

The Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic

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1. Principles and Values of the Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic

The Government of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the “Government”) formed following the democratic parliamentary election held on 17 June 2006 is, in accordance with Article 113 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, appearing before the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Along with its request to have confidence voiced, it is submitting to the Council the following Manifesto.

The Manifesto of the Government proceeds from the fact that living and working conditions of people are not only their personal concern or responsibility vis-à-vis their relatives, those closest to them and their families, but also a public concern. This is a Manifesto that balances the responsibility of the individual with the social solidarity principle.

The Manifesto of the Government supports in the economic area the linking of economic growth and the growth of employment, social cohesion and enhancement of quality of life for all. It must be economic growth built on higher quality, higher level of education and higher innovativeness serving the interests of people. It will be very demanding to achieve such a relationship, as the Government intends to do everything necessary for the introduction of the common European currency in 2009. The road to the common European currency cannot lead only through cheap labour and restricted public expenditures. The Government is for the course of qualitative growth in the economy along with efficient investment and pro-export policies. Decreasing unemployment and the abysmal difference between the standard of living of citizens of the Slovak Republic and that of the developed Member States of the European Union. This calls for the development of strong and stable public systems.

The Manifesto of the Government creates preconditions for finding the appropriate balance between public and private interests, and in general, between the public sector and the private sector. The Government acknowledges openly the ideas of the European Union concerning the permanent partnership between these sectors.

The Manifesto of the Government sets out to support harmony between the European integration in process and the consequential defence of national and State interests. The Government does not perceive the European Union only as an area of free trade and movement of labour. Primarily, the Government views it as a union of values of solidarity between nations and people, values respecting human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and respecting human rights, including the rights of individuals belonging to minorities.

The Manifesto of the Government builds on continuity with the former government wherever it is expedient and reasonable. But the objective and urgent need to change the approaches taken in recent years will be prevalent. The Government proceeds from the will of the voters manifested in the last parliamentary elections, and the Government is convinced that also the decisive majority of citizens of the Slovak Republic want certain changes.

The Government respects the fact that the main issues to which society wants answers are not determined by the Government but by the citizens, from whom State power emanates and who have the constitutional right to participate in the administration of public affairs. The Government is determined to solve the key concerns of the citizens with utmost seriousness and responsibility. There does not exist any miraculous free-market force that will address the general social situation, or unemployment and certainties about the future. Market forces, without being interconnected with the State, will only exacerbate those concerns.

The Manifesto of the Government when solving the aforementioned concerns relies on three institutes, as stipulated in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and recognized in Europe:

It is first of all *the human dignity*, that we consider the basic pillar of the human rights concept, and one of the universal values on which the European Union is constituted. The denial of human dignity or equality in human dignity has serious personal, family, social, as well as political consequences. The objective of the Government is to implement the right to human dignity in everyday life in all its basic/fundamental manifestations, not excluding the economic dimension.

It is *the Welfare State* that the Constitution of the Slovak Republic anticipated from the outset of the independent Slovak Republic by stipulating and guaranteeing the economic, social and cultural rights for all, to the extent characteristic of a welfare State. The Government shall support in a versatile manner a realistic orientation of the Slovak Republic that will lead to fulfilment of its characteristics as a welfare State. The State, together with its regions, municipalities, companies and families, bears a share of co-responsibility for shaping living conditions. The State must respect the solidarity principle as one of the fundamental values of the European Union.

The Government when determining programme objectives and how to achieve them also relies on Article 55, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. According to the article *the economy of the Slovak Republic is based on principles of a socially and ecologically oriented market economy*.

The Government is thus clearly manifesting the fact that it respects the constitutional precondition based on which the Slovak Republic is to be a welfare State with a socially and ecologically oriented market economy.

The Government is convinced it is presenting a realistic Manifesto that will be supported by the majority of Slovak citizens.

2. Macroeconomic Framework, Public Finance and Economic Policy

The economic part of the Manifesto of the Government is based on a combination of the consequential pro-growth economic policy with progressive search for the balance between the public interests and the interests of companies, commercial and financial corporations. In order that the economic policy of the State will create fundamental preconditions for the growth of employment, prosperity of market entities and individuals, these objectives, on the other hand, acknowledge the need to accept public interests.

The Government acknowledges that the basic relations between the economy, the social sphere and nature are regulated by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, and they are not subordinated to the ideology of political parties. Such an attitude corresponds with the efforts of the European Union to achieve a social market economy with high competitiveness, employment, social progress and a high level of environmental protection. The Government wants to promote the European model of a mixed economy in this context. The Government proceeds with the knowledge that the balanced interplay of the market and the State is the only way to safeguard higher living standards and to foster good conditions for workers as well as employers.

The Government sets for itself the following programme objectives:

1. To proceed from the programme documents of the European Union when forming the economic policy of the State. These objectives will be focused on a combination of economic growth and economic performance, featuring growth in employment, social cohesion and improvement of the quality of life for all. To create conditions for a rate of economic growth exceeding 5% of the gross domestic product annually. Parameters of the economic policy of the State have to be set so that the attained economic growth would be accompanied by the growth of average real wages.
2. To draft the national strategy of employment development. To support self-employed people, and small and medium-size enterprises and entrepreneurs.
3. To fulfil the criteria for the transition to the euro currency in 2009.
4. To guarantee stability and a degree of predictability in the entrepreneurial environment inasmuch as implemented changes will be the results of the broadest possible consensus of opinions among stakeholders.
5. To launch in a go-ahead manner processes supporting the constitutional amendment and the real shape of the market economy. By doing so, this Government will fulfil the justified efforts of the European Union to support the social market economy, which is characterised by high competitiveness, employment, social progress and a high level of environmental protection. To implement consistently Article 20, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, based on which ownership also entails obligations, and that also includes the ownership of natural monopolies, financial institutions and the largest market entities.
6. To insist consequentially on the support of knowledge-oriented economy and to create a social climate, models and real possibilities for the economic assertion of the individual.
7. To support the balance between public and private interests – especially those of an economic character.
8. To implement an aggressive pro-export policy through suitable economic and institutional instruments.
9. To adopt consequential measures to safeguard the harmony between international integration and globalization with the robust defence of the national and State interests.
10. To make consistent use of all accessible sources for the efficient finalization of the basic transport, information and communication infrastructure.

2. 1 Macroeconomic Framework, Public Finance and Taxes

The Government will rely on a macroeconomic framework that can safeguard stable and long-term sustainable growth of the Slovak economy and its overall convergence with the developed economies. The stability of growth shall be secured by increasing the potential product of the economy based on the growth of productivity, competitiveness and employment, which awaits the creation of a favourable business environment and the gradual orientation of the economy towards a knowledge-based economy.

The Government will closely co-ordinate its policies in the field of national economy, finance, budget, taxes, subsidies, prices, support of investments and in other economic fields with the monetary policy of the independent National Bank of Slovakia (NBS), with the objective to introduce the euro on January 1, 2009. The structure and volume of public revenues and expenditures will be encompassed in this sphere.

The Government shall focus its attention in the field of public finance to:

- rationalization of expenditures in public administration and monitoring of their efficient use, while introducing, consequently, multi-year programme budgeting, accompanied by the efficient and better use of EU funds;
- strict observance of rules when spending public funds and their consistent review and evaluation of the efficiency of their disposal;
- lowering of the tax burden on groups with low and medium incomes by increasing the tax-free base and by amendments to the flat VAT rate in selected commodities;
- lowering of tax and custom duty evasions and suppression of the grey economy.

The public finance and taxation area will be designed and used as the main economic tool for the development of the modern welfare, with the objective of minimising social exclusion, and to gradually remove all continuously growing regional differences and social imbalance.

The Government will implement the convergence of the economy in accordance with the mid-term Convergence Programme of the Slovak Republic. Further convergence processes will be specified on an annual basis, in accordance with the schedule and uniform directives of the European Commission.

The fundamental framework of enforcement of the policies and objectives of the Government contained in this Manifesto will be prudent budget policy, as well as fiscal policy, and the gradual strengthening of the stability of the public finances. This will be done at the same time as strictly observing the Maastricht criteria and obligations of the Slovak Republic ensuing from the revised Growth and Stability Pact.

With regard to the existing corruption and clientelism in the public sector, which threatens in a fundamental way the efficiency of public expenditures and Slovakia's real convergence within the framework of the EU, the Government will, with the help of competent bodies of public administration, consequently bring down the inefficient spending of public funds.

The Government is aware that there are considerable reserves in terms of improving tax discipline in the social environment of the Slovak Republic. Thus it will launch a reform of the tax administration in order to make it more efficient, with the objective to assist methodologically those entities that have good tax discipline, and expose and penalize those entities that avoid paying taxes, or, as the case may be, that commit tax fraud.

In the field of public finance expenditure the Government will launch a reform with the main emphasis on the consequent programme budgeting. Priority will be given to such expenditures, or, as the case may be, programmes that shall be of key significance for economic growth, decreasing unemployment and the alleviation of regional differences. Social and family stability, which will support the favourable demographic development and multiplication effects, will thus appear in the economy.

The Government will not increase the number of bodies in the State administration. It, meanwhile, will implement institutional reform in connection with the programme budgeting, so that such budgeting could be successfully implemented at all levels of the public administration.

The Government, besides guaranteeing the principles of decentralization of the public administration, will evaluate the status and level of financing of the territorial administration, and, as the case may be, will revamp it to remove contingent imbalances in the framework of fiscal decentralization.

The Government will actively manage the State and public debt, rationalize expenditures connected with financing the State debt and minimise the risks connected with financial assets and liabilities, as well as the overall financial flows of the State. The

Government will use the institute of State guarantees only to the necessary extent and in exceptional cases.

The Government will create legislative and other necessary preconditions for the implementation of systemic changes in the national methodology of accounting and consolidation reporting under for the whole rubric of public finance. Harmonization of the national methodology with internationally recognized and currently used methodology of the European Union will remove significant differences between these approaches. By doing the preconditions for implementation of an independent audit and for transparency of reporting will be created. This approach will also increase the efficiency and stability of the system of public finance management as one entity, with the purpose of declaring the reliability of information submitted to the Parliament (the National Council of the Slovak Republic), to Eurostat and to other international institutions.

The Government shall gradually harmonise, introduce compliance with and simplify the system of internal financial auditing in public administration. This includes preliminary and current financial control and the subsequent financial audit and internal audit, the subject of which are public budgetary funds of the Slovak Republic, EU funds and funds from other forms of aid from abroad. The need to change the legislation in the field of financial control and internal audit follows mainly from the new EC legislation for the programming period 2007 – 2013.

The Government will rationalise the performance, procedures and the overall quality of independent auditing and evaluation, management of processes and all activities in the process of implementation of programmes of foreign assistance. The aim will be to safeguard the fulfilment of the function of an audit body for the programme period 2007 – 2013.

Taxes and Taxation Policy

The Government will follow very attentively the development in the field of taxes in the European area, and within its framework, mainly the efforts of the Member States of the EU to harmonize the tax base. It shall apply a very cautious approach to those proposals and it shall carefully consider its own standpoint.

The Government considers it necessary to increase the degree of solidarity in the field of direct taxes, especially by gradual increase of the tax-free tax base, and, as the case may be, also the possible modification of the amount of the tax bonus. The Government will propose increased taxation of persons with above-standard incomes.

In connection with operation of natural monopolies and entities with significant market power, the Government will first of all exert efforts to solve the deformation of the market or the misuse of such a position in a systemic way. Emphasis will be placed on the consistent regulation of conditions of the functioning of market entities. Stability of the legal environment shall be taken into consideration, as well as equal conditions for all participants in the market, and mainly protection of the consumer – the citizen. If those systems and institutes fail or will prove not to be efficient enough and insufficiently effective, the Government considers legitimate in such a case a selective tax approach to such entities. In this respect the Government has the clear intent and ambition to act in compliance with Article 55, Paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, which clearly states that the economy of the Slovak Republic should be based on principles of a socially and ecologically oriented market economy.

The Government will propose a gift tax for third persons so as to narrow the area available for speculative transfers of assets and for money laundering.

In the field of indirect taxes the Government will propose the introduction of a lower value added tax rate on certain goods and services, while the basket of those goods will gradually growing, in accordance with development in public finance.

Use of EU Funds

The Government in co-operation with bodies of the territorial administration creates conditions for the efficient and transparent use of EU funds. This is carried out in compliance with all regulations of the EU and of the SR, mainly with the objective to level out the economic and social disparities among Slovakia's regions, while achieving the maximum intake of those funds.

The Government will use the so-called innovative financial instruments with the purpose to achieve the highest and the most efficient absorption of financial resources from the Structural Funds and from the Cohesion Fund in the 2007-2013 programming period, following the objective to reach the multiplication effect when using EU and State budget funds.

The Government will provide for the smooth implementation of funds from the EU Pre-Accession Funds and the EU Structural Funds, as well as the Cohesion Fund from the shortened 2004-2006 programme period. At the same time it will create optimum conditions and mechanisms for the efficient implementation of funds from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund within the framework of the new programming period for 2007–2013 by means of introducing a suitable system of financial management. While doing so it will search for a suitable form of participation of the territorial administration in this process.

The Government proposes that the implementation of the Structural Funds be focused on the following subject matter, which will be reflected in the national strategic referential framework:

- 1) knowledge-based economy, support of innovations and support of competitiveness;
- 2) finalization of infrastructure development in the field of railways, highways and water management;
- 3) the use of the Social Fund and of the Cohesion Fund and community initiatives in a manner that they will solve regional development problems, mitigate poverty and general inter-regional disparities;
- 4) solution of selected problems in the environmental and agricultural fields.

The whole system will be based on the multi-source financing using State budget funds, as well as funds of municipalities and EU funds.

The Government will secure preparation of an operational programme focused on support of competitiveness of industry and of services by means of innovations. This will go hand in hand with investment stimulus into research, development and innovation processes, and at the same time the creation of motivating incentives for the transfer of acquired knowledge into business practices.

The Government will secure conditions for the preparation and implementation of programmes financed also from other foreign funds.

Financial Market and Protection of its Participants

The Government shall continue in the early and consistent implementation of European legislation in the field of financial services and in improvements of the national legislation in the respective fields of the financial market, with the objective to gradually

remove obstacles that stand in the way of the effective development of the financial market, and within this framework, especially the development of the capital market.

In connection with securing the stability of the financial market, the Government will consistently co-operate with the central bank in legislative and organisational activities when fulfilling its tasks in the field of integrated supervision, as well as other activities ensuing from the requirement to safeguard the free movement of capital under existing conditions in the territory of the European Union.

In the interest of improving the business environment and access of the small innovative companies and medium-sized enterprises to capital by means of new issues of shares and bonds, the Government will facilitate the transition and changes in the functioning of the institutions of the financial market.

The Government will support preparation and introduction of new products of the financial market, with the objective to support securing the needs of socially weaker groups of citizens, and that primarily in the field of housing and the obtaining of higher qualifications.

The Government wants to continue in the creation of conditions to eliminate unfair practices in the financial market, for the struggle against legalization of income from criminal activities, as well as the conditions supporting free economic competition in the financial market. The Government will re-evaluate and systematically modify the manner of mediation of financial and investment services, as well as the rules of providing financial consulting.

The Government will safeguard adequate protection of participants in the financial market, stressing the corresponding protection and non-professional investors and depositors from the possible failure of financial market entities and it shall strengthen prevention in this field. The Government will thus propose measures through which equality of position of those clients should be achieved and their better access to information about the products, as well as fees connected with them. The Government will devote in this connection special attention to the support of the long-term financial education of the public at large. The Government will also support rationalising the system of compensation for misguided investment deposits and the investment assets of the clients.

The Government will support partial compensation of affected clients of the non-bank financial institutions.

The Government will prepare an analysis of the impact of the introduction of the euro, and will adopt efficient measures to prevent negative impacts on citizens due to rounding off of prices, as well as measures the objective of which will be to prevent unsubstantiated price hikes and subjectively perceived inflation, and that mainly by means of a sufficiently long period of time for the dual pricing of goods and services, and consistent monitoring of their price development.

2. 2 Economic Policy

The Government will create all institutional, personnel and financial conditions to draft the „Strategy of Development of the Slovak Republic in the Mid-and Long-term Horizon”. It will be submitted for broad professional and public discussion and shall be adopted only after reaching a broad political consensus. By doing so it will secure the continuity and stability of the fundamental strategic orientation of the Slovak Republic, regardless of the programme and ideology of any future ruling governments. This document shall respect to the maximum extent the main development directions of the European area, as Slovakia is a valid a full-fledged member of the European Union and shall support through its strategy the enhancing of Europe’s competitiveness.

