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Slovak Foreign Policy Association



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*Slovak Foreign Policy after  
the Elections*

Slovakia has been a full EU and NATO member for more than fifteen years. Membership of these two integration groups can be considered the basic starting point for formulating foreign and European policy strategies and recommendations.

In the current parliamentary term (2016–2020), the consensus on Slovak foreign policy priorities has disappeared and foreign policy has become inconsistent. Consequently doubt is being cast upon Slovakia's membership of the EU, and especially NATO, by several political actors (including some governing coalition MPs), and the importance of the EU and NATO is being relativized within the newly evolving international relations. The parliamentary elections in February 2020 should provide motivation to restore the consensus and that should be clearly supported by a majority of political actors.

The SFPA is the oldest foreign policy think tank in Slovakia and an impartial non-governmental organization that helped shape Slovak foreign policy through its analyses of the basis and future of Slovak foreign policy during two key periods: the turning points of 1998 and 2004 – the former concerned the fundamental direction of both domestic and foreign policy, and the latter Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO. This paper focuses on the period following the February parliamentary elections and looks at five areas (1. European Union, 2. Security, 3. Regional cooperation and relations with neighbors, 4. Eastern Policy and 5. Western Balkans) and covers the institutional issues determining the future development of Slovak foreign policy.

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# 1. European Union

## Current situation

The sovereignty of the Slovak Republic is based on its membership of the European Union. It enables Slovakia to participate in shaping the policies and regulations that underpin the functioning of the integrated Union. It differs from countries that are dependent on the EU: countries whose access to and ability to benefit from the EU is dependent on their having to accept EU rules without having a say in them. Slovakia is the most integrated Central European country as it is a member of the euro area, which puts it in quite a different position to member states that do not use the common currency, including its neighbors.

Nonetheless, Slovakia does not exploit this potential, or only to a very limited extent. Its efforts to shape the policies of the Union (from the position of policy shaper) are overshadowed by its tendency to simply implement them (as policy taker). During the post-accession period of 2004–2019, Slovakia was not a particularly active player in the EU – with the exception of the second half of 2016, when the Slovak Republic presided over the EU Council and introduced some of its own initiatives into the European debate (for example by launching the Bratislava Process for EU institutional reform). On average, the European Union adopts more than 1,000 new legislative acts every year and amends more than 500 existing legislative acts – in total around 1,500 legislative changes. By contrast the Slovak parliament (the National Council of the Slovak Republic) passes, on average, between 200 and 300 new laws, including amendments to existing laws, in each four-year term. Approximately 80 per cent of the legislation in force in the Slovak Republic is EU legislation. It is mechanically transposed and very often there is little interest in explaining the scope of the legislation adopted and its impact on citizens. Another problem is the insufficient number of experts representing Slovakia on EU committees and in expert groups, and those that do hold such posts are not well-connected with the ministries. There is also a lack of capacity to assess the effect of new legislation on Slovakia's economic interests, and Slovakia's positions are not sufficiently communicated to stakeholders. These problems have been underestimated by every government that has held office since Slovakia joined the Union.

There is no robust internal political debate on the kind of EU that is institutionally most acceptable to Slovakia, nor on the benefits the EU can bring Slovakia in terms of sectoral policies. Consequently Slovaks have problems

identifying with the EU as a “domestic” actor; instead the prevailing perception of the Union, or Brussels, is of a distant, foreign player. In addition to difficulties “mastering” European policy, Slovakia has long struggled with the so-called Slovak paradox: relatively high support for EU membership (and even the euro area) and the lowest level of voter turnout in EU elections in all the Union. If we continue to ignore the need for expert debate on sectoral policies, on the most appropriate institutional model for the EU, and above all on public participation in European policy-making, Slovaks will continue to feel alienated from the Union and support for membership is likely to fall. This could then be exploited by political actors engaging in disinformation campaigns questioning the benefits of membership and framing the Union in such a way that is likely to deter public support.

There is also the separate question of whether the European agenda should remain part of diplomacy to the extent it currently does. Neither the foreign minister, nor the ministry itself, has the capacity to effectively coordinate the whole European agenda, especially the sectoral-specific agendas. Some member states have brought the EU agenda under government office competency, which then coordinates the various ministry portfolios and reports to the prime minister or deputy prime minister. Slovakia could take inspiration from this.

