



Weekly Briefing

Slovenia social briefing:
Expectations on the developments in Slovenian society in 2020
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Summary

The year 2020 will be a closing year for many strategies regarding the development of different areas of social life – and at the same time a beginning of a new strategic period. The consensus will have to be found between the government and the civil society on the issues of climate change prevention measures, spatial development, social policies for dealing with aging population, precarity of employment, and many others.

Environment strategies

In the beginning of the year a crucial document regarding the environmental issues will be adopted, following Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action. Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan is a strategic document for the period 2020–2030 (including a vision for the 2030–2040), setting goals, policies and measures of Slovenia in five aspects of the Energy Union: lowering the emission of greenhouse gases, renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, energy safety, inner energy market and research, innovation and competitiveness. As planned key goals set for 2030 will be to reduce total emission of greenhouse gasses by 36%, improve energy efficiency by at least 35%, reach at least 27% of renewable energy, and 3% of GDP allocated to research and development, of which at least 1% has to be state funded. Achieving these goals would reduce the dependence of fossil fuels and stimulate related sustainable solutions, e. g. in traffic, building and industry. The plan also includes strategies for reducing coal use, by 30% before 2030, including the abolishment of the fifth block of ecologically problematic thermal power plant Šoštanj and stopping of the import of coal altogether. The plan also includes a deadline 2027 for deciding what will be the future of the Nuclear Power plant Krško. It does not promote the building of hydropower plants, especially those that were planned on Sava river, due to the assessment of their potential harm to the environment. When adopted, the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan will be one of the key elements of Slovenian environmental strategy, and it will be followed by adoption of a strategic document of even larger scope, the “Long-term Climate Strategy until

2050". This document will align Slovenian environmental policies with the climate goals of the Paris agreement and set the goal of carbon neutrality (zero net emission of greenhouse gasses) for 2050. In late 2019 the government conducted an online debate/questionnaire to help prepare the initial positions for the strategy adoption and the further procedure is scheduled for 2020.

In 2020/21 another important strategy will be adopted for spatial planning, the Strategy of Spatial development of Slovenia. The draft, which will be open for public debate from January to March 2020, determines the long-term strategic goals of Slovenia and the orientation for the development of activities in spatial contexts. The main objective of this strategy is to successfully balance the needs and aspirations of economic development with the goal of rational and sustainable use of space, resources and energy. This balance is even more crucial due to the very limited availability of both resources and space in a comparably small country. The goal is to achieve a satisfactory spatial cohesion, integrative solutions for the spatio-developmental challenges, sustainable development of the urban areas and the countryside. It also aims to take into account the needs and wants of certain specific areas, to balance the public policies with their spatial effects and to make sure that the economic, environmental and social strategies are based on and balanced with the spatial potential of the areas. It also strives for a more efficient, sustainable and innovative resource management and a gradual transition from normative to participative model of spatial management.

Social policies – aging population and precarious labour

Of many social issues which will have to be addressed in 2020, two main issues will have to be prioritized due to their effects on the entire Slovenian society in many different aspects – the policies to address the problems of the aging population and those to address the problems of precarious labour. As for the first issue, a key legal act that has been missing for years, is a law regulating the long-term care. Two attempts to adopt this act failed and it is again top priority for this year. Slovenian population is aging rapidly, with 19.7 % being over 65 years old at the moment and the number estimated to reach 30% by 2050. Even more, in 2050 the percentage of people over 80 will reach 11.4 %. This could cause a trend of growing costs of both public and private long-term care. As of now, there is no systemic legal regulation covering the long-term health care, instead there is a non-transparent system of different partly overlapping legal regulations. The financing of the long-term care is also not systematically regulated, with a complex list of different benefits and allowances that can partly cover these services. The aim of the planned legal act is to provide systemic solutions for long-term care

giving the beneficiaries equal right to and access to these services. At the same time the aim of the law on long-term care is to ensure that these services are to a larger extent publicly financed. An additional goal is to balance the institutional care options with home-care options, providing the beneficiaries in both settings with comparable access to services enabling and maintaining their independence.

The other key issue that will need to be addressed this year is the status of the precarious workers. As a result of financial crisis many companies took the strategy of »outsourcing« services to one-person private entrepreneurs instead of employing them, pushing a large share of especially young population into a very vulnerable employment situation. Although this practice is essentially illegal if the relationship has the character of employment (stability, full-time, working for one employer etc.), it is often not sanctioned. This practice was especially prevalent in media, creative industries, service industries and tourism, but it presents a problem in the Slovenian economy as a whole. An additional issue is that the industries where the precarious work is most common are also those where trade unions have the least influence. In 2019 Ministry of Labour attempted to tackle this issue by starting a thorough analysis, stressing that the time of stable economic growth is an ideal time to find solutions for this structural irregularity. Already in 2018, the Ministry financed a research project “Multidisciplinary Analysis of Precarious Labour”, aimed at obtaining a detailed overview into the situation in Slovenia. Parallel to this research project, which will end in March 2020, the Ministry established an interministerial work team for preparing specific measures to fight the precarious employment. Their work has unfortunately not yet resulted in any actual measures. In the coalition agreement the government has promised that they will seek to abolish such practices in the public sector, thus setting an example for the private sector. E. g., the Ministry of Justice assured to abolish voluntary traineeship for judges. As a more general measure, the Minister of Education Jernej Pikalo, assured that the system of traineeship and professional examinations will be revised for all public sector to prevent discrimination in employment. An additional pressing issue was brought to attention in the analysis, namely, the practice of employing students for long term work via the system of »student work service« because the cost is much lower and the obligations of the employer to thus employed student virtually non-existent. As with other employment malpractices, in this case the extent of this misuse of sub-contracting and student work remains possible because of insufficient number of inspectors, their inefficiency and perhaps also due to relatively low penalties which are difficult to enforce. Similar to the deceitful practice of long-term outsourcing of independent contractors instead of

employing them, student work is also largely being used in industries which the employment situation is more prone to deregulation and the trade unions have less impact.

Conclusions

Along with many other issues in Slovenian society which must be urgently addressed, the strategies for dealing with climate change, urbanisation and spatial planning, aging population and employment anomalies are the most pressing but also most the complex. 2020 will most probably be a decisive year for these issues due to two factors. The first factor is that 2020 marks an end to the financing period of the EU and to many national strategies adopted in the previous decade, while also being a beginning of new strategic documents and financing plans. As such it is a good opportunity to reset some strategies and policies of addressing these issues. On the other hand, some of these issues started to be addressed by the Marjan Šarec government, which resigned in late January. This means that the new government, when it is formed, will have the task of either completing the process of adopting these key documents and policies or will risk starting the process anew, which might prolong the decision on some key issues.