

## SLOVAK RURAL PLATFORM MEETS THE PRESIDENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

**July 2017.-** One of the long-term objectives of the Rural Platform has been to meet with the President of Slovakia, Andrej Kiska, to discuss the benefits and the added value of agriculture for the whole society and to present agriculture as a modern, progressive sector with a strategic significance. The other main objective has been to point at the problematic aspects of agriculture from the viewpoint of small and young farmers and to give voice to their perspective.

The meeting took place after the approval of Constitutional Amendments - a process which was initiated by the Rural Platform - at a small family farm which is also the first certified biological farm in Slovakia.

The meeting revolved around five core themes; (1) the state of agriculture in Slovakia; (2) soil; (3) transparency in the allocation of agricultural subsidies and grants; (4) food - finalization of processing, consumer behavior and sales and finally, a (5) long-term vision for agriculture.

“We have discussed with the president for more than an hour, which was followed by more informal discussions during the farm visit and wine degustation. He was interested in the state of agriculture and we jointly tried to figure out where the main lays is and what we could do to fix it. The president offered his support and proclaimed that agriculture should become a priority. I find this meeting crucial not only for the Rural platform, but for agricultural sector as such. It encouraged us to take more steps in order to achieve our goals and vision”, explained Lucia Gallova, the president of the Rural platform.

“Statistics show us that the Slovak agriculture is lagging behind,” said Kiska after the meeting. Together with Ireland we have the greatest share of total population living in rural areas, but paradoxically, employment in agriculture is one of the lowest in the EU. “The EU average is almost 5%, in Poland it is almost 10%, while in Slovakia merely 2.8%.”

According to Andrej Kiska, in a country where agriculture plays such an important role its development should be a priority. “Funding should be allocated to this sector, along with excellent professionals and legislation. We need to call on the responsible people, express that we need a change and to state a real timeframe where we can bring this change into action.”