Setting out its preferred integration model will be key to developing Slovakia’s European policy in the coming years. Slovakia is a small member state and so needs to consider carefully which model of integration is more appropriate for it: the community model or a deeper intergovernmental one. The government and other relevant actors should select an approach that goes beyond a single electoral cycle. That will require a cross-party political consensus and careful consideration of Slovakia’s foreign policy priorities. It is in Slovakia’s interest to prevent EU reforms that divide member countries into two categories. If the euro area reforms lead to the emergence of an exclusive club that determines financial rules affecting the EU single market as a whole and thereby non-eurozone member states as well without their participation, conflict between them and the euro area will increase. As no other Visegrad Four country is a member of the euro area, this would de facto lead to contradictions between Slovakia’s European policy and its regional policy, which would negatively affect our international position.

### Proposed solutions

- If Slovakia is to play an active role in the EU (and NATO), then it has to restore the internal political consensus on its European direction and most

important foreign policy priorities. Both the parliamentary European Affairs Committee and parliamentary Foreign Committee have integral roles to play in this and should make full use of their legal powers.

- Auditing our EU membership is an indispensable step in kick-starting Slovakia's proactive engagement in the EU and in raising public awareness of European issues. The membership audit should detail the benefits and disadvantages of EU membership for Slovak development over the past 15 years, focusing on analyzing the impact of EU legislation and policies on the development of economic sectors that are regulated by European legislation and the public sector. It should provide accurate data that will be important in the internal debate on the EU and, above all, enable us to identify Slovak interests and subsequently develop strategies for pursuing them in the European institutions.
- Slovakia needs to have a clear idea of how the EU should be reformed, including the euro area, and ensure this does not result in two categories of member state.
- Slovakia's ambition should be to actively contribute to shaping EU relations with major strategic partners, such as the United States, China and the United Kingdom, as well as with transnational groupings and initiatives.
- The public must be involved in developing Slovakia's position on European legislation and policies through the creation of an inclusive discussion platform from which the national debate on the Union and the priorities of Slovakia's EU membership can be relaunched. All relevant actors from the governmental and non-governmental spheres should be involved and the aim should be to formulate recommendations for the Slovak government.
- The government should strive for greater public involvement in decision-making on foreign and European policy through innovative participatory methods (e.g. regular citizens' consultations).
- Better coordination of European policy is needed. The move by some member states to make coordination of the European agenda a direct government competency may prove inspiring here.
- The new government should prioritize proactive, frequent and targeted public communication on the benefits of EU membership and on selected sectoral issues, otherwise it and its institutions will simply find them-

selves responding to attacks by domestic political actors who, for lack of information or consciously, question the foundations underpinning the prosperity and security of the Slovak Republic. Communication at the regional level cannot be left to the European Commission, its Europe Direct network of centers and other small ad hoc initiatives. Instead the government will have to communicate with and be available to citizens in the regions, for example through its regional offices. The network of thirteen Eurocenters in the Czech Republic may be worth considering here.

- An inclusive education program on the EU, its institutions and policies should be created for different groups of pupils. The way active citizenship is taught has to change so there is an emphasis on electoral readiness, Slovak and European institutions whose members are elected or appointed through public franchise, decision-making mechanisms and modern history, especially at primary and secondary school level. Otherwise, simple populist slogans from both the right and left wings of the political spectrum will prevail, and Slovakia will continue to have the lowest electoral turnout in the Union.

## 2. Security

### Current situation

International relations and global security policy have taken on a dynamism that is directed at revising the existing security system, as we have seen in recent decades. The distribution of power between the spheres of influence of the major players in world politics is leading to selective compliance and in some cases the violation of international security standards laid down in, for example, the Helsinki Final Act or the UN Charter. The already fragile confidence in international institutions and alliances is being undermined. It is becoming hard to read and predict domestic policy and the associated foreign policy of certain powers. Hybrid conflicts based on the latest means of communication are becoming more common than conventional ones, although they have not completely replaced them. Short-sighted populism is filtering into the security realm, where simplistic reasoning and an insufficient attention to detail can be seen in decision-making processes. The lack of trust in institutions, the decreasing transparency in decision-making and the lack of political will to cooperate in international relations have led to the return of decision-making along traditional security dilemma lines, an increase in armaments and a rhetoric promoting national interests. The Slovak Republic is part of the international security system and faces threats from both the external and internal environments. Nonetheless, understanding these separately would be a mistake.

