



# Slovakia Report

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## Sustainable Governance Indicators 2017

## Executive Summary

While Prime Minister Robert Fico managed to retain his seat in office, gains made by opposition parties in the parliamentary elections held in March 2016 changed the political scene. The electoral campaign, which started in December 2015, was shaped significantly by Fico's Smer-SD party. Under the slogan "We protect Slovakia" (Chránime Slovensko), Fico nurtured fears of migrants and terrorism, cultivating an Islamophobic discourse that culminated in the statement that "there is no place for Islam in Slovakia." However, Fico's plan to attract voters with his populist-nationalist campaign failed. His Smer-SD party lost its absolute majority and 40% of its seats, while the three right-wing parties – the neo-Nazi L'SNS, the populist Sme Rodina (We Family) and the conservative-nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) – won more votes than Smer-SD. The center-right camp was also shaken up. Two formerly centrist government parties, SDKU-DS and KDH, received significantly fewer votes and thus lost their seats in parliament. In contrast, the liberal SaS increased its vote share to become the second strongest party, and the new center-right party Siet' (Network) entered parliament. The unexpected election results forced Fico's Smer-SD into a coalition government with SNS, Siet' and Most-híd, the main political representation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. When Siet' practically collapsed after the defection of several members of parliament in August 2016, the government's majority became rather small.

The quality of democracy in Slovakia has continued to suffer from rampant corruption, intransparent media ownership, incompetent and politicized courts and a strong discrimination of Roma, women, LGBTI persons, refugees and Muslims. Despite spectacular corruption scandals, most notably in the health sector, few attempts to strengthen integrity mechanisms have been undertaken and to date, no political or business leader has been convicted or sentenced. The tug-of-war between the Fico government and President Kiska over the appointment of justices to the Constitutional Court has continued.

On a more positive note, citizens' trust in the Slovak courts and judicial system has substantially increased, even though more than 60% of those polled express a lack of trust in the courts. The improved numbers can be attributed to the positive changes made within the judiciary after the controversial figure of Stefan Harabín, who had held major positions in the Slovak judiciary for

some time, was compelled to give up several of his responsibilities. Moreover, unlike his predecessor, the Minister of Justice Lucia Žitňanská, has sought to foster transparency and fight corruption in the judicial system.

With GDP growing by more than 3% in 2015 and 2016, the Slovak economy was among the strongest growing EU and OECD countries in the period under review. In 2016, growth has been largely driven by external demand and household spending growth. By contrast, overall investment fell markedly in 2016 compared to 2015 as public investment normalized after the end of the previous programming period for EU funds. In part as a result of this strong economic growth, unemployment declined and the fiscal stance improved. There was little progress with structural reforms. With the parliamentary elections approaching in March 2016, the second Fico government refrained from initiating any controversial reform at the end of its term. The government manifesto of the third Fico government reiterated many goals of the previous one. Although it comprises around 70 pages, it has remained rather vague. After years of neglecting education policy, it has announced the presentation of a 10-year National Education and Training Development Program by the end of 2016 and a substantial increase in investment in the education sector. It also promises a new reform strategy for the health care system, another neglected sector.

The strategic capacity of the second Fico government has benefited from Smer-SD's clear parliamentary majority and the prime minister's strong position within the party. At the same time, the government has lacked transparency, and has done little to improve strategic planning, draw on expert advice or consult with social sector stakeholders other than the traditional social partners. This approach has limited checks and balances, and has deprived the government of the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of others. In the third Fico government, the power of the prime minister has declined. In the new coalition government, ministerial compliance has become more precarious, particularly since SNS-nominated ministers are not party members and lack experience working as a civil servant, which means their loyalty is not secure. Informal coordination within Smer-SD has been partly replaced with informal coordination among the coalition partners. No major reforms in the institutional arrangements of governing have been adopted.

In the second half of 2016, Slovakia took over the EU presidency for the first time. It did so under difficult external circumstances, including the refugee crisis and the Brexit discussion. The presidency was further complicated by Slovakia's damaged standing in the EU caused by the Fico government's controversial positions on the Greek debt crisis, relations to Russia and the refugee issue. This stance made it difficult for Fico to be accepted as an

“honest broker” by the other EU members. As Fico was very much willing to make the presidency a success, he faced a balancing act reconciling mainstream EU positions with his own views.

Citation:

Cunningham, B. (2016): Five takeaways from Slovakia’s election. Politico, March 6 (<http://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-fico-asylum-migrants-elections-nazi-nationalists/>).

Haughton, T., D. Malova, K. Deegan-Krause (2016): Slovakia’s newly elected parliament is dramatically different and pretty much the same. Here’s how, in: Washington Post, March 9 ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/09/slovakias-newly-elected-parliament-is-dramatically-different-and-pretty-much-the-same-heres-how/?utm\\_term=.cfa972f32e8b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/09/slovakias-newly-elected-parliament-is-dramatically-different-and-pretty-much-the-same-heres-how/?utm_term=.cfa972f32e8b)).

## Key Challenges

The 2016 parliamentary elections in Slovakia have dramatically exacerbated party system fragmentation and polarization. As in other European countries, the Slovakian electorate is expressing growing frustration with and alienation from the political elite. The vacuum this creates must be filled by new personnel and convincing programmatic approaches, as all mainstream parties are confronted with the challenge of revitalizing trust and credibility as well as of presenting convincing policy solutions for pressing problems like corruption. Part of the challenge is to counter the xenophobe discourse which has been stirred by Prime Minister Fico and Smer-SD since the summer of 2015.

While Slovakia’s short-term economic and fiscal situation looks favorable, the country faces a number of policy challenges. Long-term economic prospects are limited by the sorry state of the infrastructure, a lack of qualified labor, meager R&I activities, weak administrative capacities and rampant corruption. Investment deals such as the one with Jaguar Land Rover concluded in December 2015 are likely to boost the economy and to reduce unemployment in the short run, but will exacerbate the unbalanced structure of the Slovak economy, as the automotive sector already accounts for a large share of the Slovak industry and is especially vulnerable to external shocks. In order to put the growth of the Slovak economy on a more sustainable footing, R&D and education will need strengthening. Both sectors alike have for long suffered from low spending and institutional weaknesses. Upgrading R&D would strengthen domestic enterprises, diversify the economy and support higher added-value sectors. Improved tertiary and vocational education offerings are needed to keep up with the demands of multinational companies and foster skill-intensive domestic businesses. Improved education might also help

improve the situation of the Roma and mitigate the country's persistently strong regional disparities. Given the long-standing neglect of the two sectors and the possible pay-offs of reform, it is disappointing that the new government has not yet developed clear reform approaches in both fields.

