

TWO PREDISPOSITIONS AND THREE DETERMINANTS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: Since 1993, Slovakia has successfully undergone a process of broadly understood social transformation and has successfully integrated into European and global structures. However, in recent years, its economy has stagnated and Slovakia ranks at the bottom of the European Union countries in country ratings according to relevant economic and social indicators. The presented article discusses the causes of Slovakia's loss of competitiveness in recent years. We seek answers primarily in the current state of selected economic-geographical and regional-geographical phenomena, which is understandable given the authors' professional focus. In this paper, we gradually focus on 5 phenomena that have a significant share in Slovakia's lagging behind. Two of these phenomena, the nature of settlement and the east-west economic gradient, are considered predispositions of Slovakia. Three of them, the territorial-administrative division, the situation of the Roma population and the development of university education, are, in our opinion, determinants/limits of Slovakia's development that can be solved. In connection with the competitiveness of Slovakia, we present a model of regional competitiveness at the end of the paper. In the work, we use standard geographical research methods such as critical text analysis, comparative analysis, statistical methods and others.

Keywords: Slovakia, character of settlement, east-west gradient, territorial-administrative division, Roma population, university education, polycrisis

1 INTRODUCTION

The global situation is complex today in the mid-20s of the 21st century, which causes significant economic uncertainty in the world. Today, global problems are deeper and interconnected. Economic shocks, the energy crisis, ongoing climate change, technological progress, including artificial intelligence, and demographic development represent a very toxic “mixture” of interacting threats. In the literature, this phenomenon is called “polycrisis”, which refers to a situation when various crises appear simultaneously and act simultaneously, leading to the merging of their effects and the emergence of new forms of economic and social risk. Global chal-

allenges, such as the aforementioned geopolitical tensions due to military conflicts, the threat of climate change, economic instability, technological progress and artificial intelligence and their interaction represent a new quality of threats to economic and social development. Previous research suggests that the threats of the current “polycrisis” are evident not only on a global scale, but also on various spatial scales, including nation states (Henig and Knight, 2023; Cant, 2025). In economic-geographical research in Slovakia, there are so far only a few works dealing with the concept of “polycrisis” and its impacts on the global or national economy (Matlovič and Matlovičová, 2024).

Looking one level lower, we can state that the economy of the European Union (EU) has been synonymous with slow growth for at least two decades. There is agreement across all EU members that the EU economy suffers from excessive regulation, excessive emphasis on the “green deal”, lengthy negotiations and also a lack of decisiveness. The EU never emerged as a grand plan, it was formed gradually, overcoming smaller and larger crises, improvising and adapting. Today, the EU should build on the lessons learned and adopt a “code” of flexible and pragmatic problem-solving. The model based on rules and institutions no longer seems to work in today's turbulent world.

And when we focus on the national economy, we can state, in agreement with practically all economists in Slovakia, that the Slovak economy has been stagnating for a long time. From the above, it is clear that Slovakia does not live in a vacuum. It lives in the global world and in the EU with their polycrises, crises and problems. On the other hand, it is also clear that Slovakia, its government and institutions have many opportunities to prepare the “rules of the game” for the economy and general social development so that the state functions as best as possible.

Yes, someone could argue that slow economic growth is a global problem, not a national or regional one. In the world and in the EU, however, it is mainly small countries that are not very reformist, not very flexible and not very innovative, even rigid, that are paying the price for slow global economic growth (Ižip, 2026). In the past 15 years, Slovakia has become one of the good examples of such a small country.

And the nearest perspective of Slovakia is also not very positive. In 2025, Slovakia's GDP increased by only 0.8% year-on-year, and the forecast for 2026 optimistically predicts a year-on-year GDP growth of 0.9%. Without further, but effective, consolidation, which will also include a significant reduction in state spending, the government deficit could reach 6% of GDP within three years and the debt could exceed 75% of the state's GDP. This news should also be added to the fact that Slovakia has one of the highest inflation rates in the EU, which has been at 4% for a long time. This creates a truly extremely dangerous mixture, which is already reflected in the (non-)growth of the standard of living in the country (Hlaváč, 2023; Mikloš, 2026).

So, the most pressing question in Slovakia today is what are we going to do about it? When observing social developments in the last 10–15 years, it seems that not only economics, sociology, demography and psychology, but also political

science should contribute to solving its problems. Of course, other sciences, such as economic and regional geography, cannot remain aside from solving these problems.

The authors of this article focus on two predispositions and three determinants/limits of social development, which are directly related mainly to the economic and social problems of Slovakia. The two predispositions have developed historically and today it is very difficult to mitigate their negative impact. The three determinants/limits can also be more or less considered a consequence of historical development, but the state, the government and its institutions have the means to significantly reduce their negative impact.

The two predispositions of social development of Slovakia, which are evaluated in the article, are the character of the settlement of Slovakia and the upward east-west gradient of the economic performance of regions in Slovakia. The three determinants/limits are the territorial-administrative division of Slovakia, the Roma issue as an important socio-economic issue in Slovakia, and the development of university education after 1990 in Slovakia. The aim of the presented contribution is to describe the current state of the two aforementioned predispositions and the three determinants/limits of social development and their impact on the social development of Slovakia. In the case of the three determinants, we want to critically evaluate the state's current approaches to reducing their negative impact and to present possibilities for improvement.

2 THE NATURE OF THE SETTLEMENT OF SLOVAKIA

At the beginning of the 1990s, Slovakia was a less densely populated country within the EU with a small number of large and medium-sized urban agglomerations. Its economic base, the size of the domestic market and the density of economic activity had significantly lower parameters not only in comparison with Western European countries, but also in comparison with neighboring countries Poland, Czechia and Hungary. This settlement to a certain extent limits the potential of Slovakia and its regions to benefit from the advantages that large agglomerations provide for economic development (Krugman, 1991, 1998).

The economic advantages of investments in large agglomerations are the key arguments of several concepts of not only regional competitiveness, but also national competitiveness. The key role in the competitiveness of regions is often attributed to the performance of their cores, i.e., the economy of large cities (Simmie, 2006). As stated by several authors (Ženka et al., 2014; Korec et al., 2016 and others), a significant part of economic activities in Slovakia is located outside the large agglomerations of Bratislava and Košice and outside the agglomerations of the remaining six cities, regional centers, Prešov, Žilina, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Trnava and Trenčín.

2.1 Development of urbanization in Slovakia in the years 1950–1991

In the two attached tables (Tables 1 and 2), we can see the basic quantitative indicators of the development of urbanization in Slovakia not only during the aforementioned 40 years when the communists ruled the country, but also during the entire period of modern urbanization in Slovakia from the Austro-Hungarian Settlement in 1867 (the first population census after the settlement was in 1869) to the year of the last population census in 2021. In the period 1950–1991 (1950 was the first population census after the victory of the communists in 1948 and 1991 was the first population census after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989), all the main relative and absolute values of the urbanization indicators in Slovakia increased significantly.

The number of inhabitants living in cities increased by 2.133 million during the period 1950–1991, which represents a growth index of 3.51. The total population of Slovakia increased during this period by only 1.832 million inhabitants (the growth index was 1.53). The growth of the population in Slovakia during this period, with the exception of moderate emigration to Czechia, was the result almost exclusively of natural increase. However, the increase in the population living in the cities of Slovakia during this period had four significant sources: natural increase (i), migration from rural areas to cities (ii), administrative incorporation of municipalities into cities (iii) and an increase in the number of cities (iv). The migration of the population from rural areas to cities was of decisive importance.

Migration from rural areas to cities was mainly supported by structural changes in the Slovak economy, strong industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. Industry had a dominant share in the growth of job opportunities in cities during this period. This migration was also supported by the state with support in the field of housing construction. Large panel housing estates became part of practically all cities in Slovakia.

The urbanization of Slovakia underwent a significant change in the years 1950–1991. The number of cities increased from 65 to 123. The share of the urban population increased over 40 years of “communism” from 24.9% to 56.7%, with the important thing being the shift of the urban population's center of gravity to larger cities. In 1991, 44.00% of the city's population lived in cities with a population of over 50 thousand, while in 1950 only 29.70%. Bratislava had almost 450 thousand in 1991 and Košice almost 250 thousand inhabitants. Four other important regional centers, Prešov, Nitra, Žilina and Banská Bystrica, had more than 80 thousand in 1991.

The two attached tables 1 and 2 show the development of the population of Slovak cities that reached at least 50 thousand in 1991. The population growth indices of Slovak cities in the years 1950 to 1991 were really high. Even with a simple analysis of these tables, it is clear that the development of these cities in the period 1950–1991 can be considered unnatural. Bašovský (1995) emphasizes that Slovak cities did not go through the phase of urbanization and only the development in Slovakia after 1948 led to the concentration of the population in cities, but signifi-

cantly based only on industrialization, while agglomeration processes were taking place at the same time, i.e. the second phase of urbanization.

The peculiarity of the development of our 10 largest cities in this period will stand out when comparing their growth indices with Czech cities. In Table 2, we see that out of the ten largest cities in Czechia, only one city, the tenth Pardubice, had a growth index 1991/1950 higher than 2.0 in 1991. This fact proves that Czech cities went through a natural phase of concentration even before the World War II. A more detailed comparison of the development of urbanization in the “period of communism” is given in the work Korec and Rochovská (2003). As Bašovský (1995) states, Slovak cities did not have the necessary economic base (finance, trade, services, etc.) before 1991 to support economic development comparable not only to Western European cities, but also to Czech ones.

Table 1 Development of the population of Slovakia in cities with over 50 thousand inhabitants in 1991 and growth indices in selected periods

Order	City/Town	1869	1921	1950	1991	2021	1921/ 1869	1950/ 1921	1991/ 1950
1.	Bratislava	46 540	93 189	192 896	442 197	475 503	2	2.07	2.29
2.	Košice	21 742	52 898	62 729	235 160	229 040	2.43	1.19	3.75
3.	Prešov	10 772	17 577	22 947	87 765	84 824	1.63	1.31	3.82
4.	Nitra	10 683	19 118	22 203	89 969	78 489	1.79	1.16	4.05
5.	Žilina	2 870	12 073	26 034	83 911	82 656	4.21	2.16	3.22
6.	B. Bystrica	5 950	10 587	13 605	85 030	76 018	1.78	1.29	6.25
7.	Trnava	9 737	17 745	26 078	71 783	63 803	1.82	1.47	2.75
8.	Martin	1 844	5 657	24 383	58 393	51 669	3.08	4.31	2.39
9.	Trenčín	3 949	10 411	16 235	56 828	54 740	2.64	1.56	3.5
10.	Poprad	1 061	2 881	10 259	52 914	49 889	2.72	3.56	5.16
11.	Prievidza	2 719	3 726	5 511	53 424	45 017	1.37	1.48	9.69

Source: Štatistický lexikón obcí Slovenska (1992); SOBD v roku 2021 (2022)

It is understandable that this unnatural development of Slovak cities had to manifest itself after 1989, when Slovakia entered the trajectory of natural development of the urban structure. However, the processes of economic transformation in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, associated mainly with the transition of the economy to a market economy, caused major problems in medium-sized and small cities in Slovakia, whose development during the 40-year communist era was mainly based on industrialization. The development of tertiary and quaternary sector activities (trade, services, finance, education, tourism, IT,

media and others), which became key for the economic growth of cities after 1989/1993, started in Slovakia “practically from scratch”.

