**The Slovak regions have never been more transparent**
The fifth transparency ranking Edition of Slovak regions
Michal Piško, Transparency International Slovakia, Jun 24. 2020


1.
Good morning ladies and gentlemen, my name is Michal Piško and I am representative of Slovak NGO Transparency International Slovakia. It is my pleasure to participate in this online conference and to introduce you some experiences with the transparency rankings in Slovakia.
2.
First of all, let me tell you a couple of words about our organisation and what we are focusing on. TI Slovakia was founded in 1998 and it's one of the most influential anti-corruption NGOs in Slovakia. Our mission is to reduce corruption by increasing transparency and citizen involvement, strengthening of the processes and reducing red tapes. We are a quite small organisation with only 9 regular employees. Despite this fact, our expertise is quite broad – from health service, through justice, public procurement, media, state-owned companies to municipalities. Our municipal program has been launched since 1999 and we have more than 20-year experience in this area.
3.
There are more than 2900 towns and villages as well as 8 regions in Slovakia. They operate with significant competencies and budgets as well. Altogether, they handled more than 7,5 billion euro in 2019. How effectively are this money spent is decided primarily by their Mayors, Chairmen as well as by more than 21-thousand municipal and regional deputies. However, we can only assess the quality of their work if key decisions are not made hidden behind the doors of inaccessible offices, but in the eyes of the public.
4.
Therefore, we try to push for the more transparent approach of municipal and regional politicians in various ways - to publish the causes, to cooperate with their representatives, to lecture the local activists and journalists as well as to compare the transparency level of towns and regions via our transparency rankings.
5.
The rankings show how transparent the municipalities are in spending and decision-making processes and how open and accountable they are to their citizens. Besides, the long-term trends are shown. We have published five rankings of towns and regions in a row. Our first transparency ranking of 100 Slovak towns was published in 2010 and our last ranking of 8 Slovak regions was launched only in May 2020. However, the ranking does not directly indicate the corruption level, it is considered to be an effective tool how to improve public control and to reduce unethical behavior.
6.
Let me introduce and summarize the story of our last regional ranking through this very short video. It takes 3 minutes and it is available in the Slovak language with English subtitles on YouTube.

Video:
0:01-0:06 New transparency ranking
0:06-0:10 By the end January, buses stopped operating in Bystrica County
0:10-0:17  The new county administrator Jan Lunter has been trying to get out of disadvantageous additions to existing contracts signed by his forerunner Marian Kotleba 0:17-0:20 Thousand of people felt the conflict
0:20-0:24 Counties are operating with 1.6 billion € annually, which is more than the Ministry of Health's budget
0:24-0:32  They finance reparations of roads, suburban transportation and regional hospitals

0:32-0:40 Transparency, therefore, monitors and reviews the activities of counties and its directors from 2011

0:40-0:43 Today, we are publishing the fifth ranking

0:44-0:52 Despite problems with buses, Lunter managed to return Bystrica County to the second place from the fifth place

0:52-0:56 Other county administrators supported by centre-right parties have also started to extensively increase the transparency of counties

0:56-1:00 Rastislav Trnka in Kosice County or Jozef Viskupič in Trnava County

1:00-1:06 However, they did not manage to tie the score of Trencin County led by Jaroslav Baška of Smer

1:06-1:14 Baška took the county from Pavla Sedláčka of HZDS in 2013 with Trencin County being the last one

1:14-1:19 He declared openness of the county a priority and won the first place after four years

1:20-1:27 The world is not black and white and we criticised Baška in 2017 despite his victory for unrestricted budget change

1:27-1:31 today, he proclaims he accepted the criticism and agreed with the restriction

1:31-1:44 The County Council has made a change and agreed on the change that Chairman of Trencin County can only change the budget by at most 10%

1:45-1:47 Is Jaroslav Baška of Smer the best chairman?

