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# **SLOVAKIA'S SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY**

**U.S.-Slovakia Action Commission**  
Security and Foreign Policy Working Group

*Policy Report*

CSIS Eastern Europe Project  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association

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# Preface

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) in Bratislava started a series of Slovak-American security roundtables in 1997. On the basis of this collaboration, CSIS and the SFPA initiated in November 2000 the creation of the U.S.-Slovakia Action Commission, which consisted of the following three working groups: business conditions, banking reform, and security and foreign policy.

The start-up of the commission during 2000 was marked by measurable progress. Commission members and staff have held 75 working meetings in Bratislava and Washington, D.C. Practical recommendations were submitted to the Slovak government in the areas of economics, security, and foreign policy. The commission's three working groups involve leaders of top U.S. and Slovak banks and businesses and respected foreign and security policy experts.

Meetings of the Security and Foreign Policy Working Group brought together U.S. and Slovak security and foreign policy experts and officials who deliberated on the challenges to European security, the roles of the United States, Slovakia, NATO, and the EU, and regional Central-East European issues at the beginning of the new millennium. This U.S.-Slovakia Action Commission Policy Paper on Slovakia's security and foreign policy strategy represents a product of these joint efforts.

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## **Introduction: Strategic Overview**

### ***Importance of the Central European Region***

Central Europe is the strategic core of the continent. Historically, demographically, territorially, and politically, developments in Central Europe have had a profound impact on the stability of the continent as a whole. During the past decade Central Europe, led principally by Germany, has gained even greater importance as the engine of European integration and economic growth. Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the demise of Communist rule have expanded the scope and potential of Central Europe. The successful pursuit of political and economic transformation in the four post-Communist Central European states of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, has become critical for durable regional security and economic development. A parallel process of political reform, economic restructuring, and accession to the major pan-European institutions for all four “Visegrád” states remains essential for the completion of the process of continental integration.

### ***Regional Initiatives***

Central Europe is a compact geographical region, but it is very heterogeneous ethnically, culturally, and confessionally. These ethnic differences have been the source of many tensions and conflicts, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century the political representatives of the Central European countries are finding greater political will for cooperation and integration. At the beginning of the 1990s, a noninstitutional form of cooperation was created, called the Visegrád Three, named after the place of its origin in Hungary. Three of the most advanced post-Communist countries, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, became members of this forum. The Visegrád Three and its attendant political cooperation made easier the first important steps in the region’s transformation. The three states collaborated in the removal of the Soviet army from their territories, made a common resolution to disband the COMECON economic network, and at a meeting in Krakow, Poland, in 1991 declared NATO to be the only effective political and security organization.

By the middle of the 1990s, however, Visegrád cooperation was stagnating for a number of reasons. The separation of the Czechoslovak federation meant a cooling of relations between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The completion of the Gabčíkovo dam on the Danube River and unresolved issues pertaining to the Hungarian minority led to the escalation of tensions in Slovak-Hungarian relations. At the same time in Czech politics the opinion prevailed, as expressed by Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, that any common movement of different states was inappropriate and that each country needed to find its own way into the European Union (EU) and NATO.

The political will to revitalize Visegrád cooperation was manifested again in 1998, when the prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary during their meeting in Budapest declared that there was a chair reserved for Slovakia in Visegrád in case Bratislava again pursued democratic reform and international institutional integration. The political change in Slovakia after the parliamentary elections made this possible, and in May 1999 all four prime ministers (Jerzy Buzek, Miloš Zeman, Viktor Orbán, and Mikuláš Dzurinda) met at a summit in Bratislava and declared that Visegrád Four (V4) cooperation had been restarted.

Many projects have since been initiated in the fields of defense, security, education, environment, and culture. The prime ministers, foreign affairs ministers, and defense ministers meet regularly. The first defense ministers’ meeting took place in Poland on November 4, 1999, with a discussion on regional security and cooperation within the context of Euro-Atlantic integration. The defense ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary expressed readiness to support Slovakia’s entry into NATO. An example of their cooperation was special consultations on the adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) within V4. The three V4 countries that first became NATO members were the most vehement supporters of NATO enlargement and Slovak inclusion, as this was perceived to be in their national interest. V4 cooperation also deals with many questions pertaining to “soft” security issues, such as the campaign

against international terrorism, illegal migration, car smuggling, violence at sports events, computer crime, and so on.

The countries of Western Europe also recognize the V4. Several EU premiers have attended its meetings, including German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, French prime minister Alain Jospin and British prime minister Tony Blair. Visegrád collaboration is a valuable example of effective subregional cooperation that not only reduces tensions between neighboring countries but promotes the creation of a stronger Central European organization that could be important for the EU in the future. Other examples of effective subregional cooperation include the commercially oriented Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA), in which Slovakia is an active member, and the Central European Initiative (CEI). Some CEI members are also members of NATO, including Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland.

### ***EU and NATO Involvement***

Member states of the NATO alliance and the European Union (EU) are keenly interested and involved in securing and stabilizing the Central European region. This has been evident in their decade-long engagement in promoting domestic reform programs and enhancing cross-border relations. Specifically, the two major continental organizations have supported the consolidation of democratic pluralism, the rule of law, institutional development, and extensive market reform in the region. Above all, the prospect of NATO and EU membership for the four Central European states has encouraged and accelerated the process of indigenous transformation as each candidate country has endeavored to meet the criteria for accession to both institutions. But while Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic gained entry into NATO by 1999 and became the frontline states for future EU accession, Slovakia fell behind its neighbors in the integration process during the 1990s. However, in the past three years Slovakia has made strenuous endeavors to catch up with its three neighbors.

## **Independent Slovakia**

### ***Historical Context***

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Red Army overran the Central European states. Slovakia, which had been a client state of Nazi Germany during the war, was reincorporated in a recreated Czechoslovakia. A coalition administration was formed, but in February 1948 the Communist Party with Soviet support staged a coup in Prague and imposed a Stalinist system on the entire country: Any prospects for Slovak autonomy were unfulfilled and became redundant as Czechoslovakia became a highly centralized Communist state in which all political opposition was extinguished and the Communist Party controlled all aspects of economic, cultural, and social life. In 1960, the country was renamed the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and the powers of Slovak national organs were further curtailed.

During the “Prague Spring” of 1968, several reformist groupings sprung up in the Slovak republic, including dissident intellectual clubs demanding greater recognition of national issues. In response to their pressures, in July 1968 the country was turned into a federal state consisting of two national republics (Czech Lands and Slovakia) by the reformist administration headed by Communist Party leader Aleksander Dubček. Nevertheless, the federalization of Czechoslovakia was primarily a movement for the democratization of the Communist system. However, the fact that the Slovak national Dubček led this attempt at liberalization became very important for a young generation of Slovaks stressing the importance of universal democratic values, and it enhanced the development of a democratic opposition in Slovakia against the unreformable Communist system.

After the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the federal structure was maintained, but the powers of the republican governments were severely restricted under the reinvigorated Communist monopoly, styled as “normalization,” which was implemented after August 1969.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, small groups of dissidents were active in Slovakia, although not on the scale of Charter 77 and other formations in the Czech republic. The impact of these movements proved limited. Greater public mobilization was evident during the trial of the "Bratislava Five" in the summer of 1989, when the persecution of five well-known dissidents stirred public protests. After the mass demonstrations in Prague in November 1989, the unrest spilled over to Slovakia and led to the birth of the oppositionist and non-Communist Public Against Violence (PAV). It consisted of intellectuals, reformers, and young people who sensed that the days of Communist rule were numbered. During the Czechoslovak "velvet revolution" in November 1989 and the rapid collapse of Communist Party rule, pressures began to increase in Slovakia for extensive democratization. Several newly formed Slovak parties also placed demands for sovereignty on the national agenda.

A structural and administrative division between the Czech and Slovak republics accompanied Czechoslovakia's transition toward a pluralist polity. Although the federal structure was one of the few reforms that survived the Soviet invasion and the post-1968 "normalization," in practice there was little decentralization of executive or legislative powers as envisaged in the 1969 constitution. Following the "velvet revolution," the federal authorities failed to regulate relations between the two republics. The Czech and Slovak federal authorities proved unable to curtail dissatisfaction in both republics with their respective federal partners, and the Slovaks eventually succumbed to Czech pressure for a speedier breakup of the federation. In November 1992, the Federal Assembly voted to disband the Czech and Slovak federation, phase out all federal institutions, and give the two republics equal successor status. On January 1, 1993, Slovakia formally achieved its statehood, and a few weeks later the National Council elected Michal Kováč president.

### ***The Imperative of Independence***

Slovakia was formally part of the Czechoslovak federation after 1968; before then Czechoslovakia was a unitary state. However, it was not possible to construct an authentic federation under totalitarian communism. The 1989 "velvet revolution" instilled in many Slovaks not only the possibility of a better and more dignified life in a democratic environment and a functioning market economy, but also the hope of creating a joint state of Czechs and Slovaks. Most political forces in Slovakia were against the centralist form of managing Czechoslovakia, although they differed in their political focus and in the formula for arranging the common state.

Reformist efforts after the fall of communism aimed at strengthening Slovak autonomy within the federation were not always supported in the Czech lands. After the parliamentary elections in 1992, Václav Klaus became the strongest representative on the Czech political scene, with Vladimír Mečiar as his Slovak counterpart. With Klaus wedded to rapid construction of a nationwide free market economy and Mečiar insisting on more cautious economic reforms and a confederal structure allowing Slovak autonomy, the stage was set for the peaceful but decisive "velvet divorce." However, the separation was arranged without a referendum in either of the two republics. The larger, economically stronger, and more internationally recognized Czech Republic, with Prague as its capital, could continue largely uninterrupted in its political and economic transformation. Slovakia needed to construct its own state and all the attributes of sovereignty, including an independent army, ministries, and courts. Above all, Slovakia had to start building its own foreign policy and diplomatic service.

In the diplomatic note of the Slovak government, which was sent to all countries in December 1992, as well as in the declaration of the National Council (parliament), Slovakia declared its willingness to accept all existing principles regulating international relations, to contribute to the process of disarmament, to strengthen its own democratic political system, and to ensure the application of human rights and the rights of national minorities. On the first day of its existence on January 1, 1993, Slovakia became a participating state in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). On January 19, 1993, it was accepted as a member of the United Nations (UN) and on June 30, 1993 became a member of the Council of Europe. On October 4, 1993, an EU agreement on association was signed by Bratislava.

The gaining of independence and statehood underscored the distinctive political and national identity of Slovakia. At the same time, the process of entering international organizations meant that a part of this sovereignty would be surrendered. It was up to the country's political elite to interpret and guide this process for the public either in an integrationist or an isolationist direction.

### ***Why Slovakia Fell Behind***

After gaining independence in 1993, Slovakia had excellent prospects for integration into NATO together with its V4 neighbors. The country displayed a reasonably stable economic position, although it suffered from a lack of political will to undertake more basic economic reforms. The readiness of the Slovak army for NATO accession was fairly advanced, despite the fact that it had to build new structures such as a General Staff and a Ministry of Defense. The military was comparable with the other V4 armies, and in some aspects even exceeded that of its neighbors, according to statements made by NATO experts and officers.

Slovakia disqualified itself from the first wave of NATO enlargement because of its domestic policies. The government of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, mainly after its assumption of power after the 1994 elections, took steps that contradicted the principles of democracy and the rule of law. For example, it barred the political opposition from any supervisory bodies in parliament, undertook arbitrary and nontransparent privatization, engaged in the persecution of political opponents and media critics, and promoted the arbitrary and nondemocratic behavior of the Slovak intelligence service.

