MINISTRY
OF JUSTICE
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Answers of the Slovak Republic to additional questions of the Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Monitoring Group

1. The Slovak Criminal Procedure Code enables the complete cessation of prosecution if the person prosecuted testifies against other person. How do you assess the risk of this provision to serve as an incentive leading to defendants making testimonies "on request" regardless of the actual truth in the case? Do you consider introducing safeguards in this regard? Since this option was enacted in 2004, in how many cases has untruthful testimonies been made under this incentive? Is there a requirement of additional evidence to support such testimonies or is it enough to have just one testimony from a cooperating defendant in order to start a prosecution against someone?

The Code of Criminal Procedure knows the institute of a so-called "cooperating accused". Just as it is the right of the accused to deny that a crime has been committed, so is his right to confess to the commitment of a crime and to cooperate with law enforcement authorities. The confession of an accused does not automatically relieve law enforcement authorities from the obligation to establish and adequately clarify the facts of the case. Law enforcement authorities and courts must be particularly careful when using and evaluating the testimony of a cooperating accused in criminal proceedings.

Such testimony cannot be the only incriminating evidence but must be supported by other evidence. The court must carefully assess the credibility of each witness testimony and, given the circumstances / person of the witness / context with other evidence may evaluate the testimony as unreliable or purposeful. If it is established after the termination of the criminal proceedings that the testimony of the witness was untrue, this is the reason to use an extraordinary remedy and to reopen the proceedings.

The case-law of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic also states that this procedure (the use of the institute of a cooperating accused) enables in connection with the testimony on the criminal activity of other persons (and at the same time one's own criminal activity) to really obtain such advantage. However, this is a legal benefit which does not procedurally discriminate the testimony of the witness. Such testimony is legal evidence that does not mean that the testimony is automatically true or false. Testimonies of such witnesses, the so-called „penitents", are subject to the free assessment of evidence within the meaning of the Code of Criminal Procedure[1], just like any other evidence. That means that it must be assessed in relation to all other evidence and facts. The Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic also states in this context that the content of the court's own reflection on the choice of used evidence cannot be considered as a violation of the fundamental right to a defence. Testimonies of such witnesses, the so-called „penitents", must be evaluated with the utmost care and in the context of all relevant circumstances.

The European Court of Human Rights has also highlighted the need for special caution in the use of such testimonies, but at the same time stated that the fact of using testimony of a suspect who has been acquitted is not in itself a reason for a breach of the right to a fair trial. The specificity of the status of a penitent who formally testifies as a witness about the possible criminal activity of other persons, even though materially he is not the witness (he is the perpetrator of the crime), which means that the testimony of such a witness cannot be considered as the end of the evidencing, but rather its beginning. Such testimony of a penitent should not be overestimated, but should be thoroughly reviewed.

[1] Section 2(12) of the Act No.301/2005 Coll.

The Ministry of Justice does not have the information on the number of cases in which false testimonies have been given under this stimulus. However, if the testimony was proved to be false, the cooperating witness would lose all the advantages which he sought to obtain by cooperation.

2. The kind of arrest Mr Lucansky was under seems to provide for complete isolation from family and other outside contacts for an extended period of time. How long can a person be held in absolute isolation according to the Slovak legislation? Is there an upper limit? How do you assess this limit? Is this particular type of arrest affecting also the access to legal counsel? If yes, how and why?

The duration of detention is limited in time by the Code of Criminal Procedure[2] with the basic period of detention in the pre-trial proceedings of 7 months. In case of misdemeanours, it cannot be extended in the pre-trial proceedings and the indictment must be filed no later than twenty working days before the end of detention. The total period of detention for misdemeanours must not exceed twelve months. In case of crimes, detention can last a maximum of 36 months, out of which a maximum of 19 months in pre-trial proceedings. In case of particularly serious crimes, it is up to 48 months, out of which 25 months in pre-trial proceedings.

The accused has the right to request release from custody at any time. If the prosecutor does not comply with such a request in the pre-trial proceedings, he must immediately submit the request with his position on it for a decision of the court. As a result, an independent court always decides on detention. Moreover, an appeal against a decision on detention is also possible.

