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### **Priorities of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU**

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**Report Highlights:**

Slovakia took over its first ever European Union (EU) Council Presidency on July 1, 2016. With Slovakia's Presidency already overshadowed by broader EU crises (i.e. the United Kingdom's (UK) referendum on EU membership, the migration crisis, and concerns about the future of the Eurozone), it is unclear how effective the Slovak Presidency will be over the next 6 months. Highlights of Slovakia's stated priorities relating to agriculture include the current farm crisis, simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and promoting biodiversity. The Slovak Presidency will also inherit the draft organic food regulation proposed by the European Commission in 2014.

## **Overview**

This presidency will represent Slovakia's first leadership of the Council since joining the EU in 2004 and the 116<sup>th</sup> presidency of the Council of the EU. Slovakia's rotation will follow the Netherlands and precede Malta. Multiple immediate challenges will be de facto agenda items for Slovakia. First and foremost, the Slovakian presidency began its term one week after the historic EU membership referendum in the UK. With the UK's vote to leave the EU, Slovakia's presidency will likely be consumed by exit negotiations.

Additionally, issues arising from the overwhelming migration by refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa to the EU in the last year combined with economic fallout from the Eurozone crisis will consume a large portion of the Slovak agenda. With rising Euroskepticism not just in the UK but other countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Greece, the presidency will face enormous anti-EU sentiment during its tenure. Lastly, rising tensions between the East and West over issues such as the economy and migration reform will see Slovakia serving as a moderator between the two regions.

Other considerations concerning the formation of the Slovak priorities during their presidency come from the [18<sup>th</sup> Month Programme of the Council](#)—a framework adopted by the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Malta as their policy development mechanism to ensure continuity during the current presidential cycle. The three countries built their program on the five priority areas defined in the [Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change 2014](#).

## **Slovakia Presidency Program and Priorities Relating to Agriculture**

The two most relevant councils affecting agriculture during the Slovak presidency are the Agriculture and Fisheries Council and the Environment Council. On June 30, 2016, the agendas for both councils were finalized and can be found [here](#).

### *Agriculture and Fisheries Council*

The Agriculture and Fisheries Council is slated to meet four times between July and December of 2016. According to the provisional agenda, the current market situation and support measures addressing the farm crisis across various sectors (include milk and fruit/vegetable production) will be discussion topics of high importance. Efforts to simplify the CAP (which is set to expire in 2020) will also be critical during the Slovak presidency. With a potential UK withdrawal from the EU, the current CAP budget and contributions will need to be examined as well. Slovakia will also review fishing provisions for the Baltic Sea and various fish-stocks both in and outside EU waters. Other agenda items for the Agriculture and Fisheries Council include international forestry policy and how the Food Chain relates to the Digital Single Market. The Slovak Presidency also noted that research and innovation within agriculture is a priority during its term.

### *Environment Council*

Two meetings are scheduled for the Environment Council in October and December. One highlight during these meetings will be a first reading policy debate surrounding Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF). Promoting biodiversity is a cornerstone of the Environment Councils agenda. Water policy, biosafety, and waste management are three interrelated topics that are also agenda items during the presidency. Not surprisingly, decarbonizing the transport sector, an overreaching EU goal outlined in the Renewable Energy Directive (RED) targets, will also be discussed as the year 2020 approaches.

### **Organic Regulations**

The Slovak presidency will serve as the sixth rotating Presidency to work on proposal for a new Organic Food Regulation set forth by the Commission in 2014. Before releasing their 2015 Work Program, the EU Commission reviewed and considered withdrawing the proposal for a new Organic Regulation as little progress had been made on finalizing the regulation. While initially the Commission had indicated at that time that if the proposal was not adopted in six months it would be withdrawn, 18 months have now passed and the Slovak presidency will be expected to complete the work that began on organics in 2014.

### **Conclusions**

While Slovakia has adopted several important agenda items concerning agriculture and the environment for their six month term, it is unclear how much progress towards meaningful action in these areas they will be able to make. The main focus and resources for the EU will be diverted to exit negotiations when the UK triggers Article 50 and begins EU exit proceedings. Additionally, EU-wide dilemmas such as migration, the Eurozone, and rising Euroskepticism will create many challenges for Slovakia over the coming months.