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# TRENDS IN THE EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYMENT AND CHALLENGES IN ITS GROWTH IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

### **Abstract:**

Some of major long-term challenges for EU countries, including Slovakia, are the situation in the labour market and employment growth. Rise in the participation of population in employment, or increase in employment rate of economically active population, and particularly of disadvantaged population, and their retention in the labour market represent main protection against expansion of poverty and social exclusion. Economic growth, which is largely driven by national demand, is a basic precondition for a rise in employment rate. In the previous years, the global crisis had a considerable impact on individual economies and it also affected global labour markets, what was reflected in decreasing costs, freezing wages, dismissing workers in individual categories and an overall drop in the employment extent. In order to deal with employment issues, it is necessary to undertake activities related to economic policy, social policy, labour market policy, financial and educational policy.

### **Keywords:**

labour market, employment, globalisation, economic growth, labour market flexibility, active labour market policy

**JEL Classification:** J08, J21, J64

## Introduction

Labour market has long been one of major challenges of the Slovak economy. In each economy, employment is closely connected to dynamics and efficiency of the economy, its competitiveness; employment also depends on the evolution of offer and demand in the labour market. Compared to other EU countries, SR has a relatively low employment rate, in particular of the youth but also of the elderly, and a high unemployment rate in which long-term unemployment is dominant. Employment growth is one of main objectives of the economic policy. Rise in the participation of population in employment, or increase in employment rate of economically active population, and particularly of disadvantaged population, and their retention in the labour market also represent main protection against expansion of poverty and social exclusion. In the period of 2008-2012, the global economic crisis had a major impact on individual economies but also on global labour markets. It resulted in decreasing costs, freezing wages, dismissing workers in individual categories and an overall drop in the employment extent. This contribution is focused on identification of changes in employment, pointing out to basic problems and the resulting measures aimed at increasing employment.

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### 1. Trends in the development of employment and current situation

In the last two decades, Slovak economy has undergone several significant periods. From the start of transformation in 90's, standardisation of the economic environment after 1998, unemployment culmination in 2001, joining the EU in 2004, period of economic growth until the start of the financial and economic crisis in 2008 which still has an impact on the economy (Tiruneh-Štefánik et al., 2014, p.79).

Employment may be characterized by employment rate and its dynamics. These indicators are monitored both in relation to overall employment (number of persons employed in relation to the number of population aged 20-64) as well as to partial employment related to a certain labour force segment (e.g. employment rate of men, women, persons aged 50+, youth, etc.). The employment rate in the EU (EC, 2013) has been stagnating in the last few years and it remains lower than the target of 75% which was specified in the Europa 2020 strategy in relation to employment of the population aged 20-64. After a constant rise in 2000 - 2008 when the employment rate in the EU rose from 66.6 % to 70.3 %, in 2009 it dropped to 68.9 % as a result of a deep economic recession. In 2010, the employment rate continued decreasing to

68.5% and has basically stabilised at this level. In 2012, it slightly decreased to 68% and the difference between this rate and the target of 75% is 7 percentage points. This situation is a result of a combination of an unfavourable impact of the global crisis and the time necessary for improvements to be reflected in labour markets as well as of a slow pace of labour market reforms in several member states (EC, 2014a).

Labour market and employment in Slovakia are characterized by ageing population and a high level of unemployment which mainly affects low-qualified workers whose employment rate has long been low. The higher the level of education attained, the higher the employment rate of the particular population (Pongráczová, 2011, p. 16).

After joining the EU, the employment in SR had a rising nature. In the period of strong economic expansion between 2005 - 2006, employment in SR rose approximately to 2%, but an average unemployment rate did not significantly decrease and it exceeded 10%. 2007 saw a particularly strong economic growth - by over 10% - what was reflected in an employment growth by over 3% with one-year delay. As a result of the crisis, employment started decreasing and continued decreasing until 2011.

