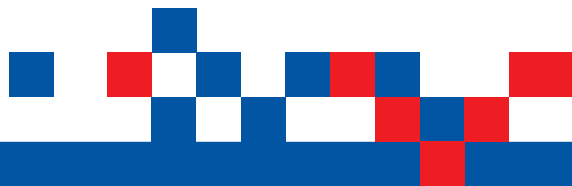


YEARBOOK OF SLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY



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30 years of foreign policy expertise



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edited by Peter Brezáni



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Rastislav Káčer

**Standing up to
aggression –
diplomacy in defence
of democratic values,
sovereign equality
and rules-based order**

The year 2022 brought a geopolitical turning point, a confluence of crises and important lessons. The brutal aggression of a permanent member of the UN Security Council against its smaller neighbor showed that our security environment is fundamentally changing with the revival of Russian imperial policy. Russia's war in Ukraine has redrawn the geopolitical map of Europe and the world. It has reminded us that the democratic world must be better prepared to defend its values and its way of life.

Despite initial concerns, we not only managed to maintain EU and NATO unity and readiness for action, but also to strengthen it. Thanks to our unity, cohesion and ability to act in a coordinated way, our community of democratic states has tackled the unprecedented challenges emanating from beyond our eastern borders and found solutions to collateral crises, especially the energy crisis. Such solutions have been reached through unity in action, the rejection of the threat or use of force and the notion of spheres of influence, endorsement of effective multilateralism and a world order based on compliance with the rules.

In this new geopolitical situation, Slovakia drew on its values and principles. From the beginning, we helped Ukraine to defend its freedom and we stood up for the principles of the UN Charter and the international order. Slovak diplomacy has remained steadfast in this mission, but the battle over the shape of the international order has yet to be won – that is the challenge awaiting our foreign and European policy in 2023.

My predecessor Ivan Korčok led the Slovak foreign ministry for the larger part of this difficult year. On taking up my ministerial seat, I reiterated the continuation of our values-based foreign policy.

■ 2022 lessons

Last year taught us several important lessons.

First and foremost: *Evil must be faced decisively*. Concession-making has to be rejected, as our own terrible historical experiences show. The immense suffering of the Ukrainians, their extraordinary heroism and determination to defend their freedom, territorial integrity and vision of a pro-European and democratic Ukraine, no matter what the cost, are a tremendous example of courage for the whole of Europe. We must therefore constantly stress that the Ukrainians are fighting a just fight and that they are fighting for our interests as well. It is our moral duty to help them. But it is also in Slovakia's strategic interest for Ukraine to succeed in defending these basic principles and values of international law and order. With Ukraine's help, we are investing in our own future. This policy is not just pro-Ukrainian; it is also pro-Slovak. The war is not between the West and Russia, but between those who want to protect international law and the international order and those who violate them.

The second lesson is the *power of solidarity*. The humanitarian, military and financial aid provided by the democratic community is crucial in helping Ukraine to defend its homeland against a stronger enemy. Most importantly, this assistance is provided in full compliance with international law, which allows military assistance to be provided to victims of military aggression. I am delighted to state that Slovakia was among the first countries to quickly deliver key military, material and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

The third message for us all is the need to *sustain compassion and empathy*. Many people in Slovakia have demonstrated the power of humanity. The Russian aggression has brought untold suffering to Ukrainian towns and villages, destroyed human lives and divided families. It has driven millions of people from their homes and plunged them into extreme poverty. In this fraught situation, there is no mistaking the value and power of compassion for fellow human beings who are suffering. The good-natured and spontaneous help given by the majority of Slovaks, the churches and civil society to Ukrainian refugees, especially mothers and children, fills me with pride and hope.

The next lesson comes from last year's political experience: our *European and NATO strategies must be based on an objective assessment of reality*, not on the desired state of affairs. We neglected the Russian warning signals, which meant we were less well-prepared to respond effectively. This applies to both military capabilities and to hybrid threats, including the weaponization of energy resources, and not just to Russia, but to other assertive actors in

global politics as well. I am therefore happy that the Slovak foreign service actively contributed to the major update of NATO and EU security concepts during the past year.

The fifth conclusion to be drawn is that despite the strong pressures of disinformation and hybrid attacks, *we must not yield in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms*, for they are an integral part and basic tool of our foreign policy. Failure to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms is one of the main causes of conflicts and social unrest. Values-based politics and human rights, which so irritate not only the Kremlin masters but also other autocrats in the world, must remain at the center of our attention and action. Only on that basis can we build free and democratic societies and shape effective multilateralism, which is a basic prerequisite for solving global problems in a peaceful and democratic manner.

Last year also reminded us more urgently *how intensely interconnected the world is*, how war and misfortune in one part of the world can affect people thousands of kilometers away. As a result of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, residents in the poorest corners of the world are suffering in the face of food and raw material insecurity. The global increase in inflation, the energy crisis, economic decline and rising social tensions, all exacerbated by the war, affect people all over the world. That is the sixth lesson.

Against the backdrop of the current security, economic, energy and migration crises, our fundamental belief that *Slovakia's integration into the EU and NATO was the correct decision* has been corroborated. Today we can see just how far-sighted we were to sign the *Defense Cooperation Agreement* with the United States in Washington at the beginning of February 2022. We can count on our allies' willingness to defend our territory and population. The creation of a combat group of our NATO allies in Slovakia is evidence of that. Our country's firm anchoring in Euro-Atlantic structures and close cooperation with allies is the best security insurance in today's turbulent world.

■ 2023 – the way forward

The year 2023 will probably not be any easier for Slovak foreign policy. It is also the year when we commemorate 30 years of Slovak independence and diplomacy. It proved a successful diplomatic story for Slovakia, although its roots go back to at least 1918. For in that year, conditions were laid for future generations of successful Slovak diplomats, as an integral part of

Czechoslovak diplomacy. They were followed much later by a group of young enthusiasts who created the Ministry of International Relations between 1990 and 1992. On January 1, 1993, they became the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the independent Slovak Republic.

Slovakia's geopolitical anchoring on the international stage and especially in European and Euro-Atlantic integration structures was a vital interest for the country, and today we can state that it has been the most important historical accomplishment of Slovak diplomacy in the past 30 years. The geopolitical developments in the east and the world more generally confirm this.

We at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs have a foreign policy vision for 2023 and onwards which has a clear goal – to consistently promote and protect Slovakia's national interests, in other words to guarantee the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, prosperity, democracy and human rights of the citizens of this country in the democratic European space.

We are aware that in order to achieve this goal, we will have to work hard to restore a functional security order in Europe and the world, to reinforce the unity of European and transatlantic structures and to strengthen democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights in the international environment, in our immediate neighborhood and at home. It is in the Slovak Republic's interests for the international rules-based order to be restored and consolidated, and for the EU to be strong, united and geopolitically relevant.

Pursuing this vision will not be easy. We have entered another difficult year domestically. A snap parliamentary election awaits us, which will be followed closely by the world and our partners, along with the elections in some other allied countries. It is highly likely that Slovakia's foreign policy direction will once again become a theme in the election campaign.

What should the Slovak foreign ministry, foreign policy community and civil society do in this situation on the domestic stage?

We need to cultivate a better public discourse and specify the essential elements of the prosperous future of the Slovak Republic and its inhabitants: e.g. that the EU is not just a normative community or an economic grouping that provides money for local development, and nor is NATO just a military organization that will comfortably and effortlessly protect us from all threats.

Uncritical pro-Russian sentiments are still strongly present in public opinion but are based on ignorance of the Russian realities, as well as the mythicization

of Russia, the misuse of nostalgic historical pan-Slavism and many years of an inadequate curriculum. Consequently, Slovak public opinion is very easily influenced.

Merely talking about our key foreign policy principles within a community that shares the same values and has the same opinions is not enough. For it is not they who need convincing. We need to speak openly and convincingly to those who are confused, disappointed and hesitant about the political developments at home and in the world, who are unsure about where the truth lies. Public opinion makers need to be vocal and honest. They are politicians, well-known political influencers, public media, respected local politicians, teachers, public figures in the cultural and sports spheres. Their statements have the biggest multiplier effect. A serious non-populist politics cannot follow where public opinion leads, but must shape it.

In politics, we have to prepare our society to recognize that we have entered a long period of overlapping crises and solving these will come at a higher cost, and may well affect our comfort or require a change in lifestyle. We have to understand that prosperity, well-being, stability and security do not just happen on their own and nor are they free. We have to actively pursue and shape them and be prepared to pay the appropriate price.

In politics, strategic communication is key, even on less pleasant topics. It is fair to say that in innovation and industrial development we lag behind our European partners and the most advanced countries in the world. We also lag behind in quality of life or purchasing power parity. In the diplomatic service, we want to help reverse these trends and prevent Slovakia from being marginalized. We want to help our country return to its trajectory of social and economic convergence with the advanced countries of the EU. We will subordinate all our efforts to this goal.

So what is the biggest political risk facing our country and the world? The old notion of Russian policy and the assumption that we are dealing with a serious partner. The facts point to the opposite: Russia's current leadership has colonial and imperialist intentions that will not change in the coming years. We need to understand that this is a constant factor. We have to limit Russia's ability to finance its war of aggression and its capacity to undermine Ukraine, and the international order, and possibly even to attack NATO territory. In this situation, more support for Ukraine, more liberated territories and more effective sanctions also mean better prospects for peace-building diplomacy in the future.

■ In lieu of a conclusion

I am aware that the lessons we have learned from last year's events and the well-formulated intentions for this year do not guarantee success. But our foreign service and political leaders will need to take them into account when making decisions. I am in no doubt that Slovak diplomacy has the capacity to handle the challenges at home as well as the challenges of today's world.

It is important for Slovakia, after the difficult 12 months of 2022, that our allies and partners consider us a reliable partner with a clear and legible foreign policy based on the values of freedom, solidarity, international law and democracy. It is in our vital interests for that to continue even in these critical moments. I will be happy if, at the end of this year, I can state that the absolute majority of Slovak citizens are proud of their country for handling all its domestic and external challenges with forethought, dignity, humility and responsibility.





The Slovak Republic in the international environment

Miroslava Pisklová

Slovakia's European policy in 2022 – the year of war in Ukraine and its impact

Just as the European Union started to recover from the global pandemic, February 24, 2022, became the defining moment of the year, substantially impacting geopolitical and European development. Russia's unprovoked aggression in Ukraine was quickly met by a strong international response and global political isolation. The war in Ukraine pushed the EU to speed up energy independence, even leading to attempts to raise long-term ambitions on Europe's green transition after some initial counter-productive emergency measures. It also showed that EU member states can reach a consensus when required to react quickly, although unity started weakening as the year progressed. The emerging economic and energy crises affected the willingness of some EU member states and citizens to support Ukraine and the refugees, as the effects of the war began to be felt in daily life. The war, its consequences and support for Ukraine were also dominant topics in Slovakia, which shares a border with Ukraine and is grappling with serious political difficulties at home.

The situation revealed the potency of some deeper issues in Slovakia (such as pro-Russian sentiment, vulnerability to malign information operations, disillusion with politics and distrust of institutions, polarization, the radicalization of political discourse and the mood in society) with potentially serious implications for citizens' support for the EU and Slovakia's affiliation with the European community and core values if not addressed properly. This chapter will examine these issues in more detail, against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. It will also consider EU progress on the digital legislation, mainly the DSA. It will not deal with the EU's response to the energy crisis, climate legislation, green transformation or Fit for 55, as these are tackled elsewhere in the *Yearbook*. Finally, this chapter will examine the way Slovakia is coping with the implementation of its national recovery plan, which is an important tool with promising benefits if handled well.

■ War in Ukraine as the defining moment of 2022

The war in Ukraine impacted the EU and Slovakia in many ways. The EU displayed unity and determination as it reacted quickly to the Russian aggression and applied economic pressure to thwart Russia's ability to pay for the war over the long term. However, despite introducing mitigating measures to tackle inflation, rising energy prices and threats to food security, such as by capping electricity producer revenue, introducing REPowerEU, enabling flexible use of unspent EU funds for crisis management purposes and supporting citizens and smaller businesses, it proved impossible to prevent the war's negative effects from spilling over into Europe. As a consequence, European unity began to weaken at the first signs of war fatigue. To maintain strong support for Ukraine requires appropriate communication with citizens that embraces the complexity of the issue,¹ as that lends domestic legitimacy to foreign policy actions. Public communication should include common achievements, such as the increasing political isolation of Russia, strong condemnation² of its actions by the global community at the UN General Assembly, or the suspension of Russia's membership of the UN Human Rights Council.³

However, at the beginning of 2023 there was potential for agreement on further EU sanction packages as member states were spending "more time discussing exemptions than tougher steps" and called for careful evaluation of subsequent steps "so that we don't go so far that we would totally damage the European economy."⁴

¹ Ukraine is not just fighting for itself but to protect European security, democracy and values as well. Many of the challenges emerged almost overnight and had to be addressed at once – the transition to clean energy, strengthening the EU's energy independence, filling Europe's gas tanks for the winter, food security and affordability, rising energy prices, providing support for Ukrainian defence while investing more in European capabilities and helping Ukrainian refugees.

² "General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine," *UN News*, March 2, 2022. Available online: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152> (accessed on January 25, 2023).

³ "UN General Assembly votes to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council," *UN News*, April 7, 2022. Available online: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115782> (accessed on January 25, 2023).

⁴ J. O'Donnell, "Analysis: EU unity over Russia sanctions falters as Europe's economy wilts," *Reuters*, December 19, 2022. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/eu-unity-over-russia-sanctions-falters-europes-economy-wilts-2022-12-16/> (accessed on January 25, 2023).

It is true that the initial bold estimate⁵ of the effect of EU sanctions on Russia's economy did not hold on encounter with reality⁶. Rising energy prices meant the overall value of imports from Russia was higher than in the pre-war period, delaying the impact of the sanctions. In Slovakia's case, the average increase in the value of Russian imports was 93 per cent.⁷ But that does not mean the sanctions are not working. The Russian economy, markets and social welfare have visibly suffered, despite the efforts of Russian propaganda to claim the opposite,⁸ and this effect will increase the longer the sanctions are in effect, the more wide-reaching they become and the better the EU anti-evasion tactics are⁹. Moreover, EU sanction packages are now gradually beginning to target more sensitive areas. It will therefore take member states more time to reach agreement and perhaps require additional safeguards (such the gas price caps adopted in December).¹⁰

Slovakia generally followed in line with and supported the EU's anti-Russian sanctions. It was even critical of Hungary's repeated blocking attempts and questioning. At the same time Slovakia asked for solidarity to be shown, in the form of extra support or concessions from the EU on intended measures that would affect Slovak vulnerabilities. Such as when the economy minister

⁵ Less than a month after the Russian aggression in Ukraine started, the High Representative stated that the Russian economy was expected to shrink by at least 15 per cent in 2022. However, in reality the figure was around 4 per cent. Sources: J. Borrell, "The war in Ukraine and its implications for the EU, European Union External Action," EEAS, March 14, 2022. Available online: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/war-ukraine-and-its-implications-eu_en (accessed on January 25, 2023); "Infographic – Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy," European Council/Council of the EU, n.d. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy/> (accessed on January 25, 2023).

⁶ Ibid

⁷ A.B. Guardia & C. Cooper, "The delayed impact of the EU's wartime sanctions on Russia," *Politico*, February 3, 2023. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/numbers-delayed-impact-eu-european-union-war-sanctions-russia-vladimir-putin/> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

⁸ B. Bernatskyi, "Data shows how new EU sanctions are devastating the Russian economy," *Visegrad Insight*, December 23, 2022. Available online: <https://visegradinsight.eu/data-shows-how-new-eu-sanctions-are-devastating-the-russian-economy/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

⁹ Instances of evasion of the EU sanctions and trade restrictions were uncovered in 2022, such as Western technologies and components entering Russia through Turkey, China and elsewhere. Source: S. Stecklow et al., "The supply chain that keeps tech flowing to Russia," *Reuters*, December 13, 2022. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-russia-tech-middlemen/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹⁰ K. Taylor, "EU seals deal on gas price cap after months of wrangling," *Euractiv*, December 12, 2022. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-seals-deal-on-gas-price-cap-after-months-of-wrangling/> (accessed on March 18, 2023).

