



**YEARBOOK  
OF SLOVAKIA'S  
FOREIGN POLICY  
2016**

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**RESEARCH CENTER  
OF THE SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION**

BRATISLAVA 2017

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MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN  
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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# FOREWORD

A year ago I wrote in the foreword to the 2015 Yearbook that with respect to international affairs (and hence Slovak foreign policy), 2016 would not be any easier than 2015, and might be even more difficult. This has proven to be not far from the truth, in various aspects of foreign policy. Within the European Union we once again witnessed the sight of terrorism costing many lives. Internationally, ongoing wars – both far from and near to the EU neighborhood – brought more tension and instability to international relations.

The EU itself faced its own internal struggles and challenges. Certainly the most consequential issue was the United Kingdom referendum, and their “yes” on the “Leave” vote. This is an unprecedented situation, whose end is still open and uncertain. Disagreements and misunderstandings among member states as to how to deal with the migration crisis continued, not to mention the ongoing ambiguity regarding the reform of EU institutions, the requests of Germany and France for a multispeed Europe, and the situation in Turkey, as well as an increase in general support among populations for populist leaders – for politicians without solutions that could actually work, or any clear agenda; politicians who, in the case of the UK, were so surprised at their success that they left almost immediately in order not to be held responsible for further developments.

For Slovakia, 2016 was an extraordinary year. Not due to the fact that parliamentary elections took place in March, as their impact on Slovakia’s foreign and European policy was negligible. It was extraordinary because the Slovak Republic held its very first Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Slovakia presided during turbulent times, having to deal with issues (and even better with their impact) which no Presidency country has ever had to deal with. One must not forget this context when evaluating our Presidency.

The year 2016 has shown us again that we must move fast and be constructive in searching for solutions to the EU’s problems. The EU’s political leaders, as well as its

civil society, businesses, and academia – all of them must put an end to competing for the most politically beautiful, and pursue instead expert answers to current issues and problems.

All of these matters, and perhaps more, are addressed here in what is now our 18<sup>th</sup> Yearbook – whether it's an assessment of our performance in the promotion of our goals and interests in the international environment, an analysis of the actions taken in pursuit of our priority foreign policy goals, or an evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of one of the instruments of their implementation. Obviously, the book can only offer its analytical assessments within the natural limits (capacities and financial resources) of a publication of this kind, not able to cover every field and region in which our foreign policy was visible or active. We offer here what we consider the most crucial.

As per tradition, the views and opinions of the Foreign Minister are presented first in the Yearbook. In his contribution he presents and assesses various issues and aspects of Slovakia's foreign policy – which are thoroughly examined by other authors in the book – as well as his opinions on the future of our foreign policy after the Presidency. His piece offers the reader a unique opportunity to see various issues from the angle of the person responsible for implementing foreign policy, as well as from the angle of experts who do not have to take party politics into consideration when writing.

As our goal is constructive critical debate and the search for real answers to current challenges, in the following selection of authors you will find mainly experts from NGOs/think-tanks and academia, since we (the editorial board) assume that their distance from the practical implementation of foreign policy (with all the direct and indirect influences involved) might bring a certain added value to their perspective.

The expert section of the book opens with an evaluation of Slovakia's performance in the international environment. The contribution of Zuzana Gabrižová, editor in chief of Euractiv.sk, assessing Slovakia's performance in 2016 within the EU, serves – as always – as the introductory text for this section. Her piece traces the sequence and milestones that defined those developments relevant both to the Slovak–EU debate and to Slovak actions vis-a-vis the EU. Martin Vlachynský, senior analyst at the Institute of Economic and Social Studies, in his economic analysis of 2016, defines the economic tone of the year as being one played by well-known instruments. The Eurozone financial system, the deficits, quantitative easing, and, of course, the Greek crisis, remained topics of the day. Pavol Szalai, senior editor at Euractiv.sk, focuses on Slovakia's energy policy, which in 2016 faced a different challenge: to preserve its role as a gas transit country, and resume its role as an electricity exporter. The section focusing on the international environment concludes with an analysis of Slovakia's security and defense policy in 2016, written by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association's two security policy analysts, Samuel Goda and Dušan Fischer.

The second part of the Yearbook, focused on the priorities of our foreign policy, opens with an article by Tomáš Strážay, head of SFPA's Central and Southeastern Europe research program. He analyzes Slovakia's Central European activities during what was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of Visegrad cooperation, while focusing also on the future role of the V4 in the EU after Brexit, and on the future of the V4 as such. Slovak involvement in what might be characterized as a turbulent year in the Western Balkans, with its progress shifting from positive hope to negative development, was

discussed, as traditionally, by the independent expert Július Lőrincz. The bilateral and multilateral context of our Eastern policy was the main subject of the analysis of Juraj Marušiak from the Institute of Political Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences. He argues that our policy towards the Eastern Europe was largely determined by two things in 2016 – our Council of the EU Presidency and Minister Lajčák's effort to become the next UN Secretary-General.

The third part of the book, devoted to foreign policy instruments, deals with the functioning of our most visible bilateral foreign policy tool – development cooperation. Maroš Čaučík, director of *Dobrá novina* – the Development Cooperation Program of eRko – an experienced expert as well as practitioner, provides an analysis of the practical fulfillment of our set goals, in his overview of Slovakia's development assistance activities in 2016. His piece also offers a set of proposals and recommendations for improving the quality and efficiency of Slovak ODA.

As usual the expert section is supplemented by appendices, such as a chronology of the most important foreign policy events, a list of international treaties, information on the structure and representatives of state administrative bodies operating within foreign policy, a list of diplomatic missions and representatives of the SR abroad, the diplomatic corps of the SR, information on military missions abroad, etc.

I firmly believe that this Yearbook will once again find its readers, and serve all those who are interested in the past, present, and future of Slovakia and her foreign policy. In conclusion, I would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic for its cooperation in this project and its support, and for the fact that thanks to this cooperation we are able to continue in building this much needed tradition.

Peter Brezáni  
editor



# SLOVAKIA AND ITS FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN POLICY IN 2016

*MIROSLAV LAJČÁK*

This is the seventh occasion on which I have had the opportunity to present my thoughts to you in this forum. Taking stock of our foreign and European policy here has never been dull – the recent years, with both their successes and complications, have been dynamic, and often dramatic. I do not tend to use superlatives or exaggerate needlessly, but in assessing 2016 I can openly say that it was one of the most dynamic and significant years since Slovakia became independent. At the same time, it is clear that we are witnessing an extraordinarily hectic and complicated period of our modern history.

The year 2016 can be seen as the beginning of an era that will change the conditions of our foreign policy. From my perspective, the year brought several new foreign policy challenges and changes having a direct and unprecedented impact on Slovakia's interests. The changes occurring all around us are not merely short-term deviations tending to return to a state of balance. They are determined by the dynamics of technological development, climate change, political direction, and a new social inequality. New threats, altered circumstances, and, primarily, unpredictability, have significantly influenced the set of arrangements in which our diplomacy has felt comfortable so far. These factors have naturally had a significant impact on Slovakia at home, as well.

We must not allow the speed and extent of these changes to lead us to resignation, lethargy or fatalism. Slovak foreign policy continues to enjoy respect, and to attract broad support on the domestic political scene, demonstrating an ability to find responsible and adequate solutions acceptable to all players. Slovakia has also managed to create suitable conditions for asserting its own national interests. It

has unequivocally and consistently acted in favor of cultivating and stabilizing the international environment, applying the principles of democracy, solidarity, mutual respect, and support for human rights against a growing number of threats which are sometimes difficult to recognize. Our journey has not always been easy, but it has been principled, which has ensured the coherence of Slovak foreign policy. The Ministry has had to cope with numerous challenges, and has managed, within a complex global context, to turn several opportunities arising during the year into successes.

## **NEW ELECTIONS, NEW GOVERNMENT, FOREIGN POLICY CONTINUITY**

I will begin my assessment at home, since in addition to events occurring abroad, our foreign and European policy performance also reflected our own domestic political developments. 2016 was a year of parliamentary elections. The new coalition government highlighted the continuity of Slovakia's pro-European and pro-Atlantic orientation as in its national interest. The following priority of the diplomacy department arose from the government's policy statement for 2016–2020: to flexibly react to the opportunities and negatives of the external environment. In 2016, the Ministry thoroughly fulfilled this task, including in the areas of consular service, expatriate care, and economic, public and cultural diplomacy. The economy, trade, energy, finance, ecology, sustainable development, transport, education, culture, information technology and security – and of course the living standards of citizens – all of these entered into practical diplomacy in 2016, more urgently than ever before. The diplomacy department, therefore, had to adapt continuously.

## **SLOVAKIA AND EUROPE**

When assessing the year 2016, we are not interested exclusively in what happened, but much more so in what will happen in the future – the future of the European Union, Slovakia's larger world and life environment. We need an open and realistic debate on what kind of Europe it should be, from our point of view. All the more so, given that Slovakia has been a European success story for over ten years now. This is also why the basic logic behind our thinking is this: a successful European Union means a successful Slovakia. It is therefore obvious that we care about the Europeans Union's positive development, its unity and common vision, and also its needed reform. The events on our continent show that the current contours of the European Union correspond neither to the expectations of the public nor to the urgency of challenges. We are aware that the Union will never be perfect, but it is nonetheless the best alternative for providing a safe place in the world both for Slovakia and for Europe itself.

In 2016, therefore, the absolute priority of our foreign and European policy was the first Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Its beginning was

marked by the decision, in June, of the citizens of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. This decision defined the atmosphere in which our Presidency was to be conducted. Its most significant event, therefore, was the informal summit of the heads of states and governments of the European Union's 27 member states, which took place in Bratislava in September. The summit reacted promptly and positively to the uncertainty and a certain nervousness within the European Union, resulting in a common commitment among the member states to continuing with the European project. It also started a process of reflection on the future of Europe, which was primarily intended to restore the citizens' confidence in the Union. The future of the European Union (in connection with the sixtieth anniversary of the Treaties of Rome), and issues of its security within the wider context, remain at the center of our attention. Slovakia is also watching very closely, and is sensitive to, the process of Brexit, since there are 80,000 Slovak citizens living, working and studying in the United Kingdom.

It is, therefore, with a sense of satisfaction that I can state that we successfully fulfilled our Presidency. We accomplished our task in an innovative way, not only during the preparatory stages but even during the Presidency itself. In the demanding situation in which the European Union now finds itself, there are four priority areas in which our achieved results can be viewed positively: we have fulfilled our ambitions to strengthen the EU economically, to modernize and extend the common market in the areas of energy and digital economy, to work on a sustainable migration and asylum policy, and, with respect to the European Union's external environment, to strengthen trade agreements and the enlargement policy.

We put practical needs first, those that actually improve people's lives. For example, in tackling unfair business practices, and in an effort to strengthen the position of farmers in the supply chain, we achieved the inclusion of a dual quality system for food products in the European Commission's work program. We also contributed to the abolition of mobile roaming charges for consumers in 2017, and reached an agreement with the European Parliament on 5G technology for high-speed internet connection.

In the extraordinarily difficult period following the United Kingdom's referendum result, the Slovak Presidency managed to negotiate the EU budget for 2017. Under our leadership, a political agreement was reached with the European Parliament on monetary market funds. The Council adopted a directive which gives tax authorities access to information possessed by those authorities responsible for the prevention of money laundering. During our Presidency, we managed to unblock negotiations and hence allow an agreement to be reached on a directive regarding fraud damaging to the EU's financial interests, which had been the subject of negotiations for over four years. Another important success was the reaching of an agreement with the European Parliament on the reviewing of decisions establishing mechanisms for information exchange related to intergovernmental agreements in the area of energy – energy security being one of the basic building blocks of the European Union.

The Paris Climate Agreement represented a milestone in the fight against climate change, and our Presidency made the maximum effort to achieve its ratification at the Bratislava summit. We also prepared the so-called effective solidarity proposal,

which responded constructively to the halted discussion on the Dublin system reform. The proposal retained the European principle of solidarity and aid by every member state, but also took into account the varying resources and capacity of individual members. Also, the European Border and Coast Guard officially began to operate.

There are many substantial areas in which cooperation among Central European countries is either needed or already exists, cooperation that relies on common values and interests. Thanks to these, we have always communicated openly with our neighbors. We have successfully built up both bilateral relations and regional cooperation, particularly within the Visegrad Four format. Slovakia has promoted the idea that the group should offer constructive solutions to the current crises. It was also in our interest to prevent the creation of potential dividing lines between East and West. This is also why both European and global players maintained their interest in a political dialogue in the "V4+" format during the Czech and Polish presidencies.

The Slovak Presidency positively contributed to the development of bilateral relations with European partners and key global players, and also to the revival of Slovakia's bilateral relations with Latin American, Caribbean, Near and Middle Eastern, Sub-Saharan and Asian countries. The numerous mutual visits with the highest officials from these countries were an impulse for developing a mainly economic cooperation. This has resulted in a commitment to exploit such a positive moment, in practical terms, in the coming years.

It was not, however, all victories and positives. In the EU's immediate neighborhood, the Ukraine crisis has not been resolved. The European Union is not a sufficiently significant player in this matter and the attention given to Ukraine diminished during the year. It is unfortunately the case that for some European Union member states Ukraine is a distant problem. They do not feel the urgent need to comment on it, let alone on its geopolitical connections. It is also important that the integration of the Western Balkans resonates as a common European theme, and that we, as the European Union, engage more there. In several countries of that region there is a growing nationalism, instability, and tension. It is therefore important to highlight those positive regional examples worth following, such as Montenegro. This is also why Slovakia did not falter in its support of the enlargement policy, and managed during our Presidency to open four chapters of the accession process with Serbia, and two with Montenegro.

## **REINFORCING SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD AND IN EUROPE**

In 2016, the Syrian conflict continued to destabilize not only the Middle East but also the European Union's own neighborhood, and contributed to an influx of migrants. The beginning of the European Border and Coast Guard's operations in October 2016, and the Slovak proposal of the effective solidarity concept, served to bring closer together significantly divergent views on how to resolve the migration issue.

The migration crisis also pointed to the need to connect development activities and humanitarian aid more closely, and to synchronize these two realms of activity in terms of content and time.

The crises affecting our immediate environment pointed to the vulnerability of our “western” civilization. Slovakia was well aware of the opposite dangers of eroding the observance of rules and values on the one hand, and of growing populism and extremism on the other. These threats spread within Europe and throughout the world, threatening cooperation and undermining consensus, and in the end may have serious consequences for our way of life. Both Slovakia and Europe therefore realized the necessity to do more to protect their citizens, and to contribute to peace and stability both within and outside of their immediate neighborhood, building on the conclusions of the European Council of December 2016. In this connection, security became a natural priority, both in Slovakia and elsewhere.

This is also why we participated in strengthening the international framework for fighting terrorism and violent extremism. The key security event for us was the NATO summit in Warsaw, which strengthened the role of the Alliance. It emphasized the need to strategically adapt NATO to new challenges and to intensify cooperation between NATO and the European Union. The worsening security situation in the world; the weakening confidence of citizens in standard institutions; the need to ensure internal security, the fight against terrorism, and cooperation between NATO and the EU; and various other phenomena and challenges – all required the accelerated preparation of the new Slovak Security Strategy.

Slovakia has always tried to reach a balance in its foreign policy – for example to strengthen transatlantic dialogue and to communicate with Russia at the same time. Addressing relations with Russia is a necessity for the long-term stabilization of Europe. The difficulties the European Union has in agreeing on any common policy towards Russia and in speaking with a single voice are not favorable conditions for achieving this goal. The Union’s relations with Russia, however, will never be simple. One of the reasons for this is undoubtedly the fact that our foreign policy accepts the declarations of countries in our eastern neighborhood that they belong to European civilization, and continues to regard them as an integral part of Europe.

The year 2016 was extraordinary for Slovakia in the multilateral dimension as well. Slovak foreign policy is undoubtedly a values-based policy, since it emphasizes the principles of multilateralism, observance of international law, and respect among nations. The more thoroughly these principles are observed, the stronger the guarantees and the more favorable the environment for our foreign policy. Slovakia was engaged in the vote for a new UN Secretary General for the first time in this environment – with the support of the highest constitutional officials and the majority of the country’s political parties, and promoting the principles mentioned above. The success of our candidacy for the post of President of the 72<sup>nd</sup> UN General Assembly also confirmed international confidence in our country. Slovakia also gained, for the first time, the Presidency of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe for 2019. Candidacies are a significant opportunity for Slovakia to influence international politics and to confirm its position as a respected partner. They also illustrate the position Slovak diplomacy has gained on the international scene after a quarter century of independence.

## ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY AND CITIZENS SERVICE

Economic diplomacy is an integral part of our foreign policy. In 2016 it focused primarily on the purposeful promotion of Slovakia's trade and economic interests. The priorities and the goals that had been set were successfully accomplished, mainly thanks to an enhancement of the coordination and cooperation between the participating players, particularly the Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency, the Council for Strategic Management, the Coordination and Operations Control of SARIO, and the Slovak Transport, Construction and Regional Development Minister's Council for the Coordination of SACR Operations. The intensive use of business missions directed not only at several Asian and African countries, but also at the Balkans and the EU, also contributed to valuable results. The missions focused on searching for market opportunities, the promotion of direct foreign investment, and engaging Slovak businessmen in EU projects. In doing so, we proceeded in line with the approved External Economic Relations Strategy for 2014–2020. During our Presidency, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) was signed. We perceive this agreement to be a modern, complex and ambitious document which is not only of economic significance, but has also wider strategic and geopolitical implications. The agreement should become a template for further trade liberalization negotiations. Presentations at international events were another economic diplomacy tool that was exploited, with a particular focus on innovations, new technology and research.

Slovakia was effective in the defense of energy interests – both its own and those of the European Union. In terms of the security of supplies, we managed to underscore the importance of the continued use of the Ukrainian–Slovak gas corridor. We thereby managed to attract the support of like-minded countries, arguing against the intention to build the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline bypassing the Ukrainian–Slovak corridor, as a project incompatible with the principles of the Energy Union or with the geopolitical interests of the European Union as a whole. Our persistent objections helped Eustream in its negotiations with the Russian partner Gazprom regarding gas transport after 2019.

The diplomacy department also regarded the ensuring of effective protection and help for Slovak citizens in emergency situations abroad as a priority in 2016. It enhanced its consular services and store of available information, in response to the instability of the external environment, new security threats in the world, and the continuously growing mobility of our citizens. In addition to improving the legislative framework of our consular help, it also focused on the use of new technology. Special attention was given to the protection of children and youth under international law.

Important progress was also made in the area of expatriate policy. The new Slovak Government Council for Expatriate Affairs is helping to improve interdepartmental coordination in this area. The first unified country brand, expressed in the slogan *Good Idea Slovakia*, was a significant contribution to Slovakia's global exposure and reputation. We also started preparations for events commemorating 1918, emphasizing the message of peace for the modern world. We focused mainly on their international dimension and an emphasis of the fact that Slovakia has become a successful, dynamic, and modern country.

## **I**N CONCLUSION

In 2016 Slovakia presented itself on the international scene as a responsible, trustworthy, and solidarity-based partner. It confirmed its reputation as a significant, reliable and decisive member of regional groups and international organizations. In 2017, the Foreign and European Affairs Ministry, in cooperation with other departments and civil society representatives, will continue to prepare and promote our priorities and interests. Needless to say, Slovak foreign and European policy concerns us all. This is a common, outward-facing presentation of Slovakia, requiring both coordination and the ability to react together to unpredictable events. Our main priority is to support the European framework, to which the key interests of Slovakia are tied – to promote common solutions and the observance of rules, and to overcome internal European crises, division lines, tensions, and the consequences of Brexit. It is more and more apparent that a new form of transatlantic partnership awaits us – at least as far as shared financial responsibility for our own security is concerned.



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I.

THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC  
IN THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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# THE YEAR OF THE EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

ZUZANA GABRIŽOVÁ

The EU entered 2016 in continuous crisis management mode – more and more so the “new normal” for the continent. The results of the UK’s “Brexit” referendum had to be digested with a view to launching the unprecedented and difficult process of this important member state’s withdrawal.

Other crises (economic, migration) were less intense in terms of the urgency felt at the highest political levels – especially as compared to 2015, when the migration crisis escalated and Greece was (again) on the verge of leaving the eurozone. However, this relatively calmer period was hardly taken advantage of by member states in order to forge a substantial unity that would allow to them to get ahead of key challenges.

For Slovakia, 2016 was a notable year domestically, and also in terms of its presence and impact within the EU. The first months were marked by the run-up ahead of the general elections held on March 5<sup>th</sup>, which substantially changed the political landscape of the country. Not only did the elections produce a coalition government of four (later reduced to three) political parties, but they also strongly raised the profile of right-wing extremists and populist political actors. On the one hand, this has had considerable effect on the domestic discourse regarding the EU and foreign policy in general. For the first time, a political party (Kotleba–ĽSNS) represented in the parliament has called for Slovakia to leave the EU. On the other hand, this effect has to a large extent been neutralized by the soothing effect and sense of responsibility linked to the preparation and execution of Slovakia’s Council of the EU Presidency in the second half of 2016.

Understandably, it is mostly the Presidency that shaped Slovakia’s EU track record during the year. It also underlined the professional skills of Slovak diplomats and ex-

perts, pulled back on specific national positions, and inspired Slovak-specific initiatives at the EU level.

The structure of this chapter follows the sequence and milestones that defined those developments relevant to the Slovak EU debate and to Slovak actions vis-a-vis the EU. In the first part, the focus is on the EU-related drivers of the pre-election debate, most notably migration, along with the pre-referendum EU–UK deal. It also offers an overview of how the Slovak political parties approached EU issues and policies within their manifestos and strategic thinking.

The second part analyzes the consequences of the election results, as well as the narrative, program, and results of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union against the backdrop of public opinion.

## EU DEBATE BEFORE THE ELECTIONS: MIGRATION, DEAL WITH THE UK, ELECTION MANIFESTOS

### *MIGRATION*

The end-of-the-year Holiday Season ended early, with Prime Minister Robert Fico (Smer–SD) holding three press conferences within the span of 5 days,<sup>1</sup> dedicated to the perceived security threat posed by asylum seekers coming to the EU. During one of these (reacting to the New Year’s Eve events in Cologne, Germany), he said the government would adopt measures to “prevent the emergence of a concentrated Muslim community in Slovakia,”<sup>2</sup> since it is impossible to integrate large groups of asylum seekers from a different cultural background. This rhetoric was illustrative of a larger trend in which the governing party Smer–SD has tried to position itself as the political force that will “protect Slovakia” against hypothetical threats, ahead of looming elections.

Robert Fico pushed this a bit further when he asserted that Slovak voters should judge the political parties on the basis of whether they “will or will not import” refugees to Slovakia.<sup>3</sup> Parallel to this, Smer–SD reduced the migration problem itself to the issue of protecting the external borders of the EU. At the European level this translated into a call for an express enactment of the European Border and Coast Guard proposal, brought by the European Commission in 2015. Prime Minister Fico even urged Eu-

<sup>1</sup> M. Tódová, “Fico mal za päť dní tri tlačovky k utečencom, k zdravotníctvu žiadnu,” [Fico had five press conferences in three days about refugees, but nothing about health service] *Denník N*, January 7, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/337276/fico-mal-za-pat-dni-tri-tlacovky-utecencom-zdravotnictvu-ziadnu/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> “Iná vláda by na Slovensko navozila tisícky migrantov, vyhlásil Fico,” [Another government would have brought to Slovakia thousands of migrants, said Fico] *Aktuality.sk*, January 14, 2016. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/311990/ina-vlada-by-na-slovensko-navozila-tisicky-migrantov-vyhlasil-fico/> (accessed on January 28 2017).

ropean Council President Donald Tusk and President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker to consider an extraordinary summit on the matter.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE EU–UK DEAL**

The EU's first months of 2016 were also dedicated to finalizing the New Settlement for the UK. Cameron said he would only campaign for Great Britain to stay in the EU ahead of the referendum if such a deal was reached. The February European Council reached a consensus on the deal.<sup>5</sup> Slovakia, while maintaining that any deal with the UK could not result in workers from the EU being discriminated against, hailed the final wording as "worth it to keep the EU together."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Robert Fico said that the New Settlement amounts to an official recognition of two speeds in the further development of the EU – one within the eurozone and one for countries outside of the single currency area. Slovakia also viewed positively the British agenda for fighting red tape to boost competitiveness and strengthening the role of national parliaments.

At this time, Slovakia was already consumed with upcoming elections. As with the eurozone crisis ahead of elections in 2010, the refugee/migration issue formed a substantial part of the pre-election debate in Slovakia – at least until it was overshadowed by more domestic issues, such as, for example, the teachers' strike and corrupt practices within the health care sector.

### **ELECTION MANIFESTOS**

A closer look at the positions<sup>7</sup> of the relevant political parties towards the EU and its policies offers a more nuanced picture. None of these parties favored a substantial deepening of integration in any policy area, the prevailing feeling being that the EU needs first and foremost an internal consolidation in the face of its various crises.

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<sup>4</sup> "Fico chce európsku pohraničnú stráž skôr," [Fico wants European border guards earlier] *EurActiv.sk*, January 11, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/zahranicie-a-bezpecnost/fico-chce-europsku-pohranicnu-straz-skor-024726/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> "European Council conclusions, 18-19 February 2016," EUCO 1/16, February 19, 2016. Available online: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/19-euco-conclusions/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> "Cameron má dohodu, začína predreferendová kampaň. Lídri únie prezentujú dohodu ako najlepší kompromis. Britský premiér už ohlásil referendum na 23. júna," [Cameron has a deal, starts the pre-referendum campaign. Union leaders present the agreement as the best compromise. British Prime Minister has announced a referendum for June 23<sup>rd</sup>] *EurActiv.sk*, February 22, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/buducnost-eu/cameron-ma-dohodu-zacina-predreferendova-kampan/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> R. Geist, Z. Gabrižová, "Analýza postojov a programov slovenských politických strán pred voľbami do Národnej rady 2016," [Analysis of attitudes and programs of political parties before the 2016 election for the Slovak National Council] *EurActiv.sk*, February 26, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/analyzy/buducnost-eu/eu-slovenske-volby-nr-sr-2016-rozsirenje-bojoveho-pola/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

With regard to migration, almost all of the parties (except SaS and SNS) criticized Smer-SD for handling the issue at the European level. Siet' and KDH denounced Slovakia's lawsuit against so-called refugee redistribution quotas. Others focused their criticism on what they perceived as an exploiting of the issue for campaign purposes in disregard of the damage to Slovakia's reputation, and on fear-inciting rhetoric. Most of them called for a European solution, although that usually meant repeating the call for the protection of borders, and the solving of problems within the countries of origin. None of them promised to drop the lawsuit, although KDH voiced a willingness to take in more refugees.

The majority of parties saw the upcoming Slovak Presidency of the Council as an opportunity in a broad sense (SaS alone seeing no specific added value in it), again without specific expectations. There was the omnipresent perception of the real possibility of disintegration in the EU (countries exiting the EU, the eurozone or Schengen). While most of them saw this development as a threat, SaS and SNS did not see these tendencies as being necessarily only negative. For example, SaS was curious to see how the United Kingdom would do outside the EU.

All political parties consider the Visegrad Group to be a platform which multiplies the influence of Slovakia in the EU and helps coordinate positions. Only the representative of KDH was very critical of the role of the Visegrad Group at the EU level. Although some parties' representatives were puzzled by political developments in Hungary and Poland, no one thought that the mechanism of "rule of law" as applied by the European Commission against Poland was justified or a right way to tackle the issue.

The majority of parties (with the exception of SNS) supported the strengthening of the defense capacities of the EU, however none of them was proposing a major qualitative step in the direction of building a European army or weakening the role of NATO. Some parties argued that Europe will have to rely more on its own capacities, especially in order to tackle conflicts in its neighborhood (SMER-SD, Most-Híd), a way of thinking which gains new momentum with a Trump administration in the White House.

When it comes to the situation in Ukraine, Smer-SD took a "pragmatic" position towards Ukraine and Russia (opposition to sanctions and Nord Stream II). It argued that the EU had failed to communicate with Russia regarding Ukraine. SNS, and to a certain extent OĽaNO, echoed this position. However, OĽaNO-NOVA, Most-Híd and KDH also argued that Ukraine should be offered a clear European future perspective. OĽaNO-NOVA requested a national action plan of assistance to Ukraine. Most-Híd and OĽaNO-NOVA were against normalization of relations with Russia to their pre-Crimea-Annexation status, until Russia fixes the situation and respects international norms.

As compared to the past, it is now more and more common for Slovak political parties to formulate specific positions on EU development and EU policies. What remains a persistent feature is that many times the EU is mentioned as a reference framework for comparing the situation in Slovakia to elsewhere in the union, or to targets set at the EU level. Most of the time they present the EU as part of the solution to the problems faced by Slovakia or by EU countries generally (migration, economic development, environmental, etc.). SNS and SaS are the exceptions in the sense that

they perceive the EU and its actions/initiatives as a threat, or as having potentially negative effects on Slovakia.

The elections produced a rather unexpected outcome,<sup>8</sup> and generated a polarizing discussion over the forming of a new governing coalition after four years of Smer-SD being in power alone. KDH, the only party that had maintained a continuous presence in the Slovak parliament since 1993, for the first time did not reach the five per cent threshold and lost its seats.

More importantly, two parties that entered parliament for the first time are either strongly Eurosceptic populist (Sme Rodina, established just few months ahead of elections) or openly anti-EU, advocating Slovakia's exit from the EU (Kotleba-ĽSNS, right-wing extremists). The latter started collecting signatures in July 2016 with a view to initiating a referendum on Slovakia leaving both the EU and NATO. For a referendum to be automatically triggered, 350,000 signatures are needed according to the constitution.

## NEW GOVERNMENT AND THE EU

These observations suggest that the coalition that emerged from the March elections – Smer-SD in the leading role and SNS and Most-Híd (and at first Siet<sup>9</sup>) as the junior partners – brought together very diverse mind-sets when it comes to the EU.

The principal role of Smer-SD, and the pro-European positions of Most-Híd (and Siet), have clearly left a bigger mark on the government manifesto<sup>10</sup> than the Euro-sceptic thinking of SNS. In this program, the government vows to continue a clear pro-European and pro-Atlantic orientation, and to work on boosting the “resilience” of the EU to counter the tendency towards fragmentation (a narrative also used during Slovak Council Presidency). It promises to intensify the domestic debate on the EU, with a view to the European election in 2019.

Institutionally, it advocates balance among the EU's institutions, and favors strengthening the role of national parliaments and the role of the V4 in coordinating EU-related positions.

More specifically, it also calls for strengthening the external border and returning to a functional Schengen. It even mentions support for introducing a fiscal stabilization mechanism for the eurozone and other initiatives in financial/economic area, to be pushed forward during the Council Presidency. There are mentions of various

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<sup>8</sup> Results: SMER-SD – 28.28 per cent, SaS – 12.11 per cent, OĽaNO-NOVA – 11.02 per cent, SNS – 8.64 per cent, Kotleba-ĽSNS – 8.04 per cent, Sme Rodina – 6.62 per cent, Most-Híd – 6.5 per cent, Siet – 5.6 per cent, KDH – 4.94 per cent, SMK – MKP – 4.04 per cent.

<sup>9</sup> The party Siet disappeared from the political arena by fall 2016. Internally it started to fracture right after the decision was made to join the Smer-SD led government. After five of the seven remaining Siet MPs joined the Most-Híd party in August 2016, the coalition was effectively reduced to three parties.

<sup>10</sup> “Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky na roky 2016–2020,” [Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the period 2016–2020] Government Office of the Slovak Republic. Available online: [http://www.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/6483\\_programove-vyhlasenie-vlady-slovenskej-republiky.pdf](http://www.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/6483_programove-vyhlasenie-vlady-slovenskej-republiky.pdf) (accessed on January 28, 2017).

aspects of the EU's internal market, the EU's environmental policies, and the ambition to maintain the cohesion policy as the main investment policy of the EU. Interestingly, the text points to a realistic scenario in which Slovakia will receive a smaller allocation of European funds after 2020, thus highlighting the need to work on the diversification of investments.

## **RUN-UP TO THE COUNCIL PRESIDENCY**

Slovakia launched its preparations for the Council Presidency in 2012. Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 and the establishment of the permanent President of the European Council, the role of the rotating Presidency has somewhat diminished. Nevertheless, it is still responsible for forging consensus on the EU's legislative and sometimes political agenda, and then negotiating the Council's position with the European Parliament and the European Commission. The only exception to this is the common foreign and security policy, where the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy is mostly in charge and the rotating Presidency plays a supporting role. Slovakia opted for a so-called Brussels-based Presidency, meaning that although it hosted informal ministerial meetings in Bratislava in July and September, all of the actual work took place in Brussels.

Once the dust had settled in Slovakia after the elections, the Presidency became high on the agenda again.

Personnel choices in the new Slovak government allowed for a great degree of continuity. Key ministries – Foreign and European Affairs, Finance and Interior – remained under the leadership of the previous ministers, Miroslav Lajčák, Peter Kažimír and Robert Kaliňák respectively. No major disruptions occurred in the final preparations for the Council Presidency as the government assumed its work well ahead of the starting date.

Migration was the most prolific public policy issue prior to Slovakia's Council Presidency. During this time, the Dutch Presidency in the Council did not push too hard on implementing the relocation scheme for refugees agreed earlier. Nevertheless, the European Commission tabled a draft reform of the Dublin system (the focal point of any reform of migration and asylum in the EU) on May 4<sup>th</sup>. The most controversial part of the proposal<sup>11</sup> envisage a "fairness mechanism" that would automatically establish when a country is handling a disproportionate number of asylum applications. Under this proposal, the number of refugees above this threshold should be relocated across the EU. A Member State would have the option temporarily to not take part in the reallocation, but in that case it would have to make a solidarity contribution of 250,000 euros for each applicant for whom it would otherwise have been responsible.

Slovak interior minister Robert Kaliňák spared no time in rebuffing the proposal as not "respecting the reality," and as coming at a time when a hard fought consensus had been found on closing the Balkan route and on a deal with Turkey. "In the middle

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<sup>11</sup> "Towards a sustainable and fair Common European Asylum System," European Commission. Available online: [http://ec.europa.eu/news/2016/05/20160504\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/news/2016/05/20160504_en.htm) (accessed on January 28, 2017).

of these very sensitive negotiations, here is a proposal that throws us nine months back," he said.<sup>12</sup>

He did, however, offer a glimpse of a constructive attitude. "I will be direct and say right away that Slovakia will not support this proposal, but we will always work towards the number of countries that look for a sensible solution being as high as possible."<sup>13</sup>

Later in the same month, on May 27<sup>th</sup>, the French Socialist Party (PS) openly criticized Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico in a statement,<sup>14</sup> for saying that Islam has no place in Slovakia. The PS voiced its concern about the upcoming Slovak Council Presidency in this respect, and called for unspecified steps to be taken by the Party of the European Socialist.

Around this same time, in a sign of good will, Slovakia promised to take in 100 refugees from Greece (as part of the voluntary scheme of relocation agreed in 2015), saying it will focus on the most vulnerable groups, namely single mothers with children.<sup>15, 16</sup>

## WORK PROGRAM OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU PRESIDENCY

Building on a detailed screening of pending and expected EU legislation and initiatives, the Slovak government prepared a lengthy document<sup>17</sup> describing the state of play as divided between each of the various Council formations. This document served as the basis for a shorter program<sup>18</sup> of the Presidency, adopted by the government in June after the UK's Brexit referendum.

<sup>12</sup> Z. Gabrižová, "250 000 eur: Sankcia alebo vykúpenie?" [250 000 euros: penalty or redemption?] *EurActiv.sk*, May 5, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/zahranicie-a-bezpecnost/250-000-eur-sankcia-alebo-vykupenie/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> "Le Parti socialiste condamne les propos du Premier ministre slovaque sur l'islam," [Socialist Party has condemned the Slovak Prime Minister's proposal on Islam] Socialist Party (France), May 27, 2016. Available online: <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/parti-socialiste-condamne-propos-premier-ministre-slovaque-lislam/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> D. Mikušovič, "Slovensko sa chystá prijať stovku utečencov aj napriek Ficovým výrokom pred voľbami," [Slovakia is going to take in hundreds of refugees despite Fico's statement before the elections] *Denník N*, June 2, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/475635/slovensko-sa-chysta-prijat-stovku-utecencov-greckych-taborov/> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> As of January 2017, only nine persons have been relocated and the number of places formally pledged by Slovakia has been modified to 30.

<sup>17</sup> "Východiská programu predsedníctva Slovenskej republiky v Rade EÚ," [Draft program of the Slovak Presidency in the EU Council] Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2016. Available online: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=25364> (accessed on January 28, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> "Program of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/data/documents/presidency-programme-eng-final5.pdf> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

“I consider it my duty as a plenipotentiary (for the Presidency) that this document have very strong political ownership,”<sup>19</sup> said State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs Ivan Korčok, explaining why this document would be decided on by the government.

In it, the Slovak Presidency pledged to work on strengthening citizens’ confidence in the EU, and to fight fragmentation via increasing the EU’s unity and coherence and delivering tangible results. The aim was to bring a “positive agenda” with real benefits and sustainable solutions, as opposed to crisis management. Policy priorities were divided into four broad topics – Economically strong Europe, Modern Single Market, Sustainable Migration and Asylum Policy, and Global Europe.

When presenting the Presidency’s priorities in Brussels, Prime Minister Fico made sure to highlight that Slovakia is aware of its responsibilities as presiding country: “We want to be an honest broker. That does not mean changing our national positions, it only means not putting them on the table.”<sup>20</sup>

## SHADOW OF BREXIT

The uncertainty surrounding the British referendum cast a shadow over the preparations for the Presidency. The concern was more than that the decision towards Brexit would steer the political attention away from the agenda set by the Presidency. What made the uncertainty even more palpable was the fact no one could quite tell what the protocol or the next steps on the British side would be.<sup>21</sup>

British voters opting for Brexit with 51.9 per cent of the votes<sup>22</sup> did take many by surprise. The leaders of the EU27 met in Brussels for an extraordinary gathering that issued a common statement.<sup>23</sup> In it, the leaders said there will be no negotiations before Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty is triggered, but also warned that there will be no access to the EU’s Single Market for a post-Brexit Britain without respecting the four freedoms that go with it, including the freedom of movement.

Just before the referendum was held, the Slovak government came out with an initiative to hold a summit in Bratislava to reflect on the next strategic planning for the

<sup>19</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Ivan Korčok: Predsedníctvo EÚ je vysoko politická záležitosť,” [Ivan Korčok: The EU Presidency is a significant political issue] *EurActiv.sk*, April 27, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/rozhovory/slovenske-predsednictvo/predsednictvo-eu-je-vysoko-politicka-zalezitost/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> P. Szalai, “Pred predsedníctvom prijme sto utečencov, migrácia bude jeho hlavná výzva,” [Before the Presidency we will take in a hundred refugees, migration will be its major challenge] *EurActiv.sk*, June 2, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/slovenske-predsednictvo/pred-predsednictvom-prijme-sto-utecencov-migracia-bude-jeho-hlavna-vyzva/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Had Britain decided to stay, the Presidency would have focused on the implementation of the New Settlement for Britain in the EU that David Cameron had negotiated with the EU27.

<sup>22</sup> The turnout was 72.2 per cent, with the “Leave” side emerging victorious in England and Wales, while only reaching 38 per cent and 44 per cent in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively.

<sup>23</sup> “Statement by the EU leaders and the Netherlands Presidency on the outcome of the UK referendum,” Council of the EU, June 24, 2016. Available online: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/06/24-joint-statement-uk-referendum/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

EU. After securing the backing of key political figures<sup>24</sup> such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and EC President Donald Tusk, the “informal meeting” in Bratislava was announced in the EU27 statement on Brexit as a place of political reflection, “to give an impulse to further reforms, in line with our Strategic Agenda, and to the development of the EU with 27 member states.”

## POLITICAL KICK-OFF OF THE PRESIDENCY

Politically, there were several messages that defined the outset of SK PRES. The Prime Minister made sure that he praised the EU as the most successful integration project in history, and of immense value for Slovakia. But he also used his appearance before the European Parliament<sup>25</sup> to criticize the “elitist” nature of the EU and its “eurospeak,” hardly understandable in the capitals. In response, he heard appeals from representatives of political groups, both EPP and S&D, that he avoid the temptation of populism and xenophobia in his rhetoric.

Talking to foreign journalist<sup>26</sup> in Bratislava, Prime Minister Robert Fico and Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák spoke of the need to empower the members states (European Council) in the agenda setting of the EU (in line with the rationale behind the Bratislava summit). As Lajčák put it, a lower trust among citizens might come as a result of the agenda being less driven by the member states. He specifically brought up a scenario in which a European Commission proposal goes against the conclusions adopted earlier by the European Council, clearly referring to the compulsory nature of the relocation mechanisms for refugees that the Commission pushed forward. Lajčák also said that the “Spitzenkandidaten” process, where the Commission President is chosen based on the outcome of elections for the European Parliament, changes the balance of power among the EU’s institutions, making the European Commission a more political and thus more powerful institution.

Fico tried to downplay these ideas at a joint press conference with Jean-Claude Juncker in Bratislava. Even though the member states are interested in “discussing more,” that does not mean “we want to weaken” the EU’s institutions,<sup>27</sup> he said.

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<sup>24</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Slovensko chce hostiť krízový post-brexít summit,” [Slovakia wants to host a crisis post-Brexit summit] *EurActiv.sk*, June 28, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/brexit-referendum/slovensko-chce-hostit-krizovy-post-brexit-summit/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Fico v EP: Využime britskú debatu ako laboratórium,” [Fico in EP – use the British debate as a laboratory] *EurActiv.sk*, July 6, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/slovenske-predsednictvo/fico-v-ep-vyuzime-britsku-debatu-ako-laboratorium/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> G. Gotev, “Slovakia advocates returning EU power to capitals,” *EurActiv.com*, July 1, 2016. Available online: <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/slovakia-advocates-returning-eu-power-to-capitals/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Jean-Claude o „Ficovom summite“: Nie sme vo vojne,” [Jean-Claude on “Fico’s summit:” We are not at war] *EurActiv.sk*, July 4, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/slovenske-predsednictvo/jean-claude-o-ficovom-summite-nie-sme-vo-vojne/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

More often than not, a call for an unspecified reform of the EU that would react to Brexit, and to the perceived growing distrust of citizens in the union, has featured in the public appearances of top Slovak officials. Slovak President Andrej Kiska tried to counter this narrative (as he did also with xenophobic rhetoric on other occasions), by saying that while he understands the calls for EU reform, they need to be “filled with substance.” Otherwise we will only be reinforcing “the image of the EU as a broken project.”<sup>28</sup>

This was echoed by Jean-Claude Juncker, who complained that everybody wants reform of the EU, but no one says how it should be done apart from those reforms that are already underway.<sup>29</sup>

The Presidency was not able to separate itself completely from domestic political setbacks and scandals, as Minister Robert Kaliňák found out during his appearance before the committee of the European Parliament, speaking about priorities in his area of responsibility. He had to face a call for his resignation by a French Green MEP, Eva Joly, who questioned his credibility and brought up his links to controversial entrepreneur Ladislav Bašternák, currently under investigation for tax fraud.<sup>30</sup> The second time the domestic folklore reached the European audience was via headlines in the European press after Prime Minister Fico referred to journalists as “dirty anti-Slovak prostitutes.”<sup>31</sup> This was an overreaction to reported suspicions surrounding dubious procurements linked to a Presidency-related event at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, brought forward by former employees who were assisted by Transparency International.<sup>32</sup>

## EVALUATING THE PRESIDENCY

In the second half of the year, Slovakia was clearly focused on its Presidency performance, national positions having been largely pulled back, with the notable exception of continuous opposition to refugee burden sharing. Much attention has been given to the Bratislava summit that produced the Bratislava declaration and the Bratislava roadmap,<sup>33</sup> containing a very broadly defined set of ambitions and work in progress

<sup>28</sup> “Kiska: Opatrne s volaním po reforme EÚ,” [Kiska: Be careful with calls for EU reform] *EurActiv.sk*, July 1, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/slovenske-predsednictvo/kiska-opatrne-s-volanim-po-reforme-eu/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Jean-Claude o „Ficovom summite“: Nie sme vo vojne,” *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> L. Vírostková, “Fraud allegations taint Slovak EU presidency,” *EUObserver*, July 7, 2016. Available online: <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/134232> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> “Slovakia’s PM calls journalists ‘dirty anti-Slovak prostitutes,’” *Guardian*, November 23, 2016. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/23/slovakias-pm-calls-journalists-dirty-anti-slovak-prostitutes> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Transparency International looks into Slovak Presidency accounting,” *EurActiv.com* November 11, 2016. Available online: <http://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/slovak-presidency-accused-of-misusing-funds/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> “Bratislavské vyhlásenie a bratislavský plan,” [Bratislava declaration and Bratislava plan] Council of the EU, October 16, 2016. Available online: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/sk/press/press-releases/2016/09/16-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmap/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

that the EU27 was able to agree upon. This includes the wish to succeed without Great Britain, as the EU27, through focusing on the economy, social issues, migration, and internal and external security. While most of the participants, including President Tusk, Juncker and PM Fico, praised the event as a place of a honest and deep discussion, the prime ministers of Italy, Matteo Renzi, and Hungary, Viktor Orbán (both under the pressure of forthcoming referendums), did not shy away from voicing outright frustration with the lack of substantial conclusions, namely on the economy and migration.<sup>34</sup>

The Visegrad group came with its own statement<sup>35</sup> on the gathering, highlighting the need to respect Member States (so that they can all feel “comfortable” in the EU), free movement, and respect for NATO when thinking about EU defense. Apart from the usual formal outcomes of the V4 format, Slovakia tried to distance itself from the more radical rhetoric of Poland and Hungary towards the EU, during its time at the helm of the Council.

Conveniently, Slovakia did not face any escalations of crises during its tenure. Brexit was put on hold by the decision of Downing Street not to trigger article 50 until March 2017. This, and low expectations generally, allowed Slovak diplomats and experts to reach “tangible results” in many areas. Let’s look at some of them.

## **ECONOMY AND FINANCE**

Some of the most relevant can be found within the Ecofin Council formation.<sup>36</sup> For example, it was Slovakia that pushed for the prolongation and increase in volume of finances in the so-called Juncker investment fund (EFSI), and for an upgrade of the Fund in terms of its rules or the eligibility of projects. Also, the deal on the EU budget for 2017 was reached surprisingly quickly as compared to other years (after only 18 days within the Council and in the first round with the European Parliament), despite the fact that the draft was delayed by the Commission due to Brexit, and that the substance of the discussion was being complicated by a parallel discussion on the revision of the 2014–2020 budgetary framework.<sup>37</sup> The taming of shadow banking; the deal made in the sensitive area of tax evasion (the blacklisting of uncooperative jurisdictions), reached laboriously at the ministers’ level at the November meeting; the expanding of capital markets – these are some of the battles fought and won by Slovak experts. However, the flagship, and most forward-looking initiative, of the Slovak Presi-

<sup>34</sup> “Frustrated Renzi attacks EU and Merkel after ‘boat trip’ Bratislava summit,” *EurActiv.com*, September 19, 2016. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/rezni-steps-up-attack-on-eu-and-merkel-after-boat-trip-bratislava-summit/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> “Joint statement of V4 countries to Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap,” September 16, 2016. Available online: <http://www.dublin.msz.gov.pl/resource/ddccb5c7-70bc-48fc-8c51-fc0f6321e71a:JCR> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> “Vyhodnotenie SK PRES,” [Evaluation of SK PRES] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, January 23, 2017. Available online: <http://www.finance.gov.sk/Default.aspx?CatID=11316> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> “Slovenské predsedníctvo dosiahlo dohodu o rozpočte Únie na budúci rok,” [Slovak Presidency reached an agreement on the Union’s budget for next year] *EurActiv.sk*. November 11, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/hospodarske-riadenie-eu/slovenske-predsednictvo-dosiahlo-dohodu-o-rozpocete-unie-na-buduci-rok/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

dency in Ecofin had to do with the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Here Slovakia tried to bridge the German-inspired fiscally prudent approach and “southern” views on the functioning of the eurozone, leading discussions on the possibility of introducing a stabilization mechanism for it. A substantial debate was held at the informal Ecofin in Bratislava. “Many colleagues from other countries were not thrilled, but we have led the discussion in a fair way and gained respect,” State Secretary at the Ministry of Finance Ivan Lesay said. “Even those that were not thrilled have characterized this discussion as one of the best, and some have even adjusted their view.”<sup>38</sup> These discussions – although lacking formal conclusions – will feed into the work on the White Book on the future of the EMU and Europe, to be presented by the European Commission in March 2017.

## MIGRATION

In the robust and highly divisive agenda on migration and asylum, the Slovak Presidency tried to calm down the controversy surrounding reform of the Dublin system by coming up with a new approach of “flexible” and later “effective” solidarity.<sup>39</sup> The idea behind this was to circumvent the notion of a mandatory relocation scheme by allowing countries to choose a different form of contribution to the common migration management efforts – such as, for example, financial contribution, the supplying of experts, assisting Frontex, or assistance with readmissions.<sup>40</sup> The bottom line – accepting refugees via relocations would not be mandatory. This proposal, while attracting some attention, failed to convince all, especially Italy, Greece and Malta.

The Slovak Council Presidency thus only succeeded in securing a deal on the Eurodac database and enabling the start of negotiations with the European Parliament on parts of the European Asylum Support Office<sup>41</sup> regulation. SK PRES also finalized the establishment of the new European Border and Coast Guard, which had been politically and legislatively carved out by the Dutch Presidency.