Table 2 Population development of the 10 largest cities in Slovakia and Czechia in thousands and growth indices during the period of “communism”

City/Town	1950	1991	91/50	91/50	1991	1950	City/Town
Bratislava	193	442	2.29	1.21	1212	999	Praha
Košice	63	235	3.75	1.3	387	299	Brno
Prešov	23	88	3.82	1.66	328	197	Ostrava
Nitra	22	90	4.05	1.45	173	119	Plzeň
Žilina	26	84	3.22	1.65	106	64	Olomouc
Banská Bystrica	14	85	6.25	1.76	102	58	Liberec
Trnava	26	72	2.75	1.73	97	56	České Budějovice
Martin	24	58	2.39	1.84	100	54	Hradec Králové
Trenčín	16	57	3.50	1.71	100	58	Ústí nad Labem
Poprad	10	53	5.16	2.23	95	43	Pardubice

Source: Štatistický lexikón obcí Slovenska (1992), Statistický lexikon obcí Česka (1992)

2.2 Metropolitanization

The problem of metropolises in relation to the development of the economy in the state and its regional structure has already been well evaluated in the literature. An inspiring work from the perspective of the post-communist development of the economy and regional structure of Slovakia was recently presented by Keller (2020), who presents interesting ideas on the position and role of metropolises in the state.

The concepts of metropolis and metropolization have been at the center of attention of economic and regional geography for a very long time. Particular attention began to be paid to them especially since the 1980s, when phenomena associated with economic globalization began to manifest themselves significantly. A major research topic has become, among others, the growth of global and national regional differences (Krugman and Venables, 1995; Soros, 2002; Šikula, 2006; Holton, 2006; Gorzelak, 2009; Blažek, 2012; Stiglitz, 2013; Korec et al.; 2016 and others).

In the current period, metropolization and its associated economic and social effects are gaining a new dimension. Keller (2020) points out that: “The term metropolization refers to the process when large cities not only multiply their mutual contacts, but at the same time each of them distances itself economically, politically, culturally and partly also socially from other areas of the state”. In our opinion, this well explains the position of Bratislava in Slovakia, which we should respect.

The growth of the economic importance of metropolises and the growth of their influence on the wider environment is also important in creating a social atmosphere in the state. It is also important in the emergence of current hybrid politics and, as Keller (2020) states, it also has a significant impact on the property structure of the population in the state. Metropolization supports the growth of a group of very wealthy people who have significantly separated themselves from the middle and lower classes. This phenomenon is behind the emergence of a whole series of direct and indirect social conflicts with an impact on political events in the state.

Self-critically, economic and regional geographers in Slovakia must admit that the phenomenon of metropolization and its impact not only on the economy and regional structure, but also on the overall social events in Slovakia has not yet been sufficiently explained to professional scientific circles and the wider public. Most of the public is not aware that over the past 35 years, Bratislava's economy, like other metropolises in Central and Eastern Europe, has developed sectors of the economy that not only enable it to achieve unprecedented economic development, but also create very good conditions for it to integrate into the globalized economy as best as possible (Keller, 2020).

Due to its diversified economy, growth opportunities based, among other things, mainly on human potential, metropolises are attracting more and more investors and a creative dynamic population. It is clear that Bratislava has become a pole of economic growth in the state, positively polarizing its broad background. The absence of several larger metropolises is a major handicap for the Slovak economy.

An interesting study in this regard was published by Servillo and Russo (2017). According to the aforementioned authors, three basic types of prevailing settlement structures at the national level can be distinguished in Europe. The first type is represented by countries with a clear predominance of large densely populated areas with large agglomerations, which are the centers of their NUTS3 regions (e.g. Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and others). This type of settlement has very suitable conditions for economic development. The second type is represented by countries with a balanced distribution of settlements with several larger agglomerations (e.g. Czechia, Poland, Austria, Romania, Italy and others). According to the authors, this type of settlement also has favorable conditions for economic development. The third type is countries with a large concentration of population in smaller settlements (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary, Norway, Lithuania and others), in which positive metropolitan effects on the development of the national economy are small.

3 SLOVAKIA'S "EAST-WEST" ECONOMIC GRADIENT

In Slovakia, there is a strongly formed, historically created east-west gradient of economic attractiveness, which can be translated as the growth of the attractiveness of the territory for economic development from east to west. The east-west gradient

is also clearly reflected in the growth of competitiveness and resilience of the regions of Slovakia. Soros (2002) stated in his work that the main source of large regional differences, polarization, unhappiness and poverty in today's world is not only bad governments and bad geographical location on a global but also national scale. This is certainly true in the case of the influence of geographical location on the regions of Slovakia. Differences in the geographical location of regions are reflected not only in the economic level, but also in the socio-cultural, settlement and infrastructure levels and ultimately in the income of the population and its standard of living.

3.1 Historical aspect of the east-west gradient of economic (and social) differences in Slovakia

The east-west gradient of economic growth in Slovakia is historically conditioned and began to take shape quite clearly in the second half of the 19th century, when Hungary began to implement a consistent industrial policy after the Austro-Hungarian settlement in 1867. In the last third of the 19th century and until the beginning of World War I, the advantage of the location of the western regions of Slovakia for industry and business, compared to the eastern ones, was obvious. The western regions benefited mainly from the proximity of the centers of the monarchy of Vienna and Budapest (sufficient investment for business and a large market for the sale of production). Natural conditions and a more developed transport network, especially the railway network, also played a positive role in favor of the western regions. The advantages of the natural conditions of the western regions were very well explained in their works by Hromádka (1943), who considered the Danubian Lowland to be the main tribal area of Slovakia, and Lukniš (1985), who identified the Danubian Lowland as the decisive core economic and settlement area of Slovakia.

From the Austro-Hungarian settlement in 1867 to the beginning of World War I in 1914, approximately 650,000 inhabitants emigrated from the territory of Slovakia for work, mainly to the USA. As Bašovský and Divinský (1991) state, the vast majority of these emigrants came from eastern Slovakia, where the standard of living was significantly lower precisely because of the small chance of finding a job. During the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic until the beginning of World War II, in the years 1918–1938, emigration from the lagging Slovakia continued. According to the cited authors, approximately 220,000 inhabitants left Slovakia at that time, again mainly from the eastern regions.

During the 40-year communist period in the years 1948–1989, the Czechoslovak government tried to equalize the differences between the west and east of Slovakia through industrialization and a new territorial-administrative division, which it largely succeeded in doing (Jaura, 1988; Mareš, 1988; Kopačka, 1992; Korec and Popjaková, 2019 and others). In the years 1951–1989, 494.4 billion CZK “left” the Czech lands, of which 327.0 billion CZK “was received” mainly for industrialization by Slovakia and 167.4 billion CZK went to foreign trade (Korec and Bleha 2018). International comparisons in 1989 finally showed that Czechoslovakia

had the most balanced economic regional structure among the European communist countries (Hallon, 1995).

After the fall of communism in 1989, the laws of the market economy had a boomerang effect on the industry of eastern Slovakia. The differences in the economy and in the social sphere between western and eastern Slovakia began to increase sharply, which was also influenced by processes associated with globalization, manifested, among other things, in the regionally differentiated inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI). Western Slovakia had better conditions for economic development after 1989 thanks to its advantageous geographical location, better transport infrastructure, the location of the capital and metropolis of Slovakia, Bratislava, in the far west of Slovakia on the border with Austria, a more favorable settlement structure and some other factors, and therefore more FDI was understandably coming there (Korec et al., 2016).

The territory of Slovakia began to be divided into a more developed west and a less developed east very quickly after 1993. The share of regions in the total volume of FDI inflows from 1993 to 2020 (before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic) was as follows (in %): Bratislava 68.4, Žilina 7.7, Trnava 6.2, Nitra 5.3, Košice 4.7, Trenčín 4.4, Banská Bystrica 1.9 and Prešov 1.4. Comparisons of the regions of Slovakia in other important economic and social indicators at the beginning of the 20s of this century are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Comparison of selected economic and social indicators by region

Region	Population (2021)		Unemployment rate (2021)		GDP per capita in PPP (2021)		Average monthly wage (2021)		Roma ethnicity (2019)	
	abs.	rel.	abs.	rel.	abs.	rel.	abs.	rel.	abs.	rel.
Bratislava	723 714	13.3	3.2	54.9	47 017.4	214.1	1 903	134.2	14 476	3.47
Trnava	565 296	10.4	3.6	61.1	23 550.2	107.2	1 428	100.7	15 882	3.8
Trenčín	573 699	10.5	3.7	62.7	18 574.7	84.6	1 397	98.5	8 188	1.96
Nitra	673 547	12.4	3.9	66.1	18 065.2	82.2	1 356	95.6	26 682	6.39
Žilina	689 525	12.6	4.6	77.9	19 313.2	87.9	1 397	98.5	8 555	2.05
B. Bystrica	620 986	11.4	8.5	144.1	16 920.7	77	1 338	94.4	82 637	19.8
Prešov	807 657	14.9	10.0	169.5	13 481.8	61.4	1 219	86	127 127	30.5
Košice	780 288	14.5	8.7	147.4	18 702.6	85.1	1 416	99.9	133 988	32.1
Slovakia	5 434 712	100	5.9	100.0	21 965.8	100	1 418	100	417 535	100

Source: Korec (2023), adapted by the authors

Other factors also had a negative impact on the economic development of eastern Slovakia after 1993. The eastern regions were surrounded by the least developed

regions of the neighboring states of southeastern Poland, northeastern Hungary, and western Ukraine (Hampl, 2005; Korec and Ondoš, 2006; Gorzelak, 2010; Novotný 2011; Rusnák and Korec, 2013 and others), and the specific demographic structure of the Banská Bystrica, Košice, and Prešov regions, with a high number and share of Roma residents, low primary potential of the territory according to Lukniš (1985), absent highway connections, and others, also played a role. We can clearly observe this “east-west gradient” of economic performance in the two neighboring countries of Poland and Hungary (Korec et al., 2016).