Sulík asked for a three-year transition period on Russian oil imports.¹¹ Views differ on the legitimacy of similar actions and the arguments used to negotiate concessions from the EU sanctions against Russia. However, the systematic or otherwise nature of such actions may reflect the purpose and importance of the issue to the member state. The EU currently faces the challenge of having to balance solidarity among member states against a potential domino effect of concessions and exceptions, which could undermine the purpose of the sanctions.

Another topic resonating in 2022 was the refugee situation, with the influx of Ukrainian families seeking for refuge in the EU reminding the bloc of its unfinished policy. Eight years after the 2015 migration crisis, the EU had still not reformed its common asylum and migration policy. At that time, Slovakia had been among the four countries opposing the relocation quota and Slovak citizens had negative perceptions of the issue. The migration crisis and relocation quota were a key topic in the run up to the 2016 parliamentary elections and were exploited to elicit fear of the unknown to garner votes for several parties.¹²

■ Slovakia's response and the atmosphere in society

The war and the related challenges were popular themes in Slovakia in 2022. But the country was also entering into an era of political instability due to disagreement among the coalition parties. Not only did the Slovak government fall, but the dividing lines in Slovak society deepened as well.

¹¹ "Slovensko podporuje ďalšie sankcie proti Rusku, požaduje iba prechodné obdobie pri rope," [Slovakia supports further sanctions against Russia, asking only for a transitional period for oil] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, May 4, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/top/slovensko-podporuje-dalsie-sankcie-proti-rusku-pozaduje-iba-prechodne-obdobie-pri-rope> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹² G. Mesežnikov, "Problematika migrácie a utečencov na Slovensku v rokoch 2015 – 2016: spoločenská atmosféra, verejná mienka, politickí aktéri," [Migration and refugees in Slovakia in 2015–2016: social atmosphere, public opinion, political actors] Inštitút pre verejné otázky & Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016, pp. 113–47. Available online: https://cz.boell.org/sites/default/files/otvorena_krajina_alebo_nedobytina_pevnost_slovensko_migranti_a_uteцени_e.pdf (accessed on January 26, 2023).

When assessing the impact of the war, it is useful to examine not just the economy and security aspects, but also popular opinion, as further provision of aid depends on it. Generally, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine shifted Slovak public opinion on the threat (with the majority of Slovaks considering Russia a security threat^{13,14}) and pushed it in a pro-Western direction.¹⁵ However, many Slovaks (46 per cent) continued to favor an imaginary "middle way," somewhere between Russia and the West.¹⁶ This unrealistic view has long been present in Slovakia, despite it being illogical and contrary to the country's strategic and economic interests.

Over 88 per cent of Slovaks expressed increasing concern over the economic impact of the war,¹⁷ and 98 per cent stated that they had been affected by higher prices.¹⁸ A previous survey showed that two thirds of Slovaks were willing to trade some rights and freedoms for better finances,¹⁹ so this tendency

¹³ 50 per cent of respondents think Russia is the most dangerous country for Slovakia. By comparison, that figure was 19 per cent in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea. See "Vojna na Ukrajine posunula Slovákov geopoliticky na Západ. Dve tretiny respondentov pokladajú Rusko za nebezpečnú krajinu," [The war in Ukraine pushed Slovaks geopolitically towards the West. Two thirds of respondents consider Russia a dangerous country] *Ako sa máte Slovensko? – Press news*, April 21, 2022. Available online: https://www.akosamateslovensko.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/TS_geopolitika_april2022.pdf (accessed on January 30, 2023).

¹⁴ The 2022 Globsec survey showed that 62 per cent of Slovaks thought Russia was a security threat to Slovakia, a significant increase on the survey conducted before the war (20 per cent in 2020), in D. Hajdu et al., "Globsec trends 2022: Central and Eastern Europe amid the war in Ukraine," *Globsec*, May 31, 2022 A. Available online: <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/GLOBSEC-Trends-2022.pdf> (accessed on January 30, 2023).

¹⁵ 38.9 per cent in 2022, compared to 25.8 per cent in 2014.

¹⁶ "Vojna na Ukrajine posunula Slovákov geopoliticky na Západ. Dve tretiny respondentov pokladajú Rusko za nebezpečnú krajinu," op. cit.

¹⁷ "Na Slovensku rastú najmä obavy z ekonomických dôsledkov vojny. Iba tretina Slovákov by bola ochotná bojovať za svoju krajinu," [In Slovakia concern over the economic consequences of the war is growing the most. Only a third of Slovaks would be willing to fight for their country] *Ako sa máte Slovensko? – Press news*, April 13, 2022. Available online: https://www.akosamateslovensko.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ASMS_rastu-obavy-z-ekonomickych-dosledkov-vojny_apri%CC%81122.pdf (accessed on January 30, 2023).

¹⁸ "Rast cien a stav zdravotníctva spôsobujú najväčšie obavy. Väčšina respondentov sa snaží nakupovať lacnejšie alebo menej," [Rising prices and healthcare are the biggest concerns. Most respondents are trying to buy less or more cheaply] *Ako sa máte Slovensko? – Press news*, August 3, 2022. Available online: https://www.akosamateslovensko.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/TS_ASMS_15_obavy_fin.pdf (accessed on January 30, 2023).

¹⁹ D. Hajdu, K. Klingová, "Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: Perceptions of democracy & governance in 10 EU countries," *Globsec*, June 23, 2020. Available online: <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-read-version.pdf> (accessed on January 30, 2023).

could lead to weaker support for democratic values/freedoms and the EU. Stakeholders should therefore take action.

An opinion poll from July caused controversy in Slovakia and beyond, as it found that more than half (52 per cent) of Slovak citizens supported a Russian victory in the war in Ukraine (30 per cent).²⁰ A follow-up poll was organized in September amid consternation over the results and the methodology. It found 19 per cent supported a Russian victory (47 per cent for Ukraine; 34 per cent were unsure or didn't care).²¹ The more recent survey paints a different picture; nonetheless support is still lower than in other EU countries. The majority of EU citizens strongly support EU assistance for Ukraine (74 per cent on average, with 5 member states even scoring over 90 per cent), while Slovakia was among the last three countries on less than 50 per cent.²² The data therefore seem to indicate a divergence between the government's and president's official foreign policy positions and citizens' views, not to mention a significant degree of apathy.

These trends can be partially explained by the long standing pro-Russian sentiment in Slovakia. It stems back to the communist past and historical sentiment, but it is also being fomented by some politicians. While Slovakia had a clear pro-Western and pro-European official foreign policy consensus in 2022, including support for the EU sanctions, with the prime minister visiting Ukraine as part of von der Leyen's delegation and the provision of wide-ranging support,²³ some opposition parties and leaders opposed these efforts, exacerbating the dividing lines in Slovakia's polarized society and reinforcing the pro-Russian and anti-EU sentiment. In addition, a malign operation by Russian embassy staff was exposed. Slovakia's Prosecutor General Žilinka

²⁰ Those supporting a Russian victory tend to be Covid vaccine refusers and voters of ĽSNS, Smer and Republika (in that order). See D. Kerekes, "Na Slovensku prevažuje želanie, aby vojnu vyhralo Rusko," [In Slovakia, the prevailing desire is for Russia to win the war] *Denník N*, September 14, 2022. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/3008629/na-slovensku-prevazuje-zelanie-aby-vojn-vyhralo-rusko/> (accessed on February 1, 2023).

²¹ K. Klingová, D. Hajdu, "New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, not Russia," *Globsec*, October 5, 2022. Available online: <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/press-releases/new-poll-slovaks-want-ukraine-win-war-not-russia> (accessed on February 1, 2023).

²² Slovakia was on 49 per cent, with Greece and Bulgaria coming last on 48 per cent. See "Autumn Parlemeter 2022: Eurobarometer 98.1 – presentation," European Parliament, January 2023. Available online: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2932> (accessed on February 1, 2023).

²³ Such as donations of military supplies or the S-300 anti-missile system, introduction of accommodation payments for Ukrainian refugees, and support for Kyiv's EU integration ambitions.

continued to undermine Slovakia's official foreign policy and pro-Russian propaganda continued to circulate.

Slovakia's official support for EU actions and Ukraine was not reflected in its popularity. While the government stuck to the foreign policy consensus, it proved unable to survive its term in government and the coalition disputes merely exacerbated public disillusionment with politics and weakened trust in institutions.²⁴ Some opposition parties²⁵ reinforced this trend. Slovak citizens are particularly susceptible to the appeal of extremist and populist movements. If the upcoming parliamentary elections lead to a big change in politics, Slovakia's pro-European policy will be at serious risk.

■ COFOE, vision of the European future and the many years of failing to communicate about the European Union in Slovakia

On May 9, 2022, the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFOE) came to an end after a year of citizen consultations across the EU member states. The final report²⁶ and set of citizens proposals was presented at the closing event in Brussels and in a subsequent progress report, while potential measures were revealed at a follow-up event in December 2022²⁷.

Faced with two major crises in a row, the EU launched a discussion on its capacity to act as a strong and respected global actor. With the COFOE (Proposal 21)²⁸

²⁴ "Dôvera v inštitúcie," [Trust in institutions] *Ako sa máte Slovensko?*, n.d. Available online: <https://www.akosamateslovensko.sk/tema/dovera-v-institucie/> (accessed on February 2, 2023).

²⁵ Namely Smer, Republika and ĽSNS, who are playing on citizens' fears and distrust of the EU and liberal democracy, often using pro-Russian disinformation narratives.

²⁶ "Conference on the Future of Europe: Report on the final outcome," European Union, May 2022. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20220509RES29121/20220509RES29121.pdf> (accessed February 2, 2023).

²⁷ "Proposals and related specific measures contained in the report on the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe: Preliminary technical assessment," Council of the European Union, November 30, 2022. Available online: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10033-2022-ADD-1-REV-1/en/pdf> (accessed February 2, 2023).

²⁸ "Conference on the Future of Europe: Report on the final outcome," op. cit., p. 64.

and the European Parliament calling for a Convention²⁹ and the political reality (increasing competition among global powers and significant changes in the European security environment), Treaty revision was once more on the table. There was also discussion over whether to extend the Council's qualified majority voting system (QMV) to Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

During its Council of EU Presidency in the second half of 2022, Czechia surveyed member states' interest in proceeding and received mixed feedback. Thirteen EU countries responded to the EU institutions' call for Treaty revisions by sending an open letter³⁰ opposing the idea for the moment. Slovakia has not yet³¹ formulated its final official position, which requires a thorough internal discussion. There are reasonable arguments on both sides.³² Slovakia is a small country and should therefore consider the national dimension first, such as its long term national interest in being part of the EU, and making it tamperproof against future changes of government. Secondly, it should bear in mind its long-term support for further EU enlargement and the accession of the Western Balkans countries and more recently Ukraine. Future enlargement is considered to be the breaking point at which the EU will have to switch to QMV in CFSP to avoid exacerbating the already complicated situation when

²⁹ "The call for a Convention for the revision of the Treaties," European Parliament, P9_TA(2022)0244, June 9, 2022. Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0244_EN.pdf (accessed on February 2, 2023).

³⁰ "Non-paper by Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Sweden on the outcome of and follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe," n.a., May 9, 2022. Available online: <https://twitter.com/SwedeninEU/status/1523637827686531072> (accessed on February 2, 2023).

³¹ Foreign ministry leaders adopted an open mindset, not ruling out the option of Treaty revision and extending QMV to CFSP, but asking for a more in-depth discussion on the real-life consequences, benefits and disadvantages. Slovak MEPs are divided on the issue, with some supporting it (Bilčík, Wiezik) and others being more cautious (Hajšel, Jurzyca, Beňová, Pollák) or opposing the idea (Lexmann). See "Korčok pre Sme: V najbližších rokoch sa Ukrajina do Únie nedostane, ukazujeme nulovú empatiu," [Korčok for SME: Ukraine will not be joining the EU any time soon, we have zero empathy] *Sme*, May 26, 2022. Available online: <https://svet.sme.sk/c/22921099/korcok-eu-ukrajina-vojna-rusko-zelenskyj.html> (accessed on February 2, 2023); "Slovenskí europoslanci sa nezhodujú v potrebe otvárania zmlúv o EÚ," [Slovak MEPs do not agree on the need to open the EU Treaties], *TASR*, June 11, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/cofoe-slovenski-europoslanci-sa-nezhod/639999-clanok.html> (accessed on February 2, 2023).

³² M. Pisklová, "QMV in CFSP: Impending necessity or resurfacing utopia?" Slovak Foreign Policy Association, February 2023. Available online: <https://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/pisklova-intempl-final.pdf> (accessed on February 15, 2023).

seeking compromises in foreign policy among the 27 countries (and either watering down the final outcome or being faced with a member state veto).³³

A second lesson from the COFOE experience that can be considered important for Slovakia is the need to find a suitable way of following up on activities already performed³⁴ and working out a long-term more encompassing strategy for communicating about the EU with Slovak citizens in order to improve understanding of how it works. That has been neglected for many years. Slovak politicians tend to either focus on "everyday" topics that voters can relate to or paint a negative image of the EU for their own benefit, instead of engaging in meaningful proper communication on democracy and values, the EU and the importance of Slovakia's membership of Western structures.

The data confirm that a positive communication strategy on the EU is needed, as this issue is deeply rooted. Slovak support for EU membership has been slowly diminishing over the past 10 years, reaching its lowest point in 2021, in contrast to the general trend across the EU.³⁵ Since then there has been a small increase (from 39 per cent in 2021 to 44 per cent), although that may be attributed to citizens' perceptions of the benefits of EU membership during the two consecutive crises and does not change the fact that the numbers are still among the lowest in the bloc. Almost every second Slovak has a neutral stance. Paradoxically, 70 per cent acknowledge the benefits of EU membership³⁶ and if a referendum was held in 2022, 77 per cent of Slovaks would vote to stay in the EU, versus 20 per cent who would leave. Despite that, 30 per cent of Slovaks (the most in the CEE) consider the EU a threat to their identity and values.³⁷ Lastly, 57 per cent of Slovak citizens think they are ill-informed about European matters.³⁸

³³ Ibid

³⁴ See last year's *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy* for more information on what has been done in the Slovak context under COFOE.

³⁵ B. Zmušková, "Slovensko má najnižšiu podporu členstva v Únii," [Slovakia has the lowest support for EU membership] *Euractiv*, February 9, 2022. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/buducnost-eu/news/slovensko-ma-najnizsiu-podporu-clenstva-v-unii/> (accessed on February 3, 2023).

³⁶ "Autumn Parlemeter 2022: Eurobarometer 98.1 – data annex," European Parliament, January 2023. Available online: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2932> (accessed on February 3, 2023).

³⁷ D. Hajdu et al., op. cit.

³⁸ "Standard Eurobarometer 96 – winter 2021–2022 – country factsheets in English: Slovakia," European Commission, April 2022. Available online: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2553> (accessed on February 3, 2023).

The evidence shows that strategic communication on EU-related topics by Slovak institutions is weak, constituting only 7–8 per cent of communication.³⁹

Another important indicator of Slovak citizens' position on the EU is participation in European elections. Every year since joining the EU in 2004 turnout in the European Parliament (EP) elections has been the lowest across the Union.^{40,41}

The data show that Slovak citizens acknowledge that Slovakia benefits from the EU and have no desire to leave the bloc, nonetheless they are not particularly interested in EU affairs and do not really understand the EU. That makes them vulnerable to populism and negative or disinformation campaigns. Slovak MEPs are well aware of the issue and have come up with ideas to address it.⁴²

Lastly, to elicit greater interest in EU affairs, Slovak institutions, especially the foreign ministry, could follow up on the COFOE activities, namely the in-person meetings with citizens across the regions, and launch a more comprehensive communication campaign. Thus far there has been no systemic far-reaching follow-up since COFOE. But former state secretary Martin Klus suggested it could be the way forward: "the dialogue between politicians and

³⁹ D. Hajdu et al., "Analýza strategickkej komunikácie v podmienkach SR," [Analysis of strategic communication in Slovakia] Globsec, May 6, 2022 B. Available online: https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Analýza-Strategickej-komunikacie-SR-2022_po-jednom.pdf (accessed on March 18, 2023).

⁴⁰ "Turnout by country (%): Final results," European Parliament, October 22, 2019. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

⁴¹ Although interest in the 2024 EP elections may be higher: the latest Eurobarometer puts the figure at 27 per cent. That would be an improvement on previous turnouts (less than 23 per cent in 2019 and under 20 per cent in 2014, 2009 and 2004) but would still put Slovakia on the bottom rung compared to the turnout in 2019. Source: Ibid & "Autumn Parlemeter 2022: Eurobarometer 98.1 – data annex," op. cit.