<sup>38</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Predsedníctvo vyškolovalo ľudí a pracovalo v atmosfére napätia v EÚ,” [The Presidency trained people and worked in an atmosphere of tensions in the EU] *EurActiv.sk*, December 22, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/slovenske-predsednictvo/predsednictvo-vyskolilo-ludi/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> J. Barigazzi, “Slovakia outlines alternative migration plan,” *Politico.eu*, November 16, 2016. Available online: <http://www.politico.eu/article/robert-fico-slovakia-outlines-alternative-migration-plan-dublin-regulation/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> “Effective solidarity: a way forward on Dublin revision,” *Statewatch*. Available online: <http://statewatch.org/news/2016/nov/eu-council-slovak-pres-non-paper-dublin-effective-solidarity-11-16.pdf> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> “Slovenské predsedníctvo v Rade EÚ: Významný prínos v rámci azylovej politiky EÚ: Rada je pripravená začať rokovania s Parlamentom o Agentúre EÚ pre azyl,” [Slovak EU Presidency: a vital contribution in the field of EU asylum policy: the Council is prepared to enter into negotiations with the Parliament on the EU Agency for asylum] Official website of the Presidency of SR in the Council of the EU, December 20, 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/tlacove-spravy/vyznamny-prinos-v-ramci-azylovej-politiky-eu-rada-je-pripravena-zacat-rokovania-s-parlamentom-o-agenture-eu-pre-azyl> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

## JUSTICE

The area of justice experienced rather an interesting fight for the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), fit to prosecute criminal offences against the financial interest of the EU. Slovakia was not one of the most vocal proponents of this new institution, but assumed its role of facilitator seriously and secured a deal concerning its decentralized structure.<sup>42</sup> It managed to reach a compromise on the PIF directive (an agreement that VAT fraud is a crime against the financial interest of the EU), which is linked to the future EPPO's areas of responsibility. However, in December several countries withdrew their support for the EPPO, citing domestic reasons, which left the dossier open for the Maltese Presidency, which most likely will need to opt for the enhanced cooperation model.<sup>43</sup>

## ENVIRONMENT

In other areas, several dossiers handled by SK PRES stand out. These include, in the environmental field, the ratification of the Paris Agreement on climate change at the EU level.<sup>44</sup> The agreement to have this ratification ready before the Marrakesh conference was the result of informal discussions at the Bratislava summit.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, it failed to find the political will for reform of one of the pillars of the EU's climate policy, the Emission Trading Scheme.<sup>46</sup> The Presidency has substantially begun the domestic discussion on the transition to a green economy with a series of high level conferences and events driven by the Environment Ministry.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> R. Geist, "Európsky prokurátor bude bojovať proti daňovým podvodom," [The European Public Prosecutor will fight to combat tax evasion] *EurActiv.sk*, October 17, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/buducnost-eu/europsky-prokurator-bude-bojovat-proti-danovym-podvodom/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> R. Geist, "Nemecko a Francúzsko presadzujú vytvorenie európskeho prokurátora," [Germany and France advocate the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor] *EurActiv.sk*, December 12, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/buducnost-eu/nemecko-francuzsko-presadzuju-vytvorenie-europskeho-prokuratora/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> P. Szalai, "Slovensko presadilo Parížsku dohodu, pomohla aj "inštitucionálna kreativita," [Slovakia enforces the Paris agreement, helps also institutional creativity] *EurActiv.sk*, September 30, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/zivotne-prostredie/slovensko-presadilo-parizsku-dohodu-pomohla-aj-institucionalna-kreativita/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> E. Krukowska, "EU leaders pledge quick ratification of Paris Climate Accord," *Bloomberg*. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-16/eu-targets-october-ratification-of-paris-climate-accord> (accessed on February 13, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> P. Szalai, "Na dohodu o reforme ETS chýbala politická vôľa, tvrdí predsedníctvo," [Agreement on the reform of the ETS lacked political will, says Presidency] *EurActiv.sk*, December 12, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/energetika/na-dohodu-o-reforme-ets-chybala-politicka-vola-tvrdi-predsednictvo/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> J. Crisp, "Bratislava: Zastávka na ceste k zelenej ekonomike," [Bratislava: a stop on the way to a green economy] *EurActiv.sk*, September 9, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/zelena-ekonomika/bratislava-zastavka-na-cestekzelenej-ekonomike/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

## DIGITAL AGENDA

The Digital agenda saw some highly technical but not irrelevant compromises deepening the internal market – on wholesale roaming prices clearing the way for the complete abolition of roaming surcharges for consumers, on the harmonization of the 700MHz radio spectrum<sup>48</sup> (a precondition for broadband internet), and on the ban of unjustified geo-blocking – vital for access to some cross border digital content and services.

## EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Trade became an unexpected priority for the Slovak Council Presidency – not so much in terms of CETA, where the Wallonia stalemate was negotiated by the European Commission, but much more with respect to the agreement on trade defense instruments, where intensive negotiations have been held resulting in a compromise that is supposed to offer fit for purpose protection against Chinese dumping (especially relevant to the steel sector).<sup>49</sup>

Foreign policy is primarily the domain of the European External Action Service rather than of the rotating Presidency, but in the area of enlargement the Slovak Presidency had concrete ambitions. Here two negotiation chapters with Montenegro and four with Serbia have been opened, and one closed. The Council adopted conclusions inviting the Commission to evaluate the application of Bosnia and Hercegovina. More ambitious conclusions on enlargement have been blocked by Austria.<sup>50</sup> Notable are the steps toward visa liberalization with Georgia and Ukraine, via an agreement on the visa suspension mechanism.<sup>51</sup> Despite the somewhat ambivalent Slovak position towards the EU sanctions against Russia, they were prolonged twice during Slovakia's time at the helm of the Council, once in July and then again in December.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> "Slovak Presidency in the Council of the EU: boosting mobile internet for all: presidency strikes deal with EP on 700 MHz," Official website of the Presidency of SR in the Council of the EU, December 14, 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/en/press-releases/boosting-mobile-internet-for-all-presidency-strikes-deal-with-ep-on-700-mhz> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> P. Szalai, "Slovensko dohodlo opatrenia proti dumpingu, v Rade EÚ ležali tri roky," [Slovakia agrees anti-dumping measures, issue stuck in the Council of the EU for three years] *EurActiv.sk*, December 13, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/energetika/slovensko-dohodlo-opatrenia-proti-dumpingu-v-rade-eu-lezali-tri-roky/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> L. Danielsson, "Austria blocks conclusions on enlargement in GAC because of Turkey. But consensus among the other 27..." *Twitter*, December 13, 2016. Available online: <https://twitter.com/EUAmbDanielsson/status/808669718420787200> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>51</sup> "Visa suspension mechanism: Council confirms agreement with Parliament," Council of the EU, December 8, 2016. Available online: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/12/07-visa-suspension-mechanism/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> "Russia: EU prolongs economic sanctions by six months," Council of the EU, December 19, 2016. Available online: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/12/19-sanctions-russia/> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

## PUBLIC PERCEPTION

As part of the narrative surrounding the Slovak Presidency in the Council, the government had the ambition to “spark interest in the Presidency in the whole of society” and to animate interest in European issues.<sup>53</sup>

The EU has long enjoyed a high level of support in Slovakia. The data collected by Focus<sup>54</sup> at the beginning of February showed that over 72 per cent of Slovaks either “strongly” or “fairly” agreed with Slovakia’s membership in the EU.

When asked about trust, however, the numbers tell a bit of a different story. In Autumn 2015, the level of distrust towards the EU surpassed the level of trust (51 per cent to 39 per cent) for the first time, according to a Eurobarometer survey.<sup>55</sup>

In 2016, the percentage of those saying they trusted the EU was slightly higher, at 42 per cent, but still lower than the 47 per cent who said they distrusted the union.

This slight shift may be attributed to the much more positive and constructive rhetoric of the government towards the European Union just before and during the Council Presidency, while it also toned down its statements accusing “Brussels” trying to force large numbers of migrants upon Slovakia.

In January 2017 *EurActiv.sk* commissioned a special public opinion survey by the Focus polling agency, asking basic questions about the Slovak Council Presidency.<sup>56</sup>

It showed that 65 per cent of the respondents were fully aware that Slovakia held the EU presidency, and an additional 20 per cent had an ambiguous feeling that they might have noticed something, but were not really sure about it. 14 per cent had no knowledge of it whatsoever.

When asked whether and how the Presidency affected their perception of the EU, a clear majority of respondents (56 per cent) said it had no effect at all, 35 per cent said the Presidency influenced their views on the EU in a positive way, and 5 per cent reported a negative impact on their perception.

These numbers are more interesting when looked at against the attitude of the respondents towards the EU as such. The positive image was reinforced by the Presidency mainly in those instances where the person already approved of Slovakia’s membership in the EU.

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<sup>53</sup> “Správa o priebehu a výsledkoch predsedníctva SR v Rade Európskej únie,” [Report on progress and results of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union] *Slov-lex*. Available online: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/-/SK/dokumenty/LP-2017-60> (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>54</sup> “Volebné preferencie politických strán – január 2017,” [Election preferences of political parties – January 2017] Focus. Available online: [http://www.focus-research.sk/files/n204\\_Volebneperc20preferencieperc20politickýchperc20stran\\_január2017.pdf](http://www.focus-research.sk/files/n204_Volebneperc20preferencieperc20politickýchperc20stran_január2017.pdf) (accessed on January 29, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> “Standard Eurobarometer,” European Commission, November, 2016. Available online: <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2137> (accessed on February 13, 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Prieskum: Predsedníctvo neoslovilo euroskeptikov,” [Survey: Presidency has not changed the mind of eurosceptics] *EurActiv.sk*, February 13, 2017. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/slovenske-predsednictvo/prieskum-predsednictvo-neoslovilo-euroskeptikov/> (accessed on February 13, 2017).

More than 42 per cent of respondents who expressed support for Slovakia's EU membership reported that the Presidency boosted their positive image of the EU.

Only 13 per cent of those who do not view favorably Slovakia's being part of the EU testified to a positive shift due to the Presidency. Similarly, only 12 per cent with no opinion on Union membership indicated that they'd been positively influenced by it.

In other words, the Slovak Presidency generally resonated with those who already took some interest in public life – but failed, however, to reach out to those who are skeptical of European integration or took no interest in it.

A more extensive poll would be necessary to draw more substantial conclusions, but these basic results indicate that the goal of the Slovak government – i.e. to meaningfully approach those indifferent or skeptical towards the EU, via communication related to the Presidency – has largely remained unfulfilled. Whether that was ever a realistic expectation from the start, is a different question.

## CONCLUSION

2016 will remain in memory as the year of the continuous assertiveness of Slovakia on the migration agenda, and of its first Presidency of the Council of the EU. While the former has left its mark on the domestic political discussion, with all the negative side-effect of its driving of populism and xenophobia, the latter actually helped to navigate the discussion within the more constructive framework of working towards an acceptable and sustainable EU response to the migration challenge.

The “Brussels bubble,” composed of diplomats, journalists and experts, largely agrees that Slovakia's performance in the Presidency role was decent and sometimes above-average. Political ownership of the Presidency and enthusiasm for related tasks varied from ministry to ministry, but overall the Slovak political representation embraced its responsibility without major setbacks.

Slovakia has gained unique experience and know-how in its managing of negotiations at all levels, both within the Council and with other EU institutions, leaving a track record of a productive, efficient Presidency that was indeed striving for the unity of the EU.

The Presidency stretched its internal capacities and limited its room to develop specific national positions, on which it might otherwise have been more vocal in some cases. This applies not only to migration, but possibly also to the European Public Prosecutor Office and the firearms directive.

How the country will benefit from the human capital shaped by this experience, and to what extent their experience of the Presidency will make Slovak representatives more open towards certain European initiatives in the future, remains to be seen.

As for Slovak society in general, ownership of the Presidency as a Slovak success within the European and wider international context seems to be limited, based on the data available at this time. The message did manage to reach those who already have an active interest in and knowledge of the EU, but less so those audiences “untouched” so far by public debates in general, or those with Eurosceptic views.

# A TIRED YEAR

MARTIN VLACHYNSKÝ

There were number of unique economic events taking place in the EU during 2016. The “Panama papers” once again fueled the discussion over more harmonized tax policies within the EU. Apple was told to pay back to Ireland 13 billion euros of “unlawful state aid” – with the Irish government strongly opposing such a windfall revenue, choosing to defend its tax sovereignty instead. The ECB decided to phase out one of the world’s most worthy banknotes – the 500 euro note. The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada – CETA – was signed in October, after 7 years of negotiations and a number of delays, while a similar deal with the US – the TTIP – barely inched forward. The European Commission imposed further anti-dumping duties on Chinese steel products, responding to the repeated outcries of struggling European steelmakers.

Yet the economic tone of the year was played by well-known instruments. The Eurozone financial system, deficits, quantitative easing, and, of course, the Greek crisis, will remain topics of the day for months to come.

No European country defaulted. Unemployment levels across Europe began to slowly decline. The PIIGS group seems to have started losing its members, as Ireland, Spain and Portugal showed stabilized or even improving overall economic conditions. Yet Europe’s obvious inability to emerge from its dismal post-2008 atmosphere, and the seemingly endless open questions about the future political and economic form of the European Union, began to take their toll.

## THE NEW YEAR TROUBLES

The year 2015 was full of political and economic defensive maneuvering. Despite populist gains (or even victories), Europe survived the Greek, Spanish and Portuguese

parliamentary elections without a major political earthquake. After long deliberations, the ECB started the engines of quantitative easing. Central Europe cheered the new inflow of investments, headed by the Jaguar-Land Rover decision to build its European factory in Slovakia.

However, the beginning of 2016 left no room for optimistic speculations. Asset prices were plummeting all around the world, sounding the alarm of a potential global slowdown. After an almost six month long continuous slide, the WTI oil price fell below the 30 USD/barrel level, down from the 60 USD levels of Summer 2015. Low oil prices have been dragging down oil producers throughout the world – Russia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela – all of them reporting various economic woes. The global significance of the impact on countries such as Venezuela and Nigeria, which are at the fringe of the global economy, was perhaps less; while others, such as Saudi Arabia and Norway, were able to use their large safety cushions to mitigate the price-dip impacts. It was the state of Russian economy which was most closely watched by Europeans. In January 2016 the Rouble dropped to a historic low, one euro costing almost 84 Russian Roubles.

Industrial commodities were not doing much better. Copper, aluminum, zinc and others were falling for months,<sup>1</sup> as the Chinese demand slowed down significantly after a decade of unprecedented growth, and producers flooded the markets with supply from new mines and improved technologies. The impact was felt most significantly in Brazil, where economic growth stalled and unemployment began rising quickly. Argentineans turned to hawkish right-wing candidate Mauricio Macri, after a decade of monetary mismanagement. Macri turned the peso into a free-floating currency, resulting in an immediate 30 per cent drop in value.<sup>2</sup> Venezuela became the number one candidate for default in 2016,<sup>3</sup> as its economic troubles grew more serious day by day.

Most eyes, however, were fixed on the global economic behemoth – China. Despite a massive 800-billion US dollar stimulus, the major stock markets in the country ended 2015 with a 40 per cent loss from the peak, followed by an 18 per cent loss within the few days of January 4–15, 2016. Global stock indexes followed in the wake. Nikkei, FTSE, and many others were down by double digits. Dow Jones recorded the worst first 10 days of a year since 1897. Some statistics showed 93 per cent of investors in red numbers in January.<sup>4</sup>

Many investors started asking out loud: “Is this the new crash?” Many stock indexes had been massively inflated after years of quantitative easing by the Fed and stimuli from other governments (the Shanghai exchange grew 150 per cent in the 12 months

<sup>1</sup> See: A. MacDonald, M. Ovaska, “The super slump,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2016. Available online: <http://graphics.wsj.com/commodities-super-slump/> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> C. Milan, “Argentina’s floating Peso a respite from emerging-market carnage,” *Bloomberg*, January 22, 2016. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-22/argentina-s-new-free-floating-peso-still-trades-alooft-from-peers> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> “Venezuela: drumbeat of default gets louder,” *Financial Times*, January 21, 2016. Available online: <http://www.ft.com/fastft/2016/01/21/venezuela-drumbeat-of-default-gets-louder/> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> M. Egan, “Ouch. 93% of investors lost money in January,” *CNN Money*, February 1, 2016. Available online: <http://money.cnn.com/2016/02/01/investing/stocks-markets-january-93-percent-lost/> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

between Summer 2014 and Summer 2015, while the S&P had gained 60 per cent in four years and was 50 per cent higher than at the pre-crisis peak of 2007). For Europe, which had been burdened with its own set of problems for years, this wasn't the greatest start one could imagine for the new year.

## THE DEAL THAT DID NOT HAPPEN

The risk of Grexit, so high in the summer of 2015, seemed to be put on ice, for some time at least, after the astonishing political pirouette of the new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. On the other hand, with polls tied, the Brexit referendum had secured top position in media coverage early in the year. However, with David Cameron's frantic efforts to cut a special deal for Britain promising to deliver the needed impact, the possibility of Britain actually leaving the EU didn't seem very high.

The threat of a renewed immigration wave in Summer 2016 looked more daunting. Yet these two agendas came into collision in mid-January, as the Commission unveiled plans to kill the Dublin rules dictating that asylum seekers must remain in the first European country they step foot on.<sup>5</sup> This was an unpleasant turn in the UK-EU renegotiations, since migration policy was one of the pillars of the refurbished relations between London and Brussels. While third-country migration kindled political quarrels across the whole of the Union, the issue of internal migration has been mainly UK-specific, where the contribution-independent welfare system is easily accessible to EU immigrants. And despite numerous analyses showing the net benefits of allowing in East European migrants – including a net fiscal contribution<sup>6</sup> – anecdotal evidence<sup>7</sup> of benefits misuse helped to propel the issue into the spotlight ahead of the referendum. There was some progress made in the negotiations at the end of January, when EU officials put forward a compromise deal on the issue of EU migrants' access to benefits in the UK. The deal would have seen the UK given an "emergency brake" on the providing of such benefits, which could be utilized if the pressure on public services (social and welfare systems) was seen to be too high. The brake would freeze such benefits for EU migrants for up to four years.

Even during the final weeks, the renegotiations were tough, both for Cameron and his EU counterparts. A leaked "deal" in mid-February showed little advance in the

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<sup>5</sup> "EU deals fresh migrant blow to David Cameron's renegotiation," *The Telegraph*, January 19, 2016. Available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/eureferendum/12109345/EU-deals-fresh-migrant-blow-to-David-Camerons-renegotiation.html> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> See for example "Impact of immigration on UK economy," *Economics Help*, July 19, 2016. Available online: <http://www.economicshelp.org/blog/6399/economics/impact-of-immigration-on-uk-economy/> (accessed on January 15, 2017), or "Positive economic impact of UK immigration from the European Union: new evidence," *UCL News*, November 5, 2016. Available online: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/1114/051114-economic-impact-EU-immigration#sthash.neSF5oOW.dpuf> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Typical example: "One migrant family's journey to benefits Britain," *Daily Mail*, September 9, 2016. Available online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3780802/Jobless-French-migrant-family-handed-44-000-benefits-year-warned-homeless-reject-house-turning-THREE-small.html> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

discussions and 130 Conservative party members openly asked David Cameron to accept the failure of the renegotiations, and to support voting Leave. Even the Labour party – led by revolutionary leftist Jeremy Corbyn since Summer 2015 – internally hesitated to show 100 per cent support for the Remain vote. When the deal finally emerged in late February, nobody was particularly astonished. However, the results of the renegotiations were not trivial.<sup>8</sup>

The deal addressed four key pillars of renegotiation. In terms of economic governance, Eurozone outsiders were promised not to be discriminated against, and some backdoors for “specific provisions within the single rulebook” for financial institutions (important for the money-generating City) remained open. The option to use both the European Court of Justice and domestic courts to enforce these new rules was one of the UK’s victories in the renegotiations. On the other hand, the second pillar – enhanced competitiveness and the reduction of red tape in the EU – remained rather vague, with mainly intangible promises. The trick to a successful reduction of bureaucracy is never in the plan itself, but in its implementation. From the beginning it was difficult to see how it could be transformed into a tangible outcome of the renegotiation.

One of the two most important areas of negotiation was the perceived threat of the looming “ever closer Union,” one in which the UK would have to sacrifice more and more of its national sovereignty. The negotiations came to a kind of impasse. The EU officially accepted that: “It is recognised that the United Kingdom, in the light of the specific situation it has under the Treaties, is not committed to further political integration into the European Union.”<sup>9</sup> While it clarified the already specific position of the UK vis- -vis the EU, Cameron’s hopes for a two-speed Union did not come into existence, and the “Leavers” were unimpressed. However, the deal did include a “red card” for national parliaments, which further enhanced the possibility to stalemate important changes within the EU. Although not entirely stopped, the path towards a more unified EU became at least more bumpy.

In the most important area, migration and benefits, the UK got a seven year “emergency brake,” meaning that the UK would be able to treat its own citizens differently to nationals of other EU member states – a historic precedent for the EU. Yet the sought-after four-year ban was not achieved, since the benefit cuts would have to reflect immigrants’ integration into the UK labor market.

While Cameron considered the results an argument for Remain, the polls did not reflect a significant swing between In and Out. The March regional election in Germany brought significant gains for AfD, signaling the year’s trend, with Incumbent political structures facing growing difficulties in the face of new challengers. Yet the June 23<sup>rd</sup> referendum results were surprising for many. The Leave victory clearly means a new stage in European history. The uncertainty which arose in the months

<sup>8</sup> For a complex analysis of the renegotiations deal, see S. Booth, “What did the UK achieve in its EU renegotiation?” *Open Europe*, February 2016. Available online: <http://openeurope.org.uk/today/blog/what-did-the-uk-achieve-in-its-eu-renegotiation/> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> “A new settlement for the United Kingdom within the European Union. Extract of the conclusions of the European Council of 18-19 February 2016,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2016/C 69 I/01, February 23, 2016. Available online: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC\\_2016\\_069\\_I\\_0001](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_069_I_0001) (accessed on January 15, 2017).

following, as David Cameron's (otherwise very successful) career as prime minister came to an end and Theresa May ascended to No. 10, is rather self-explanatory. The exact shape of UK-EU relations remains open, even more than six months after the referendum, with no part of the official leave process even initiated (March 31, 2017 being marked as the probable date for Article 50 initiation). Only one thing was certain – markets were not caught by surprise, and, while the pound slid in record falls, the UK stock market quickly reversed its losses and economic growth remained in positive territory for the time being. And the European balance of political power, in the triangle of the trade and market-oriented United Kingdom, welfare-oriented and protectionist France, and social market-oriented paternalist Germany, will undoubtedly be disturbed.

## AN EARLY HERALD

All the renegotiation haggling and referendum fallout could not completely overshadow the dismal economic start of the year. An early herald of what would be one of the biggest economic topics for the EU in 2016 was the January report of losses by Deutsche Bank for the year 2015. The biggest German bank – and a regular visitor on the list of the ten largest banks in the world and the top three on the European continent – reported a 6.8 billion euro loss in 2015, mainly due to the burden of mounting legal and restructuring costs.<sup>10</sup> The market price of its stock fell below 2009 lows. After a series of losses (including a 12 billion euro loss in 2009) the behemoth of European banking began to raise the alarm across the European financial sector. And the biggest blow was yet to come.

Its preparations for potential fines proved wise a few months later. The US Justice Department announced in October that it may seek up to a 14 billion US dollar settlement in its long term dispute with DB, while the bank set aside only 5 billion.<sup>11</sup> DB began to be dubbed the “new Lehman Brothers” by media commentators. The alarm was partly exaggerated – the bank had 200 billion euros of liquidity in its coffers and the most solvent treasury in the European Union behind its back. The potential few billion needed for recapitalization would not present any big financial problem for the German government. The political impact of a potential restructuring, however, would be significant. It would unveil how deeply entrenched the financial crisis in Europe remains. It would also made life for Angela Merkel very difficult. The German government would have to step in and save its key bank using public coffers, while at the same time it was lashing the Italian government for contemplating the public recapitalization of its banking sector, right before the eyes of the banking union and

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<sup>10</sup> J. Strasburg, “Deutsche Bank reports 6.8 billion-euro loss,” *Market Watch*, January 28, 2016. Available online: <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/deutsche-bank-reports-717-billion-loss-2016-01-28> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> M. Vlachynský, “Deutsche Bank: Pre nemecký dub neprehliadajme celý les,” [For the German oak do not ignore the whole forest] *HN online*, October 11, 2016. Available online: <http://komentare.hnonline.sk/komentare/840311-deutsche-bank-pre-nemecky-dub-neprehliadajme-cely-les> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

new bail-in<sup>12</sup> rules. Although Angela Merkel ruled out<sup>13</sup> the possibility of public assistance to DB, even this most powerful of prime ministers on the continent may not have enough power to have convinced the financial markets.

The potential 14 billion euro fine was not imposed. DB settled in December for 7.2 billion US dollars,<sup>14</sup> averting immediate troubles. One can only ask how big a change must have occurred to make the US government wish to produce chaos in the ranks of its closest ally – Angela Merkel’s government. Deutsche Bank can hardly be considered the black sheep of the European family. European banks were disproportionately hit in the January stock market fall, losing 15 per cent in the worst month of the last 5 years. The prime suspect in all of this was already identified few sentences above – Italian banks.

The dismal state of the Italian banking sector is no news for anybody taking a passing interest in the matter. With its 3.9 billion euro injection, the Italian government saved the world’s oldest bank, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, in 2013, with another 3.6 billion to help four smaller banks in November 2015. With the new bail-in rules already in play, junior debt holders were forced to take some losses. Unlike in most countries, here a non-negligible portion of the banking debt is held by small retail investors from the ranks of Italian households. At the height of the financial crisis, between Summer 2007 and Summer 2009, around 80 per cent of Italian banks’ bonds were sold to retail investors. Currently, around 31 billion euros of bank debt remains in the hands of retail investors.<sup>15</sup> The bail-in generated significant political fallout after the suicide of an elderly Italian man who lost his life savings in the restructuring, tainting all discussion of the Italian banking sector.

Italian banks are buried under a huge balloon of non-performing loans,<sup>16</sup> representing 17 per cent of all loans on the balance sheets of Italian banks. In Europe, only Cyprus, Greece and Slovenia have a higher share of NPLs.<sup>17</sup> Translated into volume, this represents 350 billion euros of loans (up from 80 billion in 2008), amounting to

<sup>12</sup> The 2015 EU Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive give resolution authorities in Europe wide-ranging powers to manage failing financial institutions. These include powers to write down debts owed to creditors, convert debt to equity or impose temporary stays on termination rights. It means junior debt holders should absorb part of the losses, before public funds are allowed to step in. For details see “BRRD: contractual recognition of bail-in and resolution stays,” Shearman and Sterling LLP, February 22, 2016. Available online: <http://www.shearman.com/~media/Files/NewsInsights/Publications/2016/02/BRRD-Contractual-Recognition-of-Bailin-and-Resolution-Stays-FIAFR-022216.pdf> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> P. Donahue, “Merkel rules out assistance for Deutsche Bank, focus reports,” *Bloomberg*, September 24, 2016. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-24/merkel-rules-out-assistance-for-deutsche-bank-focus-reports> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> It was not the first time in the recent years that DB had to pay multi-billion dollar fine. It was fined 2.5 billion USD for its part on the LIBOR scandal.

<sup>15</sup> “Households on the hook for Italy’s next bailout,” *Bloomberg*, July 28, 2016. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-07-27/italians-nest-eggs-risk-cracking-as-bank-rescue-plans-mulled> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Non-performing loan - borrowed money upon which the debtor has not made his scheduled payments for at least 90 days. A loan that is either in default or close to being in default.

<sup>17</sup> For detailed report on NPLs in Europe see: “EBA report on the dynamics and drivers of non-performing exposures in the EU banking sector,” EBA, July 22, 2016. Available online: <https://www.eba.europa.eu/documents/10180/1360107/EBA+Report+on+NPLs.pdf> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

one third of all bad loans in the Eurozone, or one quarter of Italian GDP – a sum that makes Italian banks a global problem, especially when Italy is already burdened by public debt reaching over 130 per cent of GDP. The Italian government has been trying to break the NPLs by promoting their securitization,<sup>18</sup> with only limited success.<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister Matteo Renzi was able to push through some reforms, but the banking system remained a major headache for the government, while domestic opposition during the year was slowly mounting. The government would gladly shell out some funds for bank recapitalization, but the bail in rules remain in place for now and endanger the political success of bank restructuring. Not abandoning the rules is important for the Commission and for the conservative players, headed by Germany; since breaking the rules on the first serious occasion after they were implemented would be just one more in the long line of humiliating offenses against the hopeless crusade for a rule-abiding monetary union.

The Italian grand finale came on December 4<sup>th</sup>, when voters decided by referendum against constitutional changes to the electoral system and a division of power between the State and its regions, as proposed by Renzi. While it remains a question how much this decision was influenced by the anti-euro and anti-EU sentiments of the major opposition parties (Five Star Movement and the Northern League), and how much by the peculiarities of the Italian domestic political atmosphere, the naked fact is that Renzi stepped down as prime minister. While the government continued under new Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, the scent of possible new elections is unmistakable (with Renzi himself planning a comeback). The new prime minister promised continuity in reforms, but that may prove difficult under the pressure of potential new elections. Retail investors hold up to one third of bank debt, which in the case of Monte dei Paschi di Siena concerns 40,000 households. However, the Italian banking crisis should not be regarded as hopelessly stalled. There are already potential solutions being discussed. One of these is the swapping of junior bonds of retailers into equity, and then swapping the equity in senior bonds,<sup>20</sup> thus avoiding the impact on households. Such a plan must be approved by the EU, which as 2016 comes to a close does not seem easily to be going for this solution. On December 16 the ECB decided that the request from Monte dei Paschi for a deadline extension for its recapitalization from year-end to January 20 was a delay tactic,<sup>21</sup> and the bank had until the end of 2016 to solve its problems. It did not, and the public bailout of the third biggest lender in Italy was announced at the end of the year. Besides a cost of at least 8.8 billion euros, the event also puts Italian banks in the spotlight for 2017.

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<sup>18</sup> Packaging and subsequent commercialization of the NPLs.

<sup>19</sup> See more detailed analyses for example in: "Hard times for Italian banks," Bruegel, February 17, 2016. Available online: <http://bruegel.org/2016/02/hard-times-for-italian-banks/> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> For details of the plan see: "Italy's bank rescue is a precarious balancing act," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 23, 2016. Available online: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/italys-bank-rescue-is-a-precarious-balancing-act-1482513751> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> "Will Italy's banking crisis go from bad to even worse?" *Newsweek*, December 16, 2016. Available online: <http://europe.newsweek.com/italy-matteo-renzi-banking-crisis-referendum-eu-rulings-532833?rm=eu> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

## QUANTITATIVE EASING AND FISCAL TROUBLES REMAIN AN EVERGREEN

While the Fed started slowly (very slowly) to tighten its monetary policy at the end of 2015, no such steps were on the menu at the ECB. Quite the opposite. In March, the ECB widened quantitative easing up to 80 billion euros per month, reduced the deposit rate to -0.4 per cent, and added Investment-grade euro-denominated bonds issued by non-bank corporations established in the eurozone to the list of assets that are eligible for regular purchases under QE.<sup>22</sup> The first corporate bonds were purchased under QE in June. Four new targeted longer-term refinancing operations were announced – three in 2016 and one in 2017. Interest rates in these loans can drop down to the (currently negative) deposit rate – which means, for the first time in ECB history, that banks may borrow money from the ECB, and be paid for it.

The already extended deadline for quantitative easing was extended again in early December – from March 2017 to December 2017. However, although beginning in April the monthly volume of QE purchases should be capped at 60 (not 80) billion euros, the restriction on assets with yields below the deposit rate<sup>23</sup> (-0.4 per cent in December) and the restriction on assets with maturity below two years were lifted – a move that broadened the range of available assets for purchases. And, as usual, these steps were opposed by the German representative at the ECB, Jens Weidmann.<sup>24</sup> The deep division over monetary policy choice has been going on for years. In a few words – an end to the current set of monetary policies in the eurozone is distant and foggy. For the first time during the crisis, questions about so-called “helicopter money” were directed at the ECB, both from the media and some MEPs – with Draghi vaguely responding, “It’s a very interesting concept that is now being discussed by academic economists and in various environments.”<sup>25</sup> The hopelessness of the ECB became quite visible during 2016. This hopelessness partly stems from the fact that the bank is entrusted with a goal – economic growth – which it can hardly achieve on its own. Even mild interest hikes may have an asymmetric impact, hitting mainly those countries with economic troubles (represented not only by PIIGS, but also for example Finland). And while the German constitutional court rejected the case against the OMT (Outright Monetary Transactions) tool, worries about the harmful effects of low interest rates and the resulting asset bubbles remained. The National Bank of Slovakia tightened

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<sup>22</sup> “ECB adds corporate sector purchase programme (CSPP) to the asset purchase programme (APP) and announces changes to APP,” European Central Bank, March 10, 2016. Available online: [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pr/date/2016/html/pr160310\\_2.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pr/date/2016/html/pr160310_2.en.html) (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> This allows for carry trade – investors can sell assets with low yields and park the gained liquidity in the ECB with a deposit rate higher than the yield of the sold asset, giving them a positive differential between the assets.

<sup>24</sup> “ECB policy largely powerless in propping up growth – Bundesbank’s Weidmann,” *Reuters*, December 16, 2016. Available online: <https://sports.yahoo.com/news/ecb-policy-largely-powerless-reviving-092718818.html> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> “ECB weighs a helicopter money-drop program to spark euro economy,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 20, 2016.

its general mortgage rules in response to growing concerns about the potential development of a housing bubble in Slovakia.<sup>26</sup>

All this was happening at the same time that the Fed announced another rate hike, after a year. And the slowly growing division between US and European monetary policies may grow even bigger with the election of Donald Trump as president. While sometimes confusing and contradictory, as are many parts of his program, his grudge against the Fed and its policy of maintaining low interest rates has been displayed openly many times.<sup>27</sup> The new president will likely fill four of the seven places on the Fed's Board of Governors. The USD/EUR exchange rate showed the strongest dollar in 15 years, illustrating the growing difference between the two currencies.

## THE RULES

The problem with the asymmetrical impacts of the eurozone's unified monetary policy could be mitigated by using a firm set of rules, which would force national governments to behave responsibly in good times and act swiftly in bad times. That was the idea behind the Stability and Growth Pact and behind the Fiscal Compact. Unfortunately, fiscal rules were again handled rather light-heartedly in 2016 as well.

Despite the rattling of weapons during the early summer, at the end of July the Commission decided not to fine Spain and Portugal for their excessive deficits. Portugal's deficit was 4.4 per cent of GDP in 2015 and Spain's 5.1 per cent, way above the general threshold of 3 per cent. Portugal got an extension to 2016, Spain to 2018. The ceiling for the fines (0.2 per cent of the national GDP) is far from having any devastating effect on the economy, but the political consequences of the move could be broad.

Officially, the European Commission decided not to impose sanctions because of the challenging economic environment both countries face – a common formula, used repeatedly since the introduction of preventive rules in 1999. However, there were also other circumstances to be considered, especially after the successful Brexit referendum. As Economic Affairs Commissioner Pierre Moscovici said at a press conference: "A punitive approach we didn't feel would have been most appropriate at a time when people are questioning Europe."<sup>28</sup> He was doing a favor not only to Spain and Portugal. France has been a notorious offender, and the plans to bring its budget within

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<sup>26</sup> "The first bank raises mortgage interest rate," *The Slovak Spectator*, December 7, 2016. Available online: <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20403689/the-first-bank-raises-mortgage-interest-rate.html> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> "Donald Trump's comments on the FED, interest rate policy and Janet Yellen," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2016. Available online: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trumps-comments-on-the-fed-interest-rate-policy-and-janet-yellen-1478724767> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> "Spain and Portugal dodge EU fine for breaching deficit limit," *Bloomberg*, July 17, 2016. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-07-27/spain-and-portugal-dodge-eu-fine-for-breaching-deficit-limits> (accessed on January Q5, 2017).

limits in 2017 were seen as unrealistic as early as Autumn 2016.<sup>29</sup> Given that Moscovici is a French ex-minister of finance who himself did not push fiscal consolidation in the country, it is unlikely he is going to punish France in the near future. The two Iberian states also had a close ally in Italy, which holds its deficit below three per cent of GDP, but has problems controlling its huge debt thanks to regular structural deficits.

France, with 12 (11 unauthorized) rule breaches since 1999, has the third highest number, after Portugal (15, with ten unauthorized) and Greece (17, with ten unauthorized). But if one wished to inquire as to the record of the fiscally “hawkish” states, they are right up there – UK (11 breaches, nine unauthorized), and Germany (seven, with five unauthorized)<sup>30</sup>. Being fiscally hawkish or dovish in Europe seems to be more a function of the pragmatism of economic reality, than of some long term broad political determination. Spain, with its repeatedly deadlocked election results and need for continuous fiscal reforms to keep the deficit under control, has been under different political pressures recently, as compared to Germany with its massive treasury revenues, allowing the German government much more breathing space. Quantitative easing, for now, secures a breathing space even for fiscal offenders. However, the printing press will not run on full power forever – and the path to a balanced budget is still nowhere to be found for several member countries.

With 13 austerity packages, three bailouts and seven years of fiscal crisis, the “normal” state of the Greek economy has become a matter of camp-fire legends. With the debt still over 175 per cent of GDP, a 45 per cent ratio of non-performing loans, and 23 per cent unemployment,<sup>31</sup> the country is still the worst economic performer in the EU. The Eurogroup decided to provide further debt cuts (a cumulative 20 per cent by the year 2060) by amending maturity and interest rates. More importantly, the Eurogroup did not sign off on a second review of the current bailout program. Once again, the Troika<sup>32</sup> and the Greek government are drawn into lengthy arguments over the program and loan payments. The review is important for Greece also, because it wants its bonds included in the quantitative easing from 2017. This would help Greece to re-establish itself in the bond market – the only way to successfully end the current bailout program in 2018.

## THE ELECTION YEAR

As with many other ongoing discussions in the EU (such as the migrant crisis), the Greek negotiations become harder the closer we get to the German and Dutch parliamentary elections. With Eurosceptic parties growing in both countries (and with the

<sup>29</sup> “France unlikely to achieve 2017 deficit target: fiscal watchdog,” *Reuters*, September 27, 2016. Available online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-budget-idUSKCN11X151> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> “Stats taken from Spain and Portugal Dodge EU Fine for Breaching Deficit Limit,” *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> What is even more alarming is that three quarters of the unemployed have been out of a job for more than a year.

<sup>32</sup> With the role of the IMF diminished, since the fund refused to participate directly in the last bailout and requires outright cuts of the Greek debt.

April referendum deciding against the Association Agreement with Ukraine sending a message to the Dutch government), the incumbent governments will be less likely to show any weakness. On the other hand, a Greek implosion (taking tens of billions of German and Dutch taxpayers' euros down the hole with it) shortly before the election would be disastrous, creating space once again for a deal to be cut.

A presidential election is expected also in France. With President Hollande's record low approval ratings,<sup>33</sup> and seven candidates in the primaries, it will be difficult for the ruling Socialist party to find a strong candidate. The Republicans have, a bit surprisingly, chosen ex-prime minister Francois Fillon as their candidate.<sup>34</sup> A fan of Margaret Thatcher, Fillon promises sweeping pro-business reforms in France. His contender, National Front's Marine Le Pen, has promised a "Frexit" referendum<sup>35</sup> if she wins the election. An unthinkable option 3–4 years ago, in 2017 it is a very realistic question mark in the ongoing story of the European Union.

Somewhat unusually, the first election clash of the year will take place in Brussels, where the new president of the European Parliament will be elected in the early weeks of 2017. The three candidates of the three main parliamentary factions are closely tied, and choosing a winner will require skillful diplomacy both on the stage and behind the scenes.

The year 2016 lacked big economic surprises and sudden market developments. Instead, the world of politics was shaken. At their core, however, the two worlds are indivisible. The current dead-end monetary and fiscal policies will have to change. The year 2017 will tell us a lot about just how that change will take place. It could be via the sudden thrust out of troubles the developed world experienced in the 1980s, or the downward spiral of the 1930s.

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<sup>33</sup> "Hollande's approval rating returns to all-time low: Elabe Poll," *Bloomberg*, September 8, 2016. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-08/hollande-s-approval-rating-returns-to-all-time-low-elabe-poll> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> "François Fillon wins French primary to be candidate for the right," *The Guardian*, November 27, 2016. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/27/francois-fillon-on-course-to-win-french-primary-to-be-candidate-for-the-right> (accessed on January 15, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> "Marine Le Pen promises a Frexit referendum if she becomes French president - and declares Brexit as 'the end of the EU'," *Daily Mail*, September 14, 2016. Available online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3789342/Marine-Le-Pen-promises-Frexit-referendum-French-president-declares-Brexit-end-EU.html> (accessed on January 15, 2017).



# SLOVAKIA'S ENERGY POLICY IN 2016: STRUGGLING FOR INTERCONNECTIONS

PAVOL SZALAI

Slovakia combines a high energy dependence with high energy intensity and relies on energy imports, mostly from Russia. However, in recent years this Central European country has made progress in terms of building interconnections in the gas sector, and market coupling in the power sector. Diversification is now possible for gas as well as oil supplies. Slovakia now faces a different challenge: to preserve its role as a gas transit country, and to resume its role as an electricity exporter.

As the spectre of Nord Stream 2 looms over Slovakia, the country is looking for opportunities to offset the negative effects of the offshore project. The transmission system operator Eustream, owned by the government at 51 per cent, is seeking new business opportunities. It has been successful in transporting increased volumes of gas to Ukraine, thanks to the reverse flow. It has been much less successful, however, in selling its new pipeline project, Eastring, to Romania, and in pursuing an interconnection with Poland, an LNG import country. In the meantime, both Eustream and the Slovak government seem to be approaching a compromise with Moscow, which will allow Slovakia to continue transporting Russian gas westwards despite Nord Stream 2. It was Poland, however, who made the game-changing decision on the project of Gazprom and its Western partners. The Polish competition authority effectively suspended the joint consortium, complicating the operational and financial prospects of the project.

In the power sector, Slovakia has remained a nuclear champion. It produces 58 per cent of its electricity from four reactors, and is building another two at Mochovce. Nevertheless, in 2016 the deadlines for the new construction were postponed, and the costs further increased. Once both reactors are finally online in 2019, the country

must secure export routes to Hungary, allowing access to South-Eastern Europe. After a decade of stagnation, 2016 saw the breaking of the ice on the Slovak–Hungarian border, and in March 2017 the pertinent contract was signed. Nuclear energy may have zero emissions, but it will not suffice to allow Slovakia to fulfil its international commitments. Although the country ratified the Paris Agreement in September 2016, it continues to subsidize coal and fails to speed up the integration of renewables into the grid.

The second half of 2016 was marked by Slovakia's EU Council Presidency. For six months, the country effectively gave up on promoting its national interests in order to build European compromises. The Energy Union featured among its priorities. The results of the Presidency are rather mixed. Slovakia's greatest achievement, paradoxically, is the ratification of the Paris Agreement at the EU level. Bratislava was also strong on legislative files regarding energy security. But it failed, on the other hand, to fulfil its ambitions on internal market issues. Legislation on energy efficiency and emissions trading was handed over – together with the winter energy package proposed by the European Commission in late November – to the Maltese Presidency.

## ENERGY CONSUMPTION, DEPENDENCE AND INTENSITY

Slovakia continues to be dependent on energy imports. This, coupled with its high energy intensity, determines its energy policy. The most recent data for 2014 show that the country imports 60.9 per cent of the energy it consumes, representing a slight increase from 59.2 per cent in the previous year. Still, the EU average is much lower – 53 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Slovakia also recorded a decrease in energy intensity – a proxy factor for energy efficiency – in 2015, the latest year on record. However, the national figure ranks among the highest in the EU, and is 80 per cent higher than the EU average.<sup>2</sup>

Slovakia's energy imports essentially are composed of fossil fuels. In 2015, foreign crude oil, natural gas and coal represented two thirds of the country's energy consumption.<sup>3</sup> Russia is Slovakia's main energy supplier, covering almost all of its crude oil and natural gas imports, as well as one third of its coal imports. Among the fossil fuels, only petroleum products are excepted from this: more than half of imports are covered by neighboring EU Member States: Czech Republic and Austria.<sup>4</sup>

Slovakia's oil supply security was significantly increased in 2015. The Slovak transmission system operator, Transpetrol, reconstructed and increased the capacity of the

<sup>1</sup> "The EU was dependent on energy imports for slightly over half of its consumption in 2014," *Eurostat*, February 4, 2016. Available online: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7150363/8-04022016-AP-EN.pdf/c92466d9-903e-417c-ad76-4c35678113fd> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> "2017: European semester: Country Report – Slovakia," European Commission, February 22, 2017. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2017-european-semester-country-reports\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2017-european-semester-country-reports_en) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> "Energy consumption in the EU below its 1990 level..." *Eurostat*, February 20, 2017. Available online: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7882431/8-20022017-AP-EN.pdf/4f3e5e6a-5c1a-48e6-8226-532f08e3ed09> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> "Slovak Republic – energy system overview," International Energy Agency, 2016. Available online: <https://www.iea.org/media/countries/SlovakRepublic.pdf> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

Adria pipeline on the Hungarian border. This modernization allows for the diversification of crude oil imports. Previously the Slovak refinery Slovnaft could import only Russian crude oil. The interconnection can now supply crude oil from the Mediterranean. Adria is creating new commercial opportunities for Slovnaft's own oil products, which, by volume, are mostly exported to neighboring countries.<sup>5</sup>

Slovakia became a net electricity importer in late 2006, after the first EU-negotiated shutdown of a Slovak nuclear reactor, at Jaslovské Bohunice. Another reactor had to be closed in 2008, deepening the country's import dependency. In 2015, the share of imported electricity reached 8 per cent, the highest figure since 2007. The 2015 figures show that most electricity imports were covered by the Czech Republic, with Poland ranking second. Slovakia is a net electricity exporter to Hungary and Ukraine.<sup>6</sup>

The Central European nation is now integrated within the European energy market. After the 2009 gas crisis, Slovakia now has reverse flows with Austria and the Czech Republic, which connect it to important European gas hubs where gas is traded in short-term contracts. In the electricity sector, the country participates in market coupling with the Czech Republic, Romania and Hungary.

Slovakia's current energy challenge is to maintain its profile as a gas transit country. While Eustream, in which the state is the majority shareholder, is managing to increase its volumes of transported gas, it is slow in implementing new projects such as the interconnection with Poland and Eastring. In the power sector, Slovakia wants to introduce new, indigenous sources. In 2016, however, Slovenské elektrárne, in which the state is a minority shareholder, again postponed the completion, and increased the costs, of the two new nuclear reactors at Mochovce. Moreover – and this is the government's responsibility – Slovakia fails to create a favorable environment for the uptake of renewable power sources. Add to this the ongoing subsidies for coal burning, and the country's commitment to the Paris Agreement is far removed from its policies on the ground.

## NATURAL GAS

Slovakia has a double interest in relation to natural gas. It powers the country's domestic economy, and assures revenues from transit through Slovakia. The development of physical interconnections should allow for the country to diversify its supply portfolio in consumption as well as its client portfolio in transit. In both ways, diversification would improve the position of Slovakia – as a consumer as much as a transit country.

Natural gas represents 24 per cent of Slovakia's total primary energy supply, taking second place just after nuclear energy's 25 per cent, according to the latest data

<sup>5</sup> "Annual Report 2015," Slovnaft, 2016. Available online: [https://slovnaft.sk/images/slovnaft/pdf/about\\_us/our\\_company/for\\_investors/financial\\_reports/annual\\_reports/SLN\\_Vyrocná\\_Správa\\_2015\\_ENG-WEB.pdf](https://slovnaft.sk/images/slovnaft/pdf/about_us/our_company/for_investors/financial_reports/annual_reports/SLN_Vyrocná_Správa_2015_ENG-WEB.pdf) (accessed on March 6, 2017); "Annual Report 2015," Transpetrol, 2016. Available online: [http://www.transpetrol.sk/wp-content/uploads/TP\\_VS\\_2015.pdf](http://www.transpetrol.sk/wp-content/uploads/TP_VS_2015.pdf) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> "Slovak Energy Annual 2016," 2016. Available online: [http://rocenka.sk/domains/rocenka/UserFiles/Files/Rocenka%20komplet%202016%20\\_online.pdf](http://rocenka.sk/domains/rocenka/UserFiles/Files/Rocenka%20komplet%202016%20_online.pdf) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

from 2015.<sup>7</sup> Most of this gas is supplied by Gazprom, based on a 2008 contract with Slovenský plynárenský priemysel. The contract will last until 2028. Although the flexibility of the contract has been increased, the take-or-pay clause is still preserved. And, despite taking into account hub prices, the contract is based on oil-price indexation. Gazprom supplied 3.8 BCM of natural gas to Slovakia in 2015.<sup>8</sup>

According to the government-approved *Energy Policy of the Slovak Republic of 2014*, “maximizing the utilization of the pipeline network through Slovakia” is a key objective.<sup>9</sup> The transmission capacity is 90 BCM/year, of which more than a half is booked via a ship-or-pay contract concluded with Gazprom and valid until 2028. Ever since the 2008 peak of 76.2 BCM, Slovakia's gas transit has been set for a long-term decline. The reason is lower consumption in Europe due to the economic crisis, as well as the launch of an offshore pipeline between Russia and Germany, Nord Stream 1. In 2015, however, the latest year on record, Eustream recorded a year-on-year increase of 9.3 BCM. In that year, the volume of gas transit grew to 55.8 BCM, which may be considered a success.<sup>10</sup>

In 2016, Slovakia attempted simultaneously to build its transit trajectories and to influence the development of transit routes and alternative sources outside its borders.

### **NORTH–SOUTH CORRIDOR AND REVERSE FLOW**

The gas interconnection with Hungary was opened in 2015, offering a capacity of 5 BCM/y from Slovakia and 1.8 BCM/y to Slovakia. Yet in mid-2016, Slovak media reported that the pipeline's use was low, and that it even lay empty in the summer of 2015 and in April 2016. Eustream has consistently suggested that the interconnection would be used more once the Slovak–Polish pipeline was built.<sup>11</sup>

The project of Slovakia's northward interconnection was envisaged by the 2013 intergovernmental agreement. The next step is the construction, which will be co-funded – like the Slovak–Hungarian interconnection – by the EU. The pipeline is projected to transport a maximum of 6.1 BCM/y from Slovakia and 1 BCM/y to Slovakia. But the project is lagging behind schedule. Initially planned for 2019, the launch is now

<sup>7</sup> “Slovak Republic – energy system overview,” op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> “Europe,” Gazprom. Available online: <http://www.gazprom.com/about/marketing/europe/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> “Energy policy of the Slovak Republic,” Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, October 2014. Available online: <http://www.economy.gov.sk/strategy-documents/131028s> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> “Výročná správa 2015,” [Annual Report 2015] Eustream, 2016. Available online: [http://www.eustream.sk/sk\\_media/sk\\_vyrocnne-spravy](http://www.eustream.sk/sk_media/sk_vyrocnne-spravy) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> “Slovensko-maďarský plynovod je znova prázdny,” [Slovak–Hungarian pipeline is empty again] *Pravda.sk*, May 20, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/393675-slovensko-madarsky-plynovod-je-znova-prazdny/> (accessed on March 6, 2017). “Slovensko-maďarský plynovod je ‘zatiaľ prázdny,’” [Slovak–Hungarian pipeline is ‘so far empty’] *vEnergetike.sk*, October 8, 2015. Available online: <http://venergetike.sk/slovensko-madarsky-plynovod-je-zatial-prazdny/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

foreseen for 2020.<sup>12</sup> The investment decision will be taken only this year. In any case, Eustream claims the infrastructure will give access to future new supplies to Slovakia, as well as to Hungary and Poland. Designed as part of the North–South Corridor, the Slovak–Polish and the Slovak–Hungarian interconnections will interconnect the Polish terminal for liquefied natural gas (LNG) with the Southern Corridor in Greece, opening doors to new supplies from the Caspian and East Mediterranean regions.<sup>13</sup>

Poland's LNG import terminal was, indeed, launched in December 2015, delivering the first cargoes of Qatari gas to Swinoujście. Moreover, Central Europe's gas sources could be further diversified by increasing LNG exports from the United States. In February 2016, the only LNG export terminal in the lower 48 US states, Sabine Pass, went online. It has since supplied several European countries. Slovakia will benefit more from the increased LNG supplies to Europe when Eustream launches the interconnection with Poland.