**Table 1: Employment rate in EU Member State in % (population in the age of 20-64)**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Target until
<b>EU 28</b>	67.4	67.9	68.9	69.8	70.3	68.9	68.5	68.5	68.4	68.3	75
<b>EU 27</b>	67.4	68	69	69.9	70.3	69	68.5	68.6	68.5	68.5	75
<b>Belgium</b>	65.6	66.5	66.5	67.7	68	67.1	67.6	67.3	67.2	67.2	73.2
<b>Bulgaria</b>	60.1	61.9	65.1	68.4	70.7	68.8	65.4	62.9	63	63.5	76
<b>Czech</b>	70.1	70.7	71.2	72	72.4	70.9	70.4	70.9	71.5	72.5	75
<b>Denmark</b>	77.6	78	79.4	79	79.7	77.5	75.8	75.7	75.4	75.6	80
<b>Germany</b>	68.8	69.4	71.1	72.9	74	74.2	74.9	76.3	76.7	77.1	77
<b>Estonia</b>	70.6	72	75.8	76.8	77	69.9	66.7	70.4	72.1	73.3	76
<b>Ireland</b>	71.5	72.6	73.4	73.8	72.3	66.9	64.6	63.8	63.7	65.5	69
<b>Greece</b>	64	64.6	65.7	66	66.5	65.8	64	59.9	55.3	53.2	70
<b>Spain</b>	65.2	67.2	68.7	69.5	68.3	63.7	62.5	61.6	59.3	58.2	74
<b>France</b>	69.5	69.4	69.3	69.8	70.4	69.5	69.2	69.2	69.4	69.5	75
<b>Croatia</b>	59.6	60	60.6	62.3	62.9	61.7	58.7	57	55.4	53.9	59
<b>Italy</b>	61.5	61.6	62.5	62.8	63	61.7	61.1	61.2	61	59.8	67
<b>Cyprus</b>	74.9	74.4	75.8	76.8	76.5	75.3	75	73.4	70.2	67.1	75
<b>Latvia</b>	69.3	70.3	73.5	75.2	75.8	67.1	65	66.3	68.1	69.7	73
<b>Lithuania</b>	69	70.6	71.6	72.7	72	67	64.3	66.9	68.5	69.9	72.8
<b>Luxembourg</b>	67.7	69	69.1	69.6	68.8	70.4	70.7	70.1	71.4	71.1	73
<b>Hungary</b>	62.1	62.2	62.6	62.6	61.9	60.5	60.4	60.7	62.1	63.2	75
<b>Malta</b>	57.9	57.9	57.6	58.5	59.2	58.8	60.1	61.5	63.1	64.9	62.9
<b>Netherlands</b>	74.9	75.1	76.3	77.8	78.9	78.8	76.8	77	77.2	76.5	80
<b>Austria</b>	70.8	71.7	73.2	74.4	75.1	74.7	74.9	75.2	75.6	75.5	77
<b>Poland</b>	57.3	58.3	60.1	62.7	65	64.9	64.3	64.5	64.7	64.9	71
<b>Portugal</b>	72.6	72.3	72.7	72.6	73.1	71.2	70.5	69.1	66.5	65.6	75
<b>Rumania</b>	63.5	63.6	64.8	64.4	64.4	63.5	63.3	62.8	63.8	63.9	70
<b>Slovenia</b>	70.4	71.1	71.5	72.4	73	71.9	70.3	68.4	68.3	67.2	75

