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IN SHORT

Another march
Students who organised the march against corruption, attended by several thousands of people in mid-April, are preparing a second event to take place on June 5. In addition to Bratislava, the protest marches will take place in Košice, Prešov and Žilina.

Bašternák's property
For now, the court will not look into the origin of property belonging to Ladislav Bašternák, as the Bratislava I District Prosecutor's Office found, after studying the due documents, that the legal conditions for filing the proposal have not been fulfilled.

To Russia with love
A survey suggests that admiration for Putin and Russia is uniting extremist organisations in Central Europe.

Diplomat of the Year
Ľubomír Rehák won the poll of the London-based magazine Diplomat. The Slovak ambassador to the United Kingdom, Rehák, became the European Diplomat of the Year on April 24.

Roma project awarded
The Agents of Equality project received an international award for social innovations, SozialMarie.

First skyscraper?
As part of the Eurovea 2 project which should extend the existing shopping area, a 168-metre building is planned to be built, which would become the first skyscraper in Slovakia.

For more news from Slovakia go to www.spectator.sk.

SELECT FOREX RATES

€ benchmark as of May 4

CANADA	1.31	HUNGARY	23.26
CZE REPUBLIC	26.77	JAPAN	123.7
RUSSIA	62.34	POLAND	4.21
UNITED KINGDOM	1.16	USA	1.16



Extremist MPs face charges

BY ROMAN CUPRIK
Spectator staff

ISSUES of the 20th meeting of parliament's education committee that took place on April 27 did not attract many journalists, as MPs were supposed to discuss partial legislative changes and evaluations. But it turned out to be one of the most exciting committee meetings ever.

Police officers interrupted the meeting in pursuit of Stanislav Mizík, an MP for the extremist party of Marian Kotleba. They requested his cooperation, then walked to Mizík's office to search it. The police also charged him with extremist crimes.

"If someone denies existence of the Holocaust or wants to select people based on their race, such wording is

fulfilling of a Penal Code," Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák (Smer) told the press.

The raid was related to Mizík's comments on the list of personalities awarded by Slovak President Andrej Kiska published on a social network on January 10. He commented on their Jewish origin and wrote that Kiska was insane and willingly degraded the Slovak awards. He also stated that Daniela Šilanová, an activist in Roma issues awarded in memoriam, is "a fanatic of gypsy habits".

A day after the raid, the police charged another People's Party – Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) MP Milan Mazurek with an extremist crime for his comments on private broadcaster Frontinus Radio related to Roma, migrants and Muslims.

The police operations came after legislative changes introduced by

"This is an unprecedented improvement."

Irena Bihariová, activist

Justice Minister Lucia Žitňanská (Most-Híd) that came into effect in the beginning of 2017. Racially motivated crimes now fall under the Specialised Criminal Court and the National Criminal Agency (NAKA).

The first results are already visible. In the past, the police registered around five hate crime cases per year, but this year it has charged three persons in two months, according to Irena Bihariová, the head of People Against Racism NGO.

"This is an unprecedented improvement," Bihariová opines in her blog. "Regarding news about several

NAKA 'raids', it seems that we've improved the fight [against racism] in the area of criminal legislation."

Opposition parties Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO-NOVA) and Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) criticised Kaliňák for the police raid in Mizík's office during the committee session.

The police could have waited until the session ended and then detain Mizík, now they have given Kotleba's party ĽSNS a reason to say that they are abused by state power. Extremists of ĽSNS agreed on the raid with Kaliňák or Smer head Robert Fico, according to OĽaNO leader Igor Matovič.

"It is because everyone knows that the stronger Kotleba is, the bigger the chance is that Smer will rule," Matovič told the press.

See ĽSNS pg 2

Will Matovič have to go?

BY MICHAELA TERENCEZANI
Spectator staff

THE FATE of MP Igor Matovič is in the hands of his fellow deputies in the parliament. At their May plenary session they are expected to vote on whether he should remain one of them, or leave the house altogether.

Matovič, the leader of the opposition Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO), faces being stripped of his parliamentary mandate as a punishment for his business licence having been active in conjunction with his previous election tenure, which is prohibited by law. He has already been fined €12,000 for the year 2013 when his business licence was active for 21 days after the start of his election term. The fine was later confirmed by the Constitutional Court. Shortly after the first fine, the information surfaced that Matovič's business licence was restored again last September.

"He has a chance to prove whether the mistake was deliberate or unintentional," said Smer MP Jozef Burian, as quoted by the Sme daily, speaking after the session of the parliamentary committee on incompatibility of functions that on March 28 approved the proposal to strip Matovič of his mandate.

The parliament would have to approve such a step with the qualified majority of at least 90 votes in the plenum of 150 MPs.

See VOTE pg 3



Water damaged the road in the village of Malužiná, Liptovský Mikuláš district. (More about floods on pg 2). Photo: TASR

Time to splash the cash, says Fico

BY JANA LIPTÁKOVÁ
Spectator staff

SLOVAKIA is doing well economically and financially, and citizens must also feel this in the form of improved standards of living. This was the main message Prime Minister Robert Fico conveyed in speeches in Nitra and Žilina to mark Workers' Day on May 1.

To achieve this aim, he set out plans to increase the minimum wage and supplementary payments for night, weekend and holiday work. He also

wants to ban what has been dubbed "social dumping", i.e. hiring foreign workers at low wages.

Employers responded that they would end up paying the bill for Fico's proposed measures, while economic analysts warned that the proposed changes would mean the impact of any future economic crisis could be much more painful.

The minister for labour, social affairs and family, Ján Richter (Smer), has already been instructed to prepare an amendment to the Labour Code to put the proposed changes into effect.

"I think that these measures will be passed without any problems," Fico said, as quoted by the SITA newswire.

Fico, who is also the leader of Smer, the largest party in the governing coalition, introduced this latest package of measures without any prior consultation with his coalition partners – the Slovak National Party (SNS) and Most-Híd.

Each of these parties has put forward its own proposals to ensure that Slovaks enjoy a share of the country's growing prosperity.

See PACKAGE pg 4

NEWS *in short***Danko stays despite the letter case**

ANDREJ Danko will continue serving as the parliament's speaker. Though the opposition tried to oust him from the post on May 4, its attempt failed as there were not enough MPs to support the special session's programme.

The result could have been expected as the ruling Smer party claimed before the session it would not back the plan, the Sme daily reported.

The opposition wanted to dismiss Danko because of the scandal concerning the opening of letters sent by the general public to MPs.

The scandal over the opening of private letters was brought to the attention of the media by Igor Matovič, chair of the Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO-NOVA) movement, on April 25.

He claimed that Danko ordered the employees of the parliament's filing office to open letters addressed to MPs if they were sent anonymously or by the public. If they found profanities or other offensive content, they were ordered not to give the letters to the MPs but to store them for three months and then

discard them, the TASR newswire reported.

"Andrej Danko has violated the constitutional right of people who send letters to members of parliament," said Matovič, as quoted by TASR.

He even showed the order made out for employees of the filing office, sent by the chair of the Parliament's Office, Daniel Guspan. Guspan said in response, that neither the employees of his office nor Danko reads the letters addressed to MPs. He called the accusations lies, claiming that the measures concerning the handling of correspondence have been in place for years.

Though Danko was invited to the session of the parliamentary human rights committee to explain the accusations, he failed to do so. His office sent only an email in which they apologised for his absence without stating the reason.

Danko did not attend the May 4 special parliamentary session either, but commented on the letters later in the day, saying he has never ordered the employees of the filing office to open the letters.

BY RADKA MINARECHOVÁ
Spectator staff

EXCEPT for very low temperatures, the last days of April also brought intensive rainfall to Slovakia, resulting in increased water levels particularly in the north of Slovakia. The worst situation was in Orava, Kysuce and Liptov regions, where floods caused serious problems for locals.

In addition, the deluge claimed the lives of three people. A 56-year-old man was found on April 28 in Hvozdnica, near Bytča (Trenčín Region), in a local brook. Rescuers were not able to revive him.

On the same day, in the village of Ochodnica near Kysucké Nové Mesto (Žilina Region), two men in a car tried to cross a flooded stream. The water swept the car away. The 40-year-old man was saved but unfortunately the body of the 59-year-old was not found until the next morning.

The last victim was a 45-year-old Pole who was rafting with a group of friends in



The consequences of flood near the Roňava River in eastern Slovakia.

Photo: TASR

Kráľova Lehota (Žilina Region) on the Váh River on April 29. The man fell into the water near Liptovská Porúbka and rescuers did not succeed in retrieving his body from the water until he reached Liptovský Hrádok, as the news portal Tvnoviny.sk informed.

Towns and roads under water

The Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (SHMÚ) issued a warning against increased water levels in the Váh River's catchment area on April 26.

On April 28, a third-degree

warning against floods was declared for the rivers of Kysuce and Rajčanka, while first- and second-degree warnings were issued for several Váh tributaries and the Orava River.

See FLOOD pg 9

LSNS: Prosecuted for racist rhetoric

Continued from pg 1

Leader of SaS Richard Sulík agrees.

"It is clever," Sulík wrote on his Facebook page. "A few more of those [police] searches and Kotleba will have 20 percent [of votes] and then a right-wing government could not be constructed."

In his reaction, Kaliňák stated in a similar fashion that Matovič and Sulík are preparing for cooperation with Kotleba. He pointed out that Sulík initiated a meeting with Kotleba to discuss the political strategy of Kotleba's party which happened before the 2010 elections.

Mizík was not charged because of his political opinions but for xenophobic statements which crossed the border of what society should accept. For example, after Mizík published his comment on Kiska's awards, one of the awarded people, Michal Kaščák, the organiser of the festival Pohoda, found "Jude raus!" written on his office wall, which means "Jew go away", according to Žitňanská.

"As an MP with influence on public opinion he [Mizík] has to be aware of the fact that some people who listen to him may transform his statements, even into such action," Žitňanská wrote on her blog.

Mazurek more likely to face court

The charges against Mazurek failed to spark such a political fight as the search of Mizík's office. Also, the police did not specify which comments he is being charged for.

Mazurek visited Žilina-based Radio Frontinus on October 10, 2016 to discuss his work in politics. Kotleba's MP Mazurek stated, for example, that "people from Roma settlements have done nothing for our nation, state budget, culture and are

draining our social system" and he indirectly compared Roma with animals.

In regard to migrants, Mazurek stated that "foreign non-European Muslim migrants, who hate our culture, come here to destroy everything" and repeated several debunked myths about migrants committing sexual crimes in Europe.

The licensing authority, Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission, fined Frontinus with €15,000 and stated that radio host Martin Palúch did not confront Mazurek's statements with facts or counter opinions. Frontinus is a small regional radio with a total budget of €63,000 and profit around €5,000.

The charges against Mazurek are more likely to get to court than the charges against Mizík because he was caught live. Mizík can say that he did not write the Facebook comments that are under investigation; yet Mazurek cannot say that he is not the author of his statements on radio, according to Bihariová.

She also praised Kaliňák for saying that the police cannot hesitate with charges in cases of extremism just because it is possible that the case will not make it to the court. This was common practice among police officers in the past, according to Bihariová.

"It is a success that the minister criticises such an approach and calls for more strength," Bihariová wrote on Facebook.

Mazurek is also being prosecuted for assaulting a police officer, and could face 1-5 years in prison for attacking a public official.