Can anything be done about this existing “east-west gradient” in Slovakia? This is a question that we have been asking ourselves quite often in Slovakia for more than 20 years. In our opinion, it can probably be mitigated. But it is certainly necessary to respect the opinion of Atkinson (2016), who says: “Reducing regional disparities in a country is recommended at a time when three favorable facts are present: a) consolidated public finances, including state debt and state budget deficit; b) favorable global political and economic situation supporting economic development; c) a well-informed government is ‘in power’ in the country, which ‘does not govern’ in the time horizon of only 4 election years”. Unfortunately, let's admit, such a situation has not yet occurred in Slovakia in the past more than 30 years. As already indicated, reducing regional disparities by improving the economy of the eastern regions will not be easy in Slovakia. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that the nascent initiative for cooperation in the “Three Seas” project is not being given adequate attention in Slovakia. The two current crises, economic and energy, also show that connections and cooperation between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas have great prospects. The discussed large infrastructure connections of these three seas in the north-south direction, highway, railway and gas pipeline connections, represent a great potential for economic development, especially for the regions of eastern Slovakia.

3.2 Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman's thoughts on regional differences in Slovakia

International trade and the localization of economic activities have received new impulses since the 1980s with the onset of globalization. Slovakia should not only have respected the results of its work immediately after the establishment of the state in 1993, or after the entry into the European Union in 2004, but should also respect them today in the mid-20s of the 21st century at the time of the aforementioned polycrisis.

Krugman (1991) used the new principles of the theory of international trade, significantly influenced by globalization, which focused on clarifying the simple problem of the spatial division of labor, i.e. why companies locate their production exactly where they do. He tried to find an answer to the fundamental question, what is the cause of the concentration of industry in a few main centers in the state? He considers 3 factors to be the basis of this phenomenon: increasing returns (i), transport costs (ii) and market size (iii). It is obvious that suitable conditions for the positive application of these factors are concentrated in and near metropolises.

Krugman's location model (1991) shows that the geographical structure of the economy, its spatial distribution in the state, depends mainly on the three aforementioned key parameters, economies of scale, transport costs and market size. If we were to take a lesson from the work of this Nobel Prize winner in economics to assess and the possibility of reducing regional disparities in Slovakia, we should mainly draw attention to the following recommendations:

- a) Public intervention in a less developed region must be of sufficient, suprathreshold size, so that the "economic environment" of the region begins to change.
- b) The investment offer for companies must be greater than the agglomeration advantages that companies use in their current locations in large cities.
- c) The intervention should be short-term in nature, the intervention should start cumulative processes and lead to their spontaneous continuation.
- d) A good intervention aimed at attracting companies to a well-chosen region will allow, by starting cumulative mechanisms, to significantly change the regional structure of the entire economy, respecting the concept of "path dependence".

3.3 Resilience of the regions of eastern Slovakia

The regions of eastern Slovakia, namely the Košice region, the Prešov region and the southern part of the Banská Bystrica region, are not only less economically developed, less competitive, but also less resilient to potential economic crises and unexpected shocks compared to regions in the west. In connection with improving the resilience of less developed regions, Masik (2018) pointed out the economic and social determinants that should be at an adequate level to ensure the resilience of the regions.

The cited author considers the key economic determinants to be a diversified economy of regions (i), diversified exports, both by products and by destinations (ii), price competitiveness of products (iii), technological improvement of companies (iv), numerous "Headquarters" of companies (v) and small and medium-sized flexible companies (vi). Of the social determinants, a resilient region should have an active local society (i), a high or adequate level of entrepreneurship (ii), a high or the required level of employee qualifications (iii), a flexible labor market (iv) and active leaders at the level of personalities, companies and institutions (v). Following on from the possibilities of reducing the economic backwardness of less developed regions of Slovakia, it is clear that this will not be an easy task. Several authors dealing with regional disparities in Slovakia directly and indirectly point out that the above economic and social determinants represent a serious problem, especially in the less developed regions of eastern Slovakia (Matlovičová et al., 2014; Korec et al., 2016; Rusnák et al., 2023; Ďurček et al., 2024 and others). In his work, Masik (2018) also presented the basic economic and social determinants of resilience at the state level. Of the basic economic determinants of resilience at the state level, Slovakia should be aware of its shortcomings mainly in the following three: diversified production, especially diversified industrial production (i), diversified export desti-

nations (ii) and price competitiveness of produced products (iii). Of the wide range of social determinants of resilience at the state level, the following three in particular should be pointed out in the case of Slovakia: social consensus for the development of salaries in the public and private sectors (i), response to the decline in the working-age population (ii) and prevention of high emigration of the educated population (iii).

Without a long discussion, the above determinants can be considered very important in the context of assessing Slovakia's resilience. The required level of the above economic and social determinants represents a long-term problem in Slovakia. In the coming years, demography will also affect economic and generally social development in Slovakia. The most typical demographic process in Slovakia and practically throughout Europe is currently the aging of the population. To a certain extent, the emigration of young, educated people is also contributing to the aging of the population in Slovakia.

4 TERRITORIAL-ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION OF SLOVAKIA

The fact that the current territorial-administrative division of Slovakia at the level of regions and districts does not respect the geographical organization of space has been pointed out by several authors (Bezák, 1998, 2000, 2014; Korec et al., 2005, 2016; Halás, et al., 2014 and others). Criticism pointed to two basic consequences of such a division. The first was the fact that such a division costs the state an unnecessarily large amount of financial resources. The second was that such a division would not allow for optimal management of individual territorial-administrative units from the state or regional level. Several adjustments have also been recommended at the level of rural municipalities for a long time, with the association of local governments being considered key. Several experts consider the association of local governments in Slovakia to be a necessity, not only because of financial savings, but also due to the existing personnel crisis in filling basic local government functions.

In 2024, there were 8 self-governing regions (large territorial units), 79 districts (of which 9 urban – 5 in Bratislava and 4 in Košice) and 2,927 municipal self-governing territorial-administrative units (of which 17 in Bratislava “urban municipalities” and 22 in Košice “urban municipalities”). Of the total number of municipal self-governing units, in 2024, up to 63% of them had less than 1,000 inhabitants, 84% less than 2,000 and 91% less than 3,000. It is also interesting to note that up to 22 cities out of 141 have less than 5,000 inhabitants.

At the outset, we note that the creation of 8 regions, as well as the creation of 79 districts, was, according to several authors, incorrect not only in terms of their number, but also in terms of their territorial definition. In the case of the regions that became self-governing higher territorial units (VÚC) on 1 January 2001, it is now pointed out that over the past 25 years each of them has gained significant integrity

(political, economic, socio-cultural, ecological and strategic-planning). This fact can of course be accepted. However, two questions remain open and no longer answerable. The first is whether the aforementioned integrity would not be more pronounced if they were better defined. The second is whether their better definition would not enable more efficient use of the funds spent.

4.1 Basic critical remarks on the territorial-administrative division of Slovakia

Bezák (1998) immediately after the approval of the new territorial-administrative division of Slovakia at the regional level in the National Council of the Slovak Republic in June 1996 pointed out that the regions should represent functional mesoregions, which was not respected in 1996. When assessing the complementarity of regions, a very important requirement of the territorial-administrative division at the regional level, Bezák (1998) pointed out the following four shortcomings of the approved territorial-administrative division:

- a) The Žilina and Nitra regions were narrowly defined. The Žilina Region lacks the districts of Považská Bystrica and Púchov, and the Nitra Region lacks the districts of Bánovce nad Bebravou, Partizánske and Prievidza.
- b) It would only make sense to consider the Trnava Region if the city of Bratislava were granted the status of an independent “urban” region.
- c) It is impossible to agree with the creation and territorial delimitation of the Trenčín Region. The complementary region of Trenčín occupies only about a third of the territory of the new region. Apart from the Trenčín District, it only occupies the districts of Ilava and Nové Mesto nad Váhom. The other districts of the Trenčín Region belong to the sphere of influence of Bratislava, Nitra or Žilina.
- d) The border separating the Prešov Region and the Košice Region unjustifiably intersects two internally continuous, historical regional units of the lower order, Spiš and Zemplín.

The districts should represent functional urban regions (FUR) for their effective functioning. FUR is a region that has a core, usually a larger urban center, and a hinterland, usually a rural area with small towns, which naturally tends to it based on commuting to work, schools, services, and others. For the effective functioning of public administration, districts should have a certain minimum number of inhabitants, according to Bezák (2000) 30 to 35 thousand.

When defining their territories, districts should respect two basic principles. The first principle is known as the principle of spatial efficiency, which states that districts are effective if they reflect the existing spatial structure of society to the maximum extent possible. Districts should therefore be FUR. The second principle, the principle of spatial justice, emphasizes the requirement of approximately equal area of districts, relatively small variability in the number of their inhabitants, and the effort not to exceed the critical level of time accessibility from the municipalities of

the district to its center. These principles were not respected in the new territorial-administrative division, and in many cases practically ignored.

According to Bezák (2000), a diametrical discrepancy between the new districts and the lack of respect for the principle of spatial efficiency is observed in only 29 districts, i.e. in up to 40% of the districts out of 70 new “non-city” districts. Five Bratislava and four Košice districts have a specific position in the territorial-administrative structure of Slovakia with a completely different geographical structure than the remaining 70 districts. According to the nature of the identified discrepancy, we can classify these 29 problematic districts into four qualitatively different categories (Figure 1):

- 1) The first group consists of 12 districts, Bytča, Detva, Kysucké Nové Mesto, Levoča, Malacky, Partizánske, Pezinok, Poltár, Sabinov, Senec, Sobrance and Turčianske Teplice. Each of these districts is only the periphery of some FUR with a different core.
- 2) The second group includes 8 districts, Topolčany, Zvolen, Lučenec, Martin, Poprad, Prešov, Spišská Nová Ves and Žilina. These districts correspond to the core parts of the FUR, from which peripheral zones were separated in the form of separate districts.
- 3) The third category includes 7 districts, Levice, Michalovce, Nové Zámky, Revúca, Rimavská Sobota, Svidník and Trebišov. These districts consist of two separate FURs.
- 4) The fourth category contains two special cases. The districts of Galanta and Šaľa were created by dividing one FUR with a two-member core. The district of Kežmarok was created by merging the peripheral zone of the FUR Poprad and another urban region with the core of Spišská Stará Ves.