⁴² Slovak MEPs recommend improving citizen awareness of the EU, the way the institutions work and the allocation of competences between the EU and the member states; making knowledge of the EU part of the school curriculum; focusing more on EU-related topics in the Slovak media; greater emphasis on the European elections among Slovak political parties, who tend to ignore them; better use of EU funds; and even asking for greater parliamentary powers, especially on initiating legislation. See T. Tisová, "Prečo Slováci pochybujú o členstve v Únii a prečo nechodia k eurovoľbám?" [Why do Slovaks have doubts about EU membership and why don't they vote in the European elections?] *Euractiv*, February 22, 2022. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/buducnost-eu/news/preco-slovaci-pochybuju-o-clenstve-v-unii-a-preco-nechodia-k-eurovolbam-anketa/> (accessed on February 13, 2023).

citizens should remain a fixed part of political life in the Union."⁴³ Educating young people about the EU and EU values should be a key element of awareness raising.⁴⁴ Moreover former minister Korčok has frequently talked about the need to join the dots between foreign and domestic policy, something that has often been neglected in Slovakia.

Raising citizen awareness of the EU, its processes, competences and policies is key to building a society that is more resilient to disinformation and populism, otherwise Slovaks will remain vulnerable to these forces, which could easily undermine citizen trust in institutions and EU membership. Korčok pointed out that "too many Slovak politicians foster a negative image of the EU in Slovakia and 'kick it' whenever it suits them,"⁴⁵ fueling the negative image of the EU. Furthermore, over time Slovakia will cease being a net beneficiary and with further enlargement become a net contributor to the EU budget. This and the fact that Slovak politicians regularly cite the EU funds as being a major advantage of EU membership mean that it is all the more important to start informing citizens of the many other benefits it has, if we want to prevent a shift against the EU once the situation changes. The upcoming 20th anniversary of Slovakia's EU membership presents an ideal opportunity.

■ Escalation of disinformation in Slovakia and why it matters

Slovak citizens are significantly vulnerable to disinformation, propaganda and conspiracy theories owing to the various factors mentioned in this chapter (political instability, diminishing trust in institutions, economic concerns, and pro-Russian sentiments) not to mention the years of internal and external influence operations targeted at Slovakia. In fact, the majority of Slovaks

⁴³ M. Klus, "Otvoriť zmluvy EÚ? Len či ich aj zavrieme," [Open the EU Treaties? Only if we then close them], *Sme*, June 3, 2022. Available online: <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/22928419/otvorit-zmluvy-eu-len-ci-ich-aj-zavrieme.html> (accessed on February 13, 2023).

⁴⁴ "Martin Klus: We must raise awareness of children in primary schools that Europe is our common home," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 20, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/en/web/en/what-is-new/european-affairs> (accessed on February 13, 2023).

⁴⁵ I. Korčok, "Je načase začať o EÚ hovoriť inak," [It is time we started talking differently about the EU] *Sme*, January 17, 2023. Available online: <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/23113428/je-nacase-zacat-o-eu-hovorit-inak.html> (accessed on February 13, 2023).

(5 per cent in 2020⁴⁶ and 54 per cent in 2022⁴⁷) are affected, making them the most vulnerable population in the CEE. Susceptibility to conspiracy theories and disinformation tends to be amplified by dissatisfaction and a sense of insecurity, identified in previous sections in the Slovak case.⁴⁸ Disinformation, especially if spread by political authorities, can have a serious negative effect on public opinion and create or deepen societal divisions and trust in democratic processes and institutions.⁴⁹ This applies equally to public opinion on EU membership and support.

Disinformation began filtering more visibly into Slovakia in 2014 following the Russian annexation of Crimea. Over the subsequent ten years, the threat evolved and pro-Kremlin narratives began having a larger impact on Slovak society, becoming established through a rapidly developing disinformation media network, and later through social media. Over time (some left-wing or extremist) political figures and other influential actors in Slovakia began creating and/or spreading disinformation.⁵⁰

The Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) of 2022 is one such example. Public interest was ignited after General Prosecutor Žilinka published objections to it, some of which closely reflected pro-Russian disinformation. This created fertile ground for disinformation narratives around the DCA, and some Slovak politicians exploited it as “another battleground for Slovakia’s increasing polarization,”⁵¹ feeding on fear and compounding distrust in institutions and

⁴⁶ D. Hajdu, K. Klingová, op. cit., p. 46.

⁴⁷ D. Hajdu et al., op. cit.

⁴⁸ The authors of the study identified five key factors: 1. willingness to trade freedoms for other benefits; 2. support for autocratic leaders; 3. distrust of the media; 4. dissatisfaction with the system; and 5. dissatisfaction with life. Several of these are applicable to Slovakia. See D. Hajdu, K. Klingová, op. cit.

⁴⁹ One example is the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories casting doubt on democratically held elections and led to the attack on the Capitol in Washington in 2021. See “Disinformation and propaganda: impact on the functioning of the rule of law and democratic processes in the EU and its member states – 2021 update,” European Parliament, April 27, 2021. Available online: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653633/EXPO_STU\(2021\)653633_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653633/EXPO_STU(2021)653633_EN.pdf) (accessed on March 16, 2023).

⁵⁰ M. Pisklová, J. Sýkora, “Disinformation and the Slovak Republic,” in *Information and media literacy as a tool to counter disinformation in the V4*, Slovak Foreign Policy Association, December 2022, p. 3–10. Available online: <https://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Disinformation-and-the-V4.pdf> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

⁵¹ M. Spišák, “How the Slovak-U.S. Defence Cooperation Agreement became the source of disinformation,” *Visegrad Insight*, January 18, 2022. Available online: <https://visegradinsight.eu/how-the-slovak-u-s-defence-cooperation-agreement-became-the-source-of-disinformation/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

the rise of Euroscepticism. In 2022 the dominant disinformation narratives in Slovakia focused on the war in Ukraine, aimed to create information chaos and were designed to garner support for the Russian cause, or question or attack state institutions, international communities and the democratic order.⁵²

Much has been done in Slovakia to fight disinformation, both by the state⁵³ and civil society, but tackling such deeply rooted issues takes time. Hence the need for a communication campaign to raise awareness on the EU. Slovak leaders should bear in mind that national policies are not the right tool for dealing with national politicians who became “disinformation super spreaders.”⁵⁴

In the fight against disinformation, the EU’s capacity is limited to the role of coordinator and the provision of tools, networking centers and helping lead negotiations with social media platforms. The remaining competences lie with the member states – Slovakia is responsible for reforming the education system and school curriculum and developing young people’s media and information literacy⁵⁵, setting effective cross-institutional strategic communication (ideally also working on predicting disinformation narratives,⁵⁶ or ruling out abuse of the public service media), or creating and enforcing laws enabling the prosecution of disinformation actors in Slovakia. The current legislation is inadequate and social media networks do not have the staff to tackle disinformation regulation in Central Europe. However, if the EU were to adopt legislation (such as the DSA), the situation could be improved.⁵⁷

The legal framework established by the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Media Act (DMA) in 2022 still has to be implemented and it remains to

⁵² “Správa policajného zboru o dezinformáciách na Slovensku v roku 2022,” [Report of the Police Force on disinformation in Slovakia in 2022] Department of communication and prevention of the Presidium of the Police force, February 10, 2023. Available online: https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/images/sprava-o-dezinformaciach-sr-2022.pdf (accessed on March 16, 2023).

⁵³ Such as the creation of several state departments to tackle the issue (foreign ministry, defence ministry, Office of Government, interior ministry and the National Security Authority), improve strategic state communication and regulate the disinformation media landscape.

⁵⁴ External rule of law monitoring by the EU is also crucial as is support for investigative journalists via transnational networks, and acting to prevent disinformation spilling over into hate speech and incitement to hatred/violence. See European Parliament, 2021, op. cit.

⁵⁵ But importantly, a wider critical media literacy programme should be aimed at all levels of the population, for example through mobile buses or social media apps. Source: European Parliament 2021, op. cit.

⁵⁶ For example, in 2022 the Slovak police launched a wide-ranging preventive educational campaign on Facebook.

⁵⁷ Department of communication and prevention of the Presidium of the Police force, op. cit.

be seen what impact it will have on the information environment in the EU. Implementation will take place in 2023 and be complete by March 2024.⁵⁸ It will be accompanied by legislation on the regulation of AI products and services that is currently being negotiated. Under the legislation large online platforms will be obliged to tackle disinformation and regularly review measures taken. This applies to social media as well, where disinformation is amplified through manipulative algorithms or weak content moderation. In Slovakia, the ministries responsible for drafting DSA – the Ministry of Economy⁵⁹ and the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization have generally supported the DSA.⁶⁰

The Slovak MEP Vladimír Bilčík has been working on disinformation and the European fight against malign foreign influences, including disinformation. In 2022 he was elected EPP coordinator on ING2, a special committee following up on the work of the INGE committee that concluded in March 2022.⁶¹

■ What about the rule of law?

The EU has faced problems with the rule of law in some member states and that continued to be a hot topic in 2022. The main spotlight is on Hungary and Poland, with Article 7 being triggered against them. Slovak MEP and

Vice-President of the European Parliament Michal Šimečka⁶² became a vocal critic of the way the Union handled the situation – taking too long and failing to make use of existing mechanisms – as negotiations with Hungary hit a dead end.⁶³ The European Parliament called on the Commission to be more active and in September 2022 it adopted a resolution labeling Hungary a “hybrid regime of electoral autocracy.” The majority of Slovak MEPs backed the move.⁶⁴

The last resort⁶⁵ is the new rule of law conditionality mechanism designed to protect the EU budget by suspending EU funds in countries failing to adhere to the rule of law, which was finally approved in 2022 after a European Court of Justice ruling⁶⁶. It was triggered against Hungary, a decision that Slovakia supported in the Council vote.

Although dialogue is the ideal means of solving internal EU issues, in future this case should prevent the systematic subversion of democracy and rule of law in a member state. It reveals both the limits of action and which tools are effective. Hungary has been sanctioned in an exemplary fashion. If the approach proves effective, that will be good news for Slovakia and its future in the EU. In the event Slovakia finds itself with a potential government with authoritarian tendencies, intending to breach the rule of law, centralize power, control the judiciary and limit media freedom, EU supervision will act as a guarantee.

The rule of law in Slovakia improved after the change of government in 2020, as law enforcement officials were able to work more freely. Nonetheless there

⁵⁸ “The Digital Services Act package,” European Commission, n.d. Available online: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package> (accessed on March 16, 2023).

⁵⁹ The economy ministry produced a preliminary opinion for the official Slovak position. Slovakia commented on and suggested changes to the legislation, but generally supported the DSA, recognizing its importance and wider benefits for online transparency and security, including in mitigating the systemic risks of disinformation to society and democracy. See “Riadne predbežné stanovisko k návrhu nariadenia Európskeho parlamentu a Rady o jednotnom trhu s digitálnymi službami (akt o digitálnych službách) a o zmene smernice 2000/31/ES,” [Preliminary opinion on the European Parliament and Council’s proposed single digital services market (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, n.d. (accessed on March 17, 2023).

⁶⁰ “Členské štáty sa dohodli na smerovaní pri pravidlách pre digitálny trh,” [Member states have agreed on the direction of the digital market rules] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, November 21, 2021. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/press/clenske-staty-sa-dohodli-na-smerovanii-pri-pravidlach-pre-digitalny-trh> (accessed on March 17, 2023).

⁶¹ “EP zriadil výbor pre zahraničné zasahovanie do demokratických procesov,” [EP established a special committee for foreign interference in democratic processes] *TASR*, May 13, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/zahranicie/ep-zriadil-novy-vybor-pre-zahranicne/633349-clanok.html> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

⁶² Šimečka came up with the original proposal for an effective mechanism for protecting democracy and the rule of law in the EU, adopted by the EP in October 2020.

⁶³ “Šimečka: Vyplatenie eurofondov pre Maďarsko môže byť nebezpečným precedensom,” [Šimečka: Disbursement of the EU funds to Hungary could be a dangerous precedent] *Trend*, December 12, 2022. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/politika/simecka-vyplatenie-eurofondov-pre-madarsko-moze-byt-nebezpecnym-precedensom> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁶⁴ Eight voted for the resolution, three against (including two LSNS MEPs). See “Existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded,” *MEP Watch*, September 15, 2022. Available online: <https://mepwatch.eu/9/vote.html?v=148024&country=sk> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁶⁵ If we disregard the option of withdrawing voting rights in the Council. The problem with that option is that it has to be adopted unanimously (excluding the country in question) and it has proved ineffective as Poland and Hungary supported one another.

⁶⁶ “ECJ rules in favour of making EU cash handouts conditional on a country’s respect for rule of law,” *Euronews*, February 16, 2022. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/02/16/ecj-to-rule-on-whether-eu-cash-handouts-can-be-made-conditional> (accessed on February 21, 2023).

is still room for improvement, as indicated in the *2022 Rule of Law Report*.⁶⁷ Apart from the need to adhere to the national recovery plan obligations, recommendations were made on improving the judicial system, including oversight of investigations into judges where abuse of the law is suspected, regulating lobbying, better protection for journalists and independence for public service media. The report also highlighted issues with some of the Prosecutor General's actions and recommended Slovakia restrict the power to annul prosecution decisions in light of the Prosecutor General having relied on this power to dismiss charges in certain high-level corruption cases, raising concerns about the potential abuse of power and bypassing of courts.

One incident in October 2022 not covered in the report, as it took place afterwards, was a terrorist attack on two members of the LGBTI+ community in Bratislava with fatal consequences. In response, the EP's Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Monitoring Group (DRFMG) visited Slovakia in December. It expressed concern over deficiencies in equality of rights in Slovakia, namely discrimination against the LGBTI+ and Roma communities and called on the government to act. The head of the delegation stated that the plan was to monitor future progress on this issue, as well as the ongoing judiciary reforms and the use of the Prosecutor General's powers.⁶⁸

In October 2022 President Zuzana Čaputová delivered a speech to the EP,⁶⁹ in which she honored the memory of the victims of the Bratislava hate crime, defended Slovak interests⁷⁰ and underlined its close affiliation to the EU and modern Western liberal democracies. Slovak MEPs welcomed⁷¹ the

president's speech and its emphasis on protecting democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Slovakia and in the EU.⁷²

■ Progress on the Slovak National Recovery and Resilience plan

The initial stage of Slovakia's recovery plan implementation indicates that the entire process is likely to be challenging. All the milestones have to be fulfilled and funds cannot be transferred from one reform to another. Internal issues complicated government efforts to ensure the first two reforms were approved amid a lack of support from one of the coalition parties, *Sme Rodina*.

A crucial reform of the judiciary system ("the court map") was among the last conditions to be met before the first payment could be made. The aim of the reform was to specialize the courts in order to improve and streamline decision-making but it attracted wide-spread criticism, along with resistance from some judges. In the end the coalition reached several compromises and parliament passed the reform and so the condition was met.⁷³ Having fulfilled the first 14 milestones, Slovakia requested its first payment of €458 million in April 2022. It was received in July 2022 following a positive assessment of Slovakia's progress on the reforms.⁷⁴

At the end of October, Slovakia submitted a request for second payment of €815 million. However, as the proposed national budget for 2023 contained no spending limits, the Commission confirmed that if adopted in that form, it

⁶⁷ "2022 Rule of Law Report: Country chapter on the rule of law situation in Slovakia," *European Commission*, July 13, 2022. Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/56_1_194041_coun_chap_slovakia_en.pdf (accessed on February 22, 2023).

⁶⁸ "EP: Monitorovacia skupina poukázala na nedostatky v rovnosti práv v SR," [EP: Monitoring group pointed out shortcomings in equal rights in Slovakia] *TASR*, December 18, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/ep-monitorovacia-skupina-poukazala-na/681960-clanok.html> (accessed on February 22, 2023).

⁶⁹ "Formal sitting: address by Zuzana Čaputová, president of the Slovak Republic," *European Parliament*, October, 19, 2022. Available online: https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/sk/vidео/p_1231561 (accessed on February 22, 2023).

⁷⁰ For example, by requesting parliamentary support for solutions that would help the country, such as an agreement on a natural gas price cap or decoupling electricity and gas prices.

⁷¹ With the exception of Robert Hajšel (SMER), who would have liked the speech to focus more on the high price of energy and goods.

