

Thank you for your kind words, Mr. Chairman.

Dear Members of the European Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- it is a great honor for me to be here to present you the program of the first Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union. After 12 years of the EU membership, Slovakia is honored to have the opportunity to lead the Council of the European Union.
- We are aware of utmost importance of excellent relations with the European Parliament and we stand ready to work with you on all the important files that are being discussed, and which will be presented in the near future.
- Today, I would like to present you overall priorities of the Slovak Presidency and then in particular main topics in the field of energy and competitiveness. These are my top priorities being a Minister of Economy of the Slovak republic. My colleagues, Ministers responsible for telecommunications and education and research, are going to inform on our priorities in the Agenda of Telecom and Research later on today and tomorrow.

- Slovakia is assuming its Presidency role in very challenging times when the EU struggles with many internal and external challenges.
- The recent vote of the UK people showed us that the trust of EU citizens in the EU has been significantly undermined.
- It is essential that the Union regains trust of people and focuses on solutions which will bring a long-term perspective to the European project. Therefore the Slovak Presidency intends to build upon the positive experience and focus on the agenda that will decrease existing barriers among Member States.
- The Slovak Presidency strives to be pragmatic, we will aim at overcoming fragmentation and we will focus on people.
- In order to achieve these goals, we have decided to focus on four principal priorities:
 1. to make the European economy stronger,
 2. to modernise and broaden the Single Market in areas such as energy and the digital economy,
 3. to work towards sustainable migration and asylum policy and
 4. to strengthen the global engagement of Europe.
- I truly believe that our effective cooperation will substantively contribute to implementing these priorities.
- Now I would like to focus on the Energy Union and consequently on competitiveness issues.

- From my point of view, energy policy is an important area of our common work and agreements.
- We all consume energy every day, often even without realizing it. Therefore secure, affordable and sustainable energy supplies are essential for the well-being of our households, competitiveness of the European industry and economic growth.
- 2016 has been named as THE year of delivery for the Energy Union and our aim is to jointly make it happen, to deliver.
- In follow-up to the excellent work of the Dutch Presidency, and in line with the Commission working program, we will be working on important proposals related to all five mutually reinforcing dimensions of the Energy Union.
- We will strive to enhance solidarity and trust. We will duly discuss measures needed to decarbonize our economies in a cost effective manner, while improving energy efficiency and competitiveness. And we will also aim at further development of international relations in the field of energy.
- The Slovak Presidency will conduct negotiations in an open and fair manner with a balanced approach to the three pillars of the EU energy policy.
- The objectives and principles of the Energy Union have been supported by the Council on several occasions. In this regard, we very much appreciate

the continuous support and active role of the European Parliament and hope for its further engagement.

- We have got several important files on the table and the Commission still plans to publish several other files this year. The Slovak Presidency will try to achieve as much progress as possible on all of those important files.
- Let me please briefly sum-up our intentions on respective files.
- The Council adopted its general approach on the proposal for revision of the legislative framework for the energy efficiency labelling back in 2015 under the Luxembourg Presidency. We welcome the mandate given to the rapporteur and are of the opinion that it will allow us to reach a swift compromise with added value for both citizens and industry.
- The Commission adopted the so called “gas security” package containing two legislative proposals on the security of gas supply and intergovernmental agreements in the field of energy this February.
- We are aware of the ambitions of the European Parliament and we welcome appointment and draft reports of both rapporteurs, since security of energy supply is on top of our agenda.
- As regards the intergovernmental agreements in the field of energy, we all agree on the need to ensure compliance with EU law and increase transparency. However, discussions in the Council showed divergent opinions on the ways how to get there. Nevertheless, the Dutch Presidency was able to come up with a compromise that resulted in a general approach

of the Council adopted in June 2016. I consider this compromise based on the ex-ante assessment of gas intergovernmental agreements to be a major step forward compared to the current system and it needs to be viewed as such.

- Security of gas supply is still an issue in several EU regions. The revised regulation brings in several open questions where the position of the Council still needs to be fine-tuned. This includes application of the principle of solidarity and regional cooperation, as well as transparency of gas contracts. We look forward to a constructive discussion with the European Parliament on these issues. Our aim is to engage in negotiations as soon as possible.
- As regards energy efficiency files to be published in autumn, our aim is to organize a first exchange of views within the Council and hold a policy debate at the TTE-Energy Council in December.
- Important package of proposals on the Energy Union governance, renewables and new market design are likely to be published only by the very end of our Presidency. Thus, it will be up to our TRIO colleagues from Malta to organize discussion on these files, which I consider to be of utmost significance for the future EU energy policy.
- Nevertheless, we will try to pave the way for these discussions as agreed in the TRIO program. Our Dutch colleagues held debates on new market design and we will discuss the issues of governance at the Informal Energy Council tomorrow in Bratislava . On this occasion, we will also discuss energy prices and costs, as well as energy security in context of the EU

LNG strategy. I am grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for accepting our invitation to speak at this event.

