation of their fundamental rights. The penalty of house arrest, which in some European Union countries

accounts for 20% or more of convictions, is still imposed in only a fraction of cases, currently 0.3% (2020), despite the introduction of electronic control of the execution of certain decisions (ESMO) in 2014. Prisons are then filled to a significant degree by people convicted of offences of low social severity. Also, because of overcrowding, prisons are not able to fulfil their priority tasks (resocialisation) properly. The high percentage of recidivism is, thus, among other causes, a consequence of the dismal state of our prison system.

The Government will, therefore, also prioritise formulating strategic criminal policy objectives with an emphasis on restorative justice measures. The objectives of the specific measures will focus in particular on humanising the conditions of pre-trial detention and imprisonment in accordance with the recommendations of international institutions (CPT Committee), reducing the number of persons sentenced to unconditional imprisonment, completing the functioning model of the probation and mediation service and ensuring that alternative sentences of house arrest and compulsory labour can be imposed to a significantly greater extent than hitherto.

Short-term priorities

- The Government will push through legislation aimed at modernising and humanising criminal law institutions, focusing on introducing elements of restorative justice and harmonising with European criminal law standards.
- The Government will push for depenalisation, which will translate into a substantial reduction in prison sentences to the level of developed European countries while expanding the possibility of imposing alternative sentences, including suspended prison sentences. - The Government will focus on bringing the current criminal law legislation into line with the requirements arising from the case law of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic (in view of the number of decisions on violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, whether in pre-trial or trial proceedings) and of the European Court of Human Rights, so as to eliminate distortions creating room for violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.
- The Government will set up a system of public information on criminal proceedings with an emphasis on the presumption of innocence and the human rights and freedoms of the persons concerned under European human rights standards.
- The Government will improve the institutional framework ensuring the criminal policy of the Slovak Republic with emphasis on the independence, integrity and legality of decision-making of law enforcement agencies and courts.
- The Government shall take measures to establish constitutional and technical guarantees guaranteeing the right to a fair trial in the context of the attorney-client relationship.
- In order to decriminalise, the Government will index the quantitative thresholds of harm to take into account inflation compared to 2005, when the current thresholds were introduced.
- The Government will ensure the consistent transposition of European Union acts issued for the purpose of strengthening the procedural rights of suspects and accused persons in criminal proceedings into the Slovak Code of Criminal Procedure.

Medium-term priorities

- The Government will strengthen the conditions for the individualisation of punishment in order to create the preconditions for the imposition of proportionate sentences; for this reason, it will also consider changing the treatment of mitigating and aggravating circumstances and reconsidering the principle of asperity.
- The Government will ensure that the new Criminal Law fundamentally distinguishes between (1) first-time offenders of crimes other than particularly serious crimes, where the re-socialisation aspect needs to be strengthened and priority given to alternative or suspended sentences, (2) particularly dangerous recidivists, where, on the other hand, the aspect of protection of society from the offender needs to be strengthened, and finally (3) other offenders.
- The Government will push for changes that will lead to improved protection of women and children from domestic violence, effective prosecution and sanctioning of perpetrators of violence against children, perpetrators of sexual exploitation and harassment, including punishment of online offences.
- The Government will support the implementation of the concept of addressing petty property crime with non-punitive instruments and the concept of resocialisation of offenders who have been sentenced to a non-parole period, while preserving the protective functions of the criminal law. The Government will review the functioning of the Seized Assets Management Office and the Seized Assets Institute to address identified systemic weaknesses.
- The Government will consider abolishing or substantially changing the offence of law-bending.
- The Government will eliminate long-standing application problems (including in the criminal process) reported by legal and medical practice on the issues of protective treatment, protective supervision and detention.
- The Government will focus on creating a safe and humane environment in detention and prison institutions in order to protect the fundamental human rights and freedoms of persons deprived of their liberty, with an emphasis on re-socialisation, and the subsequent integration of convicted persons into civilian life, taking into account the reservations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT Committee).
- The Government will promote the strengthening of the individualisation of the method of execution of sentences (differentiation of convicts), the development and implementation of resocialisation and educational programmes for convicts, the elimination of negative effects of the prison environment on the prisoner and his/her relatives and the increase of the preventive effect of the imposed sentences.
- The Government will provide financial, personnel and technical support to the Probation and Mediation Service, which has significant regional disparities and will consider its reorganisation.

- The Government will examine the causes of the shortcomings in the functioning of the Electronic System for Monitoring of Persons (ESMO) identified by the Supreme Audit Office and its operationalization and streamlining.

Long-term priorities

- The Government will adopt a restorative justice strategy to define clear and measurable objectives in this area, with particular emphasis on probation and mediation.
- In order to favour alternative sanctions, extend the possibility for the court to impose a fine as a separate penalty for offences other than particularly serious crimes.
- In the field of prisons, the Government will create a socially respected, modern and transparent organization, fulfilling the entire implementation procedure in accordance with European standards and the latest professional knowledge, with meaningful content and purposeful resocialization activities.
- The Government shall take measures to reduce the number of offenders sentenced to non-conditional sentences and promote measures to reintegrate offenders into society and reduce recidivism, while preserving the protective functions of the criminal law.

JUDICIARY AND THE PROSECUTION SERVICE

Background

With regard to the situation in the judiciary, the Government notes that the reform carried out by the previous Government in the form of the so-called Judicial Map elevated organisational and technical changes above the purpose of a meaningful reform, which is to improve the institution's ability to provide a timely and high-quality public service to the citizen, in this case the proper and timely handling of the judicial agenda.

The Government will make adjustments to the reform measures where necessary in the interests of local access to justice or the elimination of delays in proceedings, in accordance with the views of the public, experts and the judiciary. However, it will focus its efforts more on improving the staffing and financial security of the judiciary, in particular, the financial stabilisation of the courts' support apparatus.

The Government will take into account the limits imposed by the Recovery Plan when reviewing the reform of the judicial map (efficiency and access to justice for the citizens).

In the context of the discussions on changing the prosecutor's office into a public prosecution office, the Government recalls the constitutional framework. The prosecutor's office protects the rights and legitimate interests of natural and legal persons and the state, and the public prosecutor's office represents the state in the protection of the public interest, but does not specifically defend the rights of individuals. The role of the prosecutor's office, which derives from the constitutional establishment of the prosecutor's office as well as from the Act on Prosecution Service itself, unlike the public prosecutor's office, is, therefore, to act in a balanced and impartial manner and to protect both the state and the individual in the performance of its tasks. This is precisely the institutional solution preferred by the

Government, as it is fully in line with European rules on the status of the prosecution. Therefore, in the current constitutional framework, the Government does not plan to transform the prosecutor's office into a public prosecutor's office.

The Government disapproves of the continuing conflicts between the General Prosecutor's Office and the Special Prosecutor's Office, which is an organisational part of the General Prosecutor's Office, and which gives rise to these conflicts. These contradictions threaten the reputation of the prosecution and cannot continue. The Government refers to the legal degree of autonomy of prosecutors concerning the management of the General Prosecutor's Office, as well as to why this autonomy cannot be unbridled.

