

Political and Social Dialogue on the Slovak Republic National Convention on the EU (2004-2007)

by

Dr Kristina Mikulova, Head of Development Cooperation, Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic

*Presented at the Public-Private Dialogue 2015 Workshop
(Copenhagen, March 10-13, 2015)*

1- Background and Context

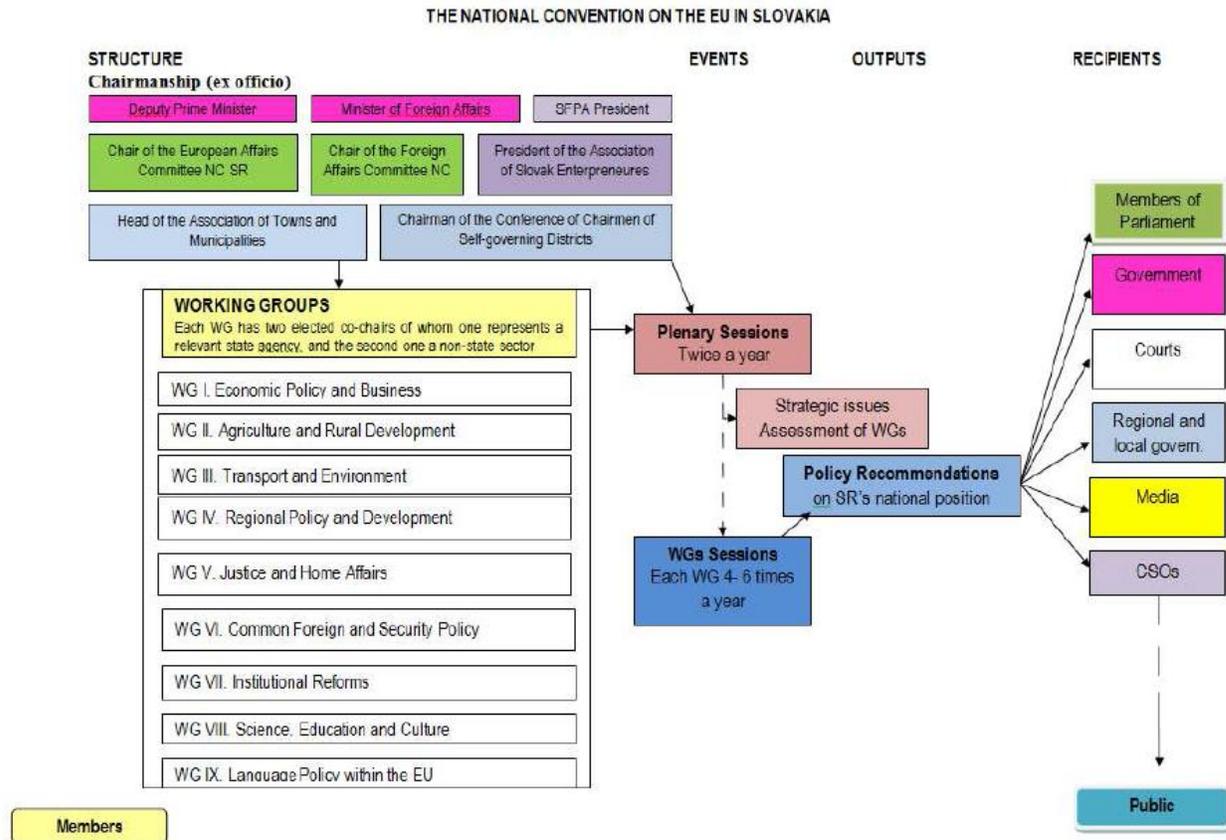
Slovakia's accession to the EU has faced the country with two major challenges, both related to succeeding as a policy-maker and/or policy-entrepreneur in a multi-layered institutional framework fraught by competing interests. At the EU level, Slovakia has been confronted with the need to navigate EU institutions in general, craft national standpoints, build coalitions, and upload its preferences into EU policies. On the home front, the country has had to address the need to involve all relevant stakeholders – including the private sector and civil society organizations – into the dialogue on its contribution to the EU agenda, as well as investment planning given the influx of EU structural funds.