Milan Lučanský was in a so-called "collusive detention" due to the existence of a reasonable concern that he would affect the witnesses, experts, co-accused or otherwise undermine the clarification of facts significant for criminal prosecution.

According to the Act on the Execution of Detention[3], accused persons in the collusive detention are placed in a cell separately from other accused. However, the Act allows placing together the accused persons in collusive detention if their criminal offences are unrelated to each other or whose criminal offences are not the subject to joint proceedings. The director of the Institute for the Execution of Detention and the Institute for the Execution of Sentences of Imprisonment in Prešov decided on the independent placement of Milan Lučanský for preventive security reasons related mainly to his professional past.[4]

If the accused is in collusive detention, only contact with his attorney is allowed. All other contacts, including contact with the family, are enabled only with the consent of the law enforcement authorities or the court. When being taken into custody, Milan Lučanský, like any other accused in custody, was informed of his rights and obligations, including the possibility to ask the law enforcement authorities or the court for permission to make telephone calls and receive visits. Milan Lučanský signed the instruction, while not taking the opportunity to request such permission when taken into custody.

At the time of his hospitalization at the Hospital for the Accused and the Convicted and the Institute for the Execution of Sentences of Imprisonment in Trenčín, Milan Lučanský was once again reminded of the possibility to request such permission. Subsequently, he decided to ask the law enforcement authorities to be allowed to make phone calls with his wife. However, by the time of his death, the response to his request

[2] Section 76 of Act No.301/2005 Coll.
[3] Section 7(2) c) of Act No.221/2006 Coll.
[4] Section 7(3) c) of Act No.221/2006 Coll.

had not been delivered to the hospital in Trenčín nor to the Institute in Prešov. The response of the National Criminal Agency ("NAKA") to the request, not granting such permission, was delivered to the Institute in Prešov on 31 December 2020.

In conclusion, it should also be noted that neither Milan Lučanský nor his attorney objected to any violation of fundamental human rights in custody. They only filed a complaint against detention.

3. What is the justification to increase the time limit for legal prosecution in prison custody up to 24 months? This length is very problematic with regard to fundamental rights standards.

If the length of detention exceeds 24 months, it must be a criminal prosecution for a crime or a particularly serious crime. At the same time, an indictment had to be filed in the case as well because the maximum length of detention in the pre-trial proceedings is shorter.

Following the filing of an indictment, the court decides ex officio whether the reasons for detention persist and the accused will remain in custody, or whether he should be released from custody because the reasons for detention have ceased to exist. The detention must be justified by the specific circumstances of the case, therefore, a general justification cannot be provided. It depends on the specific circumstances of the case, its complexity to clarify, the person of the accused.

If this is possible with regard to the person of the accused and the circumstances of the case, detention is replaced by another institute, such as supervision of the probation and mediation officer, use of electronic monitoring, financial guarantee. However, it is a decision of the independent court, which is always individual.

4. The newly elected Special Prosecutor Mr. Lipsic served as a Minister of Justice and Minister of Interior. During his latter tenure, his current superior, the Prosecutor General Mr. Zilinka, served as deputy minister, both having been nominated by same political party. Could you provide us with detailed information about the election of the special prosecutor, more specifically how do you assess the risk of politicizing one of the highest posts in the judiciary system in Slovakia? How this election reflects the legally mandated independence and political neutrality of the Slovak Prosecution Service?

As regards Mr. Lipšic and his performance in the function of Minister of Justice (2002 – 2006) or Minister of Interior (2010-2012), at that time he represented the “Christian-Democratic Movement” party, which is not present in the Parliament in the current election term. Mr. Lipšic had established another political party called “NOVA” at a later point, neither this party is currently represented in the Parliament. Mr. Lipšic left politics in 2016 given the circumstances of the traffic accident in which he took a direct part. This event resulted in him giving up his mandate as a Member of Parliament, at that time.