From a broader perspective, two main and interconnected tasks remain the key to ensuring positive political as well as economic developments: judicial reform and a tougher stance toward corruption. From a political perspective, a continuation of judicial reforms and more stringent anti-corruption measures would help contain public dissatisfaction with politics and the political class. From an economic perspective, both measures can contribute to higher investment and growth by reducing uncertainty and increasing administrative efficiency. Reforms can build on the recent improvements in the judiciary. Moreover, the new Minister of Justice, Lucia Žitňanská from the Most-híd party, brings a lot of assets to the task. As an experienced lawyer who served as state secretary (2002-2005) and justice minister (2006, 2010-2012) under the SDKU-led governments, where she was a critic of previous Fico governments, she combines experience with credibility. Moreover, she might be able to capitalize on the outrage over the recent corruption scandals and the weak showing of Smer-SD in the 2016 elections.

# Policy Performance

## I. Economic Policies

### Economy

Economic Policy  
Score: 6

With GDP growing by more than 3% in 2015 and 2016, the Slovak economy was among the strongest growing EU and OECD countries in the period under review. In 2016, growth has been largely driven by external demand and household spending growth. By contrast, overall investment fell markedly in 2016 compared to 2015 as public investment normalized after the end of the previous programming period for EU funds. In December 2015, the Fico government succeeded in signing a major agreement with the British carmaker Jaguar Land Rover (JLR). While production won't start before 2018, investments associated with construction increased GDP by about 0.3% already in 2016. Despite these successes, however, long-term growth prospects have suffered from the government's failure to enhance the business and investment climate by improving infrastructure and labor force skills, strengthening administrative capacities and fostering R&I. As the automotive sector already now makes up about 43% of the Slovak industry, the JLR deal is to further increase the dependence of the Slovak economy on a single sector and on export performance.

#### Citation:

European Commission (2017): Country Report Slovakia 2017. SWD(2017) 90 final/2, Brussels ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en_0.pdf)).

Liptáková, J. (2016): Economy grows, but policies lacking, in: Slovak Spectator, March 1, 2016 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20105571/economy-grows-but-policies-lacking.html>).

### Labor Markets

Labor Market  
Policy  
Score: 4

Due to the strong growth of the Slovak economy, the unemployment rate fell from 11.5% in 2015 to 10.3% in 2016 and is expected to dip under 10% in 2017. At the same time, however, several structural problems persist which

have not been adequately addressed by the government: Long-term unemployment is one of the highest in the EU, and the labor market participation of groups such as Roma, young people, women with children, the elderly and low-skilled persons is relatively low. As labor market mobility within Slovakia is low, regional differences in (un-)employment are strong. A more recent problem is the growing shortage of qualified labor for industrial production. The Central Labor Office has been reorganized, but the potential for individualized support to the long-term unemployed and vulnerable groups has not been realized yet. Slovakia's expenditure on active labor market policy is low compared to the rest of the EU. In addition, there is no comprehensive evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of measures.

Citation:

European Commission (2017): Country Report Slovakia 2017. SWD(2017) 90 final/2, Brussels, 6-7 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en_0.pdf)).

### Taxes

Tax Policy  
Score: 6

The introduction of a flat-tax regime in 2004 played a major role in establishing Slovakia's erstwhile reputation as a model reformer and an attractive location for investment. Whereas the first Fico government left the flat-tax regime almost untouched despite earlier criticism, the second Fico government in 2012 reintroduced a progressive income tax and increased the corporate-income tax, thereby increasing vertical equity to the detriment of competitiveness. The third Fico government changed course by reducing the corporate-income tax rate from 22% to 21% for 2017. At the same time, it extended the levies on companies in regulated industries and on banks, which had been expected to expire in 2016, and re-increased lump-sum deductions for the self-employed, which were reduced in 2012 to ensure a more equal taxation of the self-employed and employees. Other measures have included a new 8% tax on non-life insurances and an increase in excise duties on tobacco and fees on gambling. The stop-and-go in taxation has been criticized for undermining certainty.

Citation:

European Commission (2017): Country Report Slovakia 2017. SWD(2017) 90 final/2, Brussels, 14-15 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en_0.pdf)).

Remeta, J., et al. (2015): Moving Beyond the Flat Tax - Tax Policy Reform in the Slovak Republic. OECD, Taxation Working Paper No. 22, Paris (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5js4rtzr3ws2-en>).

### Budgets

Budgetary Policy  
Score: 7

Slovakia managed to reduce its fiscal deficit from 8% in 2009 to 3% in 2015 and about 2.2% in 2016. As spending was higher than budgeted, the lowering

of the deficit in 2016 was largely due to buoyant tax revenues on the back of strong economic growth and favorable labor market developments. For 2017, a further reduction of the deficit, this time largely achieved by tax increases, is projected. In order to accommodate new spending priorities, however, the third Fico government postponed the original deadline for meeting the medium-term objective from 2017 to 2019. The planned public-private partnership project to build a motorway ring around Bratislava has been associated with substantial medium-term fiscal risks.

Citation:

European Commission (2017): Country Report Slovakia 2017. SWD(2017) 90 final/2, Brussels, 15-16 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-slovakia-en_0.pdf)).

### Research and Innovation

R&I Policy  
Score: 3

Slovakia has a weak and underdeveloped research and innovation policy. R&D intensity, public expenditure on R&D, the number of patent applications and levels of employment in knowledge-intensive activities are below the EU average. Expenditure on R&D, which remains well below the EU average, has gradually increased in recent years, albeit from a very low level. The Fico government has focused on the use of EU funds and on tax incentives for R&D, but has failed to address structural problems such as the fragmented administrative framework, the lack of coordination and thematic concentration and the missing links between the multinational companies that dominate the Slovak economy and the country's universities and research institutes. In July 2016, the third Fico government cut the Slovak Academy of Sciences' budget.

Citation:

Baláž, V., K. Frank, J. Zifciakova (2017): RIO Country Report Slovakia 2016. Luxembourg: EU (<https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/library/rio-country-report-slovakia-2016>).

### Global Financial System

Stabilizing  
Global Financial  
Markets  
Score: 7

During the Slovak EU presidency in the second half of 2016, the Fico government actively sought to improve the regulation and supervision of international financial markets. Slovakia has been supporting the international regulation of financial markets, including the creation of a banking union and implementing all European Union directives regarding supervision of financial markets as well as the establishment of the European Fund for Strategic Investments. Slovakia supports also the transparency of tax systems in order to enhance investment activities and the monitoring of cross-border financial flows both within Europe and globally. However, like many other activities, these efforts are limited by the size of Slovakia's economy.



## II. Social Policies

### Education

Education Policy  
Score: 4

The quality of education and training in Slovakia has suffered both from low levels of spending and a lack of structural reforms. Spending levels on education are among the European Union's lowest, and have fallen as a percentage of GDP since 2009, partly as a reflection of a declining number of pupils. Because vocational education is underdeveloped and universities focus on non-technical education, Slovakia faces a shortage of skilled workers needed for its industry-oriented economy. In consequence, the education system is insufficiently geared to increasing Slovakia's economic potential. In 2015, Slovakia introduced a dual vocational education training system, but interest among potential participants remains limited. The implementation of the anti-segregation legislation adopted mid-2015 in order to improve education for Roma children has been hindered by low teacher participation and a lack of teachers able to teach in multicultural settings.