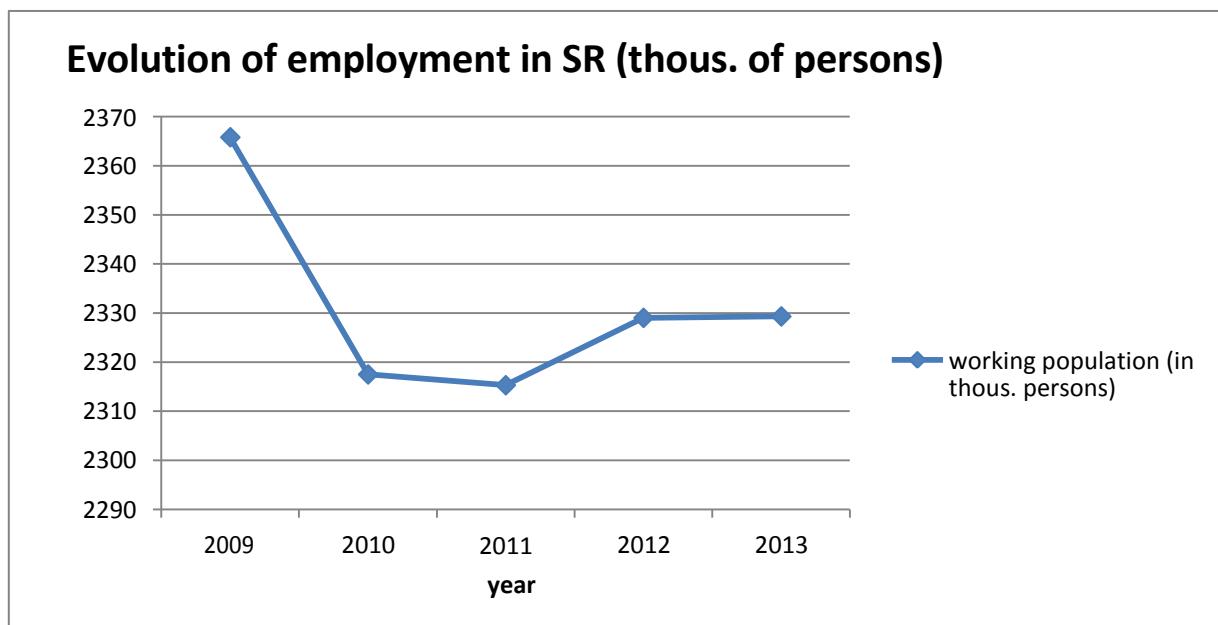
<b>Slovakia</b>	63.7	64.5	66	67.2	68.8	66.4	64.6	65	65.1	65	72
<b>Finland</b>	72.2	73	73.9	74.8	75.8	73.5	73	73.8	74	73.3	78
<b>Sweden</b>	77.4	78.1	78.8	80.1	80.4	78.3	78.1	79.4	79.4	79.8	80
<b>United Kingdom</b>	75	75.2	75.2	75.2	75.2	73.9	73.6	73.6	74.2	74.9	

Source: Bednárik: *Study of measures and mechanisms intended to support employment*. Bratislava: IVPR, 2014

In relation to examining mechanisms and measures intended to support employment, it is necessary first to identify the starting position, i.e. the employment and unemployment in Slovakia compared to other EU Member States. As for Slovakia, the target is 72%, but in 2013 it was only 65%. Out of the V4 countries, only the Czech Republic has a higher overall employment rate and Hungary has the lowest employment rate.

In the last 5 years, the evolution of employment indicators in SR indicated a trend of performance of the economy as a whole. The employment rate in SR is not very variable. The highest number of working population since 2009, pursuant to the VZPS methodology, was in 2009 when the working population exceeded almost 2 365 000. The lowest number of working population 2 315 300 was in 2011; the working population thus decreased compared to 2009 by 2.13 %. Since 2011, the employment rate started to grow gradually; in 2013 the number of working population was 2 329 300 (Mihály, 2014).