### Proposed solutions

- Slovakia has to ensure its internal and external security policy reflects these changes while seeking to proactively shape international relations by defining its own security and defense strategy. The new security strategy has to be approved along with the ensuing strategy documents that must respond to the changing international security environment.
- Information security – the state's ability to counter disinformation – has to be a priority in Slovak security policy. The use of hybrid methods for conducting enemy operations means that we require a superior and multi-dimensional system for assessing security threats that originate in the external environment but remain unidentified until their domestic supporters and promoters are found. Attempts to manipulate the Slovak public so as to weaken the country's democratic institutions, security and

defense need to be carefully analyzed. Russian activities encouraging the dissemination of false information and misinterpretation of historical facts in Slovakia and the EU, are completely unacceptable as is active support for armed conflict, or undeclared war against neighboring Ukraine.

- Extremism and radicalism are the most visible threats and must be taken seriously. Given the current situation, the focus cannot be on prevention alone but must take also into account the response as well. Restoring confidence in the rule of law and the functioning of institutions is the main concern here. Coordinating this task is the responsibility of all the relevant actors – state security forces and other state entities.
- Systematically building up the capacity and material resources of the armed forces should be a cross-border priority, and decision-making should be based on measurable indicators and a strategic approach.
- The armed forces must remain an apolitical tool for implementing domestic and foreign security policy. Decisions on weapons, recruitment and coordination are political by nature, but the armed forces must not be exploited for political purposes.
- The Slovak Republic has to build up its defense capabilities for the reasons given above, mainly, but not only, as a member of NATO – the collective defense organization that is a key pillar of our security.
- Capacity building and wider awareness of cybersecurity should be a cross-border priority.
- In the EU context, the Slovak Republic should carry out a detailed analysis of its strategic engagement with PESCO, including the mutual benefits and commitments that stem from it. The EU and NATO have complementary security roles, and efforts to strengthen the EU's security capabilities should not form part of an attempt to replace NATO, but should strengthen the EU's position as both an economic and a geopolitical security actor.
- Slovakia should promote the principles of cooperative security through institutions such as the OSCE and the UN, as well as through multilateralism in general. Engaging in multilateralism in security allows the Slovak Republic to articulate its own national positions and contribute to the formation of broader security policy at the regional and global levels. Rejecting such an approach to solving regional and global problems presents a threat to the national interest.

- On security, Slovakia should take account of technological developments and be proactive on international platforms as regards arms control and disarmament, verification, transparency building, compliance with existing treaties and updating agreements that do not reflect the latest technological developments.
- Regarding long-term security, there should be an interministerial analysis of the activities of paramilitary structures operating on the fringes of the law and that appeal to children and young people, including proposals for cross-cutting solutions. It would also be a good idea to initiate expert discussions on a possible legal alternative to paramilitary units, under the remit of the Ministry of Defense and the armed forces.
- It is in Slovakia's interests to involve the general public in the debate on defense and security through centrally coordinated as well as decentralized projects targeting those who know little of the security threats, Slovakia's security priorities or the impossibility of being neutral in the current circumstances.
- The modernization of the armed forces and any criticisms thereof should be conducted away from party influence, and the debate should be returned to its professional level.

### 3. Regional cooperation and relations with neighbors

#### Current situation

Despite sharing a geographical location in Central Europe and similar development trajectories, especially with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, Slovakia finds itself in a different situation for a number of reasons. It is the most integrated V4 country in the EU, partly because it is a eurozone member. Structural differences mean Slovakia has to sensitively balance its interests in the EU and eurozone against its interests in the region. It is likely that Slovakia will continue to be in this position in the long term and so it needs to be properly prepared.