One central problem in the education sector, namely the inadequacy of teachers' education and the low attractiveness of the teaching profession, crystallized in the massive teachers' strikes that Slovakia experienced throughout 2016. In January 2016, the Slovak Teachers Initiative (ISU) called for an indefinite strike in order to break the "ignorance of the long-term need for ensuring an adequate education funding." In its government manifesto, the third Fico government announced it would present a ten-year National Education and Training Development Program by the end of 2016. This program has called for a significant increase in investment into the education sector, as well as for starting school at the age of 5 rather than 6.

### Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion  
Policy  
Score: 5

The Slovak social-protection system covers standard social risks. Due to the country's relatively uniform income distribution, the risk of poverty is relatively low. In 2015 about 18.4% of Slovakia's inhabitants were in danger of poverty. By comparison, the EU average was almost 6 percentage points higher. While Roma and children from disadvantaged families have become the most endangered group, the share of seniors (65 and older) at risk of poverty fell from 21.9% in 2007 to 12.8% in 2015. Access to the labor market, especially for women and people living in the east and north, has remained a challenge. Despite some progress in closing the gap, unemployment in

Bratislava has been substantially lower than in eastern Slovakia. The main reasons for this phenomenon are the combination of low growth and job creation in the country's central and eastern regions, as well as an insufficient regional labor mobility to job-rich areas. The Roma face the highest poverty risk within the Slovak population.

## Health

Health Policy  
Score: 4

Slovakia has a mandatory health-insurance system that provides all residents with primary, secondary and tertiary care, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices. The state covers the health-insurance costs of children, students, pensioners, the (registered) unemployed and women on maternity leave. From a comparative perspective, the quality and efficiency of health-care services are relatively low. A government spending review published in autumn 2016 showed that there is significant scope to increase the cost-effectiveness of various areas of healthcare and identified potential savings of up to €174 million in 2017. The health policy of the second and third Fico governments has been erratic. A reform strategy developed for 2014-2020 has been implemented only very slowly and selectively and will, according to announcements by the new coalition government, be replaced by a new strategy. Little has been done to tackle the widespread corruption in the health care system, an issue highlighted by President Kiska.

Citation:

European Commission (2017): Country Report Slovakia 2017. SWD(2017) 90 final/2, Brussels, 17-18 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-repor-t-slovakia-en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-repor-t-slovakia-en_0.pdf)).

## Families

Family Policy  
Score: 4

In Slovakia, traditional notions of the family are still fairly strong. Mothers of children under two years of age rarely work, the employment rate for women (25-49) with children below six years of age reaches a mere 40%, and the gender employment gap for young women (20-29) is among the highest in the EU. Working women face an enormous double burden of both professional and domestic responsibilities. This situation is reinforced by the low incidence of part-time employment, income tax splitting and the relatively long duration of parental leave. Child-care facilities are limited and have not kept up with the increase in birth rates. Child care for children under three years of age in particular continues to be virtually unavailable. Larger towns have insufficient kindergarten slots. Public spending for families is slightly below the OECD average, with a high share devoted to cash benefits, and low shares for children's services and tax-related benefits. The Fico government has failed to address these problems. Instead of expanding child-care facilities with a view

to facilitating women's labor-market participation, it has focused on increasing cash benefits for families. The new government's manifesto does not refer to these problems at all.

### Pensions

Pension Policy  
Score: 5

Slovakia introduced a three-pillar pension system along World Bank lines in 2004. From 2012 to 2015, the Fico government adopted a number of measures aimed at strengthening the first (public, pay-as-you-go) system to the detriment of the relatively strong second (private, fully funded) pillar. These changes have re-increased the role of the state in providing for the elderly, and have given the pension system a more redistributive nature. While these reforms improved the public pension program's short-term financial situation, the expected increase in public pension spending in the long term remains much higher than the EU average. In an attempt at further weakening the second pension pillar, the third Fico government has announced in the government manifesto plans to facilitate the withdrawal of savings from the second pension pillar. Ignoring the indexation rules that have been in effect since 2013, it has also granted an ad hoc pension increase in 2017.

### Integration

Integration Policy  
Score: 3

While the share of foreigners in the Slovak population still does not exceed 1.5%, the inflow of migrants has increased in recent years. Despite the growing labor shortage, the second and third Fico governments have done little to develop consistent and sustainable policies for migrant integration. The second Fico government passed a new document on integration policy that largely embraced the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU. Largely implementing EU directives, the third Fico government reduced barriers to the arrival, stay and employment of foreigners from outside the EU by an amendment to Act on Residence of Foreigners that went into effect on 1 November 2016.

In the context of the EU refugee crisis, Prime Minister Fico has continued to oppose mandatory quotas for distributing refugees within the EU. During the 2016 election campaign, Fico instrumentalized the issue of migration and fueled anti-refugee sentiments by implicitly linking them to the threat of terrorism. In May 2016, shortly before Slovakia took over the EU presidency, Fico stated that "Islam has no place in this country."

### Safe Living

Safe Living  
Conditions  
Score: 7

Internal security has been a major issue in Slovakia since the onset of the EU refugee crisis. Prime Minister Fico has pursued a double-track strategy on this issue. For one, he has helped fuel fears by issuing a series of negative public statements regarding migrants. For another, the Fico government has sought to demonstrate its commitment to battling crime and terrorism by approving fast-track anti-terrorism legislation that made the prolonged detention of suspected terrorists possible. In addition, the Fico government has established a special police unit of 300 officers in charge of protecting of the Schengen Area's external borders and increased public spending on domestic security and public order, which, as a percentage of GDP, is now the highest in the EU. Despite such high levels of spending, Slovakia scores poorly on the OECD Personal Safety Statistics for "feeling safe when walking alone at night" and with respect to safety in general.

Citation:

OECD, Better Life Index (<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/safety/>).

### Global Inequalities

Global Social  
Policy  
Score: 6

Slovakia ceased to receive World Bank development aid in 2008, and has been a donor of development assistance ever since. In September 2013, the country became the 27th member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee. However, official development assistance (ODA) has remained substantially below the EU target of 0.33% of GNI. Slovakia's top priorities with regard to ODA, as formulated in an official strategy for 2014 – 2018, include education and health care as well as the strengthening of stability and good governance in regions and countries that are of special interest to Slovakia. In line with this strategy, Slovakia focuses its bilateral development cooperation on three countries (Afghanistan, Kenya and South Sudan) as well as on several countries in the Western Balkans (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia), Eastern Europe (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) and Africa (Tunisia), which it shares similar experiences of transformation.

### III. Environmental Policies

#### Environment

Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 5

Slovakia has considerable natural resources. However, interest groups and policymakers have traditionally assigned priority to economic growth rather than the protection of the environment. Although NGOs have helped draw attention to environmental issues, and EU accession has come with the obligation to meet the European Union's strict environmental standards, this negative legacy is still present in policymaking. As a result, each government's approach to environmental issues has tended to be patchy rather than holistic. A second major problem has been the weak implementation of environmental laws and regulations. A third problem is the country's strong industrial production, which keeps energy demand high. Although the Fico government relies heavily on nuclear power, carbon dioxide emissions increased in 2016. The planned completion of the nuclear power plant in Mochovce has been postponed once again. In terms of environmental issues, Slovakia's air pollution represents the country's biggest problem, as air quality in the country is one of Europe's worst.