Eustream's flagship project, Easting, is progressing slowly. The new North–South pipeline, composed essentially of interconnections, is supposed to increase the utility and thereby the value of the Slovak transit system. Stretching from the Ukrainian border to the Turkish border it should, in the first phase, bring 20 BCM/y of gas to the Eastern Balkans. In the second phase, it is projected to be directional, transporting another 20 BCM/y of gas to Central Europe. The first phase should be materialized in 2022, the second in 2026. In 2016, Eustream signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Bulgartransgaz, as well as with the Bulgarian government. However, it is failing to bring the Romanians on board. In fact, Easting faces fierce competition from other pipeline projects, including Turkish Stream and BRUA.<sup>14</sup> In early 2017, it was accorded one million euros for a feasibility study. Still, it remains an uncertain project.

In the second phase, Easting could bring Caspian gas to Europe. Supplies from the Southern Corridor are, however, no less distant. Its integral European part, the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), is projected to be launched in 2020, bringing 10 BCM/y of Caspian gas to Europe.

Another way of appreciating the Slovak infrastructure already in place, is in terms of gas transit to Ukraine. Daniel Křetínský, a co-owner of EPH, the minority shareholder of Eustream, went as far as to say "gas transit to Ukraine compensates completely the gaps in the long-term contracts."<sup>15</sup> The Vojany-Užhorod interconnection was launched in 2014, and its current capacity is 14.6 BCM/y. In 2016, the pipeline covered entirely Ukraine's import needs worth 11.1 BCM. Thanks to the reverse flow, the former So-

<sup>12</sup> "Eustream si prepojenie s Poľskom poistil stimulmi od ÚRSO," [Eustream underpins connection to Poland with incentives from URSO] *Energia.sk*, December 16, 2016. Available online: <http://energia.dennikn.sk/dolezite/zemny-plyn-a-ropa/eustream-si-prepojenie-s-polskom-poistil-stimulmi-od-urso/22173/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> "Výročná správa 2015," [Annual Report 2015] Eustream, 2016. Available online: [http://www.eustream.sk/sk\\_media/sk\\_vyrocné-spravy](http://www.eustream.sk/sk_media/sk_vyrocné-spravy) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> "Easting: Veľká voda narazila," [Easting: hitting the wall] *Energia.sk*, October 21, 2016. Available online: <http://energia.dennikn.sk/dolezite/zemny-plyn-a-ropa/easting-velka-voda-narazila/21586/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> "Křetínský: Desím sa, aby napätie v koalícii neohrozilo Slovensko," [Křetínský: I fear tensions in coalition threaten Slovakia] *Sme*, February 20, 2017. Available online: <https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/20462037/kretinsky-energie-slovensko-regulacie-koalicia-fico.html#ixzz4ZLvPdJlU> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

viet country imported no gas from Russia.<sup>16</sup> Ukraine's needs may change upwards, or possibly downwards – decreasing in the latter case Eustream's transit revenues. In 2016, this neighbor of Slovakia's imported less gas than in 2015 (16.4 BCM) due to a decrease in consumption.

## **NORD STREAM 2**

One of the main reasons for the lower gas transit volumes via Slovakia is obviously Nord Stream 1, an offshore pipeline between Russia and Germany that's been in place since 2012. Now, Slovakia is facing the prospect of Nord Stream 2, which will double the capacity of the initial pipeline to 110 BCM by 2019. It's precisely in that year that Gazprom's contract with the Ukrainian transmission system operator expires. In fact, as affirmed by the Russian company, Nord Stream 2 was meant to replace gas transit via Ukraine and, as a consequence, via Slovakia.

In 2016, Bratislava went from rebellion against Nord Stream 2 to accommodation. Although in 2015 Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico spoke of the "betrayal" of Western companies, in 2016 he moderated his language. At a June visit to Berlin, he said: "We are looking for answers to the question of compensation, asking what Slovakia could offer in the case of Nord Stream 2, whether we can use a part of Slovakia's transit network for this gas, or we cannot." And on the corporate side: "Eustream welcomes reassurance on the part of Gazprom that the Slovak (as well the Czech) transit network will be used in the long-term, even in the event of the construction of Nord Stream 2," it said, after a meeting with the Russian firm in summer 2016.<sup>17</sup> As for Germany, the key national player in the EU, in late 2016 it claimed it was looking for a way to preserve gas transit via Ukraine and Slovakia, one that would involve Western companies co-managing the Ukrainian transit system.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, the only key decision made in relation to Nord Stream 2 was taken by a country hugely affected by the pipeline, yet not associated with it: Poland. Warsaw undermined the project's future prospects. In August 2016, the Polish competition authority announced that the foreseen joint venture between Gazprom and its Western partners to build and operate Nord Stream 2 "will not be possible." The authority had already declared in July that the concentration could curb competition in the Polish market, where some of these companies are present. The firms then withdrew their

<sup>16</sup> "Ukrajina vlani nekúpila od Ruska ani kubík plynu," [Ukraine did not buy a single BCM of gas from Russia last year] *Pravda*, February 6, 2017. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/418998-ukrajina-vlani-nekupila-od-ruska-ani-kubik-plynu/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> "Stanovisko spoločnosti Eustream k rokovaniam s Gazpromom o dosahoch projektu Nord Stream 2," [Declaration of Eustream on negotiations with Gazprom over the impact of Nord Stream 2] Eustream, June 30, 2016. Available online: [http://www.eustream.sk/sk\\_media/sk\\_aktuality/stanovisko-spolocnosti-eustream-k-rokovaniam-s-gazpromom-o-dosahoch-projektu-nord-stream-2](http://www.eustream.sk/sk_media/sk_aktuality/stanovisko-spolocnosti-eustream-k-rokovaniam-s-gazpromom-o-dosahoch-projektu-nord-stream-2) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> "Nemecký diplomat: Plyn môže tiecť cez Nord Stream 2 aj Ukrajinu, máme riešenie," [German diplomat: Gas can flow via Nord Stream 2 and via Ukraine, we have a solution] *EurActiv.sk*, December 9, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/rozhovory/energetika-stredna-vychodna-europa/nemecky-diplomat-plyn-moze-tiect-cez-nord-stream-2-aj-ukrajinu-mame-riesenie/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

request for approval and *de facto* gave up on the joint venture. The Polish decision complicates Nord Stream 2's managerial and financial operations.<sup>19</sup> In February 2017, a representative of Engie – Gazprom's French partner – claimed the company continues to be financially involved in the project, and that it will take place.<sup>20</sup>

## ELECTRICITY

Slovakia is a nuclear champion. Nuclear energy is its main fuel and correspondingly its main source of electricity. The country hails fission as a source of secure (home-made), sustainable (low-emission), and competitive (at home and possibly abroad) energy. This Soviet heritage has, however, been combined with the European model. Within the EU, Slovakia has been engaged in increasing its share of renewable energies. Historically a hydroelectric producer, the country must now build up its other renewable capacities.

In 2015, Slovakia's power production was dominated by nuclear energy at 58 per cent. Renewables were the source of 23 per cent of electricity, which came from hydro (15 per cent), biofuels and waste (5 per cent), and solar (3 per cent). Fossil fuels provided for 19 per cent of electricity production, led by coal (12 per cent), and followed by gas (6 per cent) and oil (1 per cent). This electricity mix underscores Slovakia's dependence on fuel imports – nuclear as well as fossil fuels.<sup>21</sup>

This view, however, must be nuanced. "Electricity generated from nuclear fuel appears the least dependent on outages in the supplies of primary energy sources with regards to energy security as there is ample opportunity to secure sufficient stocks in advance and even change suppliers," reads the 2014 document "Energy Policy of the Slovak Republic."<sup>22</sup> As for coal, domestic production covers 15 per cent of consumption, a higher percentage than for gas or crude oil. Renewables obviously contribute to increasing energy independence. Moreover, within the European framework Slovakia participates in regional market coupling, which allows for imports and exports – and will in the future contribute to stabilizing supplies of intermittent renewables.

In 2016, Slovakia continued to build new nuclear and renewable capacities. The pace, however, was slow, due to internal factors. The ongoing support for coal mining and burning may be challenged in the light of Slovakia's ratification of the Paris Treaty.

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<sup>19</sup> "Nový plynovod postavíme, uisťuje Gazprom a spol. Analytici sú skeptickejší," [New gas pipeline will be built, assures Gazprom & Co. Analysts are more skeptical] *EurActiv.sk*, August 22, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/energetika/novy-plynovod-postavime-uisťuje-gazprom-a-spol-analytici-vidia-neistotu/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> "Denis Simonneau: Vďaka Nord Streamu 2 klesnú ceny plynu pre Slovensko," [Denis Simonneau: Nord Stream 2 will decrease gas prices for Slovakia] *EurActiv.sk*, February 22, 2017. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/rozhovory/energetika/denis-simonneau-vdaka-nord-streamu-2-klesnu-ceny-plynu-pre-slovensko/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> "Energy Policy of the Slovak Republic," Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, October 2014. Available online: <http://www.economy.gov.sk/strategy-documents/131028s> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

## NUCLEAR POWER AND THE HUNGARIAN FACTOR

After the closure of the first and second reactors at Jaslovské Bohunice in 2006 and 2008 respectively, Slovakia kept open two newer units at Bohunice and two more at Mochovce. In 2015, the latest figures on record, nuclear capacity totaled 1,940 MW. The two Bohunice units are scheduled to continue operating until the mid-2020s, by which time Slovakia should have two additional reactors running at Mochovce.

But 2016 saw the construction of Mochovce 3 and 4 postponed and its costs increased. In November, the Ministry of Economy announced that the total cost of finishing the two new units would be more than 5 billion euros. These reactors have been under construction since the 1980s. When construction resumed in 2008, the government estimated the cost of completion at 2.8 billion euros. The projected dates for the commercial launch are no longer valid either. Current estimates are that the third bloc will be finished in summer 2018 and the fourth in summer 2019.<sup>23</sup> The construction site is being managed by Slovenské elektrárne, whose majority stake is currently being sold (by Enel) to EPH, the minority shareholder in Eustream. Slovenské elektrárne claims the delays are mainly due to safety upgrades following the 2011 Fukushima accident. EPH's co-owner, Daniel Křetínský, has hinted at Enel's mismanagement, which in addition was taken advantage of by its subcontractors.<sup>24</sup> Once online, the new reactors will cover 13 per cent of the country's electricity consumption, transforming Slovakia from an electricity importer to a net exporter.

In 2016, Slovakia managed to progress in its preparation of the export route. Given the abundance of electricity and low prices in Western Europe, the country was able to export power only to Hungary and further southwards. The prerequisite for this was an increase in the capacity of the border interconnections. After blocking the capacity increase for several years, Hungary finally started to cooperate with Slovakia in late 2016, according to media reports.<sup>25</sup> In March 2017, the pertinent contract was finally signed by Slovak transmission system operator SEPS and its Hungarian partner, MAVIR. The new date for the launch of the interconnections is 2020.<sup>26</sup>

The history of this cooperation suggests, however, that the interconnections may suffer further delays prior to launching. Budapest, in fact, has been blocking the extension for a decade. On the Slovak side, SEPS, a state-owned company, claimed in early

<sup>23</sup> "Žiga pozná zodpovedného za Mochovce. Termín dostavby je už známy," [Žiga knows who is responsible for Mochovce. Completion date is off] *Aktuálne.sk*, November 2, 2016. Available online: <https://aktualne.atlas.sk/ekonomika/slovenska-ekonomika/ziga-nad-rozostavanymi-mochovcami-krci-plecami-moze-za-ne-enel.html> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> "Křetínský: Desím sa, aby napätie v koalícii neohrozilo Slovensko," [Křetínský: I fear tensions in the coalition threaten Slovakia] *Sme*, February 20, 2017. Available online: <https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/20462037/kretinsky-energie-slovensko-regulacie-koalicia-fico.html#ixzz4ZLvPdljU> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> "Budapešť má ukončiť blokáciu Mochoviec," [Budapest to stop blocking Mochoviec] *Pravda*, November 21, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/411553-budapest-ma-ukoncit-blokaciu-mochoviec/> <https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/20462037/kretinsky-energie-slovensko-regulacie-koalicia-fico.html#ixzz4ZLvPdljU> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> "Maďarsko súhlasilo, Slovensku umožní vyvážať nadbytočnú elektrinu z jadra," [Hungary agrees, will allow Slovakia to export excess nuclear electricity] *EurActiv.sk*, March 2, 2017. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/energetika/madari-suhlasili-slovensku-umoznia-vyvatat-nadbytocnu-elektrinu-z-jadra/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

2016 that everything was ready for construction. The Pravda daily speculated that the reason for Hungary's obstruction was the fear of lower electricity prices at home and an effort to preserve its markets, as Hungary, too, is planning to build a new nuclear power plant at Páks. The July 2016 progress report by the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators slammed Hungary and Slovakia for delays in implementing the projects.<sup>27</sup>

### **COAL, RENEWABLES AND THE PARIS AGREEMENT**

Slovenské elektrárne operate two coal power plants. In central Slovakia, Nováky, at 266 MW, is fueled by brown coal from the mines at Horná Nitra and Čárý. In the eastern part of the country, Vojany, currently at 220 MW, uses imported black coal from Russia. This power plant has increasingly been burning biomass to decrease its environmental impact. On the other hand, Nováky burns exclusively domestic coal, something that has been subjected to a heated public debate.

The Nováky operation stretches beyond energy concerns. The "Energy Policy of the Slovak Republic:"

the Slovak government confirmed the volume of electricity and heat generation and supply from domestic coal as in the general economic interest in Resolution No. 47/2010. This measure ensures the optimum level of coal extraction increases the security of electricity supply and lowers Slovakia's energy dependence in the period until 2020 and with perspective to 2035. This support has an important social aspect as it maintains employment.<sup>28</sup>

Based on this reasoning, electricity production from brown coal is subsidized by all consumers via feed-in tariffs.

As for renewables, Slovakia is progressing very slowly in terms of using its solar and wind potential. Meeting the European commitments is not the problem. In 2015, renewables covered 11.9 per cent of total energy consumption, while the indicative goal for that year was only 10 per cent. Using biofuels in transport made an important contribution to this. The problem, however, is that Slovakia produces only 3 per cent of its electricity from solar energy and close to zero from wind energy. Despite a generous levy to support production from renewables, "[t]he connection of new sources to the network is perceived as difficult, and since 2013 a 'stop status' has prohibited the connection of new renewable sources [with a capacity above 10 kW] to the grid," notes the European Commission in its 2017 European Semester country report for Slovakia. And, it adds, "the complex, opaque regulatory framework complicates relations between stakeholders in the energy market, hampering the

<sup>27</sup> "Consolidated report on the progress of electricity and gas projects of common interest for the year 2015," ACER, July 5, 2016. Available online: [http://www.acer.europa.eu/Official\\_documents/Acts\\_of\\_the\\_Agency/Publication/CONSOLIDATED%20REPORT%20ON%20THE%20PROGRESS%20OF%20ELECTRICITY%20AND%20GAS%20PROJECTS%20OF%20COMMON%20INTEREST%20for%20the%20year%202015.pdf](http://www.acer.europa.eu/Official_documents/Acts_of_the_Agency/Publication/CONSOLIDATED%20REPORT%20ON%20THE%20PROGRESS%20OF%20ELECTRICITY%20AND%20GAS%20PROJECTS%20OF%20COMMON%20INTEREST%20for%20the%20year%202015.pdf) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> "Energy policy of the Slovak Republic," op. cit.

production and distribution of renewable energy and the transition to clean energy technologies."<sup>29</sup>

The continued burning of coal and lack of progress in renewables threatens Slovakia's future climate commitments. Wanting to lead by example, Slovakia ratified the Paris Agreement in September 2016. Although it was voted in by a cross-party majority, including opposition deputies, the opposition highlighted the coal subsidies. Environment Minister László Sólymos, whose portfolio does not include energy subsidies, admitted that Slovakia does not yet know how it will implement the Paris Agreement. Within the Agreement, the EU as a whole has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent by 2030, and increasing energy efficiency by 27 per cent and the share of renewables by 27 per cent as compared to 1990. This should contribute to the Agreement's objective of limiting global warming to 1.5–2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, as compared to preindustrial levels. Specific EU and Member State policies are yet to be discussed. It is certain, however, that Slovakia will have to speed up the integration of renewables and phase out coal in the future.<sup>30</sup>

## SLOVAKIA'S EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

In the second half of 2016, Slovakia held the EU Council Presidency for the first time. The Presidency, which rotates among the 28 Member States, lasts six months and essentially aims to reach consensus on legislative files within the Council and with the European Parliament. Energy and climate issues were included in the single market agenda, one of Slovakia's four priority areas as defined by the Presidency Program. Slovakia's results at the helm of the EU are, however, mixed. The country was strong on external policy, but weak on internal market.

"The EU currently imports up to 53 per cent of its energy, which makes it the largest energy importer in the world. The Slovak Presidency hopes to contribute to the creation of a resilient and competitive Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy. The key objective must be secure and clean energy supplies at affordable consumer prices," the Presidency Program reads. The Program did define specific objectives, which allows for an objective evaluation.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "2017: European Semester: Country Report – Slovakia," European Commission, February 22, 2017. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2017-european-semester-country-reports\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2017-european-semester-country-reports_en) (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> "Parížska dohoda spojila koalíciu s opozíciou. V pléne sa hovorilo o uhli," [Paris Agreement connects coalition and opposition. Plenary discusses coal] *EurActiv.sk*, September 21, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/zivotne-prostredie/parizska-dohoda-spojila-koaliciu-s-opoziciou-v-plene-sa-hovorilo-o-uhli/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> "Programme of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/data/documents/presidency-programme-eng-final5.pdf> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

## CLIMATE POLICY

Slovakia's greatest success was the Council's ratification of the Paris Agreement in September 2016. When China and United States ratified the Agreement in early September, the EU, which helped to negotiate the deal in 2015, was under pressure to deliver too. Lobbied by France, Slovakia put the Agreement forward at the informal Bratislava Summit in mid-September and called an extraordinary Environment Council a few days later in Brussels. There, the Agreement was ratified. That allowed the EU to contribute to its entry into force and to discuss its application at COP22 in Marrakech.

However, Slovakia failed to reach agreement within the Council on the reform of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS). The EU's federalized platform covering emissions from the energy and industrial sectors currently suffers from the low price of emission quotas. The European Commission has proposed a reform for the period of 2021–2030. It was Bratislava's ambition to reach a consensus on the file during its Presidency, which it did not manage to do. The Environment Minister cited an "insufficient political will" among Member States.<sup>32</sup>

## ENERGY POLICY

The results are similar in energy policy – success with the outward-looking and failure with the inward-looking legislation. As planned, the Slovak Presidency managed to secure a compromise on the revised Regulation on the Security of Supplies. The new measure shifts crisis mechanisms from national to regional levels. The Presidency also planned to – and did – achieve consensus with the Parliament on the new Decision on Energy Inter-Governmental Agreements. The agreed version will *de facto* allow the Commission to veto agreements contrary to European law.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, and contrary to its ambitions, Bratislava did not deliver on energy efficiency. The Commission proposed amendments to the Regulation on Energy Labelling of Products. The new labelling, from A to G, should allow the legislation to catch up with technology and market developments. Slovakia had hoped to reach a compromise with the European Parliament. It failed to do so.<sup>34</sup>

The winter energy package was not published by the European Commission until late November 2016. Slovakia was barely able to organize one or two ministerial exchanges on the biggest legislative overhaul since the EU's creation. As a Presidency country, it avoided the perfect legislative storm. As is being discussed now in 2017, Slovakia can get back to promoting its national interest at the European table.

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<sup>32</sup> "Predsedníctvo sa končí. V migrácii nepresvedčilo, výsledky má inde," [Presidency winding down. Not convincing in migration, results are elsewhere] *EurActiv.sk*, December 13, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/fokus/slovenske-predsednictvo/slovenske-predsednictvo-sa-konci-v-migracii-nepresvedcilo-vysledky-ma-inde/> (accessed on March 6, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*



# STRATEGIC YEAR 2016

## IN DEFENSE

DUŠAN FISCHER, SAMUEL GODA

This publication's 2015 threat assessment listed terrorism, the migration crisis, and war in Ukraine as the main international challenges. These threats have not faded from the Euro-Atlantic region and have been joined by others – the decision of the United Kingdom to be the first country to leave the European Union, and the election of Donald Trump – a man with no prior experience of public office – to the Presidency of the United States. Both of these events have significantly intensified the expert and political debate over the question of a “European army.” Trump's election also brought discussions as to the flexibility of the EU–USA transatlantic relationship to the forefront, while future relations between the USA and Russia remain uncertain, along with their impact on Europe. These events can be perceived as providing impulses for the revision of a given country's defense, intelligence, and information capabilities.

“Post-truth” is the Oxford dictionary's 2016 Word of the Year. They defined the term as denoting culture in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. Democracy and security thus become topics probed by many – a situation that represents a core obstacle to regional cooperation.

In 2016, Slovakia experienced two important moments herself in terms of security and defense repercussions: Parliamentary elections, and the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Slovak National Party now heads the Ministry of Defense, which has added a second State Secretary position. Two issues defined the substance of Slovakia's defense and security throughout the year. The first was concerned with international commitments – including expansion of the defense budget and investment in modernization – which included regional cooperation, mainly with the closest allies in

the V4. The second area concerned the long-overdue revision of strategic documents. The formulation and adoption processes of both the Security and Defense Strategies achieved tangible headway in 2016, while the Ministry continued to assess the White Paper on Defense. The ongoing modernization of military materiel was the next issue. One of the topics that the Ministry has not grasped in terms of its full potential is the communication of its actions, including military activities such as allied exercise transport.

## SLOVAKIA AND THE NEW DYNAMICS OF SECURITY AT THE EU AND NATO LEVELS

What happened at the EU level during 2016, and especially during the Slovak EU Council Presidency? A highly anticipated moment was the release of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) on June 28, 2016 by Federica Mogherini. This was very important for the upcoming Slovak EU Council's Presidency, as a "new" agenda now appeared on the table and served as stimulation for further activities, including the Bratislava summit. From the Slovak point of view, the new strategy may be considered as rather a positive step. Some who have critiqued the document have said that it reflects the situation in EU foreign policy as it should be, and not as it is.<sup>1</sup> To some extent this is true – however, the "formulation" of EU foreign policy is rather an intra-EU process and as such forms a part of internal negotiations. There is no doubt that in terms of, for example, prioritization and hierarchy, the situation in Ukraine – from the Slovak perspective – deserves much more attention than maritime security in the Mediterranean. However, this does not mean that the EU does not have the instruments to work on both sides – foreign policy and internal negotiations. Therefore, to find a consensus in an EU internal issue is not foreign policy. During the preparation stage of this document, Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs consulted with civil society experts, which is a very positive sign. The most important message the EUGS delivered is related to the autonomy of the EU in terms of security and defense. Debate on this issue at the national level during 2016 was not a priority – however, several discussions on the "EU army" took place in the media and in public debates.<sup>2</sup> These discussions have been rather skeptical,<sup>3,4</sup> while the official position of the government and Foreign Ministry was not clear until the Bratislava Summit.

<sup>1</sup> S. Lehne, "The EU Global Strategy, a triumph of hope over experience," *Carnegie Europe*, July 4, 2016. Available online: <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=64003> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> "Vznikne európska armáda?" [Will a European army be created?] *TA3*, September 29, 2016. Available online: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1091614/vznikne-europska-armada-clintonova-vs-trump-zivot-vo-vesmire.html> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> "Armáda európskej únie: väčšina politikov si ju zatiaľ nevie predstaviť," [Army of the European Union: most politicians cannot imagine it yet] *Európske noviny*, October 5, 2016. Available online: <https://europskenoviny.sk/2016/10/05/armada-europskej-unie-vacsina-politikov-ju-zatial-nevie-predstavit/> (accessed on February 15, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> "Je spoločná európska armáda reálnym projektom," [Is a common European army a real project?] *Sme*, September 21, 2016. Available online: <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/20279810/je-spolocna-europska-armada-realnym-projektom.html> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

An exceptional moment came on July 8, 2016, when Donald Tusk, Jean-Claude Juncker and Jens Stoltenberg came out with a common declaration on the NATO–EU strategic partnership. In this declaration, they urged the two organizations to work together more closely in the following areas – countering hybrid threats, maritime operations, cyber security, development of defense capabilities, enhancement of defense industry and research, more frequent and more coordinated military exercises, and better cooperation with partners in the East and in the South. In all these areas, terms as coordination, resilience and sharing information appear frequently.<sup>5</sup> This was reaffirmed on December 6, 2016 in a document called “Council Conclusions on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.”<sup>6</sup>

The Slovak Republic has already recognized the importance of some of the areas mentioned above. In this situation, Slovakia should closely follow developments and take an active part in shaping further relations between NATO and the EU. Being a member state of both bodies, it is important for Slovakia to avoid the duplication of tasks and to focus on its own comparative advantages that could further be offered to these institutions. Moreover, this will open space for the further development of human resources, both within the MFEA and the MoD. On July 21–22, 2016, Bratislava hosted an informal meeting of defense ministers, chaired by Federica Mogherii and Minister Peter Gajdoš. The agenda included three main topics – implementation of the EUGS (already existing Battlegroups and future perspectives on PESCO – Permanent Structured Cooperation), the European Defense Action Plan (EDAP) – especially in the field of research and technology – and, last but not least, closer cooperation with NATO.<sup>7</sup>

Without any doubt, the Bratislava Summit was the most important single event of the Slovak EU Council Presidency. The main output of this unofficial summit was the so-called Bratislava Declaration, and Bratislava Roadmap<sup>8</sup> setting out legislation for the next 12 months – the Bratislava process. Besides the area of migration, which was the priority during the summit, a range of other areas were mentioned, including

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<sup>5</sup> “Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” NATO, July 8, 2016. Available online: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133163.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Council Conclusions on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” Council of the European Union, December 6, 2016. Available online: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15283-2016-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed on February 15, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> “Bratislava welcomes the defense ministers of EU member states for talks on joint steps in the field of defense policy,” *Press Release*, SK PRES, 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/en/press-releases/bratislava-welcomes-the-defense-ministers-of-eu-member-states-for-talks-on-joint-steps-in-the-field-of-defense-policy> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> “Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap,” Council of the European Union, September 16, 2016. Available online: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/09/16-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmap/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

cooperation in defense and security. The key message is that hard security is coming to the European scene.

Another important success of the Slovak Presidency occurred during talks on the future of EU security. There have been voices opposed to any deeper talk of “more security and defense” in EU and, on the other hand, strong voices even demanding an “EU army.” The Slovak Presidency managed to offer a compromise and to shape the debate into one aiming at realistic outcomes. Almost a month later, on November 14, 2016, Mogherini introduced the Implementation Plan on Security and Defense (IPSD), and soon afterwards, on November 30, 2016, the European Defense Action plan was released. In popular terms, these two plans, together with the heightened level of EU–NATO cooperation, form the three pillars of the EU’s winter 2016 security and defense package. These documents aim at introducing several new arrangements (or in some cases “old new”) which, in our opinion, constitute a positive step forward. However, the core question rests on the member states – whether they will be willing, under current circumstances, to accept these changes which are very closely interconnected with the issue of national sovereignty. These initiatives aim at creating a kind of headquarters – a “permanent operational planning and conduct capability” for EU missions as well as for “non-executive military operations.” The European Defense Fund, the Coordinated Annual Review of Defense, and plans to establish a common single market for the European defense industry are three more new (old) arrangements.<sup>9</sup> The Slovak position should be to welcome all these initiatives – as for many years they have provided space for a previously unknown kind of “labor division” between the two organizations – and to step forward to aid in their mutual cooperation. However, at the official level the Slovak position is rather reserved. Neither the minister of defense nor minister of European and foreign affairs has provided a clear position on these initiatives, besides the reserved or rather negative position towards the question of an “EU army” – which, however, is so far not on the table.<sup>10</sup>

However we may also find elsewhere, if not a criticism then rather a warning.

First, the reference to “permanent structured cooperation” (i.e. the treaty mechanism allowing a core group of member states to integrate further) is a placeholder: the current proposals are all about capabilities, without dealing with the institutional consequences. Second, the plan to earmark 500 million euros per year to spend on military R&D is groundbreaking, but is also conditional, in this case on a future agreement on the EU’s post-Brexit multi-annual financial framework (2021–2027).<sup>11</sup>

The authors of these lines also provide what in their opinion is a “key to success,” namely a greater strategic convergence, whereby EU member states fully recognize the link between the inevitable restructuring of their armed forces in the short term

<sup>9</sup> “Implementation Plan on Security and Defence,” Council of the European Union, November 14, 2016. Available online: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs\\_implementation\\_plan\\_st14392.en16\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_implementation_plan_st14392.en16_0.pdf) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> L. Bariak, “Plán európskej armády môže vstať z mŕtvych kvôli Putinovi či teroristom,” [Plan for European army could emerge again because of Putin and terrorists] *Aktuality.sk*, May 12, 2016. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/337563/plan-europskej-armady-moze-vstat-z-mrtvych-kvoli-putinovi-i-teroristom/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> “EU defence plan is ‘no game-changer,’” *EUobserver*, December 16, 2016. Available online: <https://euobserver.com/opinion/136315> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

(which is already under way through defense spending reviews in most states) and the long-term added value of pooling and sharing military capabilities in terms of sustainability and effectiveness.<sup>12</sup>

Under such circumstances, the Slovak Republic should take an active part in talks on the purpose of certain capabilities – and also on the question of which capabilities should be elaborated more deeply, and which should be rejected. This, however, might be complicated for a country that does not yet have its own defined strategy. Last but not least, it will be interesting to follow closely the progress of UK, which is leaving the EU but not European security. Their position on EU security and defense will thus be very important, and probably closely connected to the political negotiations over the shape of the UK's exit.

For NATO, 2016 was a year of assessment. The initial assurance measures introduced during the Wales Summit in 2014 included a cap on defense spending cuts and approval of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), a set of "necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment."<sup>13</sup> The introduction of RAP was meant to send a signal to the adversary to demonstrate both NATO's readiness and its cohesiveness in terms of responding to a potential attack. Further, it provided the needed assurance to those Allies who were calling for a united response to the 2014 Russian intervention in Ukraine. As part of the RAP, the Wales Summit also brought to the table the Very High Readiness Task Force (VJTF) as part of the previously formed NATO Response Forces (NRF) and NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIU). The VJTF is a task force ready to deploy within "a few days."<sup>14</sup> Consequently, what follows next should be the search for a new and faster way of responding, since "a few days" gives a potential adversary enough time to move forward and prevent a swift reaction. When operational, the NFIUs will serve as logistical centers for the command and control of deployed troops in the Eastern Flank, in cooperation with High-readiness Multinational Headquarters.

After the longest period without enlargement since the Cold War, NATO invited representatives of Montenegro to attend the Warsaw Summit as a further step towards enlargement. Although the country's official statements are supportive of Montenegro's accession to NATO, the domestic situation is still split. A poll taken in December 2016 showed that a plurality, not a majority, of Montenegrins viewed the accession unfavorably, by a margin of 0.2 per cent, while 20 per cent of responders did not have an opinion on the matter.<sup>15</sup> According to NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, this unfavorability, although high, should not stop Montenegro from joining NATO.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> "The EU's winter package for European Security and Defence," *CEPS*, December 16, 2016. Available online: <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/eu%E2%80%99s-winter-package-european-security-and-defense> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," NATO, September 5, 2014. Available online: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>15</sup> "Political Public Opinion Montenegro – NATO Integration," CEDEM, December 2016. Available online: [http://www.cedem.me/images/jDownloads\\_new/Program%20Empirijska%20istazivanja/Politicko%20javno%20mnenje/CEDEM\\_decembar\\_2016\\_istrazivanje.pdf](http://www.cedem.me/images/jDownloads_new/Program%20Empirijska%20istazivanja/Politicko%20javno%20mnenje/CEDEM_decembar_2016_istrazivanje.pdf) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> "NATO seeks higher Montenegro public support for membership," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2015.

However, there are questions surrounding the country's Russian ties and their influence over domestic politics, which need to be resolved.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that NATO must invest its own public diplomacy capabilities in this matter, in cooperation with the local government and NGOs, in order to maintain a higher level of NATO support, since public opinion can shift and through elections change the political landscape. The declining support for NATO in East-Central Europe is an example of how underestimated public policy can lead to undesired results.

In light of Great Britain's decision to leave the European Union, NATO has agreed to closer cooperation with the EU. In July 2016, the two organizations issued a Framework for cooperation. The areas of cooperation will include crisis management, hybrid threats, and maritime security. The countries involved will include Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Sudan.<sup>18</sup>

The American presidential election campaign sparked a new debate on the future of the Alliance. Then-candidate Donald Trump questioned the importance of NATO by calling it "obsolete."<sup>19</sup> Although Trump is not the first US president to encourage allies in Europe to spend more on defense, he is the most vocal about the possible consequences of inaction. A short-term remedy for the panic-stricken allies in the Baltic region was the nomination and subsequent confirmation of former General James Mattis as Secretary of Defense. As the last U.S. NATO Supreme allied commander for transformation, his relationship to the Alliance differs from that of the President. In February 2017, he stressed the need for increased defense spending, while stating that NATO remains "a fundamental bedrock" of transatlantic ties.<sup>20</sup> Russia remains the greatest geopolitical challenge for NATO. Three years after the annexation of Crimea, the political relationship between the Russian Federation and NATO representatives remains fragile and unpredictable. The military relationship, on the other hand, continues. NATO has been taking steps to stabilize the relationship, including extending an invitation to Russian representatives to observe Allied exercises in Europe. However, as the situation in Ukraine is closely tied to fulfillment of the Minsk II agreement, NATO's power in this regard is limited. It is in NATO's primary interest to continue with further steps towards transparency in its relationship with Russia.

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<sup>17</sup> "Russian nationalists behind Montenegro PM assassination plot," *BBC*, November 6, 2016. Available online: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37890683> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> "NATO-EU relations – framework for cooperation," *Factsheet*, NATO, July 2016. Available online: [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_07/20160630\\_1607-factsheet-nato-eu-en.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160630_1607-factsheet-nato-eu-en.pdf) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> "Donald Trump says NATO is 'obsolete,' UN is 'political game,'" *The New York Times*. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/04/02/donald-trump-tells-crowd-hedge-fine-if-nato-broke-up/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> "Defense Secretary Mattis issues new ultimatum to NATO allies on defense spending," *The Washington Post*, February 2017. Available online: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/02/15/mattis-trumps-defense-secretary-issues-ultimatum-to-nato-allies-on-defense-spending/?utm\\_term=.18722490bac7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/02/15/mattis-trumps-defense-secretary-issues-ultimatum-to-nato-allies-on-defense-spending/?utm_term=.18722490bac7) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

## A SOLDIER HEADING THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

General Peter Gajdoš, the former First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, was appointed Minister of Defense after the 2016 parliamentary elections. This most important managerial position was thus assigned to a soldier. Slovak President Andrej Kiska was pleased that a soldier with experience at the ministry would now oversee defense.<sup>21</sup> The former Deputy Secretary General of NATO, Alexander Vershbow, also expressed his appreciation of this fact.<sup>22</sup> The choice of Gajdoš was also commended by his predecessor as a “good choice.”<sup>23</sup> It seems, however, that this minister with a military background has now hit the wall of politics. His position now is first and foremost a political one, and it is obviously difficult for a military commander to change his mindset. The minister has refused to comment on the unresolved affairs of previous governments. In his first interview as minister, he responded to questions about the wiretapping case during Ľubomír Galko's term of office only briefly with the comment, “Let us leave these matters to the criminal justice system.”<sup>24</sup> He expressed great appreciation for his immediate predecessor, Minister Martin Glváč, for his efficiency in financing.<sup>25</sup> At the first press conference of the Slovak National Party, which nominated him for the position, he introduced himself as Lieutenant General, and frequently attends public events in uniform, for example when addressing the military police in October 2016 – evoking the characteristic behavior of defense ministers from Eastern Europe rather than those of the EU and NATO. “Waiting is the worst part,” said Minister Gajdoš when evaluating the priorities of his ministry,<sup>26</sup> suggesting that his intention was to start the process of modernization as soon as possible. The Minister emphasized that Slovakia's security and defense must

<sup>21</sup> “Minister Gajdoš predstavil prezidentovi SR A. Kiskovi programové priority rezortu obrany,” [Minister Gajdos presents the priorities of the Ministry of Defense to Slovak President A. Kiska] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, April 12, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/36831-sk/minister-gajdos-predstavil-prezidentovi-sr-a-kiskovi-programove-priority-rezortu-obrany/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> “Zástupca generálneho tajomníka NATO A. Vershbow privítal, že rezort obrany riadi bývalý vojak,” [NATO Deputy Secretary General A. Vershbow welcomes the Ministry of Defense being managed by former soldier] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, April 15, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/36878-sk/zastupca-generalneho-tajomnika-nato-a-vershbow-privital-ze-rezort-obrany-riadi-byvaly-vojak/> (February 15, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> “Vznikne európska armáda?” op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> “Zmení slovenskú armádu? Prvý rozhovor ministra obrany Petra Gajdoša. Pre PL.sk prezradil na aké hrozby sa musíme pripraviť,” [Can Gajdos change the Slovak army? First interview with Minister of Defense Peter Gajdos. Tells PL.sk what threats we have to prepare for] *Parlamentné listy*, May 17, 2016. Available online: <http://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/rozhovory/EXKLUZIVNE-Zmeni-slovensku-armadu-Prvy-rozhovor-ministra-obrany-Petra-Gajdosa-Pre-PL-sk-prezradil-na-ake-hrozby-sa-musime-pripravit-268779> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> “Minister Gajdoš: Cena a vek Gripenov, ktoré nám núkajú je neakceptovateľná,” [Minister Gajdos: Price and age of Gripens offered are unacceptable] *Sme*, May 24, 2016. Available online: [http://domov.sme.sk/c/20171946/gajdos-s-dankom-sme-blizky-vztah-nemali.html?piano\\_t=1](http://domov.sme.sk/c/20171946/gajdos-s-dankom-sme-blizky-vztah-nemali.html?piano_t=1) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> “Priority rezortu obrany,” [Priorities of the Ministry of Defense] *RTVS-Z prvej ruky*, May 5, 2016. Available online: <https://www.rtvs.sk/radio/archiv/1175/438156> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

be improved. As with the previous government, the Ministry's priorities revolve around the modernization of military infrastructure and the updating of strategic documents. However, unlike former Minister Glváč, Minister Gajdoš has attempted to include the broader expert public in the formulation of strategic documents and the White Book on Defense. As the movement of personnel between the Ministry of Defense and the non-governmental sector remains regular and tangible, the Ministry and those in charge of formulating strategic documents are in a good position to create the proper expert mix. On the other hand, it remains to be seen how many of the experts' proposals are reflected in the Ministry's final draft. So far, the meetings have been limited to discussions over earlier final documents requiring revision, as in the case of the White Book on Defense.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the Ministry's expert capabilities, the new administration has reopened the issue of reforming the Institute of Security and Defense Studies (IBOŠ). The institute has been understaffed for quite some time, unbeknownst to the public, and the ministry's position on its maintenance or cancellation has remained ambivalent. The previous government adopted a partial solution by transferring IBOŠ under the auspices of the Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš, while leaving its headquarters in Bratislava. While it remains true that the academic-analytical function of IBOŠ is needed during the current turbulent changes being undergone in international security, its transfer and change of function seem to be short-term solutions rather than the fulfilment of a long-term conceptual and sustainable vision. The Ministry should therefore adopt a clear position and create the capacities needed, including competitive remuneration, to allow the Institute to fulfill its function and supply the Ministry with high-quality analytical material. The Minister's framing of its cooperation with the non-governmental sector will be crucial to expert communication.

## INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND COOPERATION

The NATO Warsaw Summit was held in July 2016. Slovakia confirmed its Warsaw summit commitments and adopted new defense capability commitments to NATO, including participation in the Readiness Action Plan and active participation in the NATO Force Integration Unit program (NFIU). These commitments were coupled with its defense budget responsibility and the aim of increasing the defense budget to 1.6 per cent of GDP by 2020.<sup>28</sup> The government's manifesto declares its ambition to increase the defense budget, but mentions no specific numbers. Minister Gajdoš has commented

<sup>27</sup> "Rezort obrany otvoril verejnú diskusiu k návrhu aktualizovanej bielej knihy o obrane SR," [Ministry of Defense has opened a public discussion on the proposed updated version of the White Paper on Defense of the Slovak Republic] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, July 6, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/37521-sk/rezort-obrany-otvoril-verejnu-diskusiu-k-navrhu-aktualizovanej-bielej-knihy-o-obrane-sr/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> "Informácia o priebehu a výsledkoch samitu NATO vo Varšave v dňoch 8. – 9. júla 2016," [Information on the progress and results of the NATO Summit in Warsaw – July 8–9] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, September 7, 2016. Available online: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=25883> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

that the manifesto is a vision, and that specific steps can only be made after the adoption of new strategic documents. The actual defense budget in 2016 was 1.16 per cent of GDP.<sup>29</sup> At this point we can state with certainty that the Wales target will not be met. In October 2016, the government approved its state budget containing a defense budget increase to 1.19 per cent of GDP for 2017, with an estimated increase of 0.01 per cent per year – arriving at a final 1.22 per cent of GDP in the year 2019.<sup>30</sup>

The topic of spending and contributions to NATO is almost a *sine qua non* issue of any debate on security and defense within the Slovak Republic. Despite the fact, since Slovakia joined NATO, that talking about finances can often apparently lead to a dead end, such discussion is ultimately needed. The discussion, however, should first of all be based on a strategic approach towards the effective and professional management of security and defense in the country. It is not possible to offer a lasting solution without at least having a clear goal in mind. In such a situation, whatever is being proposed today may change in the near future and thus halt the whole process for several months or even longer. Despite the fact that in 2016, under Glváč, the ministry concluded the biggest defense expenditure since Slovak independence, this does not mean that it was based on a strategic and evidence-based decision.<sup>31</sup> Even if it was, the public (even experts) were not properly informed of the reasons behind these contracts.

On the other hand, Slovakia's efforts toward improving NATO's collective defense have shed a positive light. This includes the allocation of 152 members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AFSR) to a three-month training mission in Latvia to be deployed from April to June 2017.<sup>32</sup> As a unique contribution, Slovakia will take over the lead in the NATO Trust Fund for explosive ordnance disposal and demining in Ukraine.<sup>33</sup> Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) is a repeatedly proven high-quality capability of the AFSR, and one highly commended by NATO allies. The taking over of the Trust fund is currently in its preparatory stages.<sup>34</sup> Further commitments include

<sup>29</sup> "Hlavná kniha – Rozpočet verejnej správy na roky 2017 až 2019 – schálený NR SR," [Main book – government budget for 2017–2019 – approved by the National Council of Slovak Republic] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, January 23, 2107, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> M. Dubéci, "Stámiliónové nákupy vlády o ktorých nemôžete vedieť vôbec nič," *Denník N*, August 23, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/blog/stamilionove-nakupy-vlady-o-ktorych-nemozete-vediet-vobec-nic/> (accessed on February 15, 2017). The official budget breakdown is available here: <http://www.mosr.sk/rozpocet-rozpoctovej-kapitoly-ministerstva-obrany-sr-na-rok-2016/>

<sup>32</sup> "Národná rada SR potvrdila vyslanie vojakov do výcvikovej misie v Lotyšsku," [National Council endorses sending troops to training mission in Latvia] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, February 2, 2017. Available online: <http://www.mosr.sk/39110-sk/narodna-rada-sr-potvrdila-vyslanie-vojakov-do-vycvikovej-misie-v-lotyssku/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> "Informácia o priebehu a výsledkoch samitu NATO vo Varšave v dňoch 8. – 9. júla 2016," [Information on the progress and results of the NATO Summit in Warsaw – July 8–9, 2016] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> "Rezort obrany bude garantom zvereneckého fondu NATO na likvidáciu výbušnín na Ukrajine," [Ministry of Defense will guarantee the NATO Trust Fund for the disposal of explosives in Ukraine] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, July 18, 2017. Available online: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/37633-sk/rezort-obrany-bude-garantom-zvereneckeho-fondu-nato-na-likvidaciu-vybusnin-na-ukrajine/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

the creation of a NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIU) based in Bratislava.<sup>35</sup> Its main task is to manage and coordinate the deployment of allied forces in the Multinational Corps Northeast based in Polish Szczecin. The unit was partially activated in September 2016 and will be fully operational in 2017.<sup>36</sup>

One of Slovakia's other commitments to NATO – the open-door policy – was in danger a month before the Warsaw summit, when the National Council of the SR voted on the accession of Montenegro to the Washington Treaty, the first step toward full-fledged membership. This seemingly routine vote on a half-page document was deeply influenced by domestic political affairs, and the legislation passed only by a thin margin of 78 votes, including those of the otherwise Atlantic-neutral Slovak National Party.<sup>37</sup> The failure of MPs and former defense ministers in the audience to debate the actual issues related to Slovakia's membership in NATO was equally grave. The debate was thus steered by MPs belonging to the party Kotleba–People's Party Our Slovakia, toward a campaign against NATO membership. Internal politics such as these should not have such a bearing on the foreign policy positions of the SR. Pro-Atlantic MPs should be aware of the importance of how issues tied to Slovak membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions are communicated, and take every opportunity to explain and dispel ambiguities and half-truths disseminated throughout society. In times when a referendum on Slovakia's exit from NATO is being initiated, any extra effort is more than welcome. The latest attempt to seek Slovakia's exit from NATO and the EU was initiated by Kotleba–People's Party Our Slovakia, a fascist party.<sup>38</sup> Very few relevant polls have been taken to survey the attitude of Slovaks towards NATO. The Globsec Trends showed 30 per cent of respondents believing that NATO is "a good thing" and 20 per cent thinking the opposite, while half of the respondents had no opinion at all on the matter.<sup>39</sup>

The development of cross-border defense cooperation continued throughout 2016, resulting in the Joint Sky initiative – the joint defense of Czech and Slovak airspace. The negotiations on this initiative are several years old and even Hungary was being

<sup>35</sup> "Rezort obrany podpísal jeden zo základných dokumentov potrebných pre podporu pôsobenia NFIU na Slovensku," [Ministry of Defense signs one of the basic documents needed to support the work of NFIU in Slovakia] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, May 30, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/37177-sk/rezort-obrany-podpisal-jeden-zo-zakladnych-dokumentov-potrebnych-pre-podporu-posobenia-nfiu-na-slovensku/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> "Slovenská jednotka NFIU bude od 1. septembra oficiálne aktívna," [Slovak NFIU unit will officially be active from September 1] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, August 31, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/38070-sk/slovenska-jednotka-nfiu-bude-od-1-septembra-oficialne-aktivovana/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> "Národná rada SR – hlasovanie poslancov (schôdza č.6)," [The National Council of the SR – voting of MPs] (Meeting No. 6) National Council of the Slovak Republic, June 14, 2016. Available online: <http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=schodze/hlasovanie/hlasklub&ID=37377> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> "Začíname so zberom podpisov pod petície za referendum o vystúpení z EÚ a o vystúpení z NATO," [Getting started with the collection of signatures for a petition for a referendum on leaving the EU and NATO] Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, July 1, 2016. Available online: <http://www.naseslovensko.net/nase-nazory/zaciname-so-zberom-podpisov-pod-peticie-za-referendum-o-vystupeni-z-eu-a-o-vystupeni-z-nato/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> "Globsec Trends," Globsec Policy Institute, September 2016.

considered for inclusion at their outset. The Agreement on cooperation in the joint defense of airspace was adopted by the Slovak government on December 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>40</sup> After entry into force, the agreement will provide for the deployment of the military materiel and personnel necessary for securing the defense of each party's airspace at the request of its government. The full carrying out of this Agreement is contingent upon an approximation of the disparities between the parties' capabilities, via modernization of their supersonic fleet. Although the Agreement is the right step toward increasing the security of the common airspace, it must be added that it was by no means so complicated as to require such lengthy negotiations and adoption only in 2016.

