

# **SLOVAKIA - Summit for Democracy - Written Statement**

## **Introduction**

Global democracy faces formidable threats and challenges. These challenges demand urgent and robust responses on all levels and in all areas. In this regard the Slovak Republic welcomes President Biden's initiative to convene the Summit for Democracy. It reflects the strong commitment of the Slovak government to make democracy stronger and more resilient. We are ready to work at home and in the EU and internationally to make this initiative a success. Only by working together, we can build a strong global partnership for supporting democracy and preventing dangerous trend of democratic backsliding. There is a need for new ideas, innovative and truly inclusive approaches involving all partners who want to lead in developing a new architecture for advancing democracy, rule of law and human rights – from governments, through the civil society, independent media, to the private sector. We see the necessity to work for the strengthening of multilateral mechanisms supporting human rights, and renew the trust of our citizens in them.

**1.** We are fully aware that to be credible in our engagement we have to be consistent in advancing principles of democracy and fulfilling our commitments at home. We are moving forward our agenda of reinforcing democratic institutions, transparency and fighting corruption based on firm commitment to strengthen the role of civil society, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of societal life. In the run-up to the Summit Slovakia has put in place several mechanisms, initiatives and events both at home and internationally, including internal interagency cooperation to strengthen the fight against corruption, protect media freedom and pluralism, as well as independent journalism and safety of journalists, with a strong role of civil society in those processes.

**2.** We must bridge the gap between what we promise and what we deliver. We must also tackle misperceptions and false choices between security and freedom. Any initiative or measure proposed shall fully respect our

fundamental freedoms and rights, in particular freedom of expression, as a cornerstone of democracy and free debate among citizens. Nevertheless, a balance between a high respect for freedom of expression and the fight against disinformation and hate crimes shall be kept. We should not be afraid to put these problems out to the open for inclusive discussion about democratic renewal with everybody who wants to be part of it.

3. To support the fulfilment of objectives of the Summit, Slovakia has built its contribution around three major priorities and three areas of action closely aligned with the goals of the Summit. We are committed to translate these commitments into concrete steps and measures to be implemented through the “Year of Action” and beyond.

4. Promoting media freedom and pluralism and independent journalism, including investigative journalism, preventing information manipulation and interference

5. We undertake to take decisive measures to protect media freedom politically, legally, economically and physically against attacks threatening their independence and safety of journalists. We undertake to develop legislative and normative instruments and self-regulatory initiatives to promote accountability and transparency of news media by incentivizing voluntary compliance with ethical and professional norms in journalism. We undertake to combat disinformation and information manipulation, including through citizenship education and media literacy.

## **Defending democracy against corrupt practice**

1. We undertake to step up the fight against corruption, in recognition that corruption undermines democracy, rule of law and trust of citizens in the system of governance. It is one of the channels whereby authoritarian governments acquire levers of influence within democratic states. We are ready to strengthen our engagement with and support for relevant

international governmental and non-governmental mechanisms for promoting transparency and good governance, including the Open Government Partnership initiative.

2. Support for strengthening inclusive participatory democracy and good governance with strong role and involvement of civil society securing strong respect for human rights of all
3. We undertake to promote inclusive public participation in policy shaping and decision-making processes and decrease the polarization of the public arena. We will involve civil society in consultation processes and implementation of programs, e.g. in fighting corruption, extremism, intolerance, xenophobia, promotion and protection of human rights, on local, regional, and national level.

## **Commitments**

Promoting media freedom and pluralism and independent journalism, including investigative journalism, preventing information manipulation and interference

### **Commitments at home:**

- I. Slovakia will **enshrine protection of journalists in media related laws**, including measures to increase personal security, and reinforce safeguards against abuse in defamation cases and other forms of intimidation and pressure. These changes should boost independence of journalists and protection of their sources, while focusing on adherence to professional standards through means of self-regulation. Journalistic independence should be guaranteed not only with regards to state interference, but also in relation to media owners, as well. To this end, we will take appropriate legislative measures to strengthen transparency of media ownership and state advertising through new policy instruments, as well as regulatory benchmark on political advertising.

- II. We will work closely with all relevant stakeholders to implement the EC Recommendation on ensuring the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals in the European Union, including bringing the perpetrators of violence or harassment against journalists to justice. These topics will be addressed and consulted with media workers, owners and other stakeholders within thematic roundtables during the “Year of Action”.
  