A longer period of time has passed between his resignation from the Parliament and his application for the post of the Special Prosecutor. During this period, he performed solely a free profession of an advocate (attorney at law). He applied for the position of the Special Prosecutor while working as advocate. The key fact to consider could be that he did not perform any political activities for a longer period of time.

He will need to prove, that he is impartial and independent by his actions in the office. However, his application for the post had been fully legitimate, which the Parliament adequately assessed in a transparent and public selection procedure.

We believe that at the publicly held hearing everyone (including the public) could see that the selection was legitimate. It was obvious from the hearing that Mr. Lipšic was the best-prepared candidate for this position as regards his personal capability, capacity and comprehensiveness of his vision of the performance of the Special Prosecutor's Office.

5. On the judiciary reform - which considerations led to the conclusion that the suppression of higher courts (regional courts) in the capital Bratislava and the second largest city in Slovakia is appropriate and will have added value? Before the decision to return to 1996 structure was taken, has there been a public discussion and/or structural comparison of the caseload differences (quantitative and qualitative) between 1996 and 2020?

The draft design of the judicial map was based on

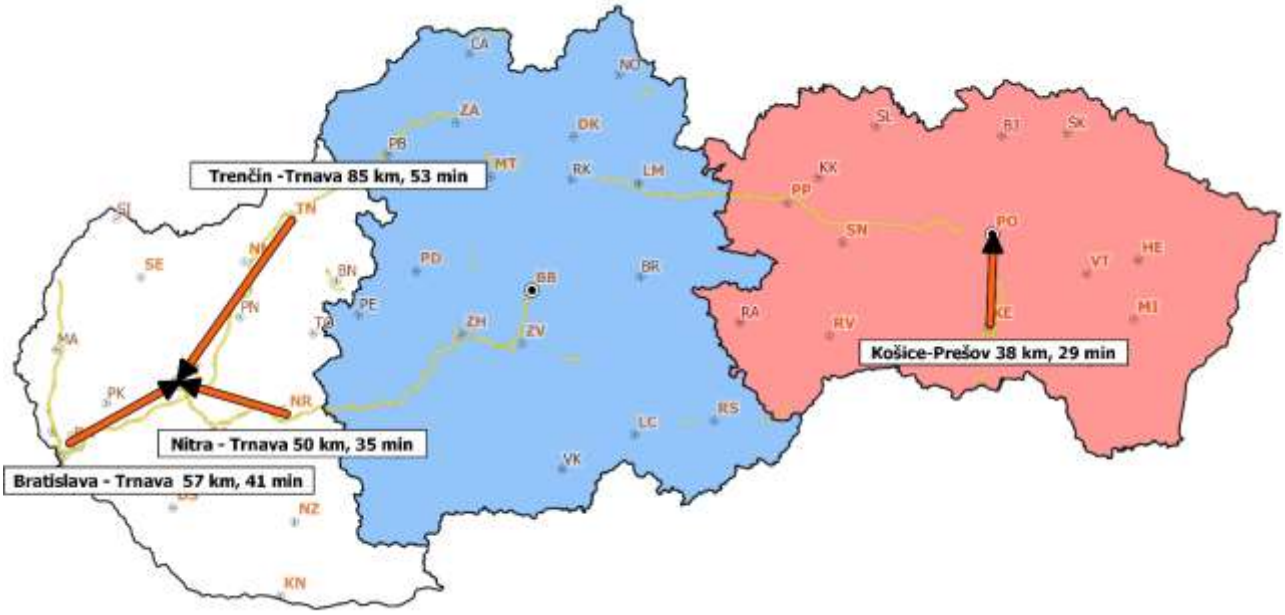
- the objective of the judicial map that is
  - the specialisation of judges in 5 case types: family cases, civil cases, criminal cases, business cases, administrative cases
  - minimally 3 specialized judges by each case type (at each court) in order to ensure the random selection of cases per judges as provided by domestic law
- the set of key performance indicators and other non-performance indicators that are internationally recognised and accepted and used and recommended by CEPEJ methodologies and working papers.

