

# SLOVAK WEEKLY NEWS

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	DEŇ /MESIAC/ROK DAY/MONTH/YEAR
PONDELOK MONDAY	
UTOROK TUESDAY	
STREDA WEDNESDAY	
ŠTVRTOK THURSDAY	<b>27.06.12</b>
PIATOK FRIDAY	
SOBOTA SATURDAY	
NEDEĽA SUNDAY	

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*The opinions included herein are not necessarily those of the publisher. The selection of news and translations has neither legal nor official authority..*

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## International Relations

### ***Finland Increasingly Interested in Co-operation with Slovakia***

Bratislava, June 23 (TASR) - The latest development in the EU, financial crisis and possibilities of further co-operation were the key topics of the meeting between President Ivan Gasparovic and Finland's parliamentary chair Eero Heinaluoma, the president's spokesman Marek Trubac told TASR on Saturday.

"I am glad that in the current financial crisis we share the same views on the preservation of the EU as such, also because Finland is the only nordic country whose currency is the same as ours - the euro," said Gasparovic.

Both Gasparovic and Heinaluoma agreed that the eurozone should expand, however the president thinks that the economy, rather than the political situation of membership candidates should be the main accession criteria in the future.

Turning to co-operation possibilities, Heinaluoma said that Finland has been increasingly interested in cooperation with Slovakia in the fields of trade, as well as tourism. According to Gasparovic, mutual co-operation between the countries could concern trade as well as education, science and culture.

len

### ***Paska Raises Voice of Protest Against Hungarian Parliament in Slovakia***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - Parliamentary Chairman Pavol Paska emphatically protests against the session of the Hungarian parliamentary Committee for Unity set to take place on June 27 in Komarno (Nitra region).

Speaking at a press conference held on Tuesday, Paska claimed that having a national parliament of a different country organise its committee's session in a foreign country is absolutely unprecedented. Paska conveyed his dismay also to Hungarian Ambassador to Slovakia Csaba Balogh.

"We don't think this is an orthodox approach. The doors always stand open and we will gladly welcome Hungarian lawmakers but in a way that is standard, diplomatic and adhering to protocol," said Paska, adding that the Hungarian Parliament didn't even bother to inform Slovakia beforehand. "This committee was founded in 2009 and features a subcommittee for autonomy. Its aim is to make contacts with Hungarian organisations outside Hungary and it's a tool for Hungary's nationalist policies."

The parliamentary chairman pointed out that the Schengen Agreement didn't cancel borders altogether, only facilitated their crossing. "Slovakia is a sovereign country. These gentlemen plan to come over here from the sovereign national parliament to talk about Slovak citizens and issues that concern all Slovak citizens, regardless of their nationality. However, if I'm not mistaken, it is still the Slovak Parliament, Slovak Government and other state administration bodies that are accountable to the citizens of Slovakia," stressed Paska.

mf/tm

### ***Bugar: Hungarian Parliament in Slovakia a Mistake***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - The decision of the Hungarian Parliament to organise its committee session in Slovakia without informing the neighbouring country beforehand doesn't sit well with ethnic-reconciliation Most-Hid party's chairman Bela Bugar, who views such a move as a recurring mistake.

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"Having a certain committee of the Hungarian Parliament convening a session in Slovakia wouldn't have been a problem in and of itself, had they chosen to contact our committee or the Foreign Affairs Ministry. There would have been no problem then. But this can only serve to flare up tensions," said Bugar on Tuesday. "I don't know who benefits from this, but it surely isn't ethnic Hungarians living here."

When asked by a reporter whether Most-Hid (which means bridge in Slovak and Hungarian respectively) plans to contact Hungarian representatives and convey their disapproval, Bugar replied with a question: "You think we have good relations? We're those they call betrayers of the nation. We received no invitation to participate ... didn't even know about it."

According to ethnic-Hungarian and non-parliamentary SMK party, the statement made by Parliamentary Chairman Pavol Paska earlier in the day, in which he criticised the Hungarian Parliament, resembles "old times" in relations between the two countries. SMK referred specifically to the 2009 incident, when the Slovak Government denied erstwhile Hungarian President Laszlo Solyom access to Slovakia to take part in a ceremony surrounding the unveiling of a statue of Hungary's King Stephen I.

SMK chairman Laszlo Berenyi plans to deliver a speech on the standing of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia at the session planned for Wednesday (June 27) at Janos Selye University in Komarno (Nitra region). According to him, no diplomatically delicate issue will be raised in his speech. "The delicate issue here is the unbelievable drop in Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality. There's 17 fewer ethnic Hungarians every single day," he added.

mf/tm

### ***Slovakia Welcomes Initiation of EU Accession Talks with Montenegro***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - The Foreign Affairs Ministry welcomes Tuesday's decision made by the Council of Europe to initiate accession talks with Montenegro this month, TASR learned from the Foreign Affairs Ministry press department on Tuesday.