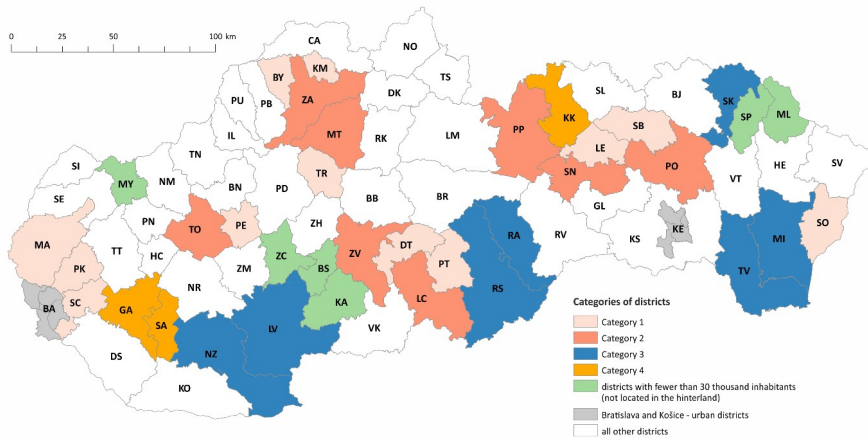


Figure 1 Basic categories of districts according to their character.
Source: Bezák (2000)

A look at the area and population density of the new districts shows that very little attention was paid to the principle of spatial justice. The area of the districts ranges from 174 km² to 1551 km². The population of the new districts in 1996 ranged from 12,966 to 162,592, again excluding the 9 urban districts. It is expected that some districts will have a significantly smaller/larger area or significantly fewer/more inhabitants than the average, but these should be exceptions and there should not be as many of them as in Slovakia in the new 1996 division.

4.2 Reform of territorial-administrative division and association of municipal governments in the context of financial savings

The reform of territorial-administrative division, streamlining of public administration and association of municipal governments have been discussed in Slovakia for a long time. Slovakia certainly needs fundamental changes in the functioning of state administration and territorial self-government, as most experts point out (Nižňanský et al., 2014; Kaliňák, 2025 and others). Not only expert criticism from Slovakia, but also one of the OECD studies says that Slovakia is losing large financial resources, significant potential for economic growth, opportunities for regional development and ultimately the possibility of reducing existing large regional disparities due to insufficient decentralization of public administration and optimization of territorial-administrative division (Mikloš, 2025).

The unquestionable fact is that the reform would save the state a large amount of financial resources. Nevertheless, from the government's point of view, it is not an attractive topic; the problem is political courage. Not only would the wage costs for mayors, their assistants, employees and deputies be saved, but also the costs of building operation, administration, public procurement and other items. The reform would bring less fragmentation, greater expertise and professionalism of district and municipal government representatives, and also better quality services. Slovakia currently has a problem with securing 2,927 professionally competent mayors and mayors of municipalities, several thousand of their assistants and several tens of thousands of deputies of municipal authorities.

Local governments already have experience with associating functions. There are, for example, just over 970 registry districts in Slovakia that maintain birth, death and marriage registers. As of 2018, 90% of all municipalities were at least once part of an associated municipal office in performing some functions, with up to 83% of municipalities operating in the section of an associated building office. However, the association model began to disintegrate in the early 2020s (Kaliňák, 2025).

Public administration experts and economists estimate that reducing the number of territorial administrative units could bring annual savings of several hundred million euros. In the case of a more complete public administration reform, the reduction in public costs could be up to one billion euros annually. Public administration in Slovakia currently includes up to 8 thousand institutions, several of which can be merged or abolished without a negative impact on the quality of public services (Toma, 2025).

The public sector currently employs about 20% of all employees in Slovakia. According to several economists and sociologists, releasing employees from the public sector could also contribute to solving the problem of labor shortages on the market. However, mass layoffs of a large number of potential voters are very unpopular. Therefore, despite repeated positive political declarations, public administration reform has not yet been initiated and the number of employees in the public sector is still high (Toma, 2025).

5 ROMA IN SLOVAKIA AS A PERMANENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUE

It cannot be said that the life of the Roma in Slovakia became a serious topic for researchers from various scientific disciplines, including political science, overnight. They have been the focus of attention of individual scientific disciplines since at least 1948, when the communist party took power in Czechoslovakia. However, adequate attention has been paid to this topic since the reign of Empress Maria Theresa in Austria-Hungary, i.e. since the 1740s.

Political scientists realized as early as 1993 that the Roma population represented an important issue on the national political scene with a direct impact on the political preferences of individual parties. However, it is certainly a tragedy not only for the Roma population in Slovakia, but for the Slovak Republic as such, that their situation is still best described today by the opening sentence of the article by Mušíňka and Kolesárová (2012): “If we had to characterize the situation of the Roma in Slovakia with one sentence, we would say that it is bad and constantly worsening”.

5.1 Economic and social context of the Roma ethnic group in Slovakia

The topic of economic and social connections of the Roma ethnic group in Slovakia is neither new nor marginal. In recent years, several authors have paid attention to it, e.g. Jurová (2000), Kozmová (2004), Sulík (2008), Marcinčin and Marcinčinová (2009) and others. Jurová (2000) considers the integration of Roma into society to be crucial in this context, while drawing attention to the fact that the economic costs of not integrating Roma into society are enormous. Kozmová (2004) in turn emphasizes that we must finally learn from the past years and accept the fact that we will not “remake the Roma in our image”. Therefore, we must try to understand their mentality and culture, which are also closely related to their employment.

Marcinčin and Marcinčinová (2009) paid great attention to the topic mentioned in the title of the subchapter in their study. According to the authors, the low work activity of the Roma is also a general regional problem in Slovakia. In the districts in the east of Slovakia and the south of the Banská Bystrica region, where the highest concentration of the Roma ethnic group is, the job offer is much lower than in the west of Slovakia. Moreover, half of the unemployed Roma population is uneducated

or has only primary education. Up to 60% of the unemployed Roma population has been unemployed for more than a year and 44% of the unemployed have been unemployed for more than two years. The authors point out that, according to their estimates, the inclusion of the Roma in society would enrich Slovakia by 7 to 11% of GDP per year. It is interesting to note that the authors note that the Roma have almost a 30% share in the volume of social benefits paid in Slovakia, while their share in the total population was only around 6.5% at the end of the first decade of this century.

It is interesting that the former chairman of the SAS political party and a long-time member of the Slovak parliament also published a critical article at the end of 2008 on the social and economic contexts associated with the Roma population in Slovakia. Despite the fact that it has been almost 20 years since then, many of his warnings are still relevant. In today's complex social situation in Slovakia, it is interesting to recall these remarks in three blocks: basic (problem) areas (i), the state's approach to solving these areas of the life of the Roma ethnic group (ii) and some known facts (iii). Sulík (2008) considered the basic (problem) areas to be the financial costs associated with the Roma ethnic group (they are practically net recipients of transfers and only minimally contribute to the budget), the multidimensional dimension of this topic (living conditions and housing, unemployment, crime, health status, impact on the surrounding area and others) and the relationship to the majority population. Critical remarks on the state's approach to solving selected areas of the life of the Roma ethnic group were summarized by (Sulík 2008) in the following points: we have been diligently closing our eyes to the problems with the Roma ethnic group for the last 20 years (1989-2008) (i), today it seems that we basically do not know anything specific about them, all information is only of a general nature (ii), we do not even know how many inhabitants of Roma ethnic group live in Slovakia (iii), we do not know some facts about the Roma ethnic group because this survey is not appropriate and we do not want to be racists and become known to the wider European society as a racist state (iv) and finally, the problem with the Roma ethnic group is big, but it is perfect for postponement until the next election period (v). According to Sulík (2008), it is a well-known fact that the state power seems to have simply resigned itself to the Roma problem. Offenses such as sexual intercourse with a minor, neglect of parental duty, failure to pay electricity bills, stealing potatoes, fruit and wood must, similarly to other residents, be subject to appropriate criminal liability.

5.2 State approaches to addressing the Roma issue in individual time periods

The state's approaches to solving the Roma issue could be divided into several stages in terms of time. In each of these stages, several laws, regulations and decrees were adopted, which were aimed at solving important issues, primarily at improving the living conditions of Roma in the territory of Slovakia, whether in Hungary, Czechoslovakia or the Slovak Republic. Until 1989, experts define the following five qualitatively different stages: 1st stage – until 1945, 2nd stage – 1945–1948,

3rd stage – 1948–1958, 4th stage – 1958– the end of the 1960s and finally 5th stage – 1968–1989. The period after 1993 represents 6th stage. We have discussed the introduction of important laws, regulations and decrees in detail in the previous work Korec and Bačík (2024). Here we will only list a selection of them to give an idea of the main problems and objectives in each stage.

1st stage – until 1945:

- 1761: Empress Maria Theresa issued the “Regulations on the Method of Emancipation of Gypsies*” (goal: rapid assimilation of Gypsies with other subjects and work in agriculture and crafts);
 - 1916: issued the “Regulation of the Hungarian Government on Changing the Way of Life of Gypsies” (goal: settlement of Gypsies in designated villages);
- * *the term Gypsy was used in the past in official communication and also appears in the titles and texts of official documents.*

2nd stage – 1945 – 1948:

- 1946–1947: controlled departure of Roma to Bohemia (to reduce the concentration of Roma and occupy the places vacated after the departure of the Germans from the borderlands).

3rd stage – 1948–1958:

- 1952: issuance of the directive “On the adjustment of the conditions of persons of Roma origin” (goal: solving the poor living conditions and way of life of the Roma).

4th stage – years late 1958– late 1960s:

- year 1965: government issued a resolution “Concept for the liquidation of Roma settlements and the dispersion of the Roma population” to other parts of the republic (goal: to eliminate segregated settlements and reduce their concentration in eastern Slovakia).

5th stage – years 1968–1989:

- systematic implementation of the “Concept for the comprehensive social and cultural integration of the Roma” (four main goals: improving housing, reducing crime, educating Roma children and re-educating adults and their inclusion in the process).

6th stage – years after 1993:

- years 1999 and 2000: the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda adopted the “Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for solving the problems of the Roma national minority and a set of measures for its implementation – 1st stage” (1999) and “The developed strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for solving the problems of the Roma national minority into a set of 282 specific measures – 2nd stage” (2000).
- 2008: the government of Robert Fico adopted the “Medium-term concept for the development of the Roma national minority in the Slovak Republic, solidarity – integrity – inclusion 2008 – 2013”.

- 2021: the government of Igor Matovič adopted the “Strategy for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma until 2030” (goal: education, housing, employment, health and the fight against Roma racism).

From the main laws, regulations and decrees shown, we see that even 260 years after the first laws and regulations aimed at the emancipation of the Roma and improving their living conditions conditions issued by Maria Theresa in 1761, the main goals of the tasks associated with improving the lives of the Roma remain practically the same.