**Figure 1: Evolution of employment in SR (thous. of persons)**



Source: Statistical Office of SR, VZPS methodology, Trexima

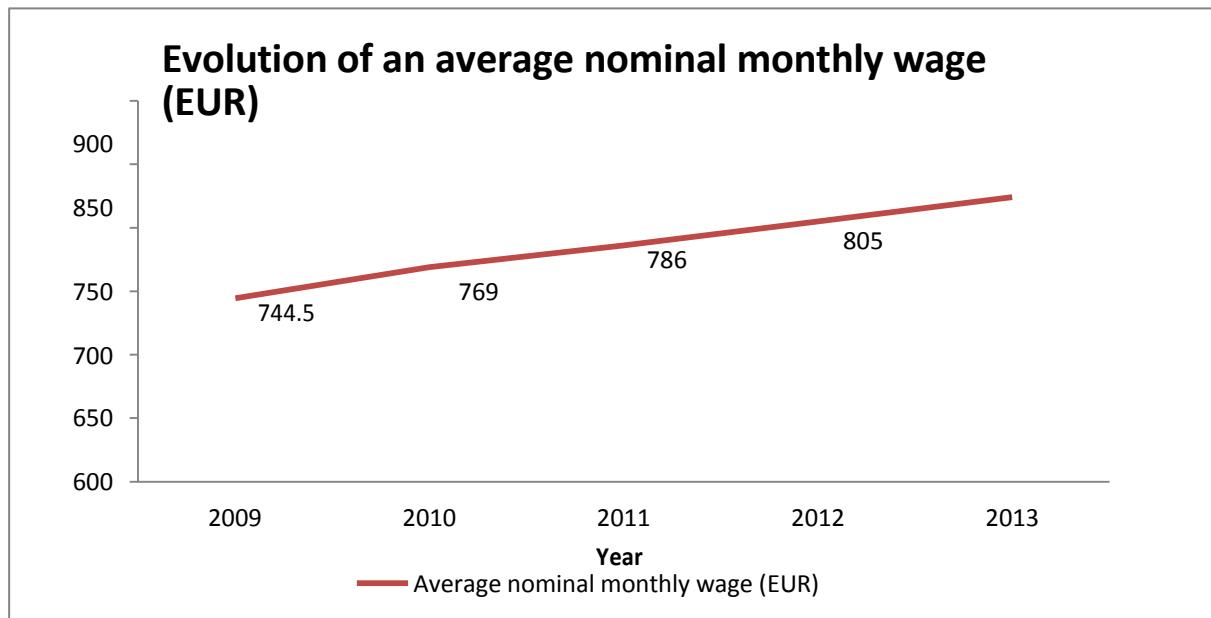
**Figure 2 Evolution of employment rates in EU-28 with respect to targets of the Europe 2020 strategy (age group 20 - 64)**



Source: *Eurostat, examining labour force and Europe 2020 strategy targets*

Wage level and its evolution is a significant factor which has a direct impact on employment. In line with economic theory, a wage level is a substantial influence on offer and demand for labour force. It is true that wage increases also lead to an increase in the offer of labour force, i.e. the number of persons who are willing to work for a particular wage. A study of the Council for Budget Responsibility, "Work or not to work", indicates that in general the likelihood of economic activity depends on the net income and on social allowances and contributions. They have found out that a 1%-increase in the net wage increases the likelihood of economic activity by 0.26 p.p. On the contrary, it is also true that a 1%-increase in social allowances decreases it by 0.04 p.p.

**Figure 3: Evolution of an average nominal monthly wage in 2009 - 2013**



Source: *Statistical Office of SR*

The demand for labour force is a derived demand since it depends on the demand for goods and services produced by the labour force. Increases in wages decrease the demand for labour force by employers in the market of production factors. Particularly with respect to industries with a low added value, an increase in wages has a considerably negative impact on their evolution, i.e. on the generation of new and retention of the existing wages, mainly for low-qualified workers (Mihály et al., 2014). As for the inequality of incomes, it grew more during the crisis in Slovakia; however, in the global comparison, the country has one of the lowest inequality levels.

Entrepreneurial environment, the quality of which is not in line with the needs of the economy, significantly contributed to the low employment rate in SR. This is also proved by unfavourable rankings of Slovakia in international entrepreneurial environment rankings and by the fact that companies are leaving Slovakia. E.g. in the global competitiveness index, in the entrepreneurial environment assessment disclosed by the World Economic Forum, Slovakia dropped from the 69th place in 2011 to the 78th place in 2013 (Kárász, 2014, p. 9).

In the current period which is still characterized by impacts of the global economic recession as well as by other currently ongoing processes, such as the conflict in Ukraine, it is difficult to forecast a future evolution of economies. It is even more difficult to forecast a future evolution of a small and highly open economy such as Slovakia. Short-term forecasts are currently reviewed on almost a monthly basis, usually downwards. Most forecasting teams are careful in decreasing rises towards negative values and tend to accept more positive expectations (Radvanský, 2009, p.9).