1:48-1:53 We cannot conclude that because the ranking only reviews a part of the whole picture and does not review economy

1:53-1:56 The higher the county ends in the ranking, the better the public control is

1:56-2:04 A good sign is that all counties improved in the newest ranking, with the highest increase on average so far

2:04-2:09 Ethical codexes, waiting lists at social care centres or participative budgets were added

2:09-2:19 The highest jump of the year belongs to Kosice County under Rastislav Trnka's command. He reviewed controversial contracts, adopted anti-corruption measures but faced some criticism

2:20-2:27 Bratislava County has been fighting coronavirus lately and changed its unfinished website

2:27-2:31 Only small improvements were only enough for the last place

2:31-2:34 Despite improvements, problems are still occurring

2:34-2:40  In Nitra, the County Newspapers are still considered a PR tool

2:40-2:43 With 32 photos of County Management on 20 pages

2:43-2:47 Problems with buses can also repeat

2:47-2:52  Only two counties have finished a public contest for the supplier of suburban transportation so far

2:53-2:58 You can find all details about the ranking on samosprava.transparency.sk

2:58-3:03 We will monitor the counties in the future.

3:03-3:06 Support us too. Thank you.


7.
Well, I hope that the story was comprehensible enough for you despite a specific Slovak background. I would like to stress the most important finding out because we are very happy about it - the self-governing regions in Slovakia are more transparent than ever before and some scope of positive progress has been observed in all of them. The overall score in Slovak regions has increased by almost 9 percentage points in two and a half years, reaching 63% (it was only 54% in 2017). It means at the same time, that the self-governing regions are even more open than the hundred largest towns in Slovakia, which reached the transparency score of 57% in our last 2018 ranking.
8.

Of course, both, Slovak and Moldovan regions still have a lot to improve and work on. If we compare the average score according to individual categories, there are still some areas with an insufficient score. We can mention Public Property Sales and Lease Policy with less than 40% in Slovak case or Businesses and institutions of self-governing regions with less than 15% in Moldovan case. However, this comparison should be taken only as indicative due to some significant differences in both rankings. The fifth Slovak ranking is now more complex than the previous ones - we have evaluated more than 130 indicators and dozens of sub-indicators from 10 various sources of information.

9.

In the final section of my presentation, I would like to share also some examples of the best practices from Slovakia. The first picture shows the specific subpage of Trnava region with community projects designed by the citizens themselves and supported through the municipal participatory budgeting. The number of self-governing regions using this participative tool for activating and supporting communities has risen from one to four since our last ranking in 2017. The screenshot on the right side represents best practice related to grant policy from Bratislava region. They support organizers of cultural, environmental, social or sporting activities with more than 1,2 million euro per year and the criteria and the description and the evaluation of the projects are publically available on the specific webpage as well.

10.

The second example of the pro-transparent measure is from Žilina region. Their Chairwoman is one of the three regional presidents, whose complete agenda has been published on the website. We appreciate this practice adopted from some western countries - it is definitely in the public interest to know who is the Chairmen meeting with and what the reason and topic of their session is.

11.

The next indicator has been focused on transparency in the category "social services". The significant improvement has been achieved also in this area - there are now published the vacancies and the waiting lists for social care facilities on the websites of five from eight regions. This activity minimizes the bribes or clientelism in this area.

12.

Definitely, two last examples could be considered being the best practice as well. The first screenshot shows the minutes from the selection procedures in Prešov region. The minutes do not include only the names of committee members, but also the criteria of their evaluation and the results of the individual candidates. On the right side of this slide, the screenshot from Banská Bystrica region displays the minutes from the open competition processes of the self-governing region asset sale or lease.

13.

We are very happy that our transparency rankings are considered being an effective tool how to push for more open and fair public services. Also, our results are broadly followed by media. In May 2020, more than 130 outputs in Slovak national and regional media covered our last ranking.

14.

We have the specific ranking portal as well similarly to Moldova. If you are interested in our research in more detail, the web page address is samosprava.transparency.com.

15.

I hope that you found these examples interesting and I will keep my fingers crossed on your way towards more transparent public services. Thank you very much for your attention and have a nice day.