The Government will determine the rules and will actively support the establishment of public-private partnerships in the field of management and generation of public assets and the provision of public services.

Business Environment and Competitiveness

The Government undertakes to respect its obligations following from the previous lawfully valid and effective agreements that were entered into.

The Government will support the process of evaluation of impacts of influences of the legislation which is being adopted and the existing legislation governing the business environment, and it will support in this process also participation of representatives of the entrepreneurial sphere.

The Government will support the establishment of integrated business service centres. In one location, they combine contacts with the general public and specialised State administration and with entrepreneurs. This will help mainly the entrepreneurs who are launching their activities in terms of establishing their company, their establishing in the market, as well as during performance of business activities, with an emphasis on the use of electronic communication.

The Government will adopt legislative measures and make decisions enabling participation of the private sector in the provision of public services, and also in the management, generation and restoration of public assets, and in doing so, EU funds will be used in a way that a competitive environment will also be created in fields with a significant share of public ownership in order to ensure efficient management and high quality of services for an appropriate price for the consumer.

In the field of industrial policy the main task of the Government will be generation of short-term and long-term programmes. This will entail measures designed to increase the competitive capability of industry in order for it to be able to contribute to the strength of the European industrial base, considering the potential of each of Slovakia's regions in terms of the possible increase in production of goods and services, especially on the basis of local sources.

Privatisation

The Government will not continue privatisation initiatives including the final stages of privatisation of the property owned by the State in strategic companies. The Government shall determine which are the companies and institutions that are strategic from the perspective of national and State interests.

The Government respects the results of completed privatisation agreements and guarantees unalterable conditions in privatized companies, if the process of privatisation was carried out in accordance with the law. The Government will forcibly apply the interests of the State in strategic companies with property share owned by the State.

Innovations and Knowledge-Based Economy

Innovations will become a priority of the Government in developing the economy. Innovative ideas will make it possible to contribute efficiently to the long-term development of society's prosperity. The Government will prepare a comprehensive legislative framework and a broad range of instruments for the field of innovation activities and for the support of

innovative companies, in accordance with requirements of the European Commission, while respecting at the same time national specificities.

The Government will elaborate an innovation strategy for Slovakia that will enable the innovation activities of Slovakia to increase in the targeted horizon to an average level being achieved within the EU. This strategy will create an efficient system of financing of the development and innovations by combining private and public funds.

Part of the policies of the Government will also emphasise the regular and objective evaluation of results of research and development, and this will be one of the decisive criteria of further transparent distribution of financial support to research and development from public funds.

The Government will re-evaluate and intensify the hitherto way of using public funds for the support of programmes and projects of science, research, applied research and innovations, with the aim to increase efficiency, usefulness, the return on investment and transparency of the used funds, and by doing also increasing the direct transfer of their use in the enhanced export and competitive capability and performance of industry.

Business, Investments and Regional Development

Entrepreneurial Activities

The Government will improve conditions for the development of all forms of entrepreneurial activities. It will devote increased attention to development of the service sector, and especially in areas of high added value which currently do not reach the required performance in Slovakia.

The Government shall safeguard harmonisation of legislation of the Slovak Republic with legislation of the EU in the field of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Government will adopt measures for improvement of co-ordination of the support programmes and institutions serving to enhance the development of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The respective horizontal policies shall be drafted in accordance with the „Think small first“ strategy of the EU.

The Government shall encourage and support the entrepreneurial efforts of youth, as well as those of other participants in educational processes. The specific modules connected with entrepreneurship will become an essential part of the educational programmes at secondary schools, institutions of higher learning, universities and other educational centres. At the same time, we will also emphasise direct links and the use of education outputs and innovations for the small and medium-size enterprises.

Investments and Regional Development

The Government will focus its attention in the field of investments in order to improve conditions for their support. Preserving the continuity of the adopted Rules of Provision of Individual State Aid, emphasising the support of investment projects from the knowledge-based economy and projects with higher added value will also be a priority. The Government will prepare a new Act on investment stimuli that will ensure the equality of domestic and foreign investors and transparency of the process of provision of the investment stimuli.

The Government will support development of industrial parks and industrial zones as instruments of regional development and the ameliorate disparities among the respective regions.

The Government will analytically evaluate the efficiency of provision of the investment stimuli linking them with the regional and economic development of the Slovak Republic.

Energy

Energy is the key factor influencing all sectors of the national economy, and it is one of the basic pillars of the economy. It influences the operation of society as a whole and it is the basic precondition of economic development and the increase in living standards. Energy represents a cross-sectional sector, the functionality and development of which is the precondition of ensuring sustainable economic growth.

The Government is aware of the significance of ensuring a favourable entrepreneurial environment in the sector of energy and the creation of conditions for reliable and secure energy supplies, as well as the operation of the energy systems and networks.

The Government acknowledges that energy security is a part of national security and that the reliable energy supplies can be guaranteed only by the sufficient number of diversified sources of electric energy located in Slovakia. Diversified supplies of primary energy sources and building sufficient capacity for cross-border transfer grids are also of key significance.

The Government will prepare the Strategy of Energy Security of the Slovak Republic encompassing the period up to 2030 ensuring self-sufficiency in the generation of electricity, the optimum pricing policy, Slovakia's pro-export capability and strengthening of its position as a transit country on the electricity, gas and oil markets, as well as ensuring reliable supplies of thermal energy and other energy sources.

The Government will support the creation of regional policies focused on the use of local sources, reducing Slovakia's dependence on external supplies of primary carriers. The objective will be to create conditions for higher employment and lower costs in relation to energy consumption.

The Government will create conditions for the development and building of an efficient energy infrastructure, with the objective to safeguard the stable and secure transport and distribution of energy.

The Government will support the construction and operation of new sources generating electrical energy, including finalization of the construction of units 3 and 4 of the Mochovce nuclear power plant. As the Slovak Republic uses nuclear energy as an acceptable option in power generation, the Government will prepare a draft of the comprehensive solution of decommissioning of the nuclear energy facilities. The possibility to further use the V1 nuclear power plant in Jaslovské Bohunice for scientific purposes will also be considered.

The Government respects the Resolution of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 1210 of 2004 concerning completion of construction of units 3 and 4 of the Mochovce nuclear power plant and the Resolution of the Committee for European Affairs No. 115 of 2005 concerning further use of the V1 nuclear power plant in Jaslovské Bohunice for scientific purposes.

The Government will create conditions for greater use of renewable sources of energy when generating electrical energy and heat, as well as for use of bio-fuels in transport. The Government will support efficient and rational use of domestic energy resources, with the objective to decrease its dependence on supplies of energy sources. The Government will prepare a motivational framework for the use of renewable energy sources and increased energy efficiency, as well as for obtaining support from EU funds in these areas.

The Government will support diversification options of sources and of transport routes

for oil and natural gas, and it will create conditions for building connecting pipelines to the energy systems in neighbouring countries. By its participation in international projects, Slovakia's standing as an important partner in the field of security of oil and gas supplies for Europe will be strengthened.

The Government will adopt measures to decrease energy consumption, including the concept of energy efficiency. It will also draw up corresponding legislation with this purpose in mind. The Government will secure the full implementation of the corresponding legal regulations of the EU concerning lowering of emissions and energy demands of buildings and energy consumption, and will do so via the consistent application of rules of energy savings in the State sector as well as in the private sector.

The Government will promulgate the finalisation of the development of the liberalised market in the field of electricity and gas supplies. The Government will adopt measures focused on safeguarding equality of conditions for all participants in the market and for prevention of misuse of the dominant market position. The Government will strengthen audit, inspection and regulation competencies of the State in the field of natural monopolies.

The Government will specify more consistently the role of the Slovak Electrification and Transfer System in relation to safeguarding an even balance of electricity sources as well as the role of the Office for Regulation of Utilities in connection with the optimum pricing policy.

The Government will participate in preparation of documents and legislation of the European Union in the field of energy and energy policy. The Government will provide for the consistent transposition of the legislation of the European Union into the national legislation, taking into consideration all the specificities of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will create conditions for the efficient, rational and permanently sustainable use of domestic natural resources vis-à-vis the needs of the economic and social development of society. The Government will provide for the rational completion of the phasing-out and liquidation of the ore mining industry.

Trade, Services and Export Support

The Government will draft a long-term strategy of the pro-export policy for the 2007 – 2013 period. The strategy will focus on development of Slovak exports, the export of investments and services and the support of competitiveness of Slovak companies on international markets. This will also include the strategy involving the trade and economic interests of the Slovak Republic in the EU and in non-European countries, in accordance with the Pan-European strategies. At the same time it will support development of inter-regional co-operation.

In accordance with the aforementioned strategies, the Government will support, by its pro-export activities, the exports of Slovak companies – as well as the flow of foreign investments to Slovakia. These activities, especially in the form of promotion within the framework of the official participation of the Slovak Republic in fairs and exhibitions, will include expositions around the world. Financial resources from Structural Funds will also be used in this endeavour.

The Government will strengthen and make more efficient the economic dimension of diplomacy, with the objective to support pro-export activities and the flow of direct foreign investments and to re-evaluate the functioning of the existing system of institutions focusing on support of Slovak exports, with the objective to increase efficiency of their operation. When implementing all the aforementioned measures, the Government will respect the trade

and political interests of Slovakia, in accordance with the trade and political interests of the EU. It will support additional liberalisation of conditions of world trade in goods and services.

When providing for protection of the consumer, the Government will implement the European policy of general safety of products and services. It will participate in the protection of economic interests of consumers, and it will support the rights of consumers connected with awareness and education. We will take into consideration requirements concerning consumer protection also when implementing other State policies.

The Government will, within the framework of the internal EU market, advocate the use of all technical as well as institutional means in the EU, with the objective to participate in the management, creation and implementation of legislation of the internal market, while focusing on the simplification of the application of the right of free movement of labour and services. The objective of this activity of the Government is the early dissemination of information for the entrepreneurial sector, and assistance in advocating its justified requirements within the framework of the internal market.

Tourism

The Government will create conditions for developing the tourism and hotel industry with the objective to increase the share of this economic sector in generation of the nation's gross domestic product. In this connection it will establish a special 'satellite account' of tourism with the objective of quantifying its real results and its contribution to the gross domestic product.

The Government shall determine the principles for the State policy of development of tourism as an area of public interest, emphasising the support of the development and significance of domestic and incoming foreign tourism. The Government shall re-evaluate the Strategy of Development of Tourism of the Slovak Republic until 2013 and prepare comprehensive legislation for securing implementation of the State policy with regard to the development of tourism, taking into consideration the institutionalisation of this sector.

The Government shall support, by means of motivating economic and financial instruments, investments into tourism, into the hotel industry, as well as entrepreneurial entities focusing on incoming tourism, with the objective to increase the quality and comprehensive scale of offered services.

The Government will create a system of financial support of activities of self-governing bodies, municipalities, towns and business entities, also with the help of EU Structural Funds, when developing the fundamental forms of tourism. These include town and cultural tourism, the spa industry, winter recreational centres, the year-round use of high mountainous areas, summer recreational centres and rural tourism.

The Government will support the acceleration of the tasks connected with the new zoning of protected areas. This should ensure the compatibility of maintaining the objectives of nature protection as well as fostering entrepreneurial activities focused on development of tourism, and at the same time preservation of natural and cultural values of the protected areas for future generations.

2.3 Transport, Postal Services, Telecommunications and Development of the Information Society

The Government considers mobility and a high quality transport infrastructure as one of the support pillars for attaining economic growth, increasing the competitiveness and prosperity of society, improvement of the social status of Slovak citizens, increasing employment and removing the economic disparities of less-developed regions.

The Government will adopt the Strategy of Transport Development in the Slovak Republic till 2015. The basic transport and political objectives and their timing and financial frameworks will be defined within it and take into consideration the needs of the citizens and of the economy. The result will represent permanently sustainable mobility that is respectful of the environment.

Within the framework of the operational programmes Transport and Knowledge-Based Economy, the Government will ensure for the more efficient implementation of finalization of building of administrative capacities. This will also entail the Information Society programme, including control mechanisms, and it will introduce such a system of implementation of funds that will enable the transparent, efficient and purpose-oriented spending of received funds.

In the field of co-operation with the EU, and in accordance with strategic objectives of the Slovak Republic, the Government will participate in a full-fledged manner – by active participation of its representatives at all levels – in the drafting of EU legislation. And within the framework of its membership in international organizations, it will continue to expand its co-operation in transport, in postal services, in telecommunications and in developing the information society.

The Government will continue in the liberalisation of the market in transportation and telecommunication services. It will create legislative preconditions in the area of a stable regulatory environment for strengthening the independence of regulatory bodies, including their independent financing.

Transport

The priority of the Government, in compliance with the common European transport policy, will be speeding up of the pace of construction and upgrading of the transport infrastructure, with the objective to connect the main transport infrastructure with the Transeuropean transport network and improvement of accessibility to the main transport infrastructure will be increased in all regions of the Slovak Republic.

In the field of road infrastructure the Government will continue in preparation and construction of motorways and express roads included into the Transeuropean transport network and the network of express roads, with the objective to achieve an even coverage of the territory of Slovakia taking into consideration transport needs. The Government shall create conditions for construction and launching into operation of 100 km of motorways and express roads until 2010. It will complete the construction of the D 1 motorway section

Považská Bystrica – Žilina, the D 3 motorway section Svrčinovec - state border with Poland, launching of the entire operation of the R 1 route Trnava – Banská Bystrica, along with the removal of black spots on the R 2 express road. The Government will provide for the preparation of the D 1 motorway section up to Košice until 2010, thus creating suitable preconditions for its uninterrupted and early completion.

The Government will safeguard the project preparation of the R 4 express road, giving priority to construction of the section from Košice to the state border with the Republic of Hungary.

The Government shall devote appropriate attention to increasing the speed and quality of systematic maintenance and the restoration of roads and bridges and will adopt efficient preventive measures to protect the road network from its disproportionate overloading and deterioration.

In the field of railway infrastructure the Government will continue in its modernization, giving priority to multimodal corridors, in accordance with the policy of the European Community, with the objective to create conditions for increasing competitiveness of passenger and cargo railway transport in the transport market.

The Government will support modernization of railway tracks included in the Transeuropean transport network, their mutual interconnection, increase of track speeds and other qualitative parameters of the railway infrastructure, and provide for its interoperability. In the regions, the Government will gradually provide for implementation of modernization of railway stations in the centres of both tourism and industry.

The Government will provide for the smooth financing of the development of the road and railway infrastructure from several sources, first of all from public finance, from the EU funds and from fees for the use of the transport infrastructure. It will legislatively determine rules and conditions of financing of projects in the form of the public-private partnership.

The Government will introduce payment of toll fees for the selected road infrastructure in the form of electronic collection of toll fees.

The Government will safeguard the creation of a stock of supply of projects from the perspective of availability of investors in connection with implementation of transport projects, in accordance with the Operational Programme Transport for the Programming Period of 2007 – 2013, and it will carry out all the necessary steps for the uninterrupted implementation of projects co-financed from EU funds in this period.

In the field of passenger transport the Government will give priority to and will support the development of public passenger transport in comparison with the individual transport.

The Government will continue in the process of transfer of responsibility of the State for the transport serviceability to the self-governing regions, with the objective of the most efficient spending of public finance and safeguarding of optimisation, harmonisation and integration of the public passenger transport.

The Government will create conditions for development and expansion of the railway and combined transport, with the objective to preserve the share of the railway transport in the transport market, to increase the environmental protection and to enhance the transport safety.

The Government will preserve the dominant position of the State in railway companies. It will re-evaluate their performance and economic efficiency and consider institutional options to change their management.

In harmony with the adopted European transport policy, the Government will ensure implementation of measures to increase safety of road traffic, first of all in the field of supervision of the safety and smoothness of road transport, transport education and awareness and promotion of road safety.

In connection with the growing requirements to improve the quality of transport services and making transport more ecological, the Government will devote attention to the introduction of information and communication systems in transport.

The Government will create conditions for the efficient use of public ports in Bratislava, Komárno and Štúrovo by establishing a public ports administration. The Government will evaluate the possibility to transfer the management of transport waterways in the area of national inland navigation under the competence of the Ministry of Transport, Postal Services and Telecommunications and it will support building of harmonized river information systems on the inland waterways.

The Government, in the interest of promoting the growth of air transport and strengthening of its safety, will provide for modifications in the performance of State administration, taking into consideration the new market environment in civil aviation.