**Table 2: Real GDP growth (in s.c.)**

country/year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
EU	1.3	1.5	2.6	2.2	3.4	3.2
SR	4.6	4.8	5.1	6.7	8.3	10.5
Germany	0.0	-0.4	1.2	0.7	3.7	3.3
country/year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU	0.4	-4.5	2.0	1.7	-0.4	0.1
SR	5.8	-4.9	4.4	3.0	1.8	0.9
Germany	1.1	-5.1	4.0	3.3	0.7	0.4

Source: EUROSTAT, elaborated by the author

The rate of vacancies is approximately 1.5%, representing more or less an average since the end of 2010 (NBS, 2013). In the medium-term perspective, it might be expected that several trends will lead to a further increase in the number of jobs, particularly in certain areas. From the point of view of potential generation of new jobs, services have the highest potential for growth. It is mainly a result of the fact that

services are considerably undersized in the Slovak economy. While the average proportion of services in generation of added value at the euro-area level exceeds 73%, in Slovakia it is lower than 60%. It is caused by the fact that services, both for the population as well as for companies, are still insufficiently developed (Kárasz, 2014).

E.g. technical progress may be expected to contribute to generation of jobs in the ICT area (900,000 vacancies in ICT are expected to be occupied by 2015), while despite the current limitations for healthcare in public budgets, the ageing of population will probably increase the demand for healthcare workers and medical services in the medium term (in 2012 already the total number of persons employed in healthcare professions was almost a million in EU-27). Moreover, ecologisation of economy may lead to an increase in the area of ecology-related jobs. Other sectors related to high-tech, such as transport industry, will require new labour force with medium-to-high qualifications in order to adapt to the growth seen e.g. in aviation and passenger transport, while it is expected that a high percentage of elderly workers will leave the transport industry by 2020 (EC, 2013).

**Table 3: Resulting indicators for employment and social inclusion in SR and the EU**

Indicator	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Target 2020
Long-term unemployment rate (% of active population aged 15+) Slovakia	11.8	10.3	8.3	6.7	6.5	9.3	9.3	9.4	10.0	3
EU	4.2	3.8	3.1	2.6	3	3.9	4.2	4.7	5.1	-
Employment rate (% in the age group 20-64) Slovakia	64.5	66	67.2	68.8	66.4	64.6	65.0	65.1	65.0	72
EU	67.9	68.9	69.8	70.3	68.9	68.5	68.5	68.4	68.3	75
Population threatened by poverty and social inclusion (% of population) Slovakia	32	26.7	21.3	20.6	19.6	20.6	20.6	20.5	-	17.2
EU	25.7	25.3	24.4	23.7	23.2	23.7	24.3	24.8	-	19.4

Source: National Reform Programme SR, 2014

An increase in the participation of population in employment or an increase in the employment rate particularly of disadvantaged unemployed persons and their

retention in the labour market represents main protection against poverty and social exclusion. At the time of demographic ageing of population, decreasing the number of jobs and unemployment growth, caused mainly by the global financial and economic crisis, it is necessary to increase the level of coordination of economic policy, social policy and employment policy at both international and national level. Employment growth in Slovakia could also be driven by external factors, e.g. export increase as a result of a fall in the value of the euro.

## **2. Selected approaches for employment growth in SR**

A strategic target which the EU started to pursue at the end of the 20th century was promotion of sustainable economic development and high employment rate as a precondition for increasing social cohesion of the society and ensuring political stability of the EU. Historically speaking, the EU emphasized economic integration, i.e. generation of a common market and an economic and monetary union. It was based on the precondition that economic integration need not be accompanied by corresponding integration measures in the area of social policy and employment policy, since economic integration will lead to an economic growth and a high employment rate with a positive impact on generation of sufficient resources for financing needs in the social area. However, in spite of a constant economic growth, the end of the 20th century saw a high increase in unemployment; the emphasis is thus now placed on the necessity of integration measures which will lead to harmonisation of adopted measures related to employment and in the social area of EU Member States (Kotýnková-Durdisová, 2014, pp. 13-14).