- III. Fight against disinformation and information manipulation and foreign interference will continue to be a priority for the Government, including by improving our capacity to counter disinformation and enhancing resilience of the state and the society against foreign information manipulation and interference by regulating generative network technology (deepfakes), including through legislative and non-legislative measures. Boosting professional standards, media literacy, raising civic awareness through citizenship education will be an important part of this process with strong involvement of the civil society.

### **Commitments Within the EU**

- I. We will engage in the EU to support the proposal of the European Commission to launch the preparation of a comprehensive “EU Media Freedom Act” and we want to be an active participant and contributor in the upcoming legislative process. In 2022, we launch a series of consultations with representatives of media and media owners to feed into the EU legislative action.
  
- II. We will engage in the EU to support the development of the EU’s toolbox against foreign information manipulation and interference.
  
- III. A broader implementation of the EC Recommendation on ensuring the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals in the European Union needs a progress in the adoption of

the Digital Services Act, proposed by the EC in 2020. We are ready to engage in this direction.

- IV. In close cooperation with the upcoming presidency, we will bring the “protection of journalists” to the centre of discussions within the Council of the European Union, including through the preparation and adoption of Council Conclusions.
- V. We will explore the possibilities how best to implement the Commission Recommendation on the safety of journalists (published in September 2021).

## Commitments Internationally

- I. Slovakia is putting in place several mechanisms, initiatives and events, both at home, in the EU and internationally, to prepare an inventory of best practices and tested solutions, which we want to share also through our programs of development cooperation. Those activities will be guided by the recently adopted Concept Paper on the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the World. As part of the implementation of the Concept Paper, we will continue giving priority to issues of media freedom and protection of journalists, including through active engagement in the Media Freedom Coalition and within relevant international organizations.
- II. In 2022, Slovakia is **increasing its support to free and independent media worldwide by doubling its foreign aid** assistance for independent media and investigative journalism. In this regard, we will work closely and in synergy with other stakeholders and international organizations, including the OSCE, Council of Europe, UNESCO etc. We will support UNESCO Global Media Defense Fund, contribute to the Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists. Bilaterally, we are launching several pilot projects to support independent media, professionalism and capacity building of media in Ukraine, Moldova, and Montenegro.

- III. Slovakia is committed to support media freedom and investigative journalism in partner countries also through cooperation with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) by allocating 300 thousand Euros to support its physical, digital and legal security program in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe.

## **Defending democracy against corrupt practice**

- I. Slovakia will continue a profound **reform of the judiciary** to rebuild the public trust in the justice system. To that aim, it is indispensable to strengthen the system of checks and balances, enhance the independence and accountability of judges, improve efficiency, quality and transparency of the judiciary. The specialization of judges, proper random allocation of cases and faster and better-quality judicial decisions shall be main results of this reform.
- II. We will also increase the transparency of the **Ultimate Beneficial Ownership** of legal entities and accuracy of information about them through the improvement of the verification and control mechanism in source registries of the UBO Register. These measures are instrumental in countering money-laundering and corruption. The Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with US partners, will prepare in 2022 an international conference and share its experience on the functioning of the register.
- III. **Asset recovery – The new Act on forfeiture of Assets and Management of the Seized Property** has been adopted and became effective on 1 January 2021. Its full implementation has been underway, including the establishment of a new Office for Management of the Seized Property. We will continue increasing effectiveness of the system of assets recovery, including awareness raising campaign with all stakeholders.

- IV. Leading officials were selected and appointed, including the Head of the **new Whistleblower Protection Office**, which started its functions as of 1 September 2021.
- V. The capacity to detect and investigate corruption offences can still be strengthened by increased governmental investments in specialization, dedicated analytical expertise and integrity trainings for National Crime Agency and Financial Administration Crime Unit.
- VI. Draft legislation on lobbying, improvement and/or introduction of new tools to reinforce integrity of public function as “revolving doors”, asset declarations, conflicts of interest of members of Parliament and top executive officials, including public figures involved in procurement, are planned or at the initial stage.

### **Defending democracy against corrupt practice within the EU:**

- I. Slovakia will continue its support towards the application of the Rule of Law mechanisms, including through the report, which presents positive and negative developments across the Member States and the Union as a whole in four key areas: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and other institutional issues related to checks and balances.
- II. We are ready to work with other EU Member States and EU Institutions in further developing and strengthening the toolbox for countering foreign influence operations and interference.
- III. Slovakia will engage in support for strengthening EU and international mechanisms and sanction regimes for fighting corruption, including support for the use of the EU Global HR Sanction regime for sanctioning those who use corruptive practices to undermine democracy and respect for human rights (similar to the US Magnitsky Act).