The Government will strengthen enforcement of the interests of the State and of the self-governing bodies in operation of the airport infrastructure, with the objective to support development of the economy and tourism.

Postal Services

In the field of postal services the Government, in compliance with the rules of the European postal policy, and specifically respecting the European postal directives connected with liberalization of postal services, will provide for the preparation of the legislative and regulatory framework of postal services under conditions of the open internal market.

Information Society

The Government considers the process of informatisation for a phenomenon that is cross-sectional and one that has a great impact on society, fundamentally influencing its quality. The ability to make efficient use of information technologies is a key to the economic success, and thus with respect to the prosperity of society as a whole.

The Government will further continue in the development of the broadband access by promoting competition, and the economical use of the frequency spectrum and support of building of high-speed broadband networks also in rural regions.

In the interest of reaching a dynamic launching of the process of transition from analogue to digital TV broadcasting, the Government undertakes to observe the deadline of

the launch of the regular digital TV broadcasting in the DVB-T system, with the objective to terminate analogue broadcasting, in accordance with requirements of the EC.

The Government will create conditions for efficient coordination of the bodies of the State administration in the field of informatisation of the society.

The Government guarantees to its citizens, by means of Internet, access to all information source under public administration, and which are, by law, publicly accessible.

The Government will enable citizens to use electronic communication in their contacts with the public administration bodies as a full-value alternative of written communication. It will provide for free-of-charge points of access for the electronic communication with public administration in selected publicly accessible State institutions.

The Government will continue in increasing digital skills of public administration employees.

The Government will provide for a stock of supply of projects suitable for possible project implementation in the framework of the Operational Programme Knowledge-Based Economy for the Programming Period of 2007 – 2013, and it will carry out all the necessary steps for the unperturbed implementation of projects co-financed from EU funds within the framework of the Information Society sub-programme.

2. 4 Agriculture

Competitiveness and permanent sustainability of agriculture, food industry and forest management in the rural areas are the guarantee of the regionally balanced development of the whole sector. They guarantee the rural development and within this framework the use of human resources, the stability of entrepreneurship, while respecting the principles of environmental protection and preservation of the country's values. The Government considers this area as a priority.

The Government will contribute with its policies to the stability of the entrepreneurial environment in the department of agriculture by creating conditions for the full application of measures defined in accession documents signed between the Slovak Republic and the European Union, as well as measures being adopted by bodies of the European Union from the perspective of support of agricultural production. The objective is to make maximum use of the economic and financial tools and instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy and national resources. In connection with the EU Accession Treaty, the Government will provide for the fulfilment of the financial framework of additional national payments. In accordance with EU legislation, the Government will make full use of measures of State aid. It will harmonise and make more efficient administrative activities for the implementation of funds from EU sources, specifically from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund, the European Agricultural Fund of Rural Development, and the European Fund of Fisheries. The Government will re-evaluate the National Strategic Plan of Rural Development emphasising the support of competitiveness of agricultural and food enterprises, renewable sources of energy and diversification of agricultural activities also with the help of utilization of the LEADER programme.

The policy of rural development will take into consideration the general objectives of the economic policy and social cohesion and contribute to attaining them, and it will integrate the priorities of this policy.

The instruments of agricultural policy will be directed, as a priority of the Government, into programmes designed to achieve growth in the rural economy and employment in the area of lowering production costs, growth of quality and promotion of sale, and consulting in accordance with EU Council Regulation No. 1782/2003, finalisation of products of agricultural primary production, development of fruit growing as well as vegetables and of flowers, wine-growing, special and technical crops, bio-energy, ecological agriculture, services and a non-agricultural economy within the entire range of rural activities.

The Government will re-evaluate the regime of use of the so-called red diesel with the intention to provide administrative simplicity.

The Government, following the objective of more efficient use and protection of agricultural and forest land which represent the greatest natural riches of the Slovak Republic, will support the settlement of land ownership. It will create preconditions for faster procedures in the settlement of land ownership by expediting the process of satisfaction of restitution claims, completion of the registry of reclamation of the original plots, and will make the process of land consolidation more dynamic - stressing the implementation of construction of joint facilities and specific measures. It will finally resolve the problems of land of unknown owners in a lawful manner, with the objective of creating preconditions for the development of the land market for the benefit of entrepreneurial entities working this land. The Government will re-evaluate the issue of taxes from agricultural land and forest plots and will make more strict the conditions applicable to agricultural soil sealing.

The Government will provide for the consistent control of quality and health harmlessness of food products by integrated control of the whole food chain from production to the sale of food products. The objective is the high level of protection of health of people, protection of consumer rights and the food security of the State. The Government will adopt legislative measures to increase the protection of consumers and protection of processing entities against the misuse of the economic power of certain commercial chains.

The Government, in connection with the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union connected with the ongoing negotiations on liberalisation of world trade with agricultural and food products, will draft analyses and prognoses of the competitiveness of agricultural and food production from the aspect of the possibility to place the Slovak products on the common European market, as well as markets of third countries.

The strategic objective of the Government in the field of forest management is the application and support of the permanently sustainable management of forests in order to secure the ecological balance and stability of the landscape, while rationally using the production and non-production functions of the forests. It will proceed, within the framework of its activities, from the international obligations that the Slovak Republic acceded to as a member country of the EU, the OECD and the UN.

The Government shall adopt a new State forestry policy in the form of the National Forestry Programme, in accordance with the action plan of the EU in the field of forest management and in connection with the National Programme of Rural Development of the Slovak Republic. It will not provide any possibility to privatise the forest assets in the ownership of the State. The harmonisation of the generally binding legal regulations influencing the permanently sustainable management of forests - the Act on Forests, the Act on Hunting and the Act on Protection of Nature and Landscape - is also envisaged. It will create legislative, technical and financial preconditions for compensation of damage that the owners suffer due to restrictions of their ownership rights.

The Government will create preconditions for the consistent control of wood extraction and forest management.

The Government, in the interest of improving the status and tasks of science and research in the department of agriculture, will orientate its activities as a priority to support

the establishment of the centres of excellence with the prospect of support from the EU funds, then to development of infrastructure and support of young scientific workers. The Government considers among its main tasks in the application of the knowledge-based economy to be the specification and implementation of the strategy of education and consulting in the department of agriculture and providing for the transfer of knowledge of an innovative character into agricultural practice. In the field of development of production of biological, technical and energy raw materials, the Government will support development of new technologies also within the framework of State programmes of research and development.

The Government will adopt measures to implement the judgement adopted by the International Court in the Hague in the matter of the system of Waterworks of Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros.

The Government will create through its steps conditions for the dynamic development of the modern and competitive agro-food sector oriented on the consumer, and it will support the continuous and multi-faceted development of the rural landscape and it will draft forecasts of the development of the Slovak agriculture, forestry and rural regions reflecting the contemporary modern trends of the European agricultural, forestry and rural policies. It will prepare alternative scenarios of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013.

2.5 Stewardship of the Environment

Environmental Improvement

Every citizen of the Slovak Republic has the right to a favourable living environment. The Government, in accordance with the European Union's environmental laws and with international conventions, considers the care for the environment to constitute a key tool in ensuring sustainable development. It is based on the integration of three interdependent and mutually supporting equal pillars – economic, social and environmental. Only a common partnership effort by the state authorities, self-government, businesses, the scientific community and non-governmental organisations focused on improving the environment can guarantee the protection of health and life and the preservation of the conditions for further economic growth and social development of the society.

In addition to the regulatory function of the state environmental policy applied in the interests of preventive protection of natural, cultural and environmental values, the Government will significantly strengthen its supporting function to benefit the municipalities' environmental quality and the development of environmentally friendly and safe business practices. It will also strengthen its protective function, reducing the threat to people and their living conditions, particularly with respect to natural disasters and accidents. The even and consequent exercise of these three functions will be enforced in policies involving all sectors, and areas with a special focus on regions with underdeveloped environmental infrastructure as well as on the use of available labour.

For the aforementioned active care of the environment, it will be necessary, also on the part of the state, to enhance and establish sufficient financial, legal, organisational, and institutional conditions, including the provision of funds to support environmental projects.

The Government will compensate for the legacy of deficiencies in the funding of environmental care using also market mechanisms and other economic instruments, which

may be an incentive for the development of small and medium-sized enterprise in the environmental sector. The global principle of “polluter pays” will be applied. It will create conditions for a system of guaranteed purchase prices, financial contributions and compensations of economic losses due to restrictions on the standard management of land. Preserving the biological, ecosystem, landscape and cultural diversity of the country and balancing the environmental quality of regions or micro regions will be part of this. However, the Government’s priority will continue to be the building of an environmental infrastructure pursuant to European standards, which will require significant support from both domestic and foreign sources, including European Union funds.

The Government, in accordance with Agenda 21, EU Sustainable Development Strategy, and the National Sustainable Development Strategy, will attend to the development of voluntary environmental policy instruments, including the preference for the production and consumption of environmentally-friendly products. This will entail the optimisation of spatial arrangement and functional use of the territory, protection of natural and cultural heritage, building environmental monitoring and information systems, increasing the population’s environmental awareness and information of the environmental situation. This is conditional upon the development of school and after-school education and awareness, environmental science, environmental regionalisation, ethics, and the promotion of environmentally beneficial activities for youth and the citizens in general.

Protection of Environmental Components and Rational Use of Resources

The basic task of society from the viewpoint of ensuring sustained prosperity is to achieve a high quality of the basic environmental components – air, water, soil, minerals, and living organisms. These components are directed toward minimising the negative influences on the environment and guaranteeing functioning, efficient systems for their protection and use. The state and private sector will be involved in these tasks.

In the framework of the state environmental policy, the Government will focus its attention on supplying the population with a sufficient amount and quality of water from the public water supply and building public sewerage systems and wastewater treatment plants. Through effective use of all existing and new water sources and of the aforementioned environmental infrastructure, the Government wants to satisfy the conditions of Slovak Republic’s accession to the European Union stemming from the transition periods. It will consider water to constitute a strategic material, whose availability and quality will be determinative regarding the level of all economic activities as well as of the citizen’s living standard. Besides consistent protection of water balances and water sources, the Government will ensure the availability of water for the population and industries particularly by exercising appropriate river basin management plans.

The Government considers the reduction of pollutants in the air to be a priority of the state environmental policy and, in this respect, it will support changes in the fuel basis of energy sources toward environmentally friendly, renewable energy sources. In coordination with other countries of the European Union, it will participate in addressing the global issues of the protection of air, Earth’s ozone layer and climatic changes while supporting the reduction of energy inefficiencies involving installations and facilities. Control of technologies within the framework of applying the Kyoto Protocol on limiting greenhouse gas emissions will be in effect.

Slovakia’s long-term serious problem continues to be illegal waste dumps and old environmental burdens that increase the contamination of the soil and the mineral

environment, particularly of groundwater. A solution to this problem will require their monitoring and inventory while evaluating their hazardousness and determining the priorities of gradual elimination of their negative impacts. At the same time, it will be necessary to prevent the formation of new environmental burdens and to support making the agriculture, transport, industry, and energy sectors, being the most significant environmental polluters, more environmentally friendly.

The Government will pay special attention to the rational use of raw mineral materials and the impact of their extraction on the environment, improvement of the geological view of fossil fuel sources, development of environmental geology, anti-erosion and anti-landslide measures, nuclear and biological safety. The basic starting point for elimination of environmental risks will be the control of environmental safety of structures, facilities and products as well as the reduction of the negative impacts of chemical, physical, and biological factors on human health, the economy, and the country's natural and cultural heritage.

The Government, within the framework of the newly prepared Waste Management Programme, will enforce prevention of waste generation and import, its safe disposal and, in particular, material and energy recovery in an environmentally friendly manner. Waste separation and recycling with the objective of reducing the raw material and energy dependency of Slovakia will be entailed in this, as well as developing the recycling industry, and introducing non-waste technologies.

Protection of Nature and Countryside Design

The Government will enforce ecologically sensitive use of the landscape of Slovakia. The development of social and economic activities therein must respect and support the maintenance of the existing historic, cultural, and natural values as a prerequisite for the development of ecotourism and travel. At the same time, the situation requires clarification of the borders and the completion of a single system for various protected parts of the country, including the Natura 2000 European network. The application of protected area care and rational management system programmes, especially in the national parks, is also involved in this endeavour. Special attention will have to be paid to the recovery of the natural environment of the Tatra National Park as well as other protected areas affected by natural disasters and devastation. The development of environmental awareness and regulated tourism will require more infrastructure building and protection of nature and the countryside, particularly of nature trails and locations, 'geo parks', and information and education facilities.

Ensuring the protection of human life and property from floods, the introduction of a flood warning and forecast system, prevention of environmental disasters and elimination of damages thereafter will require considerable effort and resources. The Government will ensure that the cleanliness of waterways is improved, that wetland and floodplain communities are protected and revitalised, and that the water regime and drainage situation in river basins is improved. The basic instrument of the environmental policy of both the state and the self-government bodies is countryside planning as part of land-use planning and integrated landscape management, which will serve as a vehicle for the protection of nature and its resources, support recovery of neglected areas. The qualitative enhancement of the level of the territorial system of ecological stability should thereby be ensured.

The protection of biological and landscape diversity has to be enforced more visibly also outside of the specially protected areas. This will be contributed to by strengthening the ecological stability of forest ecosystems with support for their public benefit functions and the

forestation of neglected agricultural land with the objective of increasing the attractiveness of the rural environment and reducing soil contamination and erosion.

The Government will provide more prominent support to the activities of municipalities and businesses and non-governmental organisations focused on environmental resuscitation, and protection and revitalisation of ecosystems in burdened and protected areas. Improving the quality and beauty of the town and village environments, building and maintenance of parks, forest parks, aesthetic public areas and leisure zones will be considered to be a priority service to the public. It will therefore support the Village Renewal Programme and care for world heritage locations in Slovakia. At the same time, it will give preference to civic construction and amenities directly in municipalities' urban areas, construction of manufacturing facilities in and around environmentally damaged areas and their gradual inclusion in the orderly, valuable, and aesthetic cultural urban and rural landscape.

2.6 Housing Construction and Regional Development

Housing Construction

Housing is one of the fundamental human needs. The present situation in housing shows considerable problems, particularly concerning young families who are unable to arrange, to a sufficient extent, their own housing on their incomes. Although the apartments that are built at present are of a higher quality, they are not affordable for the general population and, in particular, for young families. For this group of the population it is necessary to create conditions for construction of smaller rental apartments, so-called starter apartments.

The Government will create conditions for

- construction of rental apartments for young families subject to the availability of funds in the state budget;
- increasing the renewal and revitalisation of the housing stock with the objective of improving the efficiency of its operation – reducing costs and upgrading the housing stock. At the same time, conditions will be created for energy savings;
- construction of social service facilities for the elderly and severely handicapped persons and for marginalised population groups.

The Government will maintain the purpose of the State Housing Development Fund and ensure the pooling of funds from the social sphere, EU funds and special purpose funds of the state budget for housing with the objective of improving the efficiency of their use.

The Government will increase the extent of housing funding in the form of mortgage bonuses and will continue the support of building society savings with the objective of improving the access to housing, particularly for young families.

Regional Policy

The main task of the Government's regional policy is to halt the continuing trend of regional disparities through a purposeful combination of central development incentives and

partial policies of self-governing regions, or VUCs (higher territorial units), to support harmonious and sustainable growth throughout the Slovak Republic.

The Government will extend the competencies of the self-governing regions to enable them to implement development policy in their territory with a greater share of responsibility and with appropriate funds.

Balancing regional differences cannot be satisfactorily pursued using only EU structural funds with contributions from the state budget. This process must also be part of the development policies of individual ministries and self-governing regions with mutual links among all three components.

The Government considers it necessary to prepare a comprehensive vision of Slovakia's regional development for the next twenty years. A strategic document will be derived from this paper. The objectives of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) must be in accordance with this vision as well as with Slovakia's regional development strategy.

The conditions for support of the regional development and the competencies of state administration authorities and self-governing regions and municipalities will be defined in a new Act on regional development support.

In regional development, the principles of cohesion and subsidiarity will be respected while strengthening the influence of regional self-governments in the placement of EU funds.

In this respect, the Government will reconsider the draft NSRF prepared as far as the number and content of the operational programmes is concerned. The European Commission's comments on the discrepancy between the analysis and certain priorities of the existing documents, with a special emphasis on the regional operational programme, need to be reflected. What will also be addressed is the improvement of territorial accessibility as an elementary prerequisite for increasing domestic and international investment activity. We will therefore give more prominent support to the development of the nation-wide and regional transport infrastructure.