## OUTDATED REVISIONS AND OBSOLETE MODERNIZATIONS

Slovakia has been waiting for updated strategic documents, including security and defense strategy, for a long time. Some of these were issued in 2005 (Security Strategy and Defense Strategy), which means that their need to be updated is beyond urgent.<sup>41</sup> We are witnessing probably the most important developments and changes in international affairs since the end of Cold war. It should be a logical step, and priority for any State, to reflect such changes, including by updating the most important strategic documents. This would not only be a positive step *per se*, but would also create space for a pro-active approach to communication with the domestic population as well as with international partners, in a spirit of transparency, predictability and vision. The former administration at the Slovak Ministry of Defense, headed by Minister Glváč, did not manage to improve this situation before elections which were held on March 5, 2016. The new administration under Minister Gajdoš has confirmed its commitment to elaborate new versions of outdated documents. So far this has not become a reality. The White Paper on Defense of the Slovak Republic, released in 2013 and updated under the new administration in 2016, could be regarded as an exception to this. In general, we may consider any attempt to update such documents to be a positive step. Hence the release of the new White Paper on Defense of the Slovak Republic is a most important event in the area of domestic security, with broader implications for Slovak foreign policy. The document begins with an evaluation of the 2013 White Paper, identifying the most important shortcomings as, among other things: a poor level of management of the country's defense; the ineffectiveness of the defense planning system; an absence of interconnection among strategic goals, program priorities, budget and procurement; the low level of AF readiness; the lack

<sup>40</sup> "Návrh na uzavretie Zmluvy medzi Slovenskou republikou a Českou republikou o spolupráci pri vzájomnej ochrane vzdušného priestoru," [The draft contract between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic for cooperation on the mutual protection of airspace] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, December 7, 2016. Available online: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26090> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> Zákon o fungovaní Bezpečnostnej rady Slovenskej republiky v čase mieru (2004), Bezpečnostná stratégia SR (2005), Obranná stratégia SR (2005), Ústavný zákon o bezpečnosti SR (2002), Zákon o obrane (2002), Zákon o krízovom riadení štátu (2002), Zákon o hospodárskej mobilizácii (2011). All available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/zakladne-dokumenty-riesiace-bezpecnost-slovenskej-republiky/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

of AF capabilities development; a reserves deficit; and an unsatisfactory technical situation and outdated infrastructure under the management of the Defense Ministry. However, the most challenging and lasting issue is a remarkably long-lasting imbalance between declared tasks and goals and the resources allocated to achieve them.<sup>42</sup> In terms of the external security environment, the White Paper recognizes several qualitative changes, paying special attention to cyber space and other non-conventional areas as both current and future arenas of confrontation. According to this paper, the situation in the Eastern neighborhood, and especially in Ukraine, will have a decisive impact on the Slovak security environment. Deteriorating relations between Russia and Ukraine, as well as between Russia and the EU/NATO, may cause further divisions. Although the authors of the document do not explicitly mention Russian involvement in Ukraine or hybrid warfare tactics, it is not difficult to read between the lines. Last but not least, another re-emergence of this frozen conflict could have a negative impact on the lives of local residents and may lead to waves of migration out of the country.<sup>43</sup> The authors recognize Slovakia's dependence on NATO and the EU as allies in the field of national security and territorial defense. Moreover, the role of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy is stressed at a level almost comparable to that of NATO, which is logical considering such current developments as the migration crisis, Russian aggression in Ukraine, hybrid threats, the general instability to the east and south of EU borders, etc. The document also reaffirms Slovakia's ambition to reach 1.6 per cent GDP on defense spending, and 2 per cent GDP in the long term. Of this amount, 20 per cent is to be dedicated to military equipment and technology.<sup>44</sup>

The new government has intensified its formulation process for the new Security and Defense Strategies, heeding calls from the expert community for updates to it. The Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs is responsible for the first document, the Ministry of Defense for the second. The preambles of both documents speak of the specific impulses motivating these updates: besides the "timeless" threats, they refer to the renewal of armed conflict near Slovak borders, new security threats to the Euro-Atlantic area (including violations of international law by forceful disturbances of internationally recognized borders), the pressure of migration flows, and hybrid threats.<sup>45</sup> The substance of the updated Defense Strategy sees cyberspace threats as among the crucial dangers that must be reflected in the revised document.<sup>46</sup> However, half of these threats were present long before 2016. The Ukraine conflict should not have been the only trigger for revision. The last Security and Defense strategies were adopted in 2004 and 2005. Considering the complicated legislative procedures

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<sup>42</sup> "Biela kniha o obrane Slovenskej republiky," [White Paper on Defense of Slovak Republic] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, 2016. Available online: [http://www.mod.gov.sk/data/BKO2016\\_HQ.pdf](http://www.mod.gov.sk/data/BKO2016_HQ.pdf) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> "Východiská aktualizácií Bezpečnostnej stratégie Slovenskej republiky a Obrannej stratégie Slovenskej republiky," [Background of updates to the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic and the Defense Strategy of the Slovak Republic] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, September 13, 2016, p. 6. Available online: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=25878> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

involved, the timeframe is also overly optimistic. Proposals for these strategic documents, including prior discussions as to their content, should have been ready by the end of 2016. According to available sources, even the strategic drafts have not yet been developed. Based on interviews with MOD officials, the delay in producing the documents is due to this. It is therefore crucial to conceive the documents realistically in relation to the current capabilities and capacities of the Ministry of Defense and the AFSR – but also flexibly, with regular implementation check mechanisms.

Updating strategic documents goes hand in hand with the need to modernize. Some existing modernization projects were maintained after the new government took office. The Minister declared a continuation of the building of the mechanized brigade and the need to modernize the supersonic fleet – although the draft document for air force development remains classified without reason. The new government has abandoned the purchase of 8x8 armored vehicles due to their deficiencies and opted for 4-wheel versions instead, which are defined as a priority in the Ministry's Draft with regard to army modernization. It is, however, unfeasible to modernize military equipment without comprehensive budget plans also being set out in the draft.<sup>47</sup> The situation is similar with respect to the postponed modernization of radar systems.<sup>48</sup> The primary goal should be the modernization of multiple sectors in parallel – especially in the AFSR, as the White Book on Defense states that only 50 per cent of AFSR operations meet interoperability standards as set by NATO.<sup>49</sup> A legislative reform regarding the AFSR, also declared in the White Book on Defense, has set in motion the training of active reserves, creating further expenses for the Ministry and thus reducing the funding available for further modernizations.<sup>50</sup>

This financing is a necessary precondition for successful modernization. The 2019 State budget will allocate a total defense budget of 1.1 billion euros. Apart from its regular expenses, the Ministry plans to use the budget to finance the following:

- achieving full operational capability of the mechanized brigade;
- improving the capabilities of Special operations forces, which among other tasks are employable in counter-terrorism;
- improving the capabilities of the ISTAR battalion, including cyber-warfare at the tactical level;
- improving the capacity for providing combat support and combat service support to the mechanized brigade;

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<sup>47</sup> "Armádny nákup obrnených vozidiel z Poľska padol," [Army purchases of armored vehicles from Poland fall] *Sme*, July 19, 2016. Available online: [http://domov.sme.sk/c/20216557/armadny-nakup-obrnenych-vozidiel-z-polska-padol.html?piano\\_t=1](http://domov.sme.sk/c/20216557/armadny-nakup-obrnenych-vozidiel-z-polska-padol.html?piano_t=1) (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> "Minister obrany P. Gajdoš posudzuje rozbehnuté modernizačné projekty," [Minister P. Gajdos assesses underway modernization projects] *TASR*, April 30, 2016. Available online: <http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/gajdos-modernizacne-projekty-os-sr/194527-clanok.html> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> "Biela kniha o obrane Slovenskej republiky," op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> "Rezort obrany spúšťa pilotný výcvikaktívnych záloh," [Ministry of Defense launches pilot training of active reserves] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, August 26, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/38028-sk/rezort-obrany-spusta-pilotny-vyckvik-aktivnych-zaloh/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

- improving logistic capabilities for the completion of tasks in defense of the state, including against HNS [Hazardous Noxious Substances];
- achieving the full operational readiness of the NFIU in the SR;
- improving the capacity of the General Staff structure to increase necessary capabilities in the planning, control, and command of operations;
- enhancing the command and control system including securing AFSR mobilization capabilities;
- continuing the stock buildup for AFSR mobilization;
- adopting measures to achieve a balanced stock of materiel in order to improve stockpiling.<sup>51</sup>

## COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC – DOES EFFORT COUNT?

Here another issue arises – lack of communication with the domestic public, as well as with international partners and allies. American President Donald Trump is calling very strongly for the fulfilling of the commitments of NATO allies, especially the financial ones. The EU is very aware of this situation and has begun the process of boosting the EU's CFSP/CSDP. Trump's call, underscored by the EU's ambition to stand together and be firm in the face of external and internal threats and challenges, has provoked action towards the further boosting of the EU's CSFP/CSDP in a way that is complementary to the role of NATO. The general public, being not well informed about these changes, naturally raises questions about the need for defense spending, without really understand very well the importance of the Armed Forces and the Alliance. At the international level, allies in certain cases are confused about developments at the national level. Of course, responsibility in this area is at the national level. However, interoperability, capacity building, crisis management activities, and a range of other issues have an international element as well. This is an arena in which Slovak politicians, government, media, and experts can both raise awareness about defense at the national level, and communicate with our allies at the international level.

In 2016, the Defense Minister began to mention civic duty in defense of the state more frequently in his statements. The Ministry also launched a program of volunteer military training that concluded its test phase in 2016. The results, unfortunately, did not bear out the positive predictions of Ministry representatives. Despite broad agreement on the popularity of establishing a voluntary military training program, it was successfully concluded by only 31 persons – 22 males and 9 females.<sup>52</sup> This disappointment led the Ministry to attempt to make the voluntary military training program more at-

<sup>51</sup> "Biela kniha o obrane Slovenskej republiky," op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> "Historicky prví dobrovoľní vojaci ukončili prípravu. Rezort obrany ju chce do budúca zatraktívniť," [Historically first volunteer soldiers complete their training. Ministry of Defense wants volunteer service to be more attractive in future] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, September 30, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mosr.sk/38347-sk/historicky-prvi-dobrovolni-vojaci-ukoncili-pripravu-rezort-obrany-ju-chce-do-buducnosti-zatraktivnit/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

tractive through improved training facilities, increased inducements, and a shortening of the program from 12 to 11 weeks.<sup>53</sup>

The declared ambition to dismantle communication barriers between the Ministry and the public by better informing the latter on Ministry steps and activities, can be seen in the same positive light. That being said, the Ministry only utilizes its social media to provide information on historic events, sports accolades of Dukla members, or AFSR exercises. These must be supplemented by a clear and comprehensible explanation of the necessity for Slovakia's embeddedness in Euro-Atlantic structures. Photographs from international exercises are well received by the public, as they are a presentation of Slovakia's armed forces. What is missing are statements to the effect that our soldiers are part of NATO.

The Ministry of Defense is responsible for acquiring infrastructure and materiel that are subject to restricted access and require a level of expertise only had by those directly involved in the process. Furthermore, the Ministry is tasked with persuading the government, parliament, and citizens of the need to ensure state security against threats that are unfamiliar to most citizens. This makes communication on the part of Ministry representatives even more important. An effective means of achieving this could be found in the establishing of a PR strategy, not only at the level of the Ministry but also of Military Intelligence (MI), which was created by an amalgamation of Military Defense Intelligence and the Military Intelligence Service. The publishing of the director's photograph on the MI's website is a welcome step, the service thus gaining a face. That, however, is not enough – the top representatives of the MI and the Ministry should be more present in the media, publish, and participate in public debates, as is customary in other NATO countries. It is unacceptable for the Minister of Defense to have offered only one interview in print media since his appointment. The ambivalence of the population, which does not see the need to be clearly imbedded either in the West or the East – as shown by recent polls in which 12 per cent wish to be a part of the East and 23 per cent part of the West<sup>54</sup> – is all the more reason for prioritizing Ministry communication on NATO and the EU. In its manifesto, the government has declared a pro-European and pro-Atlantic direction for the years 2016–2020. To the ordinary citizen these statements are vague, and do not illustrate a clear sense of Slovakia's belonging. The state of NATO awareness among the Slovak population can be seen as alarmingly insufficient, and it is up to the Ministry of Defense to take specific steps to prevent the escalation of anti-NATO protests to a level that could have a determining effect on the society-wide debate.

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<sup>53</sup> "Rezort obrany chce zatraktívniť dobrovoľnú vojenskú prípravu," [Ministry of Defense wants to make voluntary military training more attractive] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, December 4, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mosr.sk/38798-sk/rezort-obrany-chce-zatraktivnit-dobrovolnu-vojensku-pripravu/> (accessed on February 15, 2017).

<sup>54</sup> "Globsec Trends 2016" – 54 per cent in favor of remaining in NATO, 23 per cent think Slovakia should remain part of the West.

## **2017 AS A YEAR OF OPPORTUNITIES**

For the past two years, Slovakia has found itself in a rather conflictual environment, both from the external and internal perspectives. Forces opposing the traditional, multilateral structure of European security based on institutions are increasing. Political and societal developments in the country are marked with aspects of anti-EU and anti-NATO voices of protest. Before any other steps are taken, the Slovak security and defense sector should adopt a clear position on the current situation and propose a vision for further courses of action. This should be done through a debate platform that includes numerous segments of our society, including academia, NGOs and the private sector, together with the MoD and MFEA. There is the hope that 2017 will present a great opportunity for this. In specific terms, we will closely follow further developments within the EU's CFSP/CSDP regarding continuation of the 2016 "winter package." At the 2016 OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg, Germany, Slovakia announced its willingness to chair the OSCE in 2019. It is plausible that 2017 will be the year in which we re-ignite the debate on the role of the OSCE in politico-military affairs. The further implementation of NATO assurance measures will mark the third year of adaptation. While the inauguration of Donald Trump has sparked tensions on NATO's European side, he has since openly softened his inflammatory statements on NATO and promised to attend the Brussels Summit. Similar assurances were offered by Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Vice President Mike Pence in Munich, in February 2017. The question remains as to who has the last word on foreign policy decisions in the current White House. There are, it seems, discrepancies between the declaratory statements of US officials and President Trump's social media activity, the latter being mostly aimed at the domestic audience. 2017 remains a year of multiple challenges as well as opportunities.

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**II.**

**PRIORITIES OF SLOVAKIA'S  
FOREIGN POLICY**

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# VISEGRAD 2016: MORE CHALLENGES THAN OPPORTUNITIES

TOMÁŠ STRÁŽAY

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Visegrad Group naturally had an influence on the performance of the V4 during the whole of 2016. February, especially, was full of commemorative activities, though the new challenges that the V4, and the EU as a whole, had to face overshadowed to a certain extent the anniversary celebrations. The so-called migration crisis, followed by the majority of British voters opting to leave the EU, made an imprint both on the Czech and Polish V4 presidencies. The slogan of the Czech V4 Presidency – V4 Trust – was of particular importance throughout the year due to the emerging dividing lines within the EU, and also to a certain extent within the Group. Slovakia itself was to a large extent alienated from the developments within the V4 during the second half of 2016, due to its historically first presidency of the Council of the EU and its role as an “honest broker.” Nevertheless, the question of how and in what form V4 cooperation should continue in the years to come had the same relevance in December as it had at the beginning of the year.

## **ANNIVERSARY IN THE SHADOW OF THE MIGRATION CRISIS**

The February anniversary celebrations were held in Prague, as the Czech Republic’s presidency was still underway at that time. The official commemoration of the anniversary was linked to the meeting of V4 foreign ministers. On this occasion a conference was organized, with the participation of governmental representatives and experts

from all four countries.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the Czech V4 Presidency came up with two interesting ideas – the first, a report of eminent V4 personalities assessing their past achievements and drafting some recommendations for the future of the V4;<sup>2</sup> and the second, a mid-term V4 presidency report developed by V4 think tanks.<sup>3</sup>

From the perspective of non-V4 countries, however, the V4 became well known because of the firm position taken by V4 countries on the migration crisis, especially in terms of their rejection of the redistribution quotas suggested by the Commission. The extraordinary (and extended) summit of V4 prime ministers (the president of Macedonia and prime minister of Bulgaria also taking part) that preceded the anniversary event was only partially devoted to V4 issues,<sup>4</sup> since its main focus was on migration. In their joint statement, the V4 prime ministers repeated their negative stance on the automatic relocation mechanism, but on the other hand supported those measures adopted at the EU level with the aim of protecting the Union's external border. They called for the creation of a European Border and Coast Guard without delay, as well as for the implementation of the EU–Turkey Action Plan. Besides Turkey, they also drew attention to other countries on the Balkan route and expressed their support for a back-up plan that would enable Western Balkan countries to respond effectively to the challenges connected with the migration crisis. Also, they called for the full and timely implementation of the Back to Schengen roadmap.<sup>5</sup> The summit raised certain negative expectations in some of the non-V4 EU member states, though its results were basically in line with “European” solutions. The only remaining significant difference between the V4 and non-V4 EU members was their differing positions towards refugee relocation.

The position of the Visegrad countries – that the system proposed by the European Commission has not proven effective – remained unchanged for the whole of 2016. However, while during the first half of the year the V4 countries' criticism was directed mostly towards proposed solutions, the second half was more productive in terms of the generation of concrete proposals. Although the concept of flexible solidarity presented at the EU summit in Bratislava was not clear to the majority of the V4 countries' counterparts in the EU, it may at least have been regarded as an attempt to put something more concrete on the negotiating table.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Visegrad cooperation,” Institute of International Relations, Prague, February 18, 2016. Available online: <http://www.iir.cz/article/the-25th-anniversary-of-the-establishment-of-the-visegrad-cooperation> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> “Visegrad 25 years after – report by V4 Panel of Eminent Personalities,” Prague, 2016. Available online: [http://www.mzv.cz/public/2e/3f/ea/1800883\\_1457421\\_Report\\_of\\_Eminent\\_Personalities.pdf](http://www.mzv.cz/public/2e/3f/ea/1800883_1457421_Report_of_Eminent_Personalities.pdf) (accessed on February 22, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> “Think Visegrad mid-term review: V4 Trust – the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group (2015–2016).” Available online: [http://www.mzv.cz/public/21/d6/97/1800009\\_1457092\\_Think\\_Visegrad\\_Mid\\_Term\\_Review.pdf](http://www.mzv.cz/public/21/d6/97/1800009_1457092_Think_Visegrad_Mid_Term_Review.pdf) (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> See “Joint statement of the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group countries on the 25<sup>th</sup> V4 anniversary,” Prague, February 15, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-the> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> “Joint statement on migration,” Prague, February 15, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-on> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Joint statement of the heads of governments of the V4 countries,” Bratislava, September 16, 2016. Available online: <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/4e985f7f-8a2d-416b-8b3f-52e7f704c414:JCR> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

Later, in November, Slovakia's Presidency of the EU Council introduced the concept of effective solidarity,<sup>7</sup> but this evoked rather mixed feelings among non-V4 EU member states. The other V4 countries nevertheless supported it, since they considered it to be an "effort to make compromises in the EU."<sup>8</sup> According to the V4 ministers of interior, a policy of extradition rather than of relocation should have been the crucial element in this concept.<sup>9</sup> During their meeting in November they also suggested creating a common crisis management center in order to coordinate activities that focus on supporting refugees in conflict zones, exchanging best practices, and harmonizing the use of available budget funds. The Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák, considered the setting up of such a center to be a crucial contribution to the realization of the effective solidarity principle.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these efforts, the V4 countries continued to be perceived, throughout the EU and beyond, as the main opponents of the Commission's proposal on the relocation of refugees. This unchanged reputation also highlighted the need to give more attention to the proper communication of joint V4 messages to non-V4 partners.

## FUTURE OF THE EU AND BREXIT AS A NEW CHALLENGE

The V4 countries were openly supportive of the "remain" option in the June UK referendum, but had to accept the new political reality. For all of them, the UK is quite an important trade partner and investor – only in 2015, Land Rover–Jaguar announced an immense investment in Slovakia – so naturally, the maintenance of good and intensive relations with the United Kingdom are considered a priority for V4 countries. Another important reason for the maintenance of close relations with the UK is the significant number of V4/EU citizens living and working in the UK, whose rights were very much in the focus of V4 leaders. Nevertheless, the Visegrad Group as such did not make any special effort to approach the UK directly – any such talks were held at the EU–UK level. From this point of view, however, the idea of the establishment of a V4+UK platform that would focus on issues of high importance for V4 countries became more relevant than at any time previously.

The future of the EU after the UK referendum was of primary concern to V4 leaders in the second half of 2016. The V4 prime ministers' call for a genuine trust beginning in June was directed not so much to the V4 as to the EU. In their statement a "Union of trust," followed by a "Union of action," is mentioned as a joint objective.<sup>11</sup> In their view, the EU will only be able to fulfill its common goals if there is a crucial degree of trust between member states, while EU institutions should also be trusted by its

<sup>7</sup> "Slovak presidency proposes 'effective solidarity' on migration," *EUobserver*, November 18, 2016. Available online: <https://euobserver.com/migration/135960> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> "V4 to set up a common crisis management centre," Warsaw, November 22, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/v4-to-set-up-common> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> "Joint statement of the heads of governments of the Visegrad Group countries: towards Union of trust and action," June 28, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-the-160629> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

members and stick to their mandate. The focus on a “better Europe,” instead of endless discussion over the question of “more Europe” vs. “less Europe,” was highlighted in the prime ministers’ statement as well, with the aim of reinitiating the convergence of European countries.<sup>12</sup>

The next joint statement appeared only a month later, at a time when Poland’s V4 presidency was already underway.<sup>13</sup> Besides their appeal for a Union of trust and action, the V4 prime ministers also highlighted the importance of the specific character of the various member states, expressing the desire to assign a more important role to national parliaments. All the V4 countries recognized the single market as a crucial precondition for the cohesiveness of the EU and its existence, and that therefore specific attention should be paid to its deepening. They also condemned any emerging dividing lines within the EU – be it between “old” and “new” members states, eurozone and non-eurozone members, etc. – as well as any attempts to fragment the EU.

Joint responsibility for the process of reflection on the EU was mentioned in another joint statement of the heads of government of V4 countries in September, adopted on the occasion of the Bratislava EU summit. Also in this statement, the prime ministers called for unity among the 27 member states, and appealed to the need to look for the best solutions for citizens. At the same time, they highlighted the need to maintain diversity among the member states, so that the “EU legal rules are executed in equal manner.”<sup>14</sup>

Another joint statement of V4 prime ministers focused on the EU was adopted in December, on the margins of the EU Council meeting. The heads of governments identified four key challenges the EU was facing at the end of 2016. Besides migration and security (with a focus on the CSDP), the Association Agreement with Ukraine (together with the DCFTA) and the development of the digital single market were mentioned as priorities.<sup>15</sup> As compared with previous statements, this last one was focused more on concrete challenges, while at the same time somewhat less complex in its content.

As the above mentioned joint statements suggest, the most vocal and frequent promoters of the Visegrad Group in 2016 were the prime ministers themselves. One of the reasons for this may have been the importance of those challenges that concerned not only the region, but the whole of the EU – be it migration, BREXIT or security. Another reason may have been the symbolic dimension, which became even stronger with the V4’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, during which the heads of government enjoyed presenting themselves as the defenders of their own country’s – as well as the region’s – interests. At their meetings, they presented the Visegrad Group as an important part of the EU architecture, as well as a very successful project. Other government representatives, including foreign ministers, were less visible in terms of their statements and more focused on concrete agenda. The fact that Slovakia’s presidency of the Council of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> “Joint statement of the heads of governments of the V4 countries,” Warsaw, July 21, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-the-160721> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> “Joint statement of the heads of governments of the V4 countries,” September 16, 2016, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> “Joint statement of the heads of governments of the V4 countries,” Brussels, December 15, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/joint-statement-of-the-161215-1> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

EU was taking place in the second half of the year should also be taken into account, especially when considering the coordinating role of the foreign ministry and foreign minister himself in the whole process. A very special situation occurred at a meeting of the V4 presidents held in Rzeszów, Poland in October. Slovak President Andrej Kiska drew the attention of his colleagues to the fact that never before had the V4 had such a bad reputation in Europe.<sup>16</sup> Although he remained alone in this position – his counterparts were rather praising the Visegrad Group for its achievements – his statement nonetheless revealed to the public that the V4 is also facing some internal challenges.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

The Visegrad countries have not always spoken with one voice, and their opinion on a number of issues has differed in the past. As regards the year 2016, two issues were quite sensitive on the Slovak side: reform of the EU and the election of the United Nations' Secretary General.

Already at the end of June, Poland uncovered its plans to reform the EU, plans that would also mean the adoption of the new EU Treaty.<sup>17</sup> The proposed reform, based on a shift of power from the European Commission to the Council, was considered a proper answer to the challenges the EU had been facing in the aftermath of the BREXIT referendum. Poland, which took over the V4 Presidency in July, was naturally expecting support for this idea from the other V4 countries. Nevertheless, it turned out that of the three remaining countries, only Hungary tended to be supportive of the idea, while Slovakia and the Czech Republic have been reluctant to embrace it from the very beginning. The differences between the countries lie in their level of European integration, whether current or projected – Slovakia is a member of the Eurozone, and the Czech Republic, at least under the present government, seems also to support the idea of a deeper integration. The fact that neither Slovakia nor the Czech Republic has been the object of the continuous criticism of the EU could also play a certain role.

The election of the Secretary General of the United Nations is another example of an issue on which the positions of the V4 countries differed. Despite the fact that the V4 countries have an informal agreement on supporting joint candidates, Slovakia's candidate, foreign minister Miroslav Lajčák, did not obtain the support of Poland and Hungary in the election process. This particular issue, however, showed that the V4 is able to overcome differences as to the positions of individual countries and still cooperate in other areas of joint interest.

Still, there exist a number of areas where the interests of the V4 countries meet. Since all of them are net beneficiaries of EU funds, cohesion policy remained a crucial priority for them, which also applies to the future financial perspective. Here the V4

<sup>16</sup> A. Kiska, "V4 nie je štít pre vnútropolitické zábery," [V4 is not the shield for the domestic policy goals] October 14, 2016. Available online: <https://www.prezident.sk/article/andrej-kiska-v4-nie-je-stit-pre-vnutropoliticke-zamery/> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> "Poland to push for 'radical' new EU treaty," *EUobserver*, June 28, 2016. Available online: <https://euobserver.com/institutional/134070> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

countries will certainly need to make alliances with other net-beneficiaries, especially when the uncertainty over the future shape of the cohesion policy (after 2020) is considered. Intensive discussion has already begun in the V4+4 format, which includes also Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia.<sup>18</sup> All in all, the V4 needs to prepare for the coming reality in which no more funding from the EU will be available. In this regard, the creation of a Visegrad investment bank that would finance joint projects, e.g. in the field of infrastructure, is worth being considered.

The Group's joint interest in preventing the EU from fragmentation is also worth mentioning. The joint effort to deepen the single market, with a special focus on the digital single market, as well as an emphasis on the maintenance of the Schengen zone, was obvious. The double majority voting system in the EU, however, that was introduced on the basis of the *Lisbon Treaty*, pushes the V4 countries toward a qualitatively new reality, since their influence in the EU has dropped as a result. The only way out of this is to enter into coalitions with other member states – the worsening image of the V4, however, does not enhance its coalition-making potential.

Interest in joint energy projects, especially the development of the North–South energy corridor, remains high among V4 countries. Though all the V4 countries formally oppose Nord Stream 2, in the course of 2016 it became clear that the EU does not have real instruments to stop the project. It could therefore be possible that the V4's unity will disappear, and individual countries will focus rather on their own national interests than on solidarity with their Visegrad neighbors or Ukraine. In addition, views regarding the necessity and profitability of cooperation with Russia, including openness towards Russian investments in the energy sector, differ from country to country, with Poland taking the sternest position. Different energy mixes may be another factor that could more and more undermine future cooperation in the field of energy.

Transport infrastructure will remain a priority, since the number of bottlenecks and gridlocks is decreasing only slowly. This area seems to be attractive for non-V4 partners as well, including those outside of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

Joint projects in the field of security and defense still have the potential to develop. These include joint trainings and the exchange of information, as well as a continuation of cooperation in the joint battle group that was on standby between January and June 2016. The joint engagement of V4 countries in the Baltic states is also worth mentioning, as well as their joint support for the EU's CSDP, while at the same time

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<sup>18</sup> "Meeting of the ministers for economic affairs and cohesion policy," *Visegrad Bulletin* 1/2016. Available online: [http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign\\_policy/europe/visegrad\\_group/polish\\_presidency\\_of\\_the\\_visegrad\\_group\\_2016\\_2017/visegrad\\_bulletin\\_\\_1\\_2016\\_?sessionId=21525D3182A95EE5D1F7AB7341DCA7BB.cmsap2p](http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/europe/visegrad_group/polish_presidency_of_the_visegrad_group_2016_2017/visegrad_bulletin__1_2016_?sessionId=21525D3182A95EE5D1F7AB7341DCA7BB.cmsap2p) (accessed on February 22, 2017). See also expert meeting "Evaluation in theory and practice of V4 + 4," Zakopane, September 8–9, 2016, *Visegrad Bulletin* 2/2016, October 25, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/visegrad-bulletin-2-2016> (accessed on February 22, 2017); "Meeting on cohesion policy," Brussels, November 15, 2016, *Visegrad Bulletin* 3/2016, December 7, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/visegrad-bulletin-3-2016> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> "V4–Republic of Korea high level meeting on transport and infrastructure," Warsaw, November 21, 2016, *Visegrad Bulletin* 3/2016, December 7, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/visegrad-bulletin-3-2016> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

emphasizing close cooperation between the EU and NATO in order to avoid unnecessary duplication.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of Western Balkan countries to the V4 increased in the course of the migration crisis, due to the existence of the so-called Balkan route. V4 countries even sent troops to Macedonia to help to protect the Macedonian border. Besides this engagement, the V4 countries naturally continued to be advocates of the European perspective on the Western Balkans, something that was highlighted during the traditional meeting of V4 foreign ministers and their counterparts from the Western Balkans region.<sup>21</sup> The Visegrad Group's engagement in countries of the Eastern Partnership, with a specific focus on Ukraine, also needs to be highlighted. Last past year particular attention was paid to finalizing the process of ratification of the Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, between the EU and Ukraine.<sup>22</sup>

## THE FUTURE OF THE V4

Interestingly, according to a public opinion survey published in 2016, respondents from V4 countries perceive the V4 as a decision making platform on issues of strategic importance.<sup>23</sup> This finding implies that the importance of the V4, from the public's perspective, has increased over the past twenty five years.

From the Visegrad point of view, the year 2016 was marked by continuity, especially in the field of sectoral policies, but also with respect to the V4 countries' joint position on the system of refugee relocation as proposed by the European Commission. Nevertheless, issues also arose over which the positions of V4 countries differed.

Level of integration into the EU was certainly an issue on which V4 countries held differing positions. Divergence of opinion was also visible in the case of EU Treaty reform. Though all V4 countries are opposed to the concept of a multispeed Europe, once this becomes a reality Slovakia, followed by the Czech Republic, will probably opt for a different path than that of Poland or Hungary. In order to remain at the core and avoid marginalization, Bratislava and Prague would probably prefer to deepen European integration. Slovakia, due to its membership in the Eurozone, would have no other choice.

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<sup>20</sup> "Joint statement of the heads of governments of the V4 countries," Brussels, December 15, 2016, op. cit.; see also "Meeting of chiefs of the general staff of the V4 countries' armed forces," October 4-5, Sopot, *Visegrad Bulletin* 2/2016, October 25, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/visegrad-bulletin-2-2016> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> "The Visegrad Group joint statement on the Western Balkans," Warsaw, November 29, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/the-visegrad-group-joint> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, "Communiqué of prime ministers of the Visegrad Group after the meeting with Prime Minister of Ukraine," Krynica, September 6, 2016. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/v4-heads-of-government> (accessed on February 22, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> O. Gyarfášová, G. Mesežnikov, *25 years of the V4 as seen by the public*, Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2016.

The way to avoid problems arising from the above mentioned differences is to keep Visegrad as flexible as possible. Only a low level of institutionalization will enable the V4 countries to continue their more than twenty five year long cooperation in those areas where they do share joint interests.<sup>24</sup> This weak institutionalization will also allow each of them to occupy different positions in some areas, without endangering the whole mechanism of cooperation. More institutionalization would certainly bring more rigidity, but not more influence in the EU.

The V4+ format – which enables non-V4 countries or groups of them to cooperate with the V4 – has proved to be the proper means for creating long-term or ad-hoc coalitions on various issues, including those related to different EU policies. One example, the group of the friends of cohesion policy, demonstrates the power of the V4+ formula. There is no need to look for alternative concepts of regional cooperation in Central Europe – the V4+ format is both exhaustive and efficient. At the same time, the V4 could – or even should – cultivate existing informal institutions, such as the summits of the representatives of governments, high level working groups, etc. New, sector-based standing institutions could also be supported, since coordinated sectoral policies, together with the cultivation of mutual trust and coordination, is exactly what the Visegrad Group will need in the future.

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<sup>24</sup> A unique quality of cooperation in the V4 format, which was achieved “without an unnecessary increase in institutionalization,” is stressed also in the joint statement of V4 prime ministers on the V4’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. See “Joint statement of the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group countries on the 25<sup>th</sup> V4 anniversary.”

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# WESTERN BALKANS IN THE SHADOW OF STORMS

JÚLIUS LŐRINCZ

When looking at the Western Balkans of 2016, we can hardly find a more apt description of the events and relations of this southeastern region of the European continent than to say that it was a turbulent year. The development oscillated between hope and cautious optimism on the one hand, and descent into the depth of disruption, despair, and the growing threat of destabilization on the other. In 2016 we far too often witnessed abrupt changes, ranging from good news to depressing reports.

One example of such developments were the events of spring 2016 in connection with relations between Serbia and Croatia, which at the time had exhibited a clearly upward trend that culminated at Subotica on June 20<sup>th</sup>. There, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, and President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, after friendly joint visits to Croatian Slavonia and Serbian Vojvodina, signed a declaration on enhancing their relations and solving the open issues between the two countries.<sup>1</sup> Under point one of the declaration, the parties committed themselves to enhancing the bilateral protection of minorities – both the Serbian minority in Croatia and the Croatian minority in Serbia. Point two of the declaration stipulates an immediate start of negotiations in order to define the border line between Croatia and Serbia. Under point three, the two countries agreed to accelerate the implementation of an agreement on the post-Yugoslavian succession, signed in Vienna on June 29, 2001. And

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<sup>1</sup> “Deklaracija o unapređenju odnosa i rešavanju otvorenih pitanja,” [Declaration on enhancing relations and solving open issues] *Blic*, June 20, 2016. Available online: <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/deklaracija-u-sest-tacaka-sta-danas-potpisuju-vucic-i-hrvatska-predsednica/k28k6l8> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

fourth, the parties declared that the search for missing persons after the war of the early 1990s is a priority humanitarian issue, and that the maximum effort will be made to determine their fate.

The declaration was immediately characterized as historic, with the Serbian prime minister saying that despite the exceptional difficulty of the talks, the participants were pleased to see that progress had been made and that the results of the declaration would be visible within one month – and, though they may not be astonishing, they would at least prove that things were slowly moving forward. (Yet one might hope for better results than these, given that Serbian–Croatian relations are in fact the backbone of relations between the nations and countries of the Western Balkans.) The Croatian president gave assurances that Zagreb had no intention of blocking Serbia, but rather “wants to see the country in the European Union, because that is a precondition for lasting peace, security and prosperity.” She said that the two countries would always be able to meet at the negotiating table to clarify any misunderstandings before they became a European problem.

However, at a meeting of the EU Working Party on Enlargement (COELA) on June 27<sup>th</sup>, just a week after the declaration was signed, Croatia in fact blocked the opening of Chapter 23 in Serbia’s EU accession negotiations “on fundamental grounds.” Great Britain did the same thing, but only out of short-term “technical reasons” immediately after the Brexit referendum, which were clarified and removed shortly afterwards. Behind Croatia’s “fundamental” reasons was Zagreb’s disagreement with a 2003 Serbian law on the organization and jurisdiction of Serbian state authorities in the criminal and judicial sanctioning of war crimes, a subject which the two parties had discussed previously. This discussion was now revived, and both official and unofficial sources in Belgrade claimed that it had to do with the election campaign just beginning in Croatia. The encouraging of nationalism, suspicion, and intolerance in inter-ethnic relations has indeed become common in Western Balkans countries during pre-election seasons, as a manipulation factor in their political power struggles.

In other words, instead of Belgrade and Zagreb finding “the power in themselves to meet at the negotiating table to clarify misunderstandings before they become a European problem,” as had been declared by Croatian president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović only a few days earlier, a question that should have been solved at the bilateral level had now become an item on the European agenda and a reason to block Serbia’s EU accession process. In the end the problem was solved, thanks in part to the efforts of Slovak foreign policy during the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, but by the end of the year the rhetoric was ratcheted up again. Passions flared on the anniversary of Operation Storm of August 1995, which in Croatia is celebrated as the liberation of Croatian territory occupied by separatist Serbian powers, and in Serbia regarded as a tragic event that brought about the expulsion of Serbs from Croatia. The mutual accusations began: of reviving fascist concepts of the Ustaša movement in Croatia, and on the opposite side of rehabilitating nationalist, Chetnik ideas and their adherents, and of attempting to return to the Milošević line in Serbia.

Why is this so? This question refers not only to Serbian–Croatian relations but, as the experience of 2016 shows, to relations also between the other countries of the

region, as well as to relations within these countries, within the societies themselves. The answers offered to the question are many; explanations can be discussed, and the problems' causes, sources and forces examined. Those closest to the truth seem to be the ones who point out that after the 1990s war, the countries of the Western Balkans never underwent a thorough transformation of their societies so as to reflect the principles of democracy, individual freedom and the rule of law, as opposed to just declaring them. These countries are often stuck in nationalism, which they can only overcome by their own power and through effective integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Latinka Perović, the queen of political thinking in Serbia and in the wider Western Balkans, spoke about this in an August 2016 extensive interview on the Balkan service of Radio Free Europe. The interview bore the provocative title, "We are returning to the nineteenth century."<sup>2</sup>

The dialogue between **Belgrade and Pristina** on the normalization of their relations is also stagnating, despite the fact that the First Agreement reached in Brussels in April 2013 laid good foundations for solving the complicated problems of Serbian-Albanian coexistence in Kosovo. The problem is, that not all principles enshrined either in the Brussels Agreement or in further agreements inspired by it have been implemented. Parallel Serbian power structures subordinated to Belgrade still exist in today's Kosovo, while on the other side, Kosovo's political scene – including the chaotic situation in the parliament – hinders the creation of an Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities, one of the key provisions of the Brussels Agreement. Among the few positive events in Kosovo in 2016 was the constitution of a Special court of justice for war crimes committed by members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) in 1998–2000, which was approved by the Kosovan parliament and is expected to begin operating in the Hague this year.

An event typical of the relations between Belgrade and Pristina and the distance between their positions was a provocation carried out in January 2017, when a train was sent from Belgrade to Mitrovica in Kosovo. The modern train was adorned with copies of frescoes from Serbian monasteries in Kosovo, and, more importantly, plastered with the slogan "Kosovo is Serbia" in 21 different languages. It is logical that Kosovo would oppose this, yet the reaction was perhaps inappropriately harsh, as Kosovo deployed forces of the special Rosu police, together with armored fighting vehicles, to the border. One of the main organizers of the train service, the director of the Serbian Government's Office for Kosovo and Metohija, got off the train, just to be on the safe side, at a small local station in Belgrade. The train, which also carried representatives of extremist Serbian organizations, was finally stopped in Raška in the

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<sup>2</sup> Latinka Perović says among other things: "Everything suggests that our alternative of the modern state, the rule of law, and respect for minority rights has not really been accepted. Instead, society sticks to nationalism as an absolute tradition [...] which is an expression of deep historical immaturity with possible heavy consequences [...] Everything that is now happening shows how important Europeanization is, regardless of the transient crisis on the old continent. It shows the universal values that will endure in one or another Europe. We do not have a more reliable alternative to this project. So I think it is highly irresponsible to return to what we should have left behind a long time ago." See D. Štavljanin, "Latinka Perović za RSE: Vraćamo se u 19. vek," [Latinka Perović for Radio Free Europe: We are returning to the nineteenth century] *Radio Free Europe*, August 5, 2016. Available online: <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/latinka-perovic-za-rse-vracamo-se-u-19-vek/27900716.html> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

south of Serbia after Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić ordered a halt to the service. Reactions on both Serbian and Albanian sides showed that efforts such as these only serve to incite nationalist passions and to destroy the normalization process initiated by the 2013 Brussels Agreement.

The situation in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is also a cheerless one. On the one hand, the country deserves recognition for its progress in European integration, as the Council of the European Union was able to request the European Commission to state its position on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership. On the other hand, the country's stability, safety and future are threatened due to the influence of certain politicians from the three dominant nations – the Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. President Milorad Dodik of Republika Srpska, one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina resurrected the concept of "Great Serbia" when in an interview for the Belgrade daily *Kurir* he proposed the creation of a single Serbian state drawn from Serbia, Republika Srpska (part of B&H), North Kosovo, and Montenegro (a sovereign state since 2006, aiming to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures).<sup>3</sup>

The political crisis in **Macedonia**, which has dragged on for almost two years due to the endless, aggressive battle between the coalition and opposition, is not encouraging. The situation did not change after the general election in December 2016, when neither of the two big parties gained a majority vote, forcing parties to form a coalition government. However, the winning VMRO-DPMNE, which had been the ruling party before the election, now lost its coalition-forming potential. It failed in its coalition talks, and the president, who was the party's nominee, refused to give a mandate to the second largest party – the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) – to form a government, even though it had the support of 67 MPs in the 120 seat assembly. The president accused the SDSM and its potential coalition partners – Albanian parties – of attacking Macedonia's identity and constitutional order, as they allegedly planned to grant inappropriate rights to Albanians. In a country where the members of national minorities, most of them Albanians, form about a third of the population, the ruling politicians decided to stir inter-ethnic tension in the name of keeping power.

**Montenegro** handled its internal political frictions admirably in 2016. The drama of domestic political struggle was resolved in May, when a temporary "government of election trust," with the participation of opposition nominees, was formed, which was to lead the country to parliamentary elections on October 16<sup>th</sup>. The country was invited to join NATO, and the process will probably be completed this year. However, the process is taking place in the context of a complicated battle within the state, where a part of the opposition is against Montenegro's membership in NATO, and the state is literally under brutal negative political pressure from Russia. On the eve of the October 16 general election, this pressure escalated to the point that security bodies were forced to intervene against a group of over 20 people, mostly Serbian nationalists, who had planned – with the support of Russia and the direct participation of two citizens of the Russian Federation (apparently from military intelligence) – to instigate chaos after the announcement of the election results. The members

<sup>3</sup> "Milorad Dodik za Kurir: Doživeću ujedinjenje Srbije i Srpske!" [Milorad Dodik for the Kurir: I'll live to see Serbia and Republika Srpska unite!] *Kurir*, January 7, 2017. Available online: <http://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/milorad-dodik-za-kurir-dozivecu-ujedinjenje-srbije-i-srpske-clanak-2621915> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

of the group admitted that in the event of the opposition's defeat, the event was meant to end in a violent confrontation in front of the parliamentary building, and in its seizure. The plan did not exclude even the possible removal of Prime Minister Milo Đukanović.<sup>4</sup>

Serbia's security bodies played an important role in uncovering the activities of this group and its background. In November 2016, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić said openly: "With my own eyes I saw and heard what had been planned for Montenegro. I am talking about what we discovered and what we informed Montenegro's authorities about."<sup>5</sup>

Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksey Meshkov said that Russia had earlier proposed an alternative to the Euro-Atlantic integration process for the Western Balkans. Russia "supported the so-called '4B' idea, about the formation of an alliance of neutral states: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro" in the Balkans, an alternative that Meshkov described as very promising.<sup>6</sup>

This is one of the many ideas for the Western Balkans that have come from abroad, and at first glance look like well-meaning advice. Last year in particular – very likely as a byproduct of Brexit, which has brought discredit on European integration, and as a consequence of Donald Trump's victory in the American presidential elections, which triggered ideas about a "new division in the spheres of influence" – several quasi-conceptual ideas about "the best solution" to southeastern Europe's problems materialized. These are not trivial ideas. Let us recall, for example, the outrage provoked by the letter of American Republican Congressman and chair of the Subcommittee for Europe, Dana Rohrabacher, to Serbian president Tomislav Nikolić, in which he suggested a redivision of some of the areas of the Western Balkans, a redivision that would lead, for instance, to the elimination of Macedonia.<sup>7</sup> The biggest uproar, however, was probably caused by Timothy Less's article in the influential American journal *Foreign Affairs*, in which he analyzes the current situation in the Western Balkans and suggests what he regards as a possible solution.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "CG zvanično: Rusija htjela Milovu glavu," [Montenegro officially: Russia wanted Milo's head] RTVBN, November 6, 2016. Available online: <https://www.rtvbn.com/3839936/cg-zvanicno-rusija-htjela-milovu-glavu> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> "Vučić se povlači sa čela Biroa za koordinaciju službi," [Vučić will resign from head of the Office for Coordination of Services] *Danas*, November 7, 2016. Available online: [http://www.danas.rs/politika.56.html?news\\_id=331748&title=Vu%C4%8Di%C4%87+se+povla%C4%8Di+sa+%C4%8Dela+Biroa+za+koordinaciju+slu%C5%BEbi#sthash.ZpciMFuC.dpuf](http://www.danas.rs/politika.56.html?news_id=331748&title=Vu%C4%8Di%C4%87+se+povla%C4%8Di+sa+%C4%8Dela+Biroa+za+koordinaciju+slu%C5%BEbi#sthash.ZpciMFuC.dpuf) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> "Zamenik Lavrova: Ne 'migovi', zagovornici NATO ruše Balkan," [Lavrov's Deputy: Not MiGs but NATO's advocates ruin the Balkans] *B92*, February 9, 2017. Available online: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=02&dd=09&nav\\_category=167&nav\\_id=1229003](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=02&dd=09&nav_category=167&nav_id=1229003) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> "Rohrabacher: borders in Balkan should change, a part of Macedonia to unite with Kosovo," *Gazeta Express*, February 6, 2017. Available online: <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/en/news/rohrabacher-borders-in-balkan-should-change-a-part-of-macedonia-to-unite-with-kosovo-172069/> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> According to Timothy Less, the countries of the Western Balkans are still undemocratic, and therefore unable to live as multiethnic societies, which has resulted in the collapse of the policy of reconciliation. Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia are politically dysfunctional, economically stagnating, and the corruption in these countries is institutionalized. On the contrary, Albania,

The surprising thing is that the old concepts of “Great” Albania, Serbia and Croatia – which were the domain of nineteenth and twentieth-century Balkan chauvinists and nationalists, and which obviously failed – have now been adapted into new versions by several experts from abroad.

It had been thought that with the creation of an independent Kosovo – after its unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, which according to the International Court of Justice (2010) did not violate international law – the process of the dissolution of Yugoslavia was over, and the borders in the Western Balkans would not be redrawn. Despite all the wars and political disputes in this territory, and the various ideas and proposals, all the new states were formed within the borders in which they had existed in Yugoslavia. The 2005 Guiding Principles for the resolution of Kosovo’s status settlement – set by the so-called Contact Group (USA, Russia, Germany, United Kingdom, France and Italy) and backed by the European Union and NATO – defined three points which served as axioms in drawing and implementing the concept of Kosovo’s resolution: 1. No return to the situation prior to 1999, i.e. Kosovo cannot become part of Serbia again; 2. No partition of Kosovo; and 3. No union of Kosovo with any state, or incorporation of Kosovo into another state.<sup>9</sup>

Respecting the principle of unchanging borders played a decisive role in the international community’s success in its effort to stop the violent conflicts in the Western Balkans and stabilize the situation, so that the process of restoration could start and the way to security and prosperity be paved, partly through the gradual integration of the region into Euro-Atlantic structures. This is still true today. Toying with the idea that the complicated internal problems of these societies, the open wounds from their tragic war, and their path to a better future could be resolved by “redistributing” their state structures, is at odds with reality – and irresponsible, as it would logically lead to conflicts, including violent ones. To avoid this is one of the primary tasks, not only of the realistic, rational and constructive forces within the Western Balkans societies themselves, which are capable of eliminating backward tendencies, but also of the international community, particularly the European Union, which must persist in enlarging the Union in Southeastern Europe even during periods of crisis.

Contributing to **EU enlargement in the Western Balkans** is a key task in the long-term strategy of Slovak foreign policy. This is not merely the result of the systematically-built all-around bilateral relations with the countries of the region, which has become a tradition, but an awareness of the vital need for an organic incorporation of the region into the Euro-Atlantic integration structures, as a prerequisite for a safe, stable and prosperous Europe. Despite the events of 2016, events that could not have been

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Croatia and Serbia still have good prospects. For this reason, new countries should be formed: Kosovo, the south-Serbian Presevo Valley and western Macedonia would merge with Albania; large areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina with Croatia; and Republika Srpska and the north of Kosovo with Serbia. See T. Less, “Dysfunction in the Balkans: can the Post-Yugoslav settlement survive?” *Foreign Affairs*, December 20, 2016. Available online: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/bosnia-herzegovina/2016-12-20/dysfunction-balkans> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> “EU treba spriječiti ideje o podjeli država na Zapadnom Balkanu,” [EU must thwart ideas of dividing the states of the Western Balkans] *Jutarnji list*, February 2, 2017. Available online: <http://www.jutarnji.hr/komentari/eu-treba-sprjeciti-ideje-o-podjeli-drzava-na-zapadnom-balkanu/5604503/> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

envisioned at the threshold of that year – that the British electorate would vote to leave the EU, that Turkey would see a *coup d'état* with all the negative consequences that meant for its accession process to the EU, and that the US presidential elections would produce great uncertainty in transatlantic relations – Slovak foreign policy demonstrated an understanding of a reality marked by many disquieting factors. This is attested in the introduction to a chapter on EU enlargement in a 2016 document focused on Slovakia's foreign and European policies, a document approved by the National Council and stating that Slovak foreign policy perceives EU enlargement not only as a regional issue but as a necessary part of the project of European integration.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the Slovak Republic was relatively successful in using its **Presidency of the Council of the EU** (July 1–December 31, 2016) to keep the topic of EU enlargement and the development of relations with the Western Balkans and Turkey in the foreground of the EU agenda. It is the current complicated international situation in particular that should encourage a healthy, strong and expanding EU, which despite its problems still has enough supporters, including in the Western Balkans. This is why Slovakia made EU enlargement one of its priorities during the Presidency, in order to achieve the goal of a *Globally engaged Europe*.<sup>11</sup>

This important aspect of enlargement – namely the relationship between enlargement and the strengthening of the EU's position in global relations – has been emphasized by representatives of Slovak foreign policy, especially during the Slovak Presidency. It was reflected not only in their rhetoric but also in their activities, for instance at the traditional meeting of the ministers of V4 countries with their partners in the Western Balkans in Warsaw, or at the Interparliamentary Conference on Joint EU Foreign and Security Policy in Bratislava, where Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajčák emphasized that “EU enlargement is a strategic investment in EU's security and prosperity.” He pointed out that this is a two-way process: the countries of the Western Balkans must do their homework

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<sup>10</sup> “Turbulences in world development and their consequences for the EU affirm the need to expand stability and security in our neighborhood. The accession of the countries of the Western Balkans to the EU is therefore an urgent imperative for increasing the stability and prosperity of the entire European continent. The progress of enlargement depends primarily on the speed and quality of reforms in candidate countries. However, emphasis is currently laid on the degree of responsibility of EU member states for the success of the enlargement process.” See “Zameranie zahraničnej a európskej politiky Slovenskej republiky na rok 2016,” [Slovak Republic's Foreign and European Policy for 2016] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2016. Available online: <http://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/2198827/2016++Zameranie+zahrani%C4%8Dnej+a+eur%C3%B3pskej+politiky+Slovenskej+republiky> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> *Globally engaged Europe*: The EU cannot be secure without stability, prosperity and democracy in the neighboring countries. The Slovak presidency will therefore promote effective European neighborhood policy and preservation of the dynamics in the accession process. We will also actively participate in enhancing relations with the EU's strategic partners. See “Priority slovenského predsedníctva,” [Priorities of the Slovak Presidency] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/program-a-priority/priority-slovenskeho-predsednictva> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

in the accession process, and the EU must be helpful towards countries applying for membership.<sup>12</sup>

What does this look like in real life? As noted, Serbian–Croatian relations saw oscillations related to Croatia’s blockade of the opening of Chapter 23 in Serbia’s accession negotiations. The dispute with Croatia was settled relatively quickly, one month after the blockade. Still, the negative consequences persisted for Serbian–Croatian relations, as both sides continued to accuse one another in various matters. The accession process took a positive turn after Croatia withdrew its objections at an Intergovernmental Conference between the EU and Serbia, where the EU delegation was led by Miroslav Lajčák. Two important chapters were opened: Chapter 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights, and Chapter 24 on justice, freedom and security. These chapters are related to fundamental EU values and principles such as democracy, the rule of law, and an independent judiciary.