These measures increased political and social polarization as tensions intensified between Prime Minister Mečiar and President Kováč, who criticized Mečiar's nondemocratic policies. Slovakia veered away from a Western orientation in its foreign policy and developed intensive political and economic contacts with the Russian Federation and other nondemocratic states such as Tudjman's Croatia and Milošević's Yugoslavia. As a result of domestic and foreign policy factors, Slovakia lost its credibility as a democratic country, and at the NATO Madrid summit it was not mentioned as a candidate for alliance membership.

Slovakia had three political turnovers after the 1992 general elections. The first turnover occurred in March 1994 after a split in the ruling Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) that won the 1992 elections. The intolerance of Mečiar's leadership style in 1992 and 1993 intensified the political crisis both in society and within the governing coalition. A number of members of parliament (MPs) left the parliamentary club of HZDS, which lost its small majority in parliament. The stopgap formation of a coalition government between HZDS and the Slovak National Party (SNS) averted a governmental crisis for only a short period. In a speech on New Year's Day, 1994, President Kováč denounced the government's policy and called for a broad governing coalition that could stabilize political conditions and improve Slovakia's chances of joining Western structures.

In March 1994, parliament voiced no confidence in Mečiar's cabinet. This led to a change of government, with former foreign minister Jozef Moravčík becoming premier. Early parliamentary elections were set for September 1994. The grand democratic coalition comprised five parties ranging from the center-right Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) to the Party of Democratic Left (SDL). These ruling parties failed in the general elections, and after a month of negotiations, parliamentary power settled around Mečiar's HZDS and its two coalition partners, the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS).

On November 3–4, 1994, in a late night session of the new parliament, the majority carried out what many considered to be an act of revenge for March 1994. Legislative acts and measures passed by parliament dealt Slovakia a severe blow in its democratization process. Only coalition MPs were elected as chairmen and vice chairmen of parliament and of all parliamentary committees, thus violating the principle of proportional representation. The same applied to top management functions in the electronic mass media.

An amendment of the Large Privatization Act was passed that transferred decisionmaking powers from the government to the Fund of National Property, where only representatives of the coalition were elected managers. The same was true for the National Inspection Office and the special commission for supervising



the intelligence service. The opposition lost its representation in the central organs of parliament and was deprived of any control over the Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS) and the state-owned television and radio networks.

The ruling coalition attempted to resolve the conflict between President Kováč and Prime Minister Mečiar by resorting to unconstitutional solutions. Parliament passed a resolution of no confidence in the president. The government then failed to investigate the abduction of the president's son and the related murder of former SIS agent Robert Remias. The removal of two investigators who claimed to have evidence that the events were tied to the SIS contributed to growing speculation that the events had common political origins. The SIS was misused for monitoring the political opposition, churches, and NGOs. The ruling coalition abolished the mandate of parliamentary deputy Frantisek Gaulieder forcing him to leave the legislature against his will after he left the HZDS parliamentary club. In spite of the government's promise to establish the constitutional rights of minorities, the Official Language Act of November 15, 1995, did not specify the right to use minority languages in administrative affairs.

Opposition parties decided to promote a petition aimed at holding a referendum on direct presidential elections, as there was a real threat that Slovakia would not have a president after March 1998 when President Kováč's mandate expired. The petition was successful and the president authorized a referendum with four questions (three on NATO membership initiated by the ruling coalition and one on direct presidential elections). The interior minister, who did not deliver valid paper ballots with all four questions, on orders of the government, obstructed the referendum. The thwarted referendum in May 1997 mobilized civil society against the Mečiar government, which led to Slovakia's third political turnover since independence. The ruling coalition failed to win the September 1998 elections.

### ***Reaction of Slovak Opposition and Civil Society***

The May 1997 referendum, despite being thwarted, had important domestic consequences. It forced opposition forces to coordinate their efforts and to take a clear standpoint concerning the most important questions of Slovakia's domestic and foreign policies. The five political parties that initiated the referendum on direct presidential elections—Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), Democratic Union (DU), Democratic Party (DS), Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS), and the Party of Greens in Slovakia (SZS)—established a political union called the Slovak Democratic Coalition with the aim of defeating the Mečiar coalition in the September 1998 parliamentary elections, renewing the rule of law, and enhancing Slovakia's chances for fast integration into Western structures.

Similar processes took place within the political representation of the Hungarian minority. Three Hungarian parties created a political union called the Party of the Hungarian Coalition. Another influential political force, the Party of Democratic Left (SDL), declared its readiness to cooperate with the Slovak Democratic Coalition and the Party of Hungarian Coalition with the aim of putting Slovakia back on track to democracy, a market economy, and the rule of law. The referendum campaign stimulated positive attitudes among the population in support of Slovakia's membership in NATO and the EU. The top representatives of Slovak military and business circles publicly demonstrated their disillusionment with Slovakia's integration failures in 1997 and their adverse effect on the country's security position and its economic conditions.

The chief of the Slovak General Staff, General Jozef Tuchyna, stated during the referendum campaign, "We have done so much to be prepared for NATO integration that our exclusion from the first wave of applicants could have several negative effects on the army. Professional soldiers will ask whether it was worth devoting so much effort, and people could start asking whether the money spent on NATO partnership projects could not have been better spent." Michal Lach, chairman of the Association of Employers' Unions, stated that Slovakia must fulfill the Copenhagen criteria in order to receive an invitation for EU membership. Peter Mihok, chairman of the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry, issued an unambiguous statement that "Any reluctance regarding Slovakia's EU membership or its missing out in the first round of enlargement means a risk for the state, its citizens, its economy, and its future and prosperity."

One of the consequences of Mečiar's authoritarian rule was the strengthening of Slovakia's nongovernmental organization (NGO)/nonprofit sector and of volunteerism, a unique event in the post-Communist world. In their size, variety, and sophistication, Slovak NGOs were comparable to their Western counterparts. In 1995, the Ministry of Interior registered 15,117 nonprofit NGOs. Of these, 9,967 were civil associations (societies, clubs, associations, movements, trade unions, international NGOs, sport clubs), and 1,678 were foundations. Another 2,831 were churches and religious societies, 231 were interest associations of legal entities, 123 were political parties and their organizational units, and 110 were professional bars and chambers.

From foreign policy, domestic politics, and social policy, to health care, economics, education, the environment, culture, media, the judiciary, and public administration, Slovak NGOs attempted to exert a positive influence on public policy by criticizing governmental proposals, informing citizens, and enhancing diversity and pluralism. They also organized activities related to democracy, such as campaigning, educating, protesting, monitoring the transition process, and attempting to hold elected government officials accountable to their fellow citizens. Slovak NGOs became instrumental in the country's democratic consolidation. During 1996, NGOs became more visible through the "Third Sector SOS" initiative. They organized an extensive and systematic public advocacy campaign to oppose a controversial law on foundations, led by an umbrella leadership of NGOs called the Gremium of the Third Sector.

Despite the fact that the campaign was able to obtain only small changes in the law on foundations, it significantly increased public awareness of the third sector. The governing coalition was forced to recognize the importance of a vital third sector because of the support extended to the campaign by the general public, by Slovak and international NGOs, by leaders from all opposition parties, by the president, as well as by representatives of foreign governments. An important shift occurred in 1998 in the impact of the third sector, when it entered the public policy arena.

Despite massive government propaganda against the third sector, the majority of Slovaks supported NGO involvement in the civic campaign "OK '98" for free and fair elections. The activities of NGOs participating in this campaign contributed to the high election turnout and to the strong electoral support for the democratic political forces. It can be argued that if it were not for the dozens of NGOs and hundreds of volunteers, as well as the participation of an unprecedented number of young people, the 1998 elections would have had a different outcome. The unification of opposition political parties and the mobilization of civil society because of OK '98 were two decisive factors that led to the victory of democratic forces in the September 1998 elections that placed Slovakia back on track for democracy and the rule of law.

### ***Renewed Commitment to Democratic Reform***

Despite the fact that Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) received 27 percent of the votes, while the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) obtained 26 percent in the 1998 parliamentary elections, the HZDS was not able to assemble a new government. The coalition of former opposition parties, led by the Slovak Democratic Coalition, the Party of the Democratic Left, the Hungarian Coalition, and the newly established Party of Civic Understanding (SOP), obtained a majority in parliament. They created a new government in October 1998 with Mikuláš Dzurinda selected as prime minister.

The new government launched a reform program of "national renewal" whose basic goals were: justice; freedom; responsibility; solidarity; support for the rule of law; respect for the division of powers; support for the initiatives and activities of the people; and opposition to greed, corruption, and tendencies toward the concentration of power and national wealth. The government also wanted to halt the economic decline and to create conditions for a rise in living standards, and to ensure the protection of life, health, and the property of citizens. In the international arena, it sought Slovakia's membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to place Slovakia among the first wave of candidates for EU membership, and to gain full membership in NATO.

Once the new coalition, which had a constitutional three-fifths majority in parliament, assumed power, it swiftly implemented various legislative measures aimed at rectifying some of the deformations that had

occurred in the previous period. The government began to implement the political and economic priorities included in its program declaration. An amendment to the constitution was passed for holding direct presidential elections in May 1999. Rudolf Schuster, chairman of SOP, was elected Slovakia's president in a two-round, direct vote and was inaugurated in June 1999. The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was applied, and its implementation became subject to regular assessment. The government created a pluralistic environment and thereby increased the quality of political life.

In May 2000, parliament adopted the Act on Free Access to Information, which had no precedent in the Slovak legal order. This law, which came into force on January 1, 2001, is based on the principle that everything that is not confidential is public; in this way the law brings the administration closer to the citizens. The government undertook decisive economic steps in privatization, bankruptcy legislation, restructuring of the banking sector, and supporting the inflow of foreign investment. Preparations for radical reform of the public administration and substantial amendments to the constitution were also initiated. Dzurinda's cabinet displayed its commitment to democratic reforms and significantly improved Slovakia's international position.

### ***Economic Developments***

The process of transition from a centrally planned system to a functioning market economy has decisively marked the course of economic development in Slovakia throughout most of the 1990s. Following Czechoslovakia's political changes in the aftermath of the "velvet revolution," Slovakia together with the Czech lands experienced a recession associated with the breakup of the Soviet economic bloc. Slovakia, as a constituent part of the Czech-Slovak federation, underwent major liberalizing measures combined with macroeconomic stabilization and gradual privatization of many small, medium-size, and large enterprises. Since gaining independence in 1993, Slovakia initially experienced a short period of high economic growth accompanied by relatively low inflation and a balanced annual budget and current account. Although the inflation rate reached 23 percent in 1993, it was reduced to 6.6 percent by 1996.

Similarly, the rate of growth went from a negative 3.7 percent in 1993 to a positive 4.9 percent in 1994 and 6.9 percent in 1995. However, this economic revival was principally export driven and short-lived. The level of growth was unbalanced, and the economy did not undergo fundamental structural changes needed for a successful completion of the transition. Slovakia's privatization also did not yield the desired results. Slovakia first applied the method of voucher privatization, and later, between 1994 and 1998, privatization consisted of sales to Slovak managers. The privatization program did not involve the emergence of appropriate regulatory structures nor the necessary funds and skills to achieve the successful restructuring of privatized enterprises.

Slovakia's unemployment rate remained high, and the level of foreign direct investment paled in comparison with the other Visegrád countries. This situation was partly a result of inadequate legislation and institutions. It also strongly reflected Slovakia's uncertain political developments during the coalition government led by Mečiar between 1994 and 1998. By 1998 the level of economic growth fell to 4.4 percent. Public finances showed serious imbalances while the level of foreign debt rose significantly. The unemployment rate reached 15.6 percent. Public dissatisfaction with the course of economic development and with a number of superficial reforms of previous years echoed strongly in the parliamentary elections of September 1998. The elections left the new coalition government with the onerous challenge of steering the course of economic transition.