Prosecution for donation

On May 3, police have confirmed another criminal prosecution, concerning the three cheques that LSNS distributed to socially disadvantaged families on March

14, to mark the anniversary of the establishment of the wartime Slovak state. LSNS chairman Kotleba gave three cheques worth €1,488 each to three families in need. The party is suspected of allegiance to the well-known neo-Nazi symbol 1488. The prosecution have cited the misdemeanour of demonstrating sympathy for a movement aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms.

Crackdown on extremists

Criminal charges are not the only form of consequences extremists are facing for their statements.

The parliamentary mandate and immunity committee imposed the highest possible fine of €1,000 on Mazurek and Mizík for other defamatory and racist statements they have made in parliament.

"They had the possibility to apologise but the committee did not accept this apology," the chairman of the committee Richard Raši (Smer) told the press, adding that both MPs used the space they got only to confirm their previous statements.

Moreover, Facebook blocked the fan site titled "I vote for Kotleba, I vote correctly", followed by some 45,000 people, on April 10, probably following mass reporting of those opposing Kotleba.

It has also blocked other fan sites, including the main site of LSNS with 80,000 followers, the profile of Milan Mazurek with 21,000 fans, and the profile of LSNS member Mário Vidák with some 15,000 supporters.

The official reasons have not been announced yet. One of them, however, may be that they incited hatred against various groups, such as Roma, migrants, homosexuals, Muslims, liberals, people from NGOs or "Bratislava cafe society", the Denník N daily wrote.



Andrej Danko

Photo: SITA

Fico wants a closer look at NGOs

SLOVAKIA will probably have to look at the funding and background of non-governmental organisations, said Prime Minister Robert Fico after the April 29 summit in Brussels.

"I even think that everywhere these NGOs are active, they will have to disclose information about the country they receive money from, who stands behind them in order for us to know who is who, because otherwise we will find out that various street meetings are organised here and behind them are NGOs from abroad," Fico said, as quoted by the SITA newswire.

He statements are in connection with the law on financing NGOs in Hungary, which is threatening the existence of the Central European University in Budapest. According to the new rules, some NGOs would have to be labelled as foreign agents. A similar law has

been adopted in Russia, SITA wrote.

The NGOs active in Slovakia, with which Fico discussed the anti-corruption measures in March, do not understand Fico's statements.

Ethics watchdog Fair-Play Alliance (AFP), for example, regularly publishes information about its financing, which is even more detailed than that of political parties.

"Our financing is a mixture of grants and contributions from Slovak and international foundations, institutions, companies and hundreds of individuals," Peter Kunder of AFP told the Denník N daily, stressing that their supporters do not tell them what to do.

Politicians casting doubt on civil rights movements only help extremists spread their ideology, Kunder opines.

Compiled by Spectator staff

A ticket to Germany via social network posts



Writer Michal Hvorecký (l) and Assaf Alassaf (r) during the discussion at [fjúžn] festival. Photo: Courtesy of Goethe Institut Bratislava

BY RADKA MINARECHOVÁ
Spectator staff

CAN a status on a social network change someone's life? Yes, if you write humorous stories about a fictitious German ambassador.

Syrian-born dentist Assaf Alassaf, who had to flee his home country due to conflicts with the ruling regime, started writing his funny anecdotes back in 2013. What began as a joke later developed into a series of postings transformed, with the help of German translator Sandra Hetzl, into a book titled "Abu Jürgen. Mein Leben mit dem Deutschen Botschafter" (Abu Jürgen. My Life with the German Ambassador), which unintentionally earned him a ticket to Germany where he now lives.

The book is currently available in German and it is being translated into French and English.

The Slovak Spectator spoke to Alassaf who was a guest at this year's [fjúžn] festival.

The Slovak Spectator (TSS): What was the impulse for you to start writing?

Assaf Alassaf (AA): It's linked to my childhood. I read a lot of books. Even though my parents are not highly-educated, they encouraged us to read and be educated. I started writing some 10-12 years ago. I enjoyed it, so I continued this journey.

TSS: Was it a hobby in the beginning?

AA: It's been just a hobby till now. I still work as a dentist, but I publish some articles from time to time.

TSS: Since 2013 you have been publishing anecdotes on Facebook. Why did you choose this channel? What is the strength of social networks?

AA: Facebook came to Syria in 2005 or 2006, but it was forbidden by the government until 2011 when the revolution started. It was like an alternative platform for people to say what they wanted without control. It's your window to the world.

TSS: Why did you start writing posts about a fictitious German ambassador?

AA: There was no plan, I wanted to create one to three posts. I enjoyed writing something completely fictional, with humour. The stories are not about not getting a visa, but about making a funny story, sending some messages between the lines, political or cultural.

TSS: What inspired you to create the character of Abu Jürgen?

AA: Do you know what Abu Jürgen means? It's "father of Jürgen", it's a nickname. You don't use it in western culture, but in the Arab world it's a joke. Now I can analyse this character, but when I wrote it, I didn't think about it. It was a mix of corrupted Syrian officer, some actors from Arabic movies, with touches of anti-Orientalism.

TSS: What was the turning point that turned the posts into a novel?

AA: When I met the German translator from Arabic

[Sandra Hetzl – ed. note] who told me about her project to translate new Arabic writing from social media into other languages. We then talked about the translation and chose the posts that we put in the book. We decided not to include some posts because they were very local and there was no chance to translate them. There was also the question whether we would include postings about other topics, but then we said no. We made the book about one topic, the visa.

TSS: You now live in Germany. What surprised you when you first arrived there?

AA: Every time you leave your country there's something new. I wasn't surprised by the quality of life, as for me it's something natural. There is something you need to watch, like the relationship between the people and our community. People are similar in general, but there's different culture everywhere. They behave due to their culture.

TSS: Are you trying to get rid of the prejudices and stereotypes people have about Arabs and Muslims? Do they change their opinion after meeting you?

AA: Most of the people I have met are open-minded; they are not surprised. But sometimes they are. For example, my friend was surprised that I know a lot about cinema and movies. But why? You should not be surprised that I'm Syrian and know a lot about movies.

TSS: Your wife and children are still in Lebanon. Is there

any progress in the process to have them join you?

AA: No. I have permission to stay in Germany and I have the right and privilege to bring them to Germany. But the problem is in the German Embassy in Beirut because there are many people requesting appointments. That makes the procedures very hard and you have to wait for one year, sometimes a year and a half, to get an appointment. Now we are waiting for it.

TSS: Is this your first time in Slovakia? What kind of impression do you have?

AA: Yes. I like the city. Yesterday I walked through the Old Town. You cannot imagine how similar it is to the old city of Damascus. It's the same, especially these narrow streets, the nature of the buildings. I feel like I'm at home.

TSS: You are currently working on another novel. What will it be about?

AA: Actually, I'm working on two books. One will be about memories, about the dictatorship 30 years ago, the other about the last five-six years. Both about my experience with the revolutions. Another one will be about my experience as a refugee.

TSS: Is it important to write about these experiences to change the climate in the society?

AA: If you write something with this goal, it has little chance at success. But if you write something real, you can do it. The readers are clever, they can feel whether you are real or not. I will write it just to express myself, to talk about my experience.

VOTE: Matovič faces consequences

Continued from pg 1

Though opposition MPs will not vote in favour of the motion, it is unclear what MPs of the coalition Most-Híd will do, while the extremists from LSNS might also become a decisive factor in the vote.

Smer and SNS, meanwhile, speak to the effect that their MPs will vote for ousting Matovič. Especially Smer has been targeting the MP in recent weeks. Observers tend to see their recent attacks on Matovič, particularly on the part of Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and Košice Mayor Richard Raši, as an attempt to spin the event in their favour, and present Matovič as a fraudster who only went into politics to avoid punishment for his alleged murky business practices.

Case against Matovič

In the weeks running up to the vote on Matovič's future in the parliament, several politicians of the ruling Smer party have called for his departure. They say it is necessary to also take into account the suspicions of tax evasion raised against Matovič in the past.

This happened shortly after several media outlets received anonymously a police decision which indicated that the criminal prosecution in Matovič's case of alleged tax fraud, which was medicalised repeatedly over the past seven years, was stopped because it was time-barred.

"The deed has happened," Smer MP and Košice Mayor Richard Raši, who served in the past as health minister, told the April 20 press conference, as quoted by Sme. "Igor Matovič really committed tax crimes, he robbed the state and his past is catching him up."

Tax officers investigated Matovič in connection with entering three items into the company accounts between the years 2002 and 2004: a printing press, travel compensation for driving a company car, and a transformer station.

Matovič responded to Raši's accusations, saying that he will not give up his mandate. Moreover, he is ready to submit a criminal complaint against Raši, for false accusation.

The MP also told the press on April 20 that investigator Štefan Menčík, who according to Matovič has been dealing for the past two years only with his cases, has recently been promoted to the post of leader of the West division of the National Anti-Corruption Unit.

Smer MP goes without fine

While Matovič might lose

his mandate due to an active trade licence, the parliamentary committee for incompatibility of functions did not proceed in such a strict manner in the case of a Smer MP. They decided not to impose a fine of €108,000 on MP Stanislav Kubánek, as originally proposed by committee members.

Coalition MPs supported him, and MP Jozef Burian of Smer proposed on April 4 to launch a new proceeding against him, in which Kubánek would get two fines: one for not suspending his licence, and another one for being a legal representative of a trade company.

OLaNO claims that the ruling coalition has double standards for its own, and for opposition MPs.

"The coalition uses two unequal metres for the situation," OLaNO MP Jozef Lukáč said, pointing out that Stanislav Kubánek has been violating the law by not suspending his licence for 3,285 days, thus facing a fine of €108,000.

On the other hand, Matovič had his self-employment licence active simultaneously with his parliamentary mandate for a mere 21 days, yet the result is the loss of his mandate, and a fine of €12,000.

"Government MPs are only looking for a way to reduce or cancel his fine... While he has been violating the law for nine years," Viskupič told SITA, adding that Matovič's mistake was a formality but Kubánek was, in all likelihood, really doing business.

Opposition: He should stay

The opposition criticised the attempts to rid Matovič of his mandate. The chair of the committee, Martin Poliačik of Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) said Matovič has not violated the law twice during the same election tenure. Thus, he should have received only a fine, as reported by Sme.

Smer MP Róbert Puci indicated that Matovič knew about his business licence being renewed and is only setting out to provoke with this case.

Matovič, however, reiterated that he did not earn a single euro as he actually did not do any business. He compared his case with that of Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák (Smer) and his dubious trade with businessman Ladislav Bašternák for which he has not been punished by the committee.

If Matovič loses his mandate, he may still turn to the Constitutional Court and sit in parliament until the court issues a ruling.

Read more on pg 5.

BUSINESS *in short***Eset closes in on its Silicon Valley**

THE SOFTWARE company Eset has won the public tender to purchase the premises of a former military hospital in Bratislava's borough Patrónka. The purchase opens the way for its plans to build an R&D campus there.

Eset acquired the building after it made the highest offer of €26.2 million in an auction with two other bidders on April 27. The disappointed bidders were the Forespo Reality 10 company close to the J&T financial group and the Forest Hill Company in which the tycoon František Hodorovský has an interest.

The final sum is almost six million euros less than the value of the entire property, which expert opinion estimates at €32 million.

Eset, number five in the

world in the production of security solutions for computers and other devices and number one in the EU, currently has its headquarters in the Aupark Tower across the Danube river from Bratislava's Old Town.