Respect for specific macro-economic features which have been formed in the long-term development process in the Slovak labour market represents the basis for employment growth processes, determining the success of tackling high unemployment. From among these specific features, the relation between economic growth and employment growth plays a key role from the point of view evolution of employment. It is a connection between the market of goods and services and the labour market where the growing demand for goods and services leads to an increase in the demand for work. The efficiency of this connection, i.e. a unit increase in the demand for services and goods must lead to a highest possible increase in the number of workers in the national economy, depends on several factors. Crucial roles are mainly played by the structure of the aggregate demand generating economic growth and conditions determining involvement of economically active population in the working process (Kárász, 2014, p.2)

A decrease in efficiency of harmonising the offer of work with the demand for work and the resulting high unemployment and an insufficient employment growth require interventions of public employment services and active policies in the labour market. However, the need for consolidation of public finance in many EU states, including Slovakia, does not enable to increase the volume of funds spent on active measures

in the labour markets. Therefore, they are focused more on increasing the efficiency of the existing tools. The data available from Eurostat says that expenditures on an active labour market policy in the previous years roughly copied the unemployment rate.

By the challenges for employment growth policy in Slovakia are the questions of new job creation (including construction of new businesses), as well as the issues of the legislative framework for employment growth in the formal economy and suppression of illegal work.

There are also important questions related to Clients expansion of our products and services abroad, as Consumers in the internal market are disposing although of increasing and still insufficient absorbing strength (e.g. households are still disposing of low-incomes and wealth).

In this frame, practically all departments of the Slovak economy have tasks to promote an employment growth. The National Reform Program 2014 declares promoting of employment growth as one of the key tasks for the next period. The priorities in the segment of employment are questions of improving services employment, promotion of employment of young people (especially in two main areas - early intervention and activation and supporting measures for integration at labour market) and reducing long-term unemployment. Repeatedly, as it was in the previous NPR 2013, remembers the promotion of employment also in connection with the development of measures in other structural areas - business environment, transport infrastructure, law convenience, social inclusion, education, transport, health and environmental defensibility (Bednárik, 2014 p.12-13).

According to Karász (Karász, 2014) it's possible to state that during the economic downturn is advisable to support the development investments because these mentioned investments besides a positive impact on the recovery of economic growth will also lead to the creation of new job opportunities.

Furthermore, according to the author can be stated the fact that increasing the capital-labor ratio (without reference to the development nature of investments) can the economy during the economic downturn produce only at the price of number of employees decreasing.

To the employment, the measures will significantly contribute for improving education, improving the business environment, a modernization of infrastructure and to make more effectively the public administration, which should contribute to the development of business and job creation.

As the main causes of the unfavorable business environment in particular can be identified: High liability for loading, the administrative difficulty on businesses, poor law convenience, unattractive tax system, and corruption and client ship. Slovakia is under developing compared to other EU countries in the support of starting businessmen.

Employment services must be modernized and strengthened with reference to the Employment Guidelines.

To reassess the institution's system of employment services, the effectiveness of their management so that the result is more flexibility and capability of provided personalized employment services.

In conditions of Slovakia, there were already received several measures for promotion of employment of handicapped people in the labour market - young people and school-leavers, as well as to promote the employment of people with low-incomes and long-term unemployed. As the unemployment rate of young people on average in the EU is twice as high as for other adult unemployed.

Therefore, the EU Council recommends four basic measures to promote employment of young people:

1. Warranty system for young people – to young people up to 25 years receive quality offer of employment, education, skills or internship until 4 months from finishing the school,
2. Initiative for employment support – funds for support of employment – funds for support of young people into regions where the unemployment of young people is above 25%
3. Qualitative internships and apprentices preparation – in order to improve transition from school to work
4. Working mobility – labor-saving for young to get a job, internship or lecture in a different than in the home country of the EU.

The specific concept of providing services to young people is also support of job creation by employers for young people aged up to 29 years through national projects. In conditions of Slovakia were from the beginning of year 2015 introduced several measures to support the unemployed up to 29, this is done by financing the part of cost of the Employer for total price of employees work.