⁷² "Europoslanci SR väčšinou ocenili prejav prezidentky Čaputej v EP," [Majority of Slovak MEPs welcome President Čaputová's speech to the EP] *TASR*, October 19, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/europoslanci-sr-vaccinou-ocenili-prej/668402-clanok.html> (accessed on February 22, 2023).

⁷³ "Kolíkovej súdna mapa prešla parlamentom, ministerka sľubuje kvalifikovanejšie a rýchlejšie rozsudky," [Kolíkovej's court map approved by parliament, the minister promises better and quicker verdicts] *SITA*, April 27, 2022. Available online: <https://sita.sk/kolikovej-reforma-sudnej-mapy-presla-parlamentom-ministerka-si-od-zmien-slubuje-kvalifikovanejsie-a-rychlejsie-rozsudky/> (accessed on February 24, 2023).

⁷⁴ "Slovensko obdržalo prvú platbu z Plánu obnovy," [Slovakia received its first recovery plan payment] *Government Office of the Slovak Republic*, July 29, 2022. Available online: <https://www.planobnovy.sk/aktuality/slovensko-dnes-obdrzalo-prvu-platbu-z-planu-obnovy/> (accessed on February 24, 2023).

would be treated as having reversed the recovery plan milestone and further payments would be blocked. The spending limits had initially been approved as part of the first payment request, but given the lack of progress on the national recovery plan milestones, the previous ones were also subjected to review in order to prevent a reversal.⁷⁵ In the end Heger came up with the solution of inserting an extra clause into the 2023 budget stating that spending limits were not applicable during the suspension of the European debt rules. Subsequently, the Commission approved the 16 milestones in its preliminary assessment⁷⁶ and Slovakia is currently awaiting final confirmation from the Economic and Financial Committee.

The problems do not stop there, however, with the planned construction of Rázsochy hospital now presenting difficulties.⁷⁷ Moreover, given that Slovakia has already encountered serious issues with the recovery plan implementation, further complicated by the domestic political situation, one can expect the process to be even more demanding under a caretaker government in the run-up to the early elections in 2023 and amid tough political campaigning. The successful and timely implementation of the steps planned under the national recovery plan therefore remains at risk for the time being.

■ Conclusion

The year 2022 will go down in European history. In recent years the European Union, created as a peace project, has had to tackle issues of democratic legitimacy and was intending to discuss the future of the EU based on citizens'

⁷⁵ M. Onuferová, "Brusel potvrdil, že rozpočet bez výdavkových limitov by znamenal zvrátenie mílnika plánu obnovy. Hrozia aj finančné následky," [Brussels confirmed that a budget with no spending limits would constitute a reversal of the recovery plan milestone. There may be financial consequences.] *Denník N*, November 18, 2022. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/3113169/brusel-potvrdil-ze-rozpocet-bez-vydavkovych-limitov-by-znamenal-zvratenie-milnika-planu-obnovy/> (accessed on February 24, 2023).

⁷⁶ "Positive preliminary assessment of the satisfactory fulfilment of milestones and targets related to the second payment request submitted by Slovakia on 25 October 2022, transmitted to the Economic and Financial Committee by the European Commission," European Commission, February 8, 2023. Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/C_2023_1038_1_annexe_EN.pdf (accessed on February 24, 2023).

⁷⁷ "Semafor investičných projektov: Národná univerzitná nemocnica Rázsochy," [Traffic light of investment projects: Rázsochy National University Hospital] Government Office of the Slovak Republic, n.d. Available online: <https://www.planobnovy.sk/realizacia/semafor-investicnych-projektov/narodna-univerzitna-nemocnica-raszochy/> (accessed on February 24, 2023).

proposals from COFOE, but finds itself unexpectedly facing its second major crisis in a row. The war on its border has altered perceptions of many policy areas and shifted the priorities of leaders and citizens in member states, with security, defense and protecting the EU's democratic values now at the forefront. The new situation has raised questions that Slovakia, as an EU member state, will need to find answers to and articulate positions on, such as in the debate on QMV in CFSP that has resurfaced.

Importantly, the EU demonstrated unity and determination in the face of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, with Slovakia playing an active role, supporting anti-Russian sanctions and common EU goals and providing various kinds of aid. While Slovakia's leaders maintained the pro-Western foreign policy consensus throughout 2022 and ensured the country was at the center of common European events, it suffered from internal problems at home. Years of neglect and the negative political discourse nurtured an unfavorable image of the EU, rooted in pro-Russian sentiment, and polarized Slovak society, only to be further fueled by increasingly sophisticated information operations. A combination of these factors and opinion surveys emphasize the need for a wide-ranging positive public communication campaign. It should be aimed at promoting EU values and principles, explaining how the EU works and how Slovakia shapes common European policies and, more generally, bringing EU affairs closer to citizens. Thereby fostering resilience against malign information operations from both outside and within the country and willingness to participate in shaping the future vision of the EU they live in. The apathy and uncertainty among Slovaks captured in the opinion polls indicates that there is a lot of work to do.

Despite the progress Slovakia has made there is still room for improvement in the rule of law and above all the national recovery plan. Achieving the aims and reforms outlined in the recovery plan would greatly benefit the country, but it remains to be seen how much the current domestic political instability and early elections will undermine efforts by state institutions. With early elections planned for September, the year 2023 could end up being another turning point should there be a significant change in government. That could threaten the fight against corruption, foreign policy orientation, Slovakia's strong position in Western structures and its constructive partnership in the European Union, which could in turn negatively affect EU unity on tackling the crises it faces.



Zsolt Gál

2022 – stagflation, war economy, polycrisis and megathreats

In 2022 the global economy was hit by several shockwaves. First, and most importantly, the triumphant return of inflation continued, with price increases reaching levels unseen since the 1970s. That triggered a belated reaction from central banks and relatively rapid, simultaneous monetary tightening followed, lowering growth prospects across the globe. The developed world hovered on the threshold of stagflation – a combination of high inflation and low or negative economic growth. Meanwhile some developing countries teetered on the cliff edge of sovereign debt default. The era of cheap and abundant money was definitely over, with devastating effects for virtually all markets: stock markets, bond markets and property markets were down in most countries and the downturn included some spectacular collapses like Tesla shares or the largest cryptocurrency Bitcoin. The Russian invasion of Ukraine led not just to enormous human suffering but also huge economic damage. Adding in the sanctions against Russia and the Kremlin’s policy of using energy as a weapon against the European Union, we saw further amplification of economic contraction and/or inflation. Meanwhile, China’s zero-Covid policy continued to act as a drag on local and global economic growth for most of 2022, before it was suddenly abandoned at the end of the year, and that and the swift reopening of the Chinese economy led to concerns the much tamed global inflation wave would rekindle. As if that was not enough, America intensified its “chip war” with China, adding new widespread export restrictions on semiconductors, in order to slow Beijing’s technological and military advances. Small wonder that the term “polycrisis” was being widely used to describe the multiple unfolding and often mutually reinforcing global crises on an almost unprecedented scale. Just as it seemed the prospects couldn’t be darker, one of the world’s most renowned economists, Nouriel Roubini, published a book titled *Megathreats*.

However, from late 2022 and early 2023 signs of hope appeared on the horizon of the world economy. Russia’s energy weapon seemed to backfire,

inflationary pressures decreased somewhat, the economic slowdown was a bit milder than estimated in the developed world and, all in all, Western economies demonstrated higher resilience than expected. On the other hand, the fight against inflation is far from over and higher interest rates are here to stay for a while. They have already contributed to bank collapses and bailouts from America to Switzerland in March 2023, shaking the world of global finance. Huge uncertainty seems to be the new norm; it is extremely difficult to make predictions. Positive signs of hope may signal light at the end of the tunnel, or just the light of an oncoming train – this time it is the Polycrisis Megathreats Express.

■ Inflation returns, central banks belatedly and reluctantly fight back

In 2022 the triumphant return of inflation continued, with price increases accelerating across the globe with very few exceptions (Table 1). Median global headline inflation (consumer price indices) exceeded 9 per cent in the second half of the year, its highest level since 1995; reaching almost 10 per cent in emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs), its highest level since 2008; and just over 9 per cent in advanced economies, the highest since 1982.¹ Inflation was above target – usually way above target – in virtually all countries that had previously adopted inflation targeting. The number of countries detecting double-digit annualized inflation jumped from 23 in June 2021 to 69 in June 2022.² While in most regions the steep increase in inflation was a new phenomenon, in countries that had been tackling high inflation for longer – usually as a consequence of misguided domestic economic policies – it was just business as usual. Indeed, the 210 per cent average consumer price increase in one of the notorious inflation champions, Venezuela, was the consequence of a sharp, more than tenfold decrease compared to levels measured two years earlier (Table 1). As headline inflation seemed to peak globally and in most regions in the second half of 2022, underlying or

¹ “Global economic prospects,” World Bank, January 2023, p. 11.

² “Trade and development report 2022. Development prospects in a fractured world: Global order and regional responses,” United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023, p. 3.

core inflation (calculated by leaving out food and energy prices) was still going up in most economies and remained well above pre-pandemic levels.³

Central banks across the globe reacted to the very high inflation with interest rates hikes, apart from the notable exceptions of Japan, China and Turkey.⁴ Although global financial institutions⁵ usually consider monetary policy tightening to be “unexpectedly rapid and synchronous,” understanding it has been belated, and rather cautious. First, major central banks thought the inflation wave was just transitory and later, recognizing that was not the case, took decisive action but still seemed to be trying to balance calming inflation on one hand and avoiding recession and difficulty financing public debts on the other. As Carmen Reinhart, former chief economist at the World Bank and currently a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School told Nikkei Asia:

The Fed acted late. The ECB acted even later. The narrative, for a very long time, was that the inflationary shock was transitory – that because it was transitory, and really a post-COVID phenomenon, you really didn’t need to act. And it delayed corrective action.⁶

Reinhart added that the rate hikes are not sufficient to stop inflation and attempts at a “soft landing,” or taming inflation without triggering a recession, have rarely succeeded, and the world was “highly likely” to enter into a recession. In February 2023, the Fed’s basic interest rate reached 4.75 per cent and the ECB’s 3 per cent, but both were still well below actual inflation. Far from the levels used last time, when the Fed under Chairman of the Board of Governors Paul Volker (1979–1987) defeated the high inflation of the 1970s – in 1981 the federal funds rate was allowed to approach 20 per cent.⁷

³ *World Economic Outlook Update January 2023. Inflation Peaking amid Low Growth*, International Monetary Fund, 2023, p. 2.

⁴ “Global central banks aren’t declaring victory over inflation yet,” *Bloomberg News*, January, 8, 2023. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-08/global-central-banks-aren-t-declaring-victory-over-inflation-yet?leadSource=uverify%20wall> (accessed on February 17, 2023).

⁵ “Global economic prospects,” op. cit., p. 3.

⁶ “Debt hampers fight against global inflation: Carmen Reinhart,” *Nikkei Asia*, January 5, 2023. Available online: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Debt-hampers-fight-against-global-inflation-Carmen-Reinhart> (accessed on February 17, 2023).

⁷ T. Sablik, “Recession of 1981–82 Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, Federal Reserve History, Economic Research, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.” Available online: <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/recession-of-1981-82> (accessed on February 23, 2023).

Reinhardt in another article written for Project Syndicate⁸ pointed out the exceptional circumstances of today. Real interest rates (nominal interest rates minus inflation) have remained negative for multiyear periods in the global financial center only four times since the mid-1800s: the first three episodes were during the two world wars and in the aftermath of the OPEC oil shock of 1974–1980; the fourth and longest episode is the current one, with real interest rates being consistently negative since the 2008–2009 global financial crisis.

...restoring positive real interest rates – thereby stabilizing inflation – may require monetary policy to be kept tighter for longer than many policymakers and market participants seem to expect. Yet it is far from clear that central banks will maintain their commitment to tightening in the face of weakening economic activity. The persistence of inflation in the 1970s can be explained partly by the US Federal Reserve’s tendency to do too little too late or to waver in the tightening process.⁹

In early 2023 monetary tightening was still unfinished business. For example, a Bloomberg analysis from January 2023 showed that of the 21 monitored jurisdictions 10 were expected to increase rates (apart from the two most important, the Fed and ECB; Bank of England, Reserve Bank of India, Bank of Korea, Swiss National Bank and Swedish Riksbank), nine were projected to cut rates (including China, Brazil, Australia and Canada) and two (Bank of Japan and National Bank of Poland) to hold.¹⁰ Looking at basic interest rates, among the important (G20) economies in 2022 the record holder has been Argentina with its interest rate floor of 75 per cent, while Turkey represented another extreme: for political reasons the rate went from 14 to 9 per cent and inflation exploded to over 80 per cent.¹¹

⁸ C. M. Reinhardt, “Will central banks do what it takes?” *Project Syndicate*, December 12, 2022. Available online: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/magazine/monetary-tightening-risks-recession-debt-distress-by-carmen-m-reinhart-2022-12> (accessed on February 27, 2023).

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ “Global central banks aren’t declaring victory over inflation yet,” op. cit.

¹¹ Ibid

Table 1. Inflation and economic growth in selected major economies and groups of countries (2020–2023)

	Inflation rate (% change of CPI)				Real GDP annual growth rate, %			
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2020	2021	2022	2023
World	3.2	4.7	8.8	6.5	-3	6	3.2	2.7
Advanced Economies	0.7	3.1	7.2	4.4	-4.4	5.2	2.4	1.1
United States	1.2	4.7	8.1	3.5	-3.4	5.7	1.6	1
United Kingdom	0.9	2.6	9.1	9	-9.3	7.4	3.6	0.3
European Union	0.7	2.9	9.2	6.8	-5.6	5.4	3.2	0.7
Euro Area	0.3	2.6	8.3	5.7	-6.1	5.2	3.1	0.5
France	0.5	2.1	5.8	4.6	-7.9	6.8	2.5	0.7
Germany	0.4	3.2	8.5	7.2	-3.7	2.6	1.5	-0.3
Italy	-0.1	1.9	8.7	5.2	-9	6.7	3.2	-0.2
Slovakia	2	2.8	11.9	10.1	-4.4	3	1.8	1.5
Czech Republic	3.2	3.8	16.3	8.6	-5.5	3.5	1.9	1.5
Hungary	3.3	5.1	13.9	13.3	-4.5	7.1	5.7	1.8
Poland	3.4	5.1	13.8	14.3	-2.2	5.9	3.8	0.5
Switzerland	-0.7	0.6	3.1	2.4	-2.5	4.2	2.2	0.8
Japan	0	-0.2	2	1.4	-4.6	1.7	1.7	1.6
Emerging Market Economies	5.1	5.9	9.9	8.1	-1.9	6.6	3.7	3.7
China	2.4	0.9	2.2	2.2	2.2	8.1	3.2	4.4
India	6.2	5.5	6.9	5.1	-6.6	8.7	6.8	6.1
Russian Federation	3.4	6.7	13.8	5	-2.7	4.7	-3.4	-2.3
Ukraine	2.7	9.4	20.6	-	-3.8	3.4	-35	-
Turkey	12.3	19.6	73.1	51.2	1.9	11.4	5	3
Iran	36.4	40.1	40	40	3.3	4.7	3	2
Argentina	42	48.4	72.4	76.1	-9.9	10.4	4	2
Venezuela	2355.1	1588.5	210	195	-30	0.5	6	6.5
Zimbabwe	557.2	98.5	284.9	204.6	-5.2	7.2	3	2.8

Notes: Data for 2022 and 2023 are IMF projections. The average consumer price index (CPI) is a measure of a country’s average level of prices based on the cost of a typical basket of consumer goods and services in a given period. The rate of inflation is the percentage change in the average CPI.

Source: “World Economic Outlook: countering the cost-of-living crisis,” International Monetary Fund, October 2022, pp. 97–136.

The problem with monetary tightening of course is that it hurts economic growth and the ability of highly indebted countries to manage their debts.