The judicial map has been designed on the basis of the above-mentioned objective and indicators and based on incoming cases of 2016 -2019 and judge performance. The incoming cases have been dramatically decreasing by 47% from 2013 to 2019. In the same period, the number of judges peaked in 2018 and 2019, while the number of incoming cases dropped to its lowest level since 2013, and the clearance rate significantly increased and exceeded 100% at almost all courts in the system. Moreover, in 2016, there was a fundamental change in the civil procedure where the common civil procedure code was transformed into three separate procedure codes: civil litigation procedure code, civil non-litigation procedure code and administrative procedure code. The change was so fundamental that comparison of incoming cases, caseloads and resolved cases before and after is not relevant. All the above-mentioned facts (besides others) established the basis for the analysis of the new judicial map done on the court performance data of 2016-2019. Given the performance of the judicial system and nature and composition of the cases, there was no reason to set up the new system based on older data, or even data from 25 years ago.

Based on data on court performance (2016-2019; reasons described above), the current court districts had to be enlarged in order to meet the objective (min. 3 specialized judges per each case type at each court). The newly designed court districts were therefore enlarged and merged either the smaller neighboring courts or the neighboring appeal courts into larger units. The larger units are, in fact, brand new units, with new territorial jurisdiction, where new seats had to be determined. The seats of the new units were selected and proposed based on the predefined criteria.

As regards the new appeal courts, their new seats (cities of Trnava, Banská Bystrica and Prešov) were decided to be located in the cities that are better accessible from all places in the new appeal region and that are centrally located. In fact, all these cities (i. e. Trnava, Banská Bystrica and Prešov) are even currently the seats of appeal courts. As for two largest cities in Slovakia (Bratislava and Košice), the map below shows the location of the new seat and jurisdiction of the Court of Appeal in Trnava (TT), which will include the jurisdictions of the current Courts of Appeal in Trnava (TT) and Bratislava (BA) and partially Nitra (NR) and

Trenčín (TN). The same is also shown for the new seat and jurisdiction of the Court of Appeal in Prešov (PO) that will include the jurisdictions of the current Courts of Appeal in Prešov (PO) and Košice (KE).



As for Bratislava and Košice, they have been given the status of the seats of the highest courts and new city courts. In Bratislava and Košice, brand new modern City Courts are to be established (grouping 5 current district Bratislava courts and 3 current Košice district courts). From 1 January 2021, Bratislava is the seat of the Supreme Administrative Court. Bratislava is also the seat of the Supreme Court. Košice is the seat of the Constitutional Court. The draft judicial map thus sought a balanced distribution of judicial power in the new courts units.

When the design of the new judicial map was finalized (January 2020 / November 2020), the result was very interesting, even surprising.–In fact, based on the above mentioned criteria, the number of courts needed for the Slovak first instance and appeal court scheme showed to be very similar to the court system before 1997 (i.e. before the Government led by Prime Minister Mečiar launched the non-systemic expansion of the number of courts to the smallest cities in Slovakia, without any verifiable analyses or broad public or technical discussion).

However, the current draft judicial map has not followed the status before 1997 or in 1996. It has not emanated from the situation in 1996 nor followed the status in the court system in 1996, which had dramatically changed in structure and complexity of cases over 25 years. The results of the new draft coincidentally showed similarities in numbers and seats of courts to the system from before 1997.

The activities on the development of the new judicial map started in 2017, after the CEPEJ missions and the publication of the CEPEJ Report on the State of the Slovak Judiciary. The works on the new judicial map started in 2018 and were derived from the CEPEJ report recommendations. In April 2018, technical working groups were established: WG for the specialization of courts and judges and WG for the judicial map.

Members of these working groups were representatives of 6 regional and 6 district courts (the pilot courts for the implementation of CEPEJ report recommendations), judges of the Supreme Court, representatives (judges) of the Judicial Council of the Slovak Republic and experts of the Ministry of Justice. The WGs set up

the criteria for the design of the judicial map. The WGs were very active by autumn 2018 when they summarized the criteria and short, medium and long term objectives for the development of the judicial map. WG members approved the criteria in May 2019.

