

Viewing cable 05BRATISLAVA713, SENIOR ADVISOR SPIRNAK, GMOS, AND SLOVAKIA

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: SENIOR ADVISOR SPIRNAK, GMOS, AND SLOVAKIA

REF: BRATISLAVA 412

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (U) Summary. During the July 29 to August 1 visit of Madelyn Spirnak, the Department's Senior Advisor on Agricultural Technology, Econoffs obtained additional insight into the status of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Slovakia. In science and industry, Slovaks appear educated, practical, and even eager to employ the benefits of GMOs. Business interests and farmers are also enthusiastic. However, politicians remain uninformed and susceptible to the alarmist tactics of opposition groups and neighboring countries. All seem to agree that the tide of public opinion, which remains largely undecided, will eventually sway the politicians and settle the GMO debate in Slovakia. End Summary.

SCIENTISTS AND THE LAW

¶2. (U) According to Katarina Benovska, Methodologist of Legal Protection of the Central Agricultural Inspection and Testing Institute (CAITI), GMOs are not a significant priority because none of the EU approved seeds are critical to Slovak farmlands. (Comment: Benovska referred specifically to the European corn borer insect which is not currently a problem and therefore neither harmful pesticides or corn borer resistant crops are necessary. GMO seed sellers Pioneer and Monsanto, however, stated that the infestation is migrating to Slovakia and will become a problem. End Comment.) Regardless, CAITI has been tasked by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to draft a "co-

existence" law that delineates the rules for using GMO seeds. Benovska, indicated that the law was a high priority for CAITI and the MOA and that they hoped the law would reach parliament by February 2006. When Spirnak stated that the Czech Republic's co-existence legislation would likely be quite liberal and Hungary's equate to a de facto ban, Benovska responded that Slovakia's would likely lie "somewhere in between".

¶3. (U) Scientists in Slovakia are working on and with GMO products and seem little-affected by the rigorous political debate over the issue. In meetings with scientific NGOs and academic institutions, Spirnak and Econoffs encountered professionals who comprehend the science of GMOs and cooperate on international GMO-related projects. Maria Chrenkova, Deputy Director of the Institute for Animal Nutrition, for instance, has worked on a project testing the effects of GMO feed on animals (which after years of testing has shown no difference from non-GMO feed). Anna Pretova, Director of the Institute of Plant Genetics and Biotechnology, and scientists from the Institute of Plant Production have also been working on an EU-funded project testing the effects of next-generation GMO feed for animals. The scientists uniformly agreed, however, that Slovakia lacked a consistent national strategy or plan for future development of biotechnology, so the prospects for continued research are uncertain.

FARMERS AND BUSINESS

¶4. (SBU) Throughout the meetings, scientists, technical experts, bureaucrats, politicians and NGO representatives conceded that GMOs could provide significant economic opportunities. In fact, representatives of Monsanto and Pioneer asserted that Slovak farmers are anxious to buy the seeds that will enable them to grow products more efficiently and save money on pesticides and herbicides. In addition, a Slovak company called Enviral, would like to purchase and convert GMO corn into Ethanol at its new plant. The GOS, however, appears slow to react to these interests. Jan Galoci, Senior State Counselor for International Trade at the Ministry of Economy (MOE), declared that the trade volume of agriculture between Slovakia and the U.S. was so small that the MOE had little interest in advocating against GMO trade barriers. Galoci further concluded that even on the EU level, it was scarcely a battle worth fighting. (Comment: Spirnak and Econoffs patiently explained the deficiencies of such positions but made little progress with Galoci. End Comment.)

POLITICIANS AND PUBLIC OPINION

¶5. (SBU) The Slovak scientists that met with Spirnak and Econoffs conceded that they wield little influence with politicians and the various factors that motivate their decisions (reftel). They are determined, however, to educate the public about both the benefits and potential

downsides of GMOs. As a result, they hope an informed public will advance an enlightened GMO policy from its government. While in Slovakia, Spirnak facilitated this process by drawing positive attention to GMOs and via media interviews, both in print and television. In addition, we will use the Ambassador's upcoming courtesy calls to nudge the politicians along.

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