"The opening of difficult negotiations on entry into the EU represents a well-deserved achievement for Montenegro, accomplished by virtue of its government's work, the reforms it has carried out, the determination and trust of Montenegrin citizens in the policies surrounding EU enlargement. The success of Montenegro - towards which Slovakia also contributed with its diplomatic activities and help provided during the transformation of the country and the preparation for its negotiations with EU - will present a clear message also to other countries of the West Balkans that their European prospects are realistic and that the transformation and integration process bears results," reads the statement released by the ministry.

Tuesday's decision is set to be confirmed by European leaders during the session of the European Council set for Thursday (June 28) in Brussels. Slovakia promises Montenegro all its support in the next phase of its integration efforts.

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## Domestic Policy

### ***No Increase in Pensions of Former Police and Soldiers This Year***

Bratislava, June 20 (TASR) - The pensions of police officers, soldiers, fire-fighters, prison guards, intelligence service and National Security Bureau (NBS) employees shouldn't be increased this year as previously planned, the parliamentary committee for finances, the budget and currency proposed on Wednesday.

The valorisation was previously set for July 1, 2012 and was supposed to reach 3.5 percent. There isn't enough money for this purpose, however, claimed the committee.

"Regarding the deficit in relevant accounts and an expected further worsening as of July 1, 2012, there's a need for a law to come into force before the planned valorisation," stated the committee, proposing that the amendment in question should become valid as of June 30.

The salaries of employees of the aforementioned law-enforcement bodies didn't grow in 2011 and 2012, but their pensions went up by 2.1 percent last year.

gk/df

### ***SaS Seeks Halt of Construction Work on Vaccine Plant near Malacky***

Bratislava, June 20 (TASR) - Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) party is urging the halt on the construction on a state-owned plant to be involved in the production of vaccines near the town of Malacky (Bratislava region), as it considers its construction to be illegal, TASR learnt on Wednesday.

"We're aiming to make sure that the construction work will be stopped, so that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study can be carried out and the people of Malacky have their say," said Galko.

According to Galko, the party is also pondering seeking an injunction to ensure the work is halted. In addition, SaS may also turn to the regional prosecutor's office vis-a-vis what he called "a construction permit issued illegally".

The project, which had been kept secret until recently, initially involved the construction of a vaccine-production hall in Sarisske Michalany (Presov region), where vaccine-producer Imuna Pharm offered a plot of land and building for a mere €1 - and in exchange the country's vaccine needs would be looked after. However, it was later decided, under somewhat unclear circumstances, that a new factory would be built in Malacky instead on plots worth €450,000. In addition, the construction work on the factory was launched without a vaccine-producer being selected first.

The venture was aimed at ensuring the production of vaccines for Slovakia's entire population. It was decided on by former SSHR head Eva Hrinkova (SDKU-DS nominee). [Hrinkova was forced to resign from the post in 2011 following a separate scandal involving the sale of platinum filters to a private company for a fraction of their real value. - ed. note]

tf/tm

### ***Zvolenska: Every Patient, Regardless of Insurer Should Be Cared For***

Bratislava, June 20 (TASR) - It's high time that the problems of patients and the health-care system - issues unrelated to salaries - come into focus too, Health Minister Zuzana Zvolenska said after an amendment to the Health Care Act was approved on Wednesday.

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The approved legislation again re-introduces a minimum network of hospitals via which the state will guarantee agreements with health insurers.

"I believe that we will find time to look at the moves planned in the sector conceptually and not with the nervousness connected with the issues surrounding salary hikes," the health minister said, reflecting on how the same legislation was scrapped by the government of Iveta Radicova. Health ministry representatives at that time claimed that the minimum network guarantee leads to some hospitals getting preferential treatment, with an attendant impact on patient care.

"Every citizen should be taken care of regardless of which insurer he is with," said Zvolenska.

len/tm/tf

***June Poll: Smer Remains Clearly on Top, SNS Back in Parliament***

Bratislava, June 21 (TASR) - The governing Smer-SD party remains by far the most popular party in Slovakia, with a recent poll revealing that it would have gained 42.3 percent of the vote if a general election had been held in the first half of June, Martin Slosiarik of Focus agency told TASR on Thursday.

The June 5-11 poll, carried out by Focus on a sample of 1,026 respondents, also revealed that the Christian Democrats (KDH) came second with public backing amounting to 10.8 percent.

Meanwhile, Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) were on 8.5 percent, followed by Most-Hid on 7.4 percent, and Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) on 7.1 percent. The 5-percent threshold needed to win representation in the House would also have been cleared by SDKU-DS (6.5 percent) and the Slovak National Party (SNS) on 5 percent.

In comparison to a poll in May, Smer posted a 4-percent drop in voter-support, followed by SDKU-DS with a fall of 0.4 percent. Conversely, OLaNO saw the number of its voters increase by 2.5 percent, with Most-Hid next on an extra 1.1 percent.