Subsequently, the draft of changes (in the judicial map) at the level of Regional (appeal) Courts, that was based on the causal jurisdiction in business and administrative case types, was presented to the Presidents of the Regional (appeal) Courts in May 2019, but it was not accepted. From May 2019 until February 2020, the works were ongoing on the design of a new judicial map (based on the results approved by the 2018 WGs).

In February 2020, the draft judicial map was presented to the MoJ top management (Minister and State Secretary). In March 2020, the parliamentary elections brought a new Government and a new Minister of Justice (who was the Secretary of State at the MoJ in 2018 and led the above-mentioned WGs at that time).

The new Minister followed up on the results of the 2018 WGs and the draft judicial map of February 2020. She has led the experts' WGs (on the judicial map and on administrative judiciary) created in April 2020 to the finalization of the judicial map proposal. In May 2020, in line with the legislative procedure rules, Preliminary Information announcing the launch of the process of development of a new Judicial Map was officially published at the Slovlex web portal, allowing everybody to participate.

The results were first presented to the Presidents of the Regional (appeal) Courts on 9 November 2020, then to the constitutional authorities (incl. the Slovak President), representatives of professional chambers and press. In November 2020, the Minister presented the draft judicial map and offered a discussion on the draft to the judges by 8 Regional (appeal) Courts and their district courts (54 in total). The Minister has provided discussions to the representatives of trade unions, concerned courts, representatives of municipalities and self-governments, etc. In February 2021, MoJ organized round tables on Judicial Map and Administrative Judiciary, hosting the acknowledged representatives of judicial authorities and experts from CEPEJ. Moreover, CEPEJ provided its experts' opinion of December 2020 on the draft Slovak judicial map (see attached).

In November 2020, MoJ created the Judicial Map web page (http://web.ac-mssr.sk/sudna-mapa-otazky-a-odpovede) informing about the whole process of the judicial map development from its beginning. It publishes the analytical documents designing the draft judicial map, links to the legislative process, links to the FAQ, responses of the Minister to the letters received by MoJ to the draft Judicial Map, the Minutes of WGs meetings and presence lists, roundtable videos, etc.

6. The reform of judiciary seems to foresee a different map of territorial jurisdiction of the judiciary and of the prosecution service. How has the possible negative impact of these differences been assessed?

As regards the network of prosecutor's offices, the draft judicial map does not create any new court seat where the prosecutor's office would not be today. The MoJ does not change the system of prosecutors' offices. There is no reason to unify (always and in all circumstances) the system of prosecutor's offices with the system of courts. However, the MoJ has a serious interest to set up both systems functional and effective. The MoJ thus currently keeps a lively dialogue and negotiations with the Prosecutor's Office in order to seek for the best common solutions.

7. Can you give us more information on the possibility to remove the President, Vice-President, and a member of the Judicial Council of the Slovak Republic, at a time before the expiry of their term of office? This is very critical with regard to the independence of the judiciary.

Since its establishment on 1 January 2002[5], the Judicial Council of the Slovak Republic has been composed of 18 members – 9 judges elected by all the judges and other members elected/appointed by the National Council (parliament), the President of the Republic and the Cabinet (each electing/appointing 3 members). Similarly, since 1 January 2002, Art. 141a (1) Constitution has explicitly provided that the members are "elected/appointed **and recalled/dismissed**" by the respective, and this wording has never changed in any way. The new text added by the latest constitutional amendment explicitly stipulates that such a dismissal is possible "at any time". Although that might seem as a substantive change to the existing situation, that is by no means true. In fact, the new wording only clarifies the already existing constitutional provision in order to express more properly the intention of the original constitutional lawmaker from 2001.

The aim of this clarification was to put an end to any uncertainty in this regard, partially caused by contradictory case law of the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court, in its decision[6]expressed the following ideas „ … *while the legislation does not provide reasons for dismissing a member of the Judicial Council, a general principle applies, which is that there exists no objective possibility to remove the members of the Judicial Council before the term of their function is due. Attributing to bodies that appoint the members of the Judicial Council, a constitutionally not accepted competence to dismiss the members of the Judicial Council subjectively, that means arbitrarily, before the term of their function is due, would mean an absolute negation of their term of function as it is guaranteed by the Constitution.*".