While the company has been growing and acquiring new talent, it sees the premises of the former hospital as suitable for building a new research and development campus.

When designing a new R&D centre, architects from the a11 atelier were inspired by the headquarters of the Apple company in Silicon Valley. Yet the project is only in its preliminary stage.

Eset is prepared to invest as much as €100 million into the new campus, plus the money invested in the purchase of the land.

Slovak flying car nearing reality

THE SLOVAK engineering company AeroMobil unveiled on April 20 a new model of its flying car at the Top Marques Show car expo in Monaco. The car, whose wings can fold back and has a propeller on its rear, is powered by hybrid propulsion.

"Today is a transformative day for the future of travel as the launch of the AeroMobil means that everyday flying transportation will soon be a reality," said Juraj Vaculík, co-founder and CEO of AeroMobil when unveiling the car, accompanied by Prince Albert II of Monaco.

The company is ready to take pre-orders for the first, limited edition. The production of AeroMobil's first vehicle will be limited to a maximum of 500 units. The price per model will be between €1.2 million and €1.5 million depending on final customer specifications.

The vehicle is expected to go into full production in the coming years with the first vehicles complying with air and road regulations being made available to customers by 2020.

The vehicle is the fourth generation of the flying car developed by AeroMobil.

Before showcasing of the flying car in Monaco, its inventor, Štefan Klein, left the project. He ascribed his departure from the project as a logical outcome of the development over the past year and a half.

"Our opinions on development phases of the company differed diametrically," Klein told the Trend weekly, adding that in the phase when the company was growing the situation did not fulfil his expectations as the space for his contribution narrowed significantly. "As a designer I like more to work on prototypes, concepts or visions than to concentrate on preparation of production of the flying car."

Klein now holds only a minority share in AeroMobil as he sold most of his share to Patric Hessel, founder of c2i, a manufacturer of composite parts for the aerospace and automotive industries.

Hessel has invested €3 million into AeroMobil while his c2i is one of the key technology partners and component suppliers for AeroMobil.

Compiled by Spectator staff
from press reports

Coalition SNS seeks mandatory 13th salary

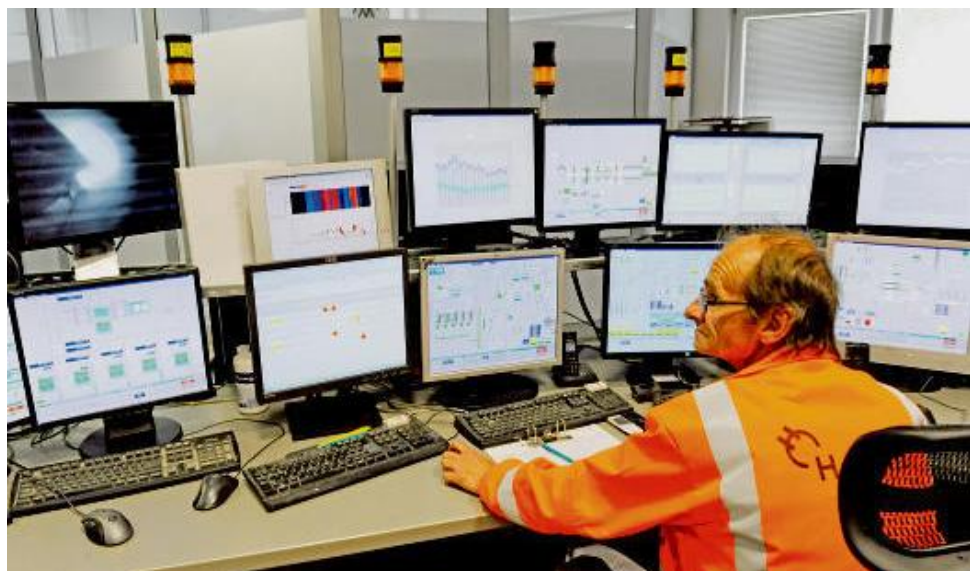
BY JANA LIPTÁKOVÁ
Spectator staff

PART of the ruling coalition, the Slovak National Party (SNS) wants to oblige companies in Slovakia to pay out a 13th salary to their employees. They see this as a way of enabling employees to enjoy the country's sound economic growth, but economic analysts perceive the idea as a populist one.

The business sector insists that stimulus such as the 13th salary should remain voluntary or it would lose its motivating effect. They also believe that although more than 70 percent of companies in Slovakia pay out some sort of a 13th salary, making this obligatory would result in speculation and hinder the growth of wages.

SNS chair Andrej Danko unveiled the idea at the party's congress in Sliač on April 8 saying that he wants to see Slovak citizens approaching their western counterparts in terms of salaries and benefits, as he does not see any meaning in the country's membership of the EU without this.

"Today SNS adopted a vision of a strong social-market economy where both employ-



More than 70 percent of companies in Slovakia pay out some sort of a 13th salary.

Photo: TASR

ees and employers would be satisfied," said Danko as cited by the TASR newswire. "The constitution declares that we have a social-market economy, and SNS is speaking about strengthening the social pillar."

Danko proposed that the 13th salary, i.e., usually the equivalent of one month's salary and paid in December around Christmas and also referred to as a Christmas bonus, could be exempt from income and payroll taxes. He would

like to see the compulsory 13th salary for all employees working for a company for at least one year introduced during the current electoral term.

"I'm fully aware of the reaction of entrepreneurs," said Danko. "That's why this motivational part is there, even featuring the possibility of absolute tax exemption."

Prime Minister Robert Fico has described the idea of the 13th salary as "inspiring" while the third coalition party, Most-Híd would instead prefer a sys-

temic solution in the form of a reduction in the compulsory sick leave insurance, for example.

13th salary yes, but not compulsory

The Business Alliance of Slovakia (PAS) conducted a survey among businesses to find out whether they pay out the 13th salary, and how they perceive the SNS' proposal.

See 13th on pg 9

PACKAGE: Proposals in pipeline

Continued from pg 1

The SNS proposes to make so-called 13th salaries (an annual bonus normally equivalent to one month's salary) compulsory, while Most-Híd is tabling an alternative package of measures that focus on income tax cuts.

Proposed changes

Fico proposes to speed up an already-planned increase in the monthly minimum wage. This currently stands at €435; the plan is to increase it to almost €500 next year and then to above €500 in 2019. The original plan was to have the minimum wage rise above €500 only in 2020.

Fico, noting that Slovakia has the largest proportion of people working night shifts in the EU (240,000 people in total), also proposes to increase the supplement for night work from 20 percent to 50 percent of the national minimum wage, i.e. from €0.50 per hour extra to €1.25 per hour. Such a surcharge would increase the annual remuneration of an average night worker by €500.

Supplements for weekend work are to be upped to 100 percent of the minimum wage, while those for working on state holidays should amount to 100 percent of the average wage of the employee in question.

Another measure to be introduced is so-called pre-retirement, which would apply to people who become jobless or wish to retire shortly before they reach the normal retirement age.

Also, a paid 10-day holiday for fathers of newborn babies should be en-

acted. Fico also wants a bonus for moving for work to be reintroduced and made more attractive than in previous iterations.

Coalition agreement

On May 4th, the coalition partners met and agreed on the social package. All three party heads, Fico, Andrej Danko of SNS and Béla Bugár of Most-Híd share the same opinion that when the country thrives, it is their duty to present solutions that will increase people's living standards, but only under strict fiscal discipline.

They will also meet during the second week in May with Finance Minister Peter Kažimír and Labour Minister Ján Richter (both Smer). Kažimír will bring a detailed analysis outlining the impacts of the proposed measures. Afterwards, they will assess the proposed measures from the viewpoint of feasibility and create one joint package of measures, said Fico.

Concrete legislative proposals should be submitted for the September parliamentary session for adoption, while most of the measures might become effective from the beginning of 2018.

Responses from the business sector

The business sector responded rather critically to the Fico's May Day package.

Employers have long complained about how the minimum wage is set in Slovakia. Their main problem is that the level is set annually only via a political decision, and there is no formula by which a regular increase is calculated.

"We require an agreement upon a mechanism that will be predictable and will not mean an annual quarrel," said Rastislav Machunka, vice-president of the Federation of Employers' Unions (AZZZ), as quoted by the Hospodárske Noviny economic daily.

Peter Kremský, executive director of the Business Alliance of Slovakia (PAS), proposes to bind increases in the minimum wage to economic indicators like average wages, inflation and labour productivity.

"Political increases in the minimum wage have devastating consequences on economically weak regions," Kremský told the Sme daily, adding that a high minimum wage may lead to the bankruptcy of small companies.

Kremský also accused the government of hypocrisy by tolerating employees in the public sector often receiving wages below the minimum, while at the same time pressuring private companies to pay higher minimum wages to their employees.

Higher pay for night, weekend and holiday work may cause major problems for companies at times of economic stress, warns Martin Hošták of the National Union of Employers (RÚZ).

"These may return to Slovakia after three or four years, and then it will be a big problem for employers," Hošták told the Pravda daily.

Businesses do not see any problem in banning social dumping, arguing that existing legislation already prevents this. They also insist that they hire foreign workers only because there is a lack of qualified labour in Slovakia.



AeroMobil is ready to take pre-orders.

Photo: AP/TASR

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: “If it should hurt one side more than the other, then it should be more painful for the UK, because they’ve made their own decision to leave.”

PM Robert Fico about Brexit

Where Fico ends

BY ZUZANA KEPPOVÁ
Spectator staff

THE PRIME minister does not like NGOs, we know that much. It was obviously not Viktor Orbán who convinced him to come up with the idea to publish the financing of NGOs. Smer has been repeatedly calling for some ostentatious transparency of the third sector.

For instance, when Deputy PM Peter Pellegrini utters in a discussion that a complaint came from a watchdog with a certain IT company in the background, the audience will be able to add the political links alone. Or when the prime minister noted that a certain anti-corruption organisation could – again through that IT company – support Andrej Kiska’s campaign.

Smer does not need to go to Orbán for advice, they already share the same view of what politics is. They deny the third sector and the media, or individuals – their own head. They always look for a central brain, the mover.

Moreover, they seek to

confront themselves with it using a simple formulation – we have won the election, so we have the mandate to make politics here.

Everyone else is doing it unauthorised, or with an interest to replace us.

If the civil society pushes for transparency – publishing contracts, order in tenders, a clearly stated final beneficiary – they want to push as well. But it should also be said that financing of NGOs can easily be looked up with a couple of clicks. If there are concerns about security, there are the respective bodies to deal with that.

It is true that funding from Visegrad, the EU, or Norway, is not the same as the usually much less exposed sources from the eastern neighbour with a moveable border. But the prime minister is unlikely trying to warn us about the threat of propaganda and undermining of the EU; he has had chances to do so before.

The issue of NGOs is, obviously, a juicy one for analysts. Yes, emerging NGOs can be perceived as part of yet another wave of ‘turbomodernisation’, like the few that this

region has already seen and absorbed before.

Yet criticising the time of transformation in this way may be interesting and useful for the self-awareness of the region. We can ask if it was not the modernisation expectations of the western countries that pushed the conservative and nationalist agenda to the margins as an unintended effect. And then the eastern power came to pick it up, dust it, and embrace it.

But this is a discussion that media, academia, and the public should lead and not let the ruling party politicise it. Because that brings a threat that it will embrace this issue as a tool to foster its power: We will rid you of the pest, we will sink the flagships of foreign interests, we will strengthen unity.

