



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Slovakia social briefing:**  
**Current Environmental Issues and their Reflection in**  
**Slovakia's Policy**  
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# **Current Environmental Issues and their Reflection in Slovakia's Policy**

## **Summary**

*The present text aims to illuminate the areas of environment protection and related issues that belong to the most current topics in Slovakia. The briefing focuses on two central topics, in concrete policy developments regarding the grey wolf, brown bear and chamois (mountain goat), and waste management. We conclude, raising environmental awareness is crucial when it comes to mitigating impacts of the climate change. We expect environmental topics to come to the forefront of not only academic discourse, but also debates in the political arena and the broad public.*

## **Introduction**

The objective of this social briefing is to present several crucial issues of the environment and how these are dealt with in the Slovak Republic. Problems of the environment are indeed diverse and interconnected, ranging from climate change, through the loss of biodiversity, to illegal hunting. Moreover, what may at the first sight seem to be a matter of nature is in fact linked to economic as well as social phenomena, exacerbating environmental migration or creating pressures on national budgets when trying to mitigate the impacts of environmental problems. The topics analysed within the particular sections of this text have been selected foremost based on their being the most current ones, with a broad media coverage.

The briefing is divided into two main chapters. The first one aims to shed light on selected animal species (mammals, in particular), namely brown bear, grey wolf and chamois (mountain goat) and the contemporary policy developments concerning them. Next, we discuss the current state and challenges of waste management and recycling, predominantly some amendments to the law.

## **Fauna in the country – brown bear, grey wolf and chamois**

The fauna in Slovakia is highly diverse, considering the size of the country. Many animal species are even protected by law, or their population is constantly monitored. Recently, wolf

and bear seem to have been receiving extraordinary attention of the media and also policy makers.

The brown bear's usual territory covers a substantial part of Slovakia, mainly the mountainous areas in the northern and the central part of the country. Due to the large area they cover, it is fairly difficult to assess how many there actually are. However, according to research conducted in 2013-2014, there seemed to be 1000-1500 bears at that time,<sup>1</sup> and the number increased to 2760 by 2020 (spring before the cubs were born). Hence, the population of the brown bear is rising rapidly, resulting in bears being spotted in areas which are not their usual habitat.<sup>2</sup> An issue linked to bears and their movements and probably also numbers is their fancying trash cans in villages. It has happened several times that bears were seen in areas inhabited by humans, eating out of containers for communal waste. Leaving these containers unlocked or otherwise unprotected, they represent an easily available source of food for the bears, as the Ministry of the Environment points out.<sup>3</sup> This is linked to another problem the country faces, namely waste management. Indeed, large quantities of unconsumed human food end up being thrown away in the communal waste, as overconsumption and inefficient composting are still a challenge that needs to be dealt with.

The brown bear has become a subject of recent media reports not only due to their eating out of people's trash containers, but also as a result of a sad event that happened several weeks ago. After approximately one hundred years, a man died after an encounter with a brown bear. It happens occasionally that a bear attacks a human, and events resulting in death are even rarer. This tragedy has re-opened debate between hunters and the activists about whether the population of the brown bear should be regulated.

Besides bears, the topic of wolves' protection made its way to the media and political arena. *Canis lupus* has officially become a protected species, and thus during the whole year, not only throughout a specific season. However, this does not mean that no wolves will be killed in the future, but the Ministry of the Environment will have to give its consent and allow a certain number of individuals to be shot down.<sup>4</sup> We absolutely consider this to be the right step.

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<sup>1</sup> Medvede u nás (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Pilz, T. (2021). Na Slovensku má byť takmer tritisíc medved'ov. Strieľať či nestrieľať?

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic (2021). Výzva na zabezpečenie odpadu pred medveďmi.

<sup>4</sup> Kubisova, J. (2021). Vlk dravý bude celoročne chránený. Nevylučujeme však, že na jeho odlov udelíme výnimku (rozhovor).