### ***Relaunching the Transition***

As a result of the large macroeconomic imbalances, the new Slovak government imposed new measures aimed at economic stabilization. The Medium-Term Concept of Economic and Social Development was prepared in 1999, and delineated the priorities for economic development. They included a new approach to macroeconomic regulation and the recovery of the business sector and the country's banks. The government

introduced new liberalizing measures while trying to maintain a social safety net. As successful privatization represents one of the key preconditions for lasting economic restructuring, the new Slovak government began to address some illegal and nontransparent privatization decisions made during previous years. It also faced the challenge of privatizing the domestic banking sector and monopolies such as telecommunications, gas, electricity, water, and the health care sector.

During 2000, Slovakia took a major decision to privatize its telecommunications industry. It also made serious attempts to attract foreign investors. The investment by U.S. Steel in the eastern Slovak steelworks represents the most concrete result of government efforts thus far. In 1996, the plant produced 9 percent of Slovakia's GDP and 12 percent of the country's exports. In the coming years, U.S. Steel is committed to investing around U.S.\$700 million in the restructuring of the plant.

Slovakia's successful bid to join the OECD has helped to speed up institutional change. Slovakia became the thirtieth member of the OECD on December 14, 2000. In its 2000 report on Slovakia's progress toward accession, the European Commission for the first time described the country as a functioning market economy that should be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. Although much remains to be accomplished in the area of privatization, restructuring, legislative change, and combating corruption, Slovakia's economic transition has already achieved significant progress.

### ***Ethnic Minority and Social Issues***

The position of national minorities in Slovakia became an object of criticism by the European Commission (EC) in the mid-1990s. One of the official reasons why Slovakia was excluded from the first ("Luxembourg") round of EU (1997) enlargement was the treatment of ethnic minorities. At that time it was the position of the Hungarian minority that posed the main obstacle to integration. In the last census taken in 1991, 567,300 citizens identified themselves as ethnic Hungarians. In July 1997, the EC published a series of reports evaluating the applications of the 10 post-Communist EU-associated countries and provided recommendations for the December 1997 EU summit in Luxembourg. Although the EC found that none of the 10 contending countries completely met the economic criteria for EU membership, Slovakia was the only country that failed to meet the political criteria.

After 1998, following parliamentary elections, a significant change in both domestic and foreign policy took place in Slovakia. The Hungarian minority question took a positive course after the Hungarian coalition became a part of the government. However, several problems revolving around the Hungarian minority issue still await resolution; these include:

- Repudiation of any current validity of the principle of collective guilt for the alleged alliance of Hungary and the collaboration of ethnic Hungarians with Nazi Germany during World War II;
- Completion of the process of compensation for Hungarians in Slovakia, including private property, churches, and legal entities confiscated by the Communist regime after World War II;
- Constitutional and institutional guarantees for minorities through an amendment to the present constitution or through drafting a separate constitutional law;
- The passage of comprehensive minority protection legislation according to paragraph 34 of the Slovak Constitution;
- The passage of a law guaranteeing the use of minority languages in every area of life; and
- Implementation of the constitutional right of minorities to be consulted on questions that affect them.

In sum, the following areas require solutions: the use of minority language education; minority culture; and effective participation in decisionmaking in areas that affect the minorities at local, regional, national, and international levels. All these problems formed part of the international recommendations for Slovakia between 1993 and 1998. The positive changes after 1998 were manifested in the participation of the Hungarian coalition in the Slovak government and the passage of the Act of Minority Language Use adopted by parliament in 1999.

In the annual Amnesty International Report for 2000, Slovakia is mentioned negatively only in connection with the Roma minority. In January 2001, after long negotiations, the government agreed on the acceptance of the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages. In spite of the fact that the Council of Europe already adopted this charter in 1992, official Slovak acceptance was interpreted as a concession toward the Hungarian minority.

### ***Roma and Other Minorities***

According to available official statistics, around 14 percent of the people living in Slovakia have an ethnic background other than Slovak. Because most members of the Roma community opted for the Slovak or Hungarian “nationality” in the last census, an estimate of 20 percent of Slovaks belonging to ethnic minorities is realistic. In the last census of 1991, the majority of Roma opted for Slovak ethnicity. A large part of the Roma living in the regions inhabited by ethnic Hungarians, however, declared their “nationality” as Hungarian. Estimates of the percentage of Roma belonging to either of the two “nationalities” differ widely. At present, the probable number of the Roma population is between 420,000 and 500,000, or about 8–9 percent of the Slovak population, making them the second-largest minority in the country.

If the present demographic trends continue, in the course of the first two decades of the twenty-first century the Roma will become the most numerous ethnic minority in Slovakia with the largest proportionate concentration of Roma in Europe. Slovakia belongs to those European countries with an above-average percentage of ethnic minorities, with the Hungarian minority remaining the largest. However, in the last few years the issue of the Roma minority has become more acute. Countries including the United Kingdom, Ireland, Finland, Norway, and Belgium introduced visa obligations for Slovak citizens between 1998 and 2000. During the last few years, the Roma issue has been recognized as more than just a social problem.

Although most of the Roma who sought refuge in EU countries did so as a result of economic motives, many forms of racial discrimination have been present in Slovak society. Discrimination has been evident in different forms and has even included physical violence. However, a latent form of discrimination was the most insidious, for example, in contacts with the authorities, in their treatment in official health institutions, and in their limited opportunities on the labor market.

Despite the wording of the Preamble of the Slovak Constitution (declaring the subject of power to be the Slovak “nation”), the document affirms the equality of all citizens regardless of their nationality, religion, faith, or social class. In recent years, the government accepted several programs that promised to tackle the Roma issue. In 1998, a special authorized representative of the government for Roma problems was established, and in 2000 a Strategy of the Government for the Solution of the Roma Problem was launched. This initiative will require time, patience, and perseverance, and it is too early to properly evaluate its success. Other relevant minorities include Czechs, Ruthenians and Ukrainians (who live mostly in eastern Slovakia), Germans, Poles, Bulgarians, Croats, and Russians. Unlike Hungarians and Roma, however, the position of these minorities does not pose any significant political, social, or economic problems for Slovakia.

## **Slovakia's Foreign and Security Policies**

### ***Achievements and Failures***

Since gaining independence in 1993, Slovakia has had to confront three simultaneous challenges in laying the foundation of its foreign policy: to achieve international diplomatic recognition as a state, to build up the institutional basis for its foreign policy activities, and to formulate its foreign policy and security program. The fact that Slovakia declared itself to be the successor of the Czechoslovak Federation, rather than of the Slovak state of 1939–1945, was very important for the relatively rapid process of international diplomatic recognition. The civilized method of dividing the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in 1992 also had a significant impact. The diplomatic note that the Slovak government sent to other governments in December 1992 and the declaration of the Slovak National Council unambiguously declared Bratislava's will to accept

all existing principles regulating international relations, to contribute to the process of disarmament, to strengthen its own democratic political system, and to ensure the application of human rights and the rights of national minorities.

As a result of these factors, the Slovak Republic was internationally recognized as a sovereign state. On the first day of its existence (January 1, 1993) Slovakia became a state participating in the CSCE (later the OSCE). On January 19, 1993, Slovakia was accepted as a member state of the UN, and on June 30, 1993, became a member state of the Council of Europe. A further important step was achieved on October 4, 1993, when the European Agreement concerning association with the European Community was signed. However, Slovakia suffered from various problems deriving from the inexperience of a newly created state administration and an inadequate institutional base. It was able to construct the formal structures of its foreign policy, but proved unable to staff them with high-quality personnel and create internal conditions for the independent role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in conducting foreign policy.

The foreign policy infrastructure and cadres of the former Czechoslovak Foreign Service remained mostly in Prague after the division of the common state. The new Slovak structure had to be established virtually from scratch, although a Ministry of Foreign Relations was created in 1990, two years before independence. Otherwise, Slovakia obtained foreign facilities on the basis of a “two-to-one” distribution of the property of the former state and could open diplomatic missions in 53 countries, as well as 4 permanent missions to international organizations. But the “two-to-one” principle was applied only to real estate and not to employees of the former federal ministry. They were asked to indicate in which of the new foreign services they wished to serve. Most, including many “ethnic Slovaks,” chose to serve in the new Czech Foreign Ministry.

The undoubted foreign policy success that Slovakia achieved in the first year of independence can be attributed more to the favorable international effect of the peaceful division of Czechoslovakia than to the merits of Slovak foreign policy. After the evaporation of this effect, Slovakia began to lose its international position. However, the main factor was the loss of its political prestige as a result of the authoritarian style of the Mečiar cabinet of 1994–1998. In 1997, the first stage of independent Slovakia’s foreign policy ended in failure with the decisions of NATO and the EU concerning their eastward enlargement.

### ***Missing the NATO, EU, and OECD Trains***

The EU delivered two demarches to Bratislava in November 1994 and October 1995 expressing “misgivings about certain phenomena” in Slovakia after the 1994 parliamentary elections. The U.S. government repeatedly expressed concern about political developments in Slovakia to the Mečiar government and supported the October 1995 EU demarche with a parallel demarche to the prime minister. An embassy press statement following the U.S. demarche emphasized that progress in democratic and free-market transformation was the key to Slovakia’s acceptance into NATO and other Western institutions.

The Mečiar government’s domestic policies disqualified Slovakia from the first wave of NATO and EU enlargement. After this period (1994–1995) the government coalition, despite its optimistic declarations, realized that Slovakia’s chances of integrating into Western structures were minimal because of the style and content of its domestic policies.

The ruling coalition faced a difficult dilemma: on the one hand, a change in its domestic policies would mean admitting defeat; on the other hand, the absence of change would mean that Slovakia would lose out on international integration. The coalition decided to adhere to its former policy and placed its own short-term power objectives above long-term national interests. It was necessary to start persuading the citizens that Slovakia “did not need integration” and that the “Western model” of transformation did not reflect Slovak needs. Thus, a myth was spawned about the “Slovak way of transformation” at the end of 1995, justifying the failed policies of the Mečiar administration.

At the close of 1995, leaders of the HZDS’s coalition partners called for Slovakia’s neutrality. Controversies with the West brought Slovak officials closer to Russia as they received no “demarches on

democracy” from Moscow. On the contrary, they received full support and understanding from the Russian government. In trying to resolve a growing economic problem in the second half of 1996, Bratislava undertook a risky attempt to establish a free trade zone with Russia and propelled itself into a diplomatic “blind alley.” The EU and Prague expressed their disagreements over establishing a free trade zone between Slovakia and Russia, which could result in the abrogation of existing accords, such as the European Agreement and the Customs Union with the Czech Republic.

The results of Slovak diplomacy proved extremely meager. The Mečiar government was unsuccessful in making Eastern markets more accessible for Slovak products. Moreover, Moscow obtained what it wanted—a deepening of Slovak dependence on Russian oil and gas imports. The Slovak government rejected Russian proposals for establishing a common Slovrusgas company in 1995, but it could not do the same in 1997. Russia gained this without any compensation to the Slovak side in terms of trade. Slovakia’s dependence on Russia grew proportionally to its growing “independence” from the West.

The ruling coalition, in seeking to elicit a mandate from the population to justify its failed political dialogue with the West, decided to hold a referendum on NATO membership in May 1997 even before the NATO Madrid summit in July 1997. Despite clear declarations from NATO representatives that the alliance would not deploy nuclear weapons on the territories of new members, the Slovak government included this question in the referendum. Many observers regarded this as a deliberate attempt to manipulate the referendum so that citizens would say “no” to Slovakia’s accession to NATO.

Slovakia missed the NATO and EU trains in 1997. Compared to its three Visegrád neighbors, the Slovak Republic also lost pace in the area of economic cooperation with developed Western countries. Although the Czech Republic was accepted into the OECD in 1995, and Hungary and Poland followed in 1996, Slovakia did not become an OECD member until four years later because of the policies of the Mečiar government between 1994 and 1998.