#### Global Environmental Protection

Global  
Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 5

Slovakia has not acted as an international agenda-setter for global environmental policy. It is rather difficult for a small country to shape the global framework. Moreover, given Slovakia's state of economic development, environmental issues are not the top priority of policymakers. The overall policy framework regarding climate change in the Slovak Republic is in line with EU strategies. Slovakia also complies with international treaties. In September 2016, the Slovak parliament ratified the Paris Agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, making the country the fourth to do so. The ratification by the end of 2016 of the agreement by all crucial states, including the EU itself, featured prominently among Slovakia's priorities for its EU presidency in the second half of 2016.

# Quality of Democracy

## Electoral Processes

Candidacy  
Procedures  
Score: 10

The procedures for registering candidates and parties in Slovakia are fair and transparent. Candidates for presidency must be nominated by at least 15 members of the unicameral National Council or document support from at least 15,000 voters. While independent candidates cannot run for office, candidate lists for parliamentary elections can be nominated by registered political parties, movements and coalitions. For registration, the nominating organizations must obtain 10,000 signatures and make a deposit of €17,000, which is returned only to candidate lists that receive at least 2% of the vote. By the deadline of 6 December 2015, 24 candidate lists were submitted to the State Commission for Elections and Control of Financing of Political Parties (established in 2014) for registration. One of them was not registered for refusing to pay the election deposit. Four citizens submitted applications as independent candidates, but were rejected by the commission.

Citation:

OSCE/ODIHR (2016): Election Assessment Mission Final Report Slovakia: Parliamentary Elections March 5, 2016. Warsaw, 7-8 (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/slovakia/235591?download=true>).

Media Access  
Score: 9

Slovakia's pluralistic media market ensures that all candidates and parties have equal access to the media, and that this access is reasonably fair. Election laws mandate that campaign messages must be clearly distinguished from other media content. While the public Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS) is required to introduce the candidates and present their campaigns, this is optional for private-media organizations. Public-media coverage has become more balanced since 2010. In the parliamentary elections in March 2016, two controversial new rules, as adopted in 2014, were applied for the first time. The new ban on the publication of opinion poll results in the last 14 days before the elections was criticized for infringing upon the public's right to information. The ban on the broadcasting of political advertisement by TV and radio stations in the 48 hours before election day was criticized for being selective by not including internet broadcasting and broadcasting from abroad. The implementation of the second ban was complicated by the fact that the law is not clear about whether the ban begins at midnight or at 7.00 am.

Voting and  
Registrations  
Rights  
Score: 9

The electoral process is largely inclusive. In principle, all adult citizens can participate in elections. There is a special electoral register for Slovak citizens without permanent residence in the country (i.e., homeless people). Since November 2009, only prisoners who have been sentenced for “particularly serious crimes” have been disenfranchised. Voters that will not be in their place of residence on election day can ask for a special voter’s pass that enables voting elsewhere. The new election law passed in 2015 has united regulations for all types of elections in Slovakia, thereby removing the discrimination of citizens residing or staying abroad at the time of presidential elections. Unlike in the past, they can now vote by mail in both parliamentary and presidential elections.

Party Financing  
Score: 6

After long debate and various failed attempts, new rules on campaign finance were eventually adopted in May 2014 and became effective in July 2015. The new rules limit campaign expenditures to €3 million for parties and €500,000 for candidates for presidential, regional and communal elections. Parties or candidates that exceed these limits can be fined up to €300,000. Parties and candidates are required to have a transparent bank account for electoral purposes that serves as a mechanism for monitoring transactions and donors. Vote-buying is subject to penalty, as is “stealing” the name of another party shortly before it is registered. A newly created state commission for elections and political party financing oversees campaigns and elections. The appointment of the 14 members of the commission in August 2015 confirmed concerns about its independence. The governing Smer-SD had a clear majority in the commission, since ten members were chosen by the parliamentary parties on the basis of their shares in seats and four members were nominated by various state institutions dominated by Smer-SD. No representative of a watchdog institution made it into the commission.

Citation:

OSCE/ODIHR (2016): Election Assessment Mission Final Report Slovakia: Parliamentary Elections March 5. 2016. Warsaw, 9-11 (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/slovakia/235591?download=true>).

Popular Decision-  
Making  
Score: 8

The Slovak Constitution provides far-reaching possibilities for citizens to actively propose and take binding decisions on issues of importance to them through popular initiatives and referendums (articles 93 – 100). Referendums are obligatory in the case of the country entering or withdrawing from an alliance with other states (like the European Union). Furthermore, a referendum can be called for in the case of “other important issues of public interest” (Article 93.2); referendums on basic rights and liberties, taxes, levies, and the state budget are forbidden (Article 93.3). There are two ways to call a referendum: by a resolution of the National Council or on the basis of a petition signed by a minimum of 350,000 citizens. The results of referendums are binding, and the constitutional barriers for changing the decisions are high; only a three-fifths majority in the National Council can overrule a decision

made by referendum, and can do so only after three years (Article 99.1). Likewise, no referendum on the same issue can be held until three years have passed (Article 99.2). Similar provisions exist at the local level. In the period under review, however, no referendum was held.

### Access to Information

Media Freedom  
Score: 6

Political pressure on the media has increased since the second Fico government took office. Prime Minister Fico has returned to his ill-famed habits during his first term in office and has ranted against journalists. The Slovak National Party (SNS), part of the governing coalition, has combined its criticism of the public broadcaster RTVS with the refusal of an increase in funding agreed upon in the coalition agreement. Political influence also is an issue in the case of TASR, the country's leading news agency which has a market share of about 65%. Its public nature gives the governing coalition a say in its management. The independence of the media is further restricted by Slovakia's libel law, which maintains one of Europe's heaviest penalties for defamation, and the lack of provisions for guaranteeing editorial independence in major private-media outlets.

Citation:

Sampor, Ž. (2016): Media Pluralism Monitor 2016: Slovakia. Florence (<http://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/slovakia/>).

Slovak Spectator (2016): Filmmakers object to political influence in RTVS, November 11 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20379661/filmmakers-object-to-political-influence-in-rtvs.html>).

Media Pluralism  
Score: 6

The shifting of ownership in the last years has raised concerns about the concentration and politicization of media. In autumn 2014, the Penta financial group entered the media market, buying 45% of Petit Press from the German Rheinisch Bergische Verlagsgesellschaft (RBVG), which publishes the Sme daily, Slovakia's most influential political daily – a transaction finally approved by the Anti-Monopoly Office in June 2016. Penta, whose true owners are still unknown, has also acquired two other publishing houses, and controls the economic weekly Trend, the daily Plus Jeden Deň and the weekly Plus 7 Dní (the latter two of which are tabloids). In addition, it operates websites and purchases advertising space via its media agency. The electronic public media only partly compensate for the ongoing concentration of ownership in print media. A new problem is the spread and popularity of conspiracy websites, partly backed by Russia.