5.3 Development of the number of Roma/residents of the Roma ethnic group in Slovakia and its spatial differentiation

After the 1991 census, when the inhabitants of Slovakia could register as Roma, we must distinguish in Slovakia between Roma, inhabitants who declared themselves as Roma during the official census, and inhabitants of the Roma ethnic group, who have the same anthropological characteristics, language, culture, way of life and other facts as Roma, but who declared themselves as a different nationality during the census, usually Slovak or Hungarian. In the 1991 census, only 75,803 inhabitants declared themselves as Roma, which was 1.44% of the inhabitants of Slovakia. This was a surprisingly low number of inhabitants, when we consider that the last unofficial census of the inhabitants of the Roma ethnic group during the communist period, in the autumn of 1989, found 253,943 Roma inhabitants.

Since the last official population census in 2021, an “original” problem has arisen in relation to the number of Roma due to the fact that the census allowed Slovak citizens to register with two nationalities, the first nationality and the second nationality. It is logical that we can only count as Roma with a capital “R” those residents who registered with the Roma nationality as the first. Those residents who registered with the Roma nationality as the second in order are certainly also residents of the Roma ethnicity, but according to the first nationality Slovaks, Hungarians, or another, not Roma.

In the official population census in 2021, only 67,179 citizens of Slovakia listed Roma nationality as their first nationality, and 88,985 citizens of Slovakia listed it as their second. The Roma growth index 2021/2011 according to registration for the first nationality is only 0.635. However, the first and second together, “up to” 156,164 listed Roma nationality, and here the growth index 2021/2011 is up to 1.477. Both of the above growth indices 0.635 – only the first nationality and 1.477 – first and second nationality together, as well as both new shares of the total population of Slovakia, 1.23% only for the first nationality and 2.86% for the first and second nationality together, differ significantly from the trends of the censuses in 1991, 2001 and 2011 (Table 4). This fact points to a certain variability in the registration of Roma ethnic population as Roma nationality in 2021. Part of the Roma from 2011 did not register as Roma in the first nationality and only a small part of the Roma ethnic population from 2011 registered as Roma in the second nationality.

Table 4 Development of the number of Roma people and their share in the territory of Slovakia during official population censuses and growth indices in ten-year intervals

Year	Abs.	Rel.	Index	Year	Abs.	Rel.	Index
1921	8 035	0,25		2011	105 738	1,96	1,176
1930	31 188	0,9	n**	2021 1. ethnicity	67 179	1,23	0,635
1991	75 803	1,44	1,161*	2021 2. ethnicity	88 985	n**	n**
2001	89 920	1,67	1,186	2021 overall	156 164	2,86	1,477

Source: Horváthová (1964), Korec et al. (2022)

* – average growth index over a 10-year period, assuming a 10-year increase of 7,435 Roma

** – data not collected

According to Korec et al. (2022), the share of Roma people in the total population in Slovakia increased from 2.48% in 1947 to 7.65% in 2019 in unofficial censuses after World War II (Table 5). The trend of increasing the share of Roma people in the total population will almost certainly continue in the coming years. According to the forecast by Šprocha (2014), 589,000 Roma people should live in Slovakia by the end of 2030, while their share of the population of Slovakia will be 10.6%. Vaňo and Haviarová (2002) also expressed a similar opinion about the development of the number of Roma people in Slovakia in their work.

Table 5 Development of the number of Roma people and their share of the total population in Slovakia according to unofficial surveys

Year	Abs.	Rel.	Method of detection
1893	36 237	1.4	Hungarian census - unofficial
1947	84 438	2.48	Registration by territorial districts of the ZNB
1970	159 275	3.52	Registration by municipalities at the time of the official SOBD
1989	253 943	4.81	Registration of national committees
2010	352 924	6.49	Registration of the Roma ethnic group by municipalities
2019	417 535	7.65	Registration for the atlas of Roma communities

Source: Horváthová (1964), Korec and Bačík (2024)

The figure of 417,535 Roma people in 2019, determined by the authors of Ravasz et al. (2020) for the needs of the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019, is certainly not an overestimation, quite the opposite. The authors state that at least 10 to

15% of Roma people are “not captured” in unofficial censuses for various reasons. According to them, at the time of the 2019 census, there were most likely at least 450,000 Roma people living there. From the above, we must agree with Sulík (2008) that we really do not know how many Roma people live in Slovakia.

For the assessment of the significant regional concentration of Roma ethnic population, data from the last unofficial census of Roma ethnic population conducted by Ravasz et al. in 2019 are very suitable. Table 6 shows the shares of the Košice region, the Prešov region and the south of the Banská Bystrica region. The dominance of the Košice and Prešov regions is accompanied by a high share of the south of the Banská Bystrica region. As many as 77.45% of the Roma ethnic population of Slovakia live in an area where only 33.82% of its total number lives. It is also alarming that up to 80.57% of the Roma population in Slovakia lives in larger or smaller concentrations outside the municipality (13.68%), on the outskirts of the municipality (35.95%) or inside the municipality (30.94%) (Ravasz et al., 2020).

Table 6 Distribution of the Roma population in 2019 by regions of Slovakia

Region	Population – Abs.	Population – Rel.	Roma – Abs.	Roma – Rel.	1
Košice	782 216	14.35	133 988	32.09	17.13
Prešov	808 931	14.84	127 128	30.45	15.72
Eastern Slovakia (ES)	1 591 147	29.19	261 116	62.54	16.41
South of B. Bystrica	252 389	4.63	62 270	14.91	24.67
ES + South of B. Bystrica	1 843 536	33.82	323 386	77.45	17.54
Other territory	3 605 734	66.18	94 150	22.55	2.61
Slovakia	5 449 270	100	417 536	100.00	7.66

1 – Share of the Roma population in the region out of the total population in the region in %

Source: Korec and Bačík (2024)

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Roma population by district in 2019. It is noteworthy that in 12 districts the share was higher than 20% and in 3 it was even higher than 30% (Revúca 33.92, Rimavská Sobota 32.29 and Gelnica 30.56).

It seems that Sulík's (2008) remarks on the status of Roma population in Slovakia in the context of their contribution to the state will remain relevant and difficult to solve for a long time. In connection with the emerging demographic crisis, expert economists, sociologists and demographers state that Slovakia has two options to mitigate this crisis. The first is to stop the departure of educated young people abroad and the second is the potential of the workforce of marginalized Roma groups.

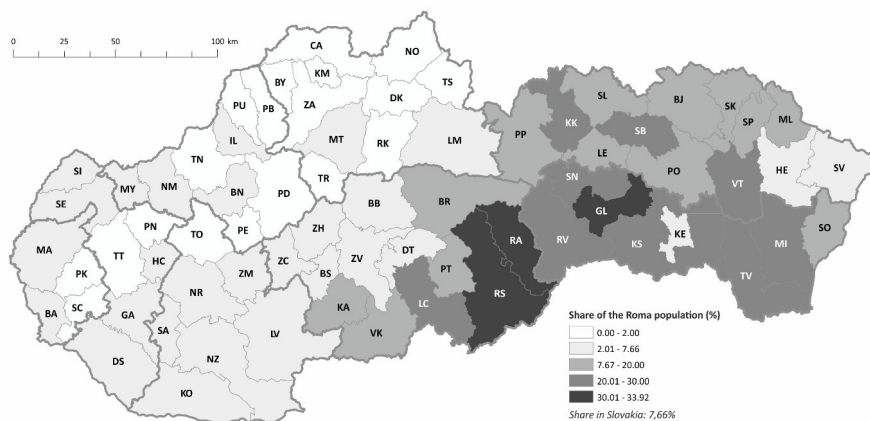


Figure 2 Share of Roma population by district in Slovakia in 2019.
Source: Ravasz et. al (2020)

5.4 Where to look for answers to the question “What next?”

The current state of the Roma community in Slovakia, its exclusion and the problem of integration are unsustainable, with the key being its alienation from the majority population. The authors of this article agree with several experts, especially sociologists, that the enormous problems of excluded Roma communities should be considered a much greater failure of independent Slovakia after 1993 than its economic backwardness.

We are aware that the solution aimed at improving the life of the Roma population in Slovakia is certainly not easy. There are a large number of causes and factors that need to be taken into account and respected, and there is also a whole range of interwoven phenomena behind the solution to this, we are not afraid to say it, “catastrophic” state. However, there are several basic facts that are important to keep in mind when considering how to proceed with this issue.

The first is the fact that social development after the World War II, especially economic development (industrialization, collectivization of agriculture, later mechanization/robotization of production, informatization and others), “took away” the Roma from their traditional professions, with which they were able to make a living for a long time. The second fact is the sharp growth of their number and share of the total population of Slovakia, with their simultaneous high concentration in selected regions. According to several authors, this fact reduces their resistance to external influences and thus makes it more difficult for them to integrate into the economy and social life of the region and the state. And the third non-negligible fact, which must be mentioned and not turned a blind eye to, is the unprecedented strength with

which the Roma “cling” to their traditional way of life, to their culture and values, which ultimately manifests itself in their persistent way of life.

In our opinion, the state and the Roma ethnic population contribute to the current poor situation of the Roma population in Slovakia with comparable contributions. The Roma population mainly by clinging to their “traditional” way of life, the state mainly by non-systemic solutions to this situation. The state should realize that the countless laws, regulations and decrees that have been adopted since the time of Maria Theresa have not yet had the desired effect. We know very well that when solving the “Roma issue”, we still encounter the absence of systemic solutions. We also know that, for example, generational poverty cannot be eliminated in a few years, it is a problem that takes twenty years or more to solve. Without a consistent systemic approach, we keep returning to the beginning.

So, at the first level, there is a “simple” answer to the question posed in the title of the sub-chapter:

1. The state should stop acting like an alibi and not reacting more or less formally in an effort to eliminate the most visible shortcomings. It should take a “more vigorous” systemic approach to correcting the existing situation, which will “hurt” both the state and the Roma.
2. Despite more than 700 years of their existence in Slovakia, the Roma are still different from the Slovaks. For more than 100 years, they have been facing the fundamental question of whether they are willing to change from within, of course while preserving their culture and traditions. The great burden of change therefore also remains with the Roma, without this change it will not work.

Yes, the answer to the question posed in the chapter title is simple at first glance, but "turning it into small pieces" to achieve the desired goal will be difficult and long.

6 “NEW TRENDS” IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

In 1989, universities and colleges were concentrated mainly in Bratislava and Košice and in selected larger cities, Nitra, Žilina, Prešov, Banská Bystrica and Zvolen. Since 1990, a number of “middle-class” universities have been established in Slovakia, which were mainly oriented towards education. Their ability to do high-quality science and research was limited (Ženka et al., 2014). After 1990, it can be said with irony, “new trends” in the development of university education were recorded in Slovakia.

In Slovakia, university education has become too atomized, when not only political, but also cultural (religious and national) arguments have prevailed.