A total of 65.8 percent of those asked would have gone to the polls, while 21.2 percent were determined not to vote for any party. Thirteen percent of the respondents were undecided or preferred not to disclose preference for any party.

tf/df

***Figel: If We Work Together, Slovakia Doesn't Have to Be Red***

Ruzomberok, June 23 (TASR) - If we join effort with similar parties, the youth, intellectuals, employees, self-employed, farmers and businessmen, in a few years, Slovakia doesn't have to be red, Christian Democrats/KDH leader Jan Figel said at the party's nation-wide congress on Saturday.

At the congress, Figel addressed the recent political development in the country and the role that the party has played in it. While he referred to the early demise of Iveta Radicova's government as a failure towards the voters, Figel also pointed out several positive achievements of Radicova's centre right cabinet.

"The fight against corruption, online publishing of contracts, consolidation of the repeated 8-percent public finance deficit, scrapping of the over-priced private-public-partnership (PPP) projects as well as the courage to face the problems of the unbearably indebted health-care sector.... are only some of the decisions and processes that helped Slovakia stop the piling on of debt and return to a more responsible economy," stressed Figel.

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Mistakes that occurred, on the other hand, according to Figel include the so-called golden parachutes scandal that concerned generous severance payments to former managers of state-run companies who were KDH nominees.

Turning to the ruling one-party government, Figel stressed that it will lead to smaller economic growth, less jobs and higher unemployment.

"The question remains to which extent it is a one-party government and or financial group holding," Figel said, adding that Premier Robert Fico's recently introduced consolidation package will poison, rather than consolidate the public finances.

Figel was re-elected as the party's chairman after 261 out of 324 delegates backed him in a secret vote.

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***Hrusovsky: Figel's Re-election Sign of Party's Inner Unity***

Ruzomberok, June 23 (TASR) - The re-election of Jan Figel as the Christian Democrats/KDH chairman was the right decision for the future of Slovakia's christian-democratic politics and at the same time an indication of the party's inner unity, KDH caucus vice-chair Pavol Hrusovsky said at a press conference on Saturday.

"The party has the trust of Jan Figel and Jan Figel has the trust of the party," Hrusovsky said.

Turning to why the proposal concerning changing party regulations wasn't approved, both Hrusovsky and Figel agreed that it was partly because it wasn't preceded by an extensive debate on the regional level. "I will set up a committee which will be in charge of the party regulations drafting and that will ensure that all proposals were discussed across regions," said Figel.

The re-elected party chairman Figel views that both SDKU-DS leader Pavol Freso and Most-Hid chairman Bela Bugár approve of the notion of setting up a joint European platform with KDH as very positive

"It is very good news... I view it as a certain breakthrough in the post-election development," said Figel.

Figel was re-elected as KDH chairman at the party's nation-wide congress in Ruzomberok on Saturday. He was backed by 261 out of 324 congress delegates.

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***Parliament Dismisses RTVS Head in Secret Vote***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - Parliament at its session on Tuesday decided to recall general director of public-service Radio and Television Slovakia (RTVS) Miloslava Zemkova.

A total of 82 legislators out of the 85 present backed a proposal drawn up by the parliamentary culture and media committee to dismiss Zemkova, while two MPs voted against and one abstained from the secret vote. The vote was made secret following a written request to this effect submitted by MPs.

The committee concluded last week that Zemkova had gone public with a tender on renting a media complex for RTVS without providing prior written notification of her intentions to the RTVS Board. In this connection, the committee recommended that Parliament should remove from her post for what it views as violation of the law.

In response to this, Zemkova said in Parliament last week that this is a fabricated scandal and that there's no factual or legal reason for her dismissal. In a 17-minute speech to legislators, she emphasised that none of her actions had led to and could have led to damage to the public interest. She backed her statements with legal analyses that concluded that she broke no laws by her actions.



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Meanwhile, Culture Minister Marek Madaric said during the parliamentary debate last week that the proposal to oust Zemkova is absolutely lawful.

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**Opposition: Vote on Zemkova's Recall Was Farce**

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - Only the caucus of the governing Smer-SD party and two opposition legislators took part in the vote in which public-service broadcaster RTVS general director Miloslava Zemkova was recalled in Parliament on Tuesday, with most of the Opposition describing the vote as a farce.

"Nobody from the Opposition will take part in the secret vote. We've agreed that we'll leave it up to Smer to allow itself to show its true colours," said Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) head Igor Matovic before the vote.

Laszlo Solymos from Most-Hid was mainly unhappy about what he described as the fabricated reasoning for the dismissal.

"This whole masquerade was a piece of theatre put on by Smer," said SDKU-DS caucus leader Ludovit Kanik, adding that the governing party resembles a steamroller that flattens everything that gets in its way.

Meanwhile, Smer MP Jan Podmanicky said that by making the vote secret, the parliamentary majority also enabled opposition MPs who view Zemkova's activities as unlawful to express their opinion freely.