According to some estimates, an increase of 1 percentage point in Fed interest rates reduces real gross domestic product (GDP) by almost 1 per cent after 11 quarters in the US and by 0.5 per cent in advanced economies and by 0.8 per cent in emerging economies after three years.¹² Apart from monetary tightening the global economy faced two more major headwinds in 2022. One was Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Putin regime's use of energy as a weapon against the European Union (see the following section), the other was China's continuing zero-Covid policy. According to a report by the German Economic Institute (IW) Russia's war against Ukraine will cost the global economy more than \$1.6 trillion (€1.5 trillion) in 2022 alone.¹³ Towards the end of 2022 the Chinese communist regime had still not been able to adjust its containment strategy to the changing Covid-19 pandemic, namely the more infectious but less lethal and severe Omicron variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The Covid-19 outbreaks led to several temporary lockdowns in major cities including the largest one, Shanghai, and weakened local demand and continued to disrupt manufacturing activities and global supply chains.¹⁴ In late 2022 the zero-Covid policy was unexpectedly reversed, this time creating concerns that a swift Chinese reopening might add further fuel to the decelerating global inflation wave. Supply chain disruptions due to the pandemic were therefore likely to remain a temporary problem. However, a much more serious strategic power contest was intensifying at the same time.

In October 2022 the next step in the ongoing "chip war" was ushered in by the Biden administration publishing a sweeping set of export controls to cut China off from certain semiconductor chips made anywhere in the world with US equipment, with the potential to set Chinese tech companies back years.¹⁵ The decision followed a series of earlier steps aimed at limiting the

¹² "Trade and development report 2022. Development prospects in a fractured world: Global disorder and regional responses," op. cit., p. 4.

¹³ M. Grömling, "Ukraine: Krieg kostet Weltwirtschaft etwa 1,6 Billionen Dollar," Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft (IW), February 21, 2023. Available online: <https://www.iwkoeln.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/michael-groemling-krieg-kostet-weltwirtschaft-etwa-16-billionen-dollar.html> (accessed on February 21, 2023).

¹⁴ "World Economic Outlook: countering the cost-of-living crisis," International Monetary Fund, October 17, 2022, pp. 7–8.

¹⁵ S. Nellis, K. Freifeld and A. Alper, "U.S. aims to hobble China's chip industry with sweeping new export rules," *Reuters*, October 10, 2022. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/technology/us-aims-hobble-chinas-chip-industry-with-sweeping-new-export-rules-2022-10-07/> (accessed on February 9, 2023).

export of sensitive cutting-edge technology to China. Previously, in August 2022 the US Congress had passed the CHIPS and Science Act (informally the CHIPS Act), which was then signed by president Biden committing \$52.7 billion for incentives and investments in domestic semiconductor chip manufacturing.¹⁶ Apart from the traditional protectionism that favors domestic production and jobs, there have been serious strategic concerns regarding this most important industry, which is heavily concentrated in a small handful of countries and companies connected to each other via a complicated supply chain network. The Covid-19 crisis disrupted the supply chains and thereby fully revealed the fragility of this network and the vulnerability of import-dependent countries including America. For example, the United States has no capacity for the fabrication of leading-edge logic chips (5 nanometers and below), while 67 per cent of manufacturing is located in Taiwan and 31 per cent in South Korea.¹⁷ "No other facet of the economy is so dependent on so few firms" noted Chris Miller, author of the book *Chip War*, who described the "bewildering complexity" of the industry as follows:

A typical chip might be designed with blueprints from the Japanese-owned, UK-based company called Arm, by a team of engineers in California and Israel, using design software from the United States. When a design is complete, it's sent to a facility in Taiwan, which buys ultra-pure silicon wafers and specialized gases from Japan. The design is carved into silicon using one of the world's most precise machinery, which can etch, deposit and measure layers of materials a few atoms thick. These tools are produced primarily by five companies, one Dutch, one Japanese, and three Californian, without which advanced chips are basically impossible to make. Then the chip is packaged and tested, often in Southeast Asia, before being sent to China for assembly into a phone or computer... Chips from Taiwan provide 37 per cent of the world's new computing power each year. Two Korean companies produce 44 per cent of the world's memory chips. The Dutch company ASML builds 100 per cent of the world's extreme ultraviolet lithography machines, without which cutting-edge chips are simply impossible to make. OPEC's 40 per cent share of world oil production looks unimpressive by comparison... As

¹⁶ V. Kannan, J. Feldgoise, "After the CHIPS Act: the limits of reshoring and next steps for U.S. semiconductor policy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022. Available online: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/11/22/after-chips-act-limits-of-reshoring-and-next-steps-for-u.s.-semiconductor-policy-pub-88439> (accessed on February 12, 2023).

¹⁷ Ibid

China and the United States struggle for supremacy, both Washington and Beijing are fixated on controlling the future of computing—and, to a frightening degree, that future is dependent on a small island that Beijing considers a renegade province and America has committed to defend by force.¹⁸

Amid the Russian aggression against Ukraine, strategic analysts across the globe tried to quantify the possible cost of conflict in the Taiwan strait. As Miller warns in his book, even a partial blockade by Chinese forces or a single missile strike on TSMC's (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited) most advanced chip factory could easily cause hundreds of billions of dollars of damage to the world economy.¹⁹

Considering all above-mentioned factors, it is no wonder that words like polycrisis or permacrisis were thought to best characterize 2022. In an effort to describe the year in a single word, executive opinion editor at the *Financial Times*, Jonathan Derbyshire, opted for "polycrisis."²⁰ Used by former US Treasury secretary Lawrence Summers and popularized by the economic historian and FT contributing editor Adam Tooze, it was found best to capture "a historical moment characterized by multiple global crises unfolding at the same time on an almost unprecedented scale."²¹ (The word was originally coined in the late 1990s by French social scientists Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern, who employed it to describe the "interwoven and overlapping crises" facing humanity, especially in the ecological sphere.) Additionally, "Permacrisis," a term created from the words permanent and crisis to describe the feeling of living through a period of war, inflation and political instability, was chosen as Collins Dictionary's word of the year for 2022.²² According to Alex Beecroft, head of Collins Learning, it "sums up just how truly awful 2022 has been for so many people." All in all, there were enough factors to slow

¹⁸ C. Miller, *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2022, pp. xxiv-xxv.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. xxvi.

²⁰ J. Derbyshire, "Year in a word: Polycrisis," *Financial Times*, January 1, 2023. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/f6c4f63c-aa71-46f0-a0a7-c2a4c4a3c0f1> (accessed on February 19, 2023).

²¹ Ibid

²² H. Bushby, "Permacrisis declared Collins Dictionary word of the year," *BBC News*, November 1, 2022. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-63458467> (accessed on February 19, 2023).

down economic growth in the three most important global economic powerhouses, the United States, the European Union and China, with spillover effects in other developed and emerging economies as well. Unsurprisingly, GDP-growth forecasts were slashed across the globe. In early 2023 global growth was projected to be only 1.7 per cent by the World Bank, 1.3 percentage points lower than in June 2022, meaning the third weakest economic expansion in nearly three decades, overshadowed only by the global recessions caused by the pandemic in 2020 and the global financial crisis in 2009.²³ The World Bank's growth projections have been downgraded for almost all advanced economies and about two-thirds of EMDEs. The European Commission in its 2022 Autumn Forecast projected a shallow contraction of the EU economy in the fourth quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023.²⁴ However, EU economies have proved more resilient vis-à-vis the Kremlin's energy weapon, with labor markets and consumption remaining robust and resulting in a more optimistic winter interim forecast, which lifted the outlook for growth from 0.3 to 0.8 per cent for the whole of the EU.²⁵ At the same time estimated average EU-inflation for 2023 declined moderately from 6.1 to 5.6 per cent – but still almost three times the ECB's official inflation target. Still, cautious optimism was returning with hopes that interest rates hikes might end sooner and at lower levels. This feeling was even stronger on the other side of the Atlantic, where investors hoped for a "soft landing" and the return of looser monetary policy which propelled stock markets in early 2023. Paradoxically, this time central bankers were much more worried about the prospect of inflation: Fed chairman, Jerome Powell warned on February 7th that the disinflationary process "has a long way to go," while the very same day Isabel Schnabel of the European Central Bank warned that underlying upward pressure on prices remained "extraordinarily high."²⁶ On disinflation we share the concerns of the world's leading economic weekly, the *Economist*, that the market celebration may turn out to be premature and the battle with inflation far from over:

²³ "Global economic prospects," op. cit., p. 5.

²⁴ "European Economic Forecast, Winter 2023," *European Economy Institutional Paper* 194, February 2023, p. 2.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ "Lots of investors think inflation is under control. Not so fast," *The Economist*, February 16, 2023. Available online: <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2023/02/16/lots-of-investors-think-inflation-is-under-control-not-so-fast> (accessed on February 17, 2023).

The oil price is lower today than it was before Russia invaded Ukraine a year ago. The picture of falling inflation is repeated around the world: the headline rate is falling in 25 of the 36 mainly rich countries in the OECD. Yet fluctuations in headline inflation often mask the underlying trend. Look into the details, and it is easy to see that the inflation problem is not fixed. America's "core" prices, which exclude volatile food and energy, grew at an annualised pace of 4.6% over the past three months, and have started gently accelerating. The main source of inflation is now the services sector, which is more exposed to labour costs. In America, Britain, Canada and New Zealand wage growth is still much higher than is consistent with the 2% inflation targets of their respective central banks; pay growth is lower in the euro area, but rising in important economies such as Spain. That should not be a surprise, given the strength of labour markets. Six of the G7 group of big rich countries enjoy an unemployment rate at or close to the lowest seen this century. America's is the lowest it has been since 1969. It is hard to see how underlying inflation can dissipate while labour markets stay so tight. They are keeping many economies on course for inflation that does not fall below 3-5% or so. That would be less scary than the experience of the past two years. But it would be a big problem for central bankers, who are judged against their targets. It would also blow a hole in investors' optimistic vision.²⁷

The sobering February 2023 flash inflation estimate from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, underlined the severity of the problem. While headline annual inflation was expected to be 8.5 per cent in February, only 0.1 per cent lower than the previous month, core inflation (without energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices) was still growing to an estimated 5.6 per cent.²⁸ Under these conditions further monetary tightening becomes a certainty.

And it could be much worse. What if all these problems are just the first act in a much bigger crisis awaiting us? The star economist, Nouriel Roubini, nicknamed Dr. Doom, identified 10 Megathreats in his new book "of such

²⁷ "Inflation will be harder to bring down than markets think," *The Economist*, February 16, 2023. Available online: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2023/02/16/inflation-will-be-harder-to-bring-down-than-markets-think> (accessed on February 17, 2023).

²⁸ "Euro area annual inflation down to 8.5%," Flash estimate – February 2023, Eurostat, March 2, 2023. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/16138299/2-02032023-AP-EN.pdf/91fa331d-8f61-adff-5e42-d92a64b6ee81> (accessed on March 10, 2023).

immense scale and urgency that we need to look ahead with clear vision and do what we can to prevent them from destroying us."²⁹ Some might consider Roubini an alarmist, but the fact that he was one of the few economists to accurately predict the great financial crisis of 2007–2009 (hence his nickname) gives weight to his arguments. Despite the megathreat warning applying to the medium-term – the subsequent two decades – the threats had already become visible by 2022:

The return of stagflation risks in advanced economies as inflation was rising sharply and the risk of recession increasing. The financial fragility and the risk of default of many highly indebted sovereigns and private sector actors as central banks were increasing interest rates to fight inflation. The bear market in global stock markets and the crash of numerous asset bubbles including the crypto ones, now that the era of cheap money started to reverse. The persistent talk and practice of deglobalization and fragmentation of the global economy; the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the risk that this conflict could expand geographically and in unconventional ways; the drum-beats of talk of a new Cold War between the US (and its western allies) and China (and its effective allies, Russia, Iran, and North Korea), and the rising tensions between the US and China on Taiwan... These were all ominous signs of a much worse and dangerous future and megathreats in the decade ahead.³⁰

In the first chapter of Roubini's book, *The mother of all debt crisis*, the author warns of the potential consequences of the unprecedented pace of global debt accumulation over the last few years. Monetary tightening has placed highly indebted countries in serious difficulties, especially developing ones. Market distress has been fueled by the many parallels with the 1980s. Then the high inflation, interest rate hikes in developed countries and the strong dollar triggered a wave of emerging market sovereign debt defaults. In 2022 four countries entered the year already in default: Lebanon, Suriname, Venezuela and Zambia, while another three were in the process of debt restructuring: Ethiopia, Chad and Mozambique.³¹ Subsequently, Sri Lanka, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine entered into default, albeit the latter three did so for

²⁹ N. Roubini, *Megathreats. The Ten Trends that Imperil Our Future, and How to Survive Them*, London: John Murray, 2022, p. 4.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 6–7.

³¹ "Trade and development report 2022. Development prospects in a fractured world: Global disorder and regional responses," *op. cit.*, p. 53.

vastly different reasons – the war and the sanctions.³² Normally Russia would have no problem honoring its external debts, but being cut off from the Western financial system due to the sanctions it technically defaulted. In contrast, many EMDE sovereigns encountered serious difficulties due to the increasing cost of servicing debt. In sub-Saharan Africa, yield spreads for more than two-thirds of sovereign bonds breached the 700 basis point level in August 2022³³ (i.e. borrowing governments were forced to pay over 7 per cent more interest on their US dollar denominated government bonds compared to US treasuries). The number of sovereigns trading at distressed levels (with dollar bonds spreads on average over 1,000 basis points over US treasuries) had increased to 21 by mid-July, from 8 at the beginning of the year, falling in September to 17.³⁴ More importantly, some countries such as Egypt, Angola and Nigeria neared the critical level while others, like Ecuador, Pakistan, Ghana, Argentina and Tunisia, went well over it. Debt servicing costs were more than 20 per cent of government revenues in Brazil and Kenya, close to 30 per cent in Nigeria and approaching 40 per cent in Pakistan and Egypt, and even 50 per cent in the case of Ghana.³⁵ Overall, 2022 EMDE bond issuance (sovereign and corporate combined) declined to just \$210 billion, its lowest level in 10 years and less than half compared to the previous year.³⁶

The situation has been much better in the European Union; nonetheless borrowing costs and yield spreads increased significantly. Starting from around zero in January 2022, by mid-March 2023 the benchmark 10-year German government bonds were offering 2.28 per cent interest, the Greek ones 4.25 and the Italians 4.15 (the corresponding rate for US treasuries was 3.56).³⁷

³² J. Wilson, *Back to the 80s? What soaring inflation, US rate hikes and a stronger dollar mean for EM sovereign debt*, ING THINK – Economic and Financial Analysis, September 6, 2022. Available online: <https://think.ing.com/articles/what-soaring-inflation-us-rate-hikes-and-a-stronger-dollar-mean-for-em-sovereign-debt> (accessed on March 10, 2023).

³³ *World Economic Outlook Update January 2023. Inflation Peaking amid Low Growth*, op. cit., p. 1.

³⁴ J. Wilson, op. cit.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ "Global economic prospects," op. cit., p. 12.

³⁷ "Bonds. Ten year government bond spreads," *Financial Times*, March 17, 2023. Available online: <https://markets.ft.com/data/bonds/government-bonds-spreads> (accessed on March 17, 2023).

■ War economies: Ukraine and Russia

Following the Russian invasion only foreign aid kept the Ukrainian economy afloat. Although it defaulted on its public debt, basic functioning has been preserved thanks mostly to Western contributions. Between January 24, 2022, (when diplomatic relations ended between Russia and Ukraine) and January 15, 2023, roughly one year, Ukraine was promised €143.63 billion in military, financial and humanitarian aid according to the Ukraine Support Tracker created by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany.³⁸ (This does not include the estimated €27.32 billion euros spent on Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries.) The aim of the tracker is to list and quantify the aid promised to Ukraine by governments of 40 countries, specifically the EU member states, other members of the G7, as well as Australia, South Korea, Turkey, Norway, New Zealand, Switzerland, China, Taiwan and India.³⁹ The largest donor is the US on €73 billion, followed by the EU on almost €30 billion and the UK on €8.3 billion. China and India did not contribute. However, when counting the aid relative to the size of the contributing economies, post-communist Eastern European countries head the list (Figure 1). Slovakia is the sixth largest contributor relative to the size of its economy, measured as a combination of bilateral aid and Slovakia's share of the EU aid, and when refugee costs are added in (Figure 1).