The autonomous status of all prosecutors is guaranteed by a number of measures in the prosecution system, including the prohibition of negative instructions, the right to request the withdrawal of a case if the instruction contradicts the prosecutor's legal opinion, guarantees related to non-interference in official activities, regulation of career advancement, self-management, association, and disciplinary proceedings. However, such autonomy is not absolute, because, given the role of prosecutors in the criminal justice system, it is necessary to preserve the equality of citizens before the court in the exercise of their powers, which requires a uniform hierarchical organisation, as well as uniform rules in the exercise of the prosecutor's powers. It is precisely such a hierarchy and uniform rules that are intended to ensure that the different branches of the prosecution service do not act differently in similar cases [paragraph 36 of Recommendation Rec(2000)19 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (The position of the prosecution service in the criminal justice system)].

In the last two years, there have been several cases of open disobedience on the part of the Special Prosecutor's Office as a subordinate branch to its superiors and of such a procedure of this branch which was contrary to the previously established internal or otherwise established procedures. The de facto autonomy of the Special Prosecutor's Office thus became greater than that which was regulated by the law, which, as a result, undermined both the hierarchy and the uniformity of the prosecution's procedures in the application of several procedural institutes of criminal proceedings. At the same time, consequences must be drawn from the identified internal organisational deficiencies that have contributed to this state of affairs.

Short-term priorities

- The Government will review the adopted new Judicial Map as well as the system and specialisation of law enforcement agencies in the context necessary for the proper use of the funds from the Recovery and Resilience Plan.
- The Government will focus on internal tools for the distribution of human resources in the judiciary in the context of the positives and negatives of the implementation of the Judicial Map, including measures to make the courts more efficient.
- The Government will review the effectiveness and set-up of the legal regulation of disciplinary liability and disciplinary proceedings within the competence of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Slovak Republic (judges, prosecutors, notaries, enforcement officers) and will eliminate the identified shortcomings.

- In the areas of the judiciary and the prosecution, the Government will introduce systemic changes to ensure the functionality of these institutions, regardless of their staffing.

Medium-term priorities

- The Government will focus on the adoption of constitutional amendments implementing European standards on the independence of the judiciary, the stabilisation of human resources in the judiciary, access to justice for the citizen, the efficiency of court proceedings and will review the impact of the reform of the Judicial Map on human resources in the judiciary.
- The Government will review the legal regulation of status issues for judges and take measures to improve the system of judicial evaluation, to distribute the judicial caseload more fairly and make the workload of judges more even.
- The Government will review the effectiveness and set-up of the legal regulation of disciplinary liability and disciplinary proceedings within the competence of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Slovak Republic (judges, prosecutors, notaries, enforcement officers) and will eliminate the identified shortcomings.
- The Government will consider reintroducing the institution of the judicial candidates.

Long-term priorities

- The Government will promote solutions using alternative dispute resolution through mediation as well as solutions using probation tools.
- The Government shall adopt measures to limit delays in proceedings which have an immediate impact on the enforceability of the law.

OTHER OBJECTIVES OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE Background

The Government will increase public participation in the adoption of laws and regulations.

So-called presidential international treaties will not be negotiated in a way that excludes public discussion of their content before they are signed.

The Government shall take measures to gradually eliminate the investment debt in the Justice Department and measures to improve the material and technical security of institutions within the scope of the Justice Department, as well as measures leading to the stabilisation and development of human resources within the scope of the ministry.

The Government will re-establish and maintain a systematic dialogue with the professional community, trade and professional associations and academia.

The Government will take measures to improve legal education in order to prepare highly professional practitioners with high ethical standards, prepared to practise the various legal professions in a morally integrated manner. The Government shall take measures to establish constitutional and technical guarantees ensuring the right to a fair trial in the context of the attorney-client relationship.

The Government will support the improvement of material and technical security, as well as the stabilisation and development of human resources within the scope of the Ministry of Justice (information systems, buildings, technical equipment, competitive remuneration, etc.).

In order to regulate everyday interpersonal relations, the Government will promote a broad debate on a modern recodification of the Civil Code, including inheritance and family law, which will fully emphasise the conditions of life in the 21st century, especially in the context of the development of means of communication. On cultural and ethical issues, it will maintain the status quo unless it unanimously decides otherwise.

The Government will explore ways to improve the regulation of bankruptcy, restructuring, liquidation and enforcement in order to provide adequate protection for honest creditors while ensuring the protection of particularly vulnerable debtors.

Enforcement officers, notaries, lawyers, administrators, mediators, experts, interpreters and translators constitute an important element of the implementation of the right to judicial protection. The Government shall create the conditions for the proper, efficient and responsible performance of their activities while ensuring that they are adequately remunerated.

Short-term priorities

- The Government considers it necessary to renew and maintain a systematic dialogue with the professional community, primarily in the field of the judiciary, but also with the professional community representing other law enforcement bodies, professional organisations and professional associations, and academia.
- The Government will review the functioning of the Seized Assets Management Office, the legal regulation of the penalty of forfeiture of property and the institution of seizure of property in order to eliminate the identified systemic deficiencies and inconsistencies with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

Medium-term priorities

- The Government will support the improvement of material and technical security, as well as the stabilisation and development of human resources within the scope of the Ministry of Justice (information systems, buildings, technical equipment, competitive remuneration, etc.). The Government will take measures to eliminate the investment debt in the Justice Department and to create conditions for stabilising the personnel capacities in the Ministry of Justice.
- The Government will prepare a recodification in the area of civil law and will focus on solving problems in the area of insolvency and enforcement law.
- The Government will focus on streamlining the link between the world of law and the world of information technology and implementing the use of artificial intelligence concepts in the application of law by law enforcement agencies (summarising information, stabilising decision-making, implementing metadata in legislation to improve the information functions of law).

- The Government will also provide the Slov-Lex system for the publication of general binding regulations of municipalities and higher territorial units and will review the system of operation of the business registry.

Long-term priorities

- The Government will focus on adapting and modernising all areas of the law so that it meets the standards of a twenty-first-century European democratic state. The Government will take care to simplify the administrative processes of the state when changing legislation.
- The Government will take measures to expand digitisation and the judicious use of artificial intelligence within the remit of the Ministry of Justice. The Government will take measures to enhance the credibility of the judiciary in the eyes of the professional and lay public.
- In cooperation with the legal academic community, the Government will promote measures aimed at improving the quality of legal education in order to prepare for practice professional experts with high ethical standards who will be able to fulfil the roles of judges, prosecutors, notaries, lawyers, enforcement officers and public administration employees. The Government will promote the linking of legal education with applied practice and support systematic lifelong learning programmes across the legal profession to raise the standard of professional morally integrated practice of the legal profession.
- The Government will support the implementation of environmental policies under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice.
- The Government will promote social cohesion, solidarity and inclusion in the policies of the justice sector and maintain and develop a dialogue with academia and professional organisations representing the legal profession, as well as social dialogue and cooperation with representative employers' and employees' organisations in the drafting of legislation.

DEMOCRATIC LAW-MAKING AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Government will fully support the demand for democratic law-making and law enforcement. For the above-stated purpose, it will, in particular:

- Promote an increase in the quality of drafting of laws and other legal norms, as well as greater stability in the legal order.
- Support the renewal of social dialogue in the drafting and approval of bills and other legislation.