A total of 82 lawmakers out of the 85 present backed a proposal drawn up by the parliamentary culture and media committee to dismiss Zemkova, while two MPs voted against and one abstained from the secret vote. The committee concluded last week that Zemkova had gone public with a tender on renting a media complex for RTVS without providing prior written notification of her intentions to the RTVS Board. In this connection, the committee recommended that Parliament should remove her from her post for what it views as a violation of the law.

bub/df

**Jarjabek: Opposition Caught in Trap Laid by Itself**

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - Parliamentary culture and media committee chairman Dusan Jarjabek (Smer-SD) said on Tuesday that he wasn't surprised at all to hear opposition MPs describe the vote in which public-service broadcaster RTVS director Miloslava Zemkova was recalled as a farce, as they were caught in a trap that they had laid themselves.

Jarjabek added that if anything was a farce, it was Zemkova's election in late 2010, after the then government decided that her then employer Slovak Radio would merge with Slovak Television (STV) as of January 1, 2011.

The Smer MP emphasised that the dismissal process was very unpleasant for him.

"I've said it several times ... this law forces me to do things that I have a problem with," said Jarjabek, adding that the law must be changed in order to be accepted by a broad part of the political spectrum.

Smer decided to fire Zemkova after she went public with a tender on renting a media complex for RTVS without providing prior written notification of her intentions to the RTVS Board.

When asked whether Smer has already selected a person to replace Zemkova, Jarjabek said that a standard selection process will be announced.

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## Economy and Business

***Unemployment Rate in May Up 0.35 p.p. Y-o-Y, Down 0.21 p.p. M-o-M***

Bratislava, June 20 (TASR) - The unemployment rate in Slovakia rose by 0.35 percentage points year-on-year in May to 13.19 percent, the Labour, Social Affairs and the Family Centre (UPSVaR) announced on Wednesday.

The unemployment rate fell by 0.21 percentage points month-on-month.

More than 356,000 people immediately ready to start work were registered at labour offices. The total number of people signing on at labour offices reached almost 400,000, however.

The highest unemployment rate was registered in Presov - 19.27 percent, while two other regions also exceeded the country's average: Banska Bystrica region - 19.12 percent, and Kosice region - 18.34 percent.

"All regions recorded month-on-month reductions in their unemployment rates. The most significant m-o-m reduction was registered in Banska Bystrica region - 0.37 p.p.," added UPSVaR.

bub/df

***Government Puts Stop to Mid-year Bonuses for State Officials This Year***

Bratislava, June 20 (TASR) - Ministers and other heads of central state administration bodies won't be allowed to pay out blanket mid-year bonuses, the Government decided on Wednesday.

"This is a Government decision adopted in the form of a resolution. We expect that all ministers will respect it," said Finance Minister Peter Kazimir after the session, adding that the high state deficit is the reason for the move.

According to Kazimir, the measure should serve as a signal to the public that this isn't the right time for administrators to receive bonuses.

gk/df/tf

***Kalinak: Tax on Pensions of Police Officers and Soldiers Not Final***

Bratislava, June 20 (TASR) - Whether a tax will be imposed on the pensions of soldiers and police officers, as reckoned with in the Government's package of consolidation measures, isn't definitive for now, Interior Minister Robert Kalinak (Smer-SD) said on Wednesday.

The ministries are still only working on changes to the social system vis-a-vis soldiers and police officers, said the minister. He went on to underscore that the planned alterations will be primarily designed to stabilise the system following what he called the destabilisation under the previous cabinet's tenure.

"It's of importance that we should discuss these issues directly with police officers, their trade unions, and to come up with a proposal that will be long-term in nature and in which no further changes will be needed," said Kalinak. "It's a reform that entails all pros and cons, and primarily it's a reform that will be backed by the masses of our employees," said Kalinak in reference to those to be affected by the overhaul.

Defence Minister Martin Glvac (Smer-SD) echoed Kalinak's view in that no final decision on the matter has been made to date. "That (the tax) is just one of the proposals," he said. That said, he underlined that the changes shouldn't ultimately deter people from serving as soldiers and police officers.

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Hospodarske Noviny daily reported on Tuesday that the 33,000 soldiers and police officers who are entitled to a special kind of pension after a particular number of years of service will see the payments frozen as early as this year and that they are also set to face a tax as of next year as well. The average pension for a police officer is currently €619 per month, while the figure swells to €806 for soldiers.

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**Fico: High Earners to Pay 25% Tax, Corporate Income Tax to Rise to 23%**

Bratislava, June 21 (TASR) - The Government is set to preserve the flat-rate income tax of 19 percent only for monthly salaries of up to €3,246, while those who earn more will pay 25 percent, TASR learnt on Thursday.

"This concerns only 1 percent of people," said Prime Minister Robert Fico (Smer-SD) after a session of the Solidarity and Development Council.

The higher rate will also apply to state officials excluding judges and prosecutors even if their incomes don't reach the aforementioned threshold.