On the basis of the experience of the shortened programming period of 2004 – 2006, besides quality improvement of the central administrative structures' work, a framework will be created for gradual transfer of the full responsibility to self-governing regions for the implementation of the respective region's comprehensive operational programme. A necessary institutional framework will be established for this.

Using the experience of application of state assistance in the previous periods, the Government will, to an increased extent, support the development of small and medium-sized enterprise with a differentiated approach to Slovakia's regions currently lagging behind.

The Government considers an important part of regional development to be the development of territorial co-operation in all its forms with a focus on cross-border co-operation of neighbouring regions. In the implementation of the respective programmes, the responsibility of self-governing regions will be strengthened.

To an increasingly greater extent, the social and economic problems of the Roma community will be addressed in the development of regions, with an emphasis on the comprehensive nature of the measures adopted to comprehensively respond to the broader area in which these communities are located.

The Government commits itself to implement a comprehensive communication action plan concerning the activities in the field of regional development, whose objective will be, in addition to information, to increase the motivation of citizens of Slovakia's towns and municipalities to improve their own living conditions.

3. Social Policy

The basic objective of Government's social policy is to provide the population with such social programmes that will guarantee the maintenance and development of human, economic, social, and cultural rights leading to a dignified living standard for every human being. The social policy system will be set up in such a way that it is socially just, transparent, financially sustainable, and so that it ensures equal opportunities. The Government's priorities include, besides initiating the knowledge economy and prosperity, also making the reform changes socially bearable, achieving social stability, and maintaining social peace. All corrections and changes to the present social system will be carried out with this objective in mind, particularly eliminating its non-systematic, destabilising and discriminating elements.

When formulating its social policies, the Government will rely, in particular, on the European social and legal culture and, to the fullest extent, it will respect the links of social processes to the European and global processes. The basis, therefore, will be the international commitments in the social area stemming from the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union, the United Nations, and especially in the International Labour Organisation and in the Council of Europe. Guarantees of social and economic rights will be strengthened by ratifying additional international treaties.

The Government, in connection with the revised EU Lisbon Strategy, will enforce compliance with social rights as laid down by the European Social Charter; in this respect, it will examine the possibilities of ratifying the revised European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security.

3.1 Employment Policy

The Government considers one of the basic criteria of the state economic and social policy's success to be having the employment rate as high as possible. In cooperation with social partners and territorial self-government bodies, the Government will implement policies supporting growth of sustainable employment and reduction of unemployment rate and economic inactivity. The objective will be to ensure sustainable economic growth and to strengthen social and territorial cohesion.

The Government will connect the effort to achieve growth in the employment rate with creating jobs through appropriately stimulated investment, increasing job attractiveness, labour quality and productivity, through involvement in the knowledge economy and through the reduction of the proportion of low-income workers.

The Government will adopt vigorous measures to enforce a programmatic and project approach focused on strengthening social inclusion, prevention of exclusion from the labour market, and support of disadvantaged groups' integration in employment, particularly concerning graduates, persons with disabilities, mothers with children, and persons close to retirement age. Special attention will be paid to the support of marginalised Roma communities' members; reduction of regional differences in employment, unemployment, and labour productivity; particularly in regions lagging behind with high unemployment. We will also strengthen the scope and financial provisions for programmes and projects.

Within the framework of active labour market policy, we will especially address the support of employing graduates, namely by supporting employers through incentives in the

form of relief on mandatory payments when hiring, particularly to support acquiring practical experience and good working habits. Special measures will be focused on increasing the employability of young people without completed elementary education, in the form of 'second-chance education'.

When addressing these problems, the Government will work closely with the social partners and with territorial self-government bodies. In areas with high unemployment and a poor population, the Government will adopt projects supporting creation of new jobs, projects and programmes to acquire and maintain working habits, particularly for the marginalised groups.

The hiring of poorly qualified long-term unemployed persons will be supported by the Government through a compensation benefit scheme. It will be designed to increase the attractiveness of employment for low-paid jobs, as well. Optionally, new working programmes for the unemployed will be introduced, aimed at increasing their living standard.

Provision of benefits in the field of social assistance will continue to be conditional upon the active involvement of the unemployed in the activation works.

The Government will reconsider the present system of support for citizens with disabilities to eliminate the barriers to creation of new jobs and to ensure the long-term sustainability of jobs created for this group of citizens.

Employment support policies will be enforced with an emphasis on the principles of equal opportunities while consistently ensuring the prohibition of discrimination of persons based on gender, religion or faith, racial origin, national or ethnic origin, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

3.2 Labour Relations and Social Dialogue

When developing the model of an economically efficient welfare state, the Government will respect the requirement of certain flexibility of labour. However, it will ensure the greatest possible protection of employees in the labour process. The same will be based on a modern understanding of the essence of knowledge economy with the human being and his or her knowledge playing an ever-greater role as central factors of economic growth.

Reform of Labour Legislation

The Government will enforce measures to improve the employees' living and working conditions and to harmonise their family and working lives. In regulation of these relations, we will respect the essence and meaning of the International Labour Organisation conventions, the European Social Charter, as well as the European Union's labour laws.

The Government will prepare an amendment to the Labour Code with the objective of ensuring greater protection of employees. The legal provisions for dependent work will later be made more precise to avoid disguising labour relations with other than labour-law relations. We will increase the protection of employees from unjustified dismissals; protection of employees in part-time jobs; we will eliminate the cases of misusing the fixed-term employment occurring through chaining such employments; the entitlement to severance payments while the notice period runs will be guaranteed. The maximum weekly working time, including overtime, will be set out; discrimination of employees employed by temporary

employment agencies will be eliminated through provision of the same degree of protection afforded other employees. The participation of employee representatives in labour standard setting and in working time scheduling will be also strengthened. The Government will engage in efforts to reintroduce the contractual institution of “agreement on work activities” (a form of a part-time employment contract), and to increasing the scope of activity performed on the basis of such a contract.

The Government commits itself to incrementally increasing the minimum wages. At the same time, it will examine the possibility of changing the applicable mechanism of determining the minimum wages to reflect the Government’s priorities particularly in the field of economic, budgetary, currency, and social policy. It will especially scrutinise the use of this institution as a reference quantity for the purpose of performance under other laws.

The Government will create legislative conditions for the use of the social fund to support the social dialogue. At the same time, it will support the extension of the social partners’ competencies to include decision-making on the use of this fund.

The Government will reconsider the standards in the field of occupational safety and health and introduce a process for their adoption on the basis of giving preference to social partners’ agreements.

To achieve a consequent compliance with labour law regulations, the labour inspectorate will be strengthened and it will perform its tasks efficiently. Emphasis will be laid, in particular, on the consequent application of the principle of equal treatment in employment, on just remuneration for work, on the improvement of occupational safety and health conditions, and on the elimination of open and hidden forms of disrespect for employee rights.

The Government will draft a Public Service Act and a new State Service Act, which will replace the present legal provisions for public sector employees’ labour relations. It will apply a remuneration system based on the type and difficulty of the work performed, the education degree achieved, and the professional experience gathered.

The new legal provisions will be based on a modern understanding of public service and state service and will be compliant with the European standards of public sector employees’ labour relations. The objective will be to ensure professional quality, efficiency and effective performance of the public service and state service with the aim of improving the quality of public administration. The legal provisions will include mechanisms that will ensure protection of public sector employees in the event of refusing to participate in an action that serves to cover up corruption of their superiors in administering public funds and in public procurement.

The Government’s priority will be the price of labour. In this respect, we must solve – in the European environment – all the necessary consequences that will objectively occur in social policy. It is necessary to discontinue the philosophy built on the competitive advantage of cheap labour. The Government’s objective will be to change the present situation in income distribution, whereupon almost 70% of employees have incomes below the level of the average wage. The Government will also adopt measures to mitigate the deepening and unjustified differences in the price of labour among regions and industries.

Social Dialogue

The Government recognises social dialogue as an efficient tool of the participation of employees and employers in formulating economic and social policy and to maintain social peace. It will therefore engage itself in efforts to help trade unions regain their position as an effective defender of employees’ interests, and as an equal party to the social dialogue.

The most important objectives in the field of social dialogue support will include that of creating conditions for achieving a consensus among social partners concerning economic and social policy and the conditions for the smooth conducting of collective bargaining.

The Government will engage in efforts to establish a supreme-level tripartite council as a body of the trilateral that will consult on the principle of equal social partnership of the Government, the trade unions, and the employers' organisations. At the same time, it will support the establishment or revival of industrial and regional tripartite organisations.

In the interests of increasing the stability of the social environment, it will support the bipartite social dialogue between the employers and the trade unions. Legislative measures which will eliminate the barriers of efficient collective bargaining and which will introduce the model of extending the higher-level collective agreements to additional employers will be featured in this effort, which will take place in accordance with the relevant conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

The framework of draft legislation will also include the strengthening of the trade union organisation's position in employee participation mechanisms in enterprises and legal provisions for the exercise of the constitutional right to strike so that violations of employees' rights and entitlements do not occur.

3.3 Social Security

The Government will enforce consequent compliance with the constitutional right to adequate material security of the population in old age, in material or social need, in unemployment or in other situations envisaged by the law. The basic objective of the Government's social policy is to create conditions for a dignified life of all residents in the Slovak Republic.

Pension Reform

The priority of the Government will be to ensure financial stability of a pension system financed on an ongoing basis, so that together with the system of old-age pension savings schemes, adequate material security in old age can be provided.

The pension insurance in the basic obligatory first pillar financed on an ongoing basis and defined on the basis of regular payments will be based on solidarity, combined with the principle of merit, equal treatment, responsibility of the insured for his or her future, and democracy in management and administration. A logical consequence of the aforementioned principles is the requirements of a guaranteed subsistence minimum while satisfying the conditions laid down by the law and enhancing the living standard achieved by the insured during his or her economically active life. The Government will maintain the existing structure of pensions. This system will continue to be fully guaranteed by the State.

With the objective of achieving the establishment of a just pension system, which will be sustainable and possible to be financed in changing economic conditions with a greater measure of solidarity, the Government will undertake reform of the pension insurance system.

The Government, following thorough analysis, will adopt necessary measures to stabilise the funding of the first pillar of the social insurance. However, the Government refuses to solve the current problems in funding the social insurance system by increasing the retirement age. The solution of the financial situation in the Social Insurance Company cannot be sought at the expense of the insured and the beneficiaries.

The Government will do its utmost to stabilise the extent of salary replacement and it will initiate its increase.

The Government, at the same time as valorisation, will address the mitigation of differences between the so-called retirees and pensioners, who were assessed the pension pursuant to the new Social Insurance Act. For retirees, the problem of pension insufficiency will be addressed particularly with respect to the growth in living costs.

For pension beneficiaries, the Government will ensure an income at least on the level of the subsistence minimum.

The Government will adopt a systemic solution of disability pensions to eliminate injustices in reconsidering the conditions of occurrence of disability and the illogical links among individual groups of the disabled.

To mitigate the social situation of old-age pension and disability pension beneficiaries, the Government will propose the provision of a Christmas benefit differentiated by the amount of pension depending on the availability of funds in the state budget.

The Government will adopt measures to make the insurance premium rates more realistic and harmonised for individual basic social insurance funds and for the reserve solidarity fund. This will be done in the interests of their balancing, and it will redefine the maximum level of the assessment base for payment of insurance premiums and will consider payment of insurance premiums from dividends and shares in profit.

The Government will maintain the old-age pension savings scheme as part of the pension system based on the capitalisation principle and on the principle of merit. To this system, whose product will be provided while fully respecting its purpose, i.e., ensuring a regular income during the entire period of living to an old age, a new element of voluntariness will be introduced so that its existence does not affect the stability of the system financed on a running basis. The Government will address the situation of savers in the second pillar, for whom this savings scheme is disadvantageous.

The Government will enforce introduction of such mechanisms that will increase the safety of the funds saved within the second capitalisation pillar. The Government will improve the legislative framework to increase the quality of information provided to savers by the pension fund administration companies.

Additional pension saving schemes will continue to be maintained as an additional system of social security. The Government will eliminate the disadvantaged position of additional pension insurance companies in comparison to other financial institutions within the voluntary pension system.

Support for Social Inclusion

The Government's priority will be to reduce, as efficiently as possible, the extent of Slovakia's poverty rate, which is one of the highest among EU states. The Government rejects the claims that deepening poverty is the result of a person's failure. It will therefore provide maximum support to combining the responsibility of the person for his or her destiny and for that of his or her family, with social solidarity and assistance from the state, territorial self-government bodies, churches and religious associations, institutions, and civil society, including self-support groups.

In connection with addressing the poverty issue, the following concepts will have to be defined in legislation: minimum living allowance, social minimum, condition of material need, condition of social need, and social housing.

The Government will reconsider the establishing of the subsistence minimum so that subsistence minimum will be the basic amount from which the amount of measures of particularly of financial nature is derived, reflecting the actual basic subsistence needs and, at the same time, that it is an efficient means to resolve situations requiring financial intervention.

The Government will reconsider the parameters of the benefit and contributions towards addressing material need so that the assistance is adequate to basic subsistence needs while maintaining the principle of dedicated provision and subsidiarity, motivational elements aimed at activation, and joint responsibility of individuals and families in dealing with their unfavourable situation and poverty prevention.

To eliminate the causes of poverty and social exclusion of individuals and groups, including marginalised Roma communities, the Government will adopt measures with an emphasis on creating conditions for implementation of non-financial measures such as, for example, social services, social and legal protection measures, social guardianship, community development, support of local partnership of social inclusion, subsidy programmes to improve equal opportunities, motivation and support for access to education and health care also with the objective of realistic strengthening of social cohesion. At the same time, the Government will consequently require adherence to the principle of subsidiarity and performance of competences by all responsible entities.

The Government will pay due attention to improving quality in the social work field, support professionalism and increasing the status of field social workers.

The Government will create the legislative environment for the development of social services, which will guarantee their beneficiaries dignified living conditions and will be aimed at their activation. The Government will ensure the interlinking of social services and health care and modify the system of their funding. The Government will make an effort to create the conditions for the development of businesses in the field of social services, based on the non-profit principle. Special attention will be paid to the elderly and to the disabled who are dependent on assistance from another person, so that they can remain in the family environment as long as possible and it will make an effort to improve the financial situation of their care provider.

The Government will draft provisions concerning social and legal protection of the elderly and of the disabled, who are unable to protect their rights independently. At the same time, it will make legislative provisions for the protection of apartment tenancy for the elderly, for the severely handicapped, and for families with dependent children.

The Government will establish the Governmental Council for Seniors as its consulting body for the issues concerning the issues of the elderly.

The Government will ensure the handing over of competencies in the area of material need to the municipalities as the transferred performance of state administration, limiting the general payment of the benefit in material need and introducing addressed and cash free assistance, while at the same time also making more prominent provisions for the possibility of using the institution of special beneficiary in provision of the assistance in material need.

State Social Support

The state social support will continue to be based on the financial support by the state in times of crisis, as recognised by the state. The state social support will be focused on increasing the solidarity primarily with families with children.

3.4 Family Support

The Government regards active support to families as a basic duty of the state, with an emphasis on young families and creating conditions for establishing the same. In the interests of creating conditions for favourable mental, physical and social development of children and creating dignified conditions for active support to young families and the growth of the birth rate, the Government will:

- introduce a bonus to the allowance upon the birth of the first child, this being in the total amount including the allowance of not less than SKK 15,000, and ensure year-on-year valorisation of the childbirth allowance and of the benefit to parents having multiple children at the same time.
- This will enforce the incremental increase of the parent benefit in a time horizon upto 2010, so that it compensates the loss of the parent's working income at least at the minimum level and, at the same time, it will enable gainfully employed parents to receive the parental benefit even if they ensure care for their child at the time of performing the gainful activity by placing the child in a nursery or kindergarten.
- A benefit will be introduced to parents with dependent children in the event that the parents receive pension benefits and, due to objective reasons, they do not have an income from a gainful activity, as a result of which they cannot claim the tax relief attributable to the dependent child being cared for (tax bonus).

The Government will support the extension of services in the field of pre- and after-school facilities, parent centres, as well as the operation of broad-range multifunctional daily community centres. It will support the increase of the availability, flexibility and equality of the system of public social services for families to make such services competitive and to increase their quality. An accompanying effect of these measures will be the growth of employment in the social economy field.

