

Dear Chairman of ENVI Committee, Honorable Members of the European Parliament and of this Committee

I am very honored to be here today to present the Slovak Presidency program in the field of health. 2016 marks the 12th anniversary of Slovak's accession to the European Union and this is the first time that Slovakia will have leading role in the council of EU.

The Slovak Presidency comes at a time when the European Union is facing many challenges: decision of the citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to leave the Union underlines the need for discussion on the future of the EU; the migration wave is testing our ability to maintain the integrity of the Schengen area; recent terrorist attacks have reminded us that there is still much to improve in terms of our cooperation in the field of internal security and the impacts of the economic and financial crisis still affect the economies of the EU Member States.

Despite these challenges and increasing uncertainty the Slovak Presidency intends to promote positive agenda and to enforce sustainable solutions. Our Presidency goals could be achieved only by working closely together with Member states, European Parliament and European Commission to maintain the positive and dynamic spirit during remaining half a year.

The European Parliament has always been the driver for progress and has always actively defended EU citizen's interests. The opinion and support of the European Parliament for the future shaping of health policy important for EU citizens is crucial. You are directly elected representatives of the citizens of the EU, your role as co-legislators is crucial to ensure that their interests are properly represented.

Before introducing Slovak presidency's priorities in the field of health and legislative process in the field of veterinary and food safety, let me thank to Dutch presidency for their hard work and their assistance as Trio partners with hopes that we can build on their achievements in order to ensure continuation in our agendas.

In the legislative area Slovak Presidency notes with satisfaction that after 4 years of a very hard work **on Regulation on medical devices and on in vitro diagnostic medical devices**, an agreement was successfully reached among three institutions, confirmed on 15 June. The Slovak Presidency's task is to formalize this agreement in the Council. We plan to submit both agreed texts to the Council for 'political agreement' in September.

Thanks to Dutch presidency achievements on medical devices regulations, **we have one legislative file to continue in in the field of health – „the regulation 726/2004“**. As it is part of a veterinary package, we will adapt the pace and ambition for this file to the progress in the veterinary file. Equally, attention will be paid to ensure coherence between this regulation and the veterinary package and to find appropriate legal instruments for adoption of measures to be implemented under Regulation 726/2004.

With respect to veterinary medicine and food safety, we have and certainly we will continue to have a strong interest in ensuring that all legislation in force as well as the one under preparation applies an integrated approach “from farm to table”. There is an important already mentioned package in this area comprising of two proposals, – the proposal on veterinary medicinal products and proposal on medicated feed.

While the proposal related to medicated feed is covered by AGRI Committee, the proposal regarding veterinary medicinal products is very important for this Committee. Let me inform you, that Slovak presidency will continue the work on this dossier in Council preparatory bodies with the objective to possibly obtain, by the end of our Presidency, a mandate that will serve as a basis for the negotiations with the European Parliament. The dossier is complex and crucial not only for the veterinary pharmaceutical, the agricultural and the pet sectors in the EU, but also for the public health given its link with the issue of antimicrobial resistance, which remains a major challenge to be addressed.

To continue with health agenda, one of Slovak presidency priorities in the non – legislative area will be availability and **shortages of medicines**, which are of critical relevance for patients and a growing problem in Europe. Voices on medicines shortages have been raised in numerous member states by patient organisations as well as health professionals. For me, as a minister of health, it represents grave issue as the primary goal of each Member State is to provide adequate level of healthcare including access to medicines for their patients. In this context it is also important to realize that pharmaceuticals are not ordinary goods because of their significance for public health and this aspect should also be reflected in a debate among member states on medicines shortages, be it for whatever reason from manufacturing and regulatory to business related causes like parallel export.

Working in this direction, our presidency will promote discussion on this topic within Working party on public health on Senior level as well as on the Informal ministerial meeting in Bratislava.

Slovak presidency also acknowledges the importance of anti-tobacco policy for European Union, which is considered as the leader in the global debate on tobacco control. SK Presidency will make its utmost so that the EU leading role is ensured also **at the seventh Conference of the Parties to the FCTC** in India later this year (7.-12. November 2016). We will work closely with the Commission and all Member States in order to ensure coordinated EU position on all items on the agenda.