A POLICY OF CORRUPTION PREVENTION, PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The Government recognises that corruption poses a risk to the stability and security of society, undermines the credibility of institutions and the values of democracy, ethical values and the administration of justice, and threatens economic development and the rule of law. The fight against corruption requires a society-wide approach.

The Government is mindful of the principles of good governance and public ownership, fairness, accountability, and equality before the law, as well as the need to protect integrity and promote a culture of non-corruption.

The Government is mindful of the principles of good governance and public ownership, fairness, accountability, and equality before the law, as well as the need to protect integrity and promote a culture of rejection of corruption. The effects and sustainability of anti-corruption measures should be more pronounced not only in terms of reducing the level of corruption, but also in terms of reducing the space and opportunities for corruption.

At the same time, it is necessary to deal with the practice of serious interference in personal liberty, personal security, health and lives by holders of state power under the guise of 'fighting corruption'. In the above context, there has been an inadequate number of decisions by the body for the protection of constitutionality on the violation of fundamental human rights. The misuse of criminal law instruments for political and power struggles, with the risk of disrupting the free competition of political forces in a democratic society, was also not rare.

To this end:

- The Government is committed to strengthening transparency and preparing anti-corruption legislation to regulate public officials' contacts with persons representing the interests of individuals and organisations; to seek consensus with other public authorities on the constitutionally compliant introduction of uniform rules for the submission of asset declarations by public officials in the public sector, with a particular emphasis on the electronicisation of asset declarations; to support comprehensively the carrying out of a comprehensive analysis of the application problems with the implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Protection of Public Interest and to propose the adoption of the necessary amendments to the legislation; by strengthening the transparency of the legislative process with a view to ensuring a proper social dialogue, as well as by introducing transparent rules for the financing of NGOs.
- The Government shall adopt rules in the form of a Code of Conduct to ensure the ethics and integrity of the highest public officials within its jurisdiction.
- The Government will strengthen cooperation with local government in the implementation of anti-corruption rules at local government level.
- Recognising the importance of professional capacities focused on corruption prevention and integrity; the Government will support the development of these capacities, both at the departmental level and at the central coordination level, by deepening the professional cooperation of the anti-corruption coordinators, both in terms of personnel and material and technical support.
- The Government will support the communication of corruption prevention and integrity issues, thereby ensuring the building of a society-wide anti-corruption culture.

- The Government is aware of its international commitments and partnerships with public institutions in the area of corruption prevention and integrity, which it will continue to support and develop.
- The Government will improve the management of corruption risks both vertically and horizontally and will create the conditions for the preparation of legislation to regulate the management of corruption risks.

In order to achieve the above commitments, the Government will adopt a National Anti-Corruption Strategy based on pillars such as improving the legislation in question, capacity building, education and communication on integrity and corruption prevention and corruption risk management.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Effective public administration is important for the provision of services to citizens, the smooth functioning of businesses and public institutions, and a sense of citizen satisfaction with and pride in their own state.

In this area, it is necessary to build on positive examples from the past, such as the ongoing reform of the "Efficient, Reliable and Open Public Administration" (Efektívna, spoľahlivá a otvorená verejná správa - ESO), as well as on the strong potential of the Slovak Republic, for example, a powerful domestic digital sector, whose further development will also be helped by cooperation with the public administration.

The development of effective public administration will rest on three pillars:

- Active control of the citizens' communication with the state based on the citizens' life situation.
- Effective digitisation of public space.
- Reorganising public administration to increase efficiency and transparency.

Short-term priorities

The Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic will prepare an audit of the use of data in the management of public administration in order to propose improvements in the collection and subsequent use of diverse data describing the life situations of citizens, social phenomena and mechanisms, the functioning of the country, and the functioning of the processes in public administration itself.

The Ministry will carry out a comprehensive audit of IT equipment. Based on this passporting, a comprehensive strategy for the equipment of individual workplaces will be prepared with the aim of standardising the hardware and software equipment of the workplaces, which will result in a significant optimisation and saving of the investment and operational resources of the Ministry.

Medium-term priorities

A large part of the state's communication with citizens and companies concerns registration formalities (cadastre, registration of motor vehicles, registration of companies and associations), the issuance of various types of certificates (identity cards, passports, disabled persons' cards, driving licences, firearms licences, trade certificates), and inspections (environment, hygiene, occupational health and safety, labour inspections, and others).

A Regulatory Commission of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic will be established at the Ministry of the Interior to monitor all three areas and to provide a regular monitoring report for each set of actions: what exactly the actions include, what are the disadvantages of the setup from the point of view of both the citizen and the authorities, what are the possible improvements or their automation. In doing so, it will mainly use the methodology of life situations.

A specific department for modernisation of the state administration will be created in the Ministry of the Interior. Its aim will be to propose streamlining intra-government management in terms of personnel policy, training, education, workplace space solutions, internal government communication, monitoring, planning and evaluation processes, and data use. This department will have the support of the Government in collecting the data needed for its analytical work.

The Ministry will also develop a system to classify and standardize the equipment of public servants.

Digitalisation brings huge opportunities to improve the efficiency of Government. The Digital State Administration Coordinator will be established as a special department in order to prepare a thorough audit of digital processes within the state administration and in cooperation with the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic to prepare a strategic framework for the gradual transformation of the state administration into a digital state administration.

Pursuing the objective of ensuring optimal and efficient operation of information systems in the Ministry's administration and the objective of minimising investments in software and hardware equipment of workstations of the Ministry's workstation employees, the Ministry shall, in particular:

- undertake a passporting of the current hardware and software equipment of the workstations,
- classification and standardisation of equipment of individual workplaces,
- setting up optimal shared service support.

In the area of cooperation with local government, it will assess effective cooperation in the development of information systems under the administration of the Ministry and information systems under the administration of local governments. The result is to ensure efficient development in the centralisation of the performance of the Ministry's services and services at the local government level while minimising IT expenditure.

The introduction of client centres in the past has dramatically improved the lives of citizens. The Ministry will prepare a plan for the expansion and further streamlining of the client

centres, with the aim of guaranteeing that citizens will be able to complete any registration task at any time in the shortest possible, guaranteed time.

The Government will also ensure the gradual completion of the network of client centres as "front office" workplaces of district offices, which will provide the required services to citizens in one place and will also continue to integrate the services of the most frequently visited offices.

As part of the comprehensive public administration reform, the Government will support the development of modern shared service centres, which will improve the efficiency and professional quality of decision-making in selected sections of local government administration by district authorities and ensure the pooling of capacities in providing services to citizens.

In order to ensure the effective delivery of tasks and services by public sector employees, the Ministry will design a new system of continuing education for public sector employees.

In spite of the extraordinary intensity of the debate on democracy, citizens' participation in democratic processes is rather limited. Only a relatively small proportion of eligible voters take part in elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In the elections to the European Parliament, we have long been ranked at the bottom of the European Union in terms of participation, and participation in elections to higher territorial units is also extremely low.