Access to  
Government  
Information  
Score: 8

Access to government information is guaranteed by the constitution and the Act on Free Access to Information (Infolaw), which was originally approved in 2000 and has been amended several times since. In mid-2015, parliament started to discuss an ambitious amendment which had been prepared by a



commission established by the Ministry of Justice. Moreover, shortly before the parliamentary elections in March 2016, three prominent watchdog organizations (Transparency International Slovensko, Fair-Play Alliance, INEKO) lobbied for improvements in the Infolaw. In particular, they recommended subjecting companies that are fully owned by the state or municipalities to the Infolaw and making public the salaries and CVs of state nominees. Moreover, the agreements signed by the state and municipalities should be published at one place and the state should start to systematically connect the databases about public procurement, founding and ownership of companies, EU funds and owners of property. However, neither the second nor the third Fico governments endorsed the proposals on the table. The former confined itself to a mini-amendment of the Infolaw in March 2016 limited to the transposition of new EU law; the latter has to date not come up with any legislative plans in this field.

Školokay, A. (2015): Complex amendment to Slovakia's FOI Act might make it one of the most liberal in Europe. LSE, Media Policy Project Blog, London (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2015/04/24/complex-amendment-to-slovakias-foi-act-might-make-it-one-of-the-most-liberal-in-europe/>).

### Civil Rights and Political Liberties

Civil Rights  
Score: 7

In Slovakia, civil rights are largely respected. However, the integrity of the judiciary and the long duration of court proceedings remain a problem, as do the police discrimination and mistreatment of the Roma population. In the period under review, clashes over these issues between the government and Public Defender of Rights (Ombudswoman) Jana Dubovcová continued. When in May 2016 Jana Dubovcová delivered her annual report on the activities of the public defender of rights for 2015, the parliament was nearly empty.

Political Liberties  
Score: 8

In Slovakia, political rights are largely respected. Citizens can freely join independent political and civic groups. The Ministry of Interior has registered over 35,000 such associations and over 60 political parties, though only 23 of which took part in the 2016 parliamentary elections. In the period under review, demonstrations and public protests have increased. The Bonaparte protests, named after the building complex in which Minister of the Interior Robert Kaliňák has resided, have targeted the issue of corruption. Nurses and teachers have staged protests for higher wages and better working conditions.

Non-discrimination  
Score: 5

While Slovakia has fairly sophisticated anti-discrimination legislation in place, the discrimination of Roma, women and LGBTI persons continues to be a major problem. The Roma population has suffered from the lack of access to adequate housing, the pervasive segregation of Roma children and their very high dropout levels in the education system, the excessive use of force by police officers during raids carried out in Roma settlements and various

manifestations of hate speech. The second and the third Fico governments alike have not cooperated with Public Defender of Rights (Ombudswoman) Jana Dubovcová who has again and again drawn public attention to the discrimination of Roma. The new commissioner for Roma affairs appointed by the third Fico government has lacked standing. The failed February 2015 referendum on the constitutional definition of marriage, adoption law and sex education in schools has led to a growth in negative propaganda and hate speech directed at LGBTI persons. Unlike in the previous year, however, the LGBTI community has dared to stage its traditional Rainbow Pride event in July 2016. Since the onset of the refugee crisis, Prime Minister Fico stirred a discriminatory discourse on refugees and migrants.

Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights (2015): Report by Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights, following his visit to the Slovak Republic from 15 to 19 June 2015. CommDH(2015)21, Strassbourg (<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CommDH%282015%2921&Language=lanEnglish>).  
Cunningham, B. (2016): Migrants are Central Europe's new roma. Politico, April 5 (<http://www.politico.eu/article/migrants-are-central-europes-new-roma-refugees-viktor-orban-robert-fico/>).

### Rule of Law

Legal Certainty  
Score: 6

Government and administration in Slovakia largely act on the basis of the law. However, legal certainty has suffered from frequent legal amendments and opaque laws. The high level of political polarization in Slovakia, combined with frequent changes in government, has made many laws rather short lived. A second problem has been the growing complexity of laws. As a result of frequent amendments, many laws have come opaque and inconsistent. This situation was widely criticized by many NGOs and watchdog organizations (e.g., Via Iuris, TIS, SGI). In response, parliament in November 2015 approved two important amendments to improve things. First, it changed the act on lawmaking, introducing the public's right to participate in lawmaking and stipulating that each governmental legislative draft has to be submitted for public discussion. Second, the rules of procedure for parliament were changed to prohibit "legislative adjuncts," that is, the opportunity to change existing legislation by amending drafts that are currently under discussion, a practice often used to avoid lengthy parliamentary readings.

Judicial Review  
Score: 6

The Slovakian court system has for long suffered from low-quality decisions, a high backlog of cases, and a repeated government intervention. In the period under review, citizens' trust in the Slovak courts and judicial system has substantially increased, even though still more than 60% of respondents do not trust courts. The main reason for this development have been positive changes brought about from within the judiciary after the disempowerment of Stefan Harabín, a controversial figure who had held major positions in the Slovak judiciary for some time. Moreover, unlike its predecessor, the Minister of Justice in the third Fico government, Lucia Žitňanská, has sought to foster transparency and fight corruption in the judicial system.

Appointment of  
Justices  
Score: 6

Slovak Spectator (2016): Poll: The rate of trust in Slovak justice increased 11 percent, October 20 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20362164/poll-the-rate-of-trust-in-slovak-justice-increased-11-percent.html>).

The justices of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court are selected by the president on the basis of proposals made by the National Council, without any special majority requirement. Since 2015, the selection of justices has been paralyzed by a struggle between President Kiska, who had made judicial reform a priority in his successful presidential campaign in 2014, and the Smer-SD-dominated parliament. When in July 2015 Kiska appointed only one out of six candidates proposed for the Constitutional Court by parliament, the five other candidates filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court. The latter eventually decided against Kiska, without really clarifying the powers of the president. Despite the Court's decision, Kiska has continued to block the appointment of new justices, arguing that the candidates greenlighted by the National Council do not fulfil the high requirements for Constitutional Court justices. As the governing coalition has stuck to its position, too, 3 out of 13 seats in the Constitutional Court are now vacant.

Slovak Spectator (2016): Appointment of constitutional judges still in question, in: Slovak Spectator, November 8 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20378245/appointment-of-constitutional-judges-still-in-question.html>).

Slovak Spectator (2016): No new Constitutional Court's candidates proposed for now, October 6 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20343392/no-new-constitutional-courts-candidates-proposed-for-now.html>).

Slovak Spectator (2016): Kiska again rejects Constitutional Court candidates, July 7 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20209757/kiska-again-refuses-constitutional-court-candidates.html>).