This whole Orbánisation leads to transferring the media into state hands – we also see those efforts here in Slovakia – and to weakening the critical power of the civil society.

So beware about where the classical Fico ends and where the piquant Orbán begins.

©Sme

Victim or clown?

IN ITS recent story about student-organised anti-corruption protests in Slovakia, the New York Times described opposition OĽaNO leader Igor Matovič as “a member of Slovakia’s Parliament whose small party was formed seven years ago to combat corruption”.

Leaving aside the fact that “small” OĽaNO won the third largest number of seats in last year’s election, that plucky image is not quite how most Slovaks would characterise the relentlessly self-publicising Matovič.

What no one can deny is that Matovič sure knows how to make a lot of noise.

The way that this previously unknown businessman, who used editorials in the advertising freesheets his firm distributed to Slovak households to catapult himself into national politics, illustrates this well enough. After securing the last four places – i.e. typically, the no-hopers’ slots – on the 150-candidate slate of the then-greenhorn Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) party, he used his weekly opinion pieces to get himself and three allies into parliament in 2010 based on preference votes – an unprecedented achievement. Those same four MPs, with Matovič the undoubted star, proceeded to found their own ‘movement’, which has remained a fixture on the Slovak political scene ever since – again, no mean achievement.

Over seven years, Matovič has inserted himself into nearly every controversy that has emerged in Slovak politics. For instance, has has accused the prime minister and his wife of having millions in a bank account in Belize – but then failed to provide any of the evidence he promised; and he has helped to destroy the political (and very possibly, nascent judicial) career

of one-time presidential contender Radoslav Procházka by secretly recording their conversations.

So to characterise Matovič as an “anti-corruption fighter” does not really do justice to this very colourful politician.

EDITORIAL



BY MICHAELA
TERENZANI
Spectator staff

But a politician he is, whatever he may claim as he stands proudly on the castle hill, against blue skies and the white parliament, in a smart black coat and trademark everyman jeans (as the New York Times chose to depict him).

He has certainly been tireless at pointing fingers at other politicians, from across the spectrum, and accusing them of corruption and lack of transparency. Just last week he and his party colleagues revealed that parliamentary officials have been opening, reading and withholding MPs’ mail, supposedly for security reasons. He blames the speaker, a key figure in the governing coalition.

In keeping with his rebellious image, Matovič now faces being only the second MP in modern Slovak history

to be stripped of his parliamentary mandate.

The previous ejectee, František Gaulieder, lost his seat in the 1990s in a move that was later ruled unlawful by the Constitutional Court but marked a significant moment in Slovakia’s Mečiar-era flirtation with authoritarian government.

Unfortunately for Matovič, his case is very different from Gaulieder’s. As one veteran of the Mečiar era, journalist Marián Leško, pointed out in an opinion piece for the Trend weekly, no one has helped put Matovič in this predicament more than Matovič himself. For some unfathomable reason, he made the mistake of having his business licence active while he was an MP – not once, but twice. Is that enough of a reason to expel him from parliament? Strictly speaking, it is – although no one seems to be arguing that he actually did any business while an MP. At the end of the day, it will be up to his fellow MPs to decide if he deserves leniency or not.

So now, after seven years of grandstanding, buffoonery, non-conformism, and generally acting the big-mouth, enfant terrible of Slovak politics, Matovič is facing what is basically unprecedented in Slovak politics. Smer, which has been building the case against him through the media – and employing underhand tactics involving police investigations and leaked tax documents to which it has privileged access – faces its own dilemma: should it force the expulsion from parliament of one of its noisiest critics (and in the process lend Matovič more fuel for his own self-stoked fire of victimhood), or make the whole issue go away more or less silently and deny Matovič another reason to point his accusing finger?

I am a foreigner and I eat...

BY ANCA DRAGU
Special to the Spectator

ABOUT a month ago in Košice I was listening to a high school history teacher explaining how her students discuss the Holocaust, visit concentration camps, read Anne Frank’s Diary as compulsory literature and are even asked to imagine how would they have behaved if they had lived back then.

She has been trying her best to encourage her students, among whom some sympathise with the far right party ĽSNS to “think with their own minds”. Chatting with a few students I came to realise that such a task is far more difficult than it seems. The students discussed the Holocaust and concentration camps during their classes but when asked about the most serious issues facing Slovakia today...well... forget about corruption, long-term unemployment, the ageing population or the quality of schools... “immigrants and Roma” was the “correct” answer but they could not really say why. Some hinted at information found on the internet. I soon realised that I was the first immigrant they had ever seen and spoken to, in the flesh.

Yes, given the relatively low number of foreigners living in Slovakia, locals lack direct experience with them and are easily influenced by “the internet” and political speeches but more history lessons in schools and trips to museums will not suddenly create generations of cosmopolite critical thinkers. History and Slovak literature textbooks are full of pieces about good natured Slovaks eating bryndza, playing the fujara, going to church and being oppressed (Hungarians and Czechs compete for the title of abuser-in-chief) during their entire history. With this mindset it’s easy for “opinion makers” whoever they may turn out to be, to replace “Prague” and “Budapest” with “Brussels” or “Berlin” when it suits them. How

can you be open to others when you grow up hearing how you should not trust your own neighbours?

How can you get to know other people when all you ask them is if they married a Slovak and what do they eat (typical food) plus an eventual bonus question on alcohol? I am sceptical that food has any real impact in changing the attitude towards foreigners. Far-right sympathisers eat kebabs but this does not stop them from bragging about how they fight against “the Islamisation of Slovakia” for example.

I have become allergic to the topic of “traditional dishes”. As part of the fjúžn festival a discussion on how some Slovak families have been helping asylum seekers in Slovakia was organised. I was really looking forward to it, unfortunately even before letting the audience know the story of the main characters – the presenter burned with desire to ask about food. I stood up and left.

This in fact illustrates the main issue that I have, both as a foreigner and as a journalist, with similar events. Who are they for? Foreigners? Well, if they speak Slovak, because most of the events are in Slovak only and are usually boycotted by officials in charge of those institutions that should be more helpful to foreigners – let’s put it politely. These include the legendary Foreigner’s Police, Labour and Education Ministries. Are these events for Slovaks? Then why are they in Bratislava and not in the regions of Slovakia which do not have foreign students, athletes or multinational companies? Where those sincerely touched by Anne Frank’s Diary go and vote for extremists and all sorts of experimental populists who promise to protect “us” against “the others”, whatever those “others” turn out to be...or eat.

Anca Dragu is a journalist with Radio Slovakia International, which is available in Bratislava in English on 98.9 FM at 18:30 and 20:30 and at www.rsi.sk. The opinions expressed in this blog are her own.

THE SLOVAK
SPECTATOR

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The Slovak Spectator is an independent newspaper published by The Rock, s.r.o. Subscriptions: inquiries should be made to The Slovak Spectator's business office at (+421-2) 55 233 300. Printing: Petit Press s.r.o. Distribution: Intexpress Slovakia s.r.o., Mediaprint-kgp s.r.o., Slovenská pošta a.s. Mail Distribution: ADČP RE 55, EV 544/08, © 2015 The Rock, s.r.o. All rights reserved. Any reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited by law. The authors of articles published in this issue, represented by the publisher, reserve the right to give their approval for reproducing and public transmission of articles marked ©The Slovak Spectator, as well as for the public circulation of reproductions of these articles, in compliance with the 3rd article and 1st paragraph of the Copyright Law. Media monitoring is provided by Kantar Media, Slovakia Online and Sita with the approval of the publisher. Advertising material contained herein is the responsibility of the advertiser and is not a written or implied sponsorship, endorsement or investigation of such commercial enterprises or ventures by The Slovak Spectator or The Rock s.r.o. ISSN 1335-9840. Address: The Rock, s.r.o., Lazaretská 12, 800 08 Bratislava. IČO: 313 862 337.

BUSINESS FOCUS

HUMAN RESOURCES

Next issue:
TOURISMFathers also take care
of their childrenBY RADKA
MINARECHOVÁ
Spectator staff

"IT WAS really a great time which cannot be bought or acquired in any other way," says Peter Biely from Pezinok, who works in marketing, about the time he spent with his son on maternity leave.

Though Slovakia has no official "paternity leave", its legislation allows men to stay home with their child for 28 weeks until the child reaches three years old, while receiving the maternity benefit. The official statistics of the state-run social insurer Sociálna poisťovňa suggest that the number of men using this possibility is increasing, though former labour minister Jozef Mihál, who introduced this change, claims the number would be even higher if the awareness was better.

And while the Labour Ministry first claimed that the current rules are sufficient, Prime Minister Robert Fico introduced planned changes to the Labour Code on May 1, part of which includes the introduction of paternity leave for men. Not everyone, however, considers the proposal a sufficient solution.

Interest is growing

The amendment to the law



An increasing number of men are staying home with their children.

Photo: Sme

on social insurance, allowing men to draw maternity benefits, came into force in 2011, initiated by Mihál, who now serves as non-affiliated MP.

"Men had to pay sickness insurance just as women but unlike them, they could not draw the maternity benefits," Mihál told The Slovak Spectator, when explaining the main reason for the change.

While in 2012 Sociálna poisťovňa registered only 208 men drawing maternity benefits, in 2016 it was 3,076. In the end of February 2017, altogether 1,707 men drew the benefits.

One of the reasons for the growing interest of men in this

kind of leave is the increasing sum provided in the form of the maternity benefit, says Michal Stuška, spokesperson for the Labour Ministry.

Currently, the maternity benefit equals 70 percent of the salary, but it increases to 75 percent as of May. This means that people drawing the benefits will receive nearly all of their net salary.

"The fathers thus have a good opportunity to stay at home with their child for a relatively long time, while the family will not see a considerable loss of income as if the father received only parental allowance," Stuška told The

Slovak Spectator. The parental allowance currently amounts to €203.20, but increases by €10 as of May 2017.

Another positive feature is flexibility as men can decide to draw the benefits after the women stop drawing them, Stuška added.

Money is not
the main reason

The number of men on maternity leave might have been even higher if the awareness about this possibility was better, Mihál opines.

See LEAVE pg 9

Dual education still ironing out the bugs

BY ERIK RÉDLI
Special to the Spectator

A SHORTAGE of qualified workforce is one of the main negatives of the Slovak labour market. Companies are trying to solve this problem by training their own staff in dual education programmes.

"One of the strategic problems of the further development of the automotive industry is the lack of qualified labour," Juraj Sinay, president of the Association of Automotive Industry (ZAP), said at a press conference in February 2017.

Dual education controls the fluctuation on the job market. It also lowers the costs of employers for recruitment and requalification as they can prepare employees according to the needs of a particular industry.

The number of companies offering dual education options is increasing each year. A student signs a contract with an employer, who has an agreement on dual

education with a school. The student receives theoretical education at the school and practical training at the employer.

"One of the main benefits is the fact that the student takes part in the practical training directly in the operation at the employer," said Martina Pavliková, spokesperson of the state rail infrastructure operator Železnice SR (ŽSR).

Based on the statistics of the Education Ministry, the largest number of student contracts for the school term 2016/2017 was signed in machinery and metal processing (636), electro technologies (210), and economics and organisation, trade and services (118).