Civic activity in the form of local initiatives or national projects aimed at improving aspects of democracy, governance and various aspects of citizens' lives is also relatively low.

On the other hand, the mass media scene often focuses on simple news formatting when reporting on public affairs, often with the aim of commercially or politically exploiting shocking or scandalous formulations, which is not conducive to the development of the complex knowledge and skills citizens need for democratic governance. The first step to improvement is to set up an objective mirror of the state of society.

That is why it is appropriate for the State of Democracy in Slovakia report to be published every year of the next legislature. This report should, on the one hand, summarise hard data on the performance of democracy (e.g. facts about the legislative process) and, on the other hand, show the state of the population's moods, attitudes and awareness (e.g. views on the electoral system), based on regular surveys throughout the year.

Such surveys during the year will be given appropriate publicity. This will also take the form of a programme on public television with a presentation of the current survey and a discussion by a panel of experts. The end-of-year report itself will have similarly strong publicity. In this case, facts related to the legislative process or the awareness of the population will be particularly emphasised.

The Ministry will also prepare amendments to the legislation on the functioning of political parties to ensure that public funds earmarked for their operation are actually used for these purposes.

The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence, as shareholders of St. Michael's University Hospital, will ensure further development and modernisation of the hospital. The hospital will significantly expand its cooperation with prestigious medical facilities abroad and

join the International Network of Health Promoting Hospitals. This will enable sharing of best practice in health promotion and quality of care improvement.

The development of St. Michael's University Hospital as a centre of excellence in medical education will contribute to attracting and retaining talented doctors and healthcare professionals in Slovakia.

Long-term priorities

The Ministry of the Interior will prepare and implement a programme to consolidate and streamline the state's administrative infrastructure. The aim will be to create a set of buildings for the needs of the central state administration that will effectively centralise administrative capacity in modern and efficiently furnished premises, while these buildings will adequately represent the Slovak Republic architecturally. The programme aims to optimise the functioning of the state administration, which will bring significant savings in both investment and operating costs.

A special entity will be created under the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, which will concentrate a key part of the assets of the central state administration. The entity will professionally manage the property, provide it to other entities as a service and at the same time provide centralised advice to other public administration entities in operations with immovable property (leases, sales, renovations, including public procurement or search for tenants or buyers).

A state agency will be created to assist the non-profit sector, awarding both short- and long-term grants. The aim is to support the part of the civil sector that is genuinely interested in improving life in the country.

The Ministry will prepare a proposal for a simplified establishment of simple civil associations. For the simplest form of civic association, immediate online registration (after payment of the appropriate fee) should apply. These will be the type of organisations without their own accounts (any financial operations will be carried out by donors). Registration of other forms of non-profit organisations will also be speeded up and simplified.

A programme of public campaigns will also be developed. They will be organised by the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and possibly other entities. The programme will have four main themes:

- Promoting consideration for others. Especially in everyday situations such as shopping, exchanging views or driving.
- Promotion of family.
- Promotion of child protection. This includes promoting greater sensitivity to how children spend their leisure time and whether they are given sufficient attention or considerate, non-aggressive behaviour towards children.
- Promotion of culture. That includes reading quality literary fiction, reading to children, and seeking out cultural events.

The campaigns will be entrusted to top experts and will be implemented gradually throughout the legislature.

The Ministry shall ensure an assessment of the current condition of the building of the Slovak National Archives in terms of comprehensive protection of archival documents managed by it and shall subsequently adopt a decision that will enable the effective performance of the tasks of the Slovak National Archives.

The Ministry will ensure the continued digitisation of archival documents of the state archives. The Government will support the implementation of the Concept for the Development of State Archives until 2028, based on the documents from the Strategy for the Protection of Archival Documents.

The Government will create conditions for the introduction of a unified information system for the management of the registry of public authorities for the smooth exercise of public authority electronically and the secure management of the resulting electronic documents.

The Government will continue to computerise electoral processes by creating an electronic register of candidates and election ballots for all types of elections.

Following the computerisation of electoral processes, the Government will review the length of the time limits for the announcement of elections so that elections can be announced no later than 90 days before they are due to take place. The government will also create conditions for postal voting for the election of the President of the Slovak Republic for the elections to be held in 2029.

INTERNAL ORDER AND SECURITY

The internal security of a country requires a lot of effort to ensure that the population feels effectively protected both from crime that causes physical or property damage and from anti-social phenomena. Both a sense of security and real security are key to a country's economic and social development.

The public now perceives the overall security situation in the Slovak Republic as relatively good, also thanks to the quality work of the police between 2006 and 2020, but some extremist acts, together with the mismanagement of the migration crisis in recent years, indicate a negative trend in this perception. The level of crime in the Slovak Republic is still lower than in most Western countries and significantly lower than in the complicated 1990s. It is the task of the security forces and other structures of the Ministry of the Interior to ensure that this trend in the perception of the level of security is improved and that a high level of security is maintained.

At the same time, it will be necessary to focus on ensuring prevention or comprehensive investigations as quickly as possible into citizen problems such as theft, domestic violence, school violence, drug offences and others.

One of the main internal security challenges in the near future will be the mass migration of citizens from many countries in Asia and Africa to Europe. It will require many measures, changes in domestic legislation, and effective cooperation with foreign partners.

At the same time, the Government will closely monitor and evaluate the development of the conflict in Ukraine in order to protect the citizens of the Slovak Republic as much as possible from any negative impact of any further deterioration of the situation in this neighbouring country. It will also continue to provide all necessary humanitarian support to the country and its citizens who have had to leave the country as a result of the conflict and are in the territory of the Slovak Republic.

The competent authorities, in cooperation with partners abroad, will also closely monitor and assess risks in other countries outside the European Union that could lead to an increase in migration flows or other risks (movement of dangerous persons, transmission of diseases, transport of dangerous substances) for the territories of the EU Member States, including the Slovak Republic.

The security of the Slovak Republic also means the security of supply of vital raw materials, especially energy carriers. The Slovak Republic, in cooperation with its partners abroad, must be prepared to monitor the situation beyond the borders of the European Union and, if necessary, to participate in diplomatic or direct interventions to ensure the continuity of supplies to the EU Member States, including the Slovak Republic.

The Government will support the Slovak security and defence industry in securing and developing domestic production capacities. The domestic security and defence industry is an important part of the state's security architecture, with its indispensable role primarily in the area of ensuring production capabilities in times of crisis and threats to the security of our country.

Last but not least, the police and other forces will be more involved in developing community safety so that individuals and communities adequately protect citizens from anti-social behaviour.

It is in the Government's interest to protect the security of its citizens and to prevent interference with our sovereignty through the economic, military, diplomatic, and informational tools of hybrid action. The Government will focus on strengthening the resilience of the state and its citizens against hybrid action by foreign actors.

The Government will develop legislative or non-legislative measures to better protect the country's sovereignty and deter potential actors from hybrid attacks. The Government will take into account the impact of legislation and measures on the defence and security of the state and its interests when drafting them.

The Government will create legal conditions to control paramilitary groups disloyal to the state, while at the same time supporting interest organisations dedicated to the military, arms and technology, which fall under the security forces of the state.