Moving on in our priorities, the Council, in the same way as the European Parliament, considers the problem of **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)** as a serious one and invited the Member States on several occasions to work at national as well as on the EU level to address this problem. In order to focus on AMR Slovak Presidency wants to address the issue **of tuberculosis and its multi-resistant strains.**

TB and MDR-TB are cross-border health threats in a globalised world with increasing mobility of population.

TB is in several European countries a serious public health challenge, with far-reaching social and economic implications, and TB has substantial cross-linkages in terms of co-morbidities with other conditions, particularly HIV/AIDS.

During the Working Party on Public Health at Senior level on 15 July 2016, the Slovak Presidency would like to initiate the discussion on the possible development of an integrated EU policy framework on TB, HIV and Hepatitis C. Subsequently the debate will continue at political level during the Informal meeting of Ministers of Health in Bratislava on 3-4 October 2016.

Communicable diseases were influenced by two major medical inventions: **vaccination and antibiotics.** Comparing the efficiency of the two, the vaccines are ahead of antibiotics. Antibiotics are used in outbreak of the disease; vaccination has preventive effect on the disease. While mostly antibiotics work against bacteria, vaccines are directed against the viral disease for which there is no specific treatment.

The Presidency considers high vaccination rate as a major tool in combatting over-consumption of antibiotics and therefore it is important to raise awareness on vaccination, also with regard to the current trend of anti-vaccination campaigns. Slovak Presidency will address the issue of vaccination during the Informal meeting of ministers of Health in Bratislava.

**Another concern in the health area of the EU is the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity** in Europe which reached the level of epidemic. While in 1995 there were 200 million people suffering globally from overweight or obesity, this number has grown to 300 million in 2000. Excess of body weight, excessive intake of energy, saturated fats, trans fatty acids, sugar and salt in food and low consumption of vegetables, fruits and wholemeal products are participating in unhealthy lifestyle.

European Commission and member states identified several areas connected with nutrition and lifestyle, which can reverse this trend.

**Food reformulation is one of the most effective ways to reduce risk factors such as saturated fats, trans fatty acids, sugar and salt in food products.** Therefore, Slovak presidency will focus on strengthening best practices among member states in food reformulation to encourage member states in common EU and national initiatives directed towards healthier nutrition and thus reduction of occurrence of non-communicable chronic diseases.

**The non-communicable diseases (NCDs) represent the major share of the burden of disease in Europe** and are responsible for 86% of all deaths. They affect more than 80% of people aged over 65 years and represent a major challenge for health and social systems. Healthy lifestyle from the early stages of life can assure a productive population, minimize the demand for healthcare services related mainly to chronic diseases and as a direct consequence limit the cost of health care and promote more growth and productivity. The ambition of our Presidency is to strengthen the objectives and activities in the area of chronic non-communicable diseases and to encourage Member States in food reformulation and reduction of risk factors.

To achieve this goal The Presidency will organise a high level conference on prevention of non-communicable diseases and healthy lifestyle on 20-21 September 2016 in Bratislava to

discuss the policy options and best practices of member states regarding prevention of risk factors towards healthier nutrition.

**Numerous initiatives at EU level have put dementia as a priority for action recognizing challenges and raising awareness of this issue.** According to World Health Organization, up to 35% of the European population suffer from brain disorders. The direct healthcare costs of brain diseases, including doctor' visits, hospital care and drugs represented 24% of total European Union health expenditures in 2010. In Europe, the cost of brain disorders is substantially higher than in other comparable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease or cancer. The indirect costs of brain diseases are of no less importance and more difficult to enumerate, including the loss of productivity, negative impact on quality of life of the patients and their relatives as well as significant social stigma.

For this priority, presidency will organize in cooperation with European Commission a conference on Alzheimer disease on 29 november in Bratislava to gather experts with various fields of expertise in order to address key scientific, medical and social aspects of dementia.

Chairman, Honorable Members of the European Parliament and of this Committee,

thank you all for your kind attention. I very much welcome this opportunity to brief you on the priorities of the Slovak Presidency in the health area and, indeed, to answer your questions.