Geographically, the largest number of students involved in dual education is in Žilina Region (297), followed by Trenčín Region (194), Bratislava Region (171) and Nitra Region (168). The lowest number is in Prešov Region, with only 50 contracts.

"In Slovakia, the dual system of education is presented only in connection with manual occupations," said Július

Hron, chairperson of the education commission of ZAP, adding that the trend should move to other industries as well.

Driven by the automotive

The most active employer in dual education in Slovakia is currently Volkswagen Slovakia, which proves the dominance of the automotive industry. The company views the system of dual education positively as it enables companies to acquire qualified workers immediately upon completing their studies.

"We support it [dual education] also from the perspective of the lack of a qualified workforce in Slovakia," said Lucia Kovarovič-Makayová, spokesperson of Volkswagen Slovakia.

In September 2016 Volkswagen Slovakia, together with partners Matador, Siemens and Bratislava Region, opened the Dual Academy in Bratislava.

See DUAL pg 8

Institutions and organisations
in the labour market

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
www.employment.gov.sk
Minister: Ján Richter

Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport
www.minedu.sk
Minister: Peter Plavčan

State Institute of Vocational Education (ŠIOV)
www.siov.sk

Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (ÚPSVaR)
www.upsvar.sk

Employment Institute
www.iz.sk

Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI)
www.celsi.sk

Compiled by Spectator staff

FOCUS short

People endangered by poverty

ALTOGETHER 12.7 percent of Slovaks were threatened by poverty last year. In absolute numbers, this accounts for 670,000 people. Compared with 2015, the number increased 0.4 percentage points, or 30,000 people, according to the EU SILC 2016 report published by the Statistics Office.

The poverty level for a one-member household in Slovakia is set at €4,171 a year, or nearly €348 a month. In 2015, the level was €4,158 a year, the SITA newswire reported.

The groups most threatened with poverty last year were the unemployed. This was the case of 48 percent of the total number of jobless, which is an increase by 2.5 percentage points year-on-year, said Ľudmila Ivančíková of the Statistics Office.

Regarding the number of household members, the most endangered are those with three and more dependent children (34.8 per-

cent) and single parents with at least one child (33.6 percent). The risk of poverty for households with three and more children increased 1.9 percentage points compared with 2015.

Prešov Region registered the highest share of people endangered by poverty last year: 18.6 percent of the total number of its inhabitants. It was followed by Banská Bystrica Region (15.3 percent), Nitra Region (14.6 percent), Žilina Region (14.1 percent), and Košice Region (13.8 percent). The best situation was in Bratislava Region (5.4 percent), Trenčín Region (7.8 percent), and Trnava Region (9 percent), SITA reported.

Except for Slovakia, only three EU countries have already provided the data about the risk of poverty for their inhabitants. In Latvia, 21.8 percent of the total population is endangered, while in Hungary it is 14.5 percent and in Finland 11.6 percent.

Compiled by Spectator staff



The threat of poverty grew in 2016.

Photo: Sme

Robots are coming to Slovak industry

BY PETER ADAMOVSKÝ
Spectator staff

THE FOURTH industrial revolution, now evolving around the world, brings not only new technological discoveries and inventions but also changes in human society. One of those changes culminates in crowding out manpower from traditional, manual work to knowledge-oriented jobs.

By now, automation and robotisation of less-qualified and assembly activities have begun to gather a significant share in the global labour market. Though countries like India, China, Africa or even central European countries may continue to absorb more jobs from companies coming from the west, experts consider robots as future job takers.

"The world production process has already integrated robots and the tendency is to automatise more," Mariana Turanová, managing partner at the TARGET Executive



Companies increasingly use robots.

Photo: Sme

Search headhunting company, told The Slovak Spectator.

So far small changes

The biggest Slovak job-search portal Profesia.sk, however, has not registered changes in replacing people with robots in Slovakia but rather the continuing growth of demand in all sectors. Investments in robotics concern

particularly the automotive and electronics industries where turn-out, or application of robots, is not so rapid, said Martin Menšík of Profesia.sk.

"Each position is more likely to move to other professions, such as toolmaker, setter, programmer or mechatronic," Menšík told The Slovak Spectator.

Slovakia currently protects itself via low labour costs,

however, in the near future robots may embrace jobs in every country with a high degree of assembly operations, according to Martin Malo, CEO of the Slovak and Czech divisions of Trenkwalder recruitment agency, listing as in danger all the countries of the Visegrad Group (V4), Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia.

Mainly automotive

The automation would liquidate repetitive professions in Slovakia such as salespeople, auxiliary construction workers, drivers, and jobs in the automotive industry. While the employment in automotive is insignificant, the sector is important for production and export, as it forms 1-2 percent of world car production, according to Michal Páleník of the non-governmental Employment Institute.

"Though the sector registered the replacement of 'dirty' positions like handling machines, the number of 'clean' positions is significantly lower," Páleník told The Slovak Spectator.

Currently, the Slovak economy consists of industry sectors with more than 70 percent of industry robot installations in the world, according to a study by the Educational Policy Institute (IEP) which runs under the Education Ministry.

Other jobs at risk

Though the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) foresees extinction of 11 percent and changes to 35 percent of jobs in Slovakia over the next 10-20 years, Turanová stressed the threat mainly in service jobs like elderly personal care and catering, in genomics like satellite navigated plant fertilisation and watering, in cyber security, and the big data industry.

In addition, automation may replace jobs at filling stations, hotel reception and jobs in product completion and quality control, according to Malo.

While Malo pointed to possibly unaffected jobs with higher added value and development, Turanová also sees the human factor as essential in headhunting where many companies already use recruitment software and conduct interviews via e-tools. Every hiring manager has got a resume that is technically precise and matched to the requirements, she said.

"However, once they begin to talk with the candidate, they find him unsuitable," Turanová said.

FOCUS shorts

Employers struggle to find workers

EVEN though more than 200,000 people can theoretically take a job immediately, there are some positions that remain empty. The reasons for this can be attributed to the employment of some jobless being thwarted by their poor education, the ineffective support of regions and barriers to doing business, according to the analysis published by the Business Alliance of Slovakia (PAS) in late March.

The unemployment rate in Slovakia has been dropping over the past few years, according to PAS. In February 2017, for example, the registered jobless rate amounted to 8.29 percent. The labour offices registered altogether 267,219 jobseekers, of whom 228,665 were ready to take jobs immediately. On the other hand, the state registered only about 48,500 vacant positions, the TASR newswire reported.

Companies, however, often struggle to find new people. Though they invest in and expand their production and create new jobs, there are no people to fill them.

"It is a very serious and growing problem, one of the barriers to business-making and economic growth in Slovakia," said Peter Kremšký, executive director of PAS, as quoted by TASR.

Moreover, PAS considers the unemployment statistics inaccurate as they do not in-

clude some excluded communities, particularly Roma. If they did, the number of the jobless would be by some 100,000 higher.

PAS therefore suggests that the government should start measuring the unemployment in Slovakia more generally and also include people who are currently excluded, said author of the analysis Jozef Hajko, as reported by TASR.

One of the main reasons of the joblessness is the inappropriate structure of schools as the education of graduates does not meet the labour market demands. The problem is also posed by regional differences. The labour opportunities and salaries drop towards the more eastern regions, while the jobless rate increases. This also has links to migration for work, Hajko said.

The employers also struggle with a high payroll tax burden, particularly regarding low-income positions. PAS thus recommends reducing the burden by introducing deductions from social payroll levies. The association also criticises the quick increase in the minimum wage which currently represents 43 percent of the average wage, and warns of the threat of the so-called technological unemployment caused by the robotisation and digitalisation in production, TASR reported.

Science not interesting for girls

THE INTEREST of girls at primary schools to study mathematics, physics, chemistry, natural or information sciences declines steeply after they turn 12.

This stems from a European survey carried out by the company Microsoft in 11 countries among 11,500 schoolgirls aged 11-18. Its aim was to find out why fewer girls than boys decide to study science and technology when they are older, the SITA newswire reported.

Slovak girls become interested in the so-called STEM subjects only as 12-year-olds, which is one year later than is the European average. The more alarming fact, however, is that in the age when they decide on which secondary school to study at (13-16 years) their interest falls well below the European average, said Lenka Čábelová, communication manager of Microsoft in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Compared with the rest of Europe, the earliest age at which girls become interested in science and technologies is in Russia: age 10. In Poland, they become interested as 12-

year-olds, but their interest keeps increasing significantly when they turn 16 and never drops below the European average, SITA reported.

The government, teachers and parents in Slovakia, and also in Europe, have four-five years on average to divert the falling interest of children in STEM subjects during the ages of 12-16, according to Microsoft. Though their interest starts increasing again when they turn 16, it never returns to the same level as when they were 12.

"Girls don't see a sufficiently strong connection between these subjects and their everyday life, they lack the support of their parents and teachers, and also enough role models to find a job in this sphere in their future life," Čábelová said, as quoted by SITA.

One of the reasons why they lose interest in STEM subjects may also be the transition from the first to the second part of primary school education, the change in environment and teachers, and their teen years.

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DUAL: Training teaches students company culture

Continued from pg 6

"In the past we needed many welders; currently there is high demand for qualified workers who can operate the robots," said Kovarovič-Makayová.

More than two-thirds of the education is practical training, including working directly in the Volkswagen manufacturing plant with the technologies.

The education is free and the company contributes to the accommodation, transport and food of the students.

"They can also get a company scholarship, bonuses for good work productivity and other benefits of dual education," specified Kovarovič-Makayová.

Upon graduation, the stu-

dents get a vocational diploma, a certificate of full secondary education – called maturita in Slovak – and an internationally valid certificate of expertise.

"They also have a job placement at the selected employer," said Kovarovič-Makayová.

Another carmaker, Kia Motors Slovakia, entered the first terms of dual education in 2016.

"We will continue the dual education system also for the 2017/2018 term, in cooperation with the technical school of mechanical engineering in Kysucké Nové Mesto," said Juraj Hammer from the department of training and education at Kia Motors.

Kia offers three study programmes: mechanical engi-

neering specialist, programmer of cutting and welding machines, and mechatronics engineer.

Know your employees

Dual education programmes are also available in food and service industries. Supermarket chain Lidl plans to open training programmes at eight schools in Slovakia as of September 2017. Moreover, about 20 out of the 128 Billa supermarkets in Slovakia are already certified for dual education.

"The interest in the retail sector is not high but it is improving with the cooperation of other employers," said Richard Havrila, HR manager of REWE group Slovakia that operates Billa supermarkets,

who sees dual education as an opportunity for personal development of the employees who train them. "Gradually, we will certify further operations every year and also be ready for accepting more students into the first grade."

Practical training at the employer provides the students with the company culture. This cuts the adaptation period when the students enter the work, which lowers the costs of business operations.

"A big advantage is also the acquisition of professional competence before actual completion of studies," said Pavliková of ZSR.

Tatry Mountain Resorts (TMR), operator of mountain resorts and provider of tourism services, is also preparing students in the dual education

programmes. Seven hotels from the TMR group have entered the scheme of dual education.

"It creates conditions for the further development of the company," Zuzana Fabianová, spokesperson of TMR, told The Slovak Spectator, adding that it is better prepared to react to the increasing requirements of the customers, which is a competitive advantage in this sector of business.

"TMR puts stress on building relationships with secondary schools and universities, so that it can effectively create sources of qualified and highly professional employees," said Fabianová.