Minister Lajčák presented this as proof that the Slovak Presidency was fulfilling one of its priorities – strengthening the credibility of EU enlargement. “If a candidate country meets its commitments, the EU will advance its position in the accession process.” A new approach was adopted, with both chapters opened at an early stage of the enlargement process in order for Serbia to achieve solid results in implementing required reforms. This should ensure that reforms related to the rule of law are sustainable and lasting.<sup>13</sup>

In December, Serbia opened Chapter 5 on public procurement and Chapter 25 on science and research, which it also provisionally closed. Serbia has thus opened six chapters since the process started in 2014, four of them during the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU. EU enlargement was one of Slovakia’s priorities, and this same effort was continued during Malta’s Presidency at the end of February 2017, when Chapter 20 on enterprise and industry, and Chapter 26 on education and culture, were opened.

The NGO sector and cooperation with Slovak non-governmental organizations plays an important role in Serbia’s integration process. For instance, the GLOBSEC Policy Institute (formerly the Slovak Atlantic Commission/Central European Policy Institute), in cooperation with the Center for Euro–Atlantic Studies in Serbia, will organize a work-

<sup>12</sup> “Within this priority, key importance is given to the credibility of a two-way process: on the one hand, we insist on the principles of conditionality and achievements, i.e. the countries in the accession process proceed according to their ability to meet the conditions, with emphasis on quality rather than speed. On the other hand, the EU must fulfill its commitments, and if the candidates complete their obligations well, we must help them get closer to the EU.” See “M. Lajčák: without the Western Balkans the European project will be incomplete,” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, September 4, 2016. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/1w1ppvnScIPx/content/p-o-i-n-t-s-t-o-m-a-k-e-minister-of-foreign-european-affairs-of-the-slovak-republic-h-e-miroslav-lajcak-the-western-balkans-and-the-eu-cooperation-and?p\\_p\\_auth=nw8DZPd1&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_1w1ppvnScIPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky\\_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D8%26strana%3D12](http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/1w1ppvnScIPx/content/p-o-i-n-t-s-t-o-m-a-k-e-minister-of-foreign-european-affairs-of-the-slovak-republic-h-e-miroslav-lajcak-the-western-balkans-and-the-eu-cooperation-and?p_p_auth=nw8DZPd1&_101_INSTANCE_1w1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D8%26strana%3D12) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> “Úspech slovenského predsedníctva: EÚ otvorila dve kapitoly so Srbskom,” [Success of the Slovak Presidency: EU opens two chapters with Serbia] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, July 18, 2016. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/1w1ppvnScIPx/content/uspech-slovenskeho-predsednictva-eu-otvorila-dve-kapitoly-so-srbskom?p\\_p\\_auth=N1AQcbBU&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_1w1ppvnScIPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky\\_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D6%26strana%3D3](http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/1w1ppvnScIPx/content/uspech-slovenskeho-predsednictva-eu-otvorila-dve-kapitoly-so-srbskom?p_p_auth=N1AQcbBU&_101_INSTANCE_1w1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D6%26strana%3D3) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

shop entitled "Partnership for Serbia: Serbia, NATO and Strategic Communication," which is part of the project "Visegrad for the South-East Europe: Towards Successful Integration." The event is organized under the auspices of the Slovak Embassy in Serbia, which is currently a NATO Contact Point Embassy in Serbia.<sup>14</sup>

One of the founders of the Belgrade Security Forum, GLOBSEC Policy Institute has remained its partner. The sixth BSF took place in October 2016 under the heading "Will Democracy Survive the Global Disorder?" One of its core events was a dialogue between Serbian PM Aleksandar Vučić and Albanian PM Edi Rama, which generated much interest.<sup>15</sup>

The WB6 Advocacy Group, a new international platform of non-governmental organizations, has recently emerged to support EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. It is run by organizations from countries of the Western Balkans and V4 countries, including the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA). In November 2016, it issued "Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans," a study authored by institutes of V4 countries, including SFPA, and research centers in the Western Balkans.<sup>16</sup>

The outcome of a total of 33 meetings of the COELA Working Party also attests to the success of the Slovak Presidency, which had prioritized the policy of EU enlargement. Intergovernmental conferences with Serbia and Montenegro were facilitated, so that after six months of hard work, Slovak diplomacy could boast of achievements not only in Serbia's accession process, but also in that of Montenegro, where two chapters were opened: Chapter 11 on agriculture and rural development, and Chapter 19 on social policy and employment. Another success was the decision of the Council of the EU to request the European Commission to state its position on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU membership, as well as to organize a meeting of the Stabilization and Association Council with Serbia (after a period of more than two years), and with Kosovo (the first such meeting). An important moment in Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession process was when its Stabilization and Association Agreement was adapted to Croatia's membership in the EU.<sup>17</sup>

A distinctive chapter in Slovakia's political and diplomatic activity in the Western Balkans has been its contribution to the establishment of Montenegro as an

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<sup>14</sup> "Partnership for Serbia: Serbia, NATO and strategic communication," Globsec Facebook, 2016. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10154231079788430.1073741875.315063938429&type=3> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> "Vučić and Rama: the EU offers an opportunity for progress in the region," *Belgrade Security Forum*, 2016. Available online: <http://www.belgradeforum.org/info/news/1068/VU%C4%8C%C4%86+AND+RAMA%3A+EU+OPPORTUNITY+FOR+IMPROVEMENT+IN+THE+REGION.html> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> "Advocacy strategy for the EU integration of the Western Balkans," *European Movement in Serbia*, 2016. Available online: <http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/dokumentipdf/Advocacy-Strategy-WB6---Guidelines-pdf.pdf> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> "M. Lajčák: Predsedníctvo v Rade EÚ končíme so ctou a radom výsledkov" [M. Lajčák: our Presidency of the Council of the EU closes with honor and an array of results] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, December 13, 2016. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/m-lajcak-predsednictvo-v-rade-eu-koncime-so-ctou-a-radom-vysledkov?p\\_auth=XC8a2lWr&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lw1ppvnScIPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky\\_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D11%26strana%3D4](http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/m-lajcak-predsednictvo-v-rade-eu-koncime-so-ctou-a-radom-vysledkov?p_auth=XC8a2lWr&_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D11%26strana%3D4) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

independent, viable and trustworthy partner in international relations, and an equal member of the family of UN member states. It was in 2016 that the tenth anniversary of the restoration of Montenegro's independence was celebrated.<sup>18</sup> The country has undergone a period of big changes, and has undoubtedly become the leader of the integration process in the Western Balkans. Slovakia's top diplomat, Miroslav Lajčák, assured the country that "Slovak diplomacy will continue to support Montenegro in its integration effort."<sup>19</sup>

When Lajčák, as Slovakia's foreign minister, signed a protocol on Montenegro's accession to NATO in Brussels on May 19, the act contained a dose of positive symbolism, since it was Lajčák who in 2006 helped facilitate Montenegro's referendum on independence, then as a personal envoy of Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (another Slovak diplomat, František Lipka, played an important role as chairman of the referendum committee). Since such an orientation for Montenegro calls forth negative reactions, particularly from Russia, Minister Lajčák's announcement on the same day can be seen as significant:

In the context of the eastern dimension we talk about setting relations with Russia. Today it is clear that we probably need to get used to what they look like now – marked by distrust. At the same time, we need to communicate with Russia, for the sake of greater transparency and to avoid misunderstandings or even incidents.<sup>20</sup>

The situation with **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is more complicated. In 2016, and for many years now, Slovak representatives have had very intensive contacts with a legion of leading politicians of this country situated in the heart of the Western Balkans. On EU ground, Slovak diplomacy did everything in its power to help Bosnia and Herzegovina integrate into the EU, and to draw the attention of other member states to the country's problems and processes, despite the difficult situation within the EU itself. Undoubtedly the biggest success of this effort during the Slovak Presidency was that the Council of the EU requested the European Commission, on September 20, 2016,

<sup>18</sup> The Principality of Montenegro lost its independence in the process of Yugoslavia's formation at the end of WWI, when the opponents of King Nikola, in Podgorica on October 24, 1918, approved Montenegro's coalescence with Serbia under the rule of the Karađorđević dynasty. Later, Montenegro was part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and in the national liberation and antifascist movement of the 1940s it became a member republic of the Yugoslav Federation, which it remained until 2006. See *Dějiny jihoslovanských zemí*. [History of the Yugoslav land] Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 380 p.

<sup>19</sup> "Minister Lajčák na výročné porade veľvyslancov Čiernej Hory," [Minister Lajčák at the annual meeting of Montenegro's ambassadors] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 12, 2016. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/podgorica/spravy/-/asset\\_publisher/qUcjGk6Falrh/content/minister-m-lajcak-na-vyrocnej-porade-velvyslancov-ciernej-hory/10182?p\\_p\\_auth=KgMoIWgk&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_qUcjGk6Falrh\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fpodgorica](https://www.mzv.sk/web/podgorica/spravy/-/asset_publisher/qUcjGk6Falrh/content/minister-m-lajcak-na-vyrocnej-porade-velvyslancov-ciernej-hory/10182?p_p_auth=KgMoIWgk&_101_INSTANCE_qUcjGk6Falrh_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fpodgorica) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> "NATO podpísalo prístupový protokol s Čiernou Horou," [NATO signs the accession protocol with Montenegro] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 19, 2016. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/lw1ppvnSciPx/content/nato-podpisalo-pristupovy-protokol-s-ciernou-horou?p\\_p\\_auth=3dQAPoKM&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lw1ppvnSciPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky\\_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D4%26strana%3D6](http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnSciPx/content/nato-podpisalo-pristupovy-protokol-s-ciernou-horou?p_p_auth=3dQAPoKM&_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnSciPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3Frok%3D2016%26mesiac%3D4%26strana%3D6) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

to state its position on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU membership. It is a positive sign that the statement of Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs contains a very realistic and critical assessment of the situation rather than a triumphant tone.<sup>21</sup>

The situation in **Macedonia** is disquieting, as the long-lasting internal political crisis complicates the country's integration efforts. Although conditions were created for democratic elections in December 2016, the political forces respected neither the results nor the coalition potential of the significant parties, and did not manage to constitute functioning legislative and executive bodies. Political tension is growing, as is the possibility of misusing the country's ethnic structure to arouse conflict between Macedonians and Albanians. At the end of 2016, however, this crisis in Macedonian society was not yet charged with so much tension as now.

Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák discussed these questions with Macedonian Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Arber Ademi in July 2016, in Bratislava. He told him that Slovakia is concerned about Macedonia's internal political situation and increasingly its lagging behind in the integration processes. To Macedonia, Slovakia offers its experience with the National Convention on the European Union, which was applied successfully not only in Slovakia but also in Montenegro, Serbia and recently in Albania, with the ideological and organizational participation of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and domestic organizations at both governmental and non-governmental levels. Within the accession process, this project created an important forum for broad discussion between all important actors in the political environment and civil society both about their ideas and their expectations of the reform process related to European integration.<sup>22</sup>

More favorable in the field of integration processes is the situation in **Albania**, concerning which talks of the Stabilization and Association Council of the EU took

<sup>21</sup> "In the past, Bosnia and Herzegovina lost much time and social energy in unnecessary domestic conflicts, which did not solve the serious problems of its inhabitants, but rather deepened dividing lines, mutual distrust and frustration, and increased people's concerns about their future and the future of their families. The Ministry is certain that a country with such rich human and natural potential can eliminate existing regressive tendencies, concentrate on real problems instead of fictional ones, and make progress in consolidating peace, democracy, liberties, prosperity and the protection of human rights, and in this way strengthen the belief of its inhabitants in a better shared future. If the political representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina base their efforts on responsibility and sincerity, and will try to reach solutions that will benefit everyone, the country can count on Slovakia's support." See "Vyhlásenie MZVaEZ SR k rozhodnutiu ministrov EÚ o Bosne a Hercegovine," [Statement of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic on the Decision of EU ministers on Bosnia and Herzegovina] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, September 20, 2016. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/sarajevo/spravy/-/asset\\_publisher/qUcjGk6Falrh/content/vyhlasenie-mzvaez-sr-k-rozhodnutiu-ministrov-eu-o-bosne-a-hercegovine/10182?p\\_p\\_auth=HRyl4WEm&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_qUcjGk6Falrh\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fsarajevo](https://www.mzv.sk/web/sarajevo/spravy/-/asset_publisher/qUcjGk6Falrh/content/vyhlasenie-mzvaez-sr-k-rozhodnutiu-ministrov-eu-o-bosne-a-hercegovine/10182?p_p_auth=HRyl4WEm&_101_INSTANCE_qUcjGk6Falrh_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fsarajevo) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> "Minister M. Lajčák s vicepremiérom Macedónska o prístupovom procese EÚ," [Minister M. Lajčák with Deputy Prime Minister of Macedonia on the EU Accession Process] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, July 20, 2016. Available online: [http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/minister-m-lajcak-s-vicepremierom-macedonska-o-pristupovom-procese-eu?p\\_p\\_auth=N1AQcbBU&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lw1ppvnScIPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%](http://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/minister-m-lajcak-s-vicepremierom-macedonska-o-pristupovom-procese-eu?p_p_auth=N1AQcbBU&_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2F) (accessed on February 26, 2017).

place in September 2016. Progress is expected in the five priority areas that were set for Albania in 2014, when the country was granted the status of a candidate country. The five key priorities are: first, to ensure progress in the reform of public administration; second, to strengthen the independence, effectiveness and responsibility of judicial institutions; third, to struggle against corruption; fourth, to combat organized crime; and fifth, to enhance the protection of human rights. As part of this program, a complex reform of the judiciary was adopted in 2016.

It is the five key priority areas, as well as problems in the economic and social spheres, that the organizers of the National Convention on the European Union – the European Movement Albania, the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, and related ministries – concentrate on. The purpose of the project is, above all, to institutionalize public debate on matters of European integration – a process based on the partnership of governmental, non-governmental and entrepreneurial institutions and interest groups – and to strengthen state capacities for talks on accession to the EU.

The project aims to engage the wider scholarly public, from all segments of society, in the creation of national policies and positions regarding the agenda of European integration, to deploy Slovak know-how of political, economic and social transformation, and to create a reliable, interactive and permanent information resource on the EU. Proof of the success and effectiveness of the project are the conclusions drawn at the general assembly of the Convention in Tirana in May 2016, attended by ministers of the Albanian government, EU representatives, and members of four working groups, who not only presented a complex picture of their activities, but critically and realistically talked about the steps to be taken for Albania's integration into the EU. Considering the success and outcomes of the project, it is surprising that its next phase has not been supported financially by the Slovak development assistance program.<sup>23</sup>

In 2016, **Kosovo** became a new active member of the project of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Kosovo entered into force in April, but as not all EU member states (including Slovakia) have recognized Kosovo as an independent polity, the agreement was not ratified by national parliaments but was legalized as a document of "Union character." At the first meeting of the Stabilization and Association Council (SAC) in November, a Framework agreement was signed between the EU and Kosovo on general principles of Kosovo's participation in Union programs.

The positive thing was that the dialogue between Slovakia and Kosovo continued also at the level of the foreign ministers of the two countries, and dealt with the problems related to stabilization and the integration of Kosovo into Euro-Atlantic structures, and with the question of a solution to the stagnating relations between Pristina and Belgrade. With such dominant topics, the question of Slovakia's recognition of Kosovo as an independent state remains open, especially when Kosovo's statehood has been recognized by 114 of the 193 UN member states.

<sup>23</sup> "Plenary Session of National Convention on European Integration," *National Convention on the EU in Albania website*, May 2016. Available online: <http://eurokonventa.al/en/plenary-session-of-national-convention-on-european-integration/> (accessed on February 26, 2017).

## **I**NSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

The year 2016 in the Western Balkans was certainly more turbulent than expected. The region lay in the shadow of the storms of today's world, but is inclined to step out of the shadow and likely to become the scene of the storm. Given this situation, even the slightest progress in integrating the Balkan states was a huge success. Although the attractiveness of the great European integration process has declined as a consequence of negative phenomena in the world, the project is still supported by the majority of European inhabitants, who rightly perceive it as an opportunity for a better and more secure life. The challenge for the European Union, including Slovakia, is not to neglect the integration of the Western Balkans into the rest of Europe, because that is the way to the stability, security and development of the region and of Europe at large. As in 2016, Slovakia will continue to contribute to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans through enhancing the credibility of the process – by supporting the reform activity of the Balkan states in accomplishing their integration tasks, and by encouraging EU countries to exemplify positive attitudes towards the countries of the Western Balkans.



# BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL CONTEXT OF THE SLOVAKIA'S EASTERN POLICY 2016

JURAJ MARUŠIAK

The Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2016, and its efforts to obtain the post of UN Secretary-General for Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák, were the key aspects determining the development of the policy of Slovakia towards the countries of the former USSR. While relations with the Russian Federation and Ukraine displayed continuity, relations with Belarus underwent a significant change. These three countries played the most important role in the Eastern policy of Slovakia in 2016.

## **BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA AND THEIR MULTILATERAL CONTEXT**

As in previous years, relations with the Russian Federation remained very intensive. Slovakia's attitude towards the Russian Federation continued to be defined by the common policy of EU and NATO member states on the military occupation of Ukrainian Crimea, its subsequent annexation in 2014, and on the involvement of Russia in armed clashes in the Donbas and Luhansk region of Ukraine, where it supported the separatist tendencies. On the other hand, representatives of the

Slovakia expressed their criticism of the policy of isolating Russia and called for the loosening of sanctions. This line has been typical of the Slovak attitude ever since tensions between the West and the Russian Federation escalated in the first months of 2014.

The policy became apparent, for example, in the debates on reopening the dialogue between NATO and the Russian Federation in the NATO–Russia Council. On his visit to Kyiv in February 2016, the Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Miroslav Lajčák, supported the convening of the NATO–Russia Council, whose operation had been suspended in April 2014. At the same time, however, he refused to restore relations as they existed prior to the annexation of Crimea.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout 2016, the Slovak prime minister repeatedly declared his disapproval of the sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union, in connection with the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russian support of separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. In an interview for the Bloomberg newswire in February 2016, he endorsed the stance adopted by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. The sanctions, which Slovakia as an EU member state was obliged to observe, were “nonsense” and had failed to change the situation in Ukraine, he said. “The sooner they are removed, the better.”<sup>2</sup> The prime minister demonstrated his positive attitude towards Russia even during his speech at a ceremony marking the anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising (SNP) in Banská Bystrica, where he declared that the current conflicts between the West and Russia were the outcome of a “looking-for-an-enemy policy.” “I will never introduce antipathy into Slovak–Russian relations, and I refuse to create a new enemy,”<sup>3</sup> he said. In September 2016, in an interview for *Reuters*, Robert Fico not only repeatedly stated that sanctions towards Russia were harming the EU, but also – when speaking of the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, signed to halt the war in Eastern Ukraine – affirmed that Ukraine was doing even less than Russia to meet its obligations.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Slovensko podporuje zvolanie Rady NATO-Rusko, vyhlásil Lajčák,” [Slovakia supports convening NATO–Russia Council, says Lajčák] *TA3*, February 2, 2016. Available online: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1077470/slovensko-podporuje-zvolanie-rady-nato-rusko-vyhlasil-lajcak.html> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> M. Tóda, “Fico by zrušil sankcie proti Moskve. Podľa analytikov podporuje okupáciu Ukrajiny,” [Fico would abolish anti-Moscow sanctions. Analysts regard it as support for Ukrainian occupation] *Denník N*, February 23, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/380654/fico-by-zrusil-sankcie-proti-moskve-podla-analytikov-podporuje-okupaciu-ukrajiny/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> “Fico na oslavách SNP kritizoval britskú premiérku, zastal sa Rusov,” [Fico at SNP celebrations: criticizes British prime minister, takes sides with Russia] *Európske noviny*, August 30, 2016. Available online: <https://europskenoviny.sk/2016/08/30/fico-oslavach-snp-kritizoval-britsku-premierku-zastal-sa-rusov/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> T. Jancarikova, J. Hovet “Slovakia’s Fico says Ukraine doing less than Russia to meet Minsk Agreements,” *Reuters*, September 17, 2016. Available online: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-crisis-slovakia-idUKKCN11N0JT> (accessed on February 21, 2017); “Diplomacia žehlila výroky Fica o Ukrajine,” [Diplomacy to ‘iron out’ Fico’s statements on Ukraine] *Aktuality.sk*, September 19, 2016. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/374326/diplomacia-zehlila-vyroky-fica-o-ukrajine/> (accessed on September 19, 2016).

At the European Council summit held on October 21, 2016, Fico renewed his call to end the sanctions against Russia, calling them dysfunctional and pointless. At the same time, he stressed that Slovakia was committed to upholding the unity of the European Union. Still, he pointed out the double standards that the European Union applies – on the one hand it imposes sanctions, while on the other it is planning construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, despite its negative effect on Ukraine's economic interests.<sup>5</sup> He repeated his reservations concerning the sanctions at a meeting of the NCSR (National Council of the Slovak Republic) European Affairs Committee on December 14, 2016. He accused both Russia and Ukraine of violating the Minsk Agreements that had led to a ceasefire between Ukrainian armed forces and pro-Russian separatists in Donbass. Notwithstanding his criticism of the sanctions, Fico reiterated that Slovakia would not undermine the unity of the EU.<sup>6</sup> That is why, at a meeting of the European Council on December 15, 2016, the Slovak Republic voted in favor of prolonging economic sanctions against Russia by six months.<sup>7</sup>

Further elements shaping Slovak–Russian bilateral relations at the highest level were the priorities of the SR connected with its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the second half of 2016. These priorities were addressed in the negotiations between minister Miroslav Lajčák and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, on Lajčák's visit to Moscow on May 10, 2016. At the same time, Lajčák pointed out that Slovak–Russian bilateral relations “have the solid foundations of a long partnership cooperation, although these are currently overshadowed by the negative atmosphere felt between the EU and Russia.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite similar declarations, even the Slovak authorities had to admit that the political interests of Slovakia and Russia differ in many respects. The Slovak Ministry of Interior did so in a report of June 2016, where it acknowledged that Slovakia, along with other Central and Eastern European countries, is “subjected to the informational impact of the so-called influential structures of the Russian Federation,” and that in this way the Russian Federation “interferes in the internal affairs of the Slovak Republic.” The Ministry views the propaganda trying to undermine Slovak membership in the

<sup>5</sup> “Fico na summite EU označil sankcie proti Rusku za nezmyselné a nefunkčné,” [Fico at EU summit: Sanctions against Russia are pointless and dysfunctional] *Pravda*, October 21, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/tlac/408664-fico-na-sumite-eu-oznacil-sankcie-voci-rusku-za-nezmyselne-a-nefunkcne/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Fico: sankcie proti Rusku nič nezmenili, držíme sa vlastnej pravdy,” [Fico: Sanctions against Russia have not changed anything; let's hold on to our truth] *Pravda*, December 14, 2016. Available online: <http://europa.pravda.sk/tlac/413931-fico-povinne-kvoty-su-mrtve-ponukame-efektivnu-solidaritu/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> “Brusel potvrdil predĺženie ekonomických sankcií voči Rusku o pol roka,” [Brussels confirmed the prolongation of economic sanctions against Russia by six months] *Teraz.sk*, December 19, 2016. Available online: <http://www.teraz.sk/zahranicie/brusel-potvrdil-predlzene-ekonomicky/234352-clanok.html> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> “Minister M. Lajčák rokoval v Moskve s ruským ministrom zahraničných vecí S. Lavrovom,” [M. Lajčák meets in Moscow with Russian counterpart S. Lavrov] *Party Smer-SD – official website*, May 10, 2016. Available online: <http://strana-smer.sk/m-lajcak-rokoval-v-moskve-s-ruskym-ministrom-zahranicnych-veci-s-lavrovom> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

EU and NATO as a hybrid threat. Consequently, the Ministry of Interior declared its intention to update the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic.<sup>9</sup>

As in previous years, Slovak President Andrej Kiska had a different view on Russia than Prime Minister Fico. Kiska voiced open criticism of Russia's policy both towards Ukraine and the EU. In March 2016, he demanded the release of imprisoned Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko, claiming that her detention was a violation of the Minsk Agreements.<sup>10</sup> On the first day of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU, Kiska accused Russia of propagating hostile propaganda seeking to split the EU.<sup>11</sup> In a crucial speech, delivered at the international Globsec (Global Security Forum) conference in Bratislava, Kiska, among other things, also touched upon relations between Russia and the EU. It was in this speech that he described the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 as "an act of aggression which had shaken the security architecture of Europe." This annexation, together with the ongoing war in Ukraine, the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the persisting "heavy disinformation campaign" against the EU, had dissolved "our vision of a strategic partnership with President Putin's Russia – at least for the foreseeable future", he said.<sup>12</sup>

In 2016, the topic of relations with Russia became less prominent in the internal political debates than it had been in 2014–2015; yet it still succeeded in dividing the political parties represented in the NCSR. Among the coalition parties, Most-Híd adopted a stance closest to that of Kiska. František Šebej, one of the party's deputies in the NCSR, accused Russia of seeking to undermine the unity of the European Union.<sup>13</sup> Although SNS (Slovak National Party), a coalition party, had previously condemned the sanctions against the Russian Federation as an act of aggression from the West<sup>14</sup> and wanted Slovakia to withdraw from them,<sup>15</sup> nonetheless upon entering the parlia-

<sup>9</sup> L. Bariak ml.: "Kaliňákov rezort priznáva: Slovensko je predmetom pôsobenia ruského vplyvu," [Resort of Minister Kaliňák admits: Slovakia subjected to Russian influence] *Aktuality.sk*, June 6, 2016. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/344132/kalinakov-rezort-priznavaslovensko-je-predmetom-posobenia-ruskeho-vplyvu/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> "Kiska vyzval Rusko, aby prepustilo ukrajinskú pilotku Savčenkovú," [Kiska demands release of Ukrainian pilot Savchenko detained in Russia] *Pravda*, March 16, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/386972-kiska-vyzval-rusko-aby-prepustilo-ukrajinsku-pilotku-savcenskovu/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> P. Vavrouška, "Andrej Kiska ve Dvaceti minutách Rádiožurnálu," [Andrej Kiska on radio program Twenty minutes of Rádiožurnál] *Český rozhlas radio station – Rádiožurnál*, July 1, 2016. Available online: [http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/dvacetminut/\\_zprava/1629626](http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/dvacetminut/_zprava/1629626) (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> "Kiska at Globsec Conference: We need new bold decisions," *President of the SR – official website*, June 20, 2016. Available online: <https://www.prezident.sk/en/article/prezident-na-globsecu-potrebujeme-odvazne-nove-rozhodnutia/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> V. Šnidl: "Štát prvýkrát priznal, že ruská propaganda útočí na prozápadné smerovanie Slovenska," [State confessed for the first time, that Russia's propaganda attacked the pro-Western orientation of Slovakia] *DenníkN*, June 8, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/481082/stat-prvykrat-priznal-ze-ruska-propaganda-utoci-prozapadne-smerovanie-slovenska/> (accessed on March 15, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> R. Rafaj, "Ruky preč od agresie proti Rusku," [Hands off aggression against Russia] *Slovak National Party – official website*, May 16, 2014. Available online: <http://www.sns.sk/aktuality/rafael-rafaj-ruky-prec-od-agresie-voci-rusku/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> R. Rafaj, "Slovensko by malo vystúpiť z mechanizmu sankcií proti Rusku," [Slovakia should quit regime of sanctions against Russia] *Slovak National Party – official website*, August 11, 2014. Available online: <http://www.sns.sk/aktuality/rafael-rafaj-slovensko-by-malo-vystupit-z-mechanizmu-sankcii-proti-rusku/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

ment and the coalition government it ceased to question the official stance of Slovak foreign policy.

Some members of the opposition openly criticized the policy of Fico's government towards the Russian Federation. Ivan Štefanec, a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for KDH (Christian Democratic Movement), affirmed that Fico's statements against the sanctions imposed on Russia were an open display of support for Putin's aggressive policy towards Ukraine and other countries.<sup>16</sup> The leader of the opposition party OĽaNO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities), Igor Matovič, rejected any questioning of the unity of NATO and the EU, and declared compliance with the current line of Slovak foreign policy to be a prerequisite for the inclusion of any candidate on the candidates list in the parliamentary elections of March 2016.<sup>17</sup> The Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) party has adopted an ambivalent stance towards the Russian Federation and the developments in Ukraine. On the one hand, it decries the foreign policy of the RF and condemns Fico's manifestations of sympathy towards Russia.<sup>18</sup> In the past, the leader of the party, Richard Sulík, has denounced the annexation of Crimea and endorsed sanctions against the RF.<sup>19</sup> Yet, on the other hand, he has also voiced criticism of the EU policy towards Ukraine. In his view, once the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement is signed, Ukraine will become “a second Greece.”<sup>20</sup>

In November 2016, Sulík, together with five other Slovak MEPs (Monika Flašíková-Beňová, Vladimír Maňka, and Monika Smolková of Smer-SD; Branislav Škripek of OĽaNO; and Anna Záborská of KDH) abstained from voting on a resolution condemning the informational activities of the Russian Federation and Islamic terrorist groups striving to undermine faith in democratic values, and calling for the EU to support the independent media in post-socialist countries and to subsidize activities trying to counter such propaganda and disinformation (e.g. those of the European Commission's expert group East StratCom). The resolution was passed by 304 votes to 179, with 208 abstentions. The majority of MEPs from the center-right parties

<sup>16</sup> “Fico otvorene podporil ruskú agresiu na Ukrajine, vyhlásil Štefanec,” [Fico openly supports Russian aggression in Ukraine, says Štefanec] *Hospodárske noviny*, February 23, 2016. Available online: <http://hnonline.sk/slovensko/592704-fico-otvorene-podporil-rusku-agresiu-na-ukrajine-vyhlasil-stefanec> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> M. Kern, “Mezenská má byť na kandidátke, keď sa prihlási k NATO,” [Mezenská on the candidate list if she endorses the NATO] *Denník N*, December 4, 2015. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/312356/mezenska-ma-byt-kandidatke-ked-sa-prihlasi-nato/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> “SaS k Ukrajine: Fico sa postavil za Rusko,” [Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) on Ukraine: Fico takes sides with Russia] *Freedom and Solidarity – official website*, December 4, 2013. Available online: <http://www.strana-sas.sk/sas-k-ukrajine-fico-sa-postavil-za-rusko/2649> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> “Sulík: SaS súhlasí s prezidentom Kiskom,” [Sulík: Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) agrees with President Kiska] *Freedom and Solidarity – official website*, August 15, 2014. Available online: <http://www.strana-sas.sk/sulik-sas-suhlasi-s-prezidentom-kiskom/2997> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> R. Sulík, “Ukrajina sa stáva druhým Gréckom,” [Ukraine to become a second Greece] *Freedom and Solidarity – official website*, January 14, 2015. Available online: <http://www.strana-sas.sk/ukrajina-sa-stava-druhym-greckom-europarlament-richard-sulik/3209> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

voted in favor of it (Pál Csáky of SMK [Party of the Hungarian Community]; Eduard Kukan of SDKÚ-DS [Slovak Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party]; József Nagy of Most-Híd; Jana Žitňanská of NOVA; Miroslav Mikolášik and Ivan Štefanec of KDH), as did Boris Zala, an MEP for Smer-SD. Although the PES (Party of European Socialists) Group proposed a different wording for the resolution, they had no intention of hindering its adoption, said Maňka.<sup>21</sup> Sulík argued mainly on the basis of freedom of speech, while Záborská objected to the connections made between Russian and Islamic propaganda.

Boris Kollár, leader of the Sme Rodina (We are Family) party, also spoke out against EU support for Ukraine. He shared on his Facebook account the news, released by representatives of Donetsk separatists, of mass graves being uncovered in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> Kollár rejected the demonization of Russia perpetrated by what he calls "Euro-Atlantic propaganda."<sup>23</sup>

Marián Kotleba, leader of the party ĽS NS (People's Party – Our Slovakia), was another who showed his sympathies towards the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, when he flew the flag of the Russian Federation at the Office of the Regional Municipality of Banská Bystrica, to welcome delegates of the infamous Russian motorcycle club, Night Wolves.<sup>24</sup> His name also appeared in connection with a report on the arrest of Mateusz Piskorski by Poland's Internal Security Agency, ABW. Piskorski, a representative of the party Change (Zmiana), was suspected of receiving funding for his party (as with other far-right parties in Europe) from Rus-

<sup>21</sup> "EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties," 2016/2030 (INI). Strasbourg: European Parliament, November 23, 2016. Available online: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2016/2030\(INI\)](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2016/2030(INI)) (accessed on February 21, 2017); V. Šnídl, "Europoslanci prvýkrát varovali pred ruskou propagandou, Sulík a Flašíková-Beňová sa zdržali," [MEPs warn of Russian propaganda for the first time, Sulík and Flašíková-Beňová abstain] *Denník N*, November 25, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/617185/europoslanci-prvykrat-varovali-pred-ruskou-propagandou-sulik-a-flasikova-benova-sa-zdrzali-dennikn/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> B. Kollár: "Kiska, hanbí sa. Toto robí armáda toho hajzla, čo si ho sem pozveš a máš ho za kamoša. Zvery nacistické, máte nakúpené, žiadna milosť, tak ako vy, tak aj vám," [Shame on you, Kiska. This is what the army of the asshole you call your friend and you invite to visit our country does. No mercy with the Nazi beasts, what you did is what you get] *Parlamentné listy*, September 30, 2015. Available online: <http://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/monitor/Boris-Kollar-Kiska-hanbi-sa-Toto-robi-armada-toho-hajzla-co-si-ho-sem-pozves-a-mas-ho-za-kamosa-Zvery-nacisticke-mate-nakupene-ziadna-milost-tak-ako-vy-tak-aj-vam-253398> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Ak chceme primárne pramene, v tomto článku bol zverejnený text Borisa Kollára. Inak je dostupný na Facebooku takto: B. Kollár: "Verejná kontrola mimovládnych organizácií by mala byť prioritou vlády," [Public control of the non-governmental organizations should be a priority of government] *Boris Kollár – official Facebook profile*, July 27, 2016. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/1464024763918594/photos/a.1513533445634392.1073741829.1464024763918594/1654968354824233/?type=3&theater> (accessed on July 28, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> "Do Bystrice prišli Noční vlci, Kotleba vyvesil na úrad ruskú vlajku," [Night wolves arrived in Bystrica, Kotleba hangs Russian flag at his office] *Hospodárske noviny*, May 5, 2016. Available online: <http://www.pluska.sk/plus-7-dni/domov/kotleba-zase-predviedol-urad-bbsk-zavesil-rusku-vlajku.html> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

sia.<sup>25</sup> Although relations with the Russian Federation presented no significant dividing line within the Slovak political scene in 2016, they were still there in its internal political dialogue. With respect to certain more specific questions, opinions varied even within individual parties.

### **ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF SLOVAK–RUSSIAN RELATIONS**

The bilateral Slovak–Russian relations echoed the countries' diverging attitudes towards construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea. Slovak pipeline operator Eustream has estimated that once Nord Stream 2 is launched, as much as 80 per cent of the volume of gas exported from Russia to the EU will be supplied through the Nord Stream. As a result, Slovakia may lose up to 700 million euros every year starting in 2028, when the bilateral contract binding Russia to pay for gas transit expires. Both Slovakia and Ukraine adopted a critical stance towards the Nord Stream 2 project as early as 2015. In November 2015, following a meeting with vice-presidents of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovski and Maroš Šefčovič, Robert Fico declared that the extension of the Nord Stream gas pipeline is not consistent with the goals of the EU Energy Union.<sup>26</sup> Slovak officials regarded the project as purely political, while the extension of the pipeline was also on the agenda at the European Council summit in December 2015. Here Fico opposed German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who considered Nord Stream 2 to be a commercial project with private investors.<sup>27</sup>

Slovakia plays the leading role among Nord Stream 2 critics. Other EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe (the Visegrad Group and Baltic countries, Romania, and Croatia) have endorsed the Slovak stance.<sup>28</sup> As a result, in 2016 Germany and Russia both exercised pressure on Slovakia to mitigate its attitude.<sup>29</sup> It was Slovakia's disapproval of the project that supposedly moved the chairman of the Russian gas concern Gazprom to pay an unofficial visit to Bratislava on February 11, 2016. The

<sup>25</sup> "Poľská tajná služba zatkla proruského politika, zmieňuje sa aj o Kotlebovi," [Poland's Internal Security Agency arrests pro-Russian politician, mentions Kotleba's name as well] *Pravda*, June 3, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/395052-polska-tajna-sluzba-zatkla-proruskeho-politika-zmienuje-sa-aj-o-kotlebovi/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> "Fico: Rozšírenie plynovodu Nord Stream ide proti energetickej únii Fico," [The extension of the Nord Stream gas pipeline goes against the Energy Union] *Pravda*, November 5, 2015. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/372968-fico-rozsirenje-plynovodu-nord-stream-ide-proti-energetickej-unii/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> "Sťažnosti voči projektu Nord Stream 2 pribúdajú," [Yet more countries complaining of Nord Stream 2 project] *Energia.sk*, January 7, 2016. Available online: <http://energia.dennikn.sk/dolezite/zemny-plyn-a-ropa/staznosti-voci-projektu-nord-stream-2-pribudaju/18831/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> "Premiéri na novom Nord Streame kritizujú viacero vecí," [Prime Ministers criticize new Nord Stream in many respects] *V energetike.sk*, March 18, 2016. Available online: <http://venergetike.sk/premieri-na-novom-nord-streame-kritizuju-viacero-veci/> (accessed on February 21, 2017); V. Ružinská, "Plynovod Nord Stream nechce deväť krajín," [Nine countries to reject Nord Stream gas pipeline] *Pravda*, March 22, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/387559-plynovod-nord-stream-nechce-devat-krajin/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> V. Ružinská, "Slovensko sa vzoprelo Rusom," [Slovakia opposes the Russians] *Pravda* daily, May 3, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/391769-slovensko-sa-vzoprelo-rusom/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

content of a meeting with Fico during that visit was not made public.<sup>30</sup> Another country to actively oppose the project was Italy. M. Renzi had denounced the Nord Stream 2 project already in November 2015. In his view, the project contradicts both the policy of sanctions against Russia and the EU's Third Energy Package.<sup>31</sup>

Even Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have expressed their reservations about the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline. The topic was addressed at a plenary session on May 10, 2016, with many MEPs pointing out the geopolitical rather than economical character of the project, one that might deepen the EU's future dependence on a single gas supplier.<sup>32</sup> A written declaration to this effect was available for MEPs to sign between March 7 and June 7, 2016. Of the 13 Slovak MEPs, only Richard Sulík (SaS) and Monika Flašíková-Beňová (Smer-SD) have decided not to sign it. Sulík reasoned that "he does not deem it correct to depend on Ukraine for gas supplies," while Flašíková-Beňová (Smer-SD), who is a known critic of the project, remarked that "it is very unlikely that a direct link between Russia and Germany will be established given the enormous pressure generated by member states."<sup>33</sup>

On June 16, 2016, with the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU approaching, Fico had a telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin. They discussed relations between the EU and the Russian Federation and the bilateral economic cooperation between their respective countries. On August 25, 2016, while meeting with Putin in Moscow, Fico repeated his call for ending EU sanctions against Russia – sanctions, he said, that harm both Russia and the EU, and have achieved absolutely nothing with respect to the sensitive issues they were supposed to influence. All the same, as an EU member state, Slovakia must comply with its obligations, he stressed. At their meeting, Fico and Putin discussed the decrease in trade turnover between the two countries since 2013, and support for Lajčák's candidacy in the UN Secretary-General elections of autumn 2016. A substantial part of their bilateral negotiations was dedicated to the future of gas transit from Russia through Slovak territory, once the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is launched. Coming from the meeting, Fico declared that whether Nord Stream 2 is built or not, "the capacity for transit through Slovakia will be preserved," and that the negotiations' outcomes succeeded in "upholding Slovakia's

<sup>30</sup> "Šéf Gazpromu rokoval v Bratislave s Ficom. Témou bol Nord Stream II?," [Chairman of Gazprom negotiates with Fico in Bratislava. Was it about Nord Stream 2?] *Energia.sk*, February 12, 2016. Available online: <http://energia.dennikn.sk/dolezite/zemny-plyn-a-ropa/sef-gazpromu-rokoval-v-bratislave-s-ficom-bol-temou-nord-stream-ii/19216/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> P. Spiegel, "Italy's Renzi joins opposition to Nord Stream 2 pipeline deal," *Financial Times*, December 15, 2015. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/ceb679c-a281-11e5-8d70-42-b68cfae6e4> (accessed on February 21, 2017); M. Tacconi, "The Italian ally in the V4 gas security battle," *Visegrad Insight*, July 15, 2016. Available online: <http://www.naturalgasworld.com/the-italian-ally-in-the-v4-gas-security-battle-30857> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> "MEPs voice grave concerns about the Nord Stream 2 project," *European Parliament – News*, May 10, 2016. Available online: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20160509IPR26345/meps-voice-grave-concerns-about-nord-stream-2-project> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> "Sulík a Flašíková nepodpisali deklaráciu proti Nord Streamu 2," [Sulík and Flašíková refuse to sign anti-Nord Stream 2 declaration] *Pravda*, June 21, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/396815-sulik-a-flasikova-nepodpisali-deklaraci-u-proti-nord-streamu-2/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

national interest."<sup>34,35</sup> He offered no further details, however, on how this would come about. In order to revive their mutual economic relations, representatives of the two countries scheduled the next meeting of the Russian–Slovak Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation for January 2017.<sup>36</sup>

The Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group countries expressed their disapproval of the Nord Stream 2 project at a meeting in Polish Krynica on September 6, 2016. The European Union "should not engage in energy projects that could threaten the future of existing gas pipelines from Russia to Europe," Fico said.<sup>37</sup> His words represented confirmation that the negotiations of August 2016 in Moscow failed to dispel the fear that Slovak economic interests were being threatened.

### **RUSSIA AND LAJČÁK'S UN SECRETARY-GENERAL CANDIDACY**

The Russian Federation backed the conventional system of regional rotation applied in the UN Secretary-General selection. In compliance with this principle, the 2016 UN Secretary-General elections should result in a candidate from Central or Eastern Europe attaining the post.<sup>38</sup> Slovak diplomacy seized on this opportunity and made Russian support for Lajčák's candidacy one of its priorities in its relations with Russia in 2016. Although there were many other candidates from the region – including Bulgarian politician and Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Vuk Jeremić – Russia was likely to back Lajčák's candidacy, since he was equally acceptable to the other permanent UN Security Council members possessing veto power. Yet the Russian Federation never officially confirmed its support.

The effort to secure Russia's vote for Lajčák was probably one of the reasons behind the statements of Slovak officials denouncing the policy of isolating the RF. Following

<sup>34</sup> V. Ružinská, "Plynovod Nord Stream nechce deväť krajín," [Nine countries to reject the gas pipeline Nord Stream] *Pravda*, March 22, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/387559-plynovod-nord-stream-nechce-devat-krajin/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> "Premiér SR Robert Fico rokoval s ruským prezidentom Vladimirom Putinom," [Prime Minister of the SR Robert Fico negotiates with Russia's President Vladimir Putin] *Government Office of the Slovak Republic – official website*, August 25, 2016. Available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/premier-sr-robert-fico-rokoval-s-ruskym-prezidentom-vladimirom-putinom/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> "Встреча с премьер-министром Словакии Робертом Фицо," [Meeting with Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico] President of the Russian Federation – official website, August 25, 2016. Available online: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52767> (accessed on February 21, 2017); T. Vasilko, "Fico bol u Putina aj lobovať za Lajčáka. Sankcie proti Rusku podľa neho neprinesli nič," [Fico meets with Putin to lobby for Lajčák. Sanctions against Russia fail to achieve their goal] *Denník N*, August 26, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/546114/fico-bol-u-putina-aj-lobovat-za-lajcaka-sankcie-proti-rusku-podla-neho-neprinesli-nic/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> "V4 podporuje bezvízový styk pro Ukrajinu. Orbán: Kyjev patří do EU," [V4 in favor of visa liberalization of Ukraine. Orbán: Kyiv is a part of the EU] *E15.cz*, September 6, 2016. Available online: <http://zpravy.e15.cz/zahranicni/politika/v4-podporuje-bezvizovy-styk-pro-ukrajinu-orban-kyjev-patri-do-eu-1319375> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> A. Furik, "Lajčák sa priblížil k postu šéfa OSN. Kľúčové slovo bude mať Rusko," [Lajčák closer to UN Secretary-General post. Russia will have decisive word] *Euractiv.sk*, August 30, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/clanky/zahranicie-a-bezpecnost/lajcak-sa-priblizil-k-postu-sefa-osn/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

the third unofficial straw poll of the UN Security Council on August 29, 2016, where Lajčák finished second behind former Portuguese Prime Minister António Guterres, the head of Slovak diplomacy expressed the will to pursue a “critical dialogue” with Russia without contradicting the common European stance.<sup>39</sup>

Yet on October 5, 2016, Lajčák lost to António Guterres in the final vote of the UN Security Council, when he received vetoes from two of its permanent members (presumably Great Britain and the USA). Despite Slovak efforts to secure its support for Lajčák, Russia did not veto the candidacy of António Guterres, who became the new UN Secretary-General. While Lajčák viewed his failure as the result of the unwillingness of certain permanent Security Council members to support a candidate from Eastern Europe,<sup>40</sup> unofficial sources (for example MEP Eduard Kukan) claimed that his candidacy was harmed by Fico's statements against Muslim immigration.<sup>41</sup> With the USA and Great Britain, however, we cannot rule out that Lajčák's chances were negatively influenced by the Slovak Prime Minister's pro-Russian statements. According to the daily *Denník N*, this was unofficially confirmed by representatives of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.<sup>42</sup> A further reason offered was Fico's criticism of British Prime Minister Theresa May for her readiness to use nuclear weapons.<sup>43</sup>

## UKRAINE

As in 2014 and 2015, Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations were marked by opposing tendencies. While the Vojany-Uzhhorod pipeline transferred gas for the Ukrainian market through Slovak territory, Ukrainian representatives objected to the statements of Prime Minister Fico criticizing the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation.