- The Energy Union is also about better cooperation, both among regions in the EU and our global partners. We want to discuss on how to strengthen our relationships with major energy producers, which will help us to increase our energy security. We will also devote our attention to the region of South Eastern Europe and countries of the Energy Community. The importance of the region was also highlighted by the recent declaration of MEP's which stresses the need for further cooperation.
- Nuclear energy plays an important role in national energy mixes of several EU Member States. Therefore, we need to continue ensuring safe and sustainable use of nuclear energy, contributing to energy security and addressing climate change issues. One of the most discussed topics in nuclear field will be the Nuclear Illustrative Programme PINC. The Slovak Presidency welcomes this Communication published by the European Commission. Purpose of the PINC will also be discussed during upcoming Nuclear Energy Forum ENEF in Bratislava at the beginning of October.
- We consider competitiveness and innovation as the one of most important elements of the European agenda for growth and jobs. It is essential that the companies should have the best possible conditions for their functioning especially when they want to succeed against global competition.
- The recent crisis in steel sector and rising voices from other industries shows that we in Europe are not always successful in providing the best regulatory and business environment for industry to grow. We must therefore join our efforts to protect the European industry in Europe.

- We were much believe that industry has to play a crucial role in our economies as it is consider as a major provider of regional employment. Moreover, we will during our Presidency promote achievement of a political target set by the European Commission of having 20 % of GDP in Europe coming from the industry. To achieve this we will focus on three specific areas:
- The digital transformation of industry, particularly in SME sector, is lagging behind our global competitors. Our priority is to support the implementation of effective measures in this area. We will focus together with the European Commission in coordinating national and regional initiatives for the digitisation of industries. We believe that this effort might bring a lot of synergies and facilitate the process of modernisation of industry.
- To support this we also need to ensure that the workforce has the right skills. Our ambition is to address the deficit in digital skills across Europe by encouraging Industry to work in cooperation with educational institutions to become frontrunners of skills initiative.
- Moreover, we would like to address the topic of modernisation of industry during the Informal Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Competitiveness during the next week in Bratislava.
- To address challenges in competitiveness, the European Commission – endorsed by the European Council – has put the mainstreaming of competitiveness across all policy areas high on the agenda. This means that every policy proposal should not hamper the competitiveness of EU businesses and should be properly scrutinized. The last several presidencies

have further developed mainstreaming on the Council side. We would like to build on their achievements.

- The Slovak Presidency aims to build on this mainstreaming agenda to ensure that it delivers for European companies. We intend to bring forward the policy agenda in those areas most important for competitiveness, that is – next to the energy union I mentioned before – the Single Market, the Digital Single Market and the Better Regulation agenda.
- Moreover, we would like to open some sectorial discussions in the Competitiveness Council which, at the same time, might have rather diverse nature. Let me stress before mentioned steel sector. The industry is facing series of challenges in many policy fields – for instance in trade policy or in climate change policy (antidumping procedures, future decision on MES China, EU ETS and so on). From our point of view this would be the perfect example of examining the mainstreaming approach yet focus on specific sector.
- Last but not least, we will pay attention to Energy Intensive Industries.
- I have already mentioned steel sector, but we will focus also on other issues such as energy prices and cost. The Informal Energy ministers meeting which will address this topic was already mentioned.
- Now let me explain in some further detail what we have in mind to achieve during our Presidency in other areas related to competitiveness: namely SMEs and Better regulation.
- As regards the SMEs, I would like to stress that in order for the competitiveness agenda to succeed; its impact on SMEs is of the highest

importance. Promoting better framework conditions for SMEs is an integrated part of the Slovak Presidency priorities. Within the context of current policy set up determined in Single Market- and Digital Single Market Strategies, there are several initiatives to improve the situation for SMEs.

- The Presidency will continue addressing the needs of SMEs in areas of particular interest. Namely: access to finance; facilitating access to markets; better regulation; and skills.
- Moreover, we would like to hold annual event dedicated to the SME agenda. The SME Assembly will take place in Bratislava in November and we believe that the meeting will provide a solid framework for the further discussions on important topics related to the SMEs.
- With regards to the better regulation agenda – better and future-proof regulation enabling more innovation is an absolute priority for Slovakia. It is essential for our economic growth and jobs to focus on the quality of European regulations, which should fit for their purpose and not impose unnecessary burdens on the businesses and are/is achieved at minimum costs.
- We will also continue efforts for the implementation of the better regulation package adopted last year. In this area, we note the remaining issues of the Inter-institutional agreement on better law making.
- Mr. Chairman, honourable Members of the European Parliament,

the Slovak Republic and my colleagues are ready to make every effort to deliver positive and tangible results in the field of EU energy policy and competitiveness as well as in other fields where progress is needed.

- We will conduct negotiations as an honest broker and I look forward to be working with you for benefit of all EU citizens.
- Thank you for sharing and supporting our priorities and I will listen with interest to your views on the program of the Slovak Presidency I have just presented.
- Thank you for your attention.