For jobs of each young person the state contributes to the companies each month with the amount of 246 to 492 €. Promotion of young people employment is implemented through the Structural Funds within the Operational Program Competitiveness and Economic Growth.

Long-term unemployment is also a problem at older age groups. This group of long-term threatened persons was not sufficiently motivated to employ, therefore, was established from year 2015, overlapping of assistance in material necessity, special contribution in the period of 12 months and labor-income to a fixed amount.

One of the main restrictions for improving the situation in the employment of low-skilled with a low labor assessment represents the payroll tax of low-income workers.

For the purpose of their employment was established recruiting deductible item for health care taxes by the Employer and the Employee in a defined level of the average wage - € 569, so. Tax relief what can lead to a decreasing of labor costs of Employers.

With the aim of reducing the regional differences, has to be consolidate economic development of regions with an emphasis on supporting of small and medium business and tourism as a boom industry for new job creation. Reducing the high regional differences in the unemployment for example- support the entry of foreign Investors, developing of infrastructure etc.

The important task within budget policy may be raising funds for labor market policy, especially for programs focused on solving a long-term unemployment, using of EU means by implementation of projects within the tools of active labor market policy.

In October 2007, the European Commission approved the Operational Program Employment and Social Inclusion. The main aims of the Operational Program are focused on purpose of the labor market, and it means the approaching to the full employment and to promote employment of threatened people excluded from the labor market.

The co-financing rate of this Operational Program from the European Social Fund is reaching the 85% of total public expenses. The remaining 15% of the funds are financed from national public sources. From the total commitment of the seven-year program period 2007 - 2013, to June 30, 2014, has been cumulative exhausted 634 800 312.08 €, it means 67.44%.

Operational Program Human Resources for the program period 2014 - 2020 for the employment has defined for the Slovak Republic the following aim: to increase the employment rate of people aged in 20-64 years to 72% until year 2020 (from 65% in years 2011 and 2012).

Slovak republic will obtain in program period 2014-2020 from euro funds 14milliard€. Most of these means should be used for a support of business environment, small and medium businesses, education, creation of new job opportunities and protection of the environment and mainly for little developed regions. At the same time, Euro funds represent almost 80% of public Investments in Slovakia.

Between the causes of ongoing high unemployment and insufficient employment growth in the Slovak economy, a key task is well coordinated by the absence of access that would complex solve the problems of employment and unemployment in mutual relation and by taking account of acting factors that affect the solution of these problems.

Until now, these problems were solved more or less in isolation so in the area of the employment as in the unemployment. In the area of employment was an effort mainly focused on support of job creation at required level in the form of different subsidies and tax benefits in dependence on the actual situation on the labor market.

In the area of unemployment, there were mainly efforts about improving of operation of the labor market with special focusing on active labor market policy and solving the relationships between social security system and labor market policy. (Kárász, 2014, p. 13)

## Conclusion

The Employment growth in Slovakia has to be supported mainly by a domestic demand. The growth of the purchasing power of the domestic population is an incitement for producers of goods and services what is a power of economic growth as a basic presumption of the employment growth.

The Employment in the country affects also decisive area policy, such as the overall tax work load, as well as setting the social system. Resurrection of demand after work depends on the ability of a country or region to create and maintain a sufficiently high rate of economic growth and to change for creation of a sufficient number of new, qualified employments that will replace the old employments with low productivity, but at the same time also retain the existing good employments.

At least half of the expected economic growth in this year could come from domestic consumption. Economic and social policy of the country should be actively stimulated economic growth and job creation by creating a favorable economic, legal and institutional environment for businesses and at the same time to take care of that the economic benefits would be fairly shared by businessmen and employees and the employees would use adequate job securities and incomes.

The necessary condition of the following development of Slovak economy and rising of living standard of population is solving the employment growth which will be leading to the sustainable job creation and significantly approach a rate of unemployment to the natural rate of unemployment.

The basic tool for achieving this aim is a suitable conceived complex economic policy. The aim of economic policy is in a long-term to achieve economic growth and competitiveness and the aim of employment policy and social policy was occurred the achieving of high rate of employment and average quality of life as provision of creation of consistent and political stability company.

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