The premier also announced a blanket increase in corporate income tax from 19 to 23 percent. "This decision marks the definitive end of the flat-tax," said Fico, who went on to call the flat rate damaging, adding that only time will tell whether or not its effect on the Slovak economy has been favourable.

The Government is also set to continue to impose a levy on dividends that was introduced by former labour minister Jozef Mihal, with the levy now set to be increased to 14 percent.

In addition, the maximum assessment base for calculating contributions will be increased, with those earning over €1,200 per month to pay extra money to the state.

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**Fico: Consolidation Measures to Leave 88% of Employees Unscathed**

Bratislava, June 21 (TASR) - The consolidation of public finances is built on solidarity, and 88 percent of employees in Slovakia won't be affected by measures to this end, Prime Minister Robert Fico said on Thursday.

Speaking after a session of the Solidarity and Development Council, the premier said that low- and middle-income groups of people will emerge unscathed.

According to Fico, any government currently in power would have to introduce measures to generate extra revenues for the budget.

Fico went on to urge the opposition parties to come up with proposals of their own. That said, the premier claimed that the measures that the parties have put forward so far are anti-social and in stark contrast to what the sitting Cabinet is introducing.

As part of the Government's consolidation drive, he confirmed reports that the Government is thinking about doing away with up to two bank holidays - one 'state' and one 'Church'. This was a reference to Constitution Day falling on September 1 and to The Feast of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, which is celebrated on September 15.

As regards the Church holiday, Fico asserted that he's found a way of introducing the planned change without having to amend Slovakia's treaty with the Holy See. "If it falls on a working day, it will be celebrated on Sunday," he said, adding that this will only be subject to an amendment to Slovak law.

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The premier also said that some public holidays that fall on a working day between Monday-Thursday may well be 'transferred' to Friday as of 2013.

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***Labour Ministry Looking to Introduce Minimum Pension in 2014***

Bratislava, June 21 (TASR) - The Labour Ministry is looking to introduce a minimum pension that would factor in the number of years that people have worked, Labour Ministry State Secretary Jozef Burian said at a 'Pension System Alternatives' conference on Thursday.

The aim of the move, according to Burian, would be to distinguish people who have worked for low salaries from those who haven't been working at all.

The state secretary thinks that it isn't fair for someone who has worked for 40 years to have to apply for basic needs allowance. "It's humiliating," he said, adding that the minimum pension would apply to people who have worked for 15-20 years.

Former labour minister Jozef Mihal (Freedom and Solidarity/SaS) concurs with the ministry's plan. The ministry during his tenure had similar intentions, but the early demise of Iveta Radicova's government after 20 months in power made it impossible to carry them out.

"I'll support the Government's initiative because I think that if someone has worked and paid social contributions for 30-35 years, he's entitled to a dignified pension," said Mihal.

The Government's measure should come into effect as of January 2014.

len/df/bub

***Slovakia's Parliament Approves ESM (UPDATE)***

Bratislava, June 22 (TASR) - Slovakia's Parliament on Friday approved the international treaty on setting up the European Financial Stability Facility (ESM) with the votes of 118 out of 144 MPs present.

In order to be ratified, the treaty must also be signed by President Ivan Gasparovic. All practical matters pertaining to Slovakia's role in the scheme will be tackled by specific domestic legislation that is expected to be debated in Parliament next month.

All MPs from the governing Smer-SD party, Most-Hid and SDKU-DS and most KDH lawmakers voted for the permanent European bail-out mechanism, while the liberal eurosceptic Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) voted against it unanimously. SaS was joined by most of Igor Matovic's Ordinary People (OlaNO), a party which as a modus operandi does not vote as a bloc but allows its MPs to vote as they see fit. KDH MP Monika Gibalova and Independents Daniel Lipsic and Jana Zitnanska (both ex-KDH) also voted against.

The House rejected SaS chief Richard Sulik's proposal on postponing the vote until Germany votes on ESM. KDH chairman and former eurocommissioner Jan Figel demanded the vote be postponed at the end of the current parliamentary session, but his proposal was also given the thumbs down.

KDH also wanted to introduce co-decisioning powers for Parliament in practical functioning of ESM. According to the proposal, finance minister would need Parliament's approval in providing specific aid from ESM and increasing its funds. Parliament rejected this proposal, too, however.

Slovakia's cash deposit into the ESM should reach €659.2 million. The total amount of Slovakia's commitments should come to €5.768 billion.

bub/tm

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**Sulik: Parliament's Approval of ESM Buries Slovakia's Sovereignty**

Bratislava, June 22 (TASR) - By approving the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) on Friday, the Slovak Parliament buried the country's sovereignty and dispatched Slovakia to economic vassalage, Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) chairman Richard Sulik said at a press conference on the same day.

Slovakia's participation in the bail-out scheme will mean that the country will soon slide into debt amounting to billions of euros.