### ***New Government Priorities***

After the parliamentary elections in 1998, a new government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda was formed. It consisted of four political parties: the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), the Party of Civic Understanding (SOP), and the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK). The new government adopted a program with the following objectives:

- Enshrine respect for life, justice, freedom, responsibility, solidarity, the rule of law, the division of powers, support for the initiatives and activities of people, and against greed, self-indulgence, corruption, the cult of power, irresponsibility, and tendencies towards the concentration of power and wealth;
- Halt the economic slide, stabilize the economy, and create conditions for a rise in the population’s living standard while building a competitive market economy;
- Develop a civil society in all aspects; and
- Gain membership in the OECD, place Slovakia among the first wave of candidates for EU accession, and gain full membership in NATO.

The Dzurinda government inherited a country in which political and economic reforms were obstructed and where society was experiencing many negative trends such as corruption, the growth of organized crime, economic instability, high unemployment, polarization, and tension. The administration set for itself the following priorities: the development of democracy, the protection of human rights and freedoms, enforceable laws, reform of the public administration, creation of new job opportunities, regional development, solving Roma minority problems, strengthening macroeconomic stability, continuing the privatization process, restructuring banks and enterprises, housing construction, a campaign against criminality, corruption, and clientelism, and emphasizing the process of international integration.

Several important strategy documents were issued, including ones focusing on decentralization, tackling the problems of the Roma minority, a program to fight corruption, a program of preparation for NATO membership, and one focusing on military reform.

### ***Slovak-NATO Relations***

During 1993–1994, opinions were voiced in Bratislava that economic and political developments could be separated. The example of the “Asian tigers” was often mentioned as a possible model for Slovakia’s transformation. The “Eastern alternative” became a standard part of Slovak policy following the division of Czechoslovakia, especially as the authorities came under increasing Western criticism of their policies.

NATO and U.S. leaders repeated the criticisms expressed by the EU. Washington admonished Bratislava for the policies of the Mečiar government, which threatened progress in democratization and economic reform and thus Slovakia’s prospects for crucial U.S. support for NATO integration. Developments inside Slovakia had significant international dimensions as they began to endanger the two most important goals of official Slovak foreign policy: membership in the EU and NATO. Many experts in Slovakia regarded membership in the EU as equally important to NATO accession. With no direct military threat, some analysts and politicians argued that the EU was even more significant than NATO.

During NATO’s Madrid summit in the summer of 1997, Slovakia was not only bypassed in the first wave of enlargement; it was not even mentioned (unlike Slovenia and Romania) among the most-likely candidates for a possible second round. Neither were developments in Slovakia an invitation for better relations with the West European Union (WEU), of which Slovakia had been an associate partner. On May 12, 1997, the WEU parliamentary speaker expressed discontent with Bratislava. Slovakia, therefore, faced a threat to its plans to become a member of all three Western security institutions (NATO, EU, and the WEU).

It was the political instability arising mainly from Bratislava’s policies and the resulting bitter political feud between the prime minister and the president that created a bad image for the country. In addition, Slovakia maintained extremely good relations with the Russian Federation, which occasionally aroused criticism in the West. Although neither the EU nor NATO openly condemned the close relationship between Bratislava and Moscow, it clearly became a source of concern.

The United States and NATO positively viewed the makeup of the incoming Dzurinda government. The new prime minister’s first official trip was to Brussels, to the EU and NATO headquarters, thus symbolizing the new orientation of Slovak foreign policy. NATO secretary general Javier Solana asserted after meeting with Dzurinda that Slovakia was a solid partner for NATO. But he could not set any concrete date for eventual NATO admission. Premier Dzurinda highlighted the argument that Slovakia had once been on the same starting point as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary for NATO accession.

Alliance representatives were reasonably impressed by arguments about the positive attitudes of the public toward membership and the compatibility of the Slovak army with Allied forces. They repeated the principle of the “open door policy” and confirmed this approach at NATO’s Washington summit in April 1999. However, it became clear that catching up on four lost years and reversing Slovakia’s exclusion from the group of leading NATO candidates would be much harder than was initially envisaged by Bratislava.

Despite the difficult international context, between 1998 and 2000, Bratislava began to repair some of the deficits. The door to Slovakia’s integration into the West was, still not open completely, however, by the end of 2000, following the December EU summit in Nice. Yet nor was it closed. Slovakia expects further evaluations of its activities and progress, including the positive results of reform in the armed forces.

In June 1999, the Slovak government reacted to NATO’s Membership Action Plan (MAP) by adopting the Program of the Preparation of the Slovak Republic for NATO (PRENAME). An effective coordination of this program has been supported by a resolution of the Slovak government in 1999. The NP MAP (October 1999) followed a specialized National Program of the PRENAME (NP PRENAME). In this way, an instrument for implementing the MAP was created, and conditions for monitoring from NATO’s side were met.



An evaluation of Slovakia's progress in implementing the MAP was made at the NATO-Slovakia North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting held under formula 19+1 in Brussels on April 20, 2001. NATO ambassadors judged that Slovakia had made significant progress in implementing the MAP over the last two years in the areas of legislation, communication strategy, security planning, and military reform. The Slovak parliament passed an important amendment to the constitution on February 23, 2001, which regulated deployment of foreign troops on Slovak territory and the deployment of Slovak troops abroad. On March 27, 2001, the Slovak parliament passed a basic document on the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic by an overwhelming majority. Eighty-seven percent of members of the Slovak parliament voted in favor of the document, which supported Slovakia's NATO membership.

The Military and Defense Strategy of the Slovak Republic is currently being prepared; it follows the Security Strategy and will specify in detail the concept of security and military reform in Slovakia. The Slovak government substantially increased resources for implementing the MAP goals in 2001 (up to 1 billion SKK). NATO ambassadors at the NAC evaluation meeting held on April 20, 2001 greeted these steps positively.

A broader national consensus was reached on NATO accession when the HZDS, the strongest opposition party in the Slovak parliament, declared its unambiguous support for Slovakia's NATO membership at a party congress in March 2000. For the first time, Slovakia's major political forces reached agreement on key foreign and security policies and viewed NATO entry as Slovakia's top foreign policy priority. Parliamentary debates and voting for the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic on March 27, 2001, proved that all major Slovak political forces endorsed Slovakia's bid for NATO membership, including the main current opposition forces represented by HZDS and the SMER party.

In order to develop a broad public discussion on NATO questions, during 2000, a Working Group for Public Opinion was established within the Governmental Committee for NATO membership. Four ministries (Foreign Affairs, Defense, Education, and Culture) have coordinated their activities with the aim of improving public understanding of international security and NATO related issues. Several programs were launched, including seminars for the pedagogical staff at primary and secondary schools, television and radio programs, and regional seminars. In 2001, a new program is to be launched in support of activities by Slovak NGOs aimed at enhancing public knowledge of international security and the role of the NATO alliance.

Despite the politically problematic period between 1994 and 1998, Bratislava's relations with NATO have deeply influenced the process of developing Slovakia's security and military planning as well as military reform. Slovakia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994, and Slovak troops took an active part in several joint exercises with NATO troops. Slovak peacekeeping battalions are deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosova, and the government opened up Slovak ground and airspace for NATO logistic transports to the Balkans during the Kosova crisis in the spring of 1999. This demonstrated the posture of Slovakia as a de facto NATO member. On the basis of an intergovernmental agreement, the U.S. Air Force uses the air base in Kuchyna in western Slovakia for its exercises. Military-to-military relations are well developed, and Slovakia's relations with NATO will continue to develop regardless of the decision reached on Slovakia's membership at the next NATO summit in the fall of 2002.

### ***Slovak-EU Relations***

The new coalition government that assumed power in November 1998 began to take a series of significant steps aimed at overcoming the political deficits of the previous government. These deficits were principally responsible for the fact that the EU did not invite Slovakia to begin membership negotiations after the Luxembourg summit in December 1997. Renewed domestic political stability coupled with a new attitude toward the Hungarian minority was complemented by extensive diplomatic efforts directed toward improving foreign contacts. In the context of Slovakia's bid for EU membership, two principal trends helped facilitate Slovakia's emergence from international isolation.

First, in its attempt to regain momentum in the process of preparations for the EU, Slovakia cooperated closely with the European Commission (EC). To foster Slovakia's efforts, the EC created a unique

institutional tool: the European Commission—Slovakia High-Level Working Group, which met five times between November 1998 and September 1999. Second, the Slovak leadership improved both the intensity and the quality of bilateral contacts with all member states of the EU. Prime Minister Dzurinda took part in 35 bilateral foreign visits prior to the EU summit in Helsinki in December 1999. The Helsinki summit marked a fundamental breakthrough in Slovak-EU relations, as the EU decided to invite Slovakia, together with five other candidate states, to open official accession negotiations.

The official talks began in February 2000 and provided Slovakia with an opportunity to catch up with the six candidate countries that started their negotiations for EU membership in March 1998. These six included Slovakia's Visegrád neighbors—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. In the course of 2000, Slovakia made significant progress toward the EU together with the other Visegrád countries. By the end of the year, Bratislava managed to close a preliminary 10 out of the 31 negotiating chapters in its accession talks. In comparison, Poland closed 12 chapters. As negotiations on more difficult chapters were beginning, the most important tasks for Slovakia were domestic preparations for EU membership. EU legislation and norms, running to 80,000 pages, have an enormous impact on any candidate state. In the past, Slovakia's primary focus was on the fulfillment of political criteria; now more attention needs to be paid to economic, institutional, and societal preparations for EU membership.

Apart from continuing with its economic transition, Slovakia faces several other important domestic challenges. On the institutional side, this includes the proper functioning of all ministries and effective coordination by those responsible for the country's EU policy. The adoption of new laws necessitates the creation of institutions and additional human and financial resources. On the societal front, it is the task of the political elite to prepare the Slovak public for EU membership. At present, around 70 percent of Slovakia's population supports the bid for EU accession. Nonetheless, the EU is a complicated organization and as such necessitates the constant education of the public. More broadly, enlargement poses a challenge not just to Slovak political elites and its population, it also requires the consent of Europe's political elites and the EU public.

### ***Slovak-U.S. Relations***

Slovak-U.S. relations dramatically improved following the September 1998 election victory of reform-oriented parties and the installation in October of Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda's coalition government. The victory of Košice mayor Rudolf Schuster over former prime minister Vladimír Mečiar in the May 1999 presidential vote further reassured U.S. policymakers that Slovakia was embarking on a democratic reform track. During a January 1999 visit to Washington, U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright told Slovak foreign minister Eduard Kukan that Slovakia had entered "the club of reliable and democratic countries." However, Kukan was left in no doubt about the U.S. view that Slovakia had fallen behind during the Mečiar years in its efforts to enter NATO and the EU and had substantial work to accomplish in order to catch up.

The Dzurinda government's democratic and pro-Western orientation also won a favorable reaction from the U.S. media and Congress, as well as the U.S. business community. In July 1999, Congressman John Mica introduced a resolution, later passed by the House but not the Senate, expressing the sense of the Congress that, based on Slovakia's democratic and economic reform course, its improved treatment of minorities, and its support for NATO's peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo, the United States should support "eventual integration of Slovakia into pan-European and trans-Atlantic economic and security institutions."

Productive U.S.-Slovak military-to-military cooperation, including financial assistance from International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF), intensified under the Dzurinda government. Trade relations and the business climate for U.S. investment improved substantially, culminating in the \$1.3-billion acquisition of the massive East Slovak Iron Works (VSZ) by U.S. Steel in October 2000. A technical assistance team from the U.S. Treasury visited Bratislava to help assess Slovakia's restructuring needs. Although the USAID program in Slovakia officially terminated in 1999, limited technical assistance and help to the NGO community continued.