Since September 2016, 18 students from the hotel school in Liptovský Mikuláš have been involved in the scheme of dual education at the com-

pany. In September 2017, the overall number of students will increase to 54, expanding the programme to the hotel school in Kežmarok as well.

"The students see how we work, they are confronted with the highest quality standards from the beginning and they have access to good equipment and the latest technologies in the industry," explained HR manager of TMR Marek Schwarz.

Employers consider the current dual education system a positive step towards interconnection of education and practical training in companies. But they criticise low participation of the state in the system.

To read the whole story, please go to www.spectator.sk.

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4.0: More men in women's professions?

Continued from pg 7

Lifelong education

Pink-collared future

Manual and less-qualified jobs that robots most endanger usually include male-dominated professions.

The trend of automation can, therefore, lead to a crowding out of men to the so-called pink-collared professions including those jobs in health-care, services, education and lower-paid positions in companies and offices such as assistants, receptionists and secretaries.

The transfer of men to more emotive, but less paid jobs has become the world trend, however, Slovak recruitment agencies have so far not recorded a significant shift in Slovakia, the Denník N daily reported.

Years of Robots

The Employment Institute expects that the trend will continue in the coming years, however, not in the form of jumps which would destroy entire professions. In public administration, robots could allow civil servants more time to do useful things, not just to shovel papers with a fork from pile to pile, said Páleník.

The future labour market should show the biggest interest in the skills that the technologies cannot yet replace, including creativity, analytical and social skills, according to Dávid Martinák of IEP. These are mainly managers, specialists and educational and professional staff in the education sector.

Mensík sees a future full of new jobs, for example, in the health-care field, that society does not yet know of. More automation may lead to exchange of work that people do not like for work in which they would find greater fulfilment, Mensík said.

New technologies are becoming more demanding on knowledge, hence the best prevention against ejection from the labour market is higher education and qualification, according to experts. The whole education system should adapt the automation trend, said Páleník.

For a better educational level in the society, Páleník proposes standards like type-writing as a mandatory subject at the primary education level, less emphasis on formal education and, on the contrary, lifelong education.

"It is unsustainable to make people think that school leaving examination means the end of their study, on the contrary it means the beginning," Páleník said.

Turanová suggests learning with technological devices, connection to practice and technical studies. Though no one can replace teachers, actors and masseurs quickly, people may study humanities and social sciences in combination with other disciplines which reflect the pulse of time.

Next steps

People should monitor the needs of the labour market and development and trends in their professions. If people see the demand for the knowledge of some programming language or technology, they can improve their knowledge through education, according to Mensík.

"People should get rid of the fear of robotisation and take it as an aid which unburdens them from repetitive and physically demanding work," Mensík said.

Companies must resolve the problem of demographics, hence how to teach the generation over age 45 to work with automatised operation, Mensík said.

FLOOD: Žilina Region stricken the most

Continued from pg 2

Warnings were issued for the Kysuce, Liptov, Orava and Upper Považie regions, as well as several districts in Trenčín, Banská Bystrica, and Prešov regions.

The centre of Čadca in Kysuce faced a critical situation when the surface of the Kysuca River exceeded two metres. The problems mainly affected drivers who were travelling under the railway flyover near the hypermarket.

The inhabitants of Svrčinovec had a different problem when their local watercourse was diverted.

"At first, we had problems with sewage contamination and later the fouled water flooded the road and the fields," said Mayor Renáta Majchráková, as quoted by the Nasekysuce.sk website.

Dam had to be emptied

In the Liptov region the Demänovka River washed out part of the road and flooded several houses in the Demänovská Dolina valley. Several villages in Liptov battled flooded roads and high river levels that endangered their homes. The road was closed for about a day.

To prepare itself for heavy rains and melting snow, the Orava region emptied the Orava Dam, part of the hydropower station built on the confluence of the White and Black Orava.

"We started to adjust the water level in the dam by matching output with inflow to the dam, letting out 150 cubic metres per second," said Róbert Hok, head of the administra-



The road near Nové Mesto nad Váhom (Trenčín Region).

Photo: SITA



The situation was also bad in Kysuce.



Photos: TASR

tion of the upper Váh basin of the Slovak Water Management Company, on April 28 as quoted by the Nasaorava.sk website.

Meanwhile, the Brestovská Cave, the biggest and only accessible cave in the Orava region, had to be temporarily closed because of high water levels, as part of the route through the cave leads above a stream.

Counting damages

With receding water levels, the situation has calmed down.

When The Slovak Spectator went to print on May 4, a third-degree warning against floods was issued for one district in Košice Region, two-degree warning in two districts in the same region, and one-degree warnings for districts in Košice and Žilina regions due to a new wave of heavy rain.

In Žilina Region, altogether 211 family houses and 92 other buildings were flooded, while the water also damaged 19 kilometres of roads and 28 bridges. In total, 630 people were affected by the flood, the

TASR newswire reported. SHMÚ started publishing water level forecasts on May 1, using information collected from 42 stations.

The information is updated four times a day, while the forecasts predict the situation for the following 48 hours.

The basic data used in the model is the precipitation forecast whose accuracy influences the accuracy of the water level forecasts the most, SHMÚ informed.

With press reports

LEAVE: Men should stay home first 10 days

Continued from pg 6

According to him, men are able to work alongside the maternity leave, though only under some specific conditions, which can even increase the family budget.

Though money is a strong motivator, fathers addressed by The Slovak Spectator agree that it was more important for them to spend time with their children and take care of them.

"From the viewpoint of a father, it is great as I can spend a nice time with my child," says Tomáš Kubica, a lawyer from Trstená, adding he would recommend it to everybody who has the possibility to do so. "A person can build a relationship with the child and help the family, and also society."

Also Daniel Grigar from Bratislava, who previously worked as a manager at 3T - Tri Tvorivé Tvory theatre, praises the time he can spend on maternity leave with his son.

"A person needs to prepare for many changes to his life, but I certainly recommend it," he added.

Janka Debrecéniová from the non-governmental organisation Citizen, Democracy and Accountability, however says that the system should be more flexible and parallel than it is now. Currently, it works in a way that first, it is the mother who takes care of the child, and then after some time she can be exchanged by the father. During the first months, however, mothers acquire more skills in childcare and develops a deeper relationship with the child, which may be very hard for fathers to catch up with, she said.

Moreover, there is no relevant data on how the system actually works among families and how caring for the child and also the household is distributed, Debrecéniová added.

"The state should invest into making it possible for both parents to learn about and acquire relevant skills, share responsibilities equally, and spend everyday time together and enjoy parenthood," she told The Slovak Spectator, adding that the current model does not allow it.

EU seeks a binding principle

The European Union, meanwhile, is discussing the possibilities of introducing rules for paternity leave that would be binding for all of its member states.

The European Commission introduced a proposal suggesting at least 10-day leave for men after their child is born and the possibility to transfer all four months of parental leave

from one parent to the other, the ČTK newswire reported in late April.

Moreover, several EU countries also offer the paternity leave during the first weeks after a child is born. The Czech Republic, for example, has recently approved the proposal to introduce one-week paternity leave during which men will receive 70 percent of their salary.

Most recently, Fico introduced the planned changes to the Labour Code, proposing a 10-day paid paternity leave after the child is born. Thus men can receive the benefit within the first month after the child is born.

As for the payment, the government expects that men will receive a sum equivalent to 10 days of their average salary. The condition is that they have to live in one household with the mother of the child, regardless if they are married or not, the Sme daily reported.

Smer proposal not enough

There have been several proposals aimed at introducing the principle to the Slovak legislation. Back in 2015, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) came up with a proposal to allow men to draw the benefits for one week within the first month after childbirth. The change sought to improve the atmosphere in families and help women when they come back from maternity hospitals, which in the end improves the situation in the society, the party claimed, as reported by the SITA newswire. The parliament failed to approve the change, however.

Also Mihal together with other non-affiliated MPs Miroslav Beblavý and Simona Petrik submitted in mid-April 2017 a proposal to the parliament, introducing a two-week paternity leave after a child is born, with men receiving 75 percent of their salary.

"It is proven that paternity leave leads to higher engagement of fathers in childcare," reads the press release sent to the media.

The proposal will be discussed at the May parliamentary session, and Mihal hopes it will be approved.

Before Fico introduced the planned changes, Stuska told The Slovak Spectator that the ministry was not planning any changes in this field, calling the current system "flexible and motivating enough".

"Conversely, our system is also interesting for other EU countries as a model of equal parenthood and a non-discriminatory approach to childcare," Stuska said.

To read the whole story, please go to www.spectator.sk.

13TH: Firms want flexible benefits

Continued from pg 4

The survey showed that out of 177 participating companies, as much as 70.6 percent pay a complete (33.9 percent) or partial (36.7 percent) 13th salary.

"The motivation for pay-

ment of the 13th salary is especially good economic results of companies," said Peter Kremšký, executive director of PAS, adding that more than one third of companies pay the 13th salaries only when they perform well. "Another large group of companies rewards employees with the aim to motivate them to work better; eventually it seeks to draw new workers."

The survey showed that if the government introduced the compulsory 13th salary exempt of income and payroll taxes, more than one third of companies would halt ordinary increases in wages and would transfer them into annual benefits. Some companies would even reduce wages in order to accumulate money for the compulsory 13th salaries.

In case the 13th salary would be exempt from income and payroll taxes, but its payment would be not obligatory, almost 40 percent of companies would pay it at the current amount. Thus, employees would get more as they would also receive money normally paid to the state and insurance

companies in the form of income and payroll taxes.

"Another, very similar group of employers would speculate," said Kremšký, adding that they would try to maximise the portion of monthly salaries going into the 13th salary to save on income and payroll taxes. "But this can be easily prevented by capping the 13th salary at the average monthly wage."

More than half of the surveyed companies opined that making the 13th salary compulsory would harm the Slovak economy and see it as a populist proposal.

"They especially complain about the loss of flexibility when rewarding their employees - they would no longer be able to appraise more quality work or exceptional results when all employees would obligatorily receive the 13th salary," said Kremšký.

Compulsory in Spain

When introducing the idea of the compulsory 13th salary, Danko cited Spain as a country where it is compulsory.

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New Drama brings God (and Gott) to stage

BY ZUZANA VILIKOVSKÁ
Spectator staff

FOCUS Israel and renowned Norwegian playwright Jon Fosse are giving a masterclass on the creation of dramatic text at the festival-competition offering a mélange of the best and most recent stagings around Slovakia this year.

“There has been a rise in Slovak drama and also in new dramatic forms in the 13 years of the festival,” head of both New Drama and the organising Theatre Institute, Vladislava Fekete, said at a press conference. “And the festival is... the umbrella under which all our events and projects of the institute are concentrated and condensed – and presented to all those who are interested in new trends.”

New Drama (Nová Dráma) is unique among Slovak theatre events, in that it presents a selection of pieces premiered in the past year in domestic theatres, with English subtitles, plus one focus on a foreign country and its theatre production, with a foreign patron as a guest. Part of the event is a competition of young playwrights, a theatology conference – this time exploring the immersive theatre



Honey and Dust: Beauty and Filth

Photo: M. Fabian

– a photo-exhibition, and more.

After a year, the core performances return to the City Theatre of P. O. Hviezdoslav in downtown Bratislava, but the pieces will be staged between May 9 and 13 (also in other venues).

