

Slovak Prime Minister calls for a long-term EU vision that citizens can trust



We need to talk to people more about Europe, democracy and future plans, Slovak PM Peter Pellegrini said. © CC-BY-4.0 ©EU 2019 –
Source: EP

To move the EU forward, isolationism, protectionism and nationalism are not a solution, Peter Pellegrini told MEPs on Tuesday in the 18th debate on the Future of Europe.

Speakers' interventions in the debate are available by clicking on their names (below).

The EU can no longer be trapped in the status quo, but needs an EU-wide debate on its strategy and aspirations for the middle of the century, [Mr Pellegrini](#) said, after he was welcomed in the chamber by EP President [Antonio Tajani](#).

United, prosperous and secure, globally relevant, honest to its citizens and caring about their future, is his “vision of an attractive Union that EU citizens can trust and support.”

“It is obvious that isolationism, protectionism and nationalism are not a solution. Our answer must not be to fragment into small national states with limited resources, but stronger unity of the EU as a global power.” Mr Pellegrini said. For that, we need a common path based on a unity of values but also the diversity of our national, regional and local cultures, he added.

Mr Pellegrini praised regional political cooperation, such as the one of the Visegrad Group, as “the essence of EU success”. “We need to communicate, try to understand each other and perhaps go the extra mile on both sides”, he said, insisting that disputes should be solved through dialogue.

The greatest challenges and the way ahead

The biggest challenges the EU is currently facing are, among others, climate change, a new wave of technological revolution, growing social differences and regional socio-economic disparities, but also “growing Russian and Chinese aspirations, which require a strong and united EU response”, the Slovak Prime Minister said.

Mr Pellegrini supported the idea of a European minimum wage and setting up a European Labour Authority, which Slovakia would like to host. The EU, he insisted, must stay at the forefront of technological progress and innovation. He defended cohesion policy, which “helps rich and poor regions to converge” and insisted that the EU should first set its policy goals and only then discuss the next EU long-term budget.

EU elections

With the EU elections quickly approaching, “we need to mobilise our forces” and “fight against fake news, hybrid threats and cyber propaganda. Make people feel the urgency. Make them understand that the elections matter”, he concluded.

EU Commission President [Jean-Claude Juncker](#) thanked the Slovak government for supporting the European Pillar of Social Rights and echoed Mr Pellegrini’s statement about cooperation, by confirming that Europe must breathe with both its lungs: western and eastern ones.

Debate with MEPs: press freedom, corruption, EU values and Russia

Press freedom is one of the fundamental pillars of democracy and when a journalist is murdered, it has a knock-on effect on all democracies, [Esteban González Pons \(EPP, ES\)](#) said, adding that besides Robert Fico’s resignation, not a lot has been done in Slovakia. He also criticised the government’s coalition partners and some presidential candidates for resorting to hate speech and called for EU unity on migration and the stance towards Venezuela.

For years there have been concerns about the mafia's influence and corruption in Slovakia. Ján Kuciak was trying to bring light into darkness and he was murdered for this, [Josef Weidenholzer \(S&D, AT\)](#) said. He welcomed significant progress in the investigation into the murders, but added that doubts about the freedom of press and judiciary remained.

If Slovakia wants to be a reliable partner, it needs to be consistent, [Jana Žitňanská \(ECR, SK\)](#) said. She criticised some of the governing coalition for undermining the country's strategic allies and flirting irresponsibly with Russia, which goes against Slovak and EU interests. She denounced scaremongering tactics in politics, for these can spin out of control and insisted on presenting a positive vision of a fair, just, safe and well managed society instead.

[Sophie in 't Veld \(ALDE, NL\)](#) praised the very strong civic engagement in Slovakia and told Mr Pellegrini that he as a prime minister was key to the future of the EU. His choices will determine the future of Slovakia, but also that of the entire Union. She recommended that Mr Pellegrini break ranks with Mr Fico and asked him whether he wants to join those who wreck the EU or to go down in history as a statesman who made his country a role model.

[Ska Keller \(Greens/EFA, DE\)](#) insisted that some member states' attempts to turn the clock back on the rule of law must be addressed at EU level, with an independent commission of experts that would observe the situation in all member states and would have powers to enact sanctions. She supported continuing with cohesion funding, but said that attributing money should be moved from the hands of national governments to the EU Commission.

[Kateřina Konečná \(GUE/NGL, CZ\)](#) welcomed Mr Pellegrini's determination to correct the image the Visegrad Group has in the EU. She also praised some social policies enacted by the Slovak government and said Slovakia is dealing with the situation following the murder of Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in a dignified manner.

[Rolandas Paksas \(EFDD, LT\)](#) criticised today's EU for being very different from the vision of its founding fathers. Brexit is the last warning, he said. He criticised globalisation and multiculturalism.

[Marcel De Graaff \(ENF, NL\)](#) praised the Visegrad Group for defending European values that "migrants are trampling". He also applauded Slovakia for rejecting the UN migration pact and called for borders to close.

[Mr Pellegrini](#) then replied to the first round of speakers and continued debating his vision of the EU's future with other MEPs. Video-recordings of all statements are available [here](#).

Further information

[Biography of Peter Pellegrini](#)

[EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material](#)

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