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## *Romania and Slovakia in the EU: achievements and challenges*

(European Institute of Romania, Conference Room)

### – EVENT REPORT –

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, the European Institute of Romania organized the conference *Romania and Slovakia: achievements and challenges*, in partnership with the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Romania. The event benefited from the participation of Mr. **George Ciamba**, State Secretary for European Affairs with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Mr. **Peter Javorčík**, State Secretary for European Affairs with the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, and Mrs **Iulia Deutsch**, Deputy Head of the European Commission Representation in Romania. The conference was moderated by Ms **Agnes Nicolescu**, Acting Head of the Studies and Analyses Unit with the European Institute of Romania.

In the opening of the conference, Ms **Nicolescu** introduced the guest speakers and outlined the framework of the discussion, referring to the significance of the year 2014 as an anniversary moment marking 10 years since the accession of Slovakia to the European Union (EU). The positive contributions of new member states such as Romania and Slovakia to the dynamics of the European integration process, in the context of the economic crisis, have been mentioned, as well as the challenges that emerged in the deepening of EU integration, considering the euro-sceptic movements manifesting in some member states, which called into question the main achievements of the integration process.

Mr **George Ciamba**, State Secretary for European Affairs, gave an overview of the Slovak guest speaker's profile and professional experience while mentioning that the event also marks a decade since the completion of Romania's accession negotiations to the EU. In a context in which the current EU is different from the one 10 years ago, states such as Romania managed to record positive economic performances, through an export oriented approach and also managed to align to the European economic parameters. Secretary of State Ciamba pointed out the necessity of drafting an economic governance model across the Union, linked at the same time to an energy policy. Mr Ciamba detailed the policy fields in which Romania and Slovakia collaborate at the European level, emphasizing that both countries profited from the opportunities created by the accession to the EU. Areas of cooperation between the two countries include: negotiations regarding the multi-annual financial framework, dossiers corresponding to the status as EU and NATO member states, the crisis in the Eastern neighbourhood, as well as energy and industrial policies. Romanian and Slovak support for EU's enlargement to the East have been highlighted, with particular focus on the support given by Bratislava for the liberalisation of the visa regime for the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the structure of the two economies is similar, and the two states share common perspectives on the trans-Atlantic relationships.

Mr **Peter Javorčík**, State Secretary for European Affairs within the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, reiterated the compatibility of the Romanian and Slovak perspectives on the vast majority of European policy portfolios, including on EU enlargement. For Slovakia, the last 10 years proved to be a period of substantial economic growth, despite difficulties that emerged before joining the EU. Accession to the Schengen area in 2007 and to the Euro zone in 2009 played an important role in this development, according to the speaker, who at the same time reiterated the support for Romania's accession to the Schengen area. In the aftermath of the economic and financial crises, Romania and Slovakia seem to have emerged stronger: in the case of Slovakia, the positive impact of the crisis consisted in a reform of the banking system, despite associated difficulties. On the negative side, there has been a reduction in the GDP, even though since 2010 an ascending trend has been noticed. The structural funds that have contributed to Slovakia's



development represent both a challenge and an opportunity for the future, in the sense that a better use of these funds is necessary. As regards the socio-economic context related to the membership in the Euro zone, the speaker considers that for the majority of the population the accession represented a positive aspect, proving a strong attachment to the EU project. However, the guest also mentioned the so-called 'Slovak paradox', which is that despite the strong public support for accession to the EU, the country had the smallest participation rate at the European Parliament elections in May this year. At the end of the speech, the challenges that Slovakia will face in the following years have been summed up: supporting small and medium enterprises, reducing excessive administrative obstacles to the business environment, consolidating Slovakia's representation within the Union's institutions, preparing for undertaking the presidency of the EU Council in 2016, strengthening the administrative capacities related to the management of European funds, as well as increasing participation in EU research and innovation programmes.

Mrs **Iulia Deutsch**, Deputy Head of the European Commission Representation in Romania brought into discussion the transformations that Europe has been going through in the past few years, since the 2004 enlargement. These changes call for an open debate on the results achieved so far as well as on the new challenges ahead. In this respect, it is important to counteract populism by emphasizing the clear accomplishments and benefits of the EU projects. Although the EU represents the most successful peace project in the world, this achievement must be reiterated and proven again and again, as peace is not to be taken for granted permanently, as shown by the actual crisis in the Eastern neighbourhood. The 2004 and 2007 enlargements have had strong, positive economic effects: the number of jobs increased, trade between old and new member states tripled, this being associated with the benefits of the freedom of movement, and leading to economic growth. Economy growth in new member states contributed to a similar phenomenon in the former UE-15, new investment opportunities appeared, and financial markets expanded considerably, paralleled by the growth of the European Single Market. The fact that globally, the role of the EU has increased must not be overlooked. Programmes such as Erasmus+ contribute to tackling problems such as the lack of competences, increasing employment prospects for fresh graduates. The 2008 crisis was not only a social crisis, but also a financial and a sovereign debt one, on top of which came a crisis of economic growth models. However, the UE-12 states managed to make up for their losses, leading to the conclusion that Europe seems to have emerged stronger from the crisis.

The conference ended up with a short Q&A session, tackling collaboration fields between Romania and Slovakia at the economic and political level. State Secretaries **Ciamba** and **Javorčík** summarized a set of elements regarding trade exchanges between the two states as well as the political collaboration within the EU, including the support for the external dimension of the Union and particularly for the Eastern Partnership.

*Report by the Studies and Analyses Unit, EIR*