Therefore, Slovakia chose to revive the national discussion forum on the basic direction of reform, which served the country in the run up to EU accession: the National Convention on the European Union (NCEU). The NCEU, whose founding fathers hail from the Slovak Foreign Policy Association – a think-tank – is both a platform for technical debate, and an actor in the policy-making process. The NCEU can capitalize on a strong tradition: its first session took place in May 2001, while its most recent Plenary was held in May 2014.

2- Partnership, Structure and Processes

The NCEU is unique in as that it provides voice to all key segments of the Slovak society, be they “public” or “private”: the executive and legislative branches of the government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, local government, the media and the general public. The initiative is overseen by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, which coordinates the country's engagement with the EU, and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.

Structure:



The NCEU conducts its activities in two formats:

1. Plenary Sessions
2. Working Groups

Plenary Sessions of the NCEU

The Plenary Sessions are in their essence **political events**. They deal with strategic issues, such as the country's performance within EU institutions, or the Union's internal problems. The Plenary convenes twice a year in the presence of the Chairmanship, with members appointed ex officio (the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Human Rights and Minorities; the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Chairman of the [Parliamentary] Committee for European Integration, the Chairman of the [Parliamentary] Foreign Affairs Committee; the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the SFPA; the President of the Association of Businessmen; the Representative of Local and Regional Government, etc). At the plenary sessions, the leaders of the working groups report on their agenda and activities.

Working Groups' Sessions of the NCEU

Working groups provide platforms for **technical discussions**. They maintain a life of their own and meet separately, focusing on their respective topics. Each of the eleven working groups meets at least four times a year. Three of the sessions ought to take place outside the capital city, Bratislava. Consultations and voting are led by two co-chairmen: a representative of the public sector (from the relevant Ministry or agency), and a representative from either the private sector, NGOs or academia, to ensure equality.

The third incarnation of the NCEU consists of the following eleven working groups:

- WG I. Economic Policy and Business
- WG II. Agriculture and Rural Development
- WG III. Environment
- WG IV. Regional Policy and Regional Development
- WG V. Justice and Judicial cooperation
- WG VI. Common Foreign and Security Policy
- WG VII. Institutional Reforms
- WG VIII. Science, Education and Culture
- WG IX. Language Policy within the European Union
- WG X. Transportation
- WG XI. Home affairs and Police Cooperation

3- Results so far

Overall, stakeholders agree that the NCEU has made an invaluable contribution to improving the Slovak Republic's policy-making capacity and strengthening participatory governance. WG recommendations have fed directly into official policy positions and policy output of the Slovak Republic at the EU level. For details of results in private sector growth, please, refer to section 5, below.

4- Expected Results

The current NCEU, established in 2013, seeks to streamline the agenda for the country's upcoming 2016 EU presidency. So far, it has helped establish **expert and policy communities** around technical issue areas that could become priorities: for instance, digital economy and innovation, cohesion policy, sustainable water, combatting tax evasion and fraud, social inclusion and energy efficiency in industrial development, which are currently in the lead. Moreover, the NCEU setup has created an enabling structure for regular communication between experts and the **general public**. In the run up to the Presidency, most likely in the second half of this year (2015), the NCEU WGs will produce

recommendations that will feed into the agenda for Slovakia's chairmanship of the EU in the second half of 2016.

5- Private Sector Growth Component

Private sector growth was covered by several Working Groups, most notably *WG I, Economic Policy and Business*. Given the NCEU's European focus, recommendations have focused on leveraging EU funds for growth. Primarily, WGs have highlighted the need to enhance transparency in EU structural funds management in order to mitigate and/or avoid conflicts of interests and violation of EU regulations on the use of financial resources. Next, they stressed that the government should strive to create a viable financing framework for PPP projects from EU funds across Operational Programs. The recommendations of the WGs have also targeted the Ministry of Finance in particular, emphasizing the importance of tracking exchange rate fluctuations and monitoring their consequences on resource allocation from all Operational Programs. WGs have also advocated for a balanced approach in the distribution of funds, given the country's regional disparities. The overarching recommendation was to channel EU funds into less developed regions in eastern and southern Slovakia, especially when it comes to infrastructure development projects.