The Visegrad Group remains the most important regional initiative in Central Europe. Nonetheless, it is an informal coalition of countries interested in cooperating in selected areas, rather than a coherent bloc. The present differences in opinion over deepening European integration are not exceptional in terms of V4 history – despite the conflicting views, it has always been possible to continue beneficial cooperation and so it remains. For the V4 to continue functioning effectively it requires a low level of institutionalization, which not only enables greater flexibility, but also allows the Visegrad countries to hold different positions. All the same, the V4 is a multilayered type of regional cooperation, and this applies to the sectors involved and government representation and experts. It is necessary to distinguish between “political” Visegrad and “practical” Visegrad. The dominance of political Visegrad is evident in the growing visibility of the V4 prime ministers in Visegrad cooperation since 2015. The “practical” dimension is often more important insofar as benefits and functioning of the V4 are concerned, with cooperation taking place at the middle management level of the ministries, but tending to be less visible. Statements by some political leaders in the V4 countries accusing Brussels of interfering in member states’ internal affairs or even of “dictating” to them are toxic and detrimental to both the group’s reputation and its practical dimension, as are attempts to exploit the V4 brand for particular objectives. So far though, this has not seriously threatened cooperation within the V4, and nor has there been any real attempt at creating an alternative integration model in Central Europe.

In the past, the Visegrad Group has helped eliminate tensions in bilateral relations between countries, especially Slovakia and Hungary. It can continue to

play this stabilizing role, but that of course requires the continued support of all four governments. Despite the current status quo, with relations between Slovakia and Hungary considered good, we cannot rule out certain parts of the political spectrum in both countries developing an interest in escalating tensions over unresolved issues such as dual citizenship or historical disputes in the future. The Czech Republic has long been a strategically important partner. Poland's significance has thus far been underestimated by Slovakia, which – despite current difficulties in its relationship with the EU over some issues – is an important member state, and its importance will grow once the United Kingdom leaves the EU. The importance of the Visegrad countries is underlined by the economic dimension of cooperation: together with Germany, the V4 countries are Slovakia's largest trading partners.

Austria is an important neighbor economically and because it has the same institutional anchoring (it is in the eurozone), which enables the joint formulation of interests in selected areas or policies. However, Austria differs from Slovakia in terms of security identity (it is not a NATO member), recent historical trajectory and its inability to develop an effective regional cooperation model over the long term.

### Proposed solutions

- It is important to maintain partnerships with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland within the V4, as all three countries are natural partners, and Slovakia has built long-term, effective and beneficial forms of cooperation with them. By choosing a suitable proactive approach, Slovakia can come up with solutions for the whole region. Effective balancing Slovakia's priorities in the EU and its interests in the region remains a long-term challenge, especially regarding the V4.
- In terms of the future functioning of the V4, the practical dimension of cooperation is crucial, including cooperation at the level of middle and lower management of the ministries or strengthening contacts between experts from the governmental and non-governmental spheres. Political leaders should create the conditions for the further development of this dimension of regional cooperation. Any political attempts to exploit the V4 brand to achieve particular objectives should be called out and rejected.
- The weak institutionalization of the V4 should be promoted further as it guarantees the flexibility and viability of the group, regardless of any differences in attitudes between countries on some issues. Support for the

International Visegrad Fund should be encouraged as its grant schemes help to strengthen regional cohesion and develop the civic dimension of cooperation between the V4 countries and the wider neighborhood.

- To maintain the balance of interests within the group, more EU partners should be involved in cooperation with the V4. The emphasis should be on Germany, as it is the Visegrad Group's key partner, and on other countries with which the V4 has established ties (Benelux countries, Nordic countries, etc.), using the V4 + format.
- In the absence of agreement between all four partners, regional solutions using smaller formats ("V4 -") could also be promoted. There is no need to maintain group coherence at all costs; the weak institutionalization of the V4 means that, in addition to the potential for asymmetric V4 cooperation formats, parallel operations of the Visegrad countries can take place under several regional initiatives.

## 4. Eastern policy

### Current situation

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis that began in 2014 is a key factor behind the current situation in Eastern Europe, affecting the European continent and Slovakia's interests. Russia's annexation of Crimea – its use of military force to change borders – is an unprecedented violation of international law not seen since the end of World War II. Its support for the separatists in Donbas is both a continuing violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and interference in its internal affairs. Russian policy towards Ukraine has set European security back to the era of World War II. It is in Slovakia's upmost interests that the Donbas crisis should be resolved by preserving Ukraine's territorial integrity and dealing with the problem of Crimea. There can only be two acceptable ways of doing this: 1. returning Crimea to Ukrainian sovereignty, or 2. Russia and Ukraine agreeing, under specific conditions, that Crimea is part of Russia. Slovakia cannot accept the second option in the absence of Ukrainian approval. Resolving the Russian-Ukrainian crisis means making decisions about the future of Europe's security, including Slovakia's. The challenges posed by the Eastern European crisis underline the strategic importance of Slovakia's membership of NATO and the EU.