The Government will enforce legislative changes in the field of social and legal protection of children with the objective of increasing the efficiency of children's rights protection and it will give preference to care in the biological family to foster family care.

The Government will establish a Ministerial Committee for Children and Youth to co-ordinate and complete a comprehensive and effective system of efficient protection of children's rights and interests in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and with the comprehensive strategy of the European Union and efficient support and ensuring children's rights within the framework of its external and internal policies.

3.5 Support of Gender Equality

The Government when pursuing its policy shall support equality of men and women as an important factor in the development of democracy and the exercising of human rights, so

as to fulfil obligations following from the Lisbon Strategy, as well as from international treaties.

The Government shall therefore secure regular monitoring of equal opportunities for men and women, and it will also create institutional structures for assertion of such issues in all policies and decisions that are being adopted within the framework of decision-making processes. This will take place at all levels of the governance of the society.

The Government when implementing its policy shall strictly observe the principle of the same treatment of men and women, and implement steps to eliminate any forms of discrimination. Inclusive in this are reasons of sex, religious conviction or belief, racial origin, national or ethnic origin, disabled from the aspect of their health, as well as ageism or sexual orientation.

The Government shall focus, within the framework of preventive programmes for elimination of domestic violence, to more efficient provision of a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach, efficient assistance to victims of violence and creation of a wide spectrum of cooperating entities providing services that correspond with European standards in this field.

The Government shall exert its maximum efforts in order to ensure that the European Gender Equality Institute is established in the Slovak Republic, and it shall participate initiatively in the European Year of Equal Chances for All (2007).

3.6 Institutional Effectiveness

The Government will adopt measures to increase effectiveness in the field of social sphere.

From the viewpoint of modernisation and informatisation of processes in the social sphere, a more state-of-the-art method of communication between the authorities and the citizens will be introduced, which will provide greater accessibility of services and a more transparent model of their operation.

The Government will ensure an interconnection of the public administration institutions' information systems so that the exchange of information on citizens and business entities is fully electronic, which will, at the same time, eliminate submitting documents to multiple public administration institutions. A single registry of persons within the sector of labour, social affairs and family will be introduced and conditions will be prepared for building a comprehensive information system for the social sphere.

Completion of the interconnected supporting information systems in the provision of individual types of services and creation of the quality standards for the services provided and further education of employees as well as of field social workers will increase the level of services provided in the framework of the entire system of the social sphere.

In the Social Insurance Company, electronisation will provide more efficient communication with clients, particularly in the field of premium collection.

The Government will make every effort to ensure balanced budget management of the Social Insurance Company, make the tripartite system of executive activity of its bodies more realistic, and, at the same time, support the creation of stable conditions (financial and personnel) for high-quality performance of the statutory duties.

4. Health Care

The Government considers health, equality in health care provision, and health care availability as the fundamental right of every citizen. Maintenance and improvement of health is the best investment for a strong economy and satisfied society. The Government considers health care to be one of its priorities. The mission of health care is the provision of care to the public using public money and therefore it has to be under public scrutiny.

The Government will ensure the principle of solidarity in health care. A socially-oriented state must not dispose of the responsibility for ensuring access to adequate health care to all its citizens. The scope of this care must be defined by the law and, to that extent, health care must be financed from health insurance.

Already in 2006, the Government will cancel some fees that are not directly related to the provision of health care and ensure compensation for the providers.

The Government is aware that the discrepancy between the lack of funds and the expectations of the population can only be solved by maintaining economically and socially sustainable participation in selected types of health care. The Government considers the support of voluntary health insurance to be critical while enabling access to health care not paid from the health insurance and to a reduction of the immediate financial impact of such participation. The Government will consider the possibility of tax relief against payments of the voluntary health insurance.

It will be an important task for the Government to restore the citizens' trust towards health care providers, to humanise the health care staff's attitude to patients, which, however, is conditional upon adequate improvement of health care staff remuneration.

The Government will ensure an increase of funds for health care in 2007 by increasing insurance premium payments for citizens where the payer is the state from 4% of the average wage to 5%. The Government will ensure that public spending in health care expressed in GDP percent has a growth tendency and that it respects the principle of approximation to advanced states of the European Union.

The Government will support multi-source financing of health care. It will contribute to the fund for compensation of extremely demanding procedures.

The Government considers the constitutionally guaranteed system of health insurance, based on the solidarity principle, to constitute the basis of health care funding. The Government will restore the public character of the Všeobecná zdravotná poisťovňa and Spoločná zdravotná poisťovňa health insurance companies. The Government will enforce such a legal environment, in which all health insurance companies have equal conditions regardless of their legal form, and which prevents insurance companies from inefficient management of the funds of the insured. The Government will enforce that the amount of health insurance companies' operating costs as of 2007 be limited by law to a maximum of 4% of the mandatory health insurance premiums collected.

The Government will not admit such legislative changes in health care that could lead to damaging the reputation of the Slovak Republic by failing to ensure an adequate protection of domestic and foreign investments. The Government accepts all forms of ownership of health care facilities and it will create conditions for their multi-source financing.

The Government will revoke the present form of insurance premiums accounting.

The Government will pay maximum attention to the use of all possibilities of financing investment activities in health care, including the EU funds.

The Government considers the basic element in health care to be the first-contact physicians, and therefore it will engage in efforts to improve conditions for their work and

continued education. In 2007, the Government will enforce restoration of the structure of districts for paediatricians, general practitioners, gynaecologists, and dentists, while maintaining the citizen's free choice of health care provider.

The Government will enforce the orientation of health care on prevention and timely diagnostics of diseases, support the implementation of the most important society-wide preventive programmes, and enforce a comprehensive programme of care for children and the elderly. The Government will adopt measures that will enable people to receive a spa treatment for those who need it most and cannot afford it.

The Government supports decentralisation in health care management while introducing the methodological, regulatory, and control role of the state vis-à-vis all health care facilities. In hospital care, it will enforce the role of the state as the owner of faculty health care facilities, facilities with nationwide scope, and those performing special tasks in emergency situations.

The Government will ensure availability and quality of health care for all citizens and it will prevent uncontrolled and inefficient extension of the network of health care facilities. At the same time, it will support the restructuring of the network of health care facilities giving preference to the transfer of activities to the outpatient sphere – including walk-in care, to achieve purposeful specialisation and growth in quality and productivity of the services provided. Medically and financially highly demanding health care procedures will only be provided at accredited workplaces of selected facilities.

The Government will support the creation of conditions for transparent competition of health care providers. At the same time, it will support creation of a system of a differentiated approach in establishing contractual relationships between health insurance companies and health care providers according to the criteria of efficiency and quality of health care provided.

The Government considers patient safety to be an extremely important part of the health care system and therefore it will support introduction of quality systems and efficiency in all areas of health care provision to achieve a medical and sanitary epidemiological standard compliant with EU norms.

The Government will enforce such development of the health care education system that will ensure an adequate number of high-quality professionals for all health care activities. It will reconsider the number of faculty hospitals to return dignity to these institutions corresponding to their importance and quality.

The Government respects the professional and trade union organisations in health care and guarantees co-operation therewith particularly when drafting legislation and conceptual blueprints. The main objective in the field of the medicinal product policy is to ensure efficient, safe and high-quality medicinal products for the entire population in the objectively needed amount and at an adequate price. The Government will enforce the principle that there be at least one medicinal product for every more serious disease fully paid by the health insurance, and it will engage in efforts to significantly reduce the supplementary payments, or user fees, by the population towards medicinal products and medical devices. The Government will apply a transparent system for the medicinal product policy based on applicable EU directives.

The Government will attend to increasing the importance of public health care in maintaining citizens' health. With their activities and comprehensive professional activity, public health care institutions must minimise the action of risk factors upon public health, which may lead to improvement of life quality and extending human life.

The critical objective of the government will be to develop the health care system informatisation at all levels. The Government will ensure legislative and institutional conditions for implementation of information and communication systems that will essentially

assist in improvement of quality, cost efficiency and time availability of services. In this area, the Government will support the project of health care informatisation and gradually implement the objectives of the national eHealth strategy.

An important objective of the Government will be the support of new, more transparent payment mechanisms for health care procedures.

The Government will enforce substantial debureaucratisation of health care and cancel all unnecessary administration and duplicity in the activities of the Ministry of Health, Health care Surveillance Authority, and other institutions. In 2007, these institutions will be subject to thorough activity audit with subsequent reconsideration of the headcount only for the activities that are inevitable, necessary for the entire society, and that are prescribed by law.

5. Knowledge-Based Society

The Government considers the formation of a knowledge-based society to be its priority, as only such a society represents a prerequisite for democratic development, scientific and technological progress, economic growth and social security, employment and growth. Based on the aforementioned reason, it will support educational, scientific research, informational and innovation activities of schools, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, private and corporate development units, businesses linked to public and private resources, creating better legislative conditions, as well as to resources in the framework of the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 – 2013, especially from the operational programmes of a knowledge economy, educational infrastructure, education, regions, and the environment.

The Government will improve the efficiency and quality of the performance of the national development strategy of forming the society's competitiveness – the National Lisbon Strategy "MINERVA", especially in the areas of investment in people, education and employment, innovation, science and research, information society and business environment, which must guarantee society-wide changes in the interests of developing the knowledge society. The Government will examine and activate the performance of separate action plans. It will also support the creation of technological platforms with the objective of a closer relationship among science, research and development, forming mutual partnerships between the business sphere and the academic environment.

The Government will guarantee efficient building of infrastructure of science and research from the European structural funds in all regions of Slovakia. At the same time, it will adopt such legislative measures that will enable and stimulate the use of the research results for the development of small and medium-sized enterprise and for the support of science and research by the private sector.

The Government considers sustainable development to be one of the basic pillars of knowledge society and therefore it will support a balanced approach thereto, taking into consideration, besides economic growth, also social and environmental impacts.

The Government is aware of the responsibility for the strategic development of the Slovak Republic with the objective of adopting sustainable development not only in the national but also in the European context. Based on the aforementioned reason and particularly with respect to preparation and adoption of the long-term vision of Slovakia and the desirable coordination, it will create conditions for establishment of the National Centre of European and Global Studies of the Slovak Republic.

The Government considers the formation and development of the information society to be one of the basic prerequisites for creating a knowledge society. In a targeted manner, it will be increasing the citizens' information literacy, creating appropriate conditions for considerable extension of Slovakia's territorial coverage with the high-speed Internet, for various uses of information and communication technologies in all areas of society's life while increasing the quality of citizens' lives.

In the development of science and technology in the Slovak Republic, the Government will support the main priorities of the European Commission included in the EU Seventh Framework Programme (2007 – 2013) and primary attention will be given to the use of structural funds for the development of science infrastructure in linking institutions from various sectors of science and technology in the Slovak Republic and using the exception granted by the European Commission to the region of Bratislava. The Government realises that the absorption capacity of structural funds in science and technology requires also supporting capital resources from the state budget. The Government will support the membership of the Slovak Republic in the prestigious European Molecular Biology Conference (EMBO) and it will support new centres of excellence funded in accordance with the MINERVA programme.

5. 1 Instruction and Education

The Government considers the instruction and education of Slovak society to be essential for its further development, and a decisive precondition for its successful adaptation within the integrating European environment. Instruction and education shall develop in the spirit of modern European and world trends, and national, social and Christian traditions, while respecting the global outlook, and applying the principles of democracy. The dominant role in education is played by the State, while proceeding in coordination with self-governing regions, municipalities and citizens.

The Government shall create preconditions for the improvement of quality of instruction and education at all types of schools emphasising national, historical and cultural values and to patriotism. Due to this reason, it shall financially support the text-book literature and journals, as well as knowledge-oriented excursions, research projects, and other creative activities focused on becoming acquainted with personalities of Slovak historical, political, literary and cultural life that co-created the complex history of the modern Slovak statehood.

The Government is aware of the fact that mainly the education has undeniable effects on the economy of the State, on its economic growth, on the development of the social dimension, on the quality of life, as well as on the growth of professional level. It fully accepts the fact that education helps significantly in solution of local employment, in revival of development focused activities of municipalities and small regions with the low degree of territorial and qualification mobility of labour. The Government is also aware of the fact that education helps in assertion within the political system of modern democracy, and in increasing the level of critical perception in public sphere. Education also increases prevention against negative social phenomena, and helps in resolving issues of solidarity, justice, humanity, historical, cultural, national and civic identity and patriotism.

The Government shall improve the quality of conditions of the national system of education, mainly concerning instruction in the mother tongues of all national minorities within the framework of the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages. But the instruction in the language of a national minority cannot be to the detriment of the quality of instruction of the State Slovak language. The Government considers the principle of life-long learning an important area for the improvement of the knowledge potential of society. This

principle also became one of the priorities of the Lisbon Strategy, which responds to changes in the labour market, social cohesion and development of modern technologies. The Government intends to raise the level of education and the ability to apply this education to the highest level of social values. That is why it shall support the level of education, science and research and information technologies as the basic preconditions for formation of the knowledge-based, information and cultural society in the Slovak Republic.

The school is the basis of educational activities. Its task is to prepare children and youth for life and work under the new conditions of the European labour market. The right to receive high quality instruction means that the school has to provide the scope for independence, creativity, and modern methods of instruction and education. The Government is fully aware of the fact that the improvement of the social and economic status of teachers and educators, improvement of their working environment and regeneration of labour is the precondition for improving quality in education. Slovakia's Government will focus its attention on the conceptual addressing of the impacts of unfavourable demographic development. The objective of the Government is to achieve gradually, within this term of office, that the average salary in the education system shall reach the level of the average salary in the national economy. The Government will create the kind of legislative and economic framework wherein teachers would, to the greatest possible degree, be able to fulfil the professional and moral preconditions for performance of this challenging profession. The Government will support educational programmes for teachers at all levels of schools and it will elaborate the concept of the career growth of teachers. The Government will support establishment of a professional chamber of pedagogical workers in education. The European legislative standards shall be applied in education. If we want to develop further the system of education, we have to reverse the long-term lagging behind of its financing.

The Government will apply multi-source financing in the system of education, with the objective to gradually reach the level of 5 % of GDP. The key precondition will be the creation of a system of efficient and purpose-oriented implementation of European funds in the field of education, science and research. The Government will enforce fundamental changes in legislation and redistribution of funds – intelligent investments, so as to be able to implement the following decisions in all parts of the system of education, in science and technology, as well as in sports and working with youth.

The Government undertakes to make the governance and administration of the system of education more efficient. The activities and competencies of the Regional School Councils will be re-evaluated, with the objective to transfer the performance of the State administration to bodies of territorial self-administration.

Regional System of Education

The Government is aware of the significance of cooperation with the local and regional self-governments, with the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia and with the Trade Union of Workers in Education and Science in Slovakia, in connection with accomplishment of priorities in the system of education.

Elementary education is „the gate of entry“ into the system of education. The level and quality of secondary schools, apprenticeship schools and other higher learning institutes depends on its level. The Government will create a legislative framework for the reorganisation of the content of instruction and education at elementary and secondary schools. The Government will support the pre-school preparation of children. It will assess the exclusion of kindergartens from the legal Act on School Establishments and its insertion into the School Act as the first level of the system of schools. While doing so, it proceeds from the

knowledge that the kindergarten is irreplaceable in preparation of children from the cognitive, physical, social and emotional aspects. It plays an important role for children from a socially poorer family environment and for children with special needs.

In the legislative field the Government will prepare a modern legal act on instruction and education, as the basic precondition of the content reform in the system of education. As well, there will be a new act on the status of teachers and educators and other employees that are active throughout the system of education. The legal act will be characterized by a new motivating system of salaries, professional growth and social status. By doing so, preconditions will be created for a systemic change in the content of the system of education. Improvements in language preparation, the development of computer literacy and communication capabilities are all connected in this respect, with considerably more extensive use of modern didactic aids, mainly IT and multimedia technology in the process of instruction. The Act will also create preconditions for instruction and education of gifted students, disadvantaged groups of children, and monitoring of the level and quality of instruction and education. The Government will take steps to decrease the student-teacher ratio in respective classes.

The Government will provide for the coordination of vocational education and the labour market, adaptation of the apprenticeship and educational areas of specialisation to its requirements, including support for the creation of new fields of study. It will propose a two-level model of educational programmes at the State and at school levels. The Government will support the continuum of different stages of vocational education and educational programmes with the objective to prepare specialists with a better adaptation capability. The Government will consider introducing motivational criteria for the participation of unions of employers and of employers in the vocational and practical preparation of students. Within the framework of financing of schools, it will amend the present methodology based on the principle of financial equality, so as to apply the economic exaction of the process of instruction and education.