The institutional development of university education after 1990 was downright catastrophic in Slovakia. The increase in the number of universities, faculties and departments, or scientific institutes within faculties, was large in Slovakia after

1990. The increase in the number of university students and graduates in Slovakia after 1990 was extreme (the number of students increased from 54,350 in 1990 to 139,716 in 2010 and the number of graduates increased from 8,148 to 43,872 over the same period, Table 7). The “budget” allocated from the state budget for universities increased only slightly in Slovakia after 1990, but it had to be distributed among a significantly higher number of universities and colleges. The number of universities and colleges in Slovakia increased from 13 in 1990 to 33 in 2010. From 1990 to 2010, an average of one new university or college was established in Slovakia each year (Table 7).

Table 7 Development of the number of universities (colleges), faculties, students and graduates in Slovakia in 1990–2025

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Colleges	13	14	20	26	33	35	33	33
Faculties	50	67	89	109	125	129	128	128
Students	54 350	74 322	92 823	116 195	139 716	118 856	102 585	99 678
Graduates	8 148	9 868	14 241	20 811	43 872	38 271	29 354	29 130

Source: portalvs.sk

This quantitative increase not only led to an inefficient allocation of funds, but also hindered the development of an effective scientific and research base. EU countries invest on average 1.4% of GDP in university education, in the EU11 region it is only 1.1%. Slovakia, with a value of 1.2% of GDP, is above the average for this eastern region, but these funds must be distributed among 33 universities and colleges (Dérer, 2011; Sedlák, 2026).

6.1 The relationship between the performance of the economy in Slovakia and the quality of its universities

For many years (2000–2015), the Slovak economy benefited from cheap labor, Slovakia's good location, political stability and geopolitical anchoring in the EU, the economic and social reforms carried out, and other factors. The most economically beneficial were the industrial sectors that used the technology, management, and business knowledge of foreign investors, with a large part of their production going to export. After 1990, the automotive and electrical engineering industries began to dominate the Slovak industry.

The necessary prerequisite for the further development of the Slovak economy was the knowledge economy and innovations in industry and services built on innovations. However, the prerequisite for this change is an educated, qualified workforce, which should be provided primarily by high-quality universities. Dérer (2011) in his “15-year-old” article “The Despair of Slovak Education and Science (on Causes and Solutions)” is very critical of Slovak universities: “Slovakia is the record

holder in Europe in terms of the number of universities per capita. It would be enough to have four times fewer universities, but four times better ones, of course with the same financial subsidies. The current state of affairs in Slovakia is reflected in the fact that there has not yet been a ‘political will’ to abolish the provincial ‘dummy’ universities that were established mainly in the 1990s. It is not enough that we give the least money to university education among the surrounding countries, and even that desperate little package is divided equally between the original good universities and new creations with a university in their name, whose diploma has no value outside the state administration”.

In the “Slovak university education” in the past three decades, some internal shortcomings were also observable, occurring individually not only by universities, but also by faculties at a given university. We will briefly point out five of these problems.

- a) the elections of academic officials at universities and faculties (including rectors, vice-rectors, deans, vice-deans, chairmen of academic senates, heads of departments and directors of institutes) sometimes had a not entirely transparent background at universities;
- b) there were more negative phenomena in habilitation and inauguration procedures (low criteria for scientific results, pedagogical work and international activities of applicants, procedures in related fields, not in the field in which the applicant works scientifically and others);
- c) procedures for approving study fields and study programs often had a formal character of assessing the qualifications of guarantors, when the only requirement for a guarantor was a degree;
- d) a large scope of distance learning with several negative aspects of this education (low number of hours of direct teaching, method of knowledge verification, method of conducting diploma theses and others);
- e) universities had “multiple-tenure” associate professors and professors who had 2 or more full-time positions, thus new faculties obtained guarantors for study fields or programs.

6.2 Slovak universities compared to EU countries

According to several published works, Slovakia today lags behind the level of education and the results of scientific research at universities not only behind the world, but also behind the most of the countries of the aforementioned EU11. Slovakia has never determined not only global, but also narrower European trends in university education. The aforementioned Dérer (2011) pointed this out back in 2011. Among other things, he stated that while Hungarian, Czech and Polish universities regularly feature in the regular Shanghai ranking of the 500 best universities in the world, Slovak universities have not yet appeared there.

Recently, in 2023, the ranking of universities according to the Hirsch Index of University Workers was published, which is an important indicator of the level of scientific research of a scientist. The first of the Slovak universities, Comenius University, was among the first 2000 universities in the world in 1216th place. This fact

alone is not so catastrophic when we consider how many universities there are in the world. What is worrying for Slovakia, however, is the fact that before Comenius University, there were as many as 11 universities from Czechia in this ranking.

The compilers of the Shanghai Ranking use generally available data that are not dependent on the country. Based on this ranking, which is highly respected in the world, Koršňák (in Ižíp, 2025) compiled an index of the quality of universities in individual EU countries in 2025. It takes into account not only the placement of universities in the Shanghai Ranking, but also other indicators (the total number of universities, their exact position, the size of the country in terms of population, the size of the target group of the population aged 20–24, and others). In such a ranking, Slovak universities were ranked among the weakest in the EU (Table 8) (<https://www.shanghai-ranking.com/news/arwu/2024>).

Table 8 Comparison of the indicators “GDP per capita in purchasing power parity” (EU % 100) (A), “University Quality Index” (B) in the EU and “Net annual income of a tertiary-educated worker in euros” (C) in 2024

A			B			C			
	EU country	EU %		EU country	EU %		EU country	Abs.	EU %
1	Luxembourg	241	1	Sweden	262	1	Denmark	46 683	140,5
2	Ireland	211	2	Finland	224	2	Ireland	44 985	135,3
3	Netherlands	135	3	Denmark	209	3	Austria	43 927	132,2
4	Denmark	128	4	Austria	200	4	Germany	42 852	128,9
5	Belgium	117	5	Ireland	179	5	Netherlands	42 621	128,2
6	Germany	115	6	Luxembourg	175	6	Belgium	40 754	122,6
6	Austria	115	7	Netherlands	153	7	Finland	39 775	119,7
8	Sweden	114	8	Belgium	139	8	France	38 510	115,9
9	Malta	109	9	Estonia	132	9	Sweden	34 826	104,8
10	Finland	108	10	Germany	126	10	Italy	31 941	96,1
11	France	99	11	Italy	117	11	Spain	27 785	83,6
12	Italy	98	12	Portugal	109	12	Slovenia	25 825	77,7
13	Cyprus	95	13	Spain	98	13	Estonia	23 664	71,2
14	Spain	92	14	Slovenia	83	14	Czechia	21 779	65,5
15	Czechia	91	15	France	73	15	Lithuania	21 110	63,5
15	Slovenia	91	16	Czechia	68	16	Latvia	20 580	61,9
17	Lithuania	87	17	Cyprus	64	17	Portugal	20 575	61,9
18	Portugal	82	18	Lithuania	62	18	Croatia	19 250	57,9
19	Poland	79	19	Hungary	56	19	Poland	16 891	50,8
19	Romania	79	20	Greece	42	20	Greece	16 725	50,3

19	Estonia	79	21	Croatia	34	21	Bulgaria	16 521	49,7
22	Hungary	77	22	Poland	16	22	Romania	13 333	40,1
22	Croatia	77	23	Slovakia	6	23	Hungary	13 149	39,6
24	Slovakia	75	24	Latvia	0	24	Slovakia	12 168	36,6
25	Latvia	71	25	Malta	0	25	Malta	nd	
26	Greece	70	26	Romania	0	26	Cyprus	nd	
27	Bulgaria	60	27	Bulgaria	0	27	Luxembourg	nd	

nd – no data

Source: EUROSTAT (2025), Toma (2025), Ižíp (2025)

In view of Slovakia's poor ranking according to the “University Quality Index”, it is necessary to draw attention once again to the three already mentioned facts: the large number of universities in Slovakia, the inefficient distribution of resources and the aforementioned internal problems of university education. One remark should be made regarding the quality of Slovak universities. Of course, we also have very high-quality faculties, quality departments and institutes or very high-quality research teams at Slovak universities, which are world-class.

In Western European countries, where university education has been developing for a long time under standard economic and social conditions and is not shaped by state intervention, university-educated employees have almost four times the Slovak wage, which is not surprising. But the fact that in Czechia they have up to 9,611 euros more per year is worth thinking about.

6.3 The departure of (the best) Slovak students to study abroad and its consequences

According to official data from the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) and the Institute of Social Policy (ISP) published in 2026, Slovak universities lose 20% of secondary school graduates every year due to their departure to study abroad. Detailed analyses show that in the case of students with a talent for mathematics, up to 65% of them go abroad. Given generally known factors, such as short distances, linguistic and cultural proximity and others, it is not surprising that about 70% of them go to study in Czechia. In order, other attractive destinations for Slovak students are universities in the United Kingdom, Hungary, Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands. According to data from the aforementioned institutes, approximately 60% of students who obtain an education abroad do not return to Slovakia after obtaining a degree at a foreign university (Spáč and Solovicová, 2006).

Czechia has a large share in the high proportion of students who remain after completing their studies abroad. According to the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), Slovaks have long been the largest group of foreign students at universities in Czechia. In 2024, 22,669 of them studied there, which represented up to 40% of all for-

eign students at universities in Czechia. On a European scale, this “Slovakia-Czech Republic” relationship is unique in the context of the number (share) of foreign university students and, consequently, the number (share) of them not returning to their country of origin. An important factor that also determines the professional success of Slovak students in Czechia is also linguistic affinity.

It should be emphasized that the departure of graduates (brain drain) has many negative consequences for the country. The departure of probably the best high school graduates to study abroad has, in addition to the deterioration of the ratio in the age structure of the population and the disruption of family relationships, other negative consequences. The failure of foreign university graduates to return to Slovakia and the departure of Slovak university graduates abroad also have a very negative impact on the lagging behind of science, research and development. As Sedlák (2026) states, Slovakia loses approximately 10% of its university-educated citizens annually in the long term. Not only the innovation potential of companies in Slovakia is affected, but also the quality of public institutions, starting with ministries and ending with municipal authorities.

It is logical that these negative consequences of the outflow of high-quality university graduates will ultimately also be reflected in the stagnation of the country's GDP growth. Sedlák (2026) considers the losses to GDP to be indirect losses from the departure of university graduates abroad. Estimates according to the cited author indicate that the brain drain is costing Slovakia 1 to 2% of GDP annually. The state invests 50 to 100 thousand euros in one graduate, depending on the field studied. These are in turn losses of direct investments in human capital. Every university graduate who decides to go abroad also takes with him future tax revenues and the aforementioned innovation potential, which are also indirect losses to GDP.