Apart from the variety of venues there is also a variety of theatres presented, from classical “brick-and-mortar” ones like SND, Aréna, the Martin, Nitra, Prešov and Žilina ones, to independent ones like the Honey and Dust grouping, Peter Mankovecký Theatre or the performance by Tomáš Procházka & Co., representing the immersive theatre.

The last performance is

also the issue of the international expert conference called Contemporary Drama and Performative Space: From Playwriting to Immersive Theatre.

The pieces representing contemporary drama tell us a lot about the state of society and the world in general, Fekete said, adding that again, the themes present in New Drama touch on the sore points and issues of Slovakia and its society, posing questions and phrasing the problems but sometimes also suggesting ideas for improvement. Theatre-makers are mediators and bridges between art and society, the head of the festival stressed. Once again, the issues in recent dra-

Foreign focus brings a hot issue, too

The play “The Admission” by Motti Lerner, dealing with the coexistence of Palestinians and Jews, takes place in Haifa in 1988 and draws from real life (from the occupation of Tantura by Israeli units in May 1948). The story of a family shows the conditions that led to reviving a long-suppressed trauma. The piece initially could not be staged in Israel, and so its world premiere was in 2014 at the J Theatre in Washington, D.C. Ultimately, the Jaffa Theatre in Tel Aviv decided to stage it and thus, “The Admission” had its Israeli premiere in September 2016. It will have both English and Slovak subtitles in Bratislava.

All the pieces performed at the festival have English subtitles, and the accompanying events are either in English, or translated.

Museums open at night again

GETTING a glimpse backstage, a chance to see sites normally closed to the public, or wandering a museum late at night – this is the bait dangled by the Night of Museums, in 2017.

The annual, Europe-wide event falls on May 20 this year, and in Slovakia, it will include not just the museums and galleries in Bratislava but also those in other cities and towns around the country.

Not just the big nationwide state institutions like the Slovak National Museum or the Slovak National Gallery but also the private ones, the regional ones and also some smaller, specialised venues will stay open longer on the Saturday closest to the International Day of Museums, May 18, and invite visitors to try something

new or discover some otherwise undisclosed phenomena.

The activities on this day – usually lasting until midnight – are oriented towards things hidden from the public during the rest of the year, the muzeum.sk website wrote. This helps the public to better understand the importance of museums in the protection and conservation of cultural and natural heritage.

From workshops and concerts, through staged tours, film screenings, lectures, discussions and performances and even the opening of the doors of some closed venues, May 20 offers something for everyone.

For a more detailed programme please check later on The Slovak Spectator website.

Slovak shortlisted for Sony Awards

ANDREJ Kiripolský was shortlisted among the top 10 contestants of the 2017 Sony World Photography Awards in February.

In the Overall Youth category, his entry “Painless Beauty” was one of the ten best, although his name did not resound when the winners were announced on April 20. Kiripolský, a 16-year old student, originally from Bystrica, is now attending a school in Trenčín, informed the organisers.

Two other Slovak photographers – František Dulík in the Wildlife category and

Dušan Chorvát in the Enhanced category also placed in the top 50 of their Open categories.

This year, over 227,000 images from 183 countries were submitted to the Sony World Photography Awards. In total, 49 nationalities are represented on the Professional Open, Youth and Student Focus shortlist, with a further 11 nationalities commended. The works of all shortlisted photographers are on display in London until May 7.

Compiled by Spectator staff

A profitable craft

THE FIRST written mentions of butchers in the territory of Slovakia date back to the 13th century. However, this does not mean that meat had not been processed here earlier. Before butchers appeared, meat was processed in family households, and this self-sufficiency remained for a long time, especially in the countryside. In towns and cities, butchery was established quite quickly as a distinctive profession.

During the 15th century, butchers started to also deal with livestock, which elevated them to the more well-off classes of craftsmen. The craft was profitable and butchers’ guilds mushroomed; initially mostly in mining towns full of miners who were always hungry.

The promised



land for stock traders used to be the region of Spiš. In 1770, for example, there were only 21 stock traders in Bratislava, but there were 27 of them in Kežmarok, and in Levoča 30.

The butchers in Spišské Podhradie were famous as masters of smoking meat. Their Spišské párky / Zips Frankfurters, well-known even today, were sought-after in the whole of Great Hungary and were also exported.

In this photo from the 1920s, we see a butcher from the Small Carpathian town of Modra at work. Behind the meat chunks hung on the hook, owners of the late pig pose proudly.

By Branislav Chovan

HISTORY TALKS

Western Slovakia

Trnava

■ **ORGAN:** Trnava Musical Spring 2017 – The festival of classical music continues with the recital of baroque music by Italian organist, Christian Tarabbia, on the oldest organ in Trnava, built in 1788 by Valentin Arnold.

Starts: May 13, 20:00; St Nicolas Basilica. More info: www.re-giontirnava.sk/en/events/calendar.

Central Slovakia

Žilina

■ **THEATRE/CHILDREN:** Puppetry Žilina / Bábková Žilina 2017 – The 5th year of the festival of Slovak puppet theatres brings 20 performances from classical and independent theatres, including the Slovak wandering Teatro Tatro and the Polish Walny-Teatr, as well as puppetry students, in the local Puppet Theatre, Labyrint club, Stanica Žilina Záriečie, at Mariánske Square and Budatín park outdoors.

Starts: May 17-19, different venues around Žilina. More info: www.bdz.sk.

Eastern Slovakia

Košice

■ **CLASSICAL MUSIC:** In Cordis – The United String Historical; Nicola Matteis and the Music between Naples and London in the 2nd Half of the 17th Cen-

EVENTS COUNTRY WIDE



CONCERT for All Those Who Helped with the Synagogue Renovation, featuring a composition containing the Names of “The Immortals”, is an event celebrating the functioning of the **New Synagogue in Žilina** (although not fully completed yet) will offer a musical composition by Marek Piaček that includes the names of all the contributors, donors and volunteers who have helped over the past six years. The male choir, the Octet Singers will perform – all the 3,000 names – as conducted by Jozef Chabroň on May 12 in the New Synagogue, J. M. Hurbanova 220/11. Admission is voluntary (bookings necessary, due to capacity, at info@novasynagoga.sk).

Photo: Peter Hapčo

tury – The historically true interpretation of baroque music at this concert – part of the Košice Musical Spring 2017 – will be led by Slovak Miloš Valent and Czech Marek Štryncl. The performers include Lucie Rozsnyó – vocals, Miloš Valent – baroque violin, Marek Štryncl – baroque cello,

Kateřina Ghannudi – baroque harp, Miloslav Študent, archlute.

Starts: May 9, 19:00; Seminar Church, Hlavná 81. Admission: €4-€8. More info: www.sfk.sk.

By Zuzana Viliková

Pisztory palace gets new look

Restoration of the palace will continue

BY JANA LIPTÁKOVÁ
Spectator staff

THE PISZTORY palace, built by a pharmacist in the late 19th century close to the current Presidential palace, is getting a fresh revamp. Bratislava's borough of Old Town has just completed the first phase of its thorough reconstruction. In two years the palace got a new roof, plaster on its facades and a heating boiler, while its original doors and wooden windows were also restored.

"We want the Pistory palace to turn into a full-fledged, viable cultural and social centre not only for residents of the Old Town but for the visitors of Bratislava," Old Town Mayor Radoslav Števíčik said on April 24 on the occasion of completion of the so-far reconstruction works.

The Old Town wants the palace to serve especially for cultural and representative events, for example, weddings, concerts, theatre performances, receptions, lectures or exhibitions.

The so-far completed works cost more than €666,000. Most of this sum was covered from the EEA and Norway Grants, known as Norwegian funds in Slovakia. These involve funds from Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. The Norwegian funds and a small contribution from Slovakia's state budget comprised 85 percent of funding. The Old Town contributed the rest, almost €100,000.

Norwegian Ambassador Inge Magistat expressed pleasure that the Piszatory palace was restored thanks in part to Norwegian funds.

"With support from the EEA and Norway grants the Piszatory Palace in Bratislava has been restored, and new life



The Piszatory palace has a new roof and refinished facade.

Photo: Sme

and activity is now breathed into the Palace," said Ambassador Magistat.

Restoration of this palace is one of 20 important cultural heritage projects in Slovakia co-financed from the Norwegian funds.

What next

The Old Town now wants to continue with the restoration of the palace.

Out of the original features craftsmen preserved the metal forged gates, staircases and balustrades, crystal lustres, mosaic terrazzo floors, rich stucco decorations in the rooms and gilded frescoes on the ceilings. Yet, the interior is still in need of restoration.

Števíčik estimates the costs for restoration of rooms, lobbies, the hall and staircases at between €1 million and €2 million.

The Old City council has already addressed the Conservation and Restoration Department at the Academy of Fine Art and Design in Bratis-

lava as well as the Construction Faculty of the Slovak Technical University in Bratislava; both of which promised to participate.

The project for revitalisation of the courtyard is already prepared. Within it the Old Town wants to revitalise the garden which is, due to nearby construction, much smaller than it used to be. But the palace also needs to dehumidify its cellars.

Estimates of costs for revitalisation of the courtyard are around €300,000. The Old Town does not have such an amount in its coffers for such a purpose and thus it may again apply for Norwegian funds. But Števíčik does not exclude any other sources of financing like grants or the Culture Ministry.

History of the palace

Only few buildings in Bratislava show how knotty the history of Slovakia is.

It was Felix Piszatory, a pharmacist of Jewish origin, who built the palace in the ec-

lectic style in the 1890s at a city boulevard that was just being built at that time.

Aside from this place, Piszatory also owned the historical house with the Red Crayfish Pharmacy, which now houses a museum of pharmacy, in the Old Town.

Part of the palace's premises was a garden stretching up to what is today the Slávin monument. Piszatory grew herbs there for his medicaments.

Piszatory, however, did not live long enough to see the palace completed, as he died in 1891. Afterwards, the palace belonged to his widow Ida Piszatoryová, based on findings of historian Štefan Holčík. What happened with the palace after her death is not clear as the pair did not have any children. But during the Second World War it was the seat of the embassy of Nazi Germany. It was exactly at this place that decisions were made about transports of Slovak Jews, or the way to suppress the Slovak National Uprising.

After the war the palace was nationalised and fell under state ownership. Then the Museum of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was launched in 1952. In recent times, a slightly larger-than-life statue recalled this part of the history of the palace.

The building became a protected national cultural monument in 1963.

After the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the totalitarian communist regime in 1989, the museum lost justification for its existence and part of the premises was used by the House of Foreign Slovaks. This organisation was the last tenant in the palace for numerous years. Afterwards, the building stood vacant for 12 years and in disrepair, as the Old City did not have the money for its reconstruction.

New life of the palace

The situation changed in 2012 when civic activists from the non-governmental organisation Via Cultura launched by actress and politician Magda Vášáryová decided to return life to this historical edifice.

They removed 15 large containers of garbage from the palace, wild greenery from the courtyard and have planted herbs to mark the original owner.

In recent years the palace has been experiencing a rich cultural life. Its left wing houses community theatres Divadlo bez Domova, Equiteatro, and Len Tak Tak Divadlo.

In the underground floor of the right wing, there is a cinema from the 1950s, Kino Film Europe. It was launched in 2013 and focuses on award winning European films.

The ground floor and the upper floor of the right wing serve for holding various festivals, concerts, exhibitions, receptions and banquets. These are also suitable for weddings ceremonies.