The Government will devote its attention to artistic education within the framework of the elementary level of education in the field of arts. It will provide for the education of special needs children and learning-challenged pupils, in co-operation with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family, in order to ensure that they can find their dignified place in the labour market.

Institutions of Higher Learning

The Government is aware of the fact that the institutions of higher learning play a substantial role in the concept of a knowledge-based society. They will participate to the largest degree in attaining the fundamental principles of the Lisbon Strategy in Slovakia. In this, it will be necessary to elaborate a new concept of education for the institutions of higher learning, and also with respect to the European legislation applicable to institutions of higher learning. But also other fields will be a part of the concept: education, institutional assessment and financing of institutions of higher learning, guaranteeing of equal opportunities connected with studying at institutions of higher learning. This also entails student mobility, language and digital skills, research and its link to the process of education and application in social life, especially in the entrepreneurial sector. This will also include the area of strategies and priorities of support and orientation of science to projects of international programmes of equal significance. Emphasis will be placed on building centres of excellence and integrated projects that are preconditions of participation of Slovak scientists within the framework of

EU research programmes – the areas generally considered as the main financial and legislative instruments of the EU for implementation in the research sphere.

The Government will take the necessary steps leading to expedite the differentiation between the university and non-university types of institutions of higher learning. The Government will provide for their systemic evaluation in an effort to attain qualitative growth at institutions of higher learning. The Government will ensure that schools without valid accreditation will not be established and will not be active in the field of education. At the same time it will support considerably the role of institutions of higher learning in the field of science and research. The Government will support university research and it will pay increased attention to the use of its outputs in industry and in social practice.

The Government will prepare an amendment of the legal Act on Institutions of Higher Learning in connection with the creation of the European environment in the field of institutions of higher learning and science, taking into consideration the new needs of the institutions. The Act must bring about higher mobility of students, improvement of the process of education and the scientific and research process, linking them with topical requirements of practice. The Act will also create conditions for the efficient functioning of the system of institutions of higher learning fully compatible with international standards. The Government will focus its attention on solving the problem of multi-source financing of institutions of higher learning. The Government will draft a new methodology of financing of the State and public institutions of higher learning, as the present methodology does not contribute to the rationalisation and economic efficiency of institutions of higher learning but leads them rather to being subordinated to the number of students. Especially in the first years of study, the number of students exceeds the capacities of institutions of higher learning, the quality of education is declining and the rate of failure grows enormously. The new methodology of financing will be amended by the Government so as to suit the economic exaction of the study, quality of education and the level of science and research.

The Government will not introduce fees for the full-time study at the institutions of higher learning. It will motivate legislatively the entrepreneurial sector to invest into education, science, research and development. The Government will extend conditions for education at institutions of higher learning, specifically in the Information Technology field as well as nanotechnology and biotechnology. It will continue supporting the development of basic and applied research at the institutions of higher learning that stimulates and improves the quality of the process of education.

The Government is aware of the fact that the modern integrated system should extend the possibilities of further education and re-training, first of all of the middle-aged and older generations, which continuously have more difficulty becoming active in the labour market. Hence the Government will create such legislative conditions at the institutions of higher learning that the system of life-long learning will take into consideration the needs of Slovakia in a way that will be economically advantageous for the schools. The Government will support introduction of new supportive educational programmes for institutions of higher learning by means of a system of scholarships, tax adjustments and modification of salary conditions. It will create a new form of subsidy – in co-operation with professional associations and unions and the private sector – to support activities at the institutions of higher learning that will make it possible for students to obtain additional financial support for their studies.

The Government will create conditions for investment incentives – intelligent investments supporting creation of technological incubators at the institutions of higher learning – involving higher added value. The Government will address the issue of the low social status of scientific and research workers and of lecturers at the institutions of higher education, and specifically of university professors. They have the greatest responsibility for

the overall profile and professional level of the institutions of higher learning in Slovakia. And of no lesser significance is their responsibility for development of fields of study, for the quality of links between the research and education at the institutions of higher learning, for the level of international mobility, for the quality of scientific results of the corresponding institution of higher learning. The level of the process of education, the preparation of fellows and the qualification development of the institutions of higher learning are all encompassed within this sphere.

5.2 Science and Technology

The Government realises the impact of science and technology on the increase of the Slovak economy's quality and population's living standard. Thus it will adopt specific measures to support research and development in accordance with the existing trends in the EU countries. The Government will base its management of science on the principles of the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Declaration, which present science and technology as the main instrument of building a knowledge society.

The Government will apply a multi-source funding of research and development. At the same time, it will reconsider the structure of the grant system of funding with the intention of unifying and speeding up the financial flows. The Government's objective is, in cooperation of universities, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, research and development centres, scientific and technology parks, business incubators, technologically oriented companies and through the successful drawing of EU funds, to incrementally achieve the level of funding into science and technology at 0.8% of GDP.

The Government will create the legislative environment for stimulation of the use of science and research results for development of, in particular, small and medium-sized enterprise. Increased attention will be paid to education of young scientific generation and its social appreciation. This will be achieved through a system of special grants for young scientific workers and doctoral students, which the Government plans to create. It will thus attempt to halt the brain drain and stabilise the young educated generation in Slovakia. The Government will create conditions for efficient use of sectoral operational plans for education, educational infrastructure, research and development according to the needs of Slovakia's regions. The Government will create a system of support for efficient building of infrastructure of science and research using resources from the European structural funds. It will improve the conditions ensuring protection of intellectual property and more efficient protection of the use of the R&D results. The Government will support scientific teams that will become part of the virtual network of the centre of technologies in Europe and centres of excellence, which will work with corporate research and development teams and companies.

5.3 Youth and Sports

The starting point for defining the relation to youth will be the consequent implementation of the objectives of the European Commission White Paper on Youth Policy - A New Impetus for European Youth and the European Youth Pact. The Government will ensure that the government policy is targeted, structured, and integrated policy based on the

cooperation of the sectors and on the coordination of services to youth. The Government will prepare a Concept of the State Policy with Respect to Children and Youth for 2008–2013. The Concept will be the starting document for establishing action plans of youth policy for individual years. The Government will also prepare a concept of information for youth and provision of information and consulting services for children and youth in the Slovak Republic. Attention will be paid also to a legislative solution of the leisure time centres' activity. In an effort to better coordinate the youth policy in the Slovak Republic, the Government will consider establishing the function of a government plenipotentiary for working with children and youth led by a deputy prime minister. The Government will increase the amount of funds allocated to support of work with children and youth.

The Government will focus on the support of informal education, information for youth, participation of children and young people in the life of towns and municipalities, and support of active use of leisure time. The Government will pass an Act on Youth. The Government considers it to be important that regions are also involved in the support of work with children and youth. The system of educational vouchers for after-school activities will be replaced by using the saved funds to support the activity of local self-governments in working with children and youth. The Government will support after-school activities and deepen the cooperation between school and family through the Open School project. Through supporting the formation of Information Centres for the Young in each district town in Slovakia, the Government will open the door for young people to information and consulting services. To achieve an increased level of work with children and youth, the Government will prepare a change of education content.

The Government will draft a new law on the support of sports, which will fully transpose the *acquis communautaire* provisions for sports in the EU with an emphasis on the fight against doping, prevention of violence in stadiums with the objective of supporting national representation, regional, youth and academic sport. At the same time, the law on sports will put emphasis on creating a transparent information system concerning management of funds in various areas of sports, including specifying a single methodology for distribution of funds, creating multi-source funding of sports, as well as creating an efficient system for resolution of sport disputes in accordance with the trend in the EU. Likewise, the Government will develop the conclusions of the European Sports Charter. The Government will provide financial support to youth sports at schools.

The state will ensure a gradual growth of financing for sports. Realising the importance of building a sports infrastructure, a long-term programme of sport infrastructure will be drafted including provisions for the coordination of sport facility constructions and their subsequent economic operation. The Government will therefore revisit the Gambling Act, the Income Tax Act, and the Accounting Act concerning non-governmental organisations and civic associations. At the same time, it will create space for pooling of public and private funds on the principle of public-private-partnership (PPP) projects. The Government will prepare draft new organisational structure of management of Slovak sports and ensure the corresponding level of management for representation and sport.

The Government will recommend the Slovak Television Council and the Slovak Radio Council to support an awareness campaign in public media focused on promotion of healthy lifestyle and changing the value orientation of the citizens. The Government will ensure linking the national sport development programme with the related programmes particularly in the field of health care, youth, tourism, and prevention of negative phenomena in the society. It will also ensure comprehensive health care for athletes and systematic support for talented youth. It will support the programme of education for experts in sports on the basis of requirements from the practice.

6. Culture

The Government perceives the development of culture in the broadest sense of the word as a necessary condition for life quality improvement for the citizens of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will exercise a targeted cultural policy based on a consensus reached in the previous period that a support for culture from public funds is legitimate and, at the same time, that direct political and ideological influence on culture is inadmissible.

The Government considers the protection and use of the cultural heritage, jointly with the support for new original art and its presentation, to be one of the crucial pillars of maintaining and strengthening Slovakia's identity in the environment of globalisation and commercialisation of culture. In the development of culture, the Government sees an efficient tool for the protection of the individual from an unbalanced, consumeristic way of life and an irreplaceable tool of deepening the spiritual dimension of human life. In this context, the Government will extend the scope for cooperation also with churches and religious associations.

The Government, in its initiatives in the field of culture, will observe three basic principles – continuity, communication and coordination. Continuity with all the positive developments in this field in the previous period, communication with the cultural community and other involved groups as an important part of the process of adopting essential decisions in the field, and co-ordination with the objective of positive synergy when creating conditions and effectively using the sources for protection, creation, and propagation of culture.

The Government will attend to the development and protection of the Slovak language as the state language in cooperation with competent state and scientific institutions as well as with professional teams of Matica slovenská (Slovak Heritage).

In the coming term, the Government wants to set clear priorities for culture, which express the interest of the state in particular areas of culture that could not function without state support or which are irreplaceable for the state or for culture. To implement these priorities, the Government will create not only appropriate legislative, organisational, and methodological conditions, but it will also continue providing direct financial assistance from public funds.

6.1 Economic Instruments

During this term, the Government aims at incrementally increasing the contribution towards the funding of culture and thus coming close to spending such a proportion of public funds for the support of culture as is usual in EU states.

The Government will draft a law on the funding of culture as a demonstration of public interest in the support of culture in the Slovak Republic. The law will define the main directions, types and sources of the funding of cultural activities as well as the mechanism of distribution, surveillance and monitoring of purposefulness of public spending. The law will include a provision for the funding of the development and propagation of the culture of national minorities and ethnic groups.

The Government declares the interest to extend, simultaneously with direct subsidies from public funds, also the possibilities of multi-source funding.

The Government will support extensive use of European funds for the renovation and rehabilitation of cultural monuments and other structures that already serve or will serve, once their rehabilitation is completed, for cultural purposes.

6.2 Media and Audiovisuals

The strategic objective of the Government's media policy will be to create legislative and institutional prerequisites for the development of mass media, just economic and professional competition in the media market, transparency of ownership and plurality of the media environment in the interests of improving the quality of exercise of citizens' constitutional rights to freedom of expression and information.

The Government will create a new legislative, financial, and organisational framework for the operation of public radio and television. The content orientation and financial provisions for public media will be processed in the form of a contract between the Parliament and Slovak Radio and the Slovak Television.

The Government will prepare a new Act on the Press Agency of the Slovak Republic that will address the organisational status, mission, and functions of TASR as the national press agency.

The Government will submit a new press (media) Act, which will provide for the basic rules and relationships among the entities in the process of providing promotional information through communication media.

The Government will create legislative and financial conditions for programme use of the digital system of television and radio broadcasting.

The Government will create conditions for the revitalisation of the domestic audiovisual culture, supporting the original works and European co-production in the field of radio, television and film (Audiovisual Fund Act) and extending the proportion of broadcasts of audiovisual works with dubbing in the Slovak language (Audiovisual Act).

The Government will prepare the concept of media education as part of the educational system of the society, support the formation of training programmes for teachers focused on the use of media and new communication technologies in the teaching process.

6.3 Rehabilitation of Monuments and Protection of Cultural Heritage

The Government commits itself to create conditions for permanent maintenance of valuable monuments, protection of preservation areas and national cultural monuments. It considers the national cultural heritage to include also the cultural works and traditions created by Slovaks living abroad.

It will put emphasis primarily on rehabilitation and restoration of national cultural monuments and their use for the development of tourism. It will focus on locations with nationwide importance, such as the existing world heritage locations, castle museums with high visiting rate, and municipal cultural reserves.

The funds for the protection and rehabilitation of monuments will be ensured by the Government through special-purpose assistance by the State as well as through multi-source funding, particularly from EU structural funds.

The Government considers an important prerequisite of protection of cultural heritage to be the adoption of the Strategy of Development of the Slovak Library Science, Museums, and Galleries.

The Government will consider the effect of the existing regulations in the field of sales, export and import of antiquities and objects of high artistic value. Considering the possibility of returning works of museum and gallery value originating in Slovakia, the Government will create a financial reserve that could be used to purchase works of Slovak art at auctions abroad for state collections.

The Government will adopt a statutory legislative measure, which will enable, through the form of a state guarantee, to import collections of high artistic value to Slovakia with the objective of having exhibition projects in the European format.

6.4 Local and Minority Culture

The Government is aware of the fact that objectives of the cultural policy cannot be reached without the support and development of the local and minority culture. That is why it will intensify the dialogue with the territorial and local self-governments and their organizations on the issues of culture and the target-oriented support of cultural activities of citizens at the local and regional level. The Government will support methodological and consultation assistance to cultural institutions from the perspective of the corresponding specialised workplaces within the competence of the Slovak Ministry of Culture.

The Government will provide for the support of culture of national minorities and ethnic groups and disadvantaged groups of citizens by means of a system of grants. It will at the same time also support the development of the Slovak culture in territories with mixed languages.

6.5 Art and National Cultural Institutions

The Government considers the development of the original literary, theatrical, film, television, radio, music and fine arts creation as one of its priorities. That is why it will support not only the creation of new works of art, but also their dignified presentation at prestigious festivals and shows, as well as within the premises of Slovak institutes abroad.

The attention of the Government shall be focused throughout the whole term of office on helping to solve the problems of the national cultural institutions. These include the Slovak National Theatre, the Slovak National Gallery, the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, the Slovak National Museum, the Slovak National Library, and also the institution Matica slovenská (Slovak Heritage). The Government does not care only about the restoration and upgrading of the premises that house active institutions of Pan-Slovak significance, but it is also interested in the overall stabilisation and improving the quality of their further activities.

6.6 Churches and Religious Societies

The Government considers maintaining harmonious relations of the State with the Churches and religious societies to be important. It declares its interest in developing a partner-like dialogue with their representatives in all fields where they are committed in terms of solving society-wide problems and it will support the social, cultural, educational and other activities of churches and religious societies that are beneficial for the public.

The Government respects the valid legislative framework applicable to activities of Churches and religious societies, and it is ready to fulfil its obligations following from it.

7. Democracy and Rule of Law

7.1 Democratic State

The Government, in the interest of developing the multiethnic and multicultural character of the society of citizens of the Slovak Republic, will fight against all forms of racial, ethnic, religious and political hatred. The Government undertakes to wage a permanent struggle against discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, extreme nationalism and chauvinism, and for the promotion of truth about the Holocaust. The Government shall proceed in its relation to national minorities in the spirit of the approved wording of the European Charter of the Regional or Minority Languages and it shall create conditions for establishment of the Office for Minorities in the SR.

The Government shall create a democratic environment for the freedom of thought, conscience and religious belief. It will respect the status and tasks of churches, religious societies and other associations and citizens without a religious confession on the principle of equality and preservation of plurality.

The Government guarantees to all citizens – regardless of their sex, race, colour of complexion, language, belief and religion, political or other ways of thinking, ethnical or social origin, property, gender or any other status – that it shall respect all the fundamental human rights and freedoms. Among these rights and freedoms belongs also the right of the human being, of the citizen, to decide freely about his/her ethnic identity. But at the same time it underlines that it will not harm anyone, nor place anyone at an advantage or disadvantage

by its decisions due to these reasons.

The Government undertakes to carry out gradual amendments of the Election Act that will remove certain existing deformations caused by the former Government and shall stipulate a greater responsibility of a Member of Parliament vis-à-vis the citizen.