With regard to the long-established constitutional practice of the public authorities, the cited legal opinion introduced a significant uncertainty into legal relationships of the bodies appointing the members of the Judicial Council on one side and the Judicial Council on the other. Regrettably, the decision dealt neither with the clear intention expressed by the original constitutional lawmaker in the explanatory memorandum to the respective constitutional act, which introduced the Judicial Council into the Constitution, nor with the clear wording of the respective provision of the Constitution (see above).

The cited opinion therefore resulted in denying the appointing bodies their constitutional competence established in Art 141a.

This conclusion missed any further reasoning, it ignored the concept of a rational legislature and refused to accept the will of the constitutional legislature to enable the authorities appointing members of the Judicial Council to dismiss the members they had appointed, for example for reasons of the loss of trust. The competence of dismissing a member of the Judicial Council by the authority that appointed him is also compatible with legal provisions on the terms of their office. Moreover, it clearly ignored an already established constitutional convention, under which the parliament, the President and the Cabinet had previously recalled/dismissed the members of the Judicial Council, appointed by them.

Moreover, we would like to stress that, apart from not being a change, but rather a clarification of the constitutional text, the provision did not encroach on the independence of the judiciary. The composition of the Judicial Council was not changed; it remains being composed of judges' elects and other bodies' appointees at par and any resolution requires an absolute majority of the Council's members. As a result, no

[5] Act No. 90/2001 Coll., amending the Constitution of the Slovak Republic - Act No. 460/1992 Coll., as amended
[6] PLz. ÚS 2/2018 of 19 September 2018

resolution can be passed without a compromise being reached between the members elected by judges and members appointed by other bodies. In fact, the new wording benefits judges as well, because they can also recall their elected representatives in the Judicial Council and thus force them to be genuine guardians of judicial independence. Therefore, the new wording more clearly underlines the direct link between the judges, whose independence the Judicial Council is to protect, and their particular representatives in that body. Therefore, it appears to us that the wording may contribute substantially to the safeguard judicial independence.

With respect to the President and Vice-President of the Judicial Council, it should first be noted that their positions are rather ceremonial. Pursuant to the wording of Art 141a of the Constitution, which has been in force since 1 September 2014[7], the President is elected by the Judicial Council from among its members, and not by any other external body. The latest constitutional amendment did in fact bring the possibility to recall the President, however, the power to recall him/her is again vested with the Judicial Council itself. In other words, by electing and/or recalling the President the Judicial Council exercises its internal powers to decide, who from among its members will head the Council's meetings and perform mostly ceremonial duties on behalf of the Council. As already mentioned above, the election as well as the recall require absolute majorities of all Council's members, which means a compromise between those elected by the judges and those appointed by other bodies. Moreover, there is no direct link between the presidency and the membership in the Council, which means that once a person is recalled as President, his/her membership remains untouched and he/she continues to serve as a regular member of the Judicial Council.

The foregoing paragraph also applies to the Vice-President, which is a position that has not existed before and was only established by the latest constitutional amendment.

8. The reform permits to transfer judges to a lower court without consent. Can you elaborate more on this possibility? It appears to be an infringement of executive powers into the independence of the judiciary.

As a matter of fact, it should be stated from the outset that the transfers and/or promotions of judges from one court to another are not a competence of the executive power. Pursuant to Art 141a (5) (d) of the Constitution, this power is vested in the Judicial Council, which exercise it by publicly discussing all such transfers and by adopting resolutions requiring an absolute majority of all members (see also the answer to the previous question). Therefore, any changes to the rules of judges' transfers/promotions do neither expand nor limit the powers of the executive in respect of the judiciary.

This having been said, we would like to stress that the latest constitutional amendments do not contain any explicit provision that would enable a no-cause transfer of a judge to a lower court without his/her consent. What the reform did was to explicitly stipulate a rule in the Constitution, reading that at the occasion of a change of the court network, the judge can be transferred to another court without his/her consent.