"One hundred and eighteen MPs voted for the permanent bail-out mechanism, even though we can't withdraw from the treaty, it can't be scrapped, and shares in the ESM can be neither sold, nor advanced or given away. One hundred and eighteen MPs voted for ESM, even though the German Constitutional Court has expressed doubts about the treaty and asked President Joachim Gauck not to sign it. Gauck then announced that he won't sign it before the Constitutional Court wraps up its investigation," said Sulik.

Former parliamentary chairman Sulik further pointed out that Slovakia's Foreign Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajcak wasn't invited to the session of ten EU foreign affairs ministers who recently discussed the idea of establishing a United States of Europe. "All the while, we were ready to break our legs to approve ESM obediently," stated Sulik.

Sulik further lambasted top representatives of the governing Smer-SD party. As for Prime Minister Robert Fico, he is no statesman but a submissive caretaker of an eastern 'guberniya' of the EU, said Sulik.

"[Parliamentary Speaker] Pavol Paska trampled on democratic customs by refusing to convene a [parliamentary] gremium ... raping the Parliament in order to see the ESM approved today at all costs. It's a very black day for democracy and Slovakia," said Sulik.

bub/tm

**Stefanec: ESM Ensures Stability for Euro and Protects Jobs in Slovakia**

Bratislava, June 22 (TASR) - The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) will ensure stability for the euro, thereby protecting jobs in Slovakia, SDKU-DS MP Ivan Stefanec said in reaction to the approval of the bail-out scheme in Slovakia's Parliament on Friday.

"At the same time, we stress that [ESM] can't be the sole solution, and so we're promoting responsible financial management, structural changes and observing the rules. In line with our principles, we're promoting debates taking place in Parliament each time when [money] from the ESM is used," said Stefanec.

The Parliament earlier in the day approved the international treaty on setting up the European Financial Stability Facility (ESM) with the votes of 118 out of 144 MPs present.

In order to be ratified, the treaty must also be signed by President Ivan Gasparovic. All practical matters pertaining to Slovakia's role in the scheme will be tackled by specific domestic legislation that is expected to be debated in Parliament next month.

bub/tm

**Opposition Questions Smer's Plans to Tax Soldiers' Pensions**

Bratislava, June 24 (TASR) - Former defence ministers Lubomir Galko (Freedom and Solidarity/SaS) and Martin Fedor (SDKU-DS) don't believe that the governing Smer-SD party will really impose taxes on the pensions of soldiers and police officers as stated in the package of consolidation measures, TASR learnt on Saturday.

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"This Government is releasing test balloons in order to gauge public opinion. First, we heard that all the intelligence services should be merged into one - nothing like that has happened and in my opinion won't happen. Now they've come with the need to tax the pensions of soldiers and police officers," said Fedor.

According to Galko, by implementing the measure the Government would deceive members of the armed forces and deliver them a "fatal blow".

Galko questions whether Robert Fico's Government really wants to carry out its plan, however. "It's an open secret that there is a rather high percentage of people within the soldier and police communities who support Smer, and I personally think that the Government would back out of its plans after seeing a huge wave of resistance from them," he said.

During his tenure as defence minister, Galko also wanted to introduce changes concerning the pension systems for soldiers and police officers. He proposed that the service period after which soldiers are entitled to pensions should be extended and the number of pension recipients reduced.

According to Defence Minister Martin Glvac, taxing pensions is only one of the possible options and not something that will definitely be carried out.

len/df

**30,000 and Counting Ink Petition to Kill Changes to Pension System**

Bratislava, June 25 (TASR) - Up to 30,000 people have so far inked a petition against changes to the second, private pillar of the pension system that are being prepared by the Government, opposition SDKU-DS party MP Ludovit Kanik told a press conference on Monday.

"As soon as we reach the threshold of 100,000 signatures, we'll comply with the condition for including this item on the agenda of a parliamentary session," said Kanik.

Kanik went on to say that the petition per se isn't so important for SDKU, as the party is more focused on bringing the public up to speed on the system's capitalisation pillar. This includes, first and foremost, information on how the pension system works, what kind of risks it involves and what can be expected in the future, said Kanik.

The petition drive to preserve the second pillar in its current form is to run throughout the summer, said fellow SDKU legislator Ivan Stefanec. "We in SDKU have decided to sacrifice our summer holiday to protect people's savings, because they're in jeopardy now and that's what matters most to us," he said.

tf/df

**Kalinak: Procurement Contracts Should Consider Falls in Market Prices**

Bratislava, June 25 (TASR) - The framework contracts under which the state purchases goods over long periods of time should include a compulsory provision to take price developments on the market into account, Interior Minister Robert Kalinak said on Monday.

Kalinak went on to say that he's aiming to push for the inclusion of such a provision in a new act on public procurements. "It's often been shown that prices, partly due to the effects of the crisis, dropped gradually but contracts included the original prices," said the minister.

This would only apply to price reductions, while the state wouldn't be obliged to cover potential increases in prices. According to Kalinak, the state is "an excellent customer" that delivers on its payment obligations, "so suppliers must realise that apart from enjoying advantages from contracts with the state, they should also have to face certain disadvantages".