In the context of the deteriorated geopolitical situation in the immediate vicinity of the Slovak Republic, but also on a wider scale, it is necessary to significantly review the readiness of civil protection and crisis management assets and to take the necessary measures at the level of management and investment in this area to ensure the protection of the population throughout the territory of the Slovak Republic.

The Ministry will be responsible for the restoration and further coordination of communication between the various security forces of the state, which has been significantly weakened in 2020-2023, which has resulted in many cases of almost complete failure of the

state's crisis management. In this area, the Ministry will prepare a new emergency management concept that will cover the entire cycle from risk management to crisis management and recovery and reconstruction, and the integrated involvement of all necessary components of the state, municipalities and communities in each region.

In addition to pursuing these priorities in these key areas, the Department will also take steps to improve the support and management of the resources used.

Short-term priorities

The new leadership of the Ministry will bring immediate calm to the situation in the police. The first priority for the coming weeks and months will be to thoroughly protect the borders of the Slovak Republic. For this purpose, such amounts of personnel and material will be allocated as the situation requires, irrespective of cost.

The Ministry will immediately establish cooperation with foreign partners and will make efforts to intensify cooperation between the Ministries of the Interior of the V4 countries, as well as Austria, Croatia and Slovenia. It will also make every effort, in cooperation with its partners, to create a truly functional mechanism for repatriating irregular migrants outside the borders of both the Slovak Republic and the European Union.

The Ministry will prepare a new concept for the protection of domestic cyberspace. The aim will be to set up, in cooperation with the SIS and other components, effective monitoring of the spread of threats (in the form of alarm messages, fake news, etc.) in the digital space and forms of intervention against these dangers. The concept will include a new definitional glossary and manuals to avoid the politicisation of the threats that has occurred in the past.

The Ministry will also prepare an audit of the functioning of police inspections and other forms of quality control of the work of the police and other security forces, with proposals on how to set up these control mechanisms in the future as effectively as possible.

Among the immediate tasks will be the rescue of part of the resources that the Ministry had allocated in the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic so that these resources are saved and used effectively despite the unclear organisation for the needs of the Slovak Republic.

Medium-term priorities

The integrity of borders is an indispensable basis for the internal and external security of Slovakia and all Member States of the European Union. The Government will consistently advocate in international fora that uncontrolled migration poses a threat to the cohesion and internal stability of the European Union.

The Government will seek effective European solutions where possible in its communication with foreign partners, emphasising the need to address the causes of migration in the countries of origin and substantially increase the rate of return of irregular migrants.

The Government will call for strong action by the whole of the European Union against illegal migration and, in particular, against those cases where external forces use migration as a tool of pressure against the European Union. The Government will oppose any attempt to impose quotas on the Slovak Republic for accepting migrants.

In the negotiations of the institutions of the European Union, Slovakia will not passively accept the proposals of others, but will actively propose solutions in the common European interest, but especially in the interest of the security of the sovereign Slovak Republic.

Through a controlled migration policy, the state will allow only those foreigners who meet, above all, the requirements of security to live in Slovakia. On the other hand, it will provide such foreigners with a helping hand for smooth cultural and professional integration into life in the Slovak Republic, including assistance in the recognition of their professional qualifications so that they can make the greatest possible contribution to the economy and society of the Slovak Republic.

In terms of homeland security, the principle of "community safety" will be strengthened in policing. The district directorates will have to monitor the specific situation in the precinct more strictly than before, and they will be given new manuals to actively solve problems in the coexistence of neighbours and control possible outbreaks of tense relations or outright crime.

Problem locations will be reinforced with civilian intervention workers, and more police officers will be out in public, day and night, if necessary.

The aim will be to strengthen the security elements to manage anti-social behaviour and other situations that negatively affect physical security or compliance with legal norms (coexistence of neighbours, littering, protection of state and municipal officials in the performance of various types of service, protection of other public sector workers, such as teachers, safe movement of children and youth in the municipality, including crossing roads, etc.).

For this purpose, the aforementioned category of civilian intervention workers will also be created to oversee security in trouble spots. Citizens' commissions (members to be appointed by the Minister of the Interior, with an advisory vote by the Parliamentary Committee on Security) will be established at the regional level to monitor community security.

The riot police will be given a manual of specific forms of cooperation with municipal police forces.

A police information system will be created for the public that will clearly display crime statistics and other data relevant to safety so that citizens have this information available in clear and up-to-date formats, including map layers.

However, the police and the Ministry of the Interior will also work on other aspects of improving the safety of citizens. One example is road safety, where the Ministry of the Interior, also in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, will introduce an effective system for monitoring the safety of pedestrian crossings, the transparency of intersections and the effectiveness of traffic signs.

The Government will prepare a proposal for the modernisation and updating of salary scales and the career system, bringing greater material security and a sense of appreciation for their service, including taking into account the real risks of a particular type of police work.

Particular attention will need to be paid to juvenile delinquency and the system of temporary placement in residential and institutional care. A specific action plan will be developed for these areas in order to intervene in the correction of antisocial phenomena but

also in the protection of adolescents and children in problems related to their family background or social and community situation.

The remit of the National Crime Agency will also be amended so that it can be deployed on cases outside the range of the most serious crime, which are complicated or where complications in the investigation may arise because of local connections.

A new system of training and quality control for high-intervention operations (interventions at protests, interventions in potentially life-threatening situations, interventions to apprehend perpetrators and suspects) will be set up. Training and ongoing quality control will be carried out by three nationwide centres. The aim is to make interventions against armed perpetrators or disturbances of order in complex situations involving large numbers of people, particularly effective. There will be greater standardisation of procedures in these situations. Both an audit of the internal administrative activities of the police and an audit of the use of buildings will be prepared. The aim will be, among other things, to substantially reduce the bureaucratic deployment of police officers in various administrative and bureaucratic areas and to move them directly into the field.

Updated studies on the management of special situations (floods, fires, epidemics, cyber-attacks, supply problems, infestations, social turmoil, minor and major sabotage with a political background, terrorism, and others) will be produced in the relevant units. The aim will be to increase the robustness of the state for non-standard situations.

The Ministry of the Interior will significantly upgrade and expand its analytical capabilities for the needs of the security of the functioning of the state and the security of the citizens and economy of the Slovak Republic in the light of the current domestic and international environment.

The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence will prepare a plan for strengthening certain elements of defence awareness and defence skills of adults and youth.

The Ministry of the Interior will also prepare a comprehensive investment programme to significantly improve the material equipment of police stations and other Ministry facilities.

An important part of the physical safety of the population is also safety in traffic situations. Emphasis will be placed on providing increased protection for cyclists and pedestrians. A national road safety programme will be established in this regard. The law will be adjusted so that pedestrians have absolute right of way in pedestrian crossings, in line with the regime in most Western European countries. Legislation on road markings will be changed to make pedestrian crossings more visible. The traffic police will be much more involved in controlling situations other than speed measurement (compliance with other traffic regulations) and controlling compliance with laws and standards in the installation of traffic signs.

The Fire and Rescue Corps of the Slovak Republic rightly maintains a high level of trust in the Slovak population thanks to the high quality of its work, which represents us also when assisting in rescue work abroad.