Based on the new legal regulation, it will be prohibited to injure, kill, transport, sell, or keep wolves. The societal value of the wolf will amount to 3000 euro. The legal regulation was signed on the Earth's Day.<sup>5</sup>

Last but not least, the counting of the chamois population resonated in the media. The “census” of this animal in Slovakia has a tradition of 70 years. The worst situation was detected in the 90's, when the population of chamois represented only around 200 pieces. The highest so far reported number was in 2018, with more than 1400 animals. However, the number fell to less than 1000 by 2020. This animal is said to be the symbol of High Tatras,<sup>6</sup> hence its protection and monitoring is inevitable. As for its current population, the final result of the data analysis remains unknown when completing this text. We hope, the analysis will have shown favourable population development.

### **Current challenges of waste management**

Waste management, no or wrong recycling and massive consumption are problems that are present in many developed countries, with Slovakia being no exception. For many years, none or only limited attention has been dedicated to this, but the situation is slowly improving. In favour of this statements speaks also recent amendment to the law on waste that has made its way through the first reading in the Slovak parliament. In accordance with the law amendment, recycling and sorting of waste should be the preferred way of waste handling, not incineration as before. The legislature should forbid incineration in cases when it is possible to reuse the material. One of the materials that is recycled in exceptionally limited amounts is textile. Should the law amendment become law eventually, municipalities would be obliged to ensure that textile is sorted as of 2025.<sup>7</sup>

What we perceive as an enormous challenge is to motivate people to change their habits, as recycling – not to mention upcycling and similar methods reducing waste – is still not common in many households. On the other hand, second hand or zero-waste / no-packaging stores have been opened in several larger towns across the country. Similarly, there are people

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<sup>5</sup> TASR (2021). Vlk dravý sa stal chráneným živočíchom, Budaj podpísal vyhlášku.

<sup>6</sup> Vysoké Tatry – TV Markíza (2021). V Tatrách ráтали kamzíky. Ich počty v uplynulých rokoch klesali.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic (2021). Novela zákona o odpadoch prešla prvým čítaním parlamentu.

that have started composting, not only in outdoor composting containers, but also in apartments using indoor versions of composters.

Obviously, raising environmental awareness should become one of the priorities of the country's environmental policy in order to persuade more people about the benefits of an eco-friendly way of life. Moreover, some incentives and motivators might work as well. An example is the possibility to bring used glass or plastic bottles and cans to a store and getting some cash in return. As for glass bottles, this has been feasible for many years now. Returning PET bottles and cans, however, is a novelty. According to statistical data, approximately one billion plastic bottles are sold in Slovakia every year, it is therefore crucial to ensure they will not end up in the nature,<sup>8</sup> which is, unfortunately, very often the case. The problem of polluting the environment has been accentuated for years, and despite that there are individuals who do not mind leaving trash behind in forests, parks, or by lakes. One of the impacts of the pandemic is a large quantity of facemasks in the nature, which has been observed also by the author of this text. Nevertheless, one billion bottles is a huge number, considering Slovakia has only some 5.5 million inhabitants. Hence, we are absolutely in favour of this step.

We would also like to seize this opportunity to refer to our Slovakia Social Briefing published in June, 2019, the theme of which was the use of disposable plastics in Slovakia.<sup>9</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the present briefing we attempted to discuss two main topics concerning the environment and related policies in the Slovak Republic, namely legal regulations regarding selected mammals and waste management.

Slovakia, in spite of its being a relatively small country as for its size, is incredibly rich when it comes to its nature, including flora and fauna. Many species have been declared protected by law. However, with the increasingly visible impacts of climate change, we can expect further changes in the legislature concerning the environment, as other species will probably need more protection in order to reverse the loss of biodiversity. Furthermore, a more

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<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic (2021). Čo prinesie zálohovanie.

<sup>9</sup> For more information see: Ciefova, M. (2019). Slovakia social briefing: No more disposable plastics in Slovakia. In: Weekly briefings, 19(3). Available at: <https://china-cee.eu/2019/07/02/slovakia-social-briefing-no-more-disposable-plastics-in-slovakia/>.

effective waste management will be necessary in order to facilitate recycling and thus reducing the amount of waste that ends up at dumps, very often in vain.

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