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The extra provision pre-supposes regular monitoring of price developments by the state and the supplier. Kalinak didn't specify the timeline for the change in the law, but said that the Interior Ministry is already working on it.

tf/df

***Fico: Closer EU Integration Necessary, But Devil Lies in Details***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - The Government of Robert Fico is in favour of deeper EU integration from the fiscal as well as the banking perspective, and that is the stance the Prime Minister will present at this week's EU Summit in Brussels.

European leaders will gather at the Summit to discuss a strategic document on further EU integration, drafted by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, European Central Bank President Mario Draghi and President of the Euro Group Jean-Claude Juncker.

Fico expects that the process of drafting and carrying out specific measures designed to create tighter economic and currency union can be expected to take place within the scope of the next decade. This next step within EU integration, according to Fico, should be based on four pillars, the first of which represents an integrated financial framework.

"We should focus on the issue of unified European banking supervision, joint deposit protection and crisis situation measures for banks," the Prime Minister said at the parliamentary European Affairs Committee session on Tuesday, where he received a mandate to represent Slovakia in Brussels.

The second item is to be an integrated budgetary framework, conceived with an eye towards laying the groundwork for fiscal union with such measures as, for instance, the issuing of joint bonds.

Fico views as the third item the integration of economic policies. "It turns out that it's difficult to maintain a common European currency with different budgetary and economic policies. It seems that we won't be able to steer clear of this kind of integration, after all," said Fico. Finally, the fourth pillar represents the bolstering of democratic legitimacy and responsibility within the EU.

The Prime Minister believes that this strategic document will win support of European leaders at the upcoming summit, as all of them realise the need for deeper economic and currency integration. "I will admit a certain degree of nervousness prevailing among the leaders. The devil always lies in details ... so we'll wait to see what kind of proposals will appear," he added.

mf/tm

***ESM Legislation to Go Through Fast-Track Debate***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - Slovakia's cash contribution to the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) will reach €659.2 million, according to the legislative proposal on ESM that will be debated in Parliament in fast-tracked legislation proceedings.

There are five repayments scheduled, with the first (€131.84 million) to be reimbursed by Slovakia within 15 days after the Act comes into force [mid-2012].

According to the document submitted by the Finance Ministry for debate, the second, identical payment is expected later on in the same year, probably in October.

"Slovakia should also provide the other three payments of the underwritten assets in the scope of 2013-14 worth €395.52 million in total," the ministry calculates. [Theoretically, the money will not be lost



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but rather invested in this fiscal underpinning of the eurozone - ed. note].

According to the Finance Ministry, the first payment will be covered by the state financial assets without any need for their strengthening, so this step won't affect the deficit of the public finances or the state debt.

The other payments will require an increase in the sources of state debt financing, so this will have a negative influence on the state debt.

ESM, as the permanent safety net available to help indebted eurozone members, has been set to replace the temporary financial mechanism EFSF. Contrary to EFSF, which operated based on guarantees for bonds issued by EFSF, ESM will require direct cash deposits. This will take place via underwriting of shares on the share capital of the EMS - an inter-governmental organization - worth €700 billion. Members will have to contribute €80 billion in cash and the remaining €620 billion will be represented by guarantees in form of shares payable on demand. Slovakia's share in the €5.768 billion of underwritten shares will reach 0.8240 percent.

gk/tm/mf

***Opposition Nominee Toth to Become NBS Vice-Governor***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - Opposition nominee Jan Toth will be appointed Slovak central bank (NBS) vice-governor, Parliament decided on Tuesday.

In a secret vote, 121 MPs out of 135 present voted for Toth, who was nominated by SDKU-DS based on agreement with the rest of the Opposition.

Toth used to serve as the chief economist of the Financial Ministry's Financial Policy Institute during the previous government.

Toth, who has also served as chief economist for Tatra Banka and ING Bank, will join the current vice-governor Viliam Ostrozlik. The post of the second vice-governor has been vacant since January 2010, when the tenure of Martin Barto expired.

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## Education and Culture

### ***Chudovsky Appointed as New SND Director***

Bratislava, June 22 (TASR) - Culture Minister Marek Madaric on Friday appointed Marian Chudovsky as the new general director of the Slovak National Theatre (SND), TASR learnt on the same day.

"I am honoured by the appointment and feel great responsibility for the (SND) building and the people involved. I'm familiar with this environment and will speak with all ensemble directors," Chudovsky said.

Learning about the outcome of the recent audit of the theatre and drawing consequences from it is among the first tasks on the newly-appointed director's agenda.

"The next step will be setting up a new SND structure," Chudovsky said.

Chudovsky's predecessor Ondrej Soth stepped down from the post in September over tensions surrounding the theatre and inspections that found violations of budgetary rules.

Former Culture Minister Daniel Krajcer (Freedom and Solidarity/SaS) then commissioned Milan Vajdicka with the management of SND.

TV and opera director Chudovsky was selected after seven out of 11 commission members backed him.