The Ministry will oversee the further modernisation of the Slovak Fire and Rescue Corps to maintain its high operational capability and respond to new technological trends (e.g., by introducing alternative eco-friendly vehicle propulsion and related charging/pumping

infrastructure). The Ministry will prepare an analysis of the number of members of the Slovak Fire and Rescue Corps and will follow the OECD recommendations in ensuring adequate numbers.

Naturally, the equipment of the Corps will be modernized, including the modernization of existing fire stations. The Ministry shall create legislative conditions in the field of fire protection reflecting changes in the national economy and changes in the law of the European Union. It will take care of the modernisation of specialised workplaces of the Fire and Rescue Corps of the Slovak Republic, such as the accredited testing room for testing the flammability of materials and products, and also the updating of education and training of the members of the Fire and Rescue Corps of the Slovak Republic, including the completion of training facilities at the Secondary School of Fire Protection of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic in Žilina and at the Training Centre of the Fire and Rescue Corps in Lešť.

Both the Ministry and the Government as a whole are aware of the invaluable contribution of volunteering in the field of fire protection, and therefore, the Ministry will further deepen its cooperation with Voluntary Fire Protection of the Slovak Republic, other civil associations active in this field, and support the voluntary fire brigades of municipalities, improving their material and technical equipment, and increasing their members' professional readiness and training. The Ministry will strive to increase the quality, efficiency and safety of mountain rescue in Slovakia through the introduction of modern technologies' and procedures, including through legislative changes, with the aim of optimising the mountain rescue system towards the effective saving of human lives. The relevant ministries will cooperate in building facilities for mountain rescue, including adequate rescue stations, through the effective use of EU funds.

The Government will materially reinforce the Air Service of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic in order to increase the air capacities needed for rescue operations and crisis situations handling.

The Government will also provide material and communication support for a new framework for crisis management, which the Ministry will prepare to cover the entire cycle of major crises, from risk management to recovery and damage repair, including regular activities in the area of prevention and maintenance of the necessary infrastructure (civil protection shelters, communication and logistical support, etc.).

In the area of asset and resource management, the Ministry will prepare a plan for the transition to central management and transfer to a single entity that will efficiently provide its resources as a service to individual departments and organisations of the public administration. The Ministry will also implement a comprehensive investment programme to significantly improve the material equipment of police stations and other Ministry facilities.

The Ministry shall carry out a comprehensive audit of personnel and technical preparedness in the field of civil protection of the population. The audit will be followed by a proposal for the strategic development of civil protection and crisis management at all levels of the state, reflecting the risks of the present, especially in relation to the situation in Ukraine, the Middle East and in connection with potential terrorist attacks on the territory of the European

Union. In this area, it will set a new policy of cooperation with the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic.

Long-term priorities

The Ministry will ensure the further development of the Police Force Academy to provide quality education and further training for police officers both in terms of comprehensive theoretical training and in training for specific situations and improving specific skills.

A new backup system for the security forces will be considered. These will be volunteers who will undergo training and will be tested regularly, several times a year, on their knowledge and skills for deployment in special situations. The force will be available for deployment in emergencies and will also be a major source of recruitment for the army.

Although they will fall under the Ministry of Defence, the force will also have a developed cooperation with elements of the Ministry of the Interior. They will also organise awareness-raising events (including exercises) for both youth and adults. There will also be an activity for youth, school cadets. They will be educated in emergency management through extra-curricular activities while maintaining adequate physical and mental fitness.

The Ministry shall ensure continuous support for the development of sport and sport infrastructure in its area of responsibility. The revitalised sports infrastructure will be made available for use by the general public to the maximum extent possible in cooperation with towns and villages.

5. INFLUENCES FROM THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Article 1(2) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic provides that the Slovak Republic acknowledges and adheres to general rules of international law, international treaties by which it is bound, and its other international obligations.

According to Article 7(2) of the Constitution, the Slovak Republic may, by an international treaty, or on the basis of such treaty, transfer the exercise of a part of its powers to the European Union.

According to Article 7(3) of the Constitution, the Slovak Republic may, for the purpose of maintaining peace, security and democratic order, under conditions established by an international treaty, join an organization of mutual collective security.

Pursuant to Article 7(4) of the Constitution, the validity of international treaties on human rights and fundamental freedoms, international political treaties, international treaties of a military character, international treaties from which membership of the Slovak Republic in international organizations arises, international economic treaties of a general character, international treaties for whose exercise a law is necessary and international treaties which directly confer rights or impose duties on natural persons or legal persons, require the approval of the National Council of the Slovak Republic before ratification.

FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN POLICY

RETURN OF SOVEREIGNTY TO SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY AND PROTECTION OF SLOVAK INTERESTS

The Government will consistently pursue a sovereign and active foreign policy and protect Slovak nation-state interests, responding to the challenges of global instability and new threats related to terrorism, military conflicts or the influx of illegal migrants.

The Government will be guided by the slogan "Slovakia First", which means to be solidary, responsible and predictable in foreign policy, taking into account the national interests of the Slovak Republic. The foreign policy of the Slovak Republic will consistently fulfil its basic mission, namely the care and protection of its citizens, including the protection of the interests of Slovak entrepreneurs abroad.

The Government considers Slovakia's membership of the European Union to be irreplaceable. The European Union, as a unique and exceptional project, is Slovakia's living space. Following Slovakia's significant steps towards deeper European integration, it will be essential to preserve all the benefits of this membership for the citizens of the Slovak Republic, including the free movement of people from the Member States, by using the free economic space to enhance the performance of the Slovak Republic's economy as a basis for sustainable growth in the quality of life of its citizens.

The Government links the uniqueness of the European Union with the right of the Slovak political representation and the citizens of the Slovak Republic to have a critical opinion on the functioning and activities of the European Union institutions. Many decisions of the European Union authorities and apparatus provoke public disapproval in Slovakia. Throughout the term of office, the Government will promote and support initiatives supporting an independent foreign and economic policy of the European Union, an equal partnership of the European Union with the USA, a return to the peaceful nature of the European Union, respect for individual Member States, regardless of their economic strength and size, while radically refusing the following:

- weakening the position of individual EU member states by abolishing the right of veto on decisions requiring the consent of all EU members,
- unjustified transfer of competencies from the Member States to the European Union,
- abolishing existing decision-making in the institutions and bodies of the European Union, which requires the consent of all members of the European Union.

The government's clear priorities will be to maintain an adequate level of cohesion funds and the Common Agricultural Policy.

Taking Slovak national interests into account is important in European migration policy proposals. The Government will strongly reject any attempt to make quotas for the redistribution of irregular migrants compulsory, or to make any punitive payments for such migrants.

The Government will support ambitious common European action to protect the climate and the environment, provided that it does not drastically undermine the competitiveness of the European Union and lead to a reduction in the standard of living of the citizens of the EU Member States.

The Government considers the completion and improvement of the economic pillar of the Slovak Republic's foreign policy to be a key strategic priority.

The Government will support the fulfilment of its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) membership obligations. The Slovak Republic will continue to be a trusted and solidary ally. The Slovak Republic will actively seek membership of the UN Security Council for the period 2028-2029. The promotion of international law and human rights will also be a priority in other international organisations.