The new U.S. administration predictably will continue to support Slovakia's democratic and economic reforms and its efforts to play a stabilizing international role in the area. Unless nationalist and populist political forces return to power, bilateral cooperation on a range of international issues will strengthen and U.S. investment in Slovakia will grow. The most problematic question in the relationship will be the U.S. response to Slovakia's quest for an invitation at the 2002 NATO summit to begin accession negotiations for membership. Slovakia will need to demonstrate that it has the national will and ability to meet its NATO MAP requirements and that its admission will contribute to alliance security. The United States can help Slovakia in this process, bearing in mind the negative political impact of a NATO rebuff in 2002 on the reformist government in Bratislava on the eve of general elections.

### ***New Threats, Challenges, and Opportunities***

One can distinguish between two sets of new security threats: military preparedness by the state or armed conflict; and other "crisis situations" of a greater or lesser magnitude in Eastern Europe that are resolved by legislation and that have been defined in the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic concerning civil defense against nonmilitary threats.

At present, it is possible to speak not about the absence of military threats but about their modification. The new challenges to security once took second place or remained in the shadow of the threat of nuclear war. The end of the Cold War in some respects contributed to these threats and challenges. However, the reasons lie much deeper. Many analysts are inclined to link the change in the nature of security threats to the course of global developments, characterized by a continuing technological revolution that penetrates all spheres of life, the emergence of a worldwide information community, and the transnational and interdependent character of the world economy.

All of these factors changed the scope of challenges, threats, and security opportunities for Slovakia. It is therefore necessary to answer two basic questions: how does the dynamic technological and economic environment influence the developing system of military threats, and how should these threats be countered? Policymakers need to rethink the nature of the structural units that foster threat. National states, and their associations, can no longer be considered as unique sources of military threat. The "new threats" have been defined in a detailed way in recent years, including the international drug trade, international migration, weapons proliferation, and cyber crime. Slovakia must make preparations and take initiatives to cope with the new threats, in tandem with the international community.

The security risks that emerged by the mid-1990s included "soft" security concerns such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and illegal migration. Up until 2001, no official Slovak document specified which of the international institutions should be preferred in dealing with these new security risks. In October 2000, however, Bratislava approved the document Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic, which listed the vital interests of the country, including securing sovereignty and integrity, democratic institutions, economic, social, and environmental development, peace and stability in Europe, and full membership in NATO and the EU. This basic security document was passed by the Slovak parliament on March 27, 2001.

Also in 2000, a Working Group for Crisis Management was established within PRENAME with the aim of developing a comprehensive strategy enabling Slovakia to resolve any crisis situation of a military or nonmilitary nature on its territory. The proposal on the crisis management system was submitted to the Slovak government for approval in October 2000.

## **A Security Blueprint for Slovakia**

### ***Defining Slovak Interests***

"National interests" constitute a problem in Slovak security policy, with some contradictions in the official literature and even in the Slovak Constitution. The notion of "nation" has a strong ethnic connotation, and the impression has been generated that Slovakia's national interest is to integrate only the nation, and not the

people, into the EU and NATO. According to official government statements, integration into NATO remains the basic priority of Slovak foreign and security policy. But certain policy deficiencies have become obvious in the practical steps undertaken by government parties in relation to such sensitive issues as collective defense.

Slovak security policymaking has had to confront a more complex situation than at the time of common security planning within the framework of the former Czechoslovakia. Although Slovakia's security position is not endangered by armed attack, economic coercion and political pressures are conceivable. Slovakia has to balance national security interests with political and economic security in its region in order to pursue its development. According to the Defense Doctrine of the Slovak Republic, national security is guaranteed when there is no threat of a military attack or threat of force or coercion. The hidden security threats are not taken into consideration explicitly, although the government's definition of key structural components of national security mention also political, economic, social, geographic, environmental, and demographic aspects besides purely military security.

In Slovakia, there is a necessity to redefine the foreign policy of the new state by examining the specific security problems the country could face and the options for addressing them. First, Slovakia could become a member of a security alliance or coalition. The Washington summit left the door open to possible future Slovak inclusion in NATO, but without any firm commitments. The country could take a second choice by abandoning any defense policy, meaning either a variant of armed neutrality (an expensive proposition) or a form of neutrality between two blocs. The third choice would involve a reevaluation of defense expenses focusing on the concept of a "defensive model of security" that would exclude the primary role of the army in security policy.

After the Madrid summit, Slovakia's immediate security interest was reduced to one single goal: NATO integration. Following the elections in 1998, no other security option seemed to be realistic. In the evolution of a national consensus, the HZDS party congress in March 2000 made it clear to its voters that NATO membership was a top foreign policy priority, demonstrating a continuity in Slovak foreign and security policy regardless of the results of the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for the fall of 2002. In October 2000, the Slovak government approved the document Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic, which specified full membership in NATO and the EU as "vital interests" for the country. The revival of Visegrád cooperation during 1998–2000 was also primarily due to the initiative of the Slovak side seeing in the Visegrád "bloc" a mechanism for enhancing Slovak security interests and for improving its qualifications for NATO inclusion.

### ***Slovakia and the Promotion of Regional Security***

Regional institutions such as the Visegrád forum and CEFTA played a crucial role in stabilizing Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after the dissolution of the socialist bloc. Moreover, they established new international conditions and were helpful in preparing the most developed CEE countries for integration into Western structures. Both NATO and the EU are concerned with maintaining and strengthening stability in those CEE countries that will not join them in the first wave, and helping determine the need to enlarge the mechanisms of CEE cooperation to countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine, which will create a new shape for the region. Moreover, such cooperation will help to stabilize the region after the first wave of NATO and EU enlargement.

These countries will face a new challenge to establish something that can be styled as Visegrád II and CEFTA II, assuming they will not change their foreign policy priorities. Slovakia has been involved in establishing the institutions of a post-bipolar CEE. It possesses experience in regional cooperation and is the most economically developed country among the non-NATO members. Slovakia will thereby face a radically new foreign policy challenge and will have an opportunity to prove its positive role in the coming years by taking aboard wider international responsibilities for building a new CEE region and becoming a generator of stability.

In playing such a role, Slovakia can become a constructive partner for Western organizations and could enhance its chances for NATO and EU inclusion. In such conditions, a country such as Ukraine could become one of Slovakia's main foreign partners in building a stable CEE. Slovakia needs to substantially revise its foreign policy concept but not because it has mistaken official goals in joining NATO and EU. On the contrary, a more activist regional approach would facilitate future integration by casting Slovakia as a generator of security and thereby serve the country's long-term national interests.

### ***Defining U.S. Interests***

U.S. interests in Slovakia broadly coincide with Slovak interests supported by the current government of Slovakia and with those of the EU and Slovakia's Visegrád partners. This community of interests puts a premium on concrete actions aimed at achieving common goals. Since Slovakia became independent in 1993, the United States has followed a consistent policy of supporting Slovakia's stated goals of democratic reform, building a market economy, and integrating into European and Euro-Atlantic structures including NATO, the EU, and the OECD. Although some progress was made toward those objectives during the short-lived Moravčík reform government in 1994, the net impact of the succeeding Mečiar administration (1994–1998) proved a setback for U.S. and Western interests and for Slovakia's stated goals.

U.S. interests in Slovakia stem from an overarching objective to foster regional security and cooperation, democracy, and functioning market economies in Central and Eastern Europe. Faced with authoritarian tendencies under Mečiar, U.S. interests and efforts in Slovakia were focused on mitigating threats to democratic structures and the rule of law and on reducing tensions with Hungary and the ethnic Hungarian minority. There was also an interest and some success in encouraging civilian control of the military and in bringing Slovakia into the Wassenaar Arrangement on export controls.

Faced with a new government committed to democratic reform and the fair treatment of its ethnic minorities, U.S. efforts have shifted toward promoting concrete progress in strengthening constitutional government and the rule of law, economic reform and restructuring, creating a more attractive climate for foreign investment, and combating organized crime and corruption. Given the credible commitment of the new government to integration into NATO, U.S. interests revolve around helping Slovakia meet concrete requirements for NATO membership, as embodied in its Membership Action Plan (MAP), and developing public understanding and support for assuming such an obligation.

Washington supported Slovakia's successful campaign for OECD membership and its EU bid. Although the United States has a strong interest in Slovakia's integration into the EU, it also aims to avoid economic discrimination or pressures during Slovakia's pre-admission phase that could weaken U.S.-Slovak ties. Finally, the United States has an interest in supporting Slovakia's efforts to contribute to regional stability. Slovak NGOs played a praiseworthy but little-known role in the former Yugoslavia in promoting democracy and in building a civil society. The Dzurinda government showed political courage in allowing NATO overflights during the 1999 Kosova operation. Slovakia's commitment to Visegrád and CEFTA cooperation and its policy of supporting Ukraine's efforts to strengthen Western ties are also deserving of U.S. support.

### ***Defining EU Interests***

Enlargement of the European Union is a two-way process. While candidate states have to fulfill the political, economic, and legal criteria, the EU itself must also prepare for enlargement. Ever since the EU decided to open its doors to the countries of the former Communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe, its approach to enlargement can broadly be characterized in two ways. First, EU leaders have consistently aspired to a strong positive rhetoric about the importance of a wider Europe. At the same time, a great deal of incrementalism and uncertainty have marked the practical steps toward the EU's fulfillment of the goal of eastern enlargement, although the Western governments have repeatedly emphasized the strategic importance of such expansion.

The newly emerging democracies of Central-Eastern Europe posed a potential challenge to the stability of the continent. The EU countries decided on a strategy of binding the post-Communist states into their own

framework of common rules, norms, and institutions. The EU took up the challenge of enlargement in order to extend Europe's zone of political stability and economic prosperity further east. Enlargement ultimately appeared the surest way of securing the union's eastern borders and of extending the opportunities and benefits of Europe's single market.

Although a number of politicians have praised the historic importance of enlargement and its strategic advantages, the reality on the road to unification of the divided halves of Europe has not always proved easy. The Copenhagen summit in June 1993 opened the possibility of eastern enlargement by setting criteria for candidate countries, but it was not until the Luxembourg summit in December 1997 that the union decided to invite the first group of six candidate countries to open accession talks.

At the Helsinki summit two years later, the EU member states invited to the negotiating table six additional states including Slovakia. Throughout this time the EU maintained its position of negotiating entry on an individual rather than on a bloc basis. This means that Slovakia or any other country that began accession talks at a later stage has a chance to catch up with the frontrunners in entering the EU. What remains open today is the question of when enlargement is actually going to take place. The EU has not set a target date for the first candidate states. Although this situation still leaves Slovakia with a real opportunity to gain full membership together with its Visegrád neighbors, it also creates some uncertainty around the enlargement process. Apart from the lack of a target date, combined with the union's gradualism toward the candidate states, the EU itself has been unable to prepare adequately for enlargement.

During the 1990s, the EU's internal focus has been largely consumed by other priorities, in particular the completion of the Economic and Monetary Union. Furthermore, the EU has been unable to reach agreement on a reform of its institutional structure. Changes in the structure and function of union institutions, especially in the European Commission, Council, and Parliament, are essential preconditions for successful enlargement. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty was a failure in this respect. The Nice summit in December 2000 offered a unique chance for a more fundamental breakthrough, but it fell short of expectations.

Both enlargement and institutional reform are in the interest of the EU. Slovakia's accession into the EU ultimately depends on the success of the union's institutional reform. The EU is interested in advancing its trade and investment interests in Central and Eastern Europe by implementing and solidifying the rules guiding its single market. At the same time, the cost of enlargement needs to be kept to a minimum. This logic implies that only those candidates that are best prepared will be eligible for membership. This poses a principal challenge for Slovakia's economic development. The speed at which the country implements economic reform and adopts EU legislation will be an important determinant of its success within the enlargement process.