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## Miscellaneous

### ***One-quarter of Slovaks Strictly Reject Physical Punishment for Kids***

Bratislava, June 20 (TASR) - One-quarter of the people in Slovakia completely reject the use of physical punishment on children, while 10 percent approve of such disciplinary measures, according to a poll carried out by NMS Market Research agency and published on Wednesday.

According to Maria Harvanikova from NMS Market Research, 66 percent of the respondents said that they are against physical punishment, but wouldn't rule it out in exceptional cases.

Meanwhile, those who completely reject physical punishment are mainly women (27 percent), the unmarried (28 percent) and young people aged between 18-25 (33 percent).

The survey was carried out on a representative sample of 1,100 respondents.

bub/df

### ***Host of Officials Fined for Belated Filing of Property Declarations***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - More than 20 public officials who failed to submit their property-disclosure declarations in time received fines from the parliamentary committee for conflicts of interest on Tuesday, TASR learnt on the same day.

Among those stripped of a month's salary were erstwhile transport ministry state secretary Kristian Takac, former ombudsman Pavel Kandrak and former Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) MP Lubos Majer.

The list of transgressors also includes former board chairman of state-run National Highway Company (NDS) Alan Sitar, former chief-of-general-staff of the Slovak Armed Forces Lubomir Bulik, and erstwhile Slovak Post Office director Paulina Stefanovicova.

Proceedings were also launched against a host of other officials who also failed to comply with legally prescribed duties vis-a-vis their property declarations. In a number of cases, however, officials claimed to have mistakenly believed that if the deadline fell on a weekend it would be automatically extended to Monday. No fines were imposed under such circumstances.

Public officials have to submit annual property declarations to the committee within 30 days after assuming a public post. A person is considered to be a public official even up to a year after ceasing to hold a public post. Consequently, the obligation to submit property declarations also applied to former MPs who'd failed to make it into Parliament in the March 2012 general election.

tf/df/mf

### ***Corgon Declared Best Slovak Pale Lager***

Bratislava, June 26 (TASR) - Slovak beer Corgon was assessed to be the best Slovak beer in the category of 10% and 12% pale lagers at the expert beer tasting 'Slovak Beer Crown 2012' on Tuesday.

Zlaty Bazant's dark beer was declared the best beer in its category.

"Beer is a Slovak national drink. It is also a sector which represents the tiniest of problem areas when it comes to food safety and quality. This competition proved that we can, without hesitation, but in moderation, drink Slovak beer," said State Veterinary and Food Directorate head Jozef Bires when announcing the winners.

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Altogether five large and medium-size breweries took part in the competition, accompanied by seven microbreweries operated by restaurants.

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## Media Monitor

### ***MPs Scrapped Miklos's Emission Tax***

Bratislava, June 21 (TASR) - The Parliament on Wednesday scrapped the extraordinary tax on emission quotas, economic news website etrend.sk reported on Thursday.

The act adopted by the previous government of Iveta Radicova in 2010 was made invalid via an amendment to the Excise Taxes Act submitted by Lubomir Vazny (Smer-SD).

Following the legislation change, companies will only pay the standard 19-percent tax on revenues from sales of emission quotas. Companies that have already paid for the quotas to the state will be entitled to claim the financial means back.

The tax, reaching 80 percent of emissions-sale revenues and the value of unsold excessive quotas, was introduced for selected companies by then-finance minister Ivan Miklos. He claimed that many manufacturers in Slovakia received more emission quotas from the first government of Robert Fico (Smer-SD) than they actually needed. The companies were able to trade the outstanding quotas and acquire additional profits in this way, argued Miklos.

gk/bub

### ***Kazimir: Future Shape of EU Will be Different, With More Integration***

(Slovak Radio, June 23, 'Sobotne dialogy')

The future shape of the European Union and the eurozone will be different from what we see now, Finance Minister Peter Kazimir said on Slovak Radio's politics talks show 'Sobotne dialogy' (Saturday dialogues).

"The discussion is clear, it revolves around stronger integration. We can't continue the way we function now, in a sub-stage. There are two options - disintegration and thus a step back with all consequences or stronger centralisation and moving forward, Kazimir explained.

The finance minister, however, views the integration process to date with criticism. According to him, it is too dependant on political cycles in individual countries.

"It's necessary to set objectives. We have to know where we are headed," Kazimir said, adding that thanks to the strength of its economy, it will be Germany that eventually decides what the future of the EU looks like.

The vice-chair of the parliamentary committee for finances and budget Jozef Kollar (Freedom and Solidarity/SaS), on the other hand, views the notion of strengthened centralisation with apprehension. While he is concerned about the recent reports of EU informal talks on EU federation, Kollar denies allegations that SaS is against Slovakia's staying part of the EU.

"That's not true. All we are saying is that economic integration doesn't necessarily require political integration. The EU has to co-operate but the integration process should stop once there is a free movement of goods, services and workers. Launching a sort of a political integration was a mistake," Kollar concluded.

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