The Government considers the Third Sector to be an important social pillar and a part of a free civic society. Bearing in mind the significance of development of the civic society, a partner dialogue with respective components and platforms of the civic society can be expected, with the purpose of developing a high quality economic and legal environment.

The Government acknowledges the solution of the Roma problems for its priority. It will support and implement all programmes of development with the objective to improve the life of the Roma and integration of the Roma community into society, while efficiently using funds that are target-oriented in the fields of education, culture, health care and social care, infrastructure and housing.

The Government shall prepare the continuation of the strategy of solution of the Roma national minority. In the interest of more operative efficiency of implementation of the respective intents it will finalize building of specialized and specific capacities directly in those regions where citizens of the Roma nationality predominantly live. The Government will create conditions for the real integration and inclusion of the Roma ethnic group, with the objective to increase its standard of living – on the basis of the broadest consensus on the one side and the political will on the other.

The Government considers Slovaks living abroad to be an integral part of the Slovak nation, their life and history as a part of the national history and their culture as a part of the Slovak national cultural heritage. In accordance with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, the Government shall support the identity and cultural life of Slovak communities abroad, with the objective to preserve and develop their national awareness. The Government expresses its readiness to solve through the Office for the Slovaks Abroad requirements and the needs of Slovak minorities and communities all over the world in the field of education, science, research, information and media.

7.2 Justice

Judiciary, Legislation, and Prison System

The Government considers the judicial power and ensuring its qualified performance to be one of its main priorities. It respects the fact that an independent and unbiased judiciary is an integral part of the democratic state and of the rule of law, and it will create conditions for improving the efficiency and quality of court proceedings and decision-making without unnecessary delays.

In the interests of achieving these objectives, the Government will create conditions to satisfy the guarantees of judicial independence, which is the basis for unbiased proceedings and decision-making; at the same time, however, it will increase the demands on quality and expedience of court proceedings and decision-making on the one hand, while maintaining judges' social security with the objective of stabilising their social position as much as possible on the other hand.

The other pole of the judges' independence guarantees will be the increasing requirements on civil integrity and ethic conduct of judges also outside of their workplace providing that in the event of culpable violation of these criteria, their legal liability will be pursued.

To continuously increase the competency of judges but also that of prosecutors, the Government will create conditions for completion of the Judiciary Academy of Slovakia in such a way that the same satisfies the requirements of a contemporary educational facility for the sectors of justice and prosecution.

The Government will engage in efforts to suppress corruption, considering the fight against it to be part of strengthening the judiciary independence.

Judiciary

The Government will ensure assessment of the condition of the Slovak judiciary from the viewpoint of law enforceability and the smoothness of court proceedings, making an analysis of cases older than one year being dealt with by the courts and examining the reasons for delays in proceedings found, including in making court decisions, not excluding legal liability being pursued against persons who caused excessive delays. Subsequently, it will prepare a set of essential organisational, systemic and material measures to prevent the recurrence of the deficiencies found, including increasing the number of judges for the necessary period, and for each judge, making available essential decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Communities and of the European Court of Human Rights in the Slovak language.

The Government will make necessary measures to gradually and materially separate the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic from the Ministry of Justice. It will define a system and a procedure which will restore the Supreme Court's purpose and importance of its constituting and inclusion in the system of courts of the Slovak Republic and examine the possibilities of creating an autonomous Supreme Administrative Court providing that the administrative agenda in first and second instances would continue to be dealt with by district and regional courts. It will adopt measures to ensure that material court competence starts at a district court as the court of factual presentation, regional court to become a court of appeal, and the Supreme Court to become a court of review, unifying and generalising the interpretation and application practice of lower instance courts.

It will consequently examine the reform of courts' organisational structure, including the reasons for dissolution of certain district courts, which caused increased public spending and made communication with the competent court more difficult, i.e., hindered the access to justice. Moreover, an analysis will be performed of the radical increase of court fees in the previous period, which attacks the constitutional principle of "...every person may claim his or her right ... at an independent and impartial court..." and creates a situation that justice may be claimed only by a person who has money. Therefore the Government, throughout its term, will not increase court fees; on the contrary, where effective, it will approach a reduction thereof (for example, in proceedings on the protection of a personality).

The Government will create conditions for increasing the objective information on court proceedings and decisions, control over the performance of judiciary by the public through creating conditions for the publishing of court judgements of all instances, as well as publishing lists of court proceedings and delivering judgements on the Internet. At the same time, this will contribute to the predictability of the provision of law and justice – with the ambition of positively influencing the level of legal awareness of the citizens and the level of

the legal environment, i.e., respect for the law and respect for the principle of law and order, including the constitutional principle of presumption of innocence.

The Government will support maintenance of the autonomous position of the ombudsman and the position of the Judiciary Council of the Slovak Republic and propose extension of their powers so that both the ombudsman and the Judiciary Council are authorised to file proposals with the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic to initiate proceedings on the conformity of legal regulations.

The Government will maintain the present form and position of the Prosecution, including maintaining social security of the prosecutors.

It will support the orientation of courts and Prosecution Offices on the use, where possible, of legal diversions for meritorious and just settlement of cases from the contradictory court proceedings. They are demanding with respect to the process and thereby also with respect to time and money.

The Government will enforce the use of alternative sanctions executed outside of the prison system, which significantly relieves the public budget from spending on the prison system.

The Government will create conditions for performing a detailed analysis of activity and it will assess the activity of special legal instruments and institutions in the fight against the most severe economic crimes and corruption particularly from the viewpoint of financial and material costs, workload, efficiency, and material justification. It will propose measures that will prevent discrimination in the profession of judges and prosecutors and, for the future, exclude political intervention in the work of law enforcement agencies.

Court Administration and Court Clerks

The Government will pay increased attention to the issues of improving the efficiency of court administration, including appointment to managerial positions, with a focus on gradually building state-of-the-art court workplaces, which will provide the necessary conditions for performance of the judiciary considering the material equipment of courts, a functioning system of information technologies, methods of collection and transmission of data and information necessary to ensure the operation of courts and handling thereof. It will examine the possibilities of improving the equipment of more courtrooms with technical equipment enabling recording and electronic signature of acts in court proceedings with the objective of assisting the speeding up of contradictory court proceedings as well as to create a permanent information system focused on monitoring of cases older than one year before courts of all instances.

The Government will create conditions for assessment of the system and activity of higher court clerks and adopt measures to improve the functionality and quality of their activity and that of the probation and mediation clerks with the objective of their effective contribution to the performance of judiciary in the scope as provided by law.

Legislation

The Government will adapt its legislative programme particularly to the priorities of the Manifesto of the Government with the objective of reducing the number of governmental legislative drafts and increasing their quality. Legislation must significantly contribute to legal

certainty and legal stability and to the reduction of delays in court proceedings, problem-free application of law, however, not with the possibility of varied interpretation. If people are expected to know the law, it cannot change every now and then and in short periods.

The Government will exclude the sector-based and hasty approach to drafting laws and it will rationally use the forthcoming period for preparation of such laws that are necessary from the viewpoint of EU membership. It will submit drafts of the most important laws for public discussion and it will support passing of laws in the shortened legislative procedure exclusively in cases where legal conditions for such procedure have been satisfied.

The Government will ensure an analysis of the present system and content of the Slovak Republic's legal system, particularly in the field of civil law, commercial law, administration, and criminal and, on the basis of the situation ascertained, it will submit changes to the legislative process particularly concerning those laws that are at variance with the requirement of efficiency in execution of justice. Within this activity, the Government will create conditions to evaluate the experience of courts, prosecution and police in interpretation and application practice concerning the provisions of criminal codes effective as of 1 January 2006 and, if necessary, propose specific legislative changes to the Criminal Law and to the Criminal Code so that they assist qualitatively and quantitatively, speed up and simplify the criminal procedures and in the elimination of the possibility of varied interpretation of the articulated forms of these laws.

The Government will perform an analysis of the efficiency of the present system of free legal assistance and, depending on its results, adopt measures for improvement of such legal assistance for the poor with the objective of creating legal equality among citizens and it will support all possibilities of out-of-court settlements of disputes.

The Government will examine the possibilities and impacts of creating such legislative conditions so as to enable the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, in proceedings on constitutional complaints pursuant to Art. 127 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic as well as in other proceedings, to make decisions also on the conformity of legal regulations and, on the basis of the results, propose a solution.

Prison System

The Government will create material conditions for custody and imprisonment with an emphasis on an even greater humanisation, including creation of a contemporary and efficient system of custody comparable to the European standard, which is in compliance with the relevant international conventions and, at the same time, reflects the cultural and social specifics of Slovakia. It will pay continued attention to employing convicts with a focus on creating workplaces at the institutions of the Prison and Justice Wards Corps in order to instill working habits in the convicts and, at the same time, to ensure the income part of the Prison and Justice Wards Corps' budget. It will pursue activities focused on the involvement of the State, volunteer, and charity organisations in the post-penitentiary regime, to complete an efficient security system ensuring protection of facilities of the Prison and Justice Wards Corps, courts and prosecution offices, as well as to maintain the social security for the Prison and Justice Wards Corps staff.

Special attention will be paid to the juvenile accused and convicts. It will enforce activation of a special regime for these persons, emphasising an education and work and with an orientation toward prevention of reoffending.

Concerning the employment of convicts, the Government will enforce that prison workplaces be more actively involved in the execution of suitable government contracts.

7.3 Internal Order and Security

Internal order and security are important attributes that any democratic, legal and consolidated state has to protect. The Government not only realises this but considers it to be extremely important to convince the citizens of the Slovak Republic through its actions that the state is capable of building an orderly society, where lawlessness is replaced with compliance with law, where lives, health, property, rights and freedoms of the citizens are protected. In real life, this includes particularly the security and protection from crime of all kinds, criminal elements and perpetrators of petty crime, drug producers and distributors, persons threatening the moral upbringing of juveniles, public order violators, aggressive and disorderly drivers on the road. The Government commits itself to do its best for the security and protection of citizens and their families, peaceful life in municipalities and towns, for their undisturbed work and rest.

The Government will adopt a new programme of fighting crime. The programme will reflect the changes in the development and structure of crime, new conditions and options of fighting against crime in the period of Slovak Republic's membership in European and transatlantic structures, qualitative changes in criminal law regulations, in the forms and methods of crime detection and investigation, as well as in the police instruments and procedures applied.

The Government will annually evaluate the capability of the key state bodies to respond in a timely and efficient way to the threat of possible terrorist attack and to the consequences of such an attack. In the context with the tasks of the National Plan of Action on Combating Terrorism, the Government will adopt necessary measures to improve the preparedness of the state to predict and avert the threat of a terrorist attack and to eliminate its consequences. The Government will prepare a draft law on combating terrorism. It will create appropriate mechanisms to improve co-ordination, cooperation and interoperation among intelligence services, the police and other relevant services. In combating terrorism and organised crime, specialised units and services perform important tasks. The Government will continue supporting their activities.

The Government will adopt a stricter course against extremism. It will not tolerate any illegal activities of members and supporters of extremist groups and movements and will act decisively in the cases of threat to peace and order, rights and freedoms of persons based on their national, racial or other difference. It will prepare a draft law on combating extremism comparable to the legal provision for combating this negative phenomenon in democratic states of Europe. It will create conditions for personnel and financial strengthening of the security structures combating this negative phenomenon.

The Government is well aware that serious economic crime and corruption threatens the basic principles of socially oriented, economically prosperous, stable, legal and globally recognised statehood. It will make necessary steps to increase the success rate of the authorities participating in the revealing and investigation of this criminal activity. It will evaluate the activity of special legal instruments and institutions in combating the most serious economic crimes and cases of corruption. The Government will not condone any political influence on their activity. It will do the utmost to bring into effect the law on documenting the origin of property and to start implementing its mechanisms in practice as soon as possible. In the interests of efficiently combating corruption, the Government will take steps to adopt legislative and technical conditions necessary to reduce the time from detecting and investigating an illegal activity and its punishment. By reducing bureaucracy,

improving the quality of legislation in the field of public administration and legal procedures, it will create conditions for limiting the scope available for corruption.

In the field of state drug policy, the Government will rely on UN conventions, UN special General Assembly in 1998, and the European Strategy to Combat Drugs for 2005–2012 and the European Action Plan for 2005–2008.

The Government will create room for more efficient responses to manifestation of ecologic crime and to the requirements connected with protection of strategic objects in the Slovak Republic.

The Government considers crime prevention to be the basis of state policy on crime. It will prepare a new strategy of crime prevention and conclude the legislative process of ensuring prevention by passing a draft law on crime prevention. It will pay increased attention to social prevention as an expression of care for the most endangered groups of population (children and juveniles, the elderly, abused women). It will adopt a system of financial provisions for preventive programmes and it will contribute to crime prevention becoming a society-wide matter.

At the forefront of the entire criminal system, the Government puts care for the victims of crime. The Government will extend and adjust the conditions for compensation of crime victims by the State.

The Government will ensure the preparation of and approve the national strategy of management and protection of the state borders of the Slovak Republic after joining the Schengen area. It will ensure completion of the conversion of the state border with Ukraine to a Schengen-type border.

The Government respects the tasks and position of the municipal police. It will assess the information and experience from application of the law on municipal police and propose applicable changes to the valid legal provisions.

The Government will be vigorously asserting the enforcement of both proven and new preventive measures in the interests of the safety and continuity of road traffic as well as strict penalties in the event of serious violation of road traffic regulations. It will make the necessary steps to bringing the Slovak Republic closer to the objectives set by the European Commission to halve, by 2010, the number of lives lost in traffic accidents.

In the field of issuing EU-format personal documents, the Government will comply with the commitments adopted by the Slovak Republic. The system of issuing personal documents must be citizen-friendly and must not lead to inefficient spending of budget funds.

The Government will adopt further necessary measures to convert the Police Corps into a state-of-the-art, streamlined, functioning and actionable armed security force guaranteeing the rights, certainties and security of Slovak Republic's citizens. The Government's priorities will include achieving Police Corps structures' full compatibility and capability to cooperate with European police corps; improving the police preparedness to combat corruption, organised crime, and drug crime; speeding up and improving the efficiency of the process of shortened investigation and investigation; improving the reliability in provision of services to citizens; and deepening the trustworthiness of the police. A dominating element in the direct performance of service must be the relationship between an orderly citizen and an orderly police person built on the principles of respecting personality, basic rights and tolerance. However, at the same time, the position of police persons need to be strengthened and their legal protection in the relation between the police person and a person violating law must be increased.

The Government will see that the Police Corps management bodies pay greater attention to the specifics of security situation and working conditions of individual district directorates of the Police Corps. Justified requirements and needs based on the Police Corps district directorates' own analyses and projects need to be carefully examined when adopting

management decisions. Attention will be focused also on optimising the management relations in the sector, particularly on the position of the Police Corps President in the structure of the ministry and in the management of the Police Corps. It will be necessary to correct the poor decisions in the field of administrative, personnel, and organisational structures of the Police Corps, including the distribution and territorial action of the Police Corps basic units.

The Government will see that in the field of human resources development in the sector of the Ministry of Interior, emphasis is put on the quality of the human factor, its professional preparedness. The Government considers the ill-judged practices of the past, when the sector was imprudently getting rid of experienced experts with years of police experience, to be a severe mistake. The Government will support progressive changes in the sectoral educational system of the Police Corps in the interests of improving the quality of police schools' management system, improving their material and technical equipment, stabilising the faculties, and more closely linking the police schools with the performance of the police service. The care for the human factor development must also include the completion of the system of psychological care for the members of the Police Corps.

The police social system deserves a special position. Through increasing the efficiency of this system, the Government wants not only to maintain but even deepen the social security of police persons, to stabilise their position in society, and to strengthen the social prestige of this profession. It realises that it is necessary to reconsider the system of remuneration of police persons, which will be preceded by introduction of their career paths.

The Government will require restructuring of spending from the Ministry of Interior's budget so that the performance of the Police Corps service is primarily and sufficiently provided for with respect to finance, personnel, material, and technology, particularly at the district level. The process of public procurement in the sector will have to be improved. It must be provided efficiently, transparently, in accordance with the law and with high professionalism.