<sup>39</sup> “Lajčák: Vzťahy SR a Rumunská spája spoločná história a členstvo v EÚ,” [Lajčák: Relations between Slovakia and Romania linked by common past and EU membership] *Teraz.sk*, August 30, 2016. Available online: <http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/lajcak-vztahy-sr-a-rumunska-spaja-s/214940-clanok.html> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> “Lajčák: Nebola vôľa vybrať generálneho tajomníka OSN z východnej Európy,” [Lajčák: There was no will to elect a UN Secretary-General from Eastern Europe] *Pravda*, October 7, 2016. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/407279-lajcak-nebola-vola-vybrat-generalneho-tajomnika-osn-z-vychodnej-europy/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> “Kukan: Fico môže za to, že Lajčáka nechcú za šéfa OSN,” [Kukan: Fico to blame for Lajčák's failure] *Aktuality.sk*, August 9, 2016. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/362431/fico-nici-karieru-lajcakovi-desiatky-statov-sa-mu-otocili-chrbtom/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> M. Tóda, “Lajčák neuspel v súboji o post šéfa OSN, vybrali Portugalčana Guterresa,” [Lajčák loses contest for UN post, Portuguese Guterres selected] *Denník N*, October 5, 2016. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/576150/lajcak-neuspel-v-suboji-o-post-sefa-osn-vybrali-portugalcana-guterresa/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> “Fico at SNP celebrations: criticizes British prime minister, takes sides with Russia,” op. cit. However, the speech of the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons included the phrase “if the need arose.” See also: “Theresa May would authorise nuclear strike causing mass loss of life,” *Guardian*, July 18, 2016. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/18/theresa-may-takes-aim-at-jeremy-corbyn-over-trident-renewal> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

On February 1, 2016, Lajčák paid a working visit to Kyiv and presented 43,000 euros in humanitarian aid to two hospitals and one non-profit organization. This subsidy was destined for two hospitals in Uzhorod (Maternity clinic, and University Hospital for Infectious Diseases) and for the non-profit organization Ukraine–Slovakia SOS working with orphanages in Sievierodonetsk and Ivano-Frankivsk. Lajčák then met with the chairman of Verkhovna Rada, Volodymyr Groysman, and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, to discuss Slovak assistance in Ukraine's transformation process. Slovak–Ukrainian bilateral relations were further negotiated in a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavlo Klimkin.<sup>44</sup> Poroshenko expressed appreciation for the increased volume of gas transferred to Ukraine through Slovak territory, and endorsed Lajčák's disapproval of the Nord Stream 2 project. Lajčák also voiced Slovakia's support for a visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens travelling to EU member states.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, however, a Bloomberg news agency interview with Prime Minister Fico on the necessity to lift the sanctions imposed on Russia met with disapproval from the Ukrainian Embassy in the Slovak Republic.<sup>46</sup>

Slovakia, together with other Visegrad Group countries, was among the EU member states in favor of introducing visa liberalization for Ukrainian citizens. The V4 prime ministers also expressed their support at their September 6, 2016 meeting in Polish Krynica. The meeting was held within the annual Economic Forum and attended by Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman.<sup>47</sup>

Negotiations on the introduction of visa-free short-time travel to the EU for citizens of Ukraine and Georgia were held throughout 2016 – predominantly in its second half, coinciding with Slovakia's Presidency of the Council of the EU. The discussions

<sup>44</sup> "SR – Ukrajina. Politické rokovania i humanitárna pomoc," [Slovak Republic–Ukraine. Political negotiations and humanitarian aid] *Ministry of Foreign and European affairs – official website*, February 1, 2016. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/kyjev/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/bZtjMy3iNwbo/content/-sr-ukrajina-politicke-rokovania-i-humanitarna-pomoc/10182?p\\_p\\_auth=GszvKZzm&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_bZtjMy3iNwbo\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fkyjev%2Fspravy](https://www.mzv.sk/web/kyjev/detail/-/asset_publisher/bZtjMy3iNwbo/content/-sr-ukrajina-politicke-rokovania-i-humanitarna-pomoc/10182?p_p_auth=GszvKZzm&_101_INSTANCE_bZtjMy3iNwbo_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fkyjev%2Fspravy) (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> "Україна та Словаччина координуватимуть зусилля на шляху європейських реформ – зустріч Президента та Глави МЗС Словаччини," [Ukraine and Slovakia will coordinate efforts on the path to European reforms – meeting of the President with the Head of Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs] *President of Ukraine – official website*, February 2, 2016. Available online: <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/ukrayina-ta-slovachchina-koordinuvatimut-zusillya-na-shlyahu-36694> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> "У зв'язку з останніми заявами Прем'єр-міністра СР Р.Фіцо щодо необхідності скасування санкцій стосовно Росії в інтерв'ю словацьким і закордонним ЗМІ Посольство України в СР вважає за потрібне зазначити наступне," [In connection with the latest declarations of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico regarding the inevitability of discarding sanctions against Russia, in interviews with both Slovak and foreign media, the Embassy of Ukraine in Slovakia considers it necessary to note the following] *Embassy of Ukraine in SR – official website*, February 26, 2016. Available online: <http://slovakia.mfa.gov.ua/sk/press-center/news/45182-u-zvzjaku-z-ostannimi-zajavami-premjer-ministra-sr-rfico-shhodo-neobkhdnosti-skasuvannya-sankcij-stosovno-rosiji-v-intervju-slovacykim-i-zakordonnim-zmi-posolystvo-ukrajini-v-sr-srvazhaje-za-potribne-zaznachiti-nastupne> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> "Krajiny V4 podporujú európske integračné ambície Ukrajiny, [V4 countries in favor of Ukraine's ambitions for European integration] *Government Office of the Slovak Republic – official website*, September 6, 2016. Available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/krajiny-v4-podporuju-europske-integracne-ambicie-ukrajiny/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

on visa-liberalization between Ukraine and the EU were launched in 2008; in 2012 Georgia was invited to join in the negotiations. The NCSR Committee for European Affairs received a proposal for the introduction of visa-liberalization for Georgian citizens<sup>48</sup> on May 13, 2016.<sup>49</sup> The Committee for European Affairs also received the relevant proposal of a resolution from the Council of the EU, along with a preliminary statement of the Slovak Ministry of Interior in favor of the resolution.<sup>50</sup>

Following the recommendations of the European Committee, the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) reached a relevant negotiating position on November 17, 2016. The implementation of the agreement enabling visa-free travel for citizens of Ukraine and Georgia for up to 180 days a year was contingent on the introduction of instruments that could suspend the visa exemption if the need arose.<sup>51</sup> On December 7, 2016 the proposal was passed in the European Parliament with the definite approval of COREPER following on the same day.<sup>52</sup> The accompanying suspension measures are to be adopted in 2017.

Unlike Georgia's visa liberalization, the Slovak stance towards the lifting of visas for Ukrainian nationals generated much controversy both on the political scene and within society. The official stance taken by the SR was in favor of visa-free travel. The Slovak Ministry of Interior maintained in its preliminary statement that Ukraine had met "all the benchmarks for exemption of the visa requirement for its citizens travelling in the territory of the EU," and recommended voting in favor of the proposal.<sup>53</sup> Both the government and Slovak President Kiska supported a suspension of the visa

<sup>48</sup> "Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Georgia)," COM (2016) 142.

<sup>49</sup> "Uznesenie Výboru NR SR pre európske záležitosti č. 13 z 13. mája 2016. 5. schôdza výboru CRD-877-3/2016-VEZ," [Resolution of the NCSR Committee for European Affairs Nr. 13 from May 13, 2016. 5. meeting of the Committee CRD-877-3/2016-VEZ] National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> "Proposal for a Council decision establishing the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union within the Joint Committee set up under the Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas to citizens of Georgia, with regard to the adoption of Common Guidelines for the implementation of the Agreement," COM (2016) 304 and a preliminary statement. See also: "Uznesenie Výboru NR SR pre európske záležitosti č. 29 z 12. septembra 2016. 13. schôdza výboru CRD-1611-2/2016-VEZ," [The resolution of the NCSR Committee for European Affairs Nr. 29 from September 12, 2016. 13. meeting of the Committee CRD-1611-2/2016-VEZ] National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> "Visas: Council agrees its negotiating position on visa liberalization for Ukraine," *SK EU2016 – official website*, November 17, 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/en/press-releases/visas-council-agrees-its-negotiating-position-on-visa-liberalisation-for-ukraine> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> "Visa suspension mechanism. Council confirms agreement with Parliament," *SK EU2016 – official website*, December 8, 2016. Available online: <http://www.eu2016.sk/en/press-releases/visa-suspension-mechanism-council-confirms-agreement-with-parliament> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> "Regular preliminary statement of the SR," COM (2016) 236 final, 20. 04. 2016, 8271/16, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic 2016.

requirement for Ukrainian citizens.<sup>54</sup> Then, the NCSR Committee for European Affairs received the relevant proposal on June 9, 2016. However, the Committee asked the NCSR Defense and Security Committee to issue a statement on the matter.<sup>55</sup> The Defense and Security Committee met on October 4, 2016 but failed to approve the proposal, with none of its members voting in favor of it. Of the eight deputies present at the meeting, two voted against, five abstained, and one did not vote at all.<sup>56</sup> However, the Committee had only an advisory role and could not block Slovakia's position on the matter. Hence Slovakia was able to support the introduction of visa-free travel for Ukraine in the Council of the European Union.

The actors in the subsequent media campaign, and among some opposition parties, warned of possible security threats. While Slovak Minister of Interior Robert Kaliňák highlighted the agreement as being "balanced and extremely important for the efficiency and credibility of EU visa policy," the deputy of the party *Sme rodina* (We are family), Milan Krajniak, accused him of "a betrayal of the national interest," expressing his concerns of a possible influx of illegal immigrants.

There are 50 million people waiting on the Ukrainian border that are now allowed to travel without restrictions to EU member states. Apart from these, there are hundreds of thousands of migrants in Ukrainian refugee camps waiting to make use of this opportunity to enter the EU with a fake Ukrainian passport,<sup>57</sup> Krajniak said.

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<sup>54</sup> "EÚ by mala Ukrajine udeliť bezvízový styk, myslí si Kiska," [EU should grant Ukraine visa-free travel, Kiska claims] *Webnoviny.sk*, August 21, 2016. Available online: <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/1095501-eu-by-mala-udelit-ukrajine-bezvizovy-styk-mysli-si-kiska/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> "Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Ukraine)," COM (2016) 236. See also: "Uznesenie Výboru NR SR pre európske záležitosti č. 17 z 9. júna 2016. 8. schôdza výboru CRD-1048-1/2016-VEZ." [The resolution of the NCSR Committee for European Affairs Nr. 17 from June 9, 2016. 16. Meeting of the Committee CRD-1048-1/2016-VEZ]

<sup>56</sup> "Výpis zo zápisnice Výboru Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky pre obranu a bezpečnosť k bodu 3. 16. schôdza Výboru NR SR pre obranu a bezpečnosť," [Minutes from the minutes of the National Council of the SR Defense and Security Committee regarding point 3. 16. Meeting of the NCSR Defense and Security Committee] October 4, 2016, National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> See "Last Crusader Milan Krajniak – official Facebook profile," December 8, 2016. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/poslednykriziak/videos/728428237323966/> (accessed on February 21, 2017). See also *alebo prerozpráváním* (teda bez citovania, lebo to povedal podstatne mäkkšie: "O 5 minút 12," [5 minutes to 12] *RTVS*, December 18, 2016). Available online: <http://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/11680/113430#524> (accessed on February 21, 2017). Back in 2015, MEPs Boris Zala (then *Smer-SD*) and Eduard Kukan (then *SDKÚ-DS*) voiced their reservations concerning the planned visa-free travel in EU territory for Ukrainian citizens. They justified their decision by the security and economic threats resulting from the possible increase of migration, and by the security situation in Ukraine. D. Jancová, "Ukrajinci bez víz pre nás nie sú hrozbou, tvrdí vláda," [Ukrainians without visa do not threaten us, says the government] *Sme*, May 25, 2015. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/7824390/ukrajinci-bez-viz-pre-nas-nie-su-hrozbou-tvrdi-vlada.html> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

In this respect, he referred to the statement of the NCSR Defense and Security Committee. In his view, the committee “unanimously” rejected<sup>58</sup> the proposal of visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens, although in reality it failed to adopt any stance, with only two out of the eleven members of the Committee actually voting against the proposal. In addition, the right to issue binding statements in this respect is reserved for the NCSR Committee for European Affairs, which received the proposal and enabled Slovakia to support it at EU meetings. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Korčok, also dismissed Krajniak’s claims, referring to the experience of 2011 in which visa liberalization for countries of Southeastern Europe led to no significant safety issues.<sup>59</sup>

The volume of trade between Ukraine and Slovakia does not equal Slovakia’s volume of trade with Russia. In 2016, export to Ukraine accounted for 0.52 per cent (336.4 million euros) of total Slovak export. This represents a year-on-year (2015–2016) increase of 18.3 per cent. On the other hand, Slovak imports from Ukraine decreased by 7.5 per cent between 2015 and 2016, amounting to 406.2 million euros, with Ukraine’s share of Slovak import equaling 0.67 per cent.<sup>60</sup> The countries’ bilateral relations were negatively affected by a scandal when the relative of a Ukrainian Embassy staff member (Serhiy Lischyshyn, husband of the Embassy’s First Secretary Oksana Lischyshyn) was charged with importing contraband cigarettes into Slovak territory. The First Secretary herself had signed the letter accompanying a false diplomatic post.<sup>61</sup> This led to the dismissal of the Ukrainian Ambassador to the SR, Oleh Havasi.<sup>62</sup>

## RELATIONS BETWEEN SLOVAKIA AND BELARUS

The most significant event in the relations between Slovakia and Belarus was the historically first visit of the Slovak Prime Minister to that country. It took place after sanctions imposed on Belarus, as a result of the authoritarian policy of its President, Alexander Lukashenka, were eased on February 15, 2016 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU. The EU suspended restrictive measures concerning an asset freeze

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Z. Gabrižová, “Korčok: Bezvízový styk pre Ukrajinu je citlivá vec, treba to ale posudzovať reálne,” [Korčok: Visa liberalization in Ukraine is a sensitive issue, but we have to be objective] *Euractiv.sk*, December 20, 2016. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/rozhovory/slovenske-predsednictvo/korcok-bezvizovy-styk-pre-ukrajinu-je-citliva-vec-treba-ale-posudzovat-realne/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> “Teritoriálna štruktúra zahraničného obchodu SR 2015, 2016,” [Territorial structure of the Slovak foreign trade in 2015, 2016] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2016.

<sup>61</sup> O. Basarab, “Ukrajinci odvolávajú diplomatov zo Slovenska. Pre pašované cigarety,” [Ukraine dismisses diplomats from Slovakia for contraband cigarettes] *Trend*, June 1, 2016. Available online: <https://www.etrend.sk/ekonomika/ukrajinci-odvolavaju-diplomatov-zo-slovenska-pre-pasovane-cigarety.html> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> “Odvolali ukrajinského veľvyslanca na Slovensku pre škandal s pašovaním cigariet,” [Ukrainian Ambassador to Slovakia dismissed following scandal with smuggled cigarettes] *Aktuality.sk*, June 3, 2016. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/343990/odvolali-ukrajinskeho-velvyslanca-na-slovensku-pre-skandal-s-pasovanim-cigariet/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

and travel ban that applied to a total of 170 representatives of the regime, including the President, and sanctions concerning three companies with close ties to the government and active in the armament industry (Beltech Holding, Beltechexport, and Spetspriborservice). Personal sanctions against four representatives of the Belarus security service, suspected of involvement in the disappearance of four political activists in 1999-2000, were retained. The arms embargo also remained in place. The validity of economic sanctions had already been suspended at the end of October 2015.<sup>63</sup> The reduction of sanctions was the outcome of the cautious liberalization of the Belarusian regime, with the presidential elections of 2015 being free from repressions against representatives of the opposition (in contrast to the elections of 2010), and from the decision of Belarus not to acknowledge the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Additionally, Belarus assumed an important role in mediating the dialogue between alienated parties in the separatist unrest in Eastern Ukraine, and between the Russian Federation and the EU.

The Slovak government welcomed the suspension of sanctions against Belarus and scheduled a visit of Robert Fico to Belarus for November 25, 2016. Fico met both with Belarusian Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov and President Alexander Lukashenka. They mainly discussed economic cooperation. Slovakia expressed an interest in cooperating in the pharmaceutical industry, namely in the research, development and production of anticancer medications. Fico also attended the opening of a joint Slovak–Belarusian medical and pharmacological science and research project Nativita, in Besenkovici in the Vitebsk region. The company Nativita is active in the development of innovative medications and was the first in Belarus to produce biotechnological preparations for the treatment of oncologic diseases. Its Slovak partner, Unipharma, participates in the project both as a technological and an investment partner.<sup>64</sup>

The SR also proposed cooperation with Slovak companies producing special laser devices for the treatment of very hard and wet wood, as well as cooperation in the rubber industry, and in the energy sector, namely in the construction of small hydroelectric power plants in Belarus. On the other side, Slovakia expressed an interest in importing petrochemical products such as liquefied gas. In the negotiations, Fico touched upon the subject of sanctions and welcomed their suspension, characterizing them as harmful, and invited the Belarusian President to visit Slovakia. On the

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<sup>63</sup> J. Rankin, "EU lifts most sanctions against Belarus despite human rights concerns," *Guardian*, February 15, 2016. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/15/eu-lifts-most-sanctions-against-belarus-despite-human-rights-concerns> (accessed on February 21, 2017); "Council Conclusions on Belarus," Council of the European Union – official website, February 15, 2016,

<sup>64</sup> S. Antonov, "СООО «Нативита» будет разрабатывать препараты против рака вместе со словацкой компанией," [The company Nativita will develop treatments against cancer jointly with a Slovak firm] *Vitebskije vesti*, November 28, 2016. Available online: <http://vitvesti.by/economy/sooo-nativita-razrabatyvat-preparaty.html> (accessed on February 21, 2017); "NatiVita в центре белорусско-словацкого сотрудничества [Nativita at the core of Belarusian–Slovak cooperation] *Nativita – official website*, November 25, 2016. Available online: <http://www.nativita.by/ru/press-tsentr/nativita-v-centre-belorussko-slovackogo-sotrudnichestva/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

occasion of Fico's visit to Minsk, the new premises of the Slovak Embassy in Ukraine were opened.<sup>65</sup>

During this visit, a bilateral agreement between the two countries' Ministries of Interior on cooperation in extraordinary situations was signed, as well as a joint communiqué on cooperation between the two countries. The agreement was initiated by Belarus in 2013 in order to stipulate conditions of cooperation, voluntary humanitarian aid, mutual assistance in extreme events, and the essential requirements of assistance provided in response to a written request of one of the parties.<sup>66</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The policy of the SR towards Eastern European countries in 2016 was determined both by the long-term priorities of Slovakia's foreign policy as defined by its EU and NATO membership, and by the pragmatic understanding of its economic interests. The "Eastern policy" of the Slovak Republic preserved its basic continuity, even during the course of the parliamentary elections of March 2016. Prime Minister Robert Fico and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajčák retained their leading roles, both in the priority-defining stage and the subsequent implementation of the "Eastern policy of the SR." Although their statements differ in their wording, we may nonetheless conclude that while Fico focuses on maintaining good relations with Russia, Lajčák is more active when it comes to issues related to the approximation of Ukraine to the EU. President Andrej Kiska became one of the distinct opponents of the Russian Federation in the Eastern European region. The views of the President and the Prime Minister differ considerably. While Kiska openly criticizes Russian policy towards Ukraine and the EU, Fico disapproves of the isolation of the RF and denounces the regime of sanctions imposed by the EU. At the same time he rejects the annexation of Crimea, and the government of the Slovak Republic supports the approximation of Ukraine to the EU.

Apart from Slovakia's strategic interests and economic issues, relations with Russia were marked by the effort of Slovak diplomacy to secure the post of UN Secretary-General for Lajčák, and in this way to increase the international prestige of the Slovak Republic. Slovakia also sought to mitigate the impact of the drop in trade turnover between the SR and RF. Despite the overall positive dynamics of Slovak foreign trade (a passive balance of 3.851 billion euros in 2016, as opposed to 3.402.8 billion euros in 2015), the import volume from the Russian Federation fell from 3.255.2 billion euros (2015) to 2.410.1 billion euros (2016), while back in 2013 it had been as high as

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<sup>65</sup> "Robert Fico v Bielorusku: Za absolútnu prioritu považujeme spoluprácu v oblasti farmácie," [Robert Fico in Belarus: Our top priority is cooperation in the field of pharmacy] *Government Office of the Slovak Republic – official website*, November 25, 2016. Available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/robert-fico-v-bielorusku-za-absolutnu-prioritu-povazujeme-spolupracu-v-oblasti-farmacie/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> "Premiér Fico v Bielorusku podpíše dohodu o spolupráci a pomoci," [Prime Minister Fico to sign an agreement on cooperation and assistance in Belarus] *Postoj.sk*, November 25, 2016. Available online: <https://www.postoj.sk/19130/premier-fico-v-bielorusku-podpise-dohodu-o-spolupraci-a-pomoci> (accessed on February 21, 2017).

6.138.8 billion euros. If the decrease in import from Russia reflects mainly the falling prices of energy raw materials, the SR recorded a similar decrease in export to Russia, from 2.546.8 billion euros in 2013 to 1.366.6 billion euros in 2015, and to 1.272.9 billion euros in 2016. This drop in export volume resulted in the reduction of Slovakia's passive balance from 3.592 billion euros in 2013 to 1.1371 billion euros in 2016.<sup>67</sup>

The decrease in trade volume between the SR and the RF is not only the result of the regime of sanctions imposed on Russia following its interference in Ukraine. Even Slovak Prime Minister Fico, a firm opponent of the sanctions, had to admit that "various objective factors,"<sup>68</sup> along with the negative development of the Russian economy after 2012, played a major role in this decrease. In 2016, Slovakia and Russia were also divided by their differing opinions on the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

Both the introduction of visa-free travel and support for Ukraine in its clashes on its Eastern borders played an important role in Slovakia's relations with Ukraine. By contrast, Slovak-Belarusian relations during the first visit of the Slovak Prime Minister to Minsk were chiefly defined by a pragmatic view on the business interests of the Slovak Republic.

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<sup>67</sup> "Territorial structure of Slovak foreign trade in 2013–2016," op. cit.

<sup>68</sup> "Premiér SR Robert Fico rokoval s ruským prezidentom Vladimirom Putinom," [Prime Minister of SR Robert Fico negotiates with Russian President Vladimir Putin] *Government Office of the SR – official website*, August 25, 2016. Available online: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/premier-sr-robert-fico-rokoval-s-ruskym-prezidentom-vladimirom-putinom/> (accessed on February 21, 2017).



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III.

SLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN  
POLICY TOOLS

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# SLOVAK OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN 2016

MARIÁN ČAUČÍK

The year 2015, proclaimed as the European Year for Development, was referred to last year in this publication as the year of missed opportunities in Slovak development assistance.<sup>1</sup> The year 2016, however, brought other big opportunities, such as the Slovak Republic's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and the candidacy of Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák for the position of UN Secretary-General. Despite all these opportunities, and the continuity of government following the parliamentary elections of March 2016, the Slovak government has traditionally paid little attention to development cooperation.

The one exception to this is humanitarian activities. At the Humanitarian summit in Istanbul, and at other international forums dealing with the causes and consequences of the migration crisis, the Slovak Republic made bigger commitments as compared to previous years. In the context of actual needs and international events, however, the commitments were rather small, and furthermore it is not certain they will be covered either by the budget or the resolution of the Slovak government.

This report focuses on evaluating Slovakia's official development assistance as managed by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and on the evaluation of scholarship programs. It should be noted that the data are not complete, as at the time of writing the official data of individual departments have not yet been published. Still,

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<sup>1</sup> P. Brezáni, "Rok rozvoja, rok nevyužitých príležitostí," [Year of development, year of unused opportunities] in P. Brezáni, ed., *Ročenka zahraničnej politiky Slovenskej republiky 2015*. [Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2015] Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2016, pp. 101–11.

I believe the available data can provide a satisfactory picture of the key facts and trends in Slovakia's official development cooperation in the period under focus.

In order to better understand and evaluate 2016, let's first have a look at 2015, which was declared the European Year for Development by the European Union with the motto "Our world, our dignity, our future." It was characterized by several milestones, perhaps the most important being the UN summit held in September in New York, which ended the 15-year-long period of fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals, and where the new ambitious Sustainable Development Goals until 2030 were adopted. Another milestone was the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP 21, held in December in Paris. The conference was preceded by unprecedented public mobilization by NGOs, churches and religious groups exerting pressure on leaders to adopt measures for reducing emissions and helping developing countries, which are too poor to face the consequences of climatic changes. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, on environmental protection and "care for our common home,"<sup>2</sup> addressed to all people of good will, can also be considered a significant contribution to the climate summit.

2015 was also the year of an unprecedented migration crisis; apart from the thousands of refugees flowing from northern Africa to Malta and Italy, thousands and thousands more, escaping the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, arrived in Europe through Turkey and Greece. The migration crisis led to increased tension among EU leaders.

All of these events required immediate reaction from the international community. It was necessary to find appropriate solutions to the problems faced by the countries affected by war, extreme poverty and climatic changes, and to increase the amounts allocated to development assistance programs.

Slovakia responded to the challenges of the refugee crisis in a rather tardy and lukewarm way. In September 2015, Prime Minister Robert Fico suggested that the funds allocated for Slovak development assistance in Africa should be transferred to Syria.<sup>3</sup>

With respect to these facts, I – as an ambassador for the European Year for Development – wrote an open letter to the prime minister, finance minister, and foreign and European affairs minister, in which I pointed out the long-lasting stagnation in the budget allocation for development cooperation, mostly in terms of its bilateral portion managed by the Foreign Ministry. This budgetary item had remained at the level of 5 to 6 million euros for over a decade. The letter also pointed out that the assistance provided by the Slovak Republic to African countries was very small (1.5 million euros in 2014), and called for a significant increase in funds for development projects and humanitarian contributions, as well as for the allocation of additional funds for the resolving of the crisis in the Middle East.

The credibility of the Slovak Republic as a donor in the eyes of the domestic and international public is at stake. As citizens and representatives of the expert community

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<sup>2</sup> "Zverejnili encykliku pápeža Františka Laudato si' o starostlivosti o „spoločný dom,“ [Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si* on care for our common home was published] Press Office of the Conference of the Bishops of Slovakia, June 18, 2015. Available online: <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocclanku=20150618043> (accessed on June 18, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> "Do riešenia krízy treba zapojiť OSN, tvrdia Fico a Figel'," [UN should be involved in resolving the crisis, Fico and Figel' state] *Pravda*, September 6, 2015. Available online: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/366767-do-riesenia-krizy-treba-zapojit-osn-tvrdia-fico-a-figel/> (accessed on February 28, 2017).

we will keep an eye on developments in the area of Slovakia's foreign development cooperation, as well as on particular actions taken to resolve the refugee crisis.<sup>4</sup>

On behalf of the Prime Minister, Miroslav Lajčák responded to the open letter and expressed appreciation for my "effort to assist the government in creating more realistic conditions for a more considerable engagement of the SR and its civil society in solving the priorities of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance." As he put it in his letter dated October 5, 2015:

The issue of increasing the total budgetary allocation for the official development cooperation of the SR proved to be crucial, yet there are also other issues of comparable importance. From the perspective of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the improvement of Slovak development cooperation also depends on the capacity of our partners to use the allocated funds meaningfully, and on the involvement of the business sector. During preparation of the 2016 state budget, the Ministry suggested increasing the budget for bilateral development cooperation by 5 million euros per year over the next three years.

Two weeks later, on October 28, 2015, Prime Minister Fico responded to the open letter, justifying the stagnation of ODA since 2008 as follows:

In terms of foreign policy, it was important to consolidate the public funds following the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008. In terms of interior policy, the development assistance largely depends on the maturity of the Slovak ODA ecosystem, which is gradually building up its capacity to implement financially demanding projects.

The Prime Minister also stated that "the increase in ODA needs to be gradual and must be linked with the consistent capacity-building of institutions and human resources, as well as with the establishment of partnerships between domestic entities and more experienced foreign partners."

In the meantime (on October 7, 2015), the government approved the public administration budget for 2016–2018 as follows:

**Table 1.** Financial resources for the development and humanitarian cooperation of Slovakia (euros)

	2016	2017	2018
Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs	5,984,864	5,984,864	5,984,864
Ministry of Defense	10,000	10,000	10,000
Ministry of Interior	100,000	100,000	100,000
Ministry of Finance	70,000	110,000	120,000
Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport	1,883,167	1,883,167	1,883,167
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	27,290	30,323	30,323
<b>total</b>	<b>8,075,321</b>	<b>8,118,354</b>	<b>8,128,354</b>

<sup>4</sup> "Open letter" is available online: [http://www.dobranovina.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Caucik\\_otvoreny\\_list.pdf](http://www.dobranovina.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Caucik_otvoreny_list.pdf) (accessed on February 28, 2017).

The table shows that the Foreign Ministry has failed to achieve any increase in funds for development and humanitarian assistance. Moreover, the same amount of 5,984,864 euros was also approved for 2017 and 2018. This stagnating budget with a zero increase can be seen in all ministries involved in the O5T program (Official development assistance), except for the minimal increases in the departments of Finance and Agriculture.

In this context, it is interesting to compare the ODA budgets managed by the Foreign Ministry for the two years of 2016 and 2008. In 2008, when the Ministry budget totaled 165,976,000 Slovak crowns (cca 5.5 million euros), a total of 4.327 million euros was allocated for the implementation of development projects; while in 2016 only 3.850 million euros was allocated to a similar program of development intervention and experience sharing.

Since 2008, the allocation for the financial humanitarian assistance program has increased by only 268,000 euros, while programs for the development education, public awareness, and capacity-building have remained at the same level, and the level of co-financing of EU development projects for Slovak entities has even dropped, from 132,000 to 40,000 euros.

The fact that the Slovak government over the last eight years has failed to substantially increase the funds allocated within its main budgetary items for development cooperation and humanitarian assistance – funds that enable Slovak entities to involve themselves in development programs – clearly shows that despite all the statements of government representatives to the contrary, this part of development cooperation has not been a government priority and has not received enough attention.

In his response to my open letter, Prime Minister Fico stated:

The Government of the SR hereby declares its effort to establish a dialogue between all departments willing to contribute to the ODA and the development of a long-term strategy for funding development cooperation. A key factor will be the leadership of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the harmonized actions of all participants in compliance with the budgetary process. The final limits of budgetary chapters always represent a compromise between the realistic possibilities of the state budget and the priorities of ministers, who may, in their negotiations with the Finance Ministry, highlight the importance of that part of the development agenda that is within their responsibility.

Considering that the foreign affairs minister failed to persuade the Finance Ministry of the importance of the development agenda and to negotiate an increased budget – either during 2015, the European Year for Development, or during 2016 (when a minimal increase of only 565,000 euros was negotiated) – the prime minister's words clearly indicate either the weak position of the Foreign Ministry, the insufficient prioritization of the development agenda within the Foreign Ministry, or the fact that the ODA system in Slovakia has the confidence of neither the Slovak government nor the Finance Ministry.

The arguments relating to the immaturity of Slovakia's "ODA ecosystem" – a result of the long-lasting stagnation of the system – are partially justified. Not only its low

budget, but also the administrative setting and the management of Slovak development cooperation are indications of the immaturity of the system itself.

Questioning the ability of partners (NGOs and businesses) to use ODA funds meaningfully, and to establish partnerships between domestic entities and more experienced foreign partners, comes across as strongly anachronistic and illustrates the unawareness among Slovak government representatives of the actual state of affairs. Slovak organizations are part of international networks and alliances that have been involved in national and international programs of development cooperation for many years. Many of these organizations have been taking active part in humanitarian and development programs for over 40 years, with some of them having a higher annual budget for development cooperation than the entire Slovak Republic, including contributions to the EU budget and international organizations. Among the obstacles preventing Slovak organizations from responding to current humanitarian and development calls for proposals are insufficient domestic resources, and an administrative setting that does not allow for any significant increases in capacity. As a result many organizations have given up their cooperation with the ODA system.

## NEW DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION ACT

In 2016, a new Act – Act No. 392/2015 on development cooperation – has entered into force.<sup>5</sup>

This Act was adopted relatively late; it came into force only on January 1, 2016. The Act included new modalities of development cooperation, such as commissions and a provision for preferential export loans. It also better defined the basic terms, principles and bases of development cooperation, including the principles of effectiveness, and of the harmonization (coherence) of Slovak Republic policies with development cooperation policy.

The provisions of the Act have also been criticized in terms of their balance, as the Act included very detailed terms and conditions for the Education Ministry's providing of government scholarships to the nationals of partnering countries, and detailed terms and conditions for the providing of export loans. The Act has been criticized for being an indirect amendment to Act no. 553/2003 on the remuneration of some employees performing works of public interest.

The development cooperation Act further describes in detail the procedures for calls for proposals, project evaluations and defining project requirements – such as, for example, that the amount of co-financing must be at least 10 or 20 per cent (Section 7 (5)). In accordance with Section 7 (8) of the Act, the terms of individual calls will be determined by the Foreign Ministry anyway, so it seems very unsystematic and uselessly limiting to specify the amount of co-financing in an Act that is meant to be effective for several years.

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<sup>5</sup> “Zákon z 18. novembra 2015 o rozvojovej spolupráci a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov,” [Act on development cooperation and changes and amendments to other acts of November 18, 2015] 392/2015. Available online: [http://www.slovakaid.sk/sites/default/files/zakon\\_392\\_2015\\_o\\_rozvojovej\\_spolupraci.pdf](http://www.slovakaid.sk/sites/default/files/zakon_392_2015_o_rozvojovej_spolupraci.pdf) (accessed on February 28, 2017).

Another provision – one that allows foreign entities to apply for grant support in the event there are budgetary allocations for such support totaling at least 15 million euros, and approved in the Stage Budget Act for the budgetary year in question (Section 7 (2)) – seems similarly unsystematic. It seems strange to link a condition allowing foreign organizations to participate in SlovakAid calls for proposals, to a particular amount approved in the state budget law. The process involved in unlocking the available aid in the Slovak national grants program can be seen as quite ridiculous given the other binding rules for grants, such as the obligation to submit all documents in the Slovak language (project proposal, related documents, reports, etc.). The necessity to have all documentation for projects undertaken in countries like Afghanistan, Kenya and South Sudan in the Slovak language has been criticized for years by Slovak NGOs as a useless burden in development cooperation. The new law on development cooperation could have addressed this issue through indirect amendment of the related legislation.

The law's very rigid conditions for local organizations are in contrast with the very easy provisions regulating contributions to international organizations, which can be effected by the decision of the Minister alone, even without having received a request or proposal.

The new Act on development cooperation has raised high expectations, but it seems both from the process of its preparation and the first year of its implementation that it has not brought about real progress in the implementation of development cooperation programs. The instruments of SlovakAid development cooperation did not receive greater financial backing, and those foreseen in the Medium-term strategy for development cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2018,<sup>6</sup> such as Block grants, were not given any special provision in the law, and have not been implemented since the law entered into force.

The implementation of this law, and the related subsequent regulations which had to be prepared by the Foreign Ministry in the first quarter of the year, meant substantial delays in calls for proposals in 2016, and have caused the participation of several organizations in the calls to be restricted.

## PROGRAMS AND TOOLS OF BILATERAL ODA

The government approved the 2016 budget for bilateral development cooperation (administered by the Ministry) for a total amount of 5,984,864 euros. These funds were increased by the addition of funds left over from 2015 totaling 400,000 euros, with further additional funds totaling 1,459,359.10 euros being approved in 2016.

These additional funds were related to the migration crisis (500,000 euros Plea for Humanity; 300,000 euros Greece; 59,359.10 euros USAID refund; 600,000 euros Syria). In total, the 2016 budget amounted to 7,844,223.10 euros, of which 6,406,100.70 euros was used in 2016 and 1,438,122.40 euros was transferred to 2017.

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<sup>6</sup> "Medium-term strategy for development cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2018," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2014. Available online: <http://www.slovakaid.sk/sk/node/514> (accessed on February 28, 2017).

The Slovak Republic's development cooperation is based on eight main programs:

- Development interventions program
- Transformation experience sharing program
- Business partnership program
- Humanitarian aid program
- Governmental scholarships program
- Program for sending development workers and civil experts to developing countries
- Development education and public awareness program
- Capacity building program

### **DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS PROGRAM**

According to the medium-term strategy for 2014–2018, the Development interventions program is a key program of Slovak bilateral cooperation with the three program countries of SlovakAid, and South Sudan. Cooperation with these countries is based on long-term strategic partnerships and is characterized by a greater volume of financial resources.

The goals of the program are human development in partner countries, primarily by supporting education and employment; and support of democracy and good governance, including dialogue between civil society and state institutions.

An overview of the budgeted and spent (contracted) means in 2016 is presented in following table:

**Table 2.** Development interventions program, 2016, euros

	<b>budget</b>	<b>spending</b>
Afghanistan	200,000	199,990
Kenya	1,100,000	921,361.20
Moldova	700,000	193,229.93
South Sudan	200,000	131,755.50
Syria and neighboring countries (projects)	1,300,000	1,197,597.15

This program is seen as a key program of Slovak bilateral cooperation with fur countries plus Syria, and with neighboring countries that have been added onto the list of Slovak ODA countries because of the migration crisis. Its limited financial allocations, however, make it questionable whether it can thus be seen as a key program. In addition, its allocated budget has not been entirely spent.

For Kenya – one of the program countries for Slovak ODA – four areas of sectoral focus have been identified:

- healthcare – improve the health of Kenyans, particularly among children and mothers; make healthcare and preventive services more accessible and effective;

- education – decrease the level of youth unemployment; make quality education and vocational training more accessible and effective;
- agriculture – reduce poverty and strengthen food security through supporting economic growth in agriculture;
- good governance – strengthen the democratic political system, the rule of law, good governance, and implementation of reforms, mainly by sharing Slovakia's transformation and reform experience.

The priorities of Slovak–Kenyan cooperation are well-set based on the country's needs and in line with the goals of the Government of Kenya in all three pillars as defined in its Vision 2030 development policy (economic, social and political).<sup>7</sup>

But it is very hard to see how Slovakia can conduct meaningful programs in the four sectoral areas in Kenya with a yearly budget of 1 million euros. This very low financial allocation together with the program's administrative demands make participation in the Development Interventions Program very difficult for any Slovak organization, and makes the whole program ineffective.

Another problem is the rigidity of the system. In spite of the fact that the medium-term strategy for 2014–2018 foresees so-called Block grants as one of the main bilateral cooperation instruments, since 2013 – despite much effort on the side of the NGOs – there has been no real movement to establish and implement this new modality, and the Small grant scheme remains the basic instrument of SlovakAid.

Another question is whether Afghanistan should remain on the list of recipient countries of SlovakAid. It is very difficult to implement development projects and other forms of development cooperation in Afghanistan, a country very unstable from the security point of view. The overall scope of the cooperation between Slovakia and Afghanistan has been at the level of one project approved (199,990 euros), one financial contribution (25,000 euros), and 2 micro grants (7,216.66 euros), which also raises question marks for Slovak ODA over the relevance of having Afghanistan at the top of its list of target countries for development cooperation.

### ***TRANSFORMATION EXPERIENCE SHARING PROGRAM***

According to the medium-term strategy for 2014–2018, this program benefits from Slovakia's comparative advantage in terms of its recent experience in building up the rule of law and state institutions, the democratization of society, implementation of reforms, and building a market environment, as well as its integration into the EU and NATO. This program is implemented mainly in the form of technical assistance. The goal of the program is to support democratization and reform processes by sharing Slovak transformation experience with respect to the specific needs of beneficiaries.

Its territorial focus covers the countries of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, primarily those which are project countries of Slovak ODA – Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo and Ukraine.

<sup>7</sup> See "Stratégia pre rozvojovú spoluprácu s Kenskou republikou na roky 2014–2018," [Strategy for development cooperation with Kenya 2014–2018] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2014. Available online: [http://www.slovakaid.sk/sites/default/files/country\\_strategy\\_paper\\_kenya\\_web.pdf](http://www.slovakaid.sk/sites/default/files/country_strategy_paper_kenya_web.pdf) (accessed on February 28, 2017).

An overview of the budgeted and spent (contracted) means in 2016 is presented in following table:

**Table 3.** Transformation experience sharing program, 2016, euros

	<b>budget</b>	<b>spending</b>
<b>Western Balkans</b>		
Albania	300,000	170,215
Bosnia and Herzegovina		100,000
Kosovo		0
<b>Eastern Partnership &amp; CETIR</b>		
Belarus	300,000	0
Georgia		139,817
Ukraine	700,000	270,878.70
CETIR	150,000	103,324.79

Again, the budgeted financial resources are very limited: even 1.5 million euros is too small a budget for meaningful development cooperation interventions in six countries, and eight sectoral priorities as follows:

1. reform and management of public finance, tax reform, and management and utilization of EU financial tools;
2. security sector reform;
3. energy, with an emphasis on energy security and alternative resources;
4. support of market environment development and small and medium enterprises;
5. protection of water, and water and waste management;
6. food security – adopting EU standards;
7. decentralization and public administration reform;
8. building civil society, and cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Yet, as can be seen from the table, the budgeted allocations were not fully utilized in 2016.

Under the CETIR program, 16 activities in ten countries were reported with a total budget of 60,945.98 euros, and salaries amounting to 42,378.81 euros for expert or study visits and internships.

The whole Transformation Experience Sharing Program is too scattered about; a new approach could be imagined: focusing on fewer countries and sectoral priorities, linking to block grants, and a more programmatic approach.

### **BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

The Business Partnership Program is meant to support the synergy between the goals of Slovak development cooperation and the goals of the business sector in developing countries. At the same time, it should strengthen the socio-economic

development of local communities (jobs, capacity-building, access to basic goods and services), and mobilize private financial resources in order to enhance development activities. The program should help to establish new partnerships with local business entities aimed at the sustainable capacity-building of those new partners. The program is also meant to help Slovak entities gain access to the markets of partner countries and to support expansion of the existing activities of the private sector in those countries, with an emphasis on their interconnection with Slovak development interventions.

Financial allocation for the Business Partnership Program for the year 2016 has been budgeted at 150,000 euros with a territorial focus on the nine program and project countries of SlovakAid (with the possibility of submitting proposals also targeting other developing countries, as defined by the OECD DAC).

The program's sectoral focus on business activities and interventions has been defined in terms of five areas: energy (production and distribution of energy, support of sustainable resources of energy, energy efficiency), infrastructure (building transport, logistics and communications infrastructure), environment (ecological technologies, protection against natural disasters), water and sanitation (supply, treatment and distribution of drinking water, waste management), agriculture (forest management, management of agricultural production, increasing agricultural production, building irrigation systems, food security, modernization of the agricultural sector) and building of social infrastructure (educational and healthcare institutions).

In the framework of the Business Partnership Program, four projects amounting to 197,180 euros (with the ceiling for individual projects set at 50,000 euros) have been approved in 2016, focused on water and agricultural production in Afghanistan, enhancing the production and effectiveness of cattle in the Georgian mountains, and ecological waste management in agriculture in Moldova and Ukraine. It is quite clear, as with the other Programs of bilateral development cooperation, that the Program is defined too broadly for the defined financial and administrative framework.

According to the medium-term strategy the Program should be assessed by the Foreign Ministry annually. This is highly recommended not only in order that this particular program continue meaningfully, but for the other Development cooperation programs as well.

## **HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

In the course of 2016, Slovakia's humanitarian assistance was primarily focused on countries and organizations faced with an influx of migration.

In 2016, the Foreign Ministry implemented for the first time humanitarian projects, through Slovak and local NGOs, focused on solving the consequences of the migration crisis. The projects were primarily focused on the provision of basic education for refugee children, and healthcare.

This financial humanitarian assistance was focused on Syrian refugees and the education of their children in Jordan and Lebanon, equipment for hospitals in refugee camps in Greece, and the education of children in a refugee camp in Subotica, Serbia.

The Slovak Republic provided assistance both to areas affected by migration and countries generating migration (Ethiopia, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan). Within the framework

of projects implemented in cooperation with V4 countries, humanitarian assistance was provided in a refugee camp in Jordan.

In May 2016, the SR took an active part in the World Humanitarian summit, where it adopted key commitments of the international community focused on resolving the refugee crisis, the problem of involuntarily displaced persons, respect for the rules of international humanitarian law, and many specific initiatives. In addition, Slovakia also declared a series of individual commitments (e.g. an amendment to the Income Tax Act in order to incorporate businesses in the provision of material humanitarian assistance). As part of the commitments adopted at the summit, the SR agreed to increase its volume of humanitarian assistance over the next few years.

According to the Foreign Ministry, in 2016 the Slovak Republic provided financial and material humanitarian assistance to refugees in the total amount of 13,113,168 euros. The funds were provided as humanitarian assistance to Syria, Greece, Jordan, Lebanon, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the form of humanitarian projects and development projects focused on education within Syria and in neighboring countries. The Slovak Republic also contributed to multilateral organizations and trust funds, such as the EU Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crises MADAD (3 million euros), the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (3.112 million euros; the total contribution will amount to 10.5 million euros), the 2016 donor conference on Syria in London (600,000 euros; total contribution will amount to 1.2 million euros including 600,000 for education projects in Syria and neighboring countries). Slovakia took on the commitment to pay 20.044 million euros through 2019 (including 13.113 million euros paid in 2016) for resolving the humanitarian crisis, and over 23.194 million euros through 2021 (including obligations arising out of the Leaders' Summit on Refugees, September 20, 2016).

In 2016, many financial contributions totaling an amount of 98,000 euros were channeled to humanitarian assistance for victims of the armed conflict in Ukraine; 50,000 euros was provided to the NATO Trust Fund for mine clearance in Ukraine, and an amount of 150,000 euros was provided for support of the UNDP Secretariat for energy sufficiency in Ukraine.

In the course of 2016, the modality of humanitarian assistance for resolving the migration crisis was tested. For this purpose, an amount of 500,000 + 800,000 euros (spring and autumn call for proposals) was allocated. However, the time interval between the announcement of the call for proposals (April 8, 2016), the approval of grants by the Minister (June 23, 2016), and the signing of the agreement and transfer of funds was far too long. A similar situation occurred with the second call for proposals for humanitarian assistance projects, announced on September 5, 2016: the Foreign Affairs Minister signed the projects approved by the commission only on December 23, 2016. In the event of an urgent humanitarian crisis, such a lengthy process would be unacceptable.

According to the medium-term strategy, the Humanitarian Aid Program should be evaluated by the Foreign Ministry annually. The evaluation criteria are the efficiency, effectiveness and promptness of providing humanitarian aid. No evaluation has been done in the past year – an evaluation of the Program is highly recommended.

## **GOVERNMENTAL SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAM**

This program for providing government scholarships to students from developing countries for studying at Slovak public universities has been a traditional form of Slovak ODA. It is implemented by MESRS SR in cooperation with MFEA SR. According to the government publication “Bilateral development cooperation of the Slovak Republic in 2017,” approved by the Slovak government on February 22, 2017,<sup>8</sup> the scope of these scholarships does not correspond to the significant political and human potential of the program, as the number of scholarships available has remained at only 48. The other problem is that students who have received Slovak government scholarships must then live in Slovakia at below the poverty level (the poverty risk level in Slovakia was defined at 346.50 euros income per month in 2016, while in 2017 the scholarship given to students from developing countries is 280 euros per month).

The goal of the program is to contribute to the support of education, an important element in promoting socio-economic progress in partner countries. The territorial focus of the program is: Afghanistan, Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kenya, Kosovo, Moldova, Mongolia, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

In September 2016, the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees (the so-called Obama Summit) was held in New York, where the Slovak Republic committed to providing 550 government scholarships to students from countries generating migration during the period of 2016–2021. The scholarships are intended mostly for students from among Syrian refugees, or students from Syria, with an unspecified portion of the promised quota going to nationals of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as to nationals of Afghanistan (mostly to refugees situated in Iran), South Sudan (mostly to refugees situated in neighboring countries) and Ethiopia (the commitment of Minister Lajčák, which he made during his visit to Angola in 2016, being fulfilled with this package).

In the academic year 2016/2017, the Slovak Republic provided an additional 30 government scholarships to students from Syria living in various refugee camps in neighboring countries of the Middle East. The first of these, 23 students, are currently engaged in a ten-month Slovak language course as well as an undergraduate degree. In the academic year 2017/2018, another 80 scholarships are to be offered. In the period 2018–2021, a total of 110 scholarships are to be provided to students from Syria.

The Government publication foresees an urgent need in 2017 to reconsider the current government scholarships program in terms of their number, territories and manner of implementation.

## **VOLUNTEER-SENDING PROGRAM**

In 2016, 31 grants totaling 226,602.18 euros were provided for volunteers as part of the Volunteer-Sending Program. Within the program, 31 volunteers were sent to de-

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<sup>8</sup> “Zameranie bilaterálnej rozvojovej spolupráce Slovenskej republiky na rok 2017,” [Bilateral development cooperation of the Slovak Republic in 2017] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2017. Available online: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26258> (accessed on February 28, 2017).

veloping countries – namely to Kenya (9); Rwanda (5); Lesotho, Cambodia and India (4 each); Uganda (2); and Albania, Lebanon and Moldavia (1 each). The average cost of sending a volunteer to a developing country was 7,310 euros.

With its flexibility and appropriate administrative requirements, the Volunteer-Sending Program has been assessed by cooperating organizations as one of the best operating components of Slovak official development cooperation. Unfortunately, in 2016, as a result of delays at the Foreign Ministry and the late approval of documents relating to the Development Cooperation Act, the call for proposals was only announced on May 24, with a closing date of June 21. As a result it was impossible to submit projects for volunteers to be sent between June and September, the period of summer holiday. Hence the number of volunteers sent to developing countries decreased from that of 2015, when 45 applications from Slovak NGOs were approved for a total amount of 301,289.40 euros.

### **MICRO-GRANTS**

A portion of the financial contributions of Slovak official development assistance has traditionally been provided through micro-grants, i.e. financial contributions provided by Slovak Embassies to local institutions and organizations in target countries. In 2016, a total of 39 micro-grants totaling 248,686.35 euros were provided. The largest number of micro-grants was provided in Moldova (9), followed by Kosovo (7), Bosnia and Herzegovina (6), Georgia (4), Kenya (4), Albania (3), Afghanistan (2), Ukraine (2), Lebanon (1), and Macedonia (1). The average amount allocated for one micro-grant was 6,377 euros.

### **DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS PROGRAM**

This program supports the incorporation of development assistance into courses of study at all grades of Slovak schools. The program also increases awareness among the Slovak public, media and other relevant actors of the importance of providing development assistance. Selected target groups are addressed through print and electronic media, the internet, and thematic events, with the aim of shaping their opinions and informing them of Slovakia's development assistance in a transparent manner. An important partner of the Ministry in the raising of public awareness of development cooperation is the NGDO Platform.

In the development education program, four projects totaling 139,537.80 euros were approved in 2016. The projects focused on introducing development-related subjects within the system of university education, the cooperation of community leaders and governments in conflict resolution, and the Challenges of Contemporary Urban Planning.

The development education program has long been inadequately funded. The migration crisis, parliamentary elections in March 2016, and the growth of extremism revealed the need to invest in programs of solidarity, and in formal and informal education on global topics. The budgetary allocation approved in 2016 for development education and public awareness did not make it possible to support either existing or new activities.

A similar situation can be seen in the Ministry of Education, which supports, with systematic grants, accredited organizations working with children and youth. The budgetary item for the support of informal youth work has stagnated for many years below the level of 2 million euros a year. The fact is that these organizations have relevant programs of informal education which also have an impact on the contemporaries of their members. In response to radicalization and expressions of extremism among young people, it is necessary to invest in programs oriented towards them. Unfortunately, both the Education Ministry and Foreign and European Affairs Ministry failed to initiate an increase in funds for development and global education in the 2017 budget.

There is still missing the National Strategy for Global Education for 2017–2021, the development of which is included among the tasks defined in the medium-term strategy. This is important not only in terms of defining the position, instruments and funding of Global education in Slovakia, but also in the context of international commitments, with an emphasis on Agenda 2030.

### ***PUBLIC AWARENESS PROGRAM***

In the framework of the Public awareness program, an amount of 28,870 euros was spent on activities of the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) in 2016. Details of these activities have not been made publicly available.

It would be good to have an allocated budget and a strategy for communicating to the public on the results of Slovak development activities – both ODA funded interventions and projects and activities undertaken without state financing – in order to inform and sensitize the public and specific target groups as to the Slovak presence in the developing world and development related issues.

### ***CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM***

The aim of this program is to build the professional capacities of Slovak development cooperation stakeholders and to increase the competitiveness of Slovak entities in the field of development cooperation internationally.

In 2016, only a reported 7,356 euros was allocated for the Capacity Building measures of the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC), with no details of these measures publicly available. Given the role of this Agency it is crucial to build up the capacity of the Agency staff especially, as experience shows a high turnover rate among specialized staff dealing with development cooperation projects.

It is necessary both to build the capacity of Agency staff and to invest in direct contact with the target countries of SlovakAid, or alternatively to outsource those tasks related to target country expertise and evaluation of projects to people with deeper knowledge of the context. The same should apply to those Foreign Ministry staff involved in decision making procedures related to development cooperation projects and programs.