EVENTS IN BRATISLAVA

MUSIC

■ **CONCERT:** Europe Day – Slovak bands Korben Dallas, Puding Pani Elvisovej, the Tolstoys and more will play to mark the official date of the foundation of the EU. The event also includes various performances and speeches held in Slovak and other European languages.

Starts: May 9, 10:00; Main Square. Admission: free. More info: www.citylife.sk.

■ **CONCERT:** Parov Stelar – The Austrian musician known as the founder of electro swing gives a gig during his Burning Spider tour.

Starts: May 12, 19:00; Aegon Arena, Prikopova 6. Admission: €39. More info: www.ticketportal.sk.

EVENTS

■ **FESTIVAL:** Cirkul'art – The international festival of contemporary theatre and circus features ensembles from around the world.

Starts: May 5-Jun 4; Various places. Admission: depends on the performance. More info: www.cirkulart.sk.

■ **LITERATURE:** John Boyne – The Irish novelist and author of the famous book, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* comes to Bratislava to meet its readers.

Starts: May 13, 18:00; Martinus, Obchodná 26. Admission: free. More info: www.slovart.sk.

EXHIBITIONS

■ **EXHIBITION:** Take a Seat – The exhibition presents retro chairs created by famous Slovak designers from the 50's to the 80's redesigned by students of The Atelier of Textile Production.

Open: Mon-Fri 12:00-18:00 until Jul 7; Design studio ULUV, Dobrovičova 13. Admission: free. More info: www.uluv.sk.

■ **EXHIBITION:** Works from Bielsko-Biala – The exhibition presents works by members of the association based in Bielsko-Biala in southern Poland.

Open: Mon-Thu 9:00-17:00, Fri 9:00-15:00 until May 21. The Polish Institute, Square SNP 27. Admission: free. More info: www.polinst.sk.

HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR

■ **CONCERT:** Andrea Bocelli – One of the greatest tenors, Italian Andrea Bocelli performs.

Starts: Nov 19, 19:30; Winter Arena of Ondrej Nepela, Odbojárov 9. Admission: from €99. More info: www.ticketportal.sk.

For more concerts and opera and ballet performances go to www.snd.sk and www.filharmonia.sk. For more exhibitions go to www.sng.sk or www.gmb.sk.

Compiled by Spectator staff

For more tips for events please go to www.spectator.sk.

Bratislava card offers more

THE BRATISLAVA tourist card, Bratislava CARD, has extended its offers for attractions and discounts to the whole Bratislava Region. Local as well as foreign tourists can now use it to enjoy more than 120 discounts, free sightseeing tours of Bratislava in eight languages, free entry to city galleries and museums and free travel via integrated transport across the whole Bratislava region. This is the most extensive offer in the entire history of this card and the aim is to improve offers for tourists and inspire them to stay here longer.

"In this way we are meeting our goal which is to extend the stays of tourists which will positively reflect in a higher collection of taxes on accommoda-

tion," said Bratislava Mayor Ivo Nesrovnal when introducing the new edition of the card for the season 2017/2018 on April 25.

The goal of Bratislava city council, the Bratislava Tourist Board (BTB), the Bratislava Self-governing Region (BSK) and other participating organisations is not only to get people into the capital but also to other parts of the Bratislava region, such as Senec, the Small Carpathians mountains or the region of Záhorie.

The Bratislava tourist card has been on the market for 11 years. Last year's upgraded edition brought a 30-percent increase in sales and an increased interest from possible partners in cooperation. Thanks to this as many as 72 subjects from the

public, state and business sectors have created a joint offer for the tourist season of 2017/2018.

This year the Bratislava Self-governing Region also joined the scheme when it extended free public transport for card holders to the whole region.

"Thus tourists can see beautiful and interesting places not only in Bratislava but also in its vicinity," said BSK governor Pavol Frešo.

There are available three variants of the card – for one, two or three days costing €15, €17 and €19, respectively. People can buy it in tourist information centres but also online via the website www.visitbratislava.com.

Compiled by Spectator staff



The 2017/18 card offers free transport, tours and more. Photo: TASR

For exercises linked to the Spectator College programme please visit www.spectator.sk

SPECTATOR COLLEGE

Lesson 18
Hobbies, Leisure and Lifestyle

The Spectator College is a programme designed to support the study and teaching of English in Slovakia, as well as to inspire interest in important public issues among young people. The project was created by The Slovak Spectator in cooperation with its exclusive partner – the Leaf Academy.

Please see our online Spectator College section at www.spectator.sk for articles, glossaries and tips for exercises which can be used in English lessons.

Glossary

abroad – v zahraničí	glad – potešený
accommodation – ubytovanie	grow – rásť
accredited – schválený	immediately – ihneď
add – dodať	immersed – ponorený
advantage – výhoda	including – vrátane
advise – radiť	infancy – detstvo
against – proti	insurance – poistenie
agreement – dohoda	internship – stáž
ahead of – pred	invite – pozvať
attend – zúčastniť sa	involve – zahrňať
be afraid – báť sa	join – pridať sa
become – stať sa	judge – sudca
better – zlepšiť	jury – porota
broadcasting – vysielanie	member – člen
care – starať sa	nominate – navrhnúť
careful – opatrný	offer – ponúkať
challenge – výzva	opportunity – možnosť
commercial – komerčný	ought – malo by
compete – súťažiť	participate – zúčastniť sa
competition – súťaž	passionate – vášnivý
concept – chápanie	possibility – možnosť
defend – obhájiť	preferred – uprednostňovaný
depend – závisieť	prepare – pripraviť
different – rôzny	presenter – moderátor
disabled – postihnutý	production – výroba
dozen – tucet	proof – dôkaz
during – počas	prove – dokázať
editor-in-chief – šéfredaktor	public – verejný
engage – zapojiť	recording – nahrávka
enriching – obohacujúci	regarding – týkajúci sa
enumerate – vymenovať	renew – obnoviť
evaluate – zhodnotiť	require – požadovať
expenses – výdavky	successfully – úspešne
focus – zamerať sa	surprise – prekvapiť
fulfil – naplniť	travel costs – cestovné náklady
gain – získať	vision – predstava
generalise – zovšeobecňovať	volunteer – dobrovoľník

Want to travel for free? Volunteer

BY NINA FRANCELOVÁ
Spectator staff

FOR young people, summer is an opportunity to work, travel, and meet new people, and volunteering is a chance to join all three into one.

Volunteering does not necessarily require travelling far, as local communities can always use help, but several months off from university make summer a good time to travel abroad. Young people usually consider volunteering and living abroad some of the best months of their lives, fulfilled with different activities, new people and enriching experiences.

Slovakia is still in its infancy regarding voluntary activities, although there is positive trend in Slovak volunteering at home as well as abroad, said Ivana Petrisková, the project coordinator in Mladiinfo, Slovakia. As a non-profit organisation, Mladiinfo's main task is to coordinate foreign volunteers in Slovakia, send Slovaks to volunteer abroad, and organise projects for youth and others.

"Travelling abroad is a bigger challenge than volunteering at home," Petrisková, who also volunteered during and after university, told The Slovak Spectator. "Youth get to know the people from the country, learn a foreign language, and find both themselves and what they are interested in."

For any interest

"Activities and tasks for volunteers depend on the agreement between the organisation and volunteer," explains Lenka Čurillová, executive director of ADEL (Association for Development, Education and Labour). ADEL or-



Some students opt to help others.

Photo: TASR

ganises youth exchanges, trainings, workshops, language courses, volunteer's programmes and others.

As a volunteer, one can be involved in the organisation of cultural, sport or outdoor activities, teaching a foreign language, caring for children, the disabled or animals, do activities to protect the environment or focus on media, marketing and graphics, enumerates Čurillová.

"In June, for example, we will send five Slovaks to Bulgaria where they will help organise a film festival," Čurillová told The Slovak Spectator. The preparation work will engage 75 young people from 15 different countries.

"In Slovakia, there is still this idea that a young person should finish secondary school, go to university, find a good job and start a family," thinks Petrisková. "I am glad that this concept is slowly changing."

Both Mladiinfo Slovakia and ADEL work as organisa-

tions involved in the European Voluntary Service (EVS). Young people aged 17 to 30 can apply and everything a volunteer needs (accommodation, food, travel cost, insurance, language course in the particular country) is paid via a grant given from the Erasmus+ programme so that volunteer has no expenses.

During the 20 years of EVS, more than 100,000 volunteers from all around the world have participated in the programme. It is possible to apply to a voluntary programme lasting from two months to one year.

Be careful who you work for

Moreover, all the organisations which send volunteers through the EVS have gone through an interview and they are accredited and checked from the EU.

"Be more careful about a host organisation; it's good to gain as much information as possible – from the sending or-

ganisation, volunteers who have already worked there or via Skype interviews with the people from the organisation," advises Čurillová.

Besides the fact that young people do not have to pay anything to volunteer abroad, there are more advantages.

"Once you finish secondary school or university, you have 50 plus years of a normal job ahead of you," said Čurillová. "This is the opportunity to do something different and the opportunity stays only when you are young."

Moreover, she sees that learning a language, gaining work and practical experience and last but not least getting the chance to travel through different cultures as advantageous. Compared to an internship, a volunteer gives people more of an opportunity to help in a community, rather than simply being immersed in work.

Petrisková added that these programmes offer a different view of society, a society of which we are part of and which we ought to participate on bettering it. Volunteering abroad will also teach youth to respect other cultures and traditions, which is necessary in today's society, thinks Petrisková.

"Young people have good ideas and they are not afraid to present them," continues Petrisková. She added that a big motivation for young people to volunteer is the possibility to travel.

The countries young Slovak volunteers prefer are Italy, France, Germany and Spain, for a simple reason – to improve their language skills. But usually there is no preferred type of voluntary work that could be generalised, said Čurillová. Often the volunteering programme is a youth's first opportunity to live away from home in a new country, meeting new people.

Student radio could compete with professionals

NOT only students at journalism schools can become passionate about radio broadcasting. In Slovakia, about a dozen Boarding Radio Studios (IRŠ) meet every year at the Radiorallye competition to prove that they could easily stand against professional presenters.

About 150 young people from 12 IRŠ are nominated to the competition with altogether 198 radio recordings in 10 different categories, including live broadcasting. All the recordings, over 10 hours worth, are listened to and evaluated. This year radio Šturko from Košice won, successfully defending the title from last year.

Student radio productions are evaluated by professionals from Slovak and Czech radios, whether commercial or public.

"Students are creative and funny. News were prepared with high quality, they could be broadcast immediately in any professional radio," said Oľga Džupinková, of Slovak commercial radio Rádio Expres, who was also part of the jury. She added that the Radiorallye competition is proof that competition is growing in the radio world.

Radiorallye came into being in 2004. Ľuboš Kasala, who attended the competition Amateur Sound Recording in the 1990s, came up with the idea.

"I wanted to renew this competition so I asked the functioning IRŠ and we organised the first competition in Košice," said Kasala, founder of the competition, for The Slovak Spectator.

Since then, the competition has moved every year from university to university. Three years ago, radio stations from the Czech Republic were invited to Radiorallye. About 12 IRŠ, two of them from Czech Republic, meet every year.

Professional judges are sometimes surprised by the high quality of the IRŠ.

"Two or three of these radio stations could easily compete with professional regional radio stations," said member of jury Marek Mikušek, editor-in-chief of Slovak commercial radio Fun Rádio.

By Nina Francelová

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