It is in our long-term interests for Ukraine to strengthen its security, restore its territorial integrity and implement reforms that will complete its post-Soviet transformation and transform it into a stable and prosperous European country that will integrate into the EU. The European integration of Ukraine will eliminate the “dividing line” of the Slovak-Ukrainian border, aid the socio-economic development of eastern Slovakia and balance regional disparities in Slovakia. Once the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU is implemented, Ukraine will become part of the EU single market, creating new opportunities for Slovak investment in Ukraine and mutual trade. The focus has to be on far greater support for cross-border cooperation with Ukraine. If we help Ukraine on its European integration path, we will be helping ourselves.

In relations with Russia, Slovakia's long-standing interest is for Russia to have a cooperative relationship with both NATO and the EU. However, that will only become possible if Russia's current foreign and security policy changes. It has to stop waging its information war against NATO and EU member states, stop undermining their democratic institutions and stop supporting extremists in European countries seeking to weaken them. Dialogue with

Russia is important because of its significance to European security issues, but we also have to learn how to tackle the hybrid warfare it is pursuing against European countries, including Slovakia. Thanks to the EU's common energy policy, Slovakia now has a constant supply of raw energy materials and is no longer dependent on Russian oil and gas supplies. This is the basis on which our policy towards Russia should be formulated.

The EU's Eastern Partnership policy is a key means whereby Slovakia can promote its interests in Eastern Europe. Fulfilling the objectives of the Eastern Partnership, and helping our partner countries achieve economic integration and political association with the EU, is in Slovakia's long-term interests. We should be supportive of reforms to the Eastern Partnership that will strengthen the Union's differentiated approach towards partner states and prioritize greater support for the three countries that have been able to conclude association agreements with the EU – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

### Proposed solutions

- Strengthen strategic communication aimed at the public regarding the situation in Eastern Europe, the challenges and threats posed by developments in the region and Slovakia's long-term interests. This is crucial for improving Slovakia's public information security, and should be coordinated by the Security Council of the Slovak Republic, as it exceeds the competencies and capacities of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. This will involve several sectors, including the public media.
- Slovakia cannot simply collect data on international crises that present an existential threat. During Slovakia's presidency of the OSCE in 2019, the foreign ministry implemented several measures to help resolve the Donbas crisis. At the EU level, this involved making sure Germany and France, representing NATO and EU member states in the Normandy format (alongside Ukraine and Russia), regularly informed other member states on the progress of the negotiations and consulted on their positions.
- As an EU member state, Slovakia should try to ensure EU relations with Ukraine progress in such a way that the Slovak-Ukrainian border no longer has a „dividing“ function and that it facilitates mutual trade. There is scope to support bilateral reforms in Ukraine, including through EU programs. Discussion should take place at the intergovernmental level on Ukraine's reform assistance requirements and Slovakia's capacity to provide that assistance. The outcome should be an intergovernmental framework document, specifically an action plan for assistance to be fol-

lowed by the relevant Slovak ministries. Much greater attention should be focused on EU programs that promote cross-border cooperation and how they can be used to develop cooperation on the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

- Slovakia should foster a dialogue between NATO, the EU and Russia, in addition to bilateral relations. It should be open and critical and set out in clear and unambiguous terms the unacceptability of Russian policy towards Ukraine. It is in Slovakia's long-term interests for Russia to abandon its current foreign and security policy and become a cooperative partner of NATO and the EU.
- Supporting the implementation of the Association Agreements of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia with the EU and related reforms is one of Slovakia's priorities and this should be clearly reflected in the way funds are allocated under the SlovakAid program to beneficiaries of Slovakia's official development and technical assistance.