Government representatives will be active in the European Union and NATO bodies to influence international decisions and processes that are important in promoting the interests of the Slovak Republic and its economy. The Government is ready to submit measures to improve the mechanism for the development and content of the opinions of the Slovak Republic on draft European Union acts.

Effective and mutually beneficial cooperation within the Visegrad V4 format is essential in promoting common interests and addressing crisis situations. The Government will support all projects aimed at further deepening relations between the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Poland and Hungary. The Government will pay special attention to the precious proximity of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic and will not allow this

unique relationship to be exposed to any danger. It will look for new ways of maintaining and improving this relationship, especially among the younger generation. The different views of the Visegrad format participants on current foreign events, especially the war conflict in Ukraine, should not jeopardise the historically excellent mutual friendly relations and the strategic importance of this regional grouping in addressing issues related to the European agenda.

Based on the experience of the Government in 2016-2020, the Government will continue its efforts and best practices of coexistence with the members of the Hungarian minority in the Slovak Republic and the Slovak minority in Hungary.

The Government is aware of the risks for the Slovak Republic of the continuation of the military conflict in Ukraine. In order to end the military conflict in Ukraine, it will support all meaningful peace plans with proposals for an immediate end to the fighting in Ukraine and for a diplomatic solution to the conflict in accordance with international law. The Government will continue to support humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, but will not continue to provide military assistance to Ukraine at the government level. The Government will advocate the use of European Union funds to support Slovakia's border regions and the involvement of Slovak companies in the reconstruction of Ukraine.

The Government will evaluate proposals for sanctions against any country in the world on the basis of analyses of the effectiveness of the proposed sanctions in achieving the intended objectives and, in particular, on the basis of their economic and social impact on Slovak citizens.

The Government is concerned about the attempts to build a new Iron Curtain between the West and the East. The Slovak Republic intends to pursue a sovereign foreign policy on all four sides of the world in the context of its membership in the European Union and NATO. Taking into account the shift of the geopolitical and economic centre of gravity to the Indo-Pacific region, the Government will deepen and significantly strengthen diplomatic and economic activities in this region. The focus will be on the countries of the Global South and especially on areas with traditional political and economic ties to Slovakia. Recognising the threat of global conflict, the Government will support all projects for the peaceful resolution of conflict in the Middle East.

The Government considers economic diplomacy as its key priority. The basic task will be to define and systematically and purposefully develop the participation of Slovak business entities in European and global markets of interest to Slovak industry and entrepreneurs. Seeking and exploiting possibilities and business opportunities for Slovak companies must be the dominant task of our embassies abroad. It is necessary to make more effective and dynamic use not only of the network of embassies but also to create space for more intensive and qualified cooperation between representatives of the relevant ministries, their subordinate organisations such as SARIO, the Slovak Investment Holding, Eximbank, business entities, the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry, employers' business professional associations and pro-export specialists. The Government will create the conditions for strengthening the economic diplomacy network in priority territories. At the same time, the Government perceives the need to support not only the export of goods and services to foreign markets, but also the need to create a system of support for investments of Slovak companies abroad and their participation in foreign consortia on important national projects abroad. The Government will support international cooperation of innovative Slovak companies not only from traditional

sectors of the economy, but also from promising sectors, including assistance in establishing the participation of Slovak scientific and research structures in transnational research networks and organisations.

Cultural diplomacy will continue to be an indispensable part of the activities of embassies and Slovak institutes. Assistance and protection of Slovak citizens abroad, which is an integral part of the foreign service, will be permanently implemented with the utmost friendliness and professionalism. The Government will strengthen the care for Slovaks living abroad, either materially or through other forms of active cooperation and reporting to Slovak diasporas.

The Government will increase its efforts through its foreign policy to return Slovak citizens to Slovakia.

The Government will support the linking of sports diplomacy with the economic and innovation diplomacy of the Slovak Republic.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF UKRAINE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The resilience of the Slovak Republic is an important component of preparedness for periods of crisis. Together with reconstruction, they form a framework that will enable Slovakia to develop sustainably. This requires two things: identifying national interest early on and identifying risks and opportunities in megatrends and European strategies that cut across ministries and linking these to the use of relevant European instruments.

The reconstruction of Ukraine with a link to its integration into the European Union, the link between competitiveness and the transformation to a zero-emission economy, or the planned internal reform of the European Union, which will concern the functioning of individual policies in the future, affect almost all areas of the economy and will therefore require the involvement of several ministries. These areas are examples of the challenges that will shape how successful Slovakia will be in the European Union in the future. Their supra-ministerial coordination requires special attention.

Short-term priorities

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic will establish a unit of strategic initiatives of European importance, whose aim will be to identify, in addition to the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, other strategic areas with a major impact on the resilience of Slovakia and with a significantly cross-departmental character. Cooperation with the ministries will, therefore, be essential. An example is the stabilisation and reconstruction of Ukraine, which represents an opportunity for the development of Slovakia, especially in our eastern regions.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic will conduct a review of the activities related to the preparation of the Slovak Republic's involvement in the stabilisation and reconstruction of Ukraine and prepare a roadmap for the next steps. Given Ukraine's expected integration into the European Union, it is not possible to wait for the war in Ukraine to end, and it is necessary to engage key actors, including the business sector, in

concrete initiatives already at this stage. As a neighbour, the Slovak Republic has a special position in integrating Ukraine into the single market, developing and modernising links between Ukraine and the European Union, including cross-border and regional links. The Government will also set up financial instruments at the national level for this purpose.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic will establish close cooperation with the European Commission, partners in the European Union and other countries in the above-mentioned areas in order to be part of European and international initiatives, as well as to implement the above-mentioned priorities in accordance with the national interests of the Slovak Republic.

Medium-term priorities

For the Government, the roadmap will be a key document for the implementation of the steps to engage in the stabilisation and reconstruction of Ukraine with a view to its integration into the European Union.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic will strengthen its analytical capacities and prepare, in cooperation with the ministries, an analysis of the impacts and opportunities of the internal reform of the European Union on Slovakia and, on this basis, will propose recommendations for the position of the Slovak Republic in the negotiations on the new Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028-2034.

The Government will strengthen its ability to focus attention to strategic issues and initiatives identified as having a major impact on the future development of Slovakia. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will actively engage at both the national and European levels in legislation relating to European strategic initiatives in order to consistently promote national interests across departments at the European level.

On the occasion of Slovakia's 20th anniversary in the European Union, the government will improve communication on European issues so that it covers not only the communication of projects funded by the European Union, but also specific policies that have helped Slovakia develop for 20 years.

Long-term priorities

In the framework of the reconstruction of Ukraine, the Government will pursue mainly such projects that will correspond to the interests of the Slovak Republic and represent an opportunity for its further development. These will be supported financially also at national level.

The Government will make sure that the Slovak Republic is ready to make the most of those areas where the most financial resources will be directed at the EU level in the future and which will bring economic growth with higher added value.

SECURITY POLICY

The rapidly changing security environment in and around Europe requires adequate government intervention to improve the readiness of the Slovak Armed Forces for new and ongoing security challenges. In the context of the international anchoring of the Slovak Republic, the Government will primarily promote and take into account the security interests of the Slovak Republic both domestically and abroad.