According to several surveys, one of the main motivations for Slovak high school graduates to study abroad, including Czechia, is clearly the higher quality and greater “reputation” of foreign universities. For this reason, universities in Prague and Brno in particular are very attractive to Slovak students. Prague and Brno are perceived by Slovaks as the two main university cities for studying. They are perceived as a guarantee of high quality. At the Brno University of Applied Sciences, the share of Slovak students in 2025 was up to 18.9% and at the “Masaryk University” in Brno 17.4%. According to an internal survey conducted by Masaryk University, the higher quality of Czech universities was identified as the main reason by 29% and modern education by 27% of Slovak students surveyed. The next reasons in order were the good reputation (the aforementioned reputation) and prestige of the university (18%) and the attractive offer of study programs (17%).

7 REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

The fact that several authors view the very concept of regional competitiveness with some distrust is not surprising. Several authors identify competitiveness with economic productivity. According to them, the main goal of the state and the region

lies in increasing economic production, which results in improving the living standards of citizens (Krugman, 2011; Djurbová, 2020). The significant role of the economy in the region in terms of its competitiveness cannot be argued. Finally, the new German Chancellor Merz said: “The economy is not everything, but without the economy there is nothing.” The concept of competitiveness shows the dependence of the relationship of other important phenomena of the region on the economy.

7.1 Three-factor model of regional competitiveness

Any attempt to assess the practical significance of specific knowledge and concepts in studying the competitiveness of states and their regions requires contextualization of this phenomenon. Although the region of Central and Eastern post-communist Europe EU11 (Slovenia, Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia) is far from homogeneous in terms of factors and various driving forces determining their economy and competitiveness, the region of these countries has some common characteristics. These characteristics justify us to evaluate them as a whole also in relation to their competitiveness. However, when discussing the competitiveness of these countries, it is important to respect their specificities. This fact was first pointed out very well in their work by Ženka et al. (2014).

In connection with the assessment of the regional competitiveness of the aforementioned EU11 countries, Bělohradský (2024) showed a model of regional competitiveness by linking theoretical knowledge and a conceptual approach. The aforementioned author presented a three-factor model of regional competitiveness, which has significant validity even in the current period of global polycrisis, deglobalization, and the advent of artificial intelligence (Figure 3).



*national, regional, local

**process improvement, product improvement, cross-sectoral improvement, functional improvement

Figure 3 Three-factor model of regional competitiveness. Source: Bělohradský (2024), adapted by the author

Among the important conceptual contributions of his work, the emphasis on feedback, which is crucial from the long-term perspective of the state and its regions, and also the emphasis on the role of the institutional factor for competitiveness should be included. The three-factor model of regional competitiveness describes that economic competition on a national and regional scale includes three important resources for which states/regions compete: investments in the sense of financial and physical capital (i), human capital in the sense that it is necessary to create conditions in the state/region for its creation, attraction, or retention, since it is an exclusive and limited “good” (ii), and institutional capital, including law, the tax system, culture and other processes, i.e. the creation of rules of the game supporting development (iii). The author directly points to the significant role of institutions for the competitiveness of a state or region. On the output side, competitiveness “covers” production (i), value added (ii), employment (iii) and the position of companies in global production networks (iv). Finally, good outputs should lead to a higher standard of living in the state or region (i), maintenance of production in the region (ii), economic complexity (iii) and regional economic and social resilience (iv) (Bělohradský, 2024).

If we look at the competitiveness of Slovakia on a global scale or on a scale of the aforementioned EU11 countries, in the context of the three basic inputs mentioned, we must state that Slovakia is significantly lagging behind in all three. In terms of attracting investments, Slovakia, not only due to the growth of labor costs, but also due to other factors, e.g. the existing rules of the game for business and geopolitical uncertainty, has ceased to be one of the leaders of the Central European region. In terms of human capital, the situation in Slovakia is also not favorable. Not only are conditions not created in Slovakia to attract experts from abroad, but on the contrary, due to the more broadly understood unfavorable social situation in Slovakia, a large number of young Slovak experts are leaving abroad. When evaluating the third source important in terms of the state's competitiveness, institutional capital, the situation is perhaps the worst of the three necessary inputs listed. Poorly set rules of the game for business, poor law enforcement, high corruption, inefficient use of budgetary and European funds, poorly developed digitalization and others, significantly reduce the competitiveness of the state and its regions.

7.2 Results of the work of the 2024 Nobel Prize winners Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson

The causes of Slovakia's economic backwardness and weak competitiveness are indirectly explained by the results of their work by the 2024 Nobel Prize winners in Economics, Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson (Acemoglu et al., 2001 2002, 2005). The main topic of research by Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, who are often referred to as “AJR” due to the extraordinary number of joint publications, is why some countries prosper while others remain poor. AJR are key representatives of the school of the so-called new institutional economics. The basis of their argument is that the key to the prosperity of the state and its regions are state institutions.

Dovčik (2024) described the results of the work of the new Nobel laureates very well. The Nobel laureates explain that inclusive institutions, based on the foundations of democracy and neo-liberalism, support broader participation in economic activity and therefore the state and its regions achieve very good economic results, while “extractive” or “exclusive” institutions that arise in autocratic systems concentrate economic and political power in the hands of a small group, which results in weaker economic results for the state and its regions. The fact that the AJR were able to formally grasp the effects of state institutions on economic and overall social development has the result that institutional economics has now become absolutely mainstream.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the AJR, according to Dovčik (2024), is that it contributed to a better understanding of the relationship between the elements of the functioning of democracy and economic prosperity. Economic science and theory have long had, to put it mildly, an uncertain relationship to democracy. Thanks to the work of the AJR, the direct relationship between democracy and the economic development of countries is now better accepted. The work of the AJR shows that democracy is not just some "political ideal", but also the key to creating an environment that allows the state and its regions to benefit from overall economic growth and technological progress in the state.

7.3 Results of the work of the 2025 Nobel Prize winners Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt

The 2025 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to three outstanding economists who have made fundamental contributions to understanding why and how sustainable economic growth and competitiveness occur. The prize was awarded to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt (Aghion and Howitt, 1996; Aghion et al., 1992, 2002; Mokyr, 2005, 2020) for their explanation of how innovation drives long-term economic growth and why the world has changed so dramatically over the past two centuries. Half of the award went to historian and economist Joel Mokyr “for identifying the prerequisites for sustainable growth through technological progress”. The other half went to Philip Aghion and Peter Howitt “for their theory of sustainable growth through creative destruction”. Mokyr connected history with economic analysis. He argues that the social environment plays an important role, namely whether society is open to new ideas and whether it supports and enables change.

Aghion and Howitt (1992) introduced a new perspective on macroeconomics with their article. They introduced the term “creative destruction”, which builds on a concept known from the work of Schumpeter (2003). According to their mathematical model, growth occurs when new products and technologies replace old ones, so innovation is both creative and destructive. According to them, competition and change are necessary conditions for growth and understandably bring conflicts. If innovations crowd out existing firms, they can defend themselves and block progress through lobbying or regulations. The balance between fostering innovation and maintaining fair competition is thus a fundamental challenge for modern economies.

Mokyr, Aghion and Howitt have shown that technological progress is about the entire economic ecosystem that allows new discoveries to not only be born, but also to develop and benefit society. In 1992, Aghion and Howitt created the first economic model that showed how growth can be explained as a consequence of competition and innovation. Their calculations showed that growth depends on how much money the state and the economy itself invest in university education and in research and development.

In Slovakia, we are having a hard time coming to terms with the fact that the golden era of industrial hyperglobalization, from which we benefited in the period 2000-2015 mainly thanks to low labor costs, a good geographical location and political credibility, is behind us. Today, it seems that Slovakia remains a museum of assembly lines and warehouses, hopelessly dependent on foreign capital. And foreign capital, as many examples show us, Samsung Voderady, Kovohuty Istebné and others, is not that it is not coming to Slovakia, but is already leaving it. The archaic economic model has brought Slovakia to the bottom of the European Union.

Mikloš (2025) states that in order to increase Slovakia's competitiveness, it would be necessary to carry out reforms in three areas in particular:

- a) reforms that will ensure a permanent improvement in the business environment,
- b) reforms to improve the efficiency of public administration and the quality of public services and
- c) reforms to increase the quality of education, especially university education, science, research and innovation.

One must clearly agree with the above opinion. Reforms in these three areas would significantly improve the "rules of the game" in Slovakia and would also significantly help improve inputs in the three phenomena, as declared in the competitiveness concept presented above.

8 CONCLUSION

Global problems in the world today are deeper and more interconnected, which causes significant economic uncertainty in the world. Economic shocks, the energy crisis, ongoing climate change, technological progress, including artificial intelligence, and demographic development represent a very toxic "mixture" of interacting threats. In the literature, this phenomenon is called a "polycrisis". Some might say that slow economic growth is a global problem, not a national or regional one. However, in the world and in the EU, it is mainly small countries that are not very reformist, not very flexible, and not very innovative that are paying the price for slow global economic growth. Slovakia has become one of the good examples of such a small country in the past 15 years. It is obvious that Slovakia itself, its government and institutions, have many opportunities to prepare the "rules of the game" for the economy and general social development so that the state functions as best as possible. There are many reasons for Slovakia's loss of competitiveness for business.

Investors perceive the loss of political and economic stability most negatively. The fight against corruption and crime is also perceived very negatively.

The article focuses on two predispositions and three determinants/limits of social development, which are directly related to the economic and social problems of Slovakia. The two predispositions have developed historically and today it is very difficult to mitigate their negative impact. The three determinants/limits can also be more or less considered a consequence of historical development, but the state, the government and its institutions, have the means to significantly reduce their negative impact. The two predispositions of social development in Slovakia are the character of the settlement of Slovakia and the upward east-west gradient of the economic performance of the regions in Slovakia. The three determinants/limits are the territorial-administrative division of Slovakia, the Roma issue as an important socio-economic issue in Slovakia and the development of university education after 1990 in Slovakia.