Corruption  
Prevention  
Score: 5

The second Fico government was shaken by several corruption scandals and has not paid much attention to anti-corruption efforts. Few attempts to strengthen integrity mechanisms have been undertaken by the Fico government, and influential politicians and business persons have not been convicted and sentenced thus far. The government manifesto of the third Fico government contained some anti-corruption measures, and the new minister of justice, Lucia Žitňanská, representing one of Smer-SD's coalition partners, has paid more attention than her predecessors to the fight against corruption. In September 2016, however, the coalition joined ranks in a no-confidence vote against Minister of Interior Robert Kaliňák and Prime Minister Fico that was fueled by the parliamentary opposition with their links to Ladislav Basternak, a fraudulent business man.

Slovak Spectator (2016): PM Fico, Minister Kaliňák survive no-confidence vote, September 26 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20286161/pm-fico-minister-kalinak-survive-no-confidence-vote.html>).

# Governance

## I. Executive Capacity

### Strategic Capacity

Strategic  
Planning  
Score: 4

The institutional capacity for strategic planning in Slovakia is weak. Capacities for planning in the ministries are limited, and there is no central policy planning unit in the Government Office. The strengthening of the expertise of the Government Office and the creation of the Solidarity and Development Council, a new advisory body, under the second Fico government failed to improve planning capacities in any substantial way. Due to the Fico government's initial emphasis on fiscal consolidation, the role of the Institute for Financial Policy, a research institute affiliated with the Ministry of Finance, has increased. However, the Institute has taken a relatively narrow fiscal perspective and has focused on the short to medium term rather than on the long term. The situation has not improved under the new coalition government.

Citation:

OECD (2015): Public Governance Review Slovak Republic: Better Co-ordination for Better Policies, Services and Results. Paris.

Scholarly Advice  
Score: 5

Slovak governments rely on various permanent or temporary advisory committees. The current government has 15 such bodies. Prime ministers have their own advisory body. Prime Minister Fico's advisers largely come from his circle of associates and include only a few truly independent experts. There are several public research institutions with close linkages to ministries that are largely dependent on state funding and provide their analysis to the government. However, the impact of any of these bodies on decision-making is not really transparent. Prime Minister Fico does not publicly include non-governmental academic experts outside of his circle in government decision-making processes, preferring instead a more corporatist approach to seeking advice. This has not changed under the third Fico government.

### Interministerial Coordination

GO Expertise  
Score: 5

Slovakia has a strong tradition of departmentalism and collegial cabinets, and these two features are likely to deepen under the new coalition of three very different parties. So far, the junior coalition partners have not exercised any substantial influence in the Government Office, which is fully under the control of Robert Fico. The GO focuses on the legal and technical coherence of draft bills, but lacks the capacity and sectoral expertise to evaluate their policy content.

Citation:

Blondel, J., F. Müller-Rommel, D. Malová et al. (2007): *Governing New Democracies*. Basingstoke/London: Palgrave.

GO Gatekeeping  
Score: 5

The Government Office (GO) has primarily administrative and technical functions. It mostly supports the work of the various advisory bodies of the government, including the Legislative Council and the Council for Solidarity and Development (which includes selected civil society actors), as well as the work of ministers without their own ministry. The GO takes part in the interministerial coordination process, but while it has the formal power to return draft laws on policy grounds, its gatekeeping role has traditionally been limited. In the period under review, bodies tasked with monitoring the distribution of EU structural funds have become subsumed under the GO, which suggests that the GO is increasingly concerned with policy implementation.

Citation:

OECD (2015): *Public Governance Review Slovak Republic: Better Co-Ordination for Better Policies, Services and Results*. Paris.

Line Ministries  
Score: 4

In Slovakia, the government manifesto defines certain priorities that are elaborated in legislative plans. These additionally divide tasks and responsibilities among the line ministries and other central bodies, and set deadlines for the submission of bills to the cabinet. In their policy-development process, the line ministries legally must include a range of institutions and interest groups that are defined as stakeholders in their respective fields. Ministries are also obliged to consult with the Government Office (GO) and its legislative council as they develop bills. However, full responsibility for drafting bills has traditionally rested with the line ministries, and consultation with the GO is mainly technical. In its attempt to formalize his leading position within the government, Prime Minister Fico has increased the monitoring activities of the Government Office, especially those related to EU structural funds.

Cabinet  
Committees  
Score: 6

The importance of cabinet and ministerial committees has varied over time in Slovakia, with every government modifying the committee structure. The second Fico government had only one cabinet committee composed exclusively of ministers, the Council for National Security. Other ministerial committees consisting of ministers and senior civil servants and chaired by the four appointed vice prime ministers or line ministers have played a major role in the preparation of government proposals, and have been quite effective in settling controversial issues prior to cabinet meetings. However, they are still neither formally nor systematically involved in the preparation of cabinet meetings.

Ministerial  
Bureaucracy  
Score: 5

In Slovakia, senior ministry officials have traditionally been heavily involved in the interministerial coordination process at the drafting stage. In contrast, coordination at the lower levels of the ministerial bureaucracy has suffered from a strong departmentalist culture and the top-down approach taken in most ministries. Under the second Fico government, the role of senior civil servants in interministerial coordination decreased and coordination within the Smer-SD party gained importance.

Informal  
Coordination  
Score: 7

Informal coordination has played a significant role in policy coordination under both the second and the third Fico government. Under the second Fico government, Fico complemented the extension of the formal role of the Government Office by informal negotiations with individual ministers, advisers and economic and social stakeholders. The fact that Fico took care of filling 7 of 13 minister positions as well as 15 state secretaries in 13 ministries by Smer politicians indicates that Fico continues to rely on coordination within the Smer-SD party under the new coalition government. The third Fico government also decided to form a system of coalition councils. The main coalition council, which coordinates the work of various sub-councils, meets at least once a month, consists of the chairmen of the parties in government and adopts decisions by a consensus of all members.

Citation:

Slovak Spectator (2016): Government publishes coalition agreement, April 13, 2016 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20137985/government-publishes-coalition-agreement.html>).

### Evidence-based Instruments

RIA Application  
Score: 6

When RIA was introduced in Slovakia back in 2001, no central unit in charge of RIA was created at the government's core. In response, the first Fico government introduced a Uniform Methodology of Assessment of Selected Impacts in 2008, which was updated by the Radičová government in 2010. Four ministries are involved in the process (Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family), with the Economic Analysis Division of the Ministry of Economy

playing a coordinating role. While these changes have improved the efficiency of RIA, its application still suffers from a high degree of fragmentation. Major measures of the second Fico government were not fully subjected to RIA procedures.

Quality of RIA  
Process  
Score: 5

The general quality of RIA has slowly improved thanks to the new methodology introduced under the first Fico government and the attention that the Radičová government paid to the issue. However, while a more efficient implementation of RIA, mainly with a view to improving the business environment, has been a declared priority of all Slovak governments, full achievement of this goal has been elusive. Consultations with stakeholders take place, but have become more selective.

Sustainability  
Check  
Score: 3

The new RIA methodology (in place since 2010) lacks effective sustainability checks. The methodology draws a distinction between five different dimensions (public finance, the social environment and labor markets, the business environment, the natural environment, and the information society); however, it does not differentiate between short-, medium- and long-term impacts. The process is unsystematic even in theory, and the reality is even weaker.