Regional and structural policies comprise the main tools for development and redistribution inside the EU. After enlargement the EU will have within its borders a number of countries whose income will be lower than that of the union's average. If the single market and the EU as a whole are to be fully consolidated, the present instruments of financial aid and redistribution will have to be equally applied to any member state. For enlargement to succeed, the EU must consider its present budgetary and policy arrangements and make necessary adjustments. This applies equally to the EU budget passed in Berlin in the spring of 1999 and to future common funding strategies. The challenge of reform also applies to crucial common policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and to regional aid. For enlargement to be a success and for Slovakia to become a member, the EU's internal institutional reform remains an imperative.

### ***Defining Visegrád Interests***

Until now the V4 represented a noninstitutional subregional grouping without a common foreign policy. The main intention of V4 was cooperation and coordination by different states in their bid for EU and NATO integration with some reverberations in other fields of foreign policy. Despite announcements by some Western European politicians that it would be valuable if the V4 countries entered the EU together, they upheld the "regatta" principle, whereby each V4 country will be judged according to its internal readiness.

In the future, the V4 would like to create, possibly together with Slovenia, a “mid-European bloc” in the EU, which could be a counterbalance to, but not a competitor with, the larger European Union countries. When the V4 states enter the EU they will have a comparable number of votes to France and Germany. Austria is also interested in such a “mid-European bloc” and other neighboring countries could conceivably be included. The Visegrád Group could thereby become some kind of “regional power,” but this goal remains very distant at present.

The national interests of Visegrád countries, their geographic location, and their distinctive historical traditions limit common political options. Nonuniform behavior was demonstrated in the implementation of the visa regime (coming from the Schengen treaty) toward Ukraine, when Poland and Hungary postponed their implementation to the last possible deadline, while Slovakia and the Czech Republic applied the visa regime immediately. This is a practical example of the ambiguity in the common foreign policy of the V4.

One of the basic links among V4 countries is their orientation in solving security problems within NATO. The elementary vital interest of the V4 countries is to allow Slovakia to become a member of the alliance as soon as possible and thereby to fill the territorial gap between the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary. The result should be a more complete political and security cohesiveness of the mid-European region. In their common announcement from the Prague summit in June 2000, the V4 prime ministers welcomed the effort to strengthen the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) and displayed their will and preparedness to support the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). At the same time, they emphasized the irreplaceability of U.S.-European transatlantic ties for maintaining European security. The strengthening of regional security and stability in the Balkans and the realization of the Stability Pact were also considered to be in the vital interest of the V4 countries.

## **Security through NATO**

### ***NATO Enlargement Debate***

The next NATO summit is to be held in Prague in the fall of 2002, and it promises to be a landmark event for the alliance. The question of burden sharing and power sharing has become paramount in the U.S.-European relationship. Discussion is also likely to focus on the feasibility of the planned European defense pillar and the interface between traditional alliance structures and the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI). The summit is also expected to take some important decisions on the enlargement question and the position of aspirant states vis-à-vis the alliance. Even a postponement of the expansion question will send an important signal to East European states struggling with structural reforms and could have a major impact not only on regional security but also on domestic political developments among candidate countries.

The proponents of expansion view the inclusion of new members as contributing to the stabilization of wider parts of the continent. Enlargement would also provide concrete inputs into future alliance operations. The process of including new members has been increasingly viewed in NATO capitals both as inevitable and beneficial for the alliance given the development of democratic governance and far-reaching civil-military restructuring in the Central European states.

Supporters of NATO expansion maintain that it is essential to stabilize countries such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (as well as Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, and others) by offering them membership in the only credible security structure that could defend their sovereignty on a permanent basis. Enlargement coupled with adaptation to handle the new European insecurities would also eliminate any nagging questions about NATO's strategy and purpose.

NATO's 1995 enlargement study underscored that any new members must commit themselves to joining its integrated structures and contributing to alliance defense needs. In addition, new NATO members must become increasingly militarily interoperable and allocate a sufficient portion of their budgets to defense purposes. According to NATO planners, expansion must not dilute alliance effectiveness. Enlargement would entail a number of benefits by: providing a secure environment for consolidating democracy and

market reform; promoting trade, investment, interdependence, and European integration; and projecting security both eastward and southward as NATO assumed a direct interest in the stability and independence of states initially excluded from the enlargement process.

Critics of NATO expansion warned that enlargement would prove extremely costly; it would dilute NATO's capabilities and effectiveness; and it would unnecessarily alienate Russia by buttressing the anti-Western arguments of nationalist forces in Moscow. Some analysts eventually accepted a limited NATO enlargement into Central Europe but remained adamantly opposed to any further expansion eastward. They argued against an "open door" policy that would commit the United States and its allies to either defending unstable states or involvement in regions where NATO's vital security interests are simply not being challenged. In addition, a prolonged debate over ESDI and over the United States' planned National Missile Defense (NMD) system could further complicate and delay the enlargement process.

Several scenarios have been proposed regarding NATO decisions on future enlargement at the forthcoming summit. These include a halt on further expansion while reiterating the commitment to an "open door" policy; a limited expansion with invitations issued to countries such as Slovakia and Slovenia; an invitation to all nine current aspirants who will first have to complete all "chapters" of the MAP requirements; or simply an announcement that NATO will invite new members at a future summit. Any of these options will have far-reaching repercussions for all the NATO contenders.

In recent years, NATO planners have concentrated primarily on the impact of enlargement on the three Central European states. However, they have not comprehensively addressed the question of other candidates and their reactions to either temporary or prolonged exclusion from the alliance. This, together with the rationale for NATO's new missions, will become an essential component of the developing enlargement debate. The Allies will need to devise a longer-term security strategy that will not only ensure the collective defense of the stable Central European nations but will project security and stability toward the more unpredictable parts of the continent, including southeastern Europe.

Some analysts have proposed the development of a two-way process in which the non-NATO states enhance their cooperation with the Allied powers and their involvement in NATO programs regardless of actual membership. In the event that NATO does continue to enlarge, the aspirant states will not only be better prepared for the rigors of membership, but they will also have a proven track record of interaction and reliability. Conversely, even if NATO does not expand in the foreseeable future, aspirant states would continue to pursue alliance-led programs through PfP and various bilateral arrangements. In sum, ways need to be found for non-NATO states to strengthen their security posture, to develop their military programs, and to promote their role as generators of stability beyond NATO's immediate borders regardless of the results of the current enlargement debate.

### ***The Case for Slovakia's Membership***

A NATO enlargement process that includes Slovakia is important for the alliance in confirming the "open door" policy that has been asserted by Western leaders if any country meets all the appropriate criteria for membership. Alternatively, a "closed door" policy would unnecessarily restrict NATO's flexibility, its reach, and its potential capabilities. It would send a negative signal to nonmembers that transatlantic security is limited to a closed and exclusive club, and it would place an even greater burden on the European Union to expand its planned security architecture and to endow it with substance.

NATO inclusion for the remaining Central European nations would fill an important geostrategic gap in the heart of Europe. In particular, it would consolidate Slovakia's Western vocation and provide an important boost for the domestic reform process. Slovakia's accession would serve to validate the course of the democratic government in its consolidation of institutional reform and modernization of the Slovak military. Alliance membership also remains vital in providing a secure zone for investment and trade. Confirming these arguments are Slovakia's three NATO neighbors (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic), who understand that the inclusion of Bratislava will buttress their own positions as part of a secure European zone.



NATO membership is costly but not prohibitive. Although it would necessitate an increase in Slovakia's defense budget, it would also ensure that these resources are used more efficiently and effectively. Indeed, alliance inclusion would help to enhance Slovakia's military posture and capabilities by modernizing the armed forces and fostering greater military interoperability with current NATO members. The government in Bratislava understands that membership brings with it responsibilities and obligations. Slovakia has already made significant contributions to NATO missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosova over the past few years. NATO accession would thereby enable NATO to draw on the readiness and experience of a new member in any future NATO missions.

Since the Washington summit in 1999, Slovak security and foreign policy has continued to steer toward full NATO membership. As the most suitable instruments for reaching this goal, a range of multilateral and bilateral activities have been advanced. In 1999–2000, 25 official documents were signed between the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and NATO partners—3 at the presidential level, 3 intergovernmental agreements, 8 agreements concluded directly between the Slovak MoD and respective partners in other countries, and 11 other agreements concluded by an authorized representative of the MoD. In the framework of the MAP, the following objectives have been followed: harmonization of legislative norms between Slovakia and NATO; assumption of NATO strategies; implementation of the C3 system (command, communication, control); participation in air defense; interoperability of infrastructure; modernization of the army; and language skill preparation.

By 2000, however, the military reform that was launched in October 1999—MoD Concept of Reform of the Army until 2002—had experienced several obstacles, and the financial ones were uppermost. An assessment report by a U.S. team headed by General Joseph Garrett, pointed out the deficits in the reform program in a detailed and critical way. These included a low level of official documentation; bad distribution of defense resources; low professionalization of armed forces; low numbers of armed forces that depend on national mobilization; nonexistence of reliable standards for the planning of resources; coexistence of military and paramilitary elements; three independent commands of armed forces (under the MoD, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications); and principles of personnel policy that still copy the Communist past. The Garrett study was a unique undertaking in Central Europe; neither in the case of the Czech Republic, Poland, nor Hungary before the first wave of enlargement was such a comprehensive and detailed audit of the state of military reforms undertaken.

In order to qualify fully as a successful NATO candidate, Bratislava also needs to be more active in the public relations arena. It is important to build extensive domestic public support for alliance membership by fostering a more informed public debate and underscoring both the costs and benefits of inclusion. Prospects for Slovak membership are of course not exclusively dependent on the country's performance but on the decisions of the 2002 NATO summit on whether to opt for the "big bang" approach, to settle for a small enlargement, to exclude further expansion altogether, or to postpone a decision. Nevertheless, the successful completion of Slovak reforms, the assurance of overwhelming public support, and a cross-party commitment to the NATO alliance, including that of a "loyal opposition," would greatly strengthen the proponents of further enlargement. Ultimately, for Bratislava both patience and performance are the keys to success, and they entail a need for realistic targets and consistent follow-through.

Military-to-military relations between Slovakia and NATO are well developed and create a good base for long-term cooperation. They include the PfP program, peacekeeping in the Balkans, and the use of air bases in Kuchyna. It is possible to speak about an institutionalization of military-to-military relations, which provides for a predictable and productive continuity in Slovak-NATO relations regardless of the identity of the government. It is also important to underscore that the Slovak military remains the most respected institution in Slovak society according to all public polls taken since 1994. Public trust in the Slovak military ranges around 70 percent.

A number of geostrategic factors provide additional credence to Slovakia's bid for NATO membership; these include:

- The need to fill a geostrategic gap between the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland after the first wave of NATO enlargement;
- The fact that 87 percent of Slovakia's borders are borders with NATO countries;
- NATO's logistical need to avoid a "neutral belt" in Central–Eastern Europe. NATO operations against Yugoslavia in 1999 demonstrated the military-strategic importance of Slovakia for the alliance in terms of logistics for military operations in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. A belt of neutral states—Switzerland, Austria, Slovakia, and Ukraine would separate the main NATO bases located in northern Europe (Great Britain and Germany) from regions of southern Europe with considerable conflict potential. This could present a security threat for a wider Euro-Atlantic area. Without Slovakia, Hungary as a NATO country is geographically isolated from the main alliance bases located in Germany and Great Britain. In opening the country's air and ground communications for NATO transports in 1999, Slovakia was the only country from the "neutral belt" to create a Central European corridor for NATO transports to the Balkans, significantly improving NATO's logistic capabilities. Dzurinda's cabinet proved in practice that Slovakia is committed to cooperating closely with NATO. NATO's position on Yugoslavia also became the Slovak government's position.