The Government will make an effort to obtain more finance for the activities of the Fire and Rescue Service. To this end, it will use restructuring of the spending of funds from mandatory contractual insurance or the possibility, if any, in the field of increasing the levy on commercial insurance companies from this insurance. This is in the interests of achieving a higher level of fire-fighting measures and rescue activities so that the same are provided in comparably the same quality, efficiently, continuously and in a timely way throughout Slovakia. An especially serious situation, a solution to which cannot be postponed, is in the Government's opinion regarding the insufficient readiness of the state to respond consequently and efficiently to natural disasters, particularly to floods, and the neglect of preventive steps. In this respect, the Government will ensure close co-operation of the respective services of the ministries of interior, defence, and environment. Through renovation and upgrading of fire-fighting technology, the Government wants to gradually achieve the level of the technical condition and average age approaching advanced countries of the European Union. The Government is aware that for the protection of lives, health and property of the citizens, it is necessary to create conditions for substantial improvement of the social security and remuneration for the members of the Fire and Rescue Service, comparable with other security services of the state.

The Government will continue to enhance the system of civic protection of the population. It will prepare a new concept of organisation and development of civil protection, which will determine its further direction in the time horizon of 2015. The capacities and structures of civil protection must be ready for operative response, flexible analysis and assessment of the extent of threat, timely and undistorted notification and warning of the population, and taking efficient steps to protect the population in the event of natural disaster,

accident, or emergency. The Government will continue modernising the warning and notification network of civil protection.

The Government considers the completion of the integrated rescue system to constitute an important task. This involves, in particular, completion of the communication and information infrastructure and implementation of the plans of further development of the integrated rescue system until 2010.

The Government will take further measures to unify the national migration policies. It will prepare conditions for establishing the Immigration and Naturalisation Office of the Slovak Republic.

7.4 Public Administration

The Government will take the necessary steps aimed at modernising public administration, particularly through its economisation and informatisation. It will improve the system of its management and public scrutiny. It will support the use of citizens' and civil associations' initiative in local public life. It will make an effort aimed at the state administration authorities and territorial self-government bodies facilitating the lives of citizens as well as legal entities. For this purpose, it considers it necessary to perform an analysis of the development and present condition of public administration with the objective of gradually solving open problems and achieving thus a higher efficiency of administrative and material services provided by its structures on individual levels. The analysis will assess the possibilities of reducing the organisational diversity and personnel demands of regional structures of state administration as well as the possibilities of transferring certain additional competences in ensuring public services to the territorial self-government bodies. As soon as possible, the Government will dissolve regional offices, whose competences will pass to the territorial self-government. The measures taken should, at the same time, improve the performance of coordinating functions of the state in ensuring social and economic development in the territory and in resolution of emergencies.

When resolving serious tasks in the field of public administration, the Government will work closely with representative associations of municipalities and towns, especially with the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia as well as with the self-governing regions.

The Government will assess the efficiency and administrative arrangement of the state, since the present arrangement does not correspond to the districts of first-instance authorities of local state administration with the objective of preparing draft solutions in the next term.

Considering the level of territorial self-government achieved, the Government will make further steps toward the Slovak Republic's accession to the remaining articles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

The Government will ensure the performance of a professional audit of legislation related to public administration and proceedings before public administration authorities to reduce, to the maximum extent possible, the annoyance caused to citizens by bureaucracy. In this respect, the Government will consider the need of passing a law against chicanery of citizens.

The Government will engage in efforts to modify the rules of decision-making activity of public administration authorities to which the state entrusted the decision-making on the

rights and obligations of citizens and legal entities. These should deepen the legal certainty and rationality of this process, particularly by eliminating delays in procedures.

The Government will adopt an amendment to the rules for granting state citizenship to foreigners with the objective of a more thorough examination of citizenship applicants.

In development of social relations, the Government will see that the constitutional principles of associating citizens create better conditions for their interests in social life, but, on the other hand, that non-compliance therewith does not result in evading the law for purposes other than those envisaged by the law.

8. State Defence

The Slovak Republic, from the political and security perspective, constitutes an integral part of the North Atlantic space. Individually or with the allies and international organisations, it will protect and defend the security and human rights, sovereignty, freedom, democracy, and law and order.

By joining NATO, the Slovak Republic became part of collective defence but also a joint guarantor of allies' security. Being admitted as a member of the EU, it obtained further guarantees of political and economic stability and the possibility of active participation in the formation and implementation of the European security and defence policy. The defence and enforcement of Slovak Republic's security interests will continue to be implemented in a broader geopolitical context.

The Government will create prerequisites for formation of such a defence potential of the state, which will enable responding to situations threatening the security of the citizens, the state, and allies, and to preventively eliminate emerging threats, including elimination of threats outside of the Slovak Republic's territory. It will make an effort that the Slovak Republic, by the end of 2010, contribute adequately to defence capabilities of the collective defence of NATO and to EU military capabilities with the objective of a full-fledged contribution in the period thereafter. It will ensure an active participation in the NATO and EU response force and in operations of international crisis management. To this end, it will use the tools of the objectives of the North Atlantic Alliance forces and the EU main objectives, which, in accordance with the nature of contemporary threats, put emphasis on: defence ability and internal security of the state, the ability to deploy forces even outside of the territory of the Slovak Republic, the ability to participate in several operations simultaneously, and the ability to flexibly adapt the mission type to a changing security situation.

The Government will increase the efficiency of management and effectiveness of use of the state defence potential, ensure sufficiently fast decisions in the framework of international crisis management of NATO, EU and UN, and enhance the legal framework for the activity of public power authorities in the field of guaranteeing the Slovak Republic's defence ability. The Government will continue developing the system of civil control of the armed forces in such a way that the political and military responsibility for state defence is transparently defined.

The Government will intensify the effort in enforcing the comprehensiveness and efficiency of defence and create prerequisites for improvement of the system of defence

management, inter alia, through an update of the Long-Term Development Plan of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic 2015. It will ensure the development of the required capabilities of armed forces with an emphasis on their deployability and sustainability. The Government will support further development of armed forces by transforming the relevant executive and support elements of the state defence system.

The Government will create an integrated security system controlling and coordinating all organisations and institutions determining state defence.

The Government will increase the level of deployability and operational readiness of armed forces. It will ensure transparency, efficiency, and economy in the use of funds. In defence planning, it will consequently comply with the development priorities of the defence sector.

The Government will assess the involvement of armed forces in operations of international crisis management, including the operation Iraqi Freedom. For the future, the Government will ensure that any decision on deploying forces includes a clear definition of a mandate containing criteria for their continuation or withdrawal.

The Government, on the basis of a dialogue with the partners involved and with Iraqi Government, will submit a clear and, with respect to time, acceptable schedule for withdrawal of the forces from Iraq. The Government is ready to participate in performance of other tasks in ensuring the stability and peace in Iraq using civilian means and likewise it is ready to participate in the process of building Iraqi security forces that will be capable of assuming responsibility for stability and security in Iraq.

The Government will support the extension of capabilities of the Slovak Republic's armed forces also to the area of assistance tasks with an emphasis on the protection of health and property of the citizens and the state in the events such as natural disasters or a terrorist attack.

The Government will complete the transformation of military educational system, support the development of national military science, and, at the same time, create conditions for education of civilian experts in the field of security and defence. The Government will adopt measures to strengthen civil responsibility for the defence and stabilising the civil character of state defence.

The Government will reconsider the system of command and control of the Slovak Republic's armed forces so that it ensures the required degree of their operational readiness to defend the state and the citizens and to fulfil the Slovak Republic's international commitments.

The Government will increase the quality of human potential in the Ministry of Defence with an emphasis on professionalism, expertise and competency in performance of their functions. It will increase the professionalism of the armed forces and stabilise their personnel, including adequate remuneration and social security. It will motivate and stimulate professional soldiers in accepting the requirement of equal opportunities.

The Government will create conditions for an improvement of the care for military retirees. It will support the development of traditions and care for military veterans and their family members.

The Government will ensure that defence spending reaches the level necessary to ensure the state defence and the Slovak Republic's commitments. It will ensure that spending on operations of international crisis management and spending related to the inclusion in NATO and EU response forces is not financed at the expense of maintenance and development of the Slovak Republic's armed forces.

The Government will build a functioning system of early warning with the objective of identifying emerging threats to be able to adopt efficient countermeasures in time.

The Government will support the development of the defence industry of the Slovak Republic. The Government will support its broadest inclusion in the modernisation and rearmament of the Slovak Republic's armed forces and international armament projects, primarily in the framework of EU and NATO. It will employ domestic capacities of research, development, production, and maintenance of state-of-the-art weapons, ammunition, and hardware. The Government will initiate the definition and legislative provision of offset rules upon substantial investments in armed and security services of the Slovak Republic.

The Government will build and maintain an adequate defence infrastructure and create conditions for its protection and operation in crisis situations. It will comply with the requirements stemming from the Slovak Republic's membership in NATO and EU, including adoption of and general provisions for the support of allied armed forces in the territory of the Slovak Republic and implementation of security investments.

The Government will ensure that the armed forces in state defence and public power authorities are supported in emergencies through the system of civil emergency planning.

9. Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of the Government shall proceed consequentially from the State interests of the Slovak Republic, so as to safeguard the necessary international conditions for strengthening of security, economic prosperity of the State and the improvement of the standard of living of Slovak citizens.

The Government shall implement a trustworthy, responsible and balanced foreign policy. It will follow up with everything positive that has been achieved so far in this area.

The Government shall emphasise the strengthening of peace and stability in Europe, as well as in the world, and it shall be a reliable ally and partner respecting its obligations. It will support the deepening of the partnership and strategic cooperation within NATO and EU. It will promote and be part of a peaceful, secure and socially responsible Europe, the development of mutually advantageous international cooperation and the creation of a secure world without conflicts and crises. It shall participate in the struggle against terrorism.

In order to assert these objectives, the Government will make use of its membership in the EU, NATO, UN, OECD, OSCE and the Council of Europe, and it will actively participate in the whole system of international organizations. It shall guarantee and enforce, in harmony with international treaties, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. It refutes categorically all manifestations of racism, intolerance, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism, extremism and anti-Semitism.

The Government shall support further deepening of the European process of integration and consolidation of the EU, with the objective to strengthen the democratic, secure, economically dynamic and prosperous, and featuring social stability and solidarity within an educated and cultural Europe. It shall emphasise the further democratisation of the

EU and its coming nearer to citizens, so that it can respond in a better way to their problems. The Slovak Republic will participate actively in the shaping of European policies, taking into equal consideration the assertion of State interests, as well as the values of European solidarity.

The Government shall participate in the preparation and implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU and in development of capacities of the European Defence and Security Policy. Slovakia shall specifically focus its attention, within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, on strengthening security and stability in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, as well as on the application of good relations within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The Government will support continuation of the ratification process of the Treaty on the Constitution for Europe. In the interest of reaching an agreement, it will not avoid further discussions concerning simplification of the European legal system, concerning the more clear delimitation of powers between the EU and its Member States and the creation of a more efficient system of decision-making in the enlarged Europe. It shall support decentralization and relocation of the European institutions into Central and Eastern Europe, including the Slovakia.

With the objective to increase the competitiveness of the EU, the Slovak Government, based on the Lisbon Strategy, will concentrate on creating efficient links between the national and the common European instruments of growth, performance and upgrading of the economy. This will be accomplished by applying the knowledge-based economy and by strengthening social cohesion. The Government shall assert the finalisation of the building of the EU common internal market and gradual removal of barriers on the European labour market and in the field of services, as well as energy. It shall intensify efforts concerning the shortening of the transitional periods applicable to free movement of labour and struggle for equal rights for our citizens on the European labour market.

It shall strive to fill the allocated quota of employees in EU institutions, in keeping with the accession documents of the Union.

The Government will support further enlargement of the EU. The accession of the new states must be fully in harmony with the determined criteria of membership.

The Government will draft an analysis of the status of rights and obligations following from Slovakia's membership in the EU, with the objective of the maximum use of its potential

The Government shall exert its maximum efforts to finalize preparations for our accession into the Schengen system, so that the Slovak Republic can become part of the Schengen zone in the shortest time possible.

The Government considers NATO to be the main guarantor of the Euro-Atlantic security. It shall respect and fulfil obligations following from Slovakia's membership in NATO. It shall continue in strengthening the transatlantic links and partnership between the member states of the Alliance, and to develop its relations with the U.S.A.

The Government shall support continuation of the process of transformation of the Alliance, and the NATO open door policy.

The Government, as a member country of the EU and NATO, shall promote the revival and enlargement of the political dialogue and practical co-operation between these groupings at the strategic and operational levels.

The Government shall devote utmost attention to its relations with neighbouring countries. Our objective is the comprehensive development of cooperation in the political, economic and cultural fields. We shall support cross-border cooperation, contacts of our towns and municipalities as a part of our good neighbourly relations. The Government is interested in resolving the problems concerning the waterworks of Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros.

The Government ascribes specific significance to the strategic partnership with the Czech Republic and to its implementation in the form of multi-faceted specific cooperation.

The Government shall develop regional cooperation, first of all within the framework of the Visegrad 4 Group. The Government shall strive to follow the objectives of this grouping in order for it to serve as an instrument of assertion of jointly defined interests, including those in the EU. It shall focus on implementation of regional projects in the field of infrastructure, energy, environment and culture.

The Government shall, as a priority, develop its multilateral co-operation with the Member States of the EU and NATO. It shall activate its relations with the Russian Federation – an important factor in the security and prosperity of the EU. It shall assert mutually advantageous relations with other important strategic partners of the EU and of the Slovak Republic. The objective of these initiatives will be the economic development of Slovakia.

The Government declares its interest to further continue contributing to the strengthening of stability and democracy in Iraq, Afghanistan and in the Middle East.

The Government shall promote efficient multilateralism. It will support strengthening of the status of international organisations of universal character, first of all of the UN as an irreplaceable organisation with global responsibility for world peace and security. As an elected member of the UN Security Council for 2006-2007, the Slovak Republic will actively contribute to solving global and regional problems, threats and challenges to security, especially those connected with terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It supports the reform of the UN in the interest of increasing its capability to respond in a flexible manner to topical security threats. The Slovak Government will strengthen participation of the Slovak Republic in UN missions.

The Government will be a constructive co-creator of the human and legal policy of the EU. It shall make use also of the half-year Presidency in the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe (November 2007 – May 2008) for the development and assertion of human and legal standards. Slovakia will be on the list of candidates for the corresponding multilateral structures active in this field, and it will actively participate in them. It will devote special attention to international cooperation in issues concerning Roma, Sinti and Kalles.

The support of fellow-countrymen shall be one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic. Its Government will create conditions for support of compatriot communities, with the objective to preserve the language, cultural and religious identity of the Slovaks living abroad.

The Government shall create the necessary financial, legislative and organizational conditions for efficient provision of development aid, in accordance with the objectives of its foreign policy. Also important will be the gradual increase in volume of targeted assistance to selected countries of the Balkans, to developing and less-developed countries.

The Government shall create the necessary conditions, including the financial coverage, for flexible provision of the humanitarian aid to countries suffering from natural or industrial disasters, as well as those stemming from environmental conditions.

In the interest of the economic prosperity of the State, the Government shall consistently strengthen the economic dimension of diplomacy. By means of a uniform foreign

service managed centrally, it shall underline the economic interests of the SR more emphatically than has been the case to date.

The Government will prepare, in accordance with the new Competency Act a comprehensive concept of a uniform presentation of the Slovak Republic abroad, and the purpose-oriented strategy of its application.

The Government perceives the cultural dimension of diplomacy as a significant part of foreign policy.

The Government will take care of the justified needs of the growing number of Slovak citizens who are staying, living and working outside Slovakia's borders, and it shall protect their rights and interests. It will provide consular assistance to Slovak citizens who become destitute abroad. In countries where the Slovak Republic has no representation, it will co-operate closely with local authorities when fulfilling its obligations with respect to the citizens of the Slovak Republic, especially concerning other Member States of the EU.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall continue in its cooperation, in accordance with foreign policy priorities, with the non-governmental sector, and with partners from the scientific and academic communities.

The tasks of the foreign service have increased with the accession of the SR to the EU and NATO, and that also means in the co-ordination of participation abroad in co-operation with other departments, bodies and institutions of the Slovak Republic active abroad. The Government will evaluate its experiences and, from the perspective of developing a uniform foreign representation of the Slovak Republic and the economic efficiency of services, it will draft reforms that will harmonise the objectives, instruments and sources and lead to its more effective functioning.

In the interest of strengthening the unity, co-ordination and efficiency of the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic, the Government will prepare a draft of a foreign service act that will modify the status of such employees. The act will proceed from the principle of the uniform character of the State service and the public service and the specifics of its long-term performance abroad, as well as from the need to strengthen its professional character and enable efficient use of funds.