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## *Report of the Slovak Bar Association on its Development in 2013*

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In June 2013 the General Assembly of the Slovak Bar, which is the most important event for the development of the legal profession in Slovakia, took place. Lawyers elected new members of the Bar Council and other bodies of the Slovak Bar Association. Dr. Ľubomír Hrežd'ovič was elected as the President of the Slovak Bar Association for the second consecutive term of office. In accordance with the Amendment to the Act on the Legal profession term of office of governing bodies was extended to four years (compared with the previous three-year's term) as from 2013. Another change is that a lawyer may be elected to one and the same governing body for a maximum of two consecutive terms (except for the Disciplinary Commission and the Appellate Disciplinary Commission).

In 2013, development of the legal profession in Slovakia was affected foremost by the substantial Amendment to the Act on the Legal Profession which entered into force on 1 January 2013. When drafting the Amendment, the most discussed were the issues related to the initial professional training of trainee lawyers. The most significant changes are as follows: Extension of the traineeship period to five years (compared with the previous three-year's period), limits on the number of trainees per one trainer – qualified lawyer (a maximum of three trainees) and the new requirement that a qualified lawyer may be a trainer after three years of enrolment with the Slovak Bar, not earlier. The Slovak Bar Association welcomed these changes as they impose more requirements on the training of future lawyers, and thus help to promote the quality of legal services provided to clients. This aim is pursued also by the latest Amendment to the Act on the Legal Profession which entered into force on 1 November 2013. This short Amendment laid down new obligation on qualified lawyers – trainers to be personally present when their trainees are taking oral part of the final Bar examination. Higher level of responsibility for the practical professional training is thus imposed on trainers. Only the years, which are to follow, will show whether all the partial steps are effective and how the Slovak Bar succeeded in achieving the aim to improve the quality of legal training of trainee lawyers. Today we can see that perhaps due to the traineeship period extension the number of trainee lawyers dropped by more than 50% (365 new trainees registered in 2013 compared to 962 trainees registered in 2012).

The latest Amendment mentioned above had been followed by the adoption of the new Examination Rules of the Slovak Bar Association, which came into force on 11 December 2013. A new part was added to the examination process – a written test with a view to making the examination process more effective in such a way that the theoretical knowledge of

applicants is assessed already at the written-test stage, and during the oral exam more time can be spent assessing professional skills and the ability of each applicant to apply law in practice when exercising and protecting his/her clients' rights. Taking into account current state of IT, it is expected that the written test could be evaluated immediately; thus the new element should not entail any higher administrative burden for the Bar or for examination panels. Currently, the Bar exam is thus composed of three parts: written test, after successful completion of which each applicant can sign in for writing case studies and for oral examination. Having regard to proposals and observations of the Examination Committee members, the new Examination Rules shifted administrative burden related to the examination process to the Slovak Bar Association under supervision of the Examination Committee members. At the same time, the system of exam schedule changed from the seasonal system (four times a year) to the permanent one due to a high number of applicants. The Slovak Bar Association expects that with the new system, approximately 720 applicants can take the Bar exam during 30 weeks per year.

In April 2013, the Slovak Bar Association launched the first mass media campaign in its modern history, which focused on several partial aims under a common goal – positive presentation of lawyers' role in the society governed by the rule of law. One of the most important goals was to suppress unqualified provision of legal services by non-lawyers who pursue this activity as their business. This was caused by the fact that members of the Slovak Bar from all regions within Slovakia draw attention to an increasing number of such cases. The Slovak Bar Association has been cooperating with the police, with public prosecution offices as well as with the Slovak Trade Inspection in this area.

In June 2013, the very first Comments on the Act on the Legal Profession were published. This unique publication prepared by members of the Slovak Bar governing bodies is a highly professional piece of work, which is to help understand individual provisions of the Act on the Legal Profession. The book is a very useful instrument not only for lawyers but for all those who deal with the legal profession in their everyday work – judges, prosecutors, police officers or other state bodies.

Since 2011, the Slovak Bar Association has been a member of the German-Czech-Slovak Lawyers' Forum, the group of four partner Bars, which every year organise a conference in one of the four participating countries. The Forum was in November 2013 hosted by the Slovak Bar Association which aims to organize events for its members inter alia focused on the issues concerning cross-border provision of legal services. Increasing the quality of legal education in the EU law/law of other Member States and the awareness of Slovak lawyers in this field is one of the main goals of the European Commission in the area of justice. Therefore, the Slovak Bar Association considers such professional events to be very important and beneficial for its Members.