## 5. Western Balkans

### Current situation

The Western Balkans is a region where Slovak foreign policy could bring added value thanks partly to the long-term support for their European prospects and engagement by Slovak diplomats, but also because of expertise on the processes ongoing in the region and the countries themselves. Economic factors are also important, as are the continuing historical social ties, the cultural, linguistic and even geographical proximity (despite none of the countries being direct neighbors of Slovakia), not to mention the existence of a significant Slovak minority in Serbia.

Since the Slovak Republic was established, its diplomacy has played an active role in the region – now comprising six countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia). Under the Bratislava Process, Slovakia helped foster agreement over the common approach of the anti-Milosevic opposition in Serbia and in relation to the dissolution of the Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Slovak diplomats have held important positions in UN and EU diplomacy, and Slovak politicians and experts knowledgeable on the Western Balkans are also visible in the EU institutions (the European Parliament and the European Commission). This is evidenced by the fact that back in 2004 Slovakia had embassies in Belgrade and Zagreb only, but now has an embassy in each of the Balkan states (with the exception of Kosovo where the Slovak Republic has a liaison office instead).

The Western Balkan countries are long-term beneficiaries of Slovak official development assistance. There are also a number of partnerships between experts in various sectors, government institutions and non-governmental organizations. But economic ambitions have not been fulfilled as expected, be they in relation to trade with the region or investments by Slovak organizations. Although Slovakia's population is roughly one-third of that of the Western Balkan region, its GDP is comparable to all the countries in the region put together. This shows the potential for economic development in the Western Balkans and untapped opportunities for Slovakia. The Western Balkans, especially Serbia, are also important sources of labor migrants to the Slovak Republic.

Slovakia has long supported Western Balkan integration ambitions regarding the EU and NATO. While all the countries in the region are interested in European integration, the same does not apply to NATO. Serbia, the

largest country in the Western Balkans, is currently opposed to NATO membership. However, that does not mean that Slovak diplomacy should not be active in this area (for example, the Slovak Embassy in Belgrade was the NATO Liaison Office in 2013). The fact that Slovakia, along with four other EU members, does not recognize Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence is not a major obstacle to promoting the region's interest in European integration, nor does it hinder the development of bilateral relations with Kosovo, including at the political level. The challenge for Slovakia and other like-minded member states is to maintain support for the integration process in the Western Balkans and to persuade EU member states that want enlargement policy or integration to be conditional on EU reforms for example.

Besides the bilateral and European dimension, Slovakia employs the regional dimension in its Western Balkans policy, with the emphasis on the V4. Although the V4 is well-received in the Western Balkans, its ability to influence enlargement policy is somewhat limited. Coalitions with other member states that clearly support the integration process are therefore of added value. Another limiting factor is the fact that Slovakia does not participate in the Berlin Process, which is perhaps the most influential initiative by a group of EU member states vis-à-vis the Western Balkans.

### Proposed solutions

- It remains crucial for Slovakia Foreign policy to be aimed at the Western Balkans. The foreign ministry should try to forge closer ties between experts on the Western Balkans and experts on enlargement policy through regular, or at least, ad hoc meetings. Consultation invitations should be extended to MEPs and non-governmental experts as well as Slovak diplomats working in the region and at headquarters.
- Despite many years having now passed since Slovakia's experience of EU integration, it can still be offered up as a useful resource, particularly now that our integration know-how is bolstered by experience of working within the EU institutions. Long-term staff continuity is another advantage, with several experts who participated in the accession talks now working in the European institutions. The National Convention on the EU, which encompasses Slovakia's know-how, is another means of sharing this experience and bringing together experts. Moreover, it is highly regarded in the Western Balkans region. There are problems ensuring funding continues in each of the countries, but these could be resolved if linked to larger programs or EU instruments for use in connection

with the Western Balkans (the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance among others).

- Slovakia is unlikely to change its position on Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. Nonetheless, to support Kosovo's integration and strengthen relations with Pristina, the government should create the conditions for Kosovo to be informally represented in Slovakia (following the model Greece implemented some time ago).
- Slovakia should be more active in building coalitions of countries that support Western Balkan integration in the EU. In addition to the Visegrad dimension – which is important – Slovakia should also try to co-create larger coalitions of like-minded countries. There is also the possibility of engaging fully in the process on the basis of bilateral consultations with countries participating in the Berlin Process.