Quite a substantial amount (134,050 euros) was spent in 2016 on the two Development diplomats based in program target countries, namely in Moldova and Kenya. These two staff should occupy a more prominent place within the ODA system in order to deepen and simplify the dialogue on development projects and on decision making procedures.

One of the important aims of the program is enhancement of the coordination and implementation capacities of the umbrella organizations of key stakeholders involved in Slovak development cooperation (e.g. non-governmental development organizations, the private sector, regional and local governments, etc.).

Among the private sector and regional and local governments much more effort needs to be made to establish functioning relations relevant to development cooperation, and to involve more stakeholders in the ODA system. With regard to the NGO scene, there is an NGDO Umbrella organization (Slovak NGDO Platform) which is a well-established body with a signed Memorandum of Understanding with the MFA. The NGDO Platform and its members have been involved in the ODA system since its inception.

Traditionally, the Ministry has given an annual grant to the Slovak NGDO Platform under this program. This grant was replaced in 2016 with contribution co-financing the "Presidency project," a project approved by the EC within the framework of the Slovak Presidency. Apart from the Presidency project, the annual grant has covered the operational work of the Platform and safeguarded the facilitation of cooperation between the Ministry and NGOs in Slovakia with respect to the main aspects of the ODA system. Therefore it is important to set up a budget line for supporting the standard function of the NGDO Platform (and in the future the Business and Municipalities Platform). The capacity building program itself is obviously important too, but should be focused on areas where there is a need for building capacities on temporary basis.

The program is intended also to systematically support the involvement of Slovak entities in development cooperation projects funded by EU grants within its development cooperation instruments. This support is given through the Co-financing budget line, which is there to support projects that have been approved in calls of the EC. This instrument is needed in order to support the participation of Slovak organizations in international calls and similar schemes exist in other EU member states too. The assessment of the budget for this budget line has been underestimated, with 40,000 euros in the indicative budget for 2016. Spending during the year increased to a final 155,850 euros, indicating the need for more generous allocations in the future.

## **SLOVAK PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU 2016**

In the field of development cooperation, Slovakia's efforts focused on the following areas:

### ***AGENDA 2030 AND THE REVISION OF THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON DEVELOPMENT***

Based on the Commission's November 22 communication on the revision of the European Consensus on Development, the first discussion of ministers regarding

development took place at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (Development), held on November 28. The Slovak Presidency (SK PRES) handed over the agenda to the Malta Presidency, and together with the EC took part in the preparation of a triologue with the EP in order to reach agreement on a new consensus by May 2017. The Slovak Presidency co-chaired a joint JUMBO–WPIEI/CODEV/CONUN working group. Following the publication of the Communication on Agenda 2030 in November, the Slovak Presidency organized the JUMBO meeting, where a further process of coordination was agreed.

### **MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

In September, the European Commission published its proposal for regulating the EP and the Council on the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), and for establishing the EFSD Guarantee and the EFSD Guarantee Fund. It was aimed at supporting investment and job creation in partner countries, in order to move towards sustainable development and address the causes of migration. Shortly after publication of this proposal for regulation, the Slovak Presidency established the Friends of the Presidency Group – EIP/EFSD – which discussed the legislative proposal. The discussions on this technically demanding and politically sensitive initiative were successfully completed in the beginning of December, with the “General Approach” of the Council being approved at the GAC meeting held on December 13.

### **SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

In July, the European Commission and HR/VP published a joint communication on reform of the security sector. Discussions at the ministerial level on the connection between security and development took place at the informal FAC DEV (September 12). The working groups CivCom/CODEV/PMG prepared Council conclusions that were adopted at the FAC meeting held on November 14.

In its development agenda, the Slovak Presidency focused on two key priorities: energy, and the informatization (digitalization) of society. The Slovak Presidency prepared Council conclusions on energy and development, on information technologies in development policy, on the EU’s common position for the First High Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, and on the EC report “Results Framework.”

### **SLOVAK PUBLIC**

The Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU brought about several events and activities geared towards raising public awareness of development cooperation. With the assistance of ten ambassadors from among celebrities and representatives of the non-governmental sector, the Slovak Presidency launched a campaign called VYBER SI/MAKE CHOICE, which promoted the idea of sustainable consumer behavior. The campaign was presented in Slovak towns and at many events such as the Pohoda Festival, and addressed thousands of people with the messages of over 30 organiza-

tions, initiatives and companies promoting alternative behavior for both individuals and the entire society. Themes such as development and sustainability entered public awareness through media output, such as a series of articles published on the SME online newspaper website in the section "Svet Inak."

Sustainability was also the key topic of three events – entitled (Ne)Udržateľná party [(Un)Sustainable Party] and held in Bratislava, Banská Bystrica and Košice – which presented development cooperation to the broad public in an appealing form.

On September 5, experts from the non-governmental sector, ministries and international institutions discussed the goals of sustainable development at an event in Bratislava organized by the NGDO Platform. The event focused on the need to harmonize individual policies and fight against tax evasion and tax havens. Another platform for discussion was provided by the Development and Democracy conference organized by the Pontis Foundation, which took place on October 27 at MFEA SR. A keynote speaker at the conference was Alaa Murabit, founder of the Voice of Libyan Women, the youngest global advocate of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and UN High Level Commissioner on Health Employment and Economic Growth.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It may be said that the results brought about in 2016 by individual components of Slovak development cooperation were adequate to the resources invested, bearing in mind the year-long stagnation of the Slovak ODA system.

At the beginning of the year, a Retreat on the future of Slovak Development Cooperation was organized in Častá-Papiernička, a special event where Slovak NGOs especially attempted to address the main challenges of the Slovak ODA system: implementation of the Mid-Term Strategy and the new Act on Development Cooperation, undersized resources and institutional setup for Slovak ODA, and opportunities with regard to the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák declared his readiness to contribute to breaching the stagnation of resources needed for development activities, and pointed to the then-upcoming Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU, and the development agenda in the framework of this historic opportunity.

The retreat was a good initiative, but did not bring about much in 2016 in terms of advancing the ODA system and moving it to a new level. Big opportunities such as the Slovak Presidency and the candidacy of Minister Miroslav Lajčák for UN Secretary General could have been used as catalysts/accelerators in order to boost the development agenda and its importance, but this potential remained unexploited.

The new state budget for 2017 was prepared and approved during the half-year of the Slovak Presidency. The government originally decided on the same development cooperation budget as in 2016 – however, the bilateral budget line 050TA that reached the Parliament was increased by 565,000 euros. This is the first increase in recent years, however the increase is still too little.

In comparison, in June 2016 the Czech government – without similar opportunities – approved an increase of 100 million CZK (approximately 3.7 million euros) in its development cooperation budget for 2017.<sup>9</sup>

In 2017, the Czech Development Agency is working with a budget of 483 million CZK (17.87 million euros), of which 219 million CZK (8.1 million euros) is allocated for new development projects and initiatives.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding global and development education, the Czech budget has earmarked 12 million CZK (444,000 euros) for education projects within the Czech Republic, out of which 3,854,000 CZK (142,603 euros) is for new projects and 300,000 euros is for ongoing projects.

In addition, the Czech Development Agency will continue to fulfil the Medium-term vision of strengthening Czech Development Agency capacities, as approved by the government in November 2016. The three strategic goals of the Vision include:

1. Greater volume of development activities, and a sufficient number of qualified and motivated people at headquarters and in partner countries;
2. An emphasis on activities in which the Czech Republic brings added value as a donor, and on the effective implementation of development cooperation that brings sustainable results;
3. Building up the positive brand of the Czech Development Agency, and cooperation with a broad range of partners and implementers.

The basic condition for moving ahead from the current stagnation (as in the case of the Czech Republic) is a substantial increase in financial allocations and investment in people who can move the ODA system ahead. The main responsibility for this is at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, which has been weak in the past in delivering results and convincing the Ministry of Finance and the Slovak government to take substantial steps towards becoming a modern and reliable donor country.

The following are recommendations for the ODA system:

- to gradually and substantially increase bilateral ODA in all Programs from 2018, in order to achieve a level of bilateral ODA of 20 million euros by the end of the current electoral period (2020)
- to elaborate the modality of Block grants in 2017 in order to become effective in 2018, at least in terms of Development interventions and Development education programs

<sup>9</sup> “Česko dá na rozvojovou pomoc o 100 miliónů korun navíc,” [Czech Republic will increase its development cooperation budget by 100 million Czech crowns] *novinky.cz*, July 11, 2016. Available online: <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/408860-cesko-da-na-rozvojovou-pomoc-o-100-milionu-koron-navic.html> (accessed on February 27, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> “Česká rozvojová agentura letos vynaloží na projekty rozvojové spolupráce 483 milionů korun,” [Czech development agency will spend 483 million Czech crowns on development projects] *CzechAid*, February 8, 2017. Available online: <http://www.czechaid.cz/ceska-rozvojova-agentura-letos-vynalozi-na-projekty-rozvojove-spoluprace-483-milionu-koron/> (accessed on February 27, 2017).

- Under block grant modality, a new mechanism for recognizing/accrediting organizations with experience in development cooperation should be elaborated. To obtain this accreditation, certain criteria (experience, partners in target countries, staff, budget, European or other donor partners, education and awareness raising programs, etc.) should be met.

After obtaining accreditation, an organization could then be given a block grant from SlovakAid for a period of several years with the requirement of fulfilling basic criteria as set by the MFA, rather than applying for individual projects in small grant schemes.

Block grants could comprise Development Interventions (possibly also Transformation Experience Sharing), Development Education and Public Awareness raising activities, and Volunteer-sending components. In this way much more synergy will be achieved on the side of recipient partners and much more predictability of funding and further meaningful interventions on the side of donor partners, as compared to the current system.

Accredited Organizations could apply for a Block grant, while the Small grant schemes would remain for other applicants. This will only work, of course, if there is sufficient financial allocation within the system. But even if finances remain restricted, beginning to implement the block grants would be a step forward, as this would limit the number of interventions as compared to the current system, which is too scattered, and with eight broadly defined programs supported by limited finances and open to an unlimited number of applicants, cannot be effective.

- to separate the programmatic and operative decision making processes: Foreign Ministry should remain the main player in terms of programming, but delegate the decision-making within certain programs to experts and expert bodies. The current system, where decisions for each project are made at the level of high ministry officials, is ineffective and outdated;
- more professionalism in positions within the ODA system: at the Foreign Ministry, the SlovakAid Agency, and at the business and NGO levels;
- reform the SlovakAid system to be friendlier towards the main actors and implementers of ODA, decrease the administrative demands of project implementation (including allowing the submission of project proposals and related documents and reports in English);
- create a body who could formulate a vision of the ODA system and formulate concrete steps towards achieving that vision, in order to achieve real outcomes and the involvement of Slovak NGOs and Business entities in the system;
- Additional substantial investment into (block) grants for Global Development Education for the next 3 years, as an investment towards building a positive awareness about migration, development, and extreme poverty among certain target groups of the Slovak public. This would be an investment to counter extremism and should be channeled especially through NGOs, churches, municipalities, and children and youth organizations who could address the young generation specifically.

Other recommendations below are merely a repetition of ongoing tasks that are defined mainly in the medium-term strategy for 2014–2018:

- developing the Strategy for policy coherence for development (task from the Strategy, 2016);
- developing the National Strategy for global education 2017–2021 (task from the Strategy, 2016);
- developing the Strategy for the government scholarships program (task from the Strategy, 2015), which will ensure the meaningfulness of the program through returning students to their countries of origin and providing educational support directly within developing countries;
- developing the Strategy for multilateral development cooperation (task from the Strategy, 2015);
- developing the Development cooperation manual (task from the Strategy, 2015);
- carrying out an external evaluation of projects (the last evaluation was carried out in 2014).

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# IV.

ANNEXES

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## A CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT EVENTS IN SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY IN 2016

*January 1* Start of Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the EU. Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic welcomes its priorities, including economic growth and employment, migration, deepening of the EMU, and climate change and energy, as these correspond to the 18-month plan of the presidency trio Netherlands–Slovakia–Malta.

*January 5* Slovakia sends policemen and technology from the new HRAD unit to protect the Macedonian border with Greece, as requested by the Macedonian Interior Minister.

*January 15* M. Lajčák attends and speaks at the Snow Meeting conference in Trakai, Lithuania, where he also meets with his Lithuanian counterpart, Linas Linkevičius. They discuss recent developments in Eastern Partnership countries, the continuous need of support for reforms in these countries, and their tighter cooperation with the EU.

*January 18* State Secretary I. Korčok meets with the European Commission's First Vice-President, F. Timmermans. They discuss the context of Slovakia's presidency of the Council of the EU, especially the migration crisis and Great Britain's referendum on EU membership.

*January 19* President A. Kiska attends a memorial meeting in Hejce (Hungary) in memory of Slovak soldiers who died there ten years ago in an AN-24 aircraft accident. Later, he has lunch with Hungarian President J. Áder.

*January 19* Minister M. Lajčák meets Serbian Kosovo President A. Jahjaga, Prime Minister I. Mustafa, and First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs H. Taçi during his visit to Pristina, where he unveils a new memorial to the Slovak soldiers who died in an air accident on their return from a deployment mission in Kosovo. Before that he meets with Serbian Foreign Minister I. Dačić in Belgrade, and discusses the accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU.

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*January 20* M. Lajčák receives US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in charge of democracy and human rights R. Berschinski to discuss the migration crisis, human rights issues and the fight against corruption, as well as developments in Ukraine.

*January 26* President A. Kiska pays an official visit to Scotland at the invitation of Prince Charles, whom he meets at the opening of the Dumfries House requalification center. They discuss the problem of unemployment, and Scotland as an inspiration for Slovakia.

*January 26* R. Fico receives Czech Prime Minister B. Sobotka; they discuss possible solutions to the migration crisis, Schengen protection, and the common approach of the two countries, ahead of the special V4 summit in February.

*January 27* M. Lajčák receives a Deputy Speaker of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), Y. Vaknin, and the head of the Israel–Slovakia Parliamentary Friendship Group, O. Forer, in Bratislava. The Knesset delegation visits Slovakia on the occasion of the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Sereď.

*January 29* M. Lajčák's working visit to Slovenia includes talks with Slovenian President B. Pahor, Prime Minister M. Cerar, and his departmental counterpart, K. Erjavec. He calls for a pan-European solution to the migration crisis.

*February 1–2* During a working visit to Ukraine, M. Lajčák meets with V. Groysman (Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada), A. Yatsenyuk (Prime Minister of Ukraine), P. Poroshenko (President of Ukraine), and P. Klimkin (Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs). The situation in Eastern Ukraine and adherence to the Minsk Agreements, as well as the ongoing reforms – especially in the area of energy – are on the meetings' agenda.

*February 4* The official visit of a Vice-President of the Cuban government, R. Cabrisas, takes place. During the visit he meets with M. Lajčák. The visit is a follow-up on the Havana agreement on developing a more intensive cooperation between Slovakia and Cuba.

*February 6* Informal meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers, on the serious security and foreign policy issues currently most preoccupying the European Union, is attended by M. Lajčák.

*February 9* M. Lajčák receives Greek Foreign Minister N. Xydakis in Bratislava, discussing the migration crisis in light of the upcoming Slovak Presidency.

*February 11* M. Lajčák receives H. Yee, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, in Bratislava. They discuss bilateral Slovak-US relations, the migration crisis, and developments in Ukraine, other Eastern Partnership countries and the Balkans.

*February 15* R. Fico attends a special meeting of V4 prime ministers to discuss the migration crisis and protection of the Schengen border. V4 representatives also meet with the president of Macedonia and the prime minister of Bulgaria.

*February 16* Minister M. Lajčák receives Netherlands' Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation L. Ploumen in Bratislava, where they discuss the cooperation of the Presidency Trio over questions of the refugee crisis and the accession process of Western Balkans countries.

*February 18* The V4 countries propose the preparation of a joint project to assist Syrian refugees and their host communities in Jordan and Lebanon. This is agreed on by the foreign ministers of the V4 states in a meeting in Prague.

*February 22* Slovakia unveils the logo for its first Presidency of the Council of the EU.

*February 28* An informal meeting of President A. Kiska with Polish President A. Duda in the High Tatras, where they discuss topics of mutual interest, including support for tourism between the two countries.

*February 29* M. Lajčák meets with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Z. Ra'ad Al Hussein, UNESCO Director General I. Bokova, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross P. Maurer, Foreign Relations Minister of Argentina S. Malcorra, and new Foreign Affairs Minister of Qatar M. bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, during his working visit to the UN Office in Geneva.

*March 1* M. Lajčák receives Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister of Iran M. Takht-Ravanchi in Bratislava, endorses closer cooperation between the European Union and Iran, and recalls that within its Presidency of the Council of the EU (SK PRES), Slovakia will also lay out tasks for the EU Delegation in Iran.

*March 2* R. Fico and Interior Minister R. Kaliňák visit the Macedonian–Greek border at Gevgelija.

*March 5* Greek Ambassador to Slovakia N. Panagiotis Plexidas is summoned, and a categorical denial of the statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic is conveyed. The Greek Foreign Ministry issues a statement accusing Slovak PM Fico of provocation and of politicizing the problem of migration in his pre-election campaign.

*March 5* General elections in Slovakia take place, and are won by SMER–SD (28.28 per cent). For the first time, the extremist People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) wins seats in the parliament, with 8.04 per cent of the votes.

*March 10* M. Lajčák receives Foreign Affairs Minister of Switzerland D. Burkhalter in Bratislava, who comes to Slovakia to discuss bilateral issues and Slovakia's upcoming Presidency in the Council of the EU.

*March 18* Prime ministers of nine EU countries, including Slovakia, send a letter to President of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker, expressing their concerns over the Nord Stream 2 project.

*March 20* M. Lajčák holds talks with S. Shoukry, his Egyptian counterpart, and is also received by A. Fattah El Sisi, President of Egypt, during his working visit to Cairo.

*March 23* Representatives of three parties, SMER-SD, Most-Híd and Sief, sign a coalition agreement on March 22. The next day President A. Kiska appoints old/new Prime Minister Fico and other ministers. M. Lajčák is appointed as foreign minister.

*March 29* US Secretary of State J. Kerry presents the Woman of Courage award to Z. Števelová, Director of the Human Rights League.

*April 4* M. Lajčák's working visit to Greece. The focus of his discussion with Minister N. Kotzias and President P. Pavlopoulos is the migrant crisis, including implementation of the EU–Turkey agreement on the returning of migrants from Greek territory.

*April 7* The priorities of Slovakia's Presidency of the Council of the EU are discussed by M. Lajčák and F.-W. Steinmeier, German Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Berlin.

*April 12* President Kiska meets the members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian President K. Grabar Kitarović, and Montenegrin President F. Vujanović in Mostar, after receiving the “Seal of a European Leader” award for SR support for Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path to joining the EU.

*April 13* M. Lajčák receives E. Aspaker, Norwegian Minister of the European Economic Area and EU Affairs, in the context of the upcoming Slovak Presidency, and the continuation of so-called Norwegian Funds.

*April 15* Minister P. Gajdoš receives Chairman of the NATO Military Committee P. Pavel. They discuss preparations for the NATO Summit in Warsaw and actual NATO operations.

*April 21–22* A two-day foreign affairs ministerial meeting of the V4 and NB8 takes place in Jūrmala, Latvia. Ministers of 12 central and northern European countries focus on current threats and challenges facing the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance.

*April 22* President A. Kiska signs the Paris Agreement at the UN General Assembly meeting in New York after meeting with Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, later participating in a high-level debate on achieving the sustainable development goals of “Agenda 2030.”

*April 28* M. Lajčák introduces a new brand for Slovakia, unifying the country’s presentation abroad – proposed by the firm Creative Department, with a graphic representation of the *Good Idea – Slovakia* slogan.

*May 4* V4 foreign ministers meet in Prague to discuss support for the Eastern Partnership.

*May 4* General secretary of the Council of the EU, J. Tranholm-Mikkelsen, visits Bratislava and attends a session of the Slovak Government. The topic is preparation for SK PRES.

*May 4* The SK PRES program is discussed between I. Korčok and Secretary-General of the Council of the EU, J. Tranholm-Mikkelsen, in Bratislava.

*May 5* President A. Kiska meets with I. Bokova, UNESCO Secretary general, who is on an official visit to Slovakia at the invitation of Minister M. Lajčák. They discuss UNESCO activities in the areas of education, science and research.

*May 5* M. Lajčák receives A. Akbar Salehi, Iranian Vice-President, to discuss areas in which Iranian and Slovak entities could launch specific investment and business activities as early as possible.

*May 10* During a visit to Moscow, M. Lajčák informs his Russian counterpart, S. Lavrov, of Slovakia’s preparations for SK PRES, with an emphasis on themes that will be important also in relation to Russia during Slovakia’s Presidency.

*May 13* Slovakia and Greece are ready to intensify bilateral contacts and political dialogue, agree M. Lajčák and his Greek departmental counterpart, N. Kotzias, during the latter’s visit to Bratislava.

*May 13* The progressing preparations, the shaping of priorities, and cooperation with EU institutions during SK PRES are discussed by M. Lajčák, A. Italianer, EC Secretary-General, and M. Selmayr, Head of the Cabinet of the President of the EC, in Bratislava.

*May 16* The position of national minorities in Slovakia, and institutional human rights architecture, dominate the meeting of M. Lajčák and OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Astrid Thors, during her working visit to Bratislava.

*May 18* M. Lajčák meets with Japanese Foreign Minister F. Kishida and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Y. Muto, discussing bilateral relations and the upcoming SK PRES, during his visit to Tokyo.

*May 19* Foreign ministers of the 28 member countries of NATO sign the Accession Protocol for Montenegro, in Brussels. Slovakia is represented by M. Lajčák.

*May 21* Montenegro's highest state recognition is awarded by President F. Vujanović to M. Lajčák, on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Montenegro's independence. A new street named after Slovakia, the Slovak Street (Slovačka ulica) is ceremoniously unveiled in the capital city, Podgorica, on the same occasion.

*May 23* President A. Kiska addresses world leaders at the World Humanitarian Summit in Turkey. He focuses on the protection of humanitarian workers world-wide, in response to the death of V. Racková, a Slovak doctor and humanitarian worker shot to death in an ambulance in South Sudan just three days prior.

*May 24* Minister P. Gajdoš attends a meeting with his departmental counterparts from V4 countries in Liblice, Czech Rep. The topics covered in the meeting include migration crisis, terrorism, and the coordination of V4 positions ahead of the Warsaw Summit.

*May 25* The Government of the Slovak Republic approves the nomination of Minister of Foreign and European Affairs M. Lajčák for the post of UN Secretary-General.

*May 26* At the plenary session of the National Convention on the EU, President of the European Parliament M. Schulz, who is visiting Slovakia, gives an address. Later he is received by R. Fico and discusses current European affairs and preparations for SK PRES.

*May 26* M. Lajčák meets his French counterpart J.-M. Ayrault in Paris to discuss objectives and priorities of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

*May 27* M. Lajčák receives Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina I. Crnadak in Bratislava. The former expresses Slovakia's desire to see the EC address the assessment report on the B&H application for EU membership during SK PRES.

*May 30–31* An official visit of Slovak President A. Kiska to Georgia takes place. He meets with Georgian President Giorgio Margvelashvili in Tbilisi and visits the border with South Ossetia, where he condemns the annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by the Russian Federation. He officially opens the National Convention on the EU project in Georgia, which is supported by SlovakAid and implemented by SPPA.

*June 1* A session of the Slovak Government is held in Brussels together with European Commissioners.

*June 7* M. Lajčák presents his candidacy, and his vision of how the world organization should operate under his leadership, at the UN headquarters in New York.

*June 8* R. Fico is received by his Czech counterpart B. Sobotka during an official visit to the Czech Republic. Later that day he also attends the V4 Summit that concludes the Czech V4 Presidency, and addresses the priorities of the upcoming Polish V4 Presidency.

*June 8* M. Lajčák becomes the first official of the Slovak Republic to visit Senegal. He holds talks with M. Sall, President of Senegal, and with M. Ndiaye, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the country's capital, Dakar.

*June 9* Luxembourg's Foreign Minister J. Asselborn visits Bratislava to discuss SK PRES with M. Lajčák.

*June 14* M. Lajčák receives D. Fried, Coordinator for Sanctions Policy at the US State Department. The partners jointly assess the implementation of the Minsk Agreements to end the conflict in Southeastern Ukraine.

*June 14* The deputies of the National Council of the Slovak Republic express their consent for the ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Accession Protocol for Montenegro.

*June 15* The possibilities for the progress of Turkey within its EU accession process during SK PRES, are one of the core topics of talks held in Bratislava between M. Lajčák and Ö. Çelik, Turkey's Minister for EU Affairs.

*June 15* R. Fico receives his counterparts from the Netherlands, M. Rutte, and Malta, J. Muscat, in Bratislava, to discuss the Council of the EU trio's program and developments.

*June 15* Minister P. Gajdoš meets with Secretary General of NATO Stoltenberg in Brussels. They discuss the situations in Ukraine and Afghanistan, and the building of the NFIU in Slovakia.

*June 16* R. Fico is received by Chancellor A. Merkel during an official visit to Berlin. They discuss the upcoming SK PRES and its priorities.

*June 17* R. Fico receives D. Zvizdić, Chairman of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to discuss bilateral relations.

*June 20* Prime Minister R. Fico receives President of Switzerland J. N. Schneider during the latter's official visit to Slovakia. They discussed bilateral relations and European affairs.

*June 22* R. Fico is received by President F. Hollande during an official visit to France. They discuss the priorities of SK PRES in light of the migration crisis.

*June 26* The departure of Britain from the EU in the context of SK PRES is discussed by the foreign ministers of Slovakia and Germany, M. Lajčák and F.-W. Steinmeier, in Berlin.

*June 27* M. Lajčák meets with his counterparts from the Visegrad Four, Germany and France in Prague, upon invitation from the Czech Republic, which holds the Presidency of the V4.

*June 28* British departure from the EU is the topic of deliberations between M. Lajčák, UK Foreign Minister P. Hammond, and Minister for Europe D. Lidington, in London. Minister Lajčák is the first EU foreign minister to arrive in London after the referendum.

*June 28* IOM Director General W. L. Swing visits Slovakia, meeting with President A. Kiska, M. Lajčák, and with representatives of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Interior SR, and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family SR.

*June 29* President A. Kiska welcomes Polish President A. Duda on the latter's official visit to SR. They discuss the Brexit, the upcoming Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the upcoming Polish Presidency of the V4, and the upcoming NATO summit in Warsaw.

*June 30* The Government of SR approves and M. Lajčák publicly presents the program of SK PRES, focused on four priority areas: an economically strong Europe, a modern single market, sustainable migration and asylum policies, and a globally-engaged Europe.

*June 30* One day before the start of SK PRES, President A. Kiska meets with the members of the European Commission together with its president J.-C. Juncker.

*June 30* The standby of the V4 EU Battlegroup comes to an end. It had been on standby since January 1, 2016.

*July 1* The Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union (SK PRES) officially starts.

*July 3–5* A working visit of M. Lajčák to the People's Republic of China, where he meets with his counterpart W. Li. Besides bilateral issues, they touch upon cooperation in international organizations, the priorities of SK PRES, and the extended cooperation of China and central and eastern Europe (China + 16).

*July 5* Prime Minister R. Fico visits the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where he meets M. Schulz and representatives of parliamentary factions, and introduces the program of SK PRES.

*July 6* Start of the Slovak Warthog 2016 military exercise. The Slovak Army is to be trained together with the Indiana National Guard until August 2.

*July 8–9* The 7<sup>th</sup> European Summit of Regions and Cities in Bratislava. I. Korčok introduces the priorities of the Slovak Presidency.

*July 8–9* President A. Kiska and ministers M. Lajčák and P. Gajdoš attend the NATO Summit in Warsaw. The NATO member states agree on measures for increasing security and stability both for themselves and partner countries.

*July 11* The ambitions of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union are introduced by Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic M. Lajčák, to the chairmen of Parliamentary Committees for EU Affairs from member and partner countries, at their meeting at the National Council (Parliament) of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava.

*July 12* M. Lajčák presents the priorities of the Slovak Presidency at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament in Brussels.

*July 14* Minister M. Lajčák meets with UN Security Council members and answers their detailed questions on his objectives and ideas in individual areas of UN activity, during his visit to New York.

*July 15* R. Fico attends the ASEM summit in Ulanbatar, Mongolia.

*July 18* The first Foreign Affairs Council meeting during Slovakia's Presidency. Two negotiation chapters in Serbia's accession process are opened: Chapter 23 – Judiciary and fundamental rights, and Chapter 24 – Justice, freedom and security.

*July 14–16* Robert Fico attends the 11<sup>th</sup> Asia–Europe Summit (ASEM) in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

*July 16–19* An official visit of R. Fico to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Besides signing several memorandums of understanding and economic cooperation, he also talks with the Government of Vietnam about abolishing the visa duty for Slovak citizens.

*July 19* Defense Minister P. Gajdoš receives US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State H. B. Yee. They discuss bilateral cooperation, the security situation in the world, the outcomes of the Warsaw NATO Summit, and SK PRES priorities in the area of defense.

*July 20* M. Lajčák receives the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs of Macedonia, A. Ademi, in Bratislava. They discuss SK PRES and evaluate the state of Macedonia's EU accession process.

*July 20* M. Lajčák receives US Deputy Assistant Secretary H. B. Yee, primarily to discuss SK PRES and its priorities in the areas of migration and EU accession processes, especially in the Western Balkans.

*July 21* R. Fico attends a meeting of the V4 PMs in Warsaw. The main topic is the future of the EU after the Brexit vote.

*July 24–25* An informal meeting of EU member states' ministers and state secretaries responsible for European affairs takes place in Bratislava, with the participation of delegates from Turkey, FYROM, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, and the Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn.

*July 26* M. Lajčák attends the ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, Laos under the appointment of High Representative F. Mogherini, to discuss strategic and security-related EU-ASEAN cooperation.

*July 28* R. Fico receives UK Prime Minister T. May in Bratislava. They discuss future negotiations between the UK and the EU after the Brexit vote.

*August 2* President A. Kiska is on an official visit to the Republic of Chile, where he meets Chilean President M. Bachelet, discusses economic co-operation, and visits the Start-Up Chile Center.

*August 4* President A. Kiska meets President M. Macri during an official visit to Argentina. During the visit, a cooperation agreement between the Slovak company Eset and the National Technological University, Buenos Aires, and a Memorandum of Understanding between the same Argentinian university and Žilina University, are signed.

*August 12* The joint exercise "Slovak Hawk," conducted by the UK's RAF Leeming unit and the Slovak Air Force, begins in Sliač and lasts until August 25.

*August 23* Minister M. Lajčák speaks at the UN Security Council in New York, on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

*August 23* Norway premier E. Solberg is received by R. Fico during her visit to Bratislava. They discuss bilateral relations and European affairs.

*August 25* R. Fico is received by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin in Moscow. They discuss Nord Stream 2, the sanctions against Russia, and the upcoming vote for the UN Secretary General.

*August 26* R. Fico attends a meeting between V4 PMs and German Chancellor A. Merkel. He brings up the topic of the upcoming Bratislava Summit.

*August 26* SK PRES and its timely and scheduled activities are discussed by Minister M. Lajčák and his Spanish departmental counterpart, J. M. García-Margallo, in Madrid.

*August 28* M. Lajčák visits Egypt, where he holds talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, S. Shoukry, with whom he signs a Slovakia–Egypt Agreement on Cooperation in the areas of science, education, culture and sport; and with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States (LAS), A. Aboul Gheit.

*August 29* M. Lajčák, at the Alpbach Forum, together with Austrian Foreign Minister S. Kurz, Ukrainian Foreign Minister P. Klimkin, and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus, E. Kupchyna, discuss the relations of East European States both with the EU and Russia.

*September 1* The Slovak NFIU (NATO Force Integration Unit) is officially activated.

*September 2* R. Fico is received by President of the European Council Tusk in Brussels, to discuss the upcoming Bratislava Summit and its program.

*September 6* R. Fico attends a meeting of the V4 prime ministers in Krynica, Poland, which is also attended by Ukrainian Prime Minister V. Hrojsman. The V4 prime ministers confirm that they fully support the EU integration plans of Ukraine.

*September 4* M. Lajčák, at the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the EU's CFSP, organized by the NC SR, discusses EU enlargement as one of the priorities of SK PRES.

*September 14* M. Lajčák gives an address to the Committee of Ministers in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, in which he introduces the priorities of SK PRES, and discusses the Slovak Presidency's approach to solving current European challenges.

*September 14* State Secretary I. Korčok represents the Council of the European Union at the plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

*September 15* An informal dinner on the eve of Bratislava Summit is attended by Slovak President A. Kiska, Prime Minister R. Fico, Foreign Minister M. Lajčák, EC President J.-C. Juncker, Council of the EU President D. Tusk, and EP President M. Schulz.

*September 16* The Bratislava Summit takes place. The informal summit of 27 member states is devoted to diagnosing the present state of the EU and discussing its common future. The Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap are agreed upon, starting the Bratislava Process.

*September 19–20* President A. Kiska and Minister M. Lajčák attend a UN General Assembly high-level meeting on addressing the large movements of refugees and migrants, and a round table on international assistance and cooperation to overcome the impacts of the migration and refugee flows. A. Kiska meets with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the presidents of Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Senegal, the Prime Minister of Georgia, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

*September 20* The Council of the EU asks the European Commission to work out its position on the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina to become an EU member.

*September 20* Start of a joint military exercise aimed at the interoperability of air defense systems, TOBRUQ LEGACY. Military personnel from eight countries participate in the exercise, which continues until September 30.

*September 22* M. Lajčák and his UAE departmental counterpart, A. bin Zayed Al Nahyan, sign a bilateral agreement on the mutual protection and promotion of investment in New York.

*September 26* A joint session of the Slovak and Czech governments in Bratislava is organized.

*September 27* R. Fico receives NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg in Bratislava.

*September 29* President A. Kiska pays an official visit to Italy, where he meets with President S. Mattarella and Senate President P. Grasso to discuss the future of the EU and the migration crisis.

*September 29* Start of the joint military exercise Slovak Shield. Military personnel from the V4 countries, the USA and Germany will train together in Lešť until October 14.

*October 1* Minister M. Lajčák and the State Minister of Finance and Economic Development of Ethiopia, A. Shide, sign an Agreement between SR and Ethiopia on the Prevention of Double Taxation, in Addis Ababa.

*October 3* Minister M. Lajčák and Prime Minister R. Fico receive German Foreign Minister F.-W. Steinmeier in Bratislava. The Federal Minister visits Slovakia as Germany celebrates its national holiday – German Unity Day.

*October 4* The 15<sup>th</sup> session of the EU–Kazakhstan Cooperation Council is held in Brussels, chaired by M. Lajčák.

*October 4* The EP gives its consent to the ratification of the Paris Agreement on climate change, enabling the Council of the EU, led by the Slovak Presidency, to adopt a definitive decision on the EU's ratification of the Paris Agreement.

*October 5* M. Lajčák announces a one-off Slovak contribution of 500,000 euros at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan.

*October 5* COREPER adopts its negotiating position on visa liberalization with Georgia on behalf of the Council of the EU. Based on this mandate, the Slovak Presidency launches talks with the EP.

*October 5* After a final vote in the Security Council, A. Guterres becomes the new UN Secretary General. The Slovak candidate, Minister M. Lajčák, ends second in the general ranking.

*October 7* R. Fico receives his Hungarian counterpart, V. Orbán, in Bratislava, saying that Slovakia fully accepts the results of the Hungarian referendum on migration quotas, and sees it as legitimate.

*October 10* A. Kiska is received by Romanian President K. Iohannis during an official visit to Bucharest. They discuss the fight against corruption and the Romanian accession process to the Schengen Area.

*October 14* At the EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting in Bangkok, M. Lajčák represents the EU upon appointment by F. Mogherini.

*October 15* A meeting of V4 Presidents takes place in Warsaw. Among other topics they discuss, together with EC VP Šefčovič, the Energy Union, and agree to withhold support from the Nord Stream 2 project.

*October 16* President A. Kiska meets with the Dalai Lama in Bratislava, over an informal lunch.

*October 21* The relations of both Slovakia and the EU with Switzerland are discussed by M. Lajčák and his Swiss counterpart, D. Burkhalter, in the town of Kehrsatz, near Bern.

*October 21* President A. Kiska, on an official visit to Switzerland, is received by President J. N. Schneider-Ammann, and visits the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH).

*October 25* I. Korčok speaks before the EP's Conference of Committee Chairs to present the results of SK PRES halfway into its term. He goes on to underscore the areas to which the Presidency will pay particular attention, including the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the Capital Markets Union, the digital single market, and the full functioning of the European Border and Coast Guard.

*October 25* The Summit in Santo Domingo between the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). The participants in the summit adopt the Declaration of Santo Domingo, and sign an agreement on the EU and Latin America, and on the Caribbean Foundation, establishing it as an international organization.

*October 29* I. Korčok holds talks with O. Barbullushi, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, assuring the latter that EU enlargement remains a priority of the Slovak Presidency.

*October 30* During the EU Summit in Brussels, attended by R. Fico, the CETA agreement on free trade between the EU and Canada is signed.

*November 4* Minister M. Lajčák's working visit to Kazakhstan includes negotiations with his counterpart, Y. Idrisov, as well as with the Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament, K.-J. Tokayev, and a reception held by the country's President, N. Nazarbayev. Minister M. Lajčák also opens the Slovak-Kazakh Business Forum in Astana.

*November 4* R. Fico meets with the other prime ministers of the Presidency Trio – the Netherlands' M. Rutte and Malta's J. Muscat – in Malta. They evaluate the fulfilling of the goals and priorities of the Presidency Trio.

*November 5* R. Fico attends a meeting of the 16 Central and Eastern European countries (CEE16) with China, in Riga.

*November 8* Foreign affairs ministers of NATO-member countries from Central and Eastern Europe discuss strengthening the Eastern flank at their meeting in Bucharest.

*November 9 I.* Korčok meets with the President of the EP, M. Schulz, to discuss specific legislative proposals for which SK PRES counts on an especially constructive and timely cooperation from the EP. These include priority areas of the digital market and energy union, and within those priorities issues such as the effective abolition of roaming fees, and international energy-related agreements.

*November 10 R.* Fico and M. Lajčák receive M. Barnier, the EC's Chief Negotiator in charge of negotiations with the UK, regarding its departure from the EU. They discuss several aspects of the process of forthcoming negotiations between the EU and London.

*November 11* External and internal challenges facing the EU are discussed by M. Lajčák in Vienna, where he presents his remarks as the keynote speaker at the opening of the European Forum, organized by the Austrian Institute for European and Security Studies.

*November 16* M. Lajčák chairs the EU-Cabo Verde ministerial dialogue on behalf of the EU, in the city of Mindelo on the island of Sao Vicente in Cabo Verde. This ministerial dialogue is held annually, based on the Cabo Verde–European Union Special Partnership Agreement.

*November 21–22* First official visit to France by President Kiska, who is received by President of the French Republic Francois Hollande. During the official visit with the French President, the Agreement in Education, Language Learning, University and Scientific Cooperation for 2016–2019 is signed.

*November 22* During his official visit to France, President Kiska meets with President F. Hollande. They discuss economic cooperation, and the situation both in the EU and globally.

*November 23 I.* Korčok gives an address before the MEPs in Strasbourg, informing them of the core outcomes of the Marrakesh Climate Change Conference (COP 22) on 17–28 November.

*November 25 PM* Fico is received by Belarussian President A. Lukašenko during his official visit to Minsk. The main theme of the visit is the restarting of the trade dialogue between the EU and Belarus.

*November 28* M. Lajčák signs a memorandum on using Norway Grants, along with EEA and European Affairs Minister of Norway Elisabeth V. Aspaker. This will enable Slovakia to draw from the EEA and so-called Norwegian funds, in the amount of 113 million euros by 2021.

*November 29* M. Lajčák attends the annual V4 ministerial meeting with Western Balkans countries under the auspices of the V4 Polish Presidency in Warsaw, also attended by HR Mogherini, as well as foreign affairs ministers and deputy ministers from Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Romania, and Slovenia. The V4 ministers reiterate their support for the Western Balkans countries on their journey towards the EU.

*November 30 – December 2* SET Plan 2016 – Central European Energy Conference X is held in Bratislava. A prestigious annual SET Plan conference is held together with the established regional conference CEEC. The event focuses on the key areas of energy, energy security, regional energy markets integration, and other areas covered by SET Plan, and is attended by the Slovak minister responsible for SET Plan, Peter Plavčan, Vice-President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič, MEP Jerzy Buzek, EC DG Dominique Ristori, and other important guests from around the EU and neighboring countries.

*December 1* The EP approves the EU budget for 2017, thus confirming the agreement prepared by SK PRES. I. Korčok and EP President M. Schulz together officially attest to the agreement with the EP on the EU 2017 budget.

*December 4* On behalf of the EU, M. Lajčák attends the ministerial Heart of Asia conference, in the Indian city of Amritsar, devoted to the support and stabilization of Afghanistan. He highlights that continuation of international support for Afghanistan is key for the sustainable development of the country and for following up on the positive results of existing activities of the international community.

*December 6* In Brussels, NATO foreign affairs ministers hold talks on the current security challenges, and discuss and adopt more than 40 proposals regarding implementation of the EU–NATO Joint Declaration from the July 2016 Warsaw Summit.

*December 7* The Slovak Government approves an intergovernmental treaty between SR and Czech Rep. on the joint defense of airspace.

*December 8* M. Lajčák gives the opening address at the plenary session debate of the 23<sup>rd</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg. The session focuses on reinforcing the OSCE in light of existing conflicts and new global threats.

*December 9* 57 OSCE member states adopt Slovakia's candidacy for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2019, as approved by OSCE foreign affairs ministers at their 23<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Council in Hamburg.

*December 12* During a visit to Berlin, President A. Kiska meets with German President J. Gauck and addresses the Konrad Adenauer Foundation with a speech on rebuilding trust in the EU.

*December 13* R. Fico gives an address to the EP in Strasbourg and is received by EP President M. Schulz. The topic in both instances is the evaluation of SK PRES.

*December 20* M. Lajčák represents Slovakia at the ministerial meeting of the EU and the League of Arab States in Cairo, and calls for tighter cooperation between these two groupings in addressing regional and global problems.

*December 20* State Secretary L. Parížek represents the Council of the European Union at the 32<sup>nd</sup> session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly taking place December 19–21 in Nairobi, Kenya. He emphasizes that besides active development assistance, there is also the need to strengthen political cooperation, including parliamentary cooperation in such areas as climate change, security, migration, and human rights.

*December 31* The Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union (SK PRES) officially ends.

## TREATIES, AGREEMENTS, CONVENTIONS PUBLISHED IN 2016

### **BILATERAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS**

#### *INTERSTATES TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS*

1. Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the United States of America to improve international tax compliance and to implement FATCA  
(Bratislava, July 31, 2015, published under No. 48/2016)
2. Protocol between the Slovak Republic and Montenegro to the Treaty between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on regulation of legal relations in civil, family and criminal matters from January 20, 1964  
(Podgorica, May 29, 2014, published under No. 46/2016)
3. Agreement between the Slovak Republic and Hungary changing and amending the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and Hungary on cooperation in preventing cross-border criminal activities and in combating organized crimes signed on October 2, 2006 in Bratislava  
(Brussels, December 5, 2014, published under No. 80/2016)
4. European cooperating state agreement between the Slovak Republic and the European Space Agency  
(Bratislava, February 16, 2015, published under No. 130/2016)
5. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Kazakhstan on the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments  
(Bratislava, November 21, 2007, published under No. 191/2016)
6. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Malaysia on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and property  
(Kuala Lumpur, May 25, 2015, published under No. 211/2016)

7. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization on mutual cooperation for training and exercise activities of the Commission related to on-site inspections (Vienna, November 18, 2015, published under No. 227/2016)

## **INTERGOVERNMENTAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS**

1. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on war graves (Bratislava, June 17, 2011, published under No. 58/2016)
2. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Serbia on international combined transport (Bratislava, December 1, 2014, published under No. 75/2016)
3. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine changing and amending Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Ukraine on railway cross-border transport signed on June 15, 1995 (Kyiv, February 6, 2015, published under No. 76/2016)
4. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Kazakhstan on mutual protection of classified information (Astana, January 21, 2016, published under No. 219/2016)
5. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration concerning humanitarian transfer of refugees in need of international protection through the Slovak Republic (Sofia, November 18, 2015, published under No. 81/2016)
6. Memorandum of Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the United States of America regarding reciprocal government quality assurance services (Washington, December 8, 2015, published under No. 147/2016)
7. Implementing Protocol between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the implementation of the Agreement between the European Community and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the readmission of persons residing without authorization (Bratislava, June 3, 2015, published under No. 133/2016)
8. Implementing Protocol between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Georgia on the implementation of the Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorization (Bratislava, November 13, 2015, published under No. 124/2016)
9. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Argentina on scientific and technological cooperation (Bratislava, September 16, 2014, published under No. 168/2016)

10. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Poland, changing and amending the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Poland on mutual recognition of studies and documents on education, academic degrees and titles gained in the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Poland signed in Warsaw on July 18, 2005 (Warsaw, March 16, 2016, published under No. 226/2016)
11. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Georgia regarding the fight against criminal activities (Bratislava, November 13, 2015, published under No. 189/2016)
12. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Czech Republic regarding cross-border interconnection of the speed way R5 in the village of Svrčinovec at the territory of the Slovak Republic and the road I/11 in the village of Mosty u Jablunkova at the territory of the Czech Republic (Prague, May 12, 2016, published under No. 251/2016)
13. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus on cooperation in the field of health policy and medical science (Nicosia, May 26, 2014, published under No. 204/2016)
14. Cooperation Program between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the State of Israel for 2017–2019 in the field of education, science, culture, youth and sports (Tel Aviv, September 12, 2016, published under No. 320/2016)
15. Treaty between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on cooperation in the field of veterinary medicine (Prague, June 21, 1957) expired on July 28, 2016, published under No. 263/2016 between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Macedonia
16. Protocol between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on mutual veterinary and sanitary measures adopted against foot and mouth disease (Belgrade, March 23, 1965) expired on July 28, 2016, published under No. 263/2016 between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Macedonia
17. Treaty between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on cooperation in the field of plant protection (Belgrade, June 16, 1965, Regulation No. 6/1966) expired on July 28, 2016, published under No. 263/2016 between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Macedonia
18. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Uzbekistan on cooperation in combating illicit trafficking of narcotics, psychotropic substances and precursors (Tashkent, September 20, 2016, published under No. 37/2017)

**MINISTERIAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS**

1. Cooperation Program between the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Education of the Peoples Republic of China for 2016–2019  
(Beijing, November 26, 2015, published under No. 30/2016)
2. Agreement between Presidium of the Police Force of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the State Headquarters of the Police of Hungary on creation of the joint patrols on the territory of Hungary in the framework of joint operations  
(Budapest, October 19, 2015, published under No. 28/2016)
3. Agreement between Presidium of the Police Force of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the Police, the Police Directorate General of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Slovenia on creation of the joint patrols on the territory of Slovenia in the framework of joint operations  
(Bratislava, November 4, 2015, published under No. 29/2016)
4. Agreement between the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria on cooperation in the field of exchange recreational stays  
(Sofia, November 19, 2015, published under No. 146/2016)
5. Cooperation Program between the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2015–2020  
(Sofia, December 10, 2015, published under No. 85/2016)
6. Change No. 3 of the Protocol between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic regarding the implementation of the Agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic on mutual visa representation through their diplomatic missions and consular offices  
(exchange of notes, published under No. 264/2016)
7. Agreement between the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany on mutual visa representation  
(exchange of notes, published under No. 265/2016)
8. Agreement between the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology on construction of the North railway interconnection between Bratislava and Vienna  
(Vienna, September 28, 2016, published under No. 294/2016)
9. Cooperation Program between the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia for 2016–2020  
(Bratislava, November 8, 2016, published under No. 330/2016)

10. Agreement between the minister of education, science, research and sport of the Slovak Republic and the minister of foreign affairs and international development of the Republic of France in the fields of education, language trainings, university and scientific cooperation 2016–2019  
(Paris, November 22, 2016, published under No. 332/2016)
11. Change of the Annex to the Agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic and the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of Austria regarding the implementation of the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Federal Government of Austria on mutual visa o representation through their diplomatic missions and consular offices, signed on May 6, 2011 in Bratislava  
(exchange of notes, published under No. 321/2016)

## **MULTILATERAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS**

1. Convention on cluster munitions  
(Dublin, May 30, 2008, published under No. 47/2016)
2. Agreement of the transfer and mutaluzation of contributions to the Single Resolution Fund  
(Brussels, May 21, 2014, published under No. 78/2016)
3. Convention on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition, enforcement and co-operation in respect of parental responsibility and measures for the protection of children  
(The Hague, October 19, 1996, published under No. 94/2016 – convention party Italy)
4. Amendment of the Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund on the reform of the Executive Board  
(Washington, December 15, 2010, published under No. 115/2016)
5. Nagoya Protocol on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization (ABS) to the Convention on biological diversity  
(Nagoya, October 29, 2010, published under No. 128/2016.)
6. Common regulations under the Madrid Agreement concerning the international Registration Marks and the Protocol relating to that Agreement  
(Geneva, October 8, 2015, published under No. 142/2016)
7. Amendments to the Regulations under the Patent Cooperation Treaty  
(Geneva, October 14, 2015, published under No. 154/2016)
8. Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against exploitation and sexual abuse  
(Lanzarote, October 25, 2007, published under No. 164/2016)
9. Amendments to Implementing regulations of the European Patent Convention  
(Munich, October 14, 2015, published under No. 165/2016)

10. Amendment to Convention on the physical protection of nuclear material (Vienna, July 8, 2005, published under No. 170/2016)
11. Amendments to the Regulations under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (Geneva, October 14, 2015, published under No. 169/2016)
12. Amendments to Implementing regulations of the European Patent Convention (Munich, October 14, 2015, published under No. 175/2016)
13. Biennial Collaborative Agreement between the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic and Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization 2016–2017 (Copenhagen and Bratislava, February 9, 2016 and February 29, 2016, published under No. 173/2016)
14. Inter-American Convention on serving criminal sentences abroad (Managua, June 9, 1993, published under No. 176/2016)
15. Cooperation Agreement on a Civil Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) between the European Community and its member states and the Kingdom of Morocco (Brussels, December 12, 2006, published under No. 183/2016)
16. Cooperation Agreement on satellite navigation between the European Union and its member states and the Kingdom of Norway (Brussels, September 22, 2010, published under No.197/2016)
17. The Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part (Brussels, June 27, 2014, published under No. 198/2016)
18. Changes and amendments to the Agreement on international goods traffic by rail (Baku, June 7–10, 2016, published under No. 214/2016)
19. The Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, of the one part, and Georgia of the other part (Brussels, June 27, 2014, published under No. 202/2016)
20. Convention on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition, enforcement and co-operation in respect of parental responsibility and measures for the protection of children (The Hague, October 19, 1996, published under No. 203/2016 – convention party Norway)
21. Amendments to Implementing Regulations of the European Patent Convention (Munich, June 30, 2016, published under No. 238/2016)
22. Changes to Rules relating to fees of the European Patent Convention (Munich, June 29, 2016, published under No. 239/2016)
23. Third Protocol to the General Agreement on privileges and immunities of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, March 6, 1959, published under No. 326/2016)