## **Defending democracy against corrupt practice Internationally:**

- I. We will actively engage in promoting the implementation of international anti-corruption conventions, in particular the UN Convention against Corruption, OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions and Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption as well as peer review mechanisms underpinning the implementation and awareness raising about tactics, techniques and procedures of information suppression by authoritarian state actors together with other international partners.
  
- II. Slovakia will support collaborative efforts between state and non-state actors to improve accountability and good, transparent governance, including through active participation in the Open Government Partnership initiative. We will continue to share best practices and lessons learned from addressing those challenges at home.
  
- III. We will support international mechanisms and sanction regimes for fighting corruption, and for sanctioning those who use corruptive practices to undermine democracy and respect for human rights.
  
- IV. Support for strengthening inclusive participatory democracy and good governance with strong role and involvement of civil society securing strong respect for human rights of all

## **Defending democracy against corrupt practice at home**

- I. We will strengthen the role and engage with the civil society on local, regional and national levels in consultative processes for decision shaping and mechanisms of implementation of reforms benefiting from their expertise, understanding of local realities and problems, contacts with the society on the ground. During the “Year of Action” we will launch a new, result-oriented and inclusive consultative platform with civil society in a form of round table with civil society involving regional and local dimensions and participation. This way we



want to promote deeper understanding of the value of democracy, human rights and rule of law on all levels among citizens, recognizing that only through grass-roots activities can citizens' trust in the democratic system and their resolve to defend it be restored.

- II. We will continue to strengthen democratic institutions fit for the future and promote collaborative, participatory and deliberative democratic methods at various governance levels, including local and regional, contribute to capacity building for citizen engagement in policy making and transparency of decision making and use of public finances. We will further support expanding participation of regional self-government in activities within the framework of the Open Government Partnership initiative.
- III. We will strengthen civil society participation on all levels in activities and mechanisms promoting tolerance, fighting racism, extremism, preventing disinformation and information manipulation, promoting respect for human rights for all, democratic integrity in the online space, including awareness raising, media literacy and civic education, using innovative approaches and new technologies.
- IV. The Government will improve the delivery of public services to their citizens by starting an implementation of:
  - a. **Strategic Municipal Planning** – the government will help municipalities to set the goals and objectives of the city/region for the medium-term future, including the **aspect of inclusiveness of citizen participation in the process**.
  - b. **Public Ethic Benchmarking** - to better assess corruption risks, improve public administration ethics standards according to the international standards
  - c. **Local finance benchmarking** - to ensure best use of available resources at central and/or local levels.

- d. **European Label of Governance Excellence (EloGE)** - to increase knowledge of the selected municipalities/regions of the principles of good democratic governance

### **Within the EU**

- I. We will support further expansion of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) and other relevant programmes to sustain and further develop open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law and that encourage youth and women participation in Europe's democratic life at local, regional, national and EU levels.
- II. We will support strengthening of the mechanisms for enforcing the EU law on combating racist and xenophobic hate speech and hate crime.
- III. We will support joint action within the Team Europe Democracy framework to increase the impact of the EU in further facilitating and enhancing political and civic participation of women, youth and marginalized groups of society in EU partner countries and improve support for countries aiming at transitioning to democracy, in particular for strengthening the rule of law, respect for human rights and the role of the civil society, protecting media freedom and safety and security of journalists. We will make our national contributions to TED, based on our experience, tested solutions and lessons learned from our transformation and reform processes.

### **Internationally**

- I. We will implement priorities stated in the Concept Paper on the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the World.
- II. Slovakia will develop cooperation priorities, including to support human rights, involvement of the civil society, women and youth in reform

processes in partner countries in the area of good governance, fight against corruption and strengthening of the respect for human rights of all, assistance to partners in coping with their HR commitments through experience sharing and technical assistance.

- III. Slovakia will be actively engaged in international and regional organizations in order to improve their ability to monitor and defend human rights and shared values and commitments, improve their performance to this end.

## **Conclusion**

Together, we will demonstrate that democracies are capable of rising against those challenges and deliver on people's expectations. In this context, we welcome the initiative of the European Commission in securing a greater synergy and impact of individual programs of EU Member States through the "Team Europe Democracy" initiative. We believe securing a greater coherence and complementarity within the EU will enable greater impact of our individual efforts on the ground. Equally, we look forward to synergy of action and coordination mechanisms generated through appropriate initiatives stemming from the Summit for Democracy and put in place through the "Year of Action". Slovakia will be firm part of these mechanisms.