### ***The Russian Factor***

In a broad strategic perspective, the aspirations of the former hegemon Russia toward Eastern Europe need to be carefully scrutinized. Indications are strong that the government of President Vladimir Putin is seeking to rebuild a broad sphere of influence in parts of Central and Southeastern Europe by forging closer alliances with unstable, authoritarian, anti-American, or criminally connected governments and political forces. For much of the 1990s, Milošević's Serbia constituted the most useful wedge for Russia in exploiting the Balkan conflicts to its advantage, by creating disputes between the United States and its European allies and weakening the case for further NATO involvement and institutional expansion.

Wide suspicion among democrats in Eastern Europe concerns Moscow's objectives. Although the Kremlin is unable to block or veto further NATO enlargement, the Putin presidency seems to be primarily interested in disqualifying the major contenders from attaining NATO membership. Among the tools employed, Moscow has endeavored to subvert their political and economic institutions, to consolidate links with antireformist interest groups, to exploit any significant ethnic and religious differences, and to capitalize on the strategic advantages accruing from the activities of organized criminal networks.

Indeed, it would be safe to conclude that the Kremlin will endeavor to keep pro-NATO governments off balance even if it cannot dislodge them from power. This serves Russia's national security interest because it keeps Moscow involved, creates complications for the NATO alliance, stirs controversies between the United States and its European allies, and thrusts Moscow forward as a "mediator" or "partner" in resolving security problems.

In the years ahead, Russian politics could undergo a more fundamental nationalist radicalization accompanied by a more aggressive foreign policy. Russia's return to an assertive authoritarianism simply cannot be ruled out given the country's unstable and unpredictable political and economic climate. Moscow may then pursue more sustained efforts to bring the states excluded from NATO or inhabiting the European periphery into a closer Russian orbit. In stark contrast to that of Russia, it is clearly in America's national interest to have secure, democratic, and law-abiding countries throughout the eastern half of Europe that will assume membership in international institutions and enable Washington to disengage gradually from the region without precipitating any new insecurities.

During the third Mečiar government, Moscow encouraged Slovakia's withdrawal from the first group of NATO and EU candidates and supported the Mečiar government during its claims about the "uniqueness of Slovak democracy." Controversies with the West brought Bratislava closer to Russia. In contrast to the neighboring Visegrád countries, Mečiar's government did not attempt to minimize the strategic dependence

of Slovakia on Russian energy sources. According to official statistics, Russia provided 100 percent of crude oil and 96 percent of natural gas for Slovakia's needs between 1993 and 1998. Furthermore, Mečiar's government signed an agreement with Moscow in 1995 according to which Slovakia will buy only Russian uranium for its nuclear plants. Jan Ducky, then minister of economics, concluded that Slovakia had become more dependent on Russia than before 1989.

After the 1998 parliamentary elections, a new era in Slovak-Russian relations began. The new Slovak government declared that it would focus its internal and foreign policy on the achievement of NATO and EU membership, and that it would "develop correct relations with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and strive to achieve a balanced relationship with the Russian Federation, one of Slovakia's foremost economic partners." In February 1999, Foreign Minister Kukan asserted that the vague wording of some agreements that had been signed with Russia by the previous administration could be misused by Moscow. He cited agreements on military cooperation, cooperation in military technology, and the protection of secret information. In March 1999, Prime Minister Dzurinda announced that Slovakia would not import the S-300 missile defense system, which meant a halt on importing Russian military equipment in the framework of Russian debt settlements as practiced by the previous government.

During his first official visit to Warsaw in November 1998, the Slovak prime minister engaged in negotiations on diversifying energy resources, namely Slovak-Polish cooperation in transporting Norwegian gas and making it accessible for CEE markets. Another important step in this respect was made during the official visit of the Ukrainian prime minister Viktor Yushchenko to Bratislava in December 2000. Both prime ministers discussed Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation in transporting Caspian oil to CEE and West European markets. During the Kosova crisis Dzurinda's cabinet decided to open Slovak ground and airspace for NATO logistic transports to the Balkans while rejecting Russian demands for using Slovak airspace for the same purpose. In all these initiatives, the new Slovak government fundamentally transformed Bratislava's relationship with Moscow and sought to dispense with Mečiar's Eastward leaning heritage.

## **Security through the EU**

### ***EU Enlargement Debate***

Ever since the European Union decided to enlarge to include the countries of the former Soviet bloc, Slovakia claimed its accession into the EU as one of the principal goals of the country's foreign policy. However, chiefly due to domestic political developments under the Mečiar government between 1994 and 1998, Slovakia became internationally isolated and was repeatedly criticized both by the EU and by the United States for its violation of basic democratic principles. Although during the mid-1990s Slovakia managed to record some impressive rates of economic growth, the country's progress toward EU membership was temporarily halted by political problems. Due to Slovakia's inability to comply with the political criteria set out by the EU summit in Copenhagen, the union excluded Slovakia from opening accession talks together with the other Visegrád states following the conclusion of the EU summit in Luxembourg in December 1997.

Since the current government led by Prime Minister Dzurinda took office in November 1998, Slovakia has striven to overcome the negative legacy of its political predecessors. Constructive contacts both with the European Commission and with EU member states have improved significantly. As a result, at the EU summit held in Helsinki in December 1999, Slovakia was invited to begin its membership negotiations. During 2000, the country made visible progress on its way to EU accession, and today it stands a realistic chance of entering the union together with the other Visegrád states. Slovakia's unique path toward EU entry offers a good illustration of the union's significance for a country's security. Unlike NATO, the EU does not and cannot offer the guarantees of collective security. Yet, the union does embody strong normative, institutional, and political ingredients that encompass important guarantees in the area of "soft security."

As the only country sidelined from accession talks due to political reasons, Slovakia learned the importance of the EU's political standards through its own experience. When the European Community

transformed itself into the European Union by signing the Maastricht Treaty in 1991, it clearly outlined the conditions guiding political practice in EU member states. These include the rule of law, respect for democracy, liberty, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The subsequent Amsterdam Treaty signed in 1997 reinforced the notion of the EU as a political union based on common values. The principles on which the union stands are binding upon the member states. They thereby constitute a normative framework that delineates the boundaries for both domestic and international policy by current or prospective member states. EU membership warrants domestic democratic conduct, and it provides an essential precondition for lasting nonmilitary security.

At the same time, democratic principles and practice are relevant for hard security. For example, transparent institutions and clear lines of control are essential for a viable model of civil-military relations. The bulk of the EU legislation that Slovakia is adopting on its path toward full membership concerns the rules and institutions guiding Europe's single market. The conditions set out by the EU serve an important role in completing the post-Communist economic and societal transition. They provide both an incentive and a model for successful domestic change. The implementation of EU norms reinforces a workable framework of "soft security" guarantees that have endured within the EU since the launching of continental integration in the early 1950s. Prosperity, flexibility, and reliability of the legal system together with a model of political and economic checks and balances are the EU's basic security provisions.

The adoption of EU rules helps to transform the quality of the commercial environment, creates credible investment opportunities, and ultimately offers prospects for a more stable and wealthier future. It also raises basic standards in the area of financial services, environmental controls, and food production. Furthermore, the union's structural and regional policies help to eradicate regional imbalances and improve Europe's infrastructure. Slovakia's eventual membership in the EU will benefit the country in all these areas. Advantages of the EU's single market are already apparent in the process of Slovakia's accession preparations.

To a limited extent, the EU has become a foreign policy and security actor. The 1991 Maastricht Treaty institutionalized its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Although the EU is still best able to speak and to act with one voice in commercial matters, it could also develop a more coherent foreign policy on a number of other issues. Although unable to take effective and decisive action in regional conflicts such as the former Yugoslavia, the EU has at least fostered a united declaratory front on important foreign policy questions.

Furthermore, in the former Yugoslavia, the EU complemented other international actors, especially NATO, by its policy of sanctions and embargoes. Finally, the CFSP contains an explicit security dimension in its commitment toward the building of the Common European Security and Defense Policy (CESDP), which could in the future provide the EU with meaningful capabilities to take effective action in the area of humanitarian operations and crisis management. During the 1990s, the EU has striven toward a single voice in foreign and security policy, and Slovakia has actively supported these efforts by aligning its foreign policy declarations with those of the EU. Indeed, one of the first negotiating chapters that Slovakia was able to close in its accession talks was the chapter on Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The prospects of EU membership are binding the country into the union's foreign policy and security structures. This bond is likely to become stronger once Slovakia accedes to the union and becomes an active shaper of the CFSP. The founding act of the European Union, the Maastricht Treaty, also formally established cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs. Issues of asylum policy, police cooperation, the fight against organized crime, and common border controls are becoming an integral part of the EU's agenda. Slovakia actively cooperates on all these matters with EU member states. As a country with the prospective eastern border of an enlarged EU, Slovakia has an enormous interest in transposing EU rules into its own legislation.

At the same time, it is an EU requirement that all candidate states adopt the framework of rules guiding the area of justice and home affairs. Movement of people, illegal trafficking, and illicit trade all represent particularly sensitive issues both for the EU and for the applicant countries. The application of the EU's

norms and cooperation with current member states on specific projects enhances Slovakia's internal security. These efforts will also ultimately strengthen the security of the whole EU. The United States as a non-EU member has consistently supported the idea of eastern enlargement and the full inclusion of the former Communist countries in Europe's integrated structures.

The security benefits for Slovakia stemming from EU membership demonstrate the logic and importance of U.S. support. Slovakia's entry into the EU will solidify the country's democratic political system. The union's normative framework further cultivates institutional transparency and compatibility of the political culture with the rest of the EU and also with the United States. The path to EU membership will make Slovakia an increasingly credible and reliable political and economic partner. The United States is the most important trading partner of the EU, and the EU represents the most significant market for U.S. exports. Slovakia's EU membership together with the membership of other post-Communist countries will enlarge and reinforce this market. EU enlargement will more permanently secure an additional area of trade and investment opportunities for U.S. companies and investors.

### ***The Case for Slovakia's EU Membership***

In July 1997, the European Commission published a series of reports evaluating applications from the 10 post-Communist EU-associated countries and gave recommendations for the December 1997 EU summit in Luxembourg. Although the commission found that not one of the 10 countries completely met the economic criteria for EU membership, the Slovak Republic was the only country the EC determined did not meet the political criteria as well. The EC report card, *Agenda 2000*, stated: "Slovakia does not fulfill in a satisfying manner the political conditions set out by the EU Council in Copenhagen. The government does not sufficiently respect the powers devolved by the constitution to other bodies, and too often disregards the rights of the opposition. In that context, the use of the police and of the secret service is worrying. The treatment of the Hungarian minority needs to be improved. It still lacks the benefit of a law on use of minority languages, as undertaken by the constitution."

Two months later, an official Slovak delegation presented its objections to this evaluation in Brussels, but it was unable to convince Leon Brittan, deputy chairman of the EC, that the commission had made a mistake. Official government sources refused to acknowledge the fact that Slovakia's development differed from that of any other associated country. The attitude of Slovakia toward the EU was decided by the parliamentary elections in 1998. The main question the elections were to answer was whether Slovakia would continue to develop as a country where political life contained strong elements of authoritarianism and undermined the principles of constitutionalism and the rule of law, or whether Slovakia would become a country where the principles of a standard parliamentary democracy applied, in which institutional structures were stable and well functioning, and where the rule of law was strictly observed.

