

MYTHS ABOUT EU

1. BY JOINING THE EUROPEAN UNION, SLOVAKIA HAS LOST ITS SOVEREIGNTY

It is a frequent myth that by joining the European Union, Slovakia has lost its sovereignty. Slovakia has been a member of the European Union since 1 May 2004 based on free will as expressed in the referendum in May 2003 when 92.46 % of the participating voters (1,747,261 citizens) voted in favour of joining the Union.

FACTS

Sovereignty as a fundamental principle of a state means that countries have control over what is happening within their borders and that they cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

While the Member States maintain this sovereignty, the EU is partly governed by a supranational system - this means that every member country transfers some of its competences to EU institutions, while in exchange for that, it gets full representation in these institutions as well as participation in joint decision making.

At the same time the EU may only make decisions within the limits of its competences that are either exclusive, which means that the Union can legislate and adopt legally binding acts, or shared, which means that the Union as well as EU Member States can legislate and adopt legally binding acts, and supporting, meaning that the EU can only intervene via activities to support, coordinate or complement the action of its Member States.

Similarly, pursuant to Article 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, “competences not conferred upon the Union by the Treaties remain with the Member States”.

Having joined the EU, we have not lost our sovereignty, we have only voluntarily conferred a part of it to joint European institutions. The EU may only make decisions where it is allowed to do so as stated in its specified competences.

2. SLOVAKIA IS GOVERNED BY THE “DICTATE OF BRUSSELS”

There is also a well-known myth about the phenomenon of the dictate of Brussels in the EU that consists of civil servants whose objective is to make up senseless rules and to command the Member States.

FACTS

The governments of Member States are connected by important aspects of sovereign power in the supranational European framework, but not even institutions like the European Commission govern the EU. In fact, the dominant part of the execution of power in the EU is in the hands of the elected governments of individual Member States that are represented with their prime ministers in the European Council and ministers in the Council of the EU, as well as the citizens themselves like members of the directly elected European Parliament – these are the main EU institutions that are crucial for its legislative activity.

In practice this means that any crucial decisions must be adopted by the democratically elected governments of Member States and in the case of legislation almost always by directly elected members of the European Parliament as well. The most important matters are negotiated by prime ministers and presidents of EU Member States, who meet at least twice every half-year in Brussels within the European Council.

Individual legislative proposals on respective European sectoral policies are then negotiated and voted on by respective ministers, including the Slovak ones, at the Council of the EU, as well as the European Parliament. Both these institutions are equal within the regular legislative procedure which is why they are known as “co-legislators”.

Depending on the issue under discussion, the Council of the EU makes its decisions by a simple majority (it is necessary that 14 Member States vote in favour), a qualified majority (it is necessary that 55% of Member States, representing at least 65% of the EU population, vote in favour), or a unanimous vote (all votes are in favour) – for instance in foreign and security policy or taxes, the decision in the Council must essentially be adopted unanimously, i.e. no member state can be outvoted and has the right to veto.

In other words, no central EU government has replaced the national governments of the Member States that fully participate in adopting European legislation. It is possible to change voting in individual spheres from unanimous vote to voting by a qualified majority, but it must be adopted unanimously – at the end of the day this means that all the Member States must agree with such a change and nobody can impose such a change on us.

EU decisions are based on the free decisions of democratic governments of the EU Member States.

3. THE EU IS ONLY A BUREAUCRATIC “COLOSSUS”

We also often come across the myth that the EU intervenes, many times in a bizarre way, in various spheres of life for instance with the regulation on the prohibition of bent bananas or cucumbers and the implementation of norms for various electrical appliances. It is a fact that the EU often adopts directives and regulations on goods and services. However, this is particularly with regards to the need to protect consumer health so that all have access to quality goods and food.

FACTS

The EU regulates electrical appliances including vacuum cleaners and kettles, but it does so to increase people’s safety, as well as health protection and energy efficiency. The objective is to be more energy efficient by having a lower consumption of electrical energy.

The EU also does not dictate the shape of cucumbers and bananas; it only regulates the size and form of these types of products sold in the EU (including imported bananas) with the objective of providing a better classification for them on the single market. Therefore, it does not mean a total ban, but only that smaller or deformed fruit belongs to another trade category or class. Paradoxically, it was farmers themselves who asked for this classification, not consumers.

Thus the regulation on the single market reflects the commitment to improve quality, product safety and mainly the health of citizens. At the same time, it is true that all these amendments are adopted as legislative acts - so the Member States in the Council of the EU as well as the MPs in the European Parliament participate in their adoption.

The Member States themselves can also enter in this process and influence it - for examples studies from several Member States from Central Europe pointed to significant discrepancies in food ingredients including a well-known chocolate spread sold under the same trade name throughout the entire EU. After diplomatic pressure on the European Commission, exerted by Slovakia as well, this phenomenon of the dual food quality was addressed in the amendment of the directive on unfair commercial practices, and eventually made producers clearly state the individual ingredients of food to avoid their “double” quality.

The EU cares for consumers’ health and protection and always acts in the interest of its citizens.

4. THE EU IS EXPENSIVE AND DISADVANTAGEOUS FOR SLOVAKIA

It is also frequently discussed that for Slovakia EU membership is only a financial burden with no profit.

FACTS

It is important to realize that the EU budget that funds the policies being implemented at the EU level is mostly an investment tool. Its objective is to complement national budgets, to help with joint priorities and support the activities that can be more efficient than measures adopted on a domestic, regional or local level. The EU has allocated EUR 1,074.3 billion for the period of 2021 – 2027. In addition to this, more than EUR 800 billion has been allocated within the NextGenerationEU package for the economic recovery of Member States after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2021-2027 budget almost equally (approximately 30 %) allocates resources that go to agriculture (as this is the only policy funded almost exclusively from the joint budget), regional development and cohesion policy (it is an important source for key investment projects with the objective of decreasing regional differences in the EU) and new priorities that, in particular, include countering climate change as well as digitalization.

The EU's four main sources of income include: customs duties on imports from outside the EU and sugar levies, as well as its own resources based on the gross national income (GNI) of Member States, plus its own resources generated by levies collected in the EU as well as those coming from the VAT. In general Member States contribute 0.3 % of their harmonized VAT base to the budget – as the EU functions on the principle of cohesion and solidarity, more wealthy countries pay more and poorer ones less.

So far Slovakia has always received more from the European budget than it has paid – so it is a so-called “net recipient”. For example, in 2020 we contributed EUR 957 million to the EU budget but we received more than EUR 2,593 billion. As part of the cohesion policy that supports the development of less developed EU regions, Slovakia will receive more than EUR 12.5 billion from the “EU funds” during the programming period 2021-2027.

Thus EU membership is highly advantageous for Slovakia and it supports our further development.