

Electric vehicle market bratislava

The available data further shows that the "intermediate step" between electromobility and combustion drive, i.e. plug-in hybrid drive technology, is still chosen by a relatively large number of Slovak drivers. During the last year, 2 622 PHEVs were added to our roads. Even more are those that use hybrid drive without the possibility of charging the battery from the grid, 23 998 of them.

Slowly but gradually the turquoise-green license plates issued for electric cars in Slovakia are becoming more a familiar sight in the country's capital Bratislava. The Slovak government subsidizes the purchase of a new all-electric car with EUR8,000 (\$8,700), and millions are being invested in expanding the charging infrastructure.

In 2021, about one million new cars rolled off production lines in Slovakia --a global record, when measured against the country's population of 5.4 million. The Slovak automotive industry contributes close to 13% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). By comparison, the German auto industry generates only about 5% of Germany's GDP.

Under the European Union's new mobility strategy, only zero-emission cars will be allowed to be sold from 2035, meaning new vans or cars with combustion engines will be banned in the bloc in a little over a decade.

Slovakia's automakers began gearing up for the industry shift in 2013, as Germany's Volkswagen (VW) launched the production of its e-up! compact car in its factory in Bratislava. According to a VW spokesperson there, a total of 41,500 units of the car were delivered in 2021, while data for 2022 are not yet available.

As the traditional combustion engine still powers most of the cars rolling off VW's Bratislava factory, the challenges facing future production at the plant are becoming ever more apparent. Electric motors are much simpler to build, and they require fewer parts, less work and ultimately fewer staff. As a result, the Slovak auto industry is facing a painful transition amid the new realities.

"In the worst case, GDP could be 10% lower," says a 2020 study by the Bratislava-based think tank Globsec, which has analyzed the transformation of the automotive sector over the next two decades. Its "best-case scenario" expects the creation of up to 8,000 new jobs, but only if the production of key components such as car batteries is located in the country.

Radovan Durana of the Institute of Economic and Social Studies in Bratislava says Slovakia could be happy that one of the world's biggest carmakers has chosen the country for producing its cars. "But if Volkswagen decides to make its electric cars in Germany, then we have no choice in Slovakia," the auto analyst told DW.

And, indeed, the auto giant is already manufacturing its ID.3 and ID.4 electric models at its German factory in Zwickau, Saxony, and produces the batteries for its e-up! car in Braunschweig, while e-motors are coming from Kassel, also in Germany.

Durana believes that state subsidies won't help much in the current industry transition and that it's know-how that matters more. "They [the carmakers] base their decisions regarding production sites on whether or not they make sense economically," he said, which is why the number of likely suppliers and the qualifications of the people in any specific region are more important. This would be true for the whole auto industry in Eastern Europe, including those in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, he added.

At the moment, the government in Bratislava is pinning high hopes on Swedish carmaker Volvo, which recently announced it wants to build a new electric-car factory in Kosice, in eastern Slovakia. About 20% of the EUR1.2 billion funding for the project will come from the Slovak state. Volvo is planning to produce 250,000 electric vehicles in Kosice from 2026, with the government hoping the new plant will narrow the wealth gap between the poor east and the richer west of the country.

In the meantime, a lively auto industry startup scene is beginning to thrive in the shadow of the legacy carmakers' sprawling factories. Homegrown startup InoBat --a manufacturer of special batteries for busses, sports cars and aircraft --is setting up shop in the Voderady industrial park, a half-hour's drive from Bratislava.

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