Already before the EU summit in Cologne in June 1999, Slovakia could meet many of the requirements contained in the *Agenda 2000* report. During the second half of 1999, prior to the Helsinki EU summit in December 1999, and the Nice summit in December 2000, the political "deficits" mentioned in *Agenda 2000* and afterward at the Luxembourg EU summit were not completely removed. Some of the problems mentioned in the reports outlived the year 2000, and Slovakia has still to tackle them.

Political criteria formed the crucial official reason why Slovakia was not included in the first group of candidates in Luxembourg. The government has clearly made progress in meeting the political criteria for free and fair elections, effective opposition participation in oversight committees and supervisory boards, judicial reform, and minority rights. Economic criteria have never been the crucial issue between the EU and Slovakia, as the country's economic performance remained in the shadow of its internal political development.

With the stabilization of the political scene, the economic criteria for joining EU (and the military ones for joining NATO) will move into the foreground. Unfortunately for the new government, the years 1999 to 2000 seemed to be the worst economically since the country gained independence. The accumulated problems of the past several years came to the forefront. The state budget deficit reached a record 19.2-

billion Slovak crowns, and most economic indicators were set to deteriorate as a result of past delays in addressing serious economic problems. With unemployment reaching 20 percent at the beginning of 2000, an unsteady economic performance could result in an unstable social dimension. The state of the Slovak economy will obviously form a substantial part of the evaluations and recommendations made by the European Commission during the coming years.

The EC in its 2000 regular report positively assessed the policies of the Slovak government aiming to strengthen macroeconomic stabilization. In particular, it approved the new bankruptcy framework and the recapitalization and privatization of state-owned banks and public utilities. In 1999, the government started to introduce an austerity package to cut excess domestic demand in order to restore macroeconomic stability. The decline in economic growth from 4.1 percent in 1998 to 1.9 percent in 2000 has proved relatively modest, given the size of the painful but necessary cuts in domestic demand. In 2000, the protracted shrinking of domestic demand continued to be compensated for by a strong positive contribution from net exports that were supported by moderate domestic wage developments and by increased productivity in some sectors.

After three years of current account deficits of around 10 percent of GDP, they declined in 1999 to below 6 percent as a result of the strong export performance and import contraction, and despite the sharp price increase in imported energy products. The current account deficit in 2000 was reduced to about 1.5 percent of GDP in the first six months, and the trade deficit was only 2.8 percent of GDP in the first eight months. In April 2000, even a surplus on the trade balance was recorded for the first time since 1995. Restrictive fiscal policy led to lower interest rates. Foreign demand for government securities increased and also contributed to lower domestic interest rates. The National Bank of Slovakia has repeatedly intervened to slow down the appreciation of the Koruna. As a result, official international reserves have increased from a low of 2.4 billion in May 1999 to 4.5 billion in May 2000. The equilibrium between demand and supply is now largely established by the free interplay of market forces. The legal system for a functioning market economy is now largely in place, and Slovakia can be regarded as a functioning market economy, concludes the 2000 European Commission's Regular Report.

### ***Recommendations: Strengthening U.S.-Slovak Relations***

The United States has a strong interest in supporting a democratic, prosperous, and secure Slovakia, integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures. The current, reform-minded Slovak government has convincingly embraced these goals and adopted credible policies to attain them. It is thus to the advantage of both governments to adopt effective policies to strengthen cooperation and to advance common interests shared with the EU and Slovakia's Central European neighbors. This paper concludes by making the following recommendations for strengthening U.S.-Slovak cooperation in the pursuit of these mutual objectives.

#### ***Political Initiatives***

The new U.S. administration needs to continue political and practical support for the Slovak government's efforts to consolidate its democratic and economic reforms and qualify for NATO and EU membership. This requires high-level attention to relations with Slovakia in the context of U.S. engagement throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Slovakia should be included in an early visit to the region by senior Bush administration officials, and return visits by Slovak leaders should be encouraged. These visits should not only be used to signify a mutual interest in strengthening relations but should address concrete areas of cooperation.

U.S. policy statements on the CEE should recognize and support Slovakia's progress in democratic and market reform and its contributions to regional stability. In addition, the United States can offer concrete support to Slovakia for cooperation on issues of mutual interest, including military export controls and the fight against crime and corruption. Adequate staffing and resources must be provided to the small U.S. embassy in Bratislava to strengthen the United States' diplomatic presence.

The Slovak government faces two major problems in strengthening Slovak-U.S. ties and securing continued U.S. attention and support. It must demonstrate political cohesion and concrete progress in its reform programs and sustained efforts to qualify for NATO and EU membership. At the same time, it needs to conduct a more effective public relations and diplomatic effort both at home and abroad to clarify its intentions and make known its considerable successes. This paper will not include as recommendations the major programs, including constitutional and administrative reforms and economic restructuring, that the Slovak government is pursuing. Rather, it makes the point that success in these reform efforts is key to attaining Slovakia's foreign policy goals, just as earlier failures in domestic policy led Slovakia to miss the NATO, EU, and even OECD trains.

At home, the public relations issue directly affecting Slovakia's NATO bid is the relatively modest level of public support for NATO membership. Slovakia's quest to join the alliance will be advanced if a substantial majority of the Slovak public understands the advantages to Slovakia of NATO membership and demonstrates its willingness to take on the burdens along with the benefits. The Slovak government should strengthen its existing public affairs program, explaining the pros and cons of NATO membership to the Slovak public.

In the United States, Slovakia suffers from a lack of recognition that many of its neighbors such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary enjoy. In addition, because it fell behind in its efforts at democratic reform and Western integration, some observers who do follow Slovak developments worry that the present reform course may give way to a return of retrograde nationalist and populist tendencies.

The Slovak government should strengthen its public diplomacy efforts in the United States to achieve recognition and enhance its image based on vigorous, factual presentation of its domestic and foreign policy successes. This entails well-prepared visits by Slovak government and private sector leaders to the United States to advance specific objectives and increasing Slovak embassy resources in Washington to complement the opening of the new Slovak embassy building in June 2001. This public diplomacy effort should focus on U.S. congressional and executive branch leaders and foreign policy staffs, NGOs involved in Central Europe, U.S. business leaders, and the U.S. media. It should project the image of Slovakia as a modern, Western, outward-looking, multiethnic, civil society anxious to take its proper place among the industrialized democracies and contribute to stability in Central Europe.

### ***Regional Initiatives***

To facilitate regional cooperation, stability, and security, U.S. public and private efforts can focus on supporting Slovak governmental and NGO initiatives throughout Central Europe and its neighborhood. In addition to collaborative Visegrád projects and links with EU partners, nearby countries such as Ukraine, the three Baltic States, and Romania can be involved in a range of endeavors. These can include initiatives on civil society development, institution building, interparliamentary liaison, legal reform, political party pluralism, interethnic and interminority roundtables, constituency development, educational and youth exchange programs, intercity and interregion cooperation, crime-fighting initiatives, trade, investment, infrastructure, and other forms of economic collaboration.

Slovak involvement in promoting democracy in Serbia during the past two years can serve as an example of further democratization efforts throughout the region. All these efforts will help each country in its bid to qualify for future EU accession. Furthermore, in view of the planned 2002 NATO summit, current and aspiring NATO members can assist each other in promoting the case for further NATO enlargement and underscoring the commitments and capabilities of the most promising candidate countries such as Slovakia. The "Vilnius Nine" (a forum launched by Lithuania for Eastern Europe's NATO aspirants) initiative should therefore act as a promoter of inclusion for the most deserving candidates regardless of the weakness of other contenders.

### ***Military and Security Initiatives***

The United States bilaterally and within NATO should continue to support Slovakia's efforts to qualify for NATO membership through military restructuring and fulfillment of its NATO MAP goals. This involves continued assistance, as embodied in the Garrett study, in developing Slovakia's Annual National Plan. Military-to-military cooperation should be strengthened through enhanced PfP exercises and expanded bilateral programs, involving military educational exchanges and cooperation through the successful partnership program with the Indiana National Guard. Particular support should be offered for English-language training for Slovak military personnel and assistance in building an effective noncommissioned officer cadre.

Slovakia now faces a higher hurdle for NATO membership than its Visegrád neighbors who entered NATO in 1999. Democratic reform, which was the biggest stumbling block for Slovakia during NATO's recent enlargement, is necessary but no longer sufficient. Slovakia must demonstrate that it will be a net contributor to alliance security by mustering the political will and resources to meet or exceed its MAP goals and demonstrating that a substantial majority of Slovaks want to be in NATO.

Slovakia should also build its NATO credentials by maintaining its helpful peacekeeping contributions in the Balkans and by offering strong cooperation on military export controls. It must strengthen its interagency effort to prepare for NATO membership, as well as its public diplomacy efforts prior to the expected fall 2002 NATO summit in Prague. It can also work closely with Visegrád partners to seek areas for military cooperation and use their support in making Slovakia's case for membership.

### ***Economic and Social Initiatives***

The United States should encourage strengthened U.S. trade and investment ties with Slovakia. Trade missions sponsored by the Department of Commerce and Overseas Private Investment Corporation would be particularly useful to complement trade missions to the United States sponsored by the Slovak government and Slovak business groups.

Educational, cultural, and scientific exchange programs, including private sector programs and official leader grants, should be increased. Fellowships can be offered to individuals preparing for service in Slovak economic ministries, diplomatic corps, and the military, as well as talented students preparing for careers in business, health services, and other areas of high national priority. Assistance to Slovak universities to make U.S. publications accessible should be continued. Practical support to Slovakia's anticorruption drive must be stepped up.

U.S. executive branch and congressional representatives concerned with the status of ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe should visit Slovakia to observe first hand how the reform government is addressing issues involving the Roma and Hungarian minorities.

The Slovak government should strengthen efforts to improve business conditions in Slovakia, speed up privatization, attract foreign investment, and advance banking and tax reforms. Top-level Slovak government support for implementing recommendations formulated by the CSIS U.S.-Slovakia Action Commission that it has accepted as appropriate should be maintained. Emphasis should be given to transparency, firmly establishing the rule of law, and increasing the efficiency of the judicial system.

Bratislava must also improve its public relations effort in the United States to bring the advantages of investing in Slovakia to the attention of a wider public. Recent trips to the United States by the prime minister and other government leaders have been particularly useful in this respect. Slovakia should also pursue its vigorous efforts to catch up with front-runners in the race to enter the EU, while maintaining its strong Euro-Atlantic ties.

Given that Slovakia and some of its neighbors in Central Europe have drawn criticism from Western human rights groups for the situation of Roma minority populations, the government should press forward with efforts to address Roma concerns. These efforts should receive greater publicity and Western advocates



for ethnic minority rights should be invited to visit Slovakia and observe the situation at first hand and offer their views and recommendations.

Given the emphasis by NATO and the EU on prospective members resolving international and domestic ethnic tensions, the Slovak government should build on the notable progress already made in developing a harmonious *modus vivendi* with Slovakia's ethnic Hungarian minority and strengthening Bratislava's much-improved relations with Hungary.

### ***Private Initiatives***

Slovakia stands to benefit from the fact that as many as 2 million Americans are of Slovak descent and are interested in the success of an independent Slovakia taking its rightful place in the Euro-Atlantic community of free-market oriented democracies. Friends of Slovakia in the United States, with the encouragement of Slovak representatives, should do more to strengthen U.S.-Slovak economic, political, and cultural ties of friendship and cooperation.

In addition, individual groups of Americans with ethnic ties to Central Europe should cooperate in advancing U.S. relations with all the countries of the area, including Slovakia's Visegrád neighbors. Some cooperation among these groups, particularly with respect to NATO enlargement, now exists, but should intensify.

Equally important, Slovakia's vibrant and innovative NGO sector should strengthen links with U.S. NGOs interested in promoting the development of civil society in Central Europe through national and regional programs. The Slovak government can encourage these ties and develop information on the numerous programs and opportunities available.