Slovakia is a sparsely populated country with a small number of large residential agglomerations. This settlement limits to a certain extent the potential of Slovakia and its regions to benefit from the advantages that large agglomerations provide for economic development. The absence of several larger urban agglomerations is a major handicap for the Slovak economy. Only one medium-sized one with 475 thousand inhabitants (Bratislava) and one larger urban agglomeration with 230 thousand (Košice) is a deficiency in the settlement structure of Slovakia in the context of economic development. In Slovakia, there is a significantly formed, historically created east-west gradient of increasing economic attractiveness. The east-west gradient of economic performance growth in Slovakia is historically conditioned and began to form relatively clearly in the second half of the 19th century and continued in the interwar period during the First Czechoslovak Republic. During the 40-year communist period in the years 1948–1989, the Czechoslovak government balanced regional differences in Slovakia through industrialization and a new territorial-administrative division. After the fall of communism in 1989, however, the differences between the west and east of Slovakia began to increase sharply, which was also influenced by processes associated with globalization. Western Slovakia had better conditions after 1989 thanks to its advantageous geographical location, better transport infrastructure, the location of the capital Bratislava in the far west of Slovakia on the border with Austria, a more favorable structure of settlements and some other factors. Other factors also had a negative effect on eastern Slovakia after 1993 (neighbors with less developed regions of neighboring states, low primary potential of the territory, absent highway connections and a demographic structure with a high share of the Roma population played a certain role).

The fact that the territorial-administrative division of Slovakia at the level of regions and districts does not respect the geographical organization of space has been the subject of criticism practically since its inception in 1996. The criticism pointed out two basic consequences of this division: it costs the state unnecessarily large financial resources (i) and it will not allow for optimal management of territorial-administrative units from the state level or from the regional level (ii). Experts in the

field of public administration and economists estimate that reducing the number of territorial-administrative units and associating municipal governments could bring annual savings of several hundred million euros.

The topic of the economic and social context of the Roma population in Slovakia is neither new nor marginal. Several authors point out that, according to estimates, the integration of the Roma into society would enrich Slovakia by 7 to 11% of GDP per year. In our opinion, the state and the Roma ethnic population contribute to the current poor situation of the Roma population in Slovakia in a comparable way. The Roma population mainly by clinging to their “traditional” way of life, the state mainly by non-systemic solutions to this situation. In searching for the answer to the question “What to do next with the bad situation of the Roma population?”, it is at the first level simple. First, the state should take a “more drastic” systemic approach, which will “hurt a little” both the state and the Roma. Second, the Roma population must think about whether they are willing to change from within, of course while preserving their culture and traditions. “Exchanging this answer for small things” in order to achieve the intended goal, however, will be difficult, long and painful. The institutional development of university education in Slovakia after 1990 was downright catastrophic. The increase in the number of universities, faculties and departments, or scientific institutes within faculties, was extreme in Slovakia after 1990, which later affected the quality of university education. Slovakia is the record holder in Europe in the number of universities per population. This development is reflected in the “very low” ranking of Slovak universities in all world rankings of university quality and the massive departure of students from Slovakia to study abroad, many of whom do not return to Slovakia. In the long term, Slovakia is losing approximately 10% of its university-educated citizens annually. Not only the innovative potential of companies in Slovakia is affected, but also the quality of public institutions, starting with ministries and ending with municipal authorities. Improving the quality of Slovak universities in Slovakia is a major challenge today.

The regional competitiveness model shown in the last chapter clearly highlights why Slovakia’s competitiveness has been declining on a European scale in recent years. Slovakia is significantly lagging behind in three crucial sources for maintaining or increasing competitiveness, which are investments, human capital and institutional capital.

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Dve predispozície a tri determinanty socio-ekonomického rozvoja Slovenska

Súhrn

Globálne problémy vo svete sú dnes hlbšie a vzájomne prepojené, čo spôsobuje vo svete značnú ekonomickú neistotu. Ekonomické otrasy, energetická kríza, prebiehajúca klimatická zmena, technologický pokrok, vrátane umelej inteligencie a demografický vývoj predstavujú veľmi toxickú „zmes“ spolupôsobiacich hrozieb. V literatúre sa tento jav nazýva „polykríza“. Niektorí by mohli povedať, že pomalý ekonomický rast je globálny problém, nie národný alebo regionálny. Vo svete a aj v EÚ však na pomalý globálny ekonomický rast doplácajú najmä malé krajiny, ktoré sú málo reformné, málo flexibilné a málo inovatívne. Slovensko sa stalo v uplynulých 15 rokoch jedným z dobrých príkladov takejto malej krajiny. Je zrejme, že Slovensko samotné, jeho vláda a inštitúcie, majú veľa možností pripraviť „pravidlá hry“ pre ekonomiku a všeobecný spoločenský rozvoj tak, aby štát fungoval čo najlepšie. Dôvodov straty konkurencieschopnosti Slovenska pre podnikanie je veľa. Investori najnegatívnejšie vnímajú stratu politickej a ekonomickej stability. Veľmi negatívne je vnímaný aj boj proti korupcii a kriminalite.

V príspevku sa sústreďuje na dve predispozície a tri determinanty/limity spoločenského rozvoja, ktoré majú priamy vzťah k ekonomickým a sociálnym problémom Slovenska. Dve predispozície sa historicky vyvinuli a dnes je veľmi ťažké zmierniť ich negatívny vplyv. Tri determinanty/limity možno viac menej tiež považovať za dôsledok historického vývoja, ale štát, vláda a jeho inštitúcie, má prostriedky na výrazné zníženie ich negatívneho vplyvu. Dvomi predispozíciami spoločenského rozvoja Slovenska sú charakter osídlenia Slovenska a vzostupný východo-západný gradient ekonomickej výkonnosti regiónov na Slovensku. Tromi determinantmi/limitmi sú územno-správne členenie Slovenska, rómska problematika ako dôležitá sociálno-ekonomická otázka Slovenska a vývoj univerzitného vzdelávania po roku 1990 na Slovensku.

Slovensko je redšie osídleným štátom s malým počtom veľkých sídelných aglomerácií. Toto osídlenie do určitej miery limituje potenciál Slovenska a jeho regiónov ťažiť z výhod, ktoré poskytujú pre rozvoj ekonomiky veľké aglomerácie. Absencia viacerých väčších mestských aglomerácií je pre ekonomiku Slovenska veľkým handicapom. Len jedna stredne veľká so 475 tisíc obyvateľmi (Bratislava) a jedna väčšia mestská aglomerácia s 230 tisíc (Košice), je v kontexte ekonomickeho rozvoja nedostatok sídelnej štruktúry Slovenska.

Na Slovensku existuje výrazne sformovaný, historicky vytvorený východo-západný gradient vzostupnosti ekonomickej atraktívnosti. Východo-západný gradient rastu výkonu ekonomiky je na Slovensku historicky podmienený a pomerne zreteľne sa začal formovať už v druhej polovici 19. storočia a pokračoval aj v medzivojnovom období počas 1. Československej republiky. Počas 40 ročného komunistického obdobia v rokoch 1948 – 1989 československá vláda industrializáciou a novým územno-správnym členením vyrovnávala regionálne rozdiely na Slovensku. Po páde komunizmu v roku 1989 sa však rozdiely medzi západom a východom Slovenska sa začali prudko zväčšovať, na čo mali vplyv aj procesy spojené s globalizáciou. Západné Slovensko malo po roku 1989 lepšie podmienky vďaka výhodnej geografickej polohe, lepšej dopravnej infraštruktúry, polohe hlavného mesta Bratislavy na krajnom západe Slovenska na hranici s Rakúskom, priaznivejšej štruktúre sídiel i niektorých ďalších faktorov. Na východnom Slovensku negatívne pôsobili po roku 1993 aj ďalšie skutočnosti (susedí s menej rozvinutými regiónmi susedných štátov, nízky primárny potenciál územia, absentujúce diaľničné spojenie a určitú úlohu zohrala demografická štruktúra s vysokým podielom rómskeho obyvateľstva).

Fakt, že územno-správne členenie Slovenska na úrovni krajov a okresov nerešpektuje geografickú organizáciu priestoru je objektom kritiky prakticky už od svojho vzniku v roku 1996. Kritika poukazovala dva základné dôsledky tohto členenia: štát stojí zbytočne veľké finančných prostriedky (i) a neumožní optimálne riadenie územno-správnych jednotiek z úrovne štátu ani z regionálnej úrovne (ii). Odborníci z oblasti verejnej správy a ekonómia odhadujú, že zníženie počtu územno-správnych celkov a združovanie obecných samospráv by mohlo priniesť ročné úspory niekoľkých stoviek miliónov eur.

Téma ekonomických a sociálnych súvislostí rómskeho obyvateľstva na Slovensku nie je nová a ani marginálna. Viacerí autori upozorňujú, že podľa odhadov by začlenenie Rómov do spoločnosti obohatilo Slovensko o 7 až 11 % HDP ročne. K súčasnej zlej situácii rómskeho obyvateľstva na Slovensku prispievajú podľa nášho názoru štát a obyvatelia rómskeho etnika porovnateľným dielom. Rómske obyvateľstvo hlavne lipnutím na svojom „tradičnom“ spôsobe života, štát hlavne pre nesystémové riešenia tejto situácie. Pri hľadaní odpovede na otázku „Ako ďalej s tou zlou situáciou rómskeho obyvateľstva?“ je v prvej rovine je jednoduchá. Po prvé, štát by mal zaujať „razantnejší“ systémový prístup, ktorý bude „trochu bolieť“ štát aj Rómov. Po druhé, rómske obyvateľstvo musí sa musí zamyslieť nad tým, či

sú ochotní zmeniť sa zvnútra, samozrejme pri zachovaní si svojej kultúry a tradícií. „Rozmeniť túto odpoveď na drobné“, aby sme dosiahli sledovaný cieľ však bude náročné, dlhé a bolestivé.

Inštitucionálny vývoj univerzitného vzdelávania na Slovensku bol po roku 1990 priam katastrofálny. Nárast počtu univerzít, fakúlt a katedier, prípadne vedeckých ústavov v rámci fakúlt bol na Slovensku po roku 1990 extrémny, čo sa neskôr prejavilo na kvalite univerzitného vzdelávania. V počte univerzít na počet obyvateľov je Slovensko v Európe rekordérom. Odrazom tohto vývoja je umiestnenie slovenských univerzít „veľmi hlboko“ vo všetkých svetových rebríčkoch kvality univerzít a masívny odchod študentov zo Slovenska na univerzitné štúdium do zahraničia, z ktorých sa veľa na Slovensko nevráti. Slovensko prichádza dlhodobo približne až o 10 % vysokoškolsky vzdelaných občanov ročne. Postihnutý je nielen inovačný potenciál firiem na Slovensku, ale aj kvalita verejných inštitúcií, ministerstvami začínajúc a obecnými úradmi končiac. Zlepšenie kvality slovenských univerzít na Slovensku je dnes veľkou výzvou.

V poslednej kapitole ukázaný model regionálnej konkurencieschopnosti jasne upozorňuje, prečo v posledných rokoch konkurencieschopnosť Slovenska v mierke Európy klesá. Pri troch rozhodujúcich zdrojoch pre udržanie, resp. zvýšenia konkurencieschopnosti, ktorými sú investície, ľudský kapitál a kapitál inštitúcií, Slovensko významne zaostáva.