Historically, the courts in Slovakia ceased to exist on several occasions: 10 district courts were closed down in 2005, military courts were closed down in 2009, the Special Court was closed down in 2009. In all these situations the judges at the cancelled courts automatically became judges of successor courts. Their consent was in those cases also replaced by a legal rule. The courts are always established or closed down by an act of parliament or, in the case of the supreme courts, directly by the Constitution. The decision on establishing or closing down a court is not made by the executive power.

[7] Act No. 161/2014 Coll., amending the Constitution of the Slovak Republic - Act No. 460/1992 Coll., as amended

The constitutional amendment has reflected this practice in the Constitution's text. Generally, the rule stipulated in Art 148 (1) has always been that a judge can be transferred to a different court subject to his/her consent or as a disciplinary measure. This general rule has not been abolished or altered; instead, a new sentence was added that the consent of a judge to his/her transfer is not required at the change of the courts' network, if it is necessary for ensuring the proper administration of justice, where details are to be laid down by law. As already mentioned, the courts' network can be changed (by establishing/closing down of courts) by an act of parliament only, as it stems from Art. 143 (2) of the Constitution, where the courts, with the exception of the supreme courts, are established by law. It follows, that such changes of court network are decided by Members of Parliament, elected directly by citizens. The court network is not static, it undergoes occasional changes, the courts being created or cancelled by law. Application practice showed that the judiciary can intervene into the court network too – the Constitutional Court de facto cancelled the Special Court by declaring certain laws unconstitutional in 2009.

The changes in courts' network are always accompanied by the redistribution of human and material resources of the courts that are being closed down. This question was historically resolved by an institute of "transfer of judicial performance" including the relations of judges to the state or other legal relations (transfer of property rights and similar). It is obvious that when the courts' map changes, a judge ceases to work at one court (a cancelled court) and has to continue the performance of his function at another court. This was always regulated by law and in compliance with Art. 143 (2) of the Constitution.

The constitutional amendment confirms this mechanism and provides an extra material dimension – it enables its use only to the extent necessary with an aim to secure the performance of justice. The question of the "necessary extent" will need to be dealt with by the legislator, when adopting the law changing the court map. The Constitutional Court will be able to assess compliance with the disapplication of the requirement of consent of a judge to his transfer, in proceeding under Article 125 of the Constitution. The aim of "securing the administration of justice" needs to be assessed with regard to the fulfilment of the purpose of courts, which is the provision of court protection, so as to act and decide on rights and legally protected interests of individuals in each particular case. It needs to be mentioned that the activation of Article 148 (1) of the Constitution is only possible, if implemented by an act of parliament, which will need to lay down details of its application in case of specific changes to the court map. It is presumed that the law can set out e.g. question of financial entitlements of a judge related to his transfer to a different court, etc.

9. Could you please describe the cooperation of the Belgian and Slovak judicial authorities in the investigation of the case of the Slovak citizen Jozef Chovanec?

10. In the case of mutual cooperation, are there any outstanding issues pertaining to the technical aspects of the cooperation?

First of all, there is no mutual cooperation between Belgian and Slovak judicial authorities in this matter (as far as we know). The main reason is, that in Slovakia there are no proceedings related to the death of Mr. Chovanec and we are not aware of the fact whether the Slovak judicial authorities were requested to provide mutual legal assistance to Belgian authorities. From what we know, the Belgian court and prosecution are communicating with witnesses and experts residing in Slovakia directly.

Nevertheless, after the video recording from the custody of Mr. Chovanec has been published, there was good communication at the political level. Belgian authorities communicated well both with representatives of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, including at the highest level.

The Slovak Republic is planning to intervene in the Chovanec case as a "*partie civile*." We expect that the application will be submitted this month (in March 2021). However, this intervention does not mean that we plan to unduly influence proceedings in Belgium. On the contrary, we hope that the participation of the Slovak Republic in the proceedings will help to promote transparency and thus, in the end - impartial, independent, and just decisions of Belgian authorities.