

Speech by
Sir Anthony Bailey, KGCN, OBE, GCSS
Reception and Investiture Ceremony
Embassy of Slovak Republic
Tuesday 19 April 2016

Ambassador, Your Royal Highnesses, Yours Serene Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Your Eminence, Your Grace, My Lords, High Sheriff, My Lord Mayor of Westminster, Mr Alderman, Distinguished Guests.

It gives me very great pleasure to be present here this evening and to receive this high honour by order of His Excellency The President of the Slovak Republic.

My first duty and indeed pleasure is to ask Your Excellency to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to President Andrej Kiska, the Honours Commission and to this Embassy for considering me worthy enough to be singled out and recognised in such a way.

I was made aware by the British Embassy that Slovakia very rarely grants honours – in fact last year I gather the number of recipients at home and abroad can be counted on one hand.

This makes this evening and this beautiful gathering of family, dear friends and colleagues all the more special and memorable.

Events like tonight bring back so many memories of

my years spent in Slovakia and the wider Central and Eastern European region.

We all too easily forget that it is just over 25 years since the end of the Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe and the Velvet Revolution of your own nation.

As a UCL SSEES student of Eastern and Central European Studies, during 1989-1991, I often travelled by train from Budapest, Sofia, Belgrade and Bucharest to Bratislava and witnessed sometimes at first hand your hard-fought successful struggle which replaced totalitarianism, dictatorship and oppression with freedom and democracy.

Joyful events for the entire world and especially for us here in Europe as we were all able to heal this open post-war wound.

Since then, the reforms undergone in Slovakia have been enormous and far-reaching: your country joined NATO and the European Union in 2004 becoming soon a success story of the enlargement.

With one of the fastest growing economies in the EU, the Slovak Republic is today one of the best performers among the euro area.

The Slovak Republic is preparing to take the EU presidency on the 1 July – one week after this country holds its referendum on EU membership.

This Presidency will be an important occasion to contribute to the formation of key EU policies and reforms for the benefit of all member states, including I so earnestly hope, the UK.

I would like to end by thanking you, Mr Ambassador for organising this investiture ceremony and reception.

Tonight has been truly memorable and I end in reaffirming to Your Excellency and through you to the President and your Government my will and determination to partner with them in new activities which can ensure our relations become even more deeper, fruitful and meaningful. God Save Slovakia.