## 6. Institutional affairs

### Current situation

Since its establishment in 1993, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs has undergone several organizational changes – either in response to Slovakia’s changing foreign policy agenda or at the behest of new ministers. The ministry last revised its organizational chart in 2017, and the current institutional structure – with its different sections and departments – has existed for almost 10 years. Nonetheless it largely reflects the key priority topics of Slovakia’s foreign and European policy, and the diplomatic capacities that need concentrating on. The ministry has yet to complete its most wide-ranging institutional reforms. Initiated in 2006 and known as TREFA, the aim is to align the organizational structure and work of the ministry, including the embassies, with foreign policy planning. The project draws on the management model of the Danish foreign ministry and is based on a comprehensive audit of processes and management. However, no foreign minister since 2008 has continued with these complex institutional reforms based on auditing of processes and strategic foreign policy planning.

In terms of expertise the ministry ranks highly among all the ministries and has the lowest staff turnover. This is mainly due to the higher salaries. When staff are seconded to diplomatic missions abroad, their salaries are indexed and they come higher on the payscale than officials in other ministries. With the growing number of diplomats who have held ambassador posts or senior diplomatic positions abroad, the ministry’s professional capacity is also improving. Nevertheless, there is scope for further changes to the ministry that would enhance Slovak diplomacy.

### Proposed solutions

- A comprehensive audit of management processes and activities should be carried out to streamline the activities of the ministry in line with the medium-term strategic objectives of Slovak foreign policy at the very least. Auditing these strategic objectives will enable the ministry to determine whether its existing organizational and management structures reflect the current and long-term interests of Slovak foreign policy or whether further institutional reform is needed.

- The greatest scope lies in foreign policy planning: there is no medium-term or long-term planning. The ministry produces an annual report on the fulfillment of foreign policy tasks and task-setting for the forthcoming year. This is short-term planning at a minimum and hence does not adequately capture Slovakia's medium and long-term outlook. The last medium-term foreign policy strategy (with 2015 as its horizon) was adopted in 2004. Since then, the ministry has not produced a longer term strategy.
- The status of the Department of Analysis and Planning (ANAP), which should be the "brains" of the ministry, does not reflect its importance in the effective implementation of Slovak foreign policy. The ministry requires a planning department that is capable of fully processing information and connecting up the different foreign policy agendas. It should be a specialist planning department that sits higher up in the ministry's organizational structure than the sections do and that reports directly to senior management on foreign policy decisions. It should be sufficiently staffed with experts capable of assessing the information and making recommendations for the medium-term at the very least. Its staff should be based at the ministry and not posted to overseas diplomatic missions for longer periods (more than 4–5 years). They should represent the very best of the ministry's analysts and motivated to work at the department by better personnel assessments.
- Foreign policy planning should be improved through better and more effective cooperation mechanisms between the ministry and the expert public, universities and specialist non-governmental institutions working on applied research in international relations. The ministry grant scheme is not sufficient for attracting the required outside expertise for foreign policy planning. The ministry should enter into agreement with the education ministry to set up a special program for supporting applied research in international relations that the ministry can then draw on for foreign policy planning purposes.
- It is important for diplomatic staff to have subject or regional specialisms in the priority areas of foreign policy. On their return from a diplomatic mission, former diplomats or ambassadors with expertise in a particular subject or country are employed by a department at headquarters that specializes in a completely different subject or region. This is a waste of human resources as that department cannot then benefit from the knowledge and experience acquired on diplomatic missions. Diplomats should specialize in particular subjects and/or regions, and their roles at headquarters and on diplomatic missions should correspond so they can

build on their expertise and thereby contribute better to Slovak foreign policy-making.

- The ministry should be much more open and accessible in public debate. Staff should engage far more in public discourse on Slovak foreign policy related to key international relations topics that attract public interest. They have the expertise and knowledge to contribute significantly to public awareness and debates on Slovakia's foreign policy interests.
- The ministry should make more active use of existing economic diplomacy in economic diplomacy and coordinate its use with other sectors.
- The ministry should also continually increase the budget for development cooperation and humanitarian aid and become more involved in joint EU programming in these areas.
- Particular attention should be paid to systematically expanding cultural diplomacy and the recruitment of cultural diplomats, as culture is an indispensable means of disseminating a positive image of the country and society.