While the West has been providing Ukraine with aid, it has also been punishing Russia for its military adventure – and partly Belarus as well – by imposing the most extensive set of economic sanctions ever used. What took 10 years in relation to Iran, happened within 10 days in Russia: the US–EU tandem, the UK and their allies turned Russia into the world's most sanctioned nation, subject to over 5,000 different targeted sanctions, more than Iran, Venezuela, Myanmar and Cuba combined.⁴⁰ Western countries have effectively frozen Russia's central bank assets within their jurisdictions (about half of official reserves); barred several Russian banks from the Society for Worldwide

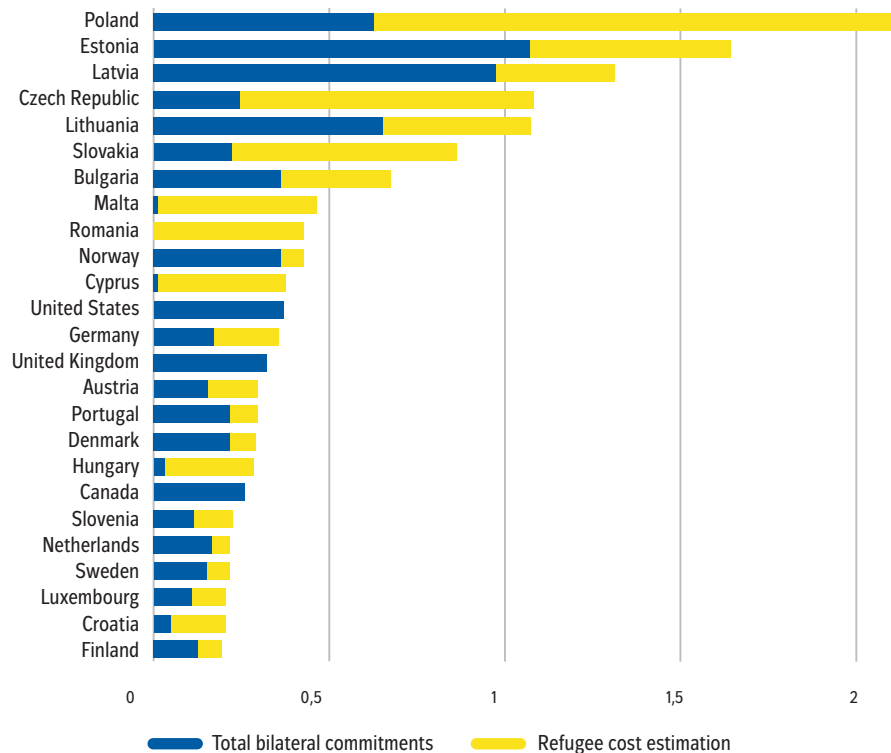
³⁸ Trebesch et al., "Ukraine support tracker. A database of military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine," IFW – Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2023. Available online: <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/> (accessed on March 12, 2023).

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ S. Vuksic, "Russia is now the world's most sanctioned country," *Castellum.AI*, March 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.castellum.ai/insights/russia-is-now-the-worlds-most-sanctioned-country> (accessed on March 12, 2023).

Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), a Belgium-based interbank messaging service; adopted multiple sanctions against Russian individuals (the list is continuously expanding over time); and prohibited the trading of securities issued in Russia.⁴¹ They have also severely limited exports of high-tech products such as aircraft equipment and semiconductors and dual-use goods to Russia and the list goes on.

Figure 1. Government support to Ukraine: by donor GDP, including refugee costs (as a percentage of GDP)



Note: Military, financial and humanitarian aid pledged to Ukraine between January 24, 2022, and January 15, 2023, plus the estimated cost of accepting refugees from Ukraine. The database

⁴¹ N. Berman, A. Siripurapu, "One year of war in Ukraine: are sanctions against Russia making a difference?" Council on Foreign Relations, February 21, 2023. Available online: <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/one-year-war-ukraine-are-sanctions-against-russia-making-difference> (accessed on March 12, 2023).

does not include other types of support, in particular donations by private individuals, companies, churches or non-governmental organizations, nor support from international organizations like the Red Cross or United Nations.

Source: Trebesch et al., "Ukraine support tracker. A database of military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine," IFW – Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2023.

The EU gradually introduced a number of import bans for a long list of Russian products, like all finished and semi-finished steel products, cements, rubber products, wood, spirits, liquor, high-end seafood and gold, and most importantly, fuel.⁴² The energy sector sanctions started with an import ban on all types of Russian coal, followed by a complete import ban on all seaborne crude oil and petroleum products and – together with the international G7+ Price Cap Coalition – culminating in the introduction of price caps on seaborne crude oil exports (fixed at a maximum price of \$60 per barrel) and petroleum products.⁴³ Natural gas has not been affected yet; although at the beginning it was Russia's Gazprom that limited supplies to Europe to create a shortage and push up prices; gradually an increasing number of countries stopped buying Russian gas.

Many international companies voluntarily joined Western governments and decided to limit their activities in Russia or leave the country altogether. Since the invasion of Ukraine began, the Chief Executive Leadership Institute at Yale School of Management has been tracking the responses of well over 1,200 large international companies.⁴⁴ Of these, over 1,000 have publicly announced they would voluntarily curtail operations in Russia to some degree, beyond the bare minimum legally required by international sanctions; 521 companies decided to totally halt Russian engagements or completely exit Russia and a further 500 are temporarily curtailing most or nearly all operations, while keeping return options open.

⁴² "EU sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine," European Commission, 2023. Available online: https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-sanctions-against-russia-following-invasion-ukraine_en (accessed on March 12, 2023).

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ "Over 1,000 companies have curtailed operations in Russia – but some remain," The Chief Executive Leadership Institute (CELI) Yale School of Management, March 11, 2023. Available online: <https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain> (accessed on March 12, 2023).

Considering that the adverse effects of the sanctions, especially on Russian fiscal revenues, became clear only at the end of 2022, for long months many concluded: “the sanctions are not working.” Naturally, the Russian propaganda machinery spread this narrative as well. As Timothy Ash, a senior emerging markets sovereign strategist at RBC BlueBay Asset Management, explained:⁴⁵

In the first few months after the all-out invasion, and as Europe headed into the winter, there was much to suggest that Putin’s calculation was well-judged. Oil prices rose \$20–25 a barrel in the period immediately after the invasion to over \$105 a barrel. Meanwhile, gas prices skyrocketed, rising more than 20-fold in some cases by the late summer, as markets fretted over European gas storage levels and the ability of Europe to survive the winter with much reduced Russian supplies. The talk was about popular discontent, energy rationing, supply disruptions, and a potentially catastrophic hit to European growth and economic activity. Western sanctions limiting Western purchases of Russian oil and energy were seen as counterproductive, playing into Russia’s hands and driving prices higher, and perversely bolstering revenue streams to Russia. As of November, the country’s budget oil revenues were running around one-third higher year-on-year, bringing confident predictions from Russian government officials... Putin seemed to have all the cards, and much suggested Europe would eventually buckle.

As it later turned out, this picture was simplistic and highly misleading. If we dig deeper, major cracks inside the Russian economy have been visible since at least mid-2022, as Vladimir Milov demonstrated in an in-depth analysis published by the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies in Brussels.⁴⁶ Milov is a Russian politician and economist, who once worked for the government but after 2002 became a vocal critic of Putin’s regime and started working with opposition leaders like Boris Nemtsov and Alexey Navalny. Milov focused attention on the gap between the relatively solid macroeconomic indicators and more detailed statistical figures that give a much grimmer picture of the economic contraction in Russia. Just a few illustrations: According to the

official figures still available (publication of many of the statistical indicators has been suspended) the Russian automobile industry has basically collapsed, with output in September 2022 down 77.4 per cent year-on-year, but many other areas were also badly affected, like the manufacturing of railway locomotives down by 20–30 per cent; railway cargo coaches by 32 per cent; bodies for motor vehicles by 44 per cent; cargo transport vehicles by 34 per cent, buses weighing under 5 tons by 51 per cent; internal combustion engines by 37 per cent; washing machines by 58 per cent; television sets by 50 per cent; refrigerators by 42 per cent; semiconductor devices and parts by 2.5 per cent; power transformers by 23 per cent; and the list goes on. The overall picture is that the most complex labor-intensive industries were hit hardest as they relied heavily on a skilled workforce and Western technologies and components. Parallel to the Russian automobile industry, the car market collapsed as well. Total car sales came in at 687,370 for 2022, decreasing by 58.8 per cent or 979,410 units in comparison with the previous year when more than 1.6 million cars were sold.⁴⁷

The second argument is that from the end of 2022 Russia’s energy weapon finally backfired and the country was suddenly faced with serious fiscal problems. Until the very end of 2022 the budget had been just in surplus but then, in December alone, a colossal record-braking deficit of 3.9 trillion rubles appeared in the books, turning the whole year minus.⁴⁸ Finance Minister Anton Siluanov had to confirm that Russia’s total budget deficit for 2022 amounted to 3.3 trillion rubles (\$47 billion) or 2.3 per cent of GDP, making it the second-largest deficit in modern Russian history, surpassed only by that recorded in 2020, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. A month later the bad news continued: Overall, 2023 January budget revenues were down 35.1 per cent and the crucial tax revenue from oil and gas had plunged 46 per cent from a year ago, while there was a 59 per cent increase in spending, mainly due to the war in Ukraine.⁴⁹ The combination of the two resulted in a deficit of 1.76 trillion rubles (\$25 billion) – the biggest budget deficit for the

⁴⁵ T. Ash, *Western Oil Cap Helps Slash Russian Oil Revenues by \$150bn*. Washington DC: Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), January 17, 2023. Available online: <https://cepa.org/article/western-oil-cap-helps-slash-russian-oil-revenue/> (accessed on February 14, 2023).

⁴⁶ V. Milov, *Beyond the headlines: the real impact of Western sanctions on Russia*, Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, November 16, 2022. Available online: <https://www.martenscentre.eu/publication/beyond-the-headlines-the-real-impact-of-western-sanctions-on-russia/> (accessed on February 8, 2023).

⁴⁷ “Year 2022 ends with 58.8% car sales market decrease,” *Press-release*, Association of European Businesses, January 12, 2023. Available online: <https://aebrus.ru/upload/iblock/319/ENG-Car-Sales-in-December-2022.pdf> (accessed on February 8, 2023).

⁴⁸ “Russia’s December fiscal deficit at record-high – Bloomberg,” *The Moscow Times*, January 11, 2023. Available online: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/01/10/beijing-fears-russia-becoming-minor-power-under-crazy-putin-ft-a79911> (accessed on February 11, 2023).

⁴⁹ “Russia’s deficit hits \$25 billion as energy income slumps,” *Bloomberg News*, February 6, 2023. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-06/russia-racks-up-25-billion-budget-gap-as-energy-income-halves> (accessed on February 11, 2023).

first month of the year since at least 1998. This January hole already stood at 60 per cent of the whole year's plan, tearing apart the 2023 budget.⁵⁰

The main problem for the Kremlin is that the 2023 budget was based on the Urals (Russian crude oil) price of \$70.10 per barrel, while in January the average price of Russia's main blend was \$49.48 a barrel, down 42 per cent on January 2022.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the average Brent benchmark price was \$77.82, meaning that the Russian oil was sold with an almost 40 per cent discount. Not only was the Russian oil traded at a much cheaper price but it usually travelled for longer distances, with tankers going to India instead of Rotterdam for instance, increasing transport costs, thus further reducing revenues. Timothy Ash estimated that Russia could potentially see an annual loss of \$100bn in 2023 due to the discounted oil price and a further \$50 billion due to the collapsing gas sales to the EU and declining gas prices on EU markets.⁵²

The Kremlin tried to cover the budget deficit by sharply stepping up domestic borrowing from the final quarter of 2022 and started to eat into its rainy day fund of accumulated energy revenues – originally saved to cover future pension obligations. Officially called the National Wealth Fund (NWF), it stood at \$174.9 billion, or 10.2 per cent of projected GDP on February 1, 2022, but shrank to \$148.4 billion on January 1, 2023, falling by \$38.1 billion in a single month, as the government cashed out the reserves to plug its budget and to prop up struggling state companies like Russian Railways and the airline Aeroflot.⁵³ Obviously, if these trends continue, the Kremlin may well run out of NWF reserves relatively quickly, within a year or so, and then depreciation pressures on the ruble and corresponding inflationary pressures will increase.

During 2022 the volume of Russian natural gas imported by the EU declined massively to about 500 million cubic meters a week, around one sixth of the previous averages and stayed there during the first weeks of 2023.⁵⁴ At the

beginning, it generated a market panic, with prices exploding but later the situation calmed down. The EU found alternative suppliers and LNG and gas prices in particular fell back to pre-invasion levels. Since Russia was unable to find alternative export markets, especially export means (to its gas pipelines leading to Europe), Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak had to announce that gas exports had decreased by 25.1 per cent to 184.4 billion cubic meters in 2022.⁵⁵ Naturally, he blamed it all on the “sabotage” of the pipelines (referring to the September explosions on sections of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines under the Baltic Sea) and “the refusal of European countries to buy Russian gas.” He forgot to mention that initially it had been Gazprom that had been wielding the main Russian energy weapon from the fall of 2021, limiting gas supplies to Europe to create market upheaval and push up prices. According to Reuters calculations, based on export duties and volumes, Gazprom's revenues from overseas sales may have declined in January 2023 to \$3.4 billion from \$6.3 billion earlier in the year and if that trend continues, Gazprom's export revenues for the whole year could be halved compared to 2022.⁵⁶ It is telling that at the end of December 2022 Novak announced that Russia was prepared to resume gas supplies to Europe via the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline (stopped in May 2022 by Gazprom).⁵⁷

■ All markets falling

2022 was a miserable year for equity markets and investors: stocks and bonds were falling across the globe and property prices started to fall as well, the world witnessed some spectacular collapses on exchanges, tech companies, currencies and some housing markets as well. Globally the stocks and bonds

⁵⁰ D. Korsunskaya, A. Marrow, “Russia's Jan budget deficit widens as energy revenues slump,” *Reuters*, February 6, 2023. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/russias-jan-budget-deficit-widens-energy-revenues-slump-2023-02-06/> (accessed on February 11, 2023).

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² T. Ash, op. cit.

⁵³ M. Trevelyan, “Russia rainy day fund shrinks by \$38 bln as government plugs deficit,” *Reuters*, January 18, 2023. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russias-national-wealth-fund-148-bln-jan-1-finance-ministry-2023-01-18/> (accessed on February 12, 2023).

⁵⁴ G. Zachmann, G. Sgaravatti and B. McWilliams, *European natural gas imports*, Brussels: Bruegel, February 15, 2023. Available online: <https://www.bruegel.org/dataset/european-natural-gas-imports> (accessed on February 15, 2023).

⁵⁵ “Russian gas exports sink by 25% despite rise in oil sales,” *The Moscow Times*, February 14, 2023. Available online: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/02/13/russian-gas-exports-sink-by-25-despite-rise-in-oil-sales-a80215> (accessed on February 15, 2023).

⁵⁶ “Gazprom's export revenue may fall by 50% in 2023,” *Euractiv*, February 15, 2023. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/gazproms-export-revenue-may-fall-by-50-in-2023/> (accessed on February 15, 2023).

⁵⁷ M. Knight, J. Pennington, “Russia ready to resume gas supply to Europe via Yamal-Europe gas pipeline,” *CNN*, December 25, 2022. Available online: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/25/europe/russia-yamal-europe-gas-pipeline/index.html> (accessed on February 15, 2023).

losses exceeded an astonishing \$30 trillion (30 thousand billion).⁵⁸ The market value of companies traded across all global stock exchanges tumbled by \$25 trillion dollars, according to Bloomberg, while the data provider's Multi-verse Index, which tracks global government and corporate debt, was down almost 16 per cent or \$9.6 trillion in market value terms.⁵⁹ The global MSCI All-World index of developed and emerging market equities shed a fifth of its value, the biggest decline since 2008, with shares from Wall Street to Shanghai and Frankfurt all notching up significant falls; the two leading indexes in America, S & P 500 and the technological sector's Nasdaq lost 19 per cent and 33 per cent respectively, also making it the worst annual performance for both since 2008.⁶⁰ Of the major stock exchanges only London's FTSE 100 index was slightly up due to the heavy presence of energy, mining and pharmaceutical companies, which fared better in the 2022 market shift. Shares of some major companies, especially in the technological sector lost more than half of their value. Elon Musk's Tesla leading the way, going down by almost 70 per cent, making the auto tech company the third-worst performing stock in the S & P 500 index.⁶¹ Meta, Facebook's parent company, did not lag far behind, going down 64 per cent, chipmaker Nvidia dropped 50 per cent and tech heavyweights like Apple and Microsoft tumbled almost 30 per cent, while Google parent Alphabet was down nearly 40 per cent.⁶² Only the rallying energy sector companies, which mostly profited from soaring gas and oil prices, saved the overall stock market performances from even bigger falls.