In accordance with the valid Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic based on the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, the UN Charter and relevant strategic documents of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union, the Government will unequivocally promote the peaceful settlement of disputes. According to available information, the war in Ukraine has no military solution. That is why the Government considers the immediate enforcement of the ceasefire and the start of peace negotiations to be the only correct solution.

The only irreplaceable component of the defence system is the Professional Soldier. The Government will place a major emphasis on the protection of the live force in the modernisation and development of the armed forces. Maintaining and deepening the security and defence of the state and its citizens is a prerequisite for the return of peace and stability in the social and economic spheres. The Government is interested in creating the best possible conditions for the implementation of a sovereign defence and security policy, which will be built on the pillars of promoting the national interests of the Slovak Republic.

Short-term priorities

The Ministry of Defence sees illegal migration as a major security risk for the Slovak Republic and its citizens. It has been repeatedly confirmed in the past that illegal migration has led to an increase in the asymmetric threat to the Member States of the European Union. For this reason, preventing illegal migration is not only a matter of civilian security, but must also be an integral part of the defence strategy. In this context, the Government will develop that part of the Armed Forces which will actively contribute to the resolution of crisis situations at the civil-military interface and will strengthen both personnel and technical capabilities.

The Ministry shall provide, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, all possible available and necessary material - technical or personnel means to prevent illegal and uncontrollable migration in the short term and to reverse the current unfavourable situation.

The Government will not proceed with further handovers of military aid from the Ministry of Defence stock. However, the Government will continue to support humanitarian and technical assistance to Ukraine in every way.

After the previous government's incomprehensible divestment of all air defence assets, the Government is focused on accelerating the restoration of sovereignty over the protection of Slovak airspace at the earliest possible date.

The Government will strive for the restoration of permanent air defence of the territory of the Slovak Republic, as well as for the airspace of the Slovak Republic to be once again protected exclusively by the Slovak Air Force.

The Government will review the contractual basis concluded by the previous leadership of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic both in the commercial sphere and the political sphere, emphasising the balance of mutual commitments. In this context, it will open negotiations with our foreign partners to remove the disadvantageous position of the Slovak Republic from such contracts.

To streamline the operations of the Ministry of Defence, the Government will rationalise all its organisational structures. The procurement process will make use of joint armaments projects with other security forces as well as with foreign partners. The funds thus obtained will be used primarily for the development of the armed forces of the Slovak Republic.

The Ministry will ensure a dignified celebration of the Slovak National Uprising corresponding to the 80th anniversary of the most important military performance of the Slovak nation, with the participation of the widest possible public, which will be held in Banská Bystrica. In the context of the Armed forces, there is a need to deepen the relationship between members of the armed forces and the general public.

Medium-term priorities

In addition to standard security requirements for modern technology, the Government will develop capabilities for modern force protection by unmanned aerial vehicles, robotic reconnaissance assets, and the development of other defence tactics. The main purpose of increased investment in this area is to minimise the risk of loss of life and limb to soldiers during conflict. And that's why the Government will make every effort to modernize in order to provide as much protection as possible.

The Government will intensify the dialogue with interest organisations in the defence sector in order to increase motivation for personnel stabilisation of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. At the same time, it will create conditions for the establishment of a fund for the construction and development of defence infrastructure, which will concentrate resources intended primarily for the development of the civil infrastructure of the state, which is fundamentally used by the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic both in peacetime and in case of crisis situations.

The Government will strive for all-round development of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The significantly negative economic conditions caused by the wasteful policies of the former government, which require a rational consolidation of public finances, cannot justify a further deterioration in the level of readiness and combat capability of the Armed Forces.

In view of the increasing number of crisis situations, the Government will ensure the development of the engineer corps to strengthen the security system with emphasis on the rapid resolution of crisis situations. The Government will consider the possibility of changing the deployment of F-16 aircraft from the Sliač base to the Kuchyňa base.

The large-scale conflict beyond the borders of the Slovak Republic has shown that Slovakia may not only be at local risk in the future but given the volatile environment to the east of our borders, there is a risk of expanding into a larger regional conflict. It follows that the territory affected by such a regional conflict may include several NATO member states in one time period. Therefore, the focus must also shift from the use of Article 5 of the North Atlantic

Treaty to Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty and to the even more fundamental development of individual defence capabilities as the basis for a collective ability to resist armed attack. In this context, we will adjust our defence strategy to be based on an increased emphasis on individual defence capability in the event of a regional conflict. The individual ability to defend oneself effectively is seen by the Government as an integral part of the collective defence. At the same time, the Government will add new capabilities that arise from the current needs of the operational environment. The Government will, first of all, strive to ensure the modernisation of weapon systems and other equipment in the conditions of domestic manufacturers or broader cooperation of V4 countries and thus contribute to the positive growth of GDP as well as the production capabilities of research and development of modern technologies.

The Government wants to fundamentally support the domestic defence industry, as a traditional part of the Slovak economy, and increase its export possibilities by active cooperation and deployment of the results of domestic manufacturers in the environment of the armed forces. In this context, the Government wants to establish an active dialogue with domestic producers and interest organisations. It is also a challenge for the Government to implement, together with the private sector, research, development and production in the field of combat and defence technologies that can provide us with a competitive advantage in the international environment and increase the defence capability of the Slovak Republic.

Long-term priorities

The Government recognises the need for the Ministry of Defence to respond regularly and flexibly to the rapidly changing security environment in Europe and the world. In response to the changes, the Government will take the necessary systemic and operational measures, initiate legislative changes, or co-create and implement related international community decisions. In the context of a rapidly changing security environment, the Government will review and adapt individual strategic documents.

In the context of a fundamental change in the security environment, the Government perceives the necessity to increase the strength of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, as well as the need to substantially strengthen the active reserves serving for the needs of possible threats and crisis situations. The Government will be flexible in its approach to the changing security environment while maintaining the two per cent of GDP as the necessary financial framework for the development of the armed forces.

The Government supports strengthening the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy, while preserving the specificities of individual Member States. The Government is pushing for a return of the European Union to a peaceful setting as a cornerstone of the creation of the European Union. The Union's highest defence objective should be to secure and maintain peace in the European area and its strategic control.

In addition to cooperation at the NATO and European Union level, the Government will play an important role in the resumption of cooperation and active communication within the V4 format, thanks to which the individual V4 Member States are able to promote their common interests more effectively within broader international organisations.

The Government will also encourage the international community and international organisations to pay increased attention to the issues of terrorism and illegal and uncontrolled migration, which pose major security threats to Slovakia and the European Union.

CONCLUSION

The submitted Programme Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic is a strategic document for the development of Slovakia in a period of complex social, political, economic and international development.

As the supreme body of the executive power, the Government of the Slovak Republic will proceed from the first day with the utmost commitment to its fulfilment to bear its constitutional and political responsibility with honour. So that Slovak men and women, members of national minorities and other citizens of the Slovak Republic can conclude at the end of her mandate that life in Slovakia is better, calmer and safer than it was in 2020-2023.