### Societal Consultation

Negotiating  
Public Support  
Score: 6

Both the second and the third Fico government have not assigned much importance to consultation with societal actors. The Solidarity and Development Council established in 2012 has not included social and environmental NGOs or representatives of national minorities. The tripartite consultation on the minimum wage failed both in 2015 and 2016 with the result that the government took a unilateral decision in increasing the minimum monthly wage from €380 to €405 in 2016 and to €435 in 2017. In some cases, for example, the controversial construction law, consultation, has taken place a posteriori, that is, after laws have come under fire.

Citation:

Slovak Spectator (2016): Ministry wants consensus for new law. February 15, 2016 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20093567/ministry-wants-consensus-for-new-law.html?ref=av-center>).

Slovak Spectator (2016): New construction act in focus. May 26, 2016 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20174627/new-construction-act-in-focus.html>).

### Policy Communication

Coherent  
Communication  
Score: 6

While Prime Minister Fico was able to capitalize on his uncontested position as party leader to streamline communication in the second Fico government, the situation has changed since the elections in March 2016. However, the

positions of the members of the new coalition government on major issues in 2016 such as the EU presidency, the Brexit, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or the refugee issue have been broadly similar, so that open conflicts have been confined to minor issues, such as license fees for public broadcaster Radio and Television Slovakia (RTVS). Keen on avoiding early elections, SNS and Most-Híd, the junior coalition partners, have been cautious to avoid engaging in open conflict.

### Implementation

Government  
Efficiency  
Score: 6

The government manifesto of the second Fico government was very vague. While the government met its fiscal and employment goals, self-declared reform projects such as health care reform, the adoption of a new construction act or the amendment of the Civil Service Act were not completed and had to be carried over to the new term. The government manifesto of the third government reiterates many goals of the previous one. Although it comprises around 70 pages, it lacks action plans, timelines and budgets.

Ministerial  
Compliance  
Score: 7

Under the second Fico government, the prime minister's dominant position within Smer-SD and the strong party discipline ensured a high degree of ministerial compliance. In the third Fico government, ministerial compliance has been more precarious since it rests on an "unnatural" coalition that includes parties as diverse as the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the mostly Hungarian minority based party Most-Híd (Bridge). Moreover, the ministers nominated by the SNS are not party members and have little experience as civil servants, which means they are less loyal than would normally be the case.

Monitoring  
Ministries  
Score: 6

Although Prime Minister Fico has been able to count on a significant degree of ministerial compliance, he nevertheless expanded the Government Office's responsibilities in monitoring line ministries, particularly with respect to European affairs and economic and fiscal issues, during his second term. Under the third Fico government, monitoring has remained strong in the case of ministries in the hands of Smer-SD, but has weakened in the ministries led by its coalition partners.

Monitoring  
Agencies,  
Bureaucracies  
Score: 5

The politicization of agencies has continued. Prime Minister Fico has gradually replaced a majority of the heads and core executives of all state agencies at the national level. As he has not yet succeeded in weakening the legal powers of independent executive agencies, he has sought to control them via personnel changes, as well as by increasing their financial dependence on the central government. As with the line ministries, the government has closely monitored the agencies' implementation activities.

Task Funding  
Score: 6

In Slovakia, the degree of decentralization is relatively high. However, funding for subnational governments has been precarious. While the shares of



both municipalities and regional self-governments in personal income tax revenues have substantially risen from 2014 to 2016, subnational governments have continued to complain about unfunded mandates. At the same time, their own fiscal discipline is poor, and a portion of their fiscal problems stem from their leaders' irresponsible behavior.

Constitutional  
Discretion  
Score: 3

Unlike its predecessor, the second Fico government pursued a hands-on approach limiting the constitutional discretion of subnational governments. The government's plans to streamline the administration raised concerns that the role of subnational self-governments might be further limited. Critics fear that the creation of the new district offices will lead to a concentration of power and a further politicization of local government bodies. Under the new coalition government, no changes have been introduced so far.

National  
Standards  
Score: 4

Public-service standards are poorly defined, especially with regard to the independent functions of subnational governments. Moreover, the monitoring of compliance with these standards is often fragmented. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for overseeing subnational self-government, but largely focuses on formal compliance with existing laws and cost efficiency. While the ministry regularly monitors all levels of self-government, the number of breaches of the law and the extent and effects of ministerial intervention are not transparent. Clearly, there are differences between national and EU standards that negatively influence the effective use of EU structural funds. The second Fico government's ESO project has focused on increasing the administrative capacity of subnational governments by realizing economies of scale and by sharing and centralizing services such as facility management, procurement and payroll management. However, implementation of these envisaged changes has been slow.

### Adaptability

Domestic  
Adaptability  
Score: 5

In the past, Slovakia's ability to adapt domestic government structures to international and supranational developments, most notably at the EU level, has been weak. Despite several attempts at reform, the rate of absorption of EU funds has remained low, as the the absorption of EU funds has been hindered by dysfunctional planning procedures, poor project design and selection, and the failure to comply with the requirements of environmental impact assessments.

International  
Coordination  
Score: 6

Because of its size, Slovakia's capacity to shape strategic global frameworks is limited. For a long time, the country was eager to be seen as a reliable and trustworthy partner within NATO and EU. In recent years, however, this reputation and Slovakia's standing in the EU has suffered from the Fico governments' positions on the Greek debt crisis, relations to Russia and the refugee issue, where Slovakia has joined ranks with the other Visegrad

countries. This stance made it difficult for Fico to be accepted as an “honest broker” during Slovakia’s first EU presidency in the second half of 2016. As Fico was very much willing to make the presidency a success, he faced a balancing act reconciling mainstream EU positions with his own views.

### Organizational Reform

Self-monitoring  
Score: 3

There is no regular and systematic self-monitoring of institutional arrangements in Slovakia. Governments and governmental bodies (such as the parliament, Government Office) must issue annual reports and a final report at the end of their term in office, however, these documents focus more on policies and formal financial accounting rather than institutional design. In addition, there are sporadic audits within particular ministries. The institutions and processes of governing are analyzed only infrequently and selectively. Shortcomings in audit procedures persist.

Institutional  
Reform  
Score: 5

The second Fico government adopted a number of institutional reforms at the beginning of its term, including the creation of the Council for Solidarity and Development and the reshuffling of competencies for human rights. Later on, it shifted the control over the distribution of EU structural funds to the Government Office in an effort to improve coordination and control of strategic public investments. In the period under review, no major changes in institutional arrangements were adopted. The Ministry of Finance’s “value-for-money” initiative has introduced regular spending reviews. The planned amendment of the Act on Civil Service, postponed to the 2016-2020 term, has progressed slowly.

Citation:

OECD (2015): Public Governance Review Slovak Republic: Better Co-Ordination for Better Policies, Services and Results. Paris.

Liptáková, J. (2016): Value for Money Project Implemented, in: Slovak Spectator, July 28 (<https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20225671/value-for-money-project-implemented.html>).