Parallel to the stock markets, the bond markets fell as well, leaving no safe havens for investors on Planet Finance in 2022. The benchmark government bonds considered the safest and therefore traditional go-to assets in troubled times, US treasuries and German bonds, lost 17 per cent and 25 per cent respectively in dollars.⁶³ The return on the S & P US Treasury Bond Index was

⁵⁸ T. Stubbington, A. Samson, K. Duguid, "Stock and bond markets shed more than \$30tn in 'brutal' 2022," *Financial Times*, December 30, 2022. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/87ed8ea6-4913-4452-9135-498040ad338f> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ N. Goodkind, J. Horowitz, D. Goldman, "Goodbye 2022 – and good riddance. Markets close out their worst year since 2008," *CNN*, December 30, 2022. Available online: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/30/investing/dow-stock-market-2022/index.html> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁶² T. Stubbington, A. Samson, K. Duguid, op. cit.

⁶³ M. Jones, "How 2022 shocked, rocked and rolled global markets," *Reuters*, December 30, 2022. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/global-markets-wrapup-1-pix-2022-12-22/> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

-10.7 per cent; the 30-year US Treasury bond, at its lowest, sunk to its worst return, -35 per cent, in a century.⁶⁴ But it was not just the sovereign bonds that were the victims of interest rate hikes, corporate bonds had a miserable year too: the return on bonds issued by S & P 500 companies was -14.2 per cent and the Bloomberg Aggregate US Bond Index had its worst year since the index's inception in 1977.⁶⁵ While previously the stock and bond markets had often been able to mutually compensate or at least reduce losses, this time both fell and thus investors with classic "60/40" portfolios (60 per cent shares, and 40 per cent bonds) were facing the worst return for a century.⁶⁶ Almost all currencies weakened against the US dollar, including major reserve currencies like the euro (by 6 per cent), Chinese yuan (9 per cent), British pound (11 per cent) and Japanese yen (14 per cent); but some emerging country currencies, like the Ukrainian hryvnia, New Turkish lira and Egyptian pound were hardest hit (minus 26, 29 and 37 per cent).⁶⁷ The Russian ruble collapsed by 50 per cent following the invasion of Ukraine, but after the introduction of capital controls the exchange rate strengthened and stabilized – it is important to note that since then it is an administrative and not a market exchange rate. There was no escaping to the crypto world either, on the contrary, the most widespread cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, lost 64 per cent of its value against the dollar, while the wider crypto market shrank by \$1.4 trillion, squashed by the collapse of Sam Bankman-Fried's FTX cryptocurrency exchange, Celsius and supposed "stablecoins" terra USD and Luna.⁶⁸

Finally, from late 2022 the falling prices reached global property markets. In the last quarter of the year (or in the last quarter with data available) inflation-adjusted housing prices fell in two-thirds, or 31 of the 46 economies in which the OECD tracks development.⁶⁹ The most important contributing factor of course has been monetary tightening which dramatically increased mortgage interest rates. According to the ECB staff calculations, a one percentage

⁶⁴ N. Goodkind, J. Horowitz, D. Goldman, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ G. Wearden, "Inflation, tech plunge and 'crypto winter': global stock markets in 2022," *The Guardian*, December 30, 2022. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/dec/30/inflation-tech-plunge-crypto-global-stock-markets-2022-shares-bonds-interest-rates> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁶⁷ M. Jones, op. cit.

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ H. Ahir, P. Loungani, K. Bhasin, "House prices continue to fall as borrowing costs rise," *IMF Blog*, March 15, 2023. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2023/03/14/house-prices-continue-to-fall-as-borrowing-costs-rise> (accessed on March 16, 2023).

point mortgage rate increase in a low interest rate environment leads, all else being equal, to a decline in house prices of around 9 per cent and to a drop in housing investment by 15 per cent after about two years.⁷⁰ Considering that this time central bank policy rates shot up from near zero to 3–4 per cent within a year or so and still more is expected, it is clear that the worst of the housing crunch is still ahead of us. Mortgage rates have already increased dramatically, for example, the average American 30-year fixed mortgage rate had risen to a two-decade high of 7.1 per cent by the end of 2022.⁷¹ According to the *Economist*, the most endangered countries are those that have experienced the largest price increases in the last few years – where households built up the largest debt (relative to disposable income) and where interest rate hikes have been sharpest: namely Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden.⁷² The epicenter of the last big housing crash that triggered the global financial crisis of 2007–2009 was the US, but this time it is merely following the others. However, probably very few countries, if any, will be able to avoid house price corrections – the contributing factors are universal. Just to illustrate what could happen, let's look at Sweden. As its central bank, the Riksbank, had raised interest rates to 3 per cent from zero, house prices plummeted about 15 per cent from their peak in March 2022 to the end of the year.⁷³ With more rate increases expected, a further decline in prices is almost certain. (The Swedish mortgage market is known for its widespread use of variable or short-term fixed rates on home mortgages loans, and therefore, reacts swiftly to interest rate changes.)

One of the world's two largest economies, China, has already suffered much of the pain as its mostly homegrown property entered into crisis in 2022. Since in recent years real estate and related industries such as construction and property services have contributed around a quarter of China's GDP, the bursting of its giant property bubble became a global concern. Average house prices across 70 major Chinese cities began declining in April 2022 –

⁷⁰ N. Battistini, J. Gareis and M. Roma, "The impact of rising mortgage rates on the euro area housing market," *ECB Economic Bulletin*, Issue 6/2022, pp. 61–2. Available online: <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/economic-bulletin/html/eb202206.en.html> (accessed on March 17, 2023).

⁷¹ H. Ahir, P. Loungani, K. Bhasin, op. cit.

⁷² "Housing markets face a brutal squeeze," *The Economist*, October 20, 2022. Available online: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2022/10/20/housing-markets-face-a-brutal-squeeze> (accessed on March 14, 2023).

⁷³ E. Nelson, "Where high interest rates have sent home prices sliding," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2023. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/21/business/sweden-housing-prices-interest-rates.html> (accessed on March 22, 2023).

for the first time since 2015 the year-on-year decline reached 2.3 per cent in December.⁷⁴ Sales of new residential properties tumbled 28 per cent, to a five-year low, when measured by floor area they dropped to their lowest level in nearly a decade and land sales by area dropped 53 per cent to a level below that of 1999, the year China's National Bureau of Statistics began releasing the data.⁷⁵ Developers that had previously built up liabilities of over 200 billion in dollar-denominated offshore bonds struggled to honor their debts after the 2021 regulatory crackdown by Chinese authorities, and at least 18 defaulted on offshore bonds, including China Evergrande Group, once the country's biggest developer.⁷⁶ According to an IMF report, in November 2022, developers that had already defaulted or were likely to default – with average bond prices below 40 per cent of face value – represented 38 per cent of the 2020 market share of firms with available bond pricing.⁷⁷ As selling unfinished (or yet to be built) properties to future homeowners reliant on mortgages had been commonplace and considering that almost three-quarters of household assets were in property, it is not surprising that protests and boycotts erupted across the country. At their peak, in mid-July, mortgage boycotts by owners of unfinished homes had spread to over 300 housing projects in about 90 cities.⁷⁸ At the same time, economists at Nomura International HK Ltd. estimated that Chinese developers had delivered only about 60 per cent of homes pre-sold between 2013 and 2020. The government responded to the protests with wide-ranging measures to boost homebuyer demand, regulators introduced mortgage repayment moratoria for affected homebuyers and a central state-funded mechanism for the completion of troubled pre-sold unfinished housing projects.⁷⁹ As the government loaded the new obligations on taxpayers' shoulders, there were concerns about debt sustainability. The IMF report noted that government and household debt-to-GDP ratios were

⁷⁴ R. Feng, C. Li, "China's property bust compounds economic pain," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 2023. Available online: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-property-bust-compounds-economic-pain-11674123815> (accessed on March 14, 2023).

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ E. Curran, "How China's property developers got into such a mess," *The Washington Post*, December 15, 2022. Available online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-chinas-property-developers-got-into-such-a-mess/2022/12/14/1743c080-7b86-11ed-bb97-f47d47466b9a_story.html (accessed on March 14, 2023).

⁷⁷ "People's Republic of China – IMF Country Report No. 23/67," International Monetary Fund, February 2023, p. 9.

⁷⁸ E. Curran, op. cit.

⁷⁹ "People's Republic of China – IMF Country Report No. 23/67," op. cit., p. 10.

estimated to have increased to new highs of 108 and 62 per cent respectively in the second quarter of 2022, while corporate debt was hovering around a “very elevated” 125 per cent.⁸⁰ Internationally these are very high levels of indebtedness, considering the level of economic development and that Chinese corporate debt-to-GDP ratio is the highest of all the main large economies in the world. Global concerns over the Chinese property market and the overall state of the economy remain and political developments merely amplify them. With president Xi Jinping cementing his power at the 2022 October Communist Party Congress and, in a break with previous tradition, entering into his third term as China’s most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, surrounded by loyalists, investor uncertainty about future developments continued. Amid rising tensions in the superpower rivalry with US, increasing threats toward Taiwan, the growing risk of policy missteps, repeated regulatory crackdowns and high-profile Chinese entrepreneurs disappearing, foreign capital was cautious and capital outflows from China became commonplace.⁸¹

■ Conclusions

Words like stagflation, war, sanctions, polycrisis, permacrisis, megathreats, collapse, default and crash best characterize the world economy in 2022. Most countries – developed and emerging – were tackling the highest inflation wave of the last four decades, and most central banks responded with rapid monetary tightening putting a definite end to the era of cheap and abundant money. All the major economic powerhouses – America, Europe and China – slowed at the same time and the slowdown spread to emerging countries as well. An increasing number of highly indebted sovereigns and corporates faced difficulty servicing debts. Stock markets and bond markets fell at the same time – a most unusual phenomenon – and still the end was not reached as ever more property markets joined the fall. In real estate, the worst was still to come. On the other hand, headline inflation peaked and

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ S. H. Costa, H. Ren, T Chen, Bloomberg, “Investor enthusiasm for reopened China fades amid wariness of Xi Jinping’s unchecked power,” *Fortune*, February 27, 2023. Available online: <https://fortune.com/2023/02/26/investor-enthusiasm-for-reopened-china-fades-amid-wariness-of-xi-jinping-unchecked-power/> (accessed on March 14, 2023).

growth estimates for 2023 were more favorable than previously expected. With a miserable year behind us there are some reasons for optimism at least. However, it should be clear that the fight against inflation continues and the crisis is not over yet. In March 2023 bank failures and bailouts from America to Switzerland rocked the world of finance, a sign of multiple systemic problems and that problems in some market segments (like losses on government bonds) would have spillover effects contaminating other parts of the economy (like the banking sector). The big question is whether central banks will be able to defeat inflation while doing the necessary minimum harm to economic recovery. Or maybe, if it is possible, they will prove able to defeat the inflation wave without causing a recession and sending sovereigns, corporates, households and banks through the purgatory of sustainability. As Mark Twain once noted: “Prediction is difficult – particularly when it involves the future.”



Vladimír Tarasovič

2022—the thirtieth year of Slovak security and defense policy following independence

The year 2022 was the third consecutive challenging year for Slovak security and defense policy. In 2020, the Slovak Republic had to deploy its armed forces in the civilian operation to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Then in 2021, in addition to fighting covid, the Slovak Armed Forces assisted with the evacuation from Afghanistan. By the end of 2021, there were signs that 2022 would be even more challenging than the previous two years. Despite most countries, led by NATO and EU member states, refusing to accept Russia's ultimatum on Ukraine, Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, unleashing a military conflict that threatened to escalate into the first global conflict since World War II.

This paper will assess Slovakia's security and defense policy in 2022. As Slovakia has been a member of NATO and the EU since 2006, that assessment cannot be undertaken from a national position alone.

The introductory part looks at the military conflict in Ukraine from a foreign security perspective and considers Slovakia's assistance to Ukraine. The next part assesses Slovakia's participation in international organizations, particularly NATO, the EU and the V4 as well as relations with the US. The final part concentrates on security and defense policy and the Slovak Armed Forces.

■ War in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has shown that the world is not as safe as we thought. Russia's unprecedented aggression against Ukraine was an opportunity for the public to learn about the reality of security and defense.

At the end of 2021, Russia lay down terms that could not be accepted by Ukraine and the Western community and then on February 24, 2022, Russia committed unprecedented aggression against Ukraine. Thus began a tragic

year, both for our eastern neighbor Ukraine and the entire civilized community. Russia, which sees itself as a world military power, assumed it would be able to handle Ukraine before the West had recovered. That belief was based on its previous military operations in nearby and distant regions (Georgia 2008, Russia's annexation of Crimea in February–March 2014, the war in eastern Ukraine launched in April 2014, Syria 2015) and on Russian political and military leaders talking about needing a few days or weeks at most to defeat Ukraine. But rather than taking a few days the war has been going on for nearly a year now, and thanks to their determination and the help of the democratic world, the Ukrainians are still resisting their aggressor.

The Russian operation is also reliant on the extensive use of propaganda, honed over many years, that portrays Ukraine and its supporters as the culprit and Russia as the victim. At the UN General Assembly, 143 countries responded unambiguously to Russia by condemning its aggression against Ukraine.

Slovakia very quickly realized that as Ukraine's neighbor it would have to stand with the countries helping Ukraine. For the consequences of the sovereign state of Ukraine being broken up would be dire for Slovakia's security and economy. Moreover, Russia, the aggressor, would become Slovakia's new neighbor. According to Rastislav Kačer¹, prospects for peace diplomacy increase with more military support for Ukraine, more liberated territories and people and more effective sanctions. Russia has to understand once and for all that evil can only be met with strength, not weakness.²

Slovakia began helping Ukraine immediately after the Russian aggression began – politically, humanitarily, economically and militarily. In a ranking conducted by *Forbes* magazine from February 24 to May 30, 2022, Slovakia

¹ Rastislav Káčer is a Slovak diplomat and was appointed ambassador to the Czech Republic on October 20, 2020. On September 13, 2022, he was made non-partisan Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic under the Eduard Heger government. Before that, he served as Slovak ambassador to the United States (2003–2008) and Hungary (2013–2018) and was long involved in efforts to join NATO.

² "Rastislav Káčer o poučeníach do roku 2023 na ceste k mieru: O Rusku už Západ nesmie mať ilúzie," [Rastislav Káčer on the lessons for 2023 on the road to peace: The West cannot retain any illusions about Russia] *Euractiv.sk*, November 21, 2022 (updated: November 22, 2022). Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/obrana-a-zahranicie/opinion/rastislav-kacer-o-pouceniach-do-roku-2023-na-ceste-k-mieru-o-rusku-uz-zapad-nesmie-mat-iluzie/> (accessed on January 15, 2023).

was among the 10 greatest supporters of Ukraine.³ Nonetheless, it is important to note that at the beginning the extent of the foreign support for Ukraine was embarrassing and more rhetorical than real. It was much like the support given in relation to past aggressions, and to which Russia had become accustomed. That fact was not lost on Slovakia. At the start of the war, it condemned Russia's aggression but sent only a few tons of ammunition, mines and aviation fuel. This cautious stance was naturally met with criticism from Ukraine, whose political leaders stressed from the outset that they needed highly effective systems, especially air defense ones.

With reports of fighting in extremely difficult conditions in Mariupol, along with the revelation of the crimes committed in Bucha and other villages around Kiev, there was a reawakening in most Western countries. The day after the first reports of the massacre, NATO countries agreed to supply tanks to Ukraine, although no detail was given on the numbers or types. In the following days, new combat systems were gradually delivered to Ukraine. A breakthrough came in late April 2022, with the first donors meeting at the US base at Ramstein in Germany. Thanks to the agreement of 40 countries, a central system was set up to coordinate Ukraine's requests to the Allies for the delivery of the equipment needed and the ability to provide it. A second meeting, at the end of May, resulted in a promise to send new long-range equipment to Ukraine. In the first half of 2022, Slovakia sent its S-300 air defense system to Ukraine, along with ammunition for Grad missile launchers, four Mi-17 helicopters and an Mi-2 helicopter. In August, an agreement was reached to send 30 infantry fighting vehicles in exchange for 15 German Leopard 2A4 tanks⁴ and the sale of eight Zuzana 2 self-propelled howitzers from Slovakia along with personnel training.⁵

³ The *Forbes* analysis took into account the vote at the UN General Assembly on demanding that Russia immediately withdraw its troops from Ukraine, recognition that Russia's actions in Ukraine were genocide, the expulsion of Russian diplomats, Russia's inclusion on the list of "enemy states," attendance of the conference at Ramstein Air Base in Germany aimed at supporting Ukraine, the amount of financial aid provided in both absolute terms and as a proportion of GDP, visits to Ukraine by high-ranking officials since the February 24 to May 30 and the number of Russian diplomatic missions to Ukraine, and opposition to the imposition of sanctions against Moscow. See: "TA3 TASR, Forbes ranked the countries helping Ukraine the most. Slovakia is in the top ten," *TA3*, June 6, 2022. Available online: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/237623/forbes-hodnotil-ktore-krajiny-najviac-pomahaju-ukrajine-v-prvej-desiatke-je-aj-slovensko> (accessed on January 27, 2023).

