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***Summary***

**Slovakia and the Limits of European Integration**

Study for the project "Forum für EUropa"

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This study was conducted by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) for the project „Forum für EUropa“.

The aim of the study is to analyze and explain the underlying factors behind discernible Eurosceptic tendencies in Slovakia. The study considers two key variables that help explain the nature of Slovakia's preferences and behavior in the European Union. First, it identifies the nature of the country's accession process into the European Union and the nature of its EU membership that is marked by a number of limitations through the existence of several transitional arrangements for the achievement of full-fledged membership in the European Union. Hence, it focuses on a set of international factors that have framed and largely constrained the country's path into the EU and its place within it. Second, it assesses the degree of domestic politicization of the EU membership. In other words, it looks at the degree to which Slovakia's political parties have presented a differentiated set of preferences within the European Union. While focusing primarily on the attitude of the political elite, the study also presents a summary finding of public opinion surveys toward the main policy and institutional issues discussed within the European Union since the 2004 EU enlargement.

The study focuses on the period from the accession process to 2007. It does not attempt to answer big questions but rather through a case study of Slovakia's changing preferences within the European Union it strives to tap into a bigger debate on the nature of EU membership and the corresponding views on the limits of European integration. It combines both the analysis of the international environment and its impact on Slovakia and the analysis of changing domestic preferences of relevant political actors for Slovakia's role within the European Union.

In terms of research, the study surveys the elite views pronounced by Slovakia's politicians toward:

- key strategic issues of deepening and widening of the EU (institutional and policy reform, EU enlargement, EU financial perspective);
- key policy areas necessary for the completion of Slovakia's full-fledged membership in the EU (four freedoms of the Single European Market, the adoption of the euro, the extension of the Schengen area).

It also presents the available domestic and international (Eurobarometer) findings on changing public trends toward the aforementioned issues of EU widening, EU deepening and the completion of EU enlargement from 2004.

In conclusion, the study points to the fact that in the case of post-communist Central European states the EU accession assigned the overriding primacy to foreign policy goals such as the achievement of membership in the European Union. The strategic integration goal that achieved mass popular support left limited if any room for Eurosceptic tendencies. However, EU membership, contrary to EU candidate status, creates a new operative space for the formulation and execution of a country's public interests whereby the term operative space denotes the country's ability to assert its array of preferences. With the gradual transition from a status of a candidate country to its EU membership, Slovakia's ability to assert particular policy preferences has been enhanced. In practical terms this means that while as a candidate country during accession talks Slovakia responded to the evolving EU *acquis* almost exclusively with compliance or promises of future compliance, Slovakia as an acceding country and as a member of the EU responded to the demands of the EU with a variety of preferences.

The study argues that such preferences are most observable at the level of party politics. While Slovakia's government still plays the role of a "good EU member state", political parties have begun to differentiate on the basis of their respective attitudes toward the scope and the speed of the European integration. The study illustrates that the challenge of successful completion of the 2004 EU enlargement (such as the expected widening of the Schengen area and the Euro zone) together with the apparent mistrust of some older EU member states vis-à-vis the new ones create an additional impetus for rising Eurosceptic tendencies in Slovakia.