24. Convention on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition, enforcement and co-operation in respect of parental responsibility and measures for the protection of children  
(The Hague, October 19, 1996, published under No. 348/2016 – convention party Republic of Serbia)
25. Cooperation Agreement on a Civil Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) between the European Community and its member states and the Republic of Korea  
(Helsinki, September 9, 2006, published under No. 337/2016)
26. Framework Agreement on comprehensive partnership and cooperation between the European Union and its member states, of the one part, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, of other part  
(Brussels, September 28, 2011, published under No. 391/2016)

## STRUCTURE OF THE STATE ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITIES ACTING IN INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS IN 2016

AS OF FEBRUARY 2017

### **PRESIDENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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#### *Department of Protocol*

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#### *Department of Foreign Affairs*

Head of the Department: Vít Koziak, tel.: 02/5788 8165

### **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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### **Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic**

Peter Pellegrini (until March 23, 2016)  
Andrej Danko (since March 23, 2016)

#### *Foreign Affairs Committee*

František Šebej, Chairman, tel.: 02/5972 1233, [zv@nrsr.sk](mailto:zv@nrsr.sk)

#### *European Affairs Committee*

Ľuboš Blaha, Chairman, tel.: 02/5972 2751, [vez@nrsr.sk](mailto:vez@nrsr.sk),

*Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities Committee*

Erika Jurinová, Chairwoman, tel.: 02/5972 1699, vlpnm@nrsr.sk

*Defence and Security Committee*

Anton Hrnko, Chairman, tel.: 02/5972 1225, vob@nrsr.sk

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**Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic**

Robert Fico

**Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Informatization**

Peter Pellegrini

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**Minister**

Miroslav Lajčák

**State Secretary, Government's Plenipotentiary for the Presidency in the Council of the EU**

Ivan Korčok

**State Secretary**

Igor Slobodník (until March 23, 2016)

Lukáš Parížek (since March 23, 2016)

**Secretary General of the Ministry**

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**Directorate of Minister**

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### **Human Resources Office**

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### **Directorate of Security, Processing and Transfer of Information**

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Rastislav Chovanec

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Marián Saloň (since March 23, 2016)  
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Radko Kuruc (since March 23, 2016)

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Tomáš Drucker (since March 23, 2016)

**State Secretary**

Mario Mikloši (until April 14, 2016)

Andrea Kalavská (since April 14, 2016)

Stanislav Špánik (since April 14, 2016)

**MINISTRY OF LABOUR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND FAMILY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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**State Secretary**

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Ivan Švejna (since March 23, 2016)

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Romana Kanovská

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Lucia Žitňanská (since March 23, 2016)

**State Secretary**

Monika Jankovská (until March 23, 2016)

Mária Kolíková (since March 23, 2016)

Monika Jankovská (since March 23, 2016)

**Directorate of International Law**

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*Department of Private International Law*

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**State Secretary**

Vojtech Ferencz (until March 23, 2016)

Ján Ilavský (until March 23, 2016)

Norbert Kurilla (since March 23, 2016)

Boris Susko (since March 23, 2016)

**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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Gabriela Matečná (since March 23, 2016)

**State Secretary**

Magdaléna Lacko-Bartošová (until March 23, 2016)

Jozef Spevár (until March 23, 2016)

Gabriel Csicsai (since March 23, 2016)

Anton Stredák (since March 23, 2016)

**MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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**Minister**

Ján Počiatek (until March 23, 2016)

Roman Brečely (since March 23, until August 31, 2016)

Arpád Érsek (Since August 31, 2016)

**State Secretary**

Viktor Stromček

František Palko (until March 23, 2016)

Arpád Érsek (since March 23, until August 31, 2016)

Peter Ďurček (since august 31, 2016)

**ANTIMONOPOLY OFFICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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**President**

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## LIST OF THE EMBASSIES OF THE EU, NATO, AND SOME OTHER COUNTRIES

### THE EMBASSIES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AND THEIR HEADS AS OF FEBRUARY 2017

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	-	Na Karlovce 1387/6 160 00 Praha 6 Czech Republic	<b>Homayun Kamgar</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Albania	1. 1. 1993	Podjavorinskej 4 811 03 Bratislava	<b>Enkeleda Mërkuri</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
People's Democratic Republic of Algeria	1. 1. 1993	Rudolfingerasse 18 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Fauzia Mebarki</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: September 12, 2016
The Principality of Andorra	3. 6. 1996	Kärtnering 2A/13 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Marta Salvat Batista</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Angola	30. 9. 1993	Seilerstätte 15/1/10 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Maria de Jesus dos Reis Ferreira</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Argentine Republic	1. 1. 1993	Goldschmiedgasse 2/1 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Rafael Mariano Grossi</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Armenia	14. 11. 1993	Na Pískách 1411/95 160 00 Praha Czech Republic	<b>Tigran Seiranian</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Commonwealth of Australia	1. 1. 1993	Mattiellstrasse 2 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Brendon Hammer</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Republic of Azerbaijan	27. 11. 1993	Hügelgasse 2 A-1130 Vienna Austria	<b>Galib Israfilov</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
		Hviezdoslavovo nám. 14 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Jafar Huseyn Zada</b> <i>chargé d'affaires for Slovak Republic</i>
The People's Republic of Bangladesh	3. 3. 1993	Dovestr.1 D-105 87 Berlin Germany	<b>Muhammad Ali Sorcar</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Kingdom of Belgium	1. 1. 1993	Prinz-Eugen-Strasse 8-10 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Willem Van de Voorde</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Benin	19. 1. 1993	Englerallee 23 D-14159 Berlin Germany	<b>Josseline Marie Louise da Silva Gbony</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Belarus	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 5 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Igor Leshchenya</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: September 6, 2016
The Plurinational State of Bolivia	5. 3. 1993	Waaggasse 10/8 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Ricardo Javier Martinez Covarrubias</b> <i>chargé d'affaires a. i.</i>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1. 1. 1993	Opletalova 27 110 00 Praha Czech Republic	<b>Danka Savić</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Botswana	-	6 Stratford Place W1C 1AY London United Kingdom	<b>Roy Warren Blackbeard</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Federative Republic of Brasil	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 47 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Susan Kleebank</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Bulgaria	1. 1. 1993	Kuzmányho 1 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Yordanka Chobanova</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: January 1, 2017
Burkina Faso	1. 8. 1997	Strohgasse 14c A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Solange Eveline Agnetom Bogore</b> <i>Ambassador</i>
The Republic of Burundi	29. 6. 1999	Berliner Strasse 36 D-10715 Berlin Germany	<b>Edouard Bizimana</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Republic of Cyprus	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Nearchos Palas</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Chad		Korovy Val 7, Moscow, Russian Federation	<b>Yousseouf Abassalah</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Czech Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 8 P.O.Box 208 810 00 Bratislava	<b>Lívia Klausová</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Montenegro	1. 1. 1993	Mahlerstrasse 12/5/4 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Ivan Milić</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Chile	1. 1. 1993	Lugeck 1/311 A-1010 Vienna, Austria	<b>Armin Andereya</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The People's Republic of China	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 8b 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Lin Lin</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of Denmark	1. 1. 1993	Führichgasse 6 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Liselotte Kjærsgaard Plesner</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Representation of European Commission in the SR	-	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Dušan Chrenek</b> <i>Head of Representation</i>
European Parliament Information Office	-	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Robert Hajšel</b> <i>Director</i>
The Arab Republic of Egypt	1. 1. 1993	Panská 14 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Amr Wa'ik Elhenawy</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Ecuador	1. 1. 1993	Andrássy út 20.1/2. 1061 Budapest Hungary	<b>Maria del Carmen González Cabal</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Estonia	1. 1. 1993	Wohlebengasse 9/12 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Rein Oidekivi</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	-	Boothstrasse 20a D-12207 Berlin Germany	<b>Yohannes Shode Didawa</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of the Philippines	1. 1. 1993	Laurenzerberg 2/II/ZWG A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Maria Zeneida Angara Collinston</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Finland	1. 1. 1993	Hellichova 1 118 00 Prague Czech republic	<b>Helena Elisabet Tuuri</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The French Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 7 812 83 Bratislava 1	<b>Christophe Léonzi</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The republic of the Gambia	18. 8. 1995	Avenue F. D. Roosevelt 126 1050 Brussels Belgium	<b>Teneng Mba Jaitèh</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Ghana	-	V Tišine 718/4 160 00 Prague Czech republic	<b>S.Z. Okaikou</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Georgia	25. 11. 1993	Michalská 9 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Revaz Gachechiladze</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: June 8, 2016
The Republic of Guatemala	15. 4. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/ Top7 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Antonio Roberto Castellanos López</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Guinea	16. 3. 1993	Jägerstrasse 67-69 DE-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Mamadou Bouliwel Sou</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Guinea-Bissau	-	Kronenstrasse 72 DE-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Malam Djassi</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Hellenic Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 4 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Maria Louisa Marinakis</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of the Netherlands	1. 1. 1993	Fraňa Kráľa 5 811 05 Bratislava 1	<b>Richard Van Rijssen</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Honduras		Cuxhavener Strasse 14 DE-10555 Berlin Germany	
The Republic of Croatia	1. 1. 1993	Mišíkova 21 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Jakša Muljačić</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of India	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 4 811 08 Bratislava	<b>Param Jit Mann</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The republic of Indonesia	1. 1. 1993	Brnianska 31 811 04 Bratislava 1	<b>Djumantoro Purwokoputro Purbo</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Iraq	1. 1. 1993	Radvanská 15 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Mohamed Hakiem Abd Ali Hamza Al-Robaiee</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Islamic Republic of Iran	1. 1. 1993	Jauresgasse 9 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Ebadollah Molaie</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Anne-Marie Callan</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Iceland	1. 1. 1993	Naglergasse 2/3/8 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Þórhður Ingi Gudmundsson</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The State of Israel	1. 1. 1993	Slávičie údolie 106 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Zvi Aviner Vapni</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Jamaica	1. 1. 1993	Schmargendorfer Strasse 32 D-12159 Berlin Germany	<b>Margaret Ann Louise Jobson</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
Japan	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné nám. 2 813 27 Bratislava	<b>Jun Shimmi</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: June 8, 2016
The Republic of Yemen	1. 1. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 18 – 20 1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Samy Al-Basha</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	3. 3. 1993	Rennweg 17/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Hussam Abdullah Ghodayeh Al Hussein</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of South Africa	1. 1. 1993	Sandgasse 33 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Tebogo Joseph Seokolo</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of Cambodia	-	Benjamin-Vogelsdorf Str. 2 D-13187 Berlin Germany	<b>Thai Chun</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Cameroon	-	Ulmenallee 32 D-14050 Berlin Germany	
Canada	1. 1. 1993	Laurenzerberg 2 A-1010 Vienna Austria  Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Mark Bailey</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>  <b>John von Kaufmann</b> <i>chargé d'affaires, Bratislava</i>
The State of Qatar	-	Schottenring 10/Top 7a 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Ali Khalfan A.K. Al-Mansouri</b> <i>Ambassador</i>
The Republic of Kazakhstan	1. 1. 1993	Pod Hradbami 662/9 160 00 Prague Czech Republic Kancelária v Bratislave Gunduličova 6 811 05 Bratislava	<b>Serzhan Abdykarimov</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Kenya	1. 1. 1993	Andromeda Tower, 16th Floor Donau-City Strasse 6 1220 Vienna Austria	<b>Michael Adipo Okoth Oyugi</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kyrgyz Republic	1. 1. 1993	Invalidenstrasse 3/8, A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Ernek Ibraimov</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: February 4, 2016
The Republic of Colombia	1. 1. 1993	Stadiongasse 6-8/15 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Jaime Alberto Cabal Sanclemente</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

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The Republic of the Congo	30. 6. 1998	Grabbeallee 47 D-13156 Berlin Germany	<b>Serge Michel Odzocki</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Democratic Republic of the Congo	18. 2. 1993	Soukenická 34/1765 110 00 Prague Czech republic	<b>Albertine Kabambi Milebwe Musenge</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Štúrova 16 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Lee Tae-Ro</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Na Větru 395/18 162 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Kim Pyong Il</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Costa Rica	6. 10. 1993	Wagramer Strasse 23/1/1/2-3 A-1220 Vienna Austria	<b>Herbert Daniel Espinoza Solano</b> <i>Consul General, chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Cuba	1. 1. 1993	Somolického 1/A 811 05 Bratislava	<b>Yamila Sonia Pita Montes</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: January 18, 2017
The State of Kuwait	1. 1. 1993	Lodná 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Essa Y.K.E Al Shamali</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	-	Sommerhaidenweg 43 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Phoukhao Phomma Vongsa</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of Lesotho	8. 5. 1995	Via Serchio 8 001 98 Rome Italy	<b>Joseph Sempe Lejaha</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Lebanese Republic	1. 1. 1993	Oppolzergasse 6/3 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Salim Baddoura</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
Libya	1. 1. 1993	Révova 45 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Abdulhafid M.M. Benzeitun</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Lithuania	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Loreta Zakarevčienė</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Latvia	1. 1. 1993	Stefan Esders Platz 4 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Edgars Skuja</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	1. 1. 1993	Sternwartestrasse 81 A-1180 Viedeň Rakúska republika	<b>Hubert Wurth</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	1. 1. 1993	Kinderspitalgasse 5/2 A-1090 Vienna Austria	<b>Vasilka Poposka Trenevska</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Madagascar	16. 2. 1996	Koursovoy Per. 5 119 034 Moscow Russian Federation	<b>Eloi A. Maxime Dovo</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Hungary	1. 1. 1993	Nad Iomom 28 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Éva Czibalmosné Molnár</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Malaysia	1. 1. 1993	Floridsdorfer Hauptstrasse 1-7 Florido Tower 24.řl. A-1210 Vienna Austria	<b>Dato' Adnan Bin Othman</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Malawi	-	Westfälische Strasse 86 D-10709 Berlin Germany	<b>Michael Barth Kamphambe Nkhoma</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Mali	-	Novokuznetskaya 11 115184 Moscow Russian Federation	<b>Bruno Maiga</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Opernring 5/1 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Anthony Licari</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of Morocco	1. 1. 1993	Hasenauerstrasse 57 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Lotfi Bouchaara</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Islamic Republic of Mauritania	-	Kommandantenstrasse 80 D-10117 Berlin, Germany	<b>Mohamed Mahomud Ould Brahim Khilil</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
Republic of the Union of Myanmar	-	Kneza Miloša 72 11000 Belehrad Serbia	<b>Myo Aye</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Republic of Moldova	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/10 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Andrei Popov</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Mongolia	1. 1. 1993	Na Marně 5 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Bayarkhuu Erdenebileg</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Namibia	9. 12. 1997	Zuckerandlgasse 2 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Simon Madjumo Maruta</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Federal Republic of Germany	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 10 813 03 Bratislava	<b>Joachim Bleicker</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: August 17, 2016
Nepal	4. 3. 1994	Guerickestrasse 27 D-10587 Berlin Germany	<b>Prakash Mani Paudel</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Federal Republic of Niger	1. 1. 1993	Rennweg 25 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Gazing Jessy Napmwang Dangtim</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
Republic of the Niger	-	Machnowerstraße 24 D-14165 Berlin Germany	
The Republic of Nicaragua	5. 1. 1993	Joachi-Karnatz-Alle 4 10557 Berlin Germany	<b>Karla Luzetta Beleta Brenes</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of Norway	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Inga Magistad</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
New Zealand	1. 1. 1993	Mattiellistrasse 2-4/3 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Deborah Geels</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Sultanate of Oman	3. 3. 1993	Wahringer Strasse 2-4/24-25 A-1090 Vienna Austria	<b>Badr Mohammed Zaher Al Hinai</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Islamic Republic of Pakistan	1. 1. 1993	Hofzeile 13 A-1190 Vienna, Austria	<b>Ayesha Riyaz</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The State of Palestine	1. 1. 1993	Červeňova 15 811 03 Bratislava	<b>Abdallahman S. O. Bsaiso</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Panama	-	Goldschmiedgasse 10/403 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Paulina Francesci Navarro</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>

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The Republic of Paraguay	8. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/7 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Horacio Norgués Zubizarreta</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Republic of Peru	1. 1. 1993	Mahlerstrasse 7/22 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Juan Fernando Javier Rojas Samanez</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The republic of Poland	1. 1. 1993	Paulínyho 7 814 91 Bratislava	<b>Leszek Soczewica</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Portugal	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 16 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Ana Maria Coelho Ribeiro Da Silva</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Austria	1. 1. 1993	Astoria Palace Hodžovo námestie 1/A 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Helfried Carl</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Romania	1. 1. 1993	Tichá 45/A 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Steluta Arhire</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Russian Federation	1. 1. 1993	Godrova 4 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Alexei Leonidovič Fedotov</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Rwandese Republic	-	Jägerstrasse 67 – 69 D-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Christine Nkulikiyinka</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of El Salvador	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/2/1 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Ramiro Recenos Trejo</b> <i>Minister, chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of San Marino	1. 1. 1993	Via Cisono 27 48100 Ravenna Italy	<b>Severino Bollini</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	16. 6. 1995	Formanekgasse 38 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Abdullah Alsolamy</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Senegal	-	Dessauer Strasse 29/29 D-10963 Berlin Germany	
The Republic of Seychelles	-	Boulevard Saint Michel, 28 1040 Brussels Belgium	<b>Johette Stephen</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Republic of Sierra Leone	-	Rublevskoe šosse, 26/1, of. 58-59 121615 Moscov Russian Federation	<b>John Bobor Laggah</b> <i>Consul</i>
The Republic of Singapore	12. 2. 1993	MFA, Tanglin 248163 Singapore	<b>Chay Wai Chuen</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Slovenia	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 5 813 15 Bratislava 1	<b>Bernarda Gradišnik</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Federal Republic of Somalia	-	Simferopolsky Bulvar 7a-145 117 556 Moscov, Russian Federation	<b>Mohamed Mahmoud Handule</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The United Arab Emirates	3. 1. 1993	Chimanistrasse 36 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Abdelhadi Abdelwahid Alkhajah</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The United kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Panská 16 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Andrew Garth</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The United States of America	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo námestie 4 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Adam Harold Sterling</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

<b>Country</b>	<b>Start of diplomatic relations</b>	<b>Adress of embassy</b>	<b>In charge of embassy (LoC)</b>
The United Mexican States	1. 10. 1993	Renngasse 5 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Alicia Buenrostro Massieu</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Serbia	1. 1. 1993	Búdkova 38 811 04 Bratislava 1	<b>Šani Dermaku</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Democratic Socialist republic of Sri Lanka	15. 2. 1993	Weyringergasse, 33-35 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Priyaneer Wijesekera</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Republic of the Sudan	27. 7. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 29/5 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Mohamed Hussein Hassan Zaroug</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom Of Swaziland	-	Avenue Winston Churchill 188 1180 Brussels Belgium	
The Holy See	1. 1. 1993	Nekrasovova 17 811 04 Bratislava 1	<b>Mario Giordana</b> <i>Apostolic Nuncio</i>
The Syrian Arab Republic	1. 1. 1993	Daffingerstrasse 4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Bassam Ahmad Nazim Al Sabbagh</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom Of Spain	1. 1. 1993	Prepoštská 10 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Félix Valdés y Valentin-Gamazo</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Switzerland	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Alexander Wittwer</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Kingdom of Sweden	1. 1. 1993	Liechtensteinstrasse 51 A-1090 Vienna Austria	<b>Helen Edwards</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Tajikistan	-	Universitaetstr. 8/1a A-1090 Vienna Austria	<b>Ismatullo Nasredinov</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Italy	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 49 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Roberto Martini</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The United Republic of Tanzania	1. 1. 1993	Eschenallee 11 D-14050 Berlin Germany	<b>Philip S. Marmo</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Kingdom of Thailand	1. 1. 1993	Cottagegasse 48 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Arthayudh Srisamoot</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Tunisia	1. 1. 1993	Sieveringerstrasse 187 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Ghazi Jomaa</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Turkey	1. 1. 1993	Holubyho 11 811 03 Bratislava 1	<b>Hatice Ashgül Üğdül</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i> LoC: January 18, 2017
Turkmenistan	1. 1. 1993	Argentiniierstrasse 22/II/EG A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Silapberdi Ashirgeldiveich Nurberdiyev</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Ukraine	1. 1. 1993	Radvanská 35 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Oksana Kytsum</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	-	Mahlerstrasse 11/2/2 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Bruno Javier Machado Faraone</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Uzbekistan	20. 1. 1993	Pötzleinsdorfer Strasse 49 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Rustamjan Khakimov</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>

<b>Country</b>	<b>Start of diplomatic relations</b>	<b>Adress of embassy</b>	<b>In charge of embassy (LoC)</b>
The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/1/11 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b><i>Dulfa Dalila Hernández Medina</i></b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 15 811 08 Bratislava	<b><i>Hồ Đắc Minh Nguyệt</i></b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Republic of Zambia	5. 5. 1993	Axel-Springer Strasse 54 A D-10117 Berlin Germany	<b><i>Bwalya Stanley Kasonde Chiti</i></b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
The Republic of Zimbabwe	3. 3. 1993	Neustift am Walde 91 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b><i>G. H. Nyathi</i></b> <i>Counsel</i>
Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Kapitulská 9 811 01 Bratislava	<b><i>Alfred Prinz von Schönburg-Hartenstein</i></b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

## LIST OF CONSULATES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

### THE HEADS OF THE CONSULATES AS OF FEBRUARY 2017

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The Republic of Azerbaijan	Klobučnícka 4 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Džalal Gasmov</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Albania	Štúrova 22 949 01 Nitra	<b>Valér Husarovič</b> Honorary Consul
The Commonwealth of the Bahamas	Ventúrska 10 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Michal Lazar</b> Honorary Consul
The People's Republic of Bangladesh	Pod záhradami 41 841 01 Bratislava	<b>Štefan Petkanič</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Belgium	Moskovská cesta 10/B 040 11 Košice	<b>Dany R. E. Rottiers</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Belgium	Moskovská 13 811 08 Bratislava	<b>Bart Waterloos</b> Honorary Consul
Belize	Krajná ulica 56C 821 04 Bratislava	<b>Miroslav Strečanský</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Belarus	Osadská 679/15 028 01 Trstená	<b>Marián Murín</b> Honorary Consul
Montenegro	Mudroňova 3/B 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Rudolf Autner</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Chile	Klzává 31/C 831 01 Bratislava	<b>Jaroslav Šoltys</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Denmark	Bajkalská 5/A 831 03 Bratislava	<b>Michal Lörintz</b> Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Ecuador	M.R.Štefánika 58 036 01 Martin	<b>Ján Molitor</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Estonia	Tomášikova 19 82101 Bratislava	<b>Peter Pochaba</b> Honorary Consul
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	Bojnická 3 831 04 Bratislava	<b>Štefan Rosina</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Philippines	Cesta na Senec 15725/24 830 06 Bratislava	<b>Pavol Konštiak</b> Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Finland	Moyzesova 5 811 05 Bratislava	<b>Karol Kállay</b> Honorary General Consul
Georgia	Hlavná 24 040 01 Košice	<b>Franco Pigozzi</b> Honorary Consul

<b>State</b>	<b>Address of the consulate in the SR</b>	<b>Consul</b>
The Republic of Guatemala	Vajnorská 8/A 831 04 Bratislava	<b>Zoroslav Kollár</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Kingdom of The Netherlands	Košická 44 P.O. Box 21 080 01 Prešov	<b>Matúš Murajda</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Iceland	Palisády 39 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Otto Halás</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The State of Israel	Garbiarska 5 040 01 Košice	<b>Peter Frajt</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Jamaica	Porubského 2 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Marián Valko</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Kingdom of Jordan	Mostová 2 813 07 Bratislava	<b>Jaroslav Rebej</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of South Africa	Fraňa Kráľa 1 851 02 Bratislava	<b>Milan Lopašovský</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Kazakhstan	Ventúrska 3 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Štefan Rosina</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Kyrgyz Republic	Miletičova 1 821 08 Bratislava	<b>Tibor Podoba</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Colombia	AC Diplomat Palisády 29/ A 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Anton Siekel</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Democratic Republic of Congo	Kučičdorfská dolina 4 902 01 Pezinok	<b>Pavol Jánošík</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Costa Rica	Prepoštská 6 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Tomáš Chrenek</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	Panská ulica 27 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Bounthong Bounthong</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Kingdom of Lesotho	Slávičie údolie 31 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Dušan Blattner</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Lithuania	Cukrová 14 813 39 Bratislava	<b>Marián Meško</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Latvia	Krmanova 1 040 01 Košice	<b>Miroslav Repka</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Prievozska 4/A 821 09 Bratislava	<b>Peter Kríško</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Malaysia	Jaškova 2 821 03 Bratislava	<b>Igor Junas</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Maldives	Lazaretská 29 811 09 Bratislava	<b>Andrej Matko</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Mali	Mikulášska 3 - 5 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Eugen Horváth</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Malta	Palisády 33 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Martin Hantabál</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Kingdom of Morocco	Krajná 86 821 04 Bratislava	<b>Lubomír Šídala</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Moldova	Zámocká 16 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Antonio Parziale</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Republic of Moldova	Trieda SNP 39 040 11 Košice	<b>Ján Varga</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Principality of Monaco	Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Miroslav Výboh</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Mongolia	Národná trieda 56 040 01 Košice	<b>Peter Slávik</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
The Federal Republic of Germany	Timonova 27 040 01 Košice	<b>Juraj Banský</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>

<b>State</b>	<b>Address of the consulate in the SR</b>	<b>Consul</b>
The Republic of Nicaragua	Vrbová 22 900 43 Hamuliakovo	<b>Vladimír Kašfák</b> Honorary Consul
The Sultanate of Oman	Sasinkova 12 811 08 Bratislava	<b>Oszkár Világi</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Paraguay	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Martin Šamaj</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Peru	Tuhovská 5 831 07 Bratislava	<b>Andrej Glatz</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	Nám. osloboditeľov 1 031 01 Liptovský Mikuláš	<b>Tadeusz Frackowiak</b> Honorary Consul
Romania	Kapitulská 1 Banská Bystrica	<b>Ladislav Reháč</b> Honorary Consul
Romania	Nám.sv. Mikuláša 2 064 01 Stará Ľubovňa	<b>Marián Gurega</b> Honorary Consul
Russian federation	Moldavská 10/B 040 11 Košice	<b>Ladislav Štefko</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of El Salvador	Záhradnícka 62 82108 Bratislava	<b>Igor Moravčík</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Senegal	Kálov 655/10 010 01 Žilina	<b>Souleymane Seck</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Seychelles	Beblavého 4 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Andrej Hryc</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Sierra Leone	Partizánska 16 811 03 Bratislava	<b>Branislav Hronec</b> Honorary General Consul
The United Mexican States	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Václav Míka</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Serbia	Jesenského 12 040 01 Košice	<b>Eva Dekanovská</b> Honorary Consul
The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Peter Gabalec</b> Honorary Consul
The Syrian Arab Republic	Tatranská 1 841 06 Bratislava-Záhorská Bystrica	<b>Mustafa Al-Sabouni</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Spain	Hutnícka 1 040 01 Košice	<b>Daniel Lučkaníč</b> Honorary Consul
Switzerland	Vajanského 10 080 01 Prešov	<b>Helena Virčíková</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Sweden	Tomášikova 30 821 01 Bratislava	<b>Vladimír Kestler</b> Honorary General Consul
The Kingdom of Thailand	Viedenská cesta 3-7 851 01 Bratislava	<b>Alexander Rozin</b> Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Turkey	Kuzmányho 16 974 01 Banská Bystrica	<b>Vladimír Soták</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Turkey	Mlynská ulica 2 040 01 Košice	<b>Štefan Melník</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uganda	Ružová dolina 25 821 09 Bratislava	<b>Andrej Brna</b> Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Budovateľská 29 093 01 Vranov nad Topľou	<b>Stanislav Obický</b> Honorary Consul
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	Trnkova 46 851 10 Bratislava	<b>Milan Beniak</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uzbekistan	Business Centrum Lake Side Park Tomášikova 64 831 04 Bratislava	<b>Ľudovít Černák</b> Honorary Consul
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	Hlavná 70 040 01 Košice	<b>Rastislav Sedmák</b> Honorary Consul

## LIST OF THE EMBASSIES OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC, PERMANENT MISSIONS, CONSULATES GENERAL, SLOVAK INSTITUTES ABROAD

### EMBASSIES OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC, PERMANENT MISSIONS, CONSULATES GENERAL, SLOVAK INSTITUTES AND THEIR HEADS AS OF FEBRUARY 2017

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Abuja	Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon, Gabon, Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Mali, Liberia, Togo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Côte d'Ivoire	21st Crescent, Off Constitution Avenue, Central Business District Abuja, Nigeria	<b>Peter Holásek</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Abu Dhabi	The United Arab Emirates	Al Mataf Street No. 16, Villa 2 Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates	<b>Dušan Horniak</b> <i>Ambassador</i>
Addis Abeba	Djibouti Republic, Ethiopia, Central African Republic	Yeka Sub-City, Woreda 13, Kebele 20/21, House No.: P7 CARA-VIL Compound Addis Abeba Ethiopia	<b>Jozef Cibula</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Ankara	Turkey	Atatürk Bulvarı 245 06692 Ankara Turkey	<b>Anna Tureničová</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Astana	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	D.A Kunajeva 1, C 11 010 000, Astana Kazakhstan	<b>Peter Juza</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Athens	The Hellenic Republic (Greece)	Georgiou Saferi 4, Palaio Psychiko 154 52 Athens Greece	<b>Peter Michalko</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Bangkok	Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar	9-th Floor, South Sathorn Road 25 Bangkok 10 120 The Kingdom of Thailand	<b>Stanislav Opiela</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Beijing	China, Mongolia	Ritan Lu, Jian Guo Men Wai 100 600 Beijing The People's Republic of China	<b>Tomáš Felix</b> <i>chargé d'affaires</i>
Beirut	Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria	Weavers Center, 14th FL. Clemenseau Street, Beirut Lebanon	<b>Lubomír Macko</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Belgrade	Serbia	Bulevar umetnosti 18 110 70 Novi Beograd Serbia	<b>Dagmar Repčėková</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Berlin	Germany	Hildebrandstraße 25 10785 Berlin Germany	<b>Peter Lizák</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

<b>Embassy</b>	<b>Accredited</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Head of the Embassy</b>
Bern	Switzerland, Liechtenstein	Thunstrasse 63 3074 Muri b. Bern, Switzerland	<b>Andrea Elscheková Matisová</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Brasilia	Brazil, Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Surinam, Guyana	SES, Avenida das Nações, Qd. 805, Lote 21 B CEP 70 200-902 Brasília, D.F. Brazil	<b>Milan Cigáň</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Brussels	Belgium, Luxemburg	Avenue Moliere 195 1050 Brusel Belgium	<b>Stanislav Vallo</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Budapest	Hungary	Stefánia út 22 – 24. 1143 Budapest XIV Hungary	<b>Rastislav Káčer</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Buenos Aires	Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay	Figuroa Alcorta 3240 Buenos Aires Argentina	<b>Branislav Hitka</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Bucharest	Romania	Strada Otetari 020 977 Bucuresti Romania	<b>Ján Gábor</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Cairo	Egypt, Chad, Yemen, Lybia, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Tunisia	3 Adel Hosen Rostom P.O. Box 450 11794 – Ramses Post Office Dokki, Cairo Egypt	<b>Valér Franko</b> <i>Ambassador</i>
Canberra	Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua-New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	47 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley 2606 Canberra Australia	<b>Igor Bartho</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Chisinau	Moldova	A. Sciuseva 101 Chisinau Moldova	<b>Róbert Kirnág</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Copenhagen	Denmark	Vesterled 26 – 28 2100 Copenhagen Denmark	<b>Boris Gandel</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Delhi	India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan	50-M, Niti Marg, Chanakyapuri 110021 New Delhi India	<b>Žigmund Bertók</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Dublin	Ireland	80 Merrion Square South Dublin 2 Ireland	<b>Dušan Matulay</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
The Hague	Netherlands	Parkweg 1 2585 Den Haag Netherlands	<b>Roman Bužek</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Hanoi	Vietnam	12 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan Ba Dinh District Hanoi Vietnam	<b>Igor Pacolák</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Havana	Antigua a Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Saint Lucia, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago.	Calle 66, No. 521 Entre 5B y 7, Miramar, Playa Havana Cuba	<b>Ladislav Straka</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Helsinki	Finland, Estonia	Vähäniityntie 5 00570 Helsinki Finland	<b>Tibor Králik</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Jakarta	Brunei, East Timor, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore	Jalan Profesor Mohammad Yamin 29 Jakarta 103 10 Indonesia	<b>Michal Slivovič</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>

<b>Embassy</b>	<b>Accredited</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Head of the Embassy</b>
Kuwait	Kuwait, Bahrein, Quatar	Block No. 2, Street No. 16 Villa No. 22 131 23 Area Surra Kuwait	<b>Pavol Svetík</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Kyiv	Ukraine	Jaroslavov val 34 019 01 Kyiv Ukraine	<b>Juraj Siváček</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Lisbon	Portugal	Avenida da Liberdade 200 5 Esq., 1250-147 Lisbon Portugal	<b>Jozef Adamec</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
London	The United Kingdom	25, Kensington Palace Gardens W8 4QY London The United Kingdom	<b>Lubomír Reháč</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Ljubljana	Slovenia	Bleiweisova 4 1000 Ljubljana Slovenia	<b>Eva Ponomarenková</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Madrid	Spain, Andorra, Morocco	C/Pinar, 20 28006 Madrid Spain	<b>Vladimír Grác</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Mexico City	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize	Julio Verne 35 11 560 Mexico City Mexico	<b>Anna Gažurová</b> <i>Ambassador Designated</i>
Minsk	Belarus	Volodarskogo 6 220 030, Minsk Belarus	<b>Jozef Migaš</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Moscow	Russian Federation	J. Fučíka 17/19 115 127 Moscow Russian Federation	<b>Peter Priputen</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Nairobi	Kenya, Comoros, Burundi, Congo, Seychelles, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda, Tansania, Eritrea, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo	Jakaya Kikwete Rd., P.O.Box 30 204 00 100 Nairobi Kenya	<b>František Dlhopoček</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Nicosia	Cyprus	Kalamatas Street No. 4 Strovolos, 2002 Nicosia, Cyprus	<b>Oksana Tomová</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Oslo	Norway, Iceland	Thomas Heftyes gate 24 N-0244 Oslo Norway	<b>František Kašický</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Ottawa	Canada	50 Rideau Terrace K1M 2A1, Ottawa, Ontario Canada	<b>Andrej Droba</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Paris	France, Monaco, Algeria	125 rue du Ranelagh 75016 Paris France	<b>Marek Eštok</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Podgorica	Montenegro	Crnogorskih Serdara 5 81000 Podgorica Montenegro	<b>Roman Hlobeň</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Prague	Czech Republic	Pelléova 12 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Peter Weiss</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Pretoria	South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe	930 Arcadia Street Arcadia 0083 Pretoria South Africa	<b>Monika Tomašovičová</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Prishtina	Serbia (Kosovo)	Metush Krasniqi 7 Dragodan 10000 Prishtina Kosovo	<b>Lubomír Batáry</b> <i>Head of the branch office</i>
Riga	Latvia, Lithuania	Smišū iela 8 1050 Riga Latvia	<b>Peter Határ</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>

<b>Embassy</b>	<b>Accredited</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Head of the Embassy</b>
Rome	Italy, Malta, San Marino	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144VI/A00194 Rome Italy	<b>Ján Šoth</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Trnovska 6 710 00 Sarajevo Bosnia and Herzegovina	<b>Ján Pšeniča</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Skopje	FYROM (Macedonia)	Budimpeštanska 39 1000 Skopje FYROM	<b>Martin Bezák</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Sofia	Bulgaria	Blv. Janko Sakazov 9 1504 Sofia Bulgaria	<b>Marián Jakubócy</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Seoul	South Korea, North Korea	389-1 Hannam-dong, Yongsang-gu 140-210 Seoul Republic of South Korea	<b>Milan Lajčiak</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Stockholm	Sweden	Arsenalsgatan 2/3 TR, Box 7183 10 388, Stockholm Sweden	<b>Jaroslav Auxt</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Taipei (Slovak economic and cultural office)	Republic of China (Taiwan)	333 Keelung Road, Section 1 110 Taipei Taiwan	<b>Michal Kováč</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Tashkent	Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Kičik Bešjogoč 38 100070 Tashkent Uzbekistan	<b>Pavol Ivan</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Tehran	Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan	72 Moghadassi St., Niavaran St., 1971836199, P.O.Box 19395-6341, Tehran Iran	<b>Ľubomír Golian</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Tel Aviv	Israel, Palestine	Jabotinsky 37 P.O. Box 6459 Tel Aviv Israel	<b>Peter Hulényi</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Tirana	Albania	Rruga Skenderbej 8 Tirana Albania	<b>Milan Čigánik</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Tripoli	Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, Chad	Hay Al-Andalus, Gargaresh Street 3 km, Tripolis Libya	
Tbilisi	Georgia	13 Mtskheta Str., Apt. 23, 0179 Tbilisi Georgia	<b>Rudolf Michalka</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Tokyo	Japan, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau	2-11-33, Moto-Azabu, Minato-ku 106-0046 Tokyo Japan	<b>Michal Kottman</b> <i>Head of the Mission</i>
Vatican (The Holy See)	Vatican (The Holy See), Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144 00135 Rome Vatican	<b>Peter Sopko</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Vienna	Austria	Armbrustergasse 24 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Juraj Macháč</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Warsaw	Poland	Litewska 6 00-581 Warsaw Poland	<b>Dušan Krištofik</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Washington	USA	3523 International Court, NW 20008 Washington D.C. USA	<b>Peter Kmec</b> <i>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary</i>
Zagreb	Croatia	Prilaz Gjure Deželica 10 10000 Zagreb Croatia	<b>Juraj Priputen</b> <i>Ambassador</i>

**PERMANENT MISSIONS**

<b>Permanent mission</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Head of the Mission</b>
PM International Organizations Vienna	Blaastraße 34 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<i>Olga Algayerová</i>
PM EU Brussels	Avenue de Cortenbergh 107 1000 Brussels Belgium	<i>Peter Javorčík</i>
PM NATO Brussels	Boulevard Leopold III NATO HQ 1110 Brussels Belgium	<i>Tomáš Valášek</i>
PM OECD Paris	28, Avenue d'Eylau 750 16 Paris France	<i>Juraj Tomáš</i>
PM UN New York	801 Second Avenue 10017 New York USA	<i>František Ruzička</i>
PM UN Geneva	9, Chemin de l'Ancienne Route 1218 Grand Saconnex Switzerland	<i>Fedor Rosocha</i>
PM Council of Europe Strasbourg	1 Rue Ehrmann 67000 Strasbourg France	<i>Drahošlav Štefánek</i>
PM UNESCO Paris	1, rue Miollis 757 32, Paris France	<i>Klára Novotná</i>

**CONSULATES GENERAL**

<b>State</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Consul Genral</b>
The People's Republic of China	1375 Huaihai Central Road 200031 Shanghai	<i>František Hudák</i>
Hungary	Derkovits sor 7 5600 Békéscsaba	<i>Igor Furdík</i>
Poland	Św. Tomasza 34 31 027 Cracow	<i>Ivan Škorupa</i>
Russian Federation	Orbeli č. 21/2 194 223 Saint Petersburg	<i>Augustín Čísár</i>
USA	801 Second Avenue, 12th Floor New York, N.Y. 10017	<i>Jana Trnovcová</i>
Germany	Vollmannstrasse 25d 819 25 Munich	<i>Ján Voderadský</i>
Turkey	3. Levent Bambu Sokak No: 6 343 30 Istanbul	<i>Jozef Šesták</i>
Ukraine	Lokoty 4 880 00 Uzhhorod	<i>Janka Burianová</i>

## SLOVAK INSTITUTES

<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Head</b>
Slovak Institute Berlin	Hildebrandstr. 25 10785 Berlin Germany	<i>Viera Polakovičová</i>
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Slovak Institute Vienna	Wipplingerstrasse 24 --26 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<i>Alena Heribanová</i>

## LIST OF CONSULATES OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC HEADED BY THE HONORARY CONSULS

### THE HEADS OF THE CONSULATES AS OF FEBRUARY 2017

State	Consulate	Consul
Albania	Tirana	<b>Faik Dizdarii</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Argentina	La Plata	<b>Eduardo Kabát</b> <i>Honorary General Consul</i>
Armenia	Yerevan	<b>Gagik Vladimirovič Martirosian</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Australia	Brisbane	<b>Michal Horvath</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Australia	Melbourne	<b>Eugénia Mocnay</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Australia	Perth	<b>Pavol Faix</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Australia	Sydney	<b>Milan Neklapil</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Austria	St. Pölten	<b>Veit Schmid-Schmidfelden</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Austria	Innsbruck	<b>Jurgen Bodenser</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Austria	Linz	<b>Harald Papesch</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Austria	Salzburg	<b>Gerald Hubner</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Austria	Eisenstadt	<b>Alfred Tombor</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Bahamas	Nassau	<b>Isacc Chester Cooper</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Bangladesh	Dhaka	<b>Miran Ali</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Belgium	Antwerp	<b>Gunnar Riebs</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Belgium	Gent	<b>Arnold Vanhaecke</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Belgium	Liege	<b>Raffaele Antonio Apruzzese</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>

<b>State</b>	<b>Consulate</b>	<b>Consul</b>
Belarus	Vitebsk	<b>Alexej Syčov</b> Honorary Consul
Bolivia	La Paz	<b>Hernán Guido Vera Ruiz</b> Honorary Consul
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Medjugorje	<b>Rajko Zelenika</b> Honorary Consul
Brazil	Joinville	<b>Ernesto Heinzelmann</b> Honorary Consul
Brazil	Recife	<b>João Alexandre Neto</b> Honorary Consul
Brazil	Rio de Janeiro	<b>Mohamad Faïçal Mohamad Said Ham-moud</b> Honorary Consul
Brazil	Sao Paulo	<b>Peter Pauliček</b> Honorary General Consul
Bulgaria	Varna	<b>Edita Blagoevova</b> Honorary Consul
Czech Republic	Brno	<b>Jaroslav Weigl</b> Honorary Consul
Croatia	Osijek	<b>Ivan Komak</b> Honorary Consul
Chile	Santiago	<b>Paul Nador</b> Honorary Consul
China	Hong Kong	<b>Willy Sun Mo Lin</b> Honorary Consul
Denmark	Aarhus	<b>Claus Søgaard Poulsen</b> Honorary Consul
Egypt	Alexandria	<b>Mohamed Moustafa el Naggar</b> Honorary Consul
Estonia	Tallinn	<b>Even Tudeberg</b> Honorary Consul
Ethiopia	Addis Abeba	<b>Feleke Bekele Safo</b> Honorary Consul
Philippines	Cebu City	<b>Antonio N. Chiu</b> Honorary Consul
Philippines	Manilla	<b>Robert Chin Siy</b> Honorary General Consul
Finland	Teerijärvi	<b>Mikael Ahlbäck</b> Honorary Consul
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France	Lille	<b>Alain Bar</b> Honorary Consul
France	Strasbourg	<b>Christian Rothacker</b> Honorary Consul
France	Marseille	<b>Marc-André Distanti</b> Honorary Consul
France	Bordeaux	<b>Philippe Lorette</b> Honorary Consul
Grécko	Chania	<b>Stavros Paterakis</b> Honorary Consul
Grécko	Thessaloniki	<b>Konstatinos Mavridis</b> Honorary Consul

<b>State</b>	<b>Consulate</b>	<b>Consul</b>
Grécko	Patras	<b>Phaedon Couniniotis</b> Honorary Consul
Grécko	Pireus	<b>Michael Bodouroglou</b> Honorary Consul
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Guatemala	Guatemala	<b>Mario Fernando Montúfara Rodrigues</b> Honorary Consul
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Haiti	Port-au-Prince	<b>Claude Martin jr.</b> Honorary Consul
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India	Kolkata	<b>Pattha Sadhan Bosé</b> Honorary Consul
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Indonesia	Denpasar	<b>Jürgen Schreiber</b> Honorary Consul
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Italy	Napoli	<b>Franca Serao</b> Honorary Consul
Italy	Trieste	<b>Miljan Todorovič</b> Honorary Consul
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Japan	Osaka	<b>Shiro Murai</b> Honorary Consul

<b>State</b>	<b>Consulate</b>	<b>Consul</b>
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Jordan	Amman	<b>Khaldun A. Abuhassan</b> Honorary General Consul
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<b>State</b>	<b>Consulate</b>	<b>Consul</b>
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<b>State</b>	<b>Consulate</b>	<b>Consul</b>
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Russian Federation	Vladivostok	<b>Apres Voskanian</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
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Serbia	Niš	<b>Stela Jovanovič</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
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Turkey	Kusadasi	<b>Tevfik Bağci</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
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<b>State</b>	<b>Consulate</b>	<b>Consul</b>
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Ukraine	Odesa	<b>Muzalev Mychailo Viktorovič</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
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USA	Denver	<b>Gregor James Fasing</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Venezuela	Caracas	<b>Manuel Antonio Polanco Fernandéz</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>
Vietnam	Ho Chi Minh City	<b>Huy Ho</b> <i>Honorary General Consul</i>
Zambia	Lusaka	<b>Jaroslav Kulich</b> <i>Honorary Consul</i>

## NUMBERS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN PEACE MISSIONS

AS OF FEBRUARY 2017

Mission	Country	Number of the Slovak Armed Forces Members
<b>UN</b>		
UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus) – UN	The Republic of Cyprus	169
UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) – UN	Syria, Israel	2
<b>NATO</b>		
RS (Resolute Support)	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	42
NATO Headquarters Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1
<b>EU</b>		
ALTHEA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	41
EUMM	Georgia	1
EUTM	Mali	2

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**V.**

**AUTHORS**

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## AUTHORS

**Marián Čaučík** is the director of *Dobrá novina* – the Development Cooperation Program of eRko. In 1990 he co-founded the Christian Children Communities Movement (eRko) where he served as executive secretary and chairman. Under his leadership, eRko has supported development projects in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and South Sudan since 1995, and has become one of the leading development NGOs in Slovakia. He was a founding member of the Slovak NGDO Platform and served as its chairman and board member. He has been actively involved in setting up the Slovak ODA system. In 2015 he was an Ambassador of the European Year for Development. (maros@erko.sk)



**Dušan Fischer** graduated from the American Studies Program at Heidelberg University, and from the Program on Applied Security Studies at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. Since 2014, he has worked as a researcher at the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. His research is in American studies, NATO, and European and transatlantic security. (fischer@sfpa.sk)





**Zuzana Gabrižová** is the editor-in-chief of EurActiv.sk – an independent Slovak edition of the Paneuropean online media outlet EurActiv, covering EU policies in the Slovak context. Since 2007 she has been involved in EU-related reporting. She is a chairperson at EuroPolicy – an NGO focusing on expert publications and a stakeholder in public events on EU policies and legislative dossiers – and has been involved in various research and TV/news projects. She holds an MA degree in international relations and diplomacy. (gabrizova@euractiv.sk)



**Samuel Goda** works as a researcher at the Slovak Foreign Policy Association and as an assistant professor at the University of Economics in Bratislava. His research is focused on OSCE related issues, EU CFSP/CSDP, conflict transformation, crisis management, Latin America, and regions of Eastern Europe. He is a Slovakia's representative in the OSCE Network of think tanks and academic institutions. He also works on one of the SFPA's projects in Moldova: Gagauzian Modernization Convention – GaMCon. (goda@sfpa.sk)



**Miroslav Lajčák** began his professional career when joining Czechoslovakia's Foreign Ministry in 1988. He was Ambassador to Japan between 1994 and 1998, and later Ambassador to Belgrade, with accreditation to Macedonia and Albania, between 2001 and 2005. Before becoming Slovak Foreign Minister in January 2009, he served in the capacity of High Representative and EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina from July 2007 to March 2009. He was the mediator and personal representative of the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, in overseeing the Montenegro's referendum in 2006. In 2010–2012, he served as Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia for the European Union's External Action Service. Since 2012, he has served as Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. (kami@mzv.sk)

**Július Lőrincz** has been working as a professional journalist for over forty years. The former Yugoslavia was the focus of his interest in the seventies, and his interest there increased during the crisis years of the 1990s. He is the author and co-author of numerous interviews published in the newspaper *Pravda*, with important political figures of the region. In 2002–2005, he worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, at the Slovak Embassy in Zagreb. He cooperates on a long-term basis with various non-governmental organizations, especially in activities related to the Western Balkans. (julius.lorincz@gmail.com)



**Juraj Marušiak** graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University in Bratislava (1994). Since 1996 he has worked as a research fellow at the Institute of Political Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences. His research is on the history of Slovakia in the twentieth century and on international relations in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. (Juraj.Marusiak@savba.sk)



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**Martin Vlachynský** is an analyst at the Institute of Economic and Social Studies. He graduated with a degree in Economic Policy from the Faculty of Economics and Administration, Masaryk University, and a degree in Economics, Management and International Relations from the Graduate Business School, Aberdeen University. After several years in the private sector he joined INESS where he has been since 2012. His main focus is on economic competitiveness, business environment, European economic policies, and the energy sector. He currently leads the project Top20, advocating policy reforms to improve the competitiveness of the Slovak economy. (martin.vlachynsky@iness.sk)



# YEARBOOK OF SLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY 2016

BRATISLAVA 2017

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- publishes periodical and non-periodical expert publications serving to increase awareness in the field of international relations and foreign policy of the Slovak Republic and as a source of qualified information for both, the expert and general public;
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- stimulates the interest of wider Slovak public in the global events as well as a deeper understanding of the significance of foreign policy and its link to the domestic policy.

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