## II. Executive Accountability

### Citizens’ Participatory Competence

Policy  
Knowledge  
Score: 6

While the liberal legislation on access to public information has improved the availability of information about policymaking, the population’s overall policy knowledge has suffered from the public disenchantment with politics and the political elite. The second Fico government followed a very selective information strategy. Fico’s main message to the public was that the

government takes care of the people's everyday worries as well as the national interests of Slovakia. By pursuing this kind of paternalism, the Fico government discouraged citizens from political participation and seeking independent, alternative information.

### Legislative Actors' Resources

Parliamentary  
Resources  
Score: 6

Members of the National Council have some resources enabling them to monitor government activity. Most parliamentarians have a support staff of at least two persons, and there is a parliamentary library (with about 65,000 books). In addition, there is the Parliamentary Institute – a research unit providing expertise for parliamentary committees, commissions and individual legislators. However, most members of parliament tend to rely on other sources of information. Whereas members of parliament from the governing party have access to government organizations such as the Institute for Financial Policy, members of parliament from the opposition parties make heavy use of experts among party members or draw on analyses by think tanks.

Obtaining  
Documents  
Score: 5

Parliamentary committees have the formal right to ask for almost all government documents. The main limits stem from the logic of party competition. Smer-SD members of parliament are highly disciplined and do not support opposition members of parliament in their activities. As a result, the committees' access to government documents is limited.

Summoning  
Ministers  
Score: 7

The right of parliamentary committees to summon ministers is enshrined in Article 85 of the Slovak constitution. In practice, however, committees make little use of this right.

Summoning  
Experts  
Score: 8

In Slovakia, parliamentary committees may invite experts. However, this is not a very common practice.

Task Area  
Congruence  
Score: 9

During the second Fico government, the Slovak National Council had more parliamentary committees than there were ministries (by a ratio of 19 to 14), and two committees (the European Affairs Committee and the Committee for Human Rights and Minorities) had several ministerial counterparts. With the new government the ratio has changed slightly (19 to 13). However, committees have covered all ministerial task areas and the control responsibilities for major issues have not been split; thus, the division of subject areas among committees has not hampered parliamentary oversight of ministries.

Audit Office  
Score: 7

The Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic (NKÚ) is an independent authority accountable exclusively to the National Council. The chairman and the two vice-chairmen are elected by the National Council for seven years each, and the office reports regularly and whenever requested by the Council. There is an informal agreement that the chairman should be proposed by the

opposition. After NKÚ Chairman Ján Jasovský's term expired in 2012, Fico's Smer-SD successfully prevented the election of a new chairman four times. In May 2015, the National Council eventually elected a new chairman, Karol Mitrík. While Mitrík was suggested by one of the opposition parties, he did not muster the support of the majority of the opposition, thus raising doubts about his independence from the government. Among other things, the NKÚ has revealed flaws in the government's e-Health project, has found that hospital tenders violated the law and has announced its intent to audit the management and use of public finances in the Supreme Court.

Ombuds Office  
Score: 7

In addition to the Petitions and Complaints Office of the National Council, there is an independent ombudsman, the Public Defender of Rights, who is accountable exclusively to the Council. The Public Defender is elected by the Council for a term of five years and reports regularly to it. In March 2012, Jana Dubovcová, a former judge and one of the most vocal critics of the current state of the Slovak judiciary, took the position from Pavel Kandráč. Dubovcová has taken a quite proactive role with regard to anti-discrimination issues and has been a vocal critic of unlawful detention cells and the excessive use of force by Slovak police officers in Roma settlements. However, most of her critique has been ignored by the authorities. When Dubovcová in May 2016 delivered her annual report on the public defender of rights' activities for 2015, she faced a near-empty parliament. In the newly formed parliamentary committee for human rights, which must approve the Public Defender's Report, the governing parties have a majority. Moreover, the committee includes members of parliament who represent the right-wing L'SNS party and the right-wing populist Sme Rodina party.

### Media

Media Reporting  
Score: 5

The quality and professionalism of media reporting in Slovakia is not extraordinarily high. The public TV and radio stations have lost market shares. Moreover, the commercialization of nationwide broadcasters, with a consequent negative impact on public-interest news and current-affairs coverage, has not left the public stations untouched. As for the print media, the recent ownership changes have raised concerns about the political agenda of the new owners and the resulting decline in journalistic quality. A new risk is the growing popularity of conspiracy websites, many of which are sponsored by Russia.

### Parties and Interest Associations

Intra-party  
Democracy  
Score: 3

All Slovak parties are elite projects that are dominated by a few party leaders. In the last elections in March 2016 new parties entered the parliament: the extreme right L'SNS, the populist Sme Rodina and the center party Siet'. The

nationalist party SNS (former coalition partner of Smer in the 2010-2016 government) could renew its parliamentary presence while two standard parties – the former government parties SDKU-DS and KHD – remained outside. These parties have a huge personnel and leadership problem. Smer remains strongly centered around Fico, who has led the party since its founding in 1999. The inner circle of the party and the number of party representatives with influence are rather limited. Rank-and-file members have little influence on decision-making. In 2016, however, criticism has been raised from within the party, and the approval of a new party program could not be achieved at the program conference in September and had to be postponed. Dominated by Radoslav Procházka, Smer practically collapsed before it developed proper organizational structures.

## Citation:

Malová, D., B. Dolný (2016): Economy and Democracy in Slovakia during the Crisis: From a Laggard to the EU Core, in: *Problems of Post-Communism* 63(5/6): 300-312.

Terenzani, M. (2016): Smer is in an Identity crisis, in: *Slovak Spectator*, September 28, 2016 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20288741/smer-is-in-an-identity-crisis.html>).

Association  
Competence  
(Business)  
Score: 6

In Slovakia, business associations and unions alike have some policy competence. Business associations are in a better position to provide full-blown policy proposals as they have more resources and some of them run or support think tanks. In the period under review, the National Union of Employers (RUZ), the Federation of Associations (AZZZ) and the Business Alliance of Slovakia (PAS) were quite active. On the occasion of the 2016 election campaign, they presented comprehensive analyses of reform requirements, including a “Decalogue of Requirements of Entrepreneurs from Political Parties.” Compared to business associations, trade unions are less well equipped and have suffered from fragmentation. However, some trade unions, including those representing medical doctors, nurses and teachers, can analyze the impact of decisions and formulate relevant policies. KOZ SR, the main Trade Union Confederation representing almost 30 sectoral unions, has focused primarily on increasing the minimum wage and an assortment of less controversial issues such as workplace security.

## Citation:

Liptáková, J. (2016): Economy grows, but policies lacking, in: *Slovak Spectator*, March 1, 2016 (<http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20105571/economy-grows-but-policies-lacking.html>).

Association  
Competence  
(Others)  
Score: 8

Slovakia has a vibrant third sector and many competent interest associations whose analyses and proposals have featured prominently in the media. Think tanks are an integral part of civil society, feature close links to academia and other experts and profoundly influence public discourse. They often serve as a substitute for political opposition. Following the 2012 change in government,

many experts from the Radičová government became active in NGOs or have cooperated with them, thereby providing important policy knowledge. Some of them now cooperate with Most-Híd.

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