Biographies of Authors:

Dr Kristina Mikulova is currently Head of Development Cooperation at the Finance Ministry of the Slovak Republic. Last year, Kristina completed a Transatlantic Post-Doc Fellowship in International Relations and Security at SAIS Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC, with a stint at the European Union Institute for Security Studies in Paris. Kristina holds a doctorate (D.Phil.) in Politics and International Relations from Nuffield College, Oxford University, and a master's (M.Phil.) degree in Russian and East European Studies from St. Antony's College, Oxford University. Kristina previously consulted for The World Bank, UNDP and Oxford Analytica, and worked as a reporter at various media outlets, including The Economist, the Financial Times' editorial office in Prague, and The Moscow Times in Moscow.



As you decide how to best write your 4-page note, you might want to consider some of these ideas:

- *Country, Name of initiative, Year established.*
- *Areas in which the initiative is designed to have an impact on.*
- *Main government and private sector sponsors.*
- *Development Partner sponsor.*
- *Program management/Coordinator/facilitation main people and facilities.*
- *Background and context information (explain the background of the partnership and list the major milestones. Indicate budget, funding sources and relationships with government, private sector, other donors and others in the World Bank Group. Indicate your sense of ownership of this initiative, if you feel it is sustainable, if its vocation is to become an institution or remain a temporary initiative).*
- *Enacted reforms processed through this public-private initiative (list each reform separately and indicate the specific reference for each law, code, act, etc.). Estimated impact of reforms listed above, if ever estimated.*
- *What material or guidance have you been using to help you in the implementation of this initiative?*
- *What are some of the biggest challenges you have encountered in the establishment of the PPD?*
- *What are some of the risks you have encountered and how have you mitigated these?*
- *What would you identify as some of the main factors of success while establishing dialogue?*
- *Status and progress of the partnership in the following 12 areas. Give as much detail as you see fit. Feel free to refer to the PPD handbook for a better understanding of these process areas):*

1. *Mandate and Institutional Alignment (what is the mandate of the initiative, where is it anchored, what role for different actors, how is the secretariat funded, etc.).*
2. *Structure and Participation (how many working groups and on what, working group membership and base, respective roles, etc.).*
3. *Champions (what political will, reservoir of experience and initiative in the private sector, who are the main champions, etc.).*
4. *Facilitator (who is facilitating, how is the secretariat organized, what are the different roles, etc.).*
5. *Outputs (what are the desired outputs of the initiative, what are the main targets, and what is the selection process for reform proposals, etc.).*
6. *Outreach and communications (is there a communication strategy, stakeholder plan, what has been its outputs and results so far, is there a website, etc.).*
7. *Monitoring and evaluation (is the initiative being evaluated periodically, what method or process is used for doing so, what indicators have been adopted, and what corrective measures have been adopted when issues were identified, are there planning tools, are results reported publicly, etc.).*
8. *Sub-national (is there a sub-national component to this initiative, etc.).*
9. *Sector-Specific (how does the initiative addresses sector, clusters, or industrial strategies, etc.).*
10. *International Role (has the initiative a role in international negotiations regarding trade, commercial treaties, promoting regional trade etc.).*
11. *Crisis-mitigation (has the initiative a role in re-building trust between conflicted parties – post-conflict economies, or has it had a role in addressing critical needs after a crisis – financial crisis , natural disasters, etc.).*
12. *Development partners (what is the role of donors, how are donors coordinating their activities around the initiative or not, how is the agenda of the initiative independent or not for these this of donors, how financially dependent the PPD is from donors etc.).*