

Contribution by: Slovak Republic

Plenary session: Advancing crime prevention, criminal justice, and rule of law

Madam President,

Your Excellences, dear ladies, dear gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

I am glad I can share with this forum information about reforms we undergo in the Slovak Republic in order to strengthen the rule of law and advance the crime prevention and criminal justice.

Past years lead to profound changes in Slovakia, which resulted in a change of the government. The first reforms were focused on

- 1) tackling corruption
- 2) restoring trust in the judiciary and the rule of law and
- 3) improving the efficiency of justice.

A major reform was realized in the area of **assets forfeiture and seized asset management**, because to fight the crime effectively, we must not only go after criminals but also confiscate the proceeds of crime more systematically, so that the crime does not pay off.

Moreover, we extended penalization of corrupt behaviour via new criminal offense of **“sweetening” of public officials** or the offense of **bending the law**.

Strengthening the independence of the judiciary came into the spotlight, too. The judges must not only be independent but also be seen as independent.

Therefore, we introduced new rules reinforcing **transparency** for the top judicial function (constitutional judges, Chief General Prosecutor, Specialized Prosecutor and President of Supreme Court) by introducing **obligatory public hearings during the recruitment procedure**.

We improved the representativeness of the **Judicial Council** via changes in election of its members and we strengthened its competences. For example, via greater control over the assets declarations of judges.

The **Supreme Administrative Court** is being established. We expect not only enhanced efficiency and quality of decisions in administrative matters, but this court will function also as a disciplinary court for judges and other legal professions. This should reduce personal links that were difficult to avoid in the past.

Since justice delayed is justice denied, the **efficient and speedy court proceedings** are also important.

Majority of our reforms related to efficiency are based on the results of our cooperation with the **European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ)** that realized a thorough audit of the Slovak justice system and proposed a detailed strategy for improving its efficiency.

Among these reforms is also a change of the **court map**. Unfortunately, our experience proved that fragmented courts are less efficient and more prone to building local bonds, which increases corrupt practices. Fragmentation of courts also limits possibilities for specialization.

All of these reforms are accompanied by a **digitalization** of the court agenda, which should create better efficiency and enhanced availability of fast and quality decisions. We expect also a better overview of the progress of the cases for the parties and better court management.

Since the outbreak of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, we have been reaching out to the **most vulnerable groups** by adjusting our services to a hybrid form, focusing on emerging forms of cybercrime such as fraudulent conduct, sexual exploitation, but also to combating disinformation.

In the area of **crime prevention**, a major development was made by engaging with human rights institutions in the preparatory processes prior to the adoption of the new **Conceptual Framework for Combating Radicalization and Extremism** and this year we plan to adopt the new **Crime Prevention Strategy** and to amend the **Crime Prevention act**.

In the next period, we would like to also focus on combating **trafficking in human beings**, including tackling the child marriage cases.

Dear Madam President, distinguished delegates,

I am sure that some reforms I mentioned could be regarded as something obvious for certain countries. But I hope that at least a part of our experiences could serve as an inspiration for others the same way we are inspired by the interventions of previous speakers. And that is why I consider important the exchange of experiences at forums like this one.