⁴ M. Cuník, "Vojenské dodávky," [Military supplies] *Obrana*, No. 10/2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-102022/> p. 20 (accessed on December 10, 2022).

⁵ *Ibid*

In July 2022, at the Commanders' Assembly of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, the President of the Slovak Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic stated

[...] we find ourselves in the biggest security crisis since the end of the Cold War. At no time since entering the North Atlantic Alliance have we been closer to invoking Article 5. The situation beyond our national borders challenges us to increase our preparedness to deal with potential crisis situations and to substantially strengthen our defense capability.⁶

At the end of 2022, Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad' confirmed that Slovakia would continue to support Ukraine

as long as it is necessary and as long as we are able to follow this path. This is absolutely in line with the UN Charter, which says that a country that is under military aggression has the right to defend itself, and assistance to an attacked country is also in line with the UN Charter.⁷

■ Slovakia and NATO

NATO Strategic Concept 2022

In June 2022, NATO heads of states and governments gathered in Madrid, Spain, to discuss the key issues facing the Alliance. NATO's strategic direction was set at the Madrid Summit set, ensuring that it will continue to adapt to the changing world by issuing transformative decisions. The leaders approved the 2022 Strategic Concept, which is NATO's guiding document, to replace the one agreed in Lisbon in 2010 and to reflect the new security situation. Under the new concept, NATO's Core Tasks are:

- Deterrence and Defense,
- Crisis Prevention and Management,
- Cooperative Security.⁸

NATO's new Strategic Concept is very different from the 2010 one. It no longer just describes the security environment but sets out key tasks. Until recently, it was not clear how the allies would define the security challenges posed by Russia or China. Some states, including France and Germany, had been cautious about labeling Moscow an enemy. However, that changed after February 24, 2022.⁹ The 2022 Strategic Concept clearly identifies Russia as the most significant direct threat to NATO security, peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. In light of China's growing assertiveness, stated ambitions, hybrid and cyber operations, disinformation and confrontational rhetoric have led NATO members to consider China a security challenge for the first time in history.¹⁰

The language of the new strategy changed as well. While the 2010 Strategic Concept spoke of "peace in the Euro-Atlantic area" and the "low threat of conventional attack against NATO territory," the new concept states the exact opposite. Not only is the Euro-Atlantic area having to face up to the end of a peaceful era, but NATO "cannot exclude (even) the possibility of an attack against (...) its territorial integrity."¹¹ Leaders reaffirmed their interest in continuing to support Ukraine and spoke positively of all contributions, including Slovakia's substantial assistance. The NATO allies committed to helping Ukraine rearm itself with modern equipment and leaders further pledged to increase targeted support to partner countries Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Georgia.

⁶ Z. Čaputová, "Vážim si vojenskú profesionalitu, odhodlanie a oddanosť," [I respect the military's professionalism, dedication and commitment] *Obrana* 9/2022, pp. 16–7. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-92022/> (accessed on December 21, 2022).

⁷ "Modernizácia, profesionalita a proatlantická orientácia," [Modernization, professionalism and pro-Atlantic orientation] *Obrana*, No. 1/2023, p. 6–9. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-12023/> (accessed on January 27, 2023).

⁸ For more, see: "NATO Strategic Concept," NATO, July 1, 2022. Available online: [290622-strategic-concept.pdf](https://www.nato.int/docu/strat/2022/290622-strategic-concept.pdf) (nato.int) (accessed on December 21, 2022).

⁹ Quoted in Slovak in L. Yar, "Severoatlantická aliancia má novú stratégiu do najbližšej dekády," [The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has a new strategy for the next decade], July 1, 2022 (Updated: July 4, 2022). Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/obrana-a-zahranicie/news/severoatlanticka-aliancia-ma-novu-strategiu-do-najblizsej-dekady/> (accessed on July 21, 2022).

¹⁰ "Summit v Madride a Nová strategická koncepcia NATO," [Madrid Summit and NATO's New Strategic Concept] *Obrana*, No. 8/2022, pp. 12–3. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-82022/> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

¹¹ L. Yar, op. cit.

Alliance budget

NATO Strategic Concept 2022 is a response to the deterioration of the security environment in the Euro-Atlantic area owing to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, hence the increase in the common budget. At the Madrid Summit, the allies agreed to invest more in NATO and approved to increase the joint budget for 2023 to over €3 billion. As the summit documents stress, “investing in NATO is the best way to ensure a lasting bond between European and North American allies while contributing to global peace and stability.”¹² Under the formula valid until the end of 2024, Slovakia pays approximately 0.52 per cent of the common funds. Germany and the United States contribute the most (16.34 per cent of the budget each), followed by the United Kingdom (11.28 per cent) and France (10.49 per cent). The common funds are expected to increase to €3.27 billion next year.¹³

The Slovak parliament approved a national defense budget of €2.45 billion, or 2.01 per cent of GDP. The year-on-year increase in defense ministry spending is €609 million. The increase is mainly in capital expenditures and spending on goods and services, primarily repairs and maintenance of air and ground equipment, the purchase of spare parts and the replenishment of ammunition stocks. The largest projects the defense ministry has signed implementation contracts for are the purchase of F-16 fighter aircraft (2018), 3D radars with various ranges (2021), Zuzana 2 howitzers (2018), 8x8 armored fighting vehicles and infantry fighting vehicles (2022). Defense spending of 2.01 per

¹² “NATO Strategic Concept,” NATO, July 1, 2022, p. 11. Available online: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf (accessed on December 21, 2022).

¹³ NATO’s common funds represent 0.3 per cent of all defense spending by the Allies. The joint budget for 2023 was agreed at the North Atlantic Council meeting (December 14, 2022). Civilian spending is budgeted at €370.8 million and military spending at €1.96 billion, while funding for military infrastructure and capabilities is €1 billion. This is an increase of almost 27 per cent compared to 2022. In: L. Yar, “Spoločný rozpočet Severoatlantickej aliancie budúci rok narastie o vyše štvrtinu,” [Joint North Atlantic Treaty Organization budget to grow by more than a quarter next year] *Euractiv.sk*, December 22, 2022 (Updated: January 20, 2023). Available online: https://euractiv.sk/section/obrana-a-zahranicie/news/spolocny-rozpocet-severoatlantickej-aliancie-buduci-rok-narastie-o-vyse-stvrtinu/?utm_source=traqli&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=6888&pnspid=DO0npU5ds30BmwuZ8YPNEU5SuQ0g2K9m8xhAQ6YdPoHKJLVnqb.rLC.gCBQjAIZIKD6TxSXUw (accessed on January 21, 2023). For more see: “Funding NATO”. Updated: January 12, 2023. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm (accessed on January 21, 2023).

cent of GDP is also planned for 2024 and 2025, which reflects the NATO political commitment to spend at least two per cent of GDP on defense by 2024.¹⁴

New NATO members

Another NATO milestone in 2022 was the invitation for Sweden and Finland to join NATO. The two countries abandoned their long-standing policy of neutrality and expressed an interest in joining NATO following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Immediately after the NATO summit in Madrid in July, 30 NATO member countries signed the accession protocols, but these have yet to be individually ratified by all NATO members. It had been thought that the ratification process would be rapid but negotiations with Hungary and Turkey have proved complicated.

At the time of writing neither country had ratified the accession protocols. The Hungarian parliament was supposed to have ratified them by the end of 2022. According to Hungarian politicians, there is nothing standing in the way of ratification, they just need more time.¹⁵ Hungary’s primary reason is probably that it wishes to take advantage of the situation and use the time for its negotiations in the EU over the €7.5 billion of funding that Hungary could lose for contradicting EU policy on domestic and foreign affairs. A secondary reason may be the desire to broaden domestic (but also international) support for a more neutral or even pro-Russian policy.¹⁶ Turkey is demanding that Sweden first hand over 73 of its political opponents (labeled “terrorists” by the Turkish president)¹⁷ and is exploiting even the smallest opportunity

¹⁴ “Na obranu má v roku 2023 ísť 2,45 miliardy eur, teda 2,01 % HDP,” [€2.45 billion, i.e. 2.01 per cent of GDP, to be spent on defense in 2023] *Teraz.sk*, October 14, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/na-obranu-ma-v-roku-2023-ist-245-mil/667183-clanok.html> (accessed on December 21, 2022).

¹⁵ “Fínsko a Švédsko oznámili, že do NATO vstúpia spoločne,” [Finland and Sweden announce they will join NATO together] *Trend.sk*, October 28, 2022. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/finsko-svedsko-oznamili-nato-vstupia-spolocne> (accessed on December 21, 2022).

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ In the ten-point memorandum, both the Finns and the Swedes committed to address Ankara’s primary demands. For more, see: L. Yar, “Bude NATO dlhšie natahovať Orbán alebo Erdoğan?” [Who will keep NATO dangling longest – Orbán or Erdoğan?] *Euractiv.sk*, September 28, 2022. (Updated: January 20, 2023). Available online: https://euractiv.sk/section/obrana-a-zahranicie/news/bude-nato-dlhsie-natahovat-orban-alebo-erdogan/?utm_source=traqli&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=6888&pnspid=XbA08kRC9zpnhQyL98rMGhgTvQ8mmb59qQtQQ.pdLZPKsis92rYKH.oiiLnLKe3iBVHg4ee (accessed on January 28, 2023).

to delay ratification. Finland seems to be less of a problem for Turkey. One possible scenario appears to be a split ratification, with Turkey ratifying Finland's NATO entry first and voting on Sweden's accession before the crucial parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for May 2023. "We are in no hurry, they are in a hurry to join NATO," İbrahim Kalin, a senior adviser to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, told reporters.¹⁸ The response of Finland and Sweden has remained unchanged throughout the negotiation process. The two countries have taken all steps together and rejected the possibility of joining separately, as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has often spoken about. Sweden and Finland struck a deal with Turkey in June 2022 under which they will "thoroughly" examine Ankara's requests to extradite individuals suspected of involvement in Turkey's attempted coup of 2016 or of being Kurdish militants.

This was confirmed by Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson at a joint press conference with Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin in Helsinki on 28 October 2022. "It is perfectly legitimate that Turkey receives confirmation that Sweden is implementing everything it has committed to under the agreement."¹⁹

Slovakia supports both countries in their pursuit of NATO membership, but the internal political crisis in Slovakia in the second half of 2022 unnerved allies, who feared unnecessary delays in the ratification process. In the end, Slovak politicians managed to reach an agreement even amid the crisis and on September 27, 2022, parliament approved it (Finland's accession was supported by 126 out of the 142 MPs who voted, while Sweden's accession was approved by 124 out of 140 MPs).²⁰ The following day, September 28, 2022, President Zuzana Čaputová ratified the accession protocols of both Finland and Sweden.

¹⁸ D. Drake, "Maďarsko s Tureckem se zatím nerozhodly, jestli si přejí rozšíření NATO o Finsko a Švédsko," [Hungary and Turkey have not yet decided whether they want NATO to be enlarged to include Finland and Sweden] *Novinky.cz*, January 16, 2023. Available online: <https://www.novinky.cz/autor/daniel-drake-49?timeline--pageItem=40421294> (accessed on January 21, 2023).

¹⁹ "Fínsko a Švédsko vstúpia do NATO spoločne," [Finland and Sweden will join NATO together] *Aktuality.sk*, October 28, 2022. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/JcZNYJb/finsko-a-svedsko-vstupia-do-nato-spolocne/> (accessed on December 21, 2022).

²⁰ "Prezidentka ratifikovala vstup Fínska a Švédska do NATO," [President ratifies the NATO accession of Finland and Sweden] *Správy RTVS*, September 28, 2022. Available online: <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2022/09/prezidentka-ratifikovala-vstup-finska-a-svedska-do-nato/> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

■ Slovakia and the EU

It took a relatively long time for the European Union to start addressing the security and defense issues that arose in early 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It has remained somewhat in the background, although nationally its members have dealt with security issues in parallel. It is only the dangerously evolving situation in Ukraine that has "forced" the EU rethink. First and foremost, cooperation with NATO, is now quite different from a decade ago. Then, the formal summits between the leaders of the two organizations did not advance cooperation sufficiently, whereas now the two organizations are turning their cooperation into concrete plans so as to respond to newly emerging crises in a complementary and, above all, swift manner.

The last Eurobarometer²¹ survey of 2022 indicated, for example, that 74 per cent of EU citizens approve of the EU's actions in support of Ukraine following the Russian invasion, while 23 per cent disapproved. Support was lowest in Bulgaria, Greece (both on 48 per cent) and Slovakia (49 per cent). The highest percentages were recorded in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Denmark (between 97 and 92 per cent). Ten months after the start of the war, the numbers favoring EU support for sanctions against the Russian government and financial, military or humanitarian support for Ukraine remained high, at 73 per cent. In Slovakia, the figure was only 47 per cent, with only Greece (46 per cent) performing worse.²²

At the November EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, the defense ministers²³ in Brussels discussed the situation in Ukraine and the Sahel region of Africa, as well as the EU's ability to respond rapidly to imminent threats and crisis scenarios. Part of the talks took place in the presence of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov.

²¹ The survey was conducted from October 12 to November 7, 2022 on a sample of 26,443 respondents in 27 EU member states and published on December 14, 2022.

²² "Až 74 percent Európanov považuje kroky Únie na podporu Ukrajiny za správne," [Up to 74 per cent of Europeans consider the Union's actions in support of Ukraine to be correct] *Euractiv.sk*, December 12, 2022. Available online: https://euractiv.sk/section/buducnost-eu/news/az-74-percent-europanov-povazuje-kroky-unie-na-podporu-ukrajiny-za-spravne/?utm_source=traqli&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=6888&pnespid=XbcoqF5V9SIQjASK5cDUFV8boB8.k_kvT-BhUEfONNjvKUKRaJiiRExL2O40TLHWX5cLIHU_n (accessed on December 18, 2022).

²³ The meeting was attended by Marian Majer, State Secretary of the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic.

NATO attaches strategic importance to cooperation with the EU. The NATO concept states that a stronger and more capable EU contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and places the development of mutually reinforcing and complementary defense capabilities without unnecessary duplication at the heart of NATO–EU joint efforts.²⁴

■ V4

On the first of July 2022, Slovakia's one-year presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4) began. Slovakia followed the long-established format of negotiations on security and defense issues. First, the state secretaries met in Pezínok to discuss defense cooperation, support for Ukraine and developments in NATO and the EU. According to State Secretary of the Ministry of Defense Marian Majer, the priority of V4 military assistance to Ukraine should be expertise and assistance in demining and clearing unexploded ordnance. One of the conclusions of the negotiations was the signing of a framework agreement to improve Visegrad cooperation in defense planning.²⁵ The follow-up meeting of defense ministers at the end of September in Banská Štiavnica was focused on assistance to Ukraine, defense cooperation, disruptive activities by hybrid actors and security challenges in the Western Balkans and other regions. The discussion also included defense cooperation topics, such as the preparation of the EU V4 Battle Group, which will be on standby in the first half of 2023. The talks in Banská Štiavnica also focused on stepping up joint training and exercises and expanding the V4+ dialogue to include partners from the US, France, Germany, the UK and South Korea. Strengthening cooperation between defense industry companies, whose renaissance could be constrained by the rising cost of materials, energy and dependence on imports from third countries, was also on the agenda.²⁶

²⁴ "Summit v Madride a Nová strategická koncepcia NATO," op. cit.

²⁵ "Rokovali štátni tajomníci V4," [V4 state secretaries meet] *Obrana*, No. 12/2022, p. 6. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-122022/> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

²⁶ "V4 je odolný a dôležitý organizmus," [The V4 is a resilient and important body] *Obrana* No. 10/2022, pp. 4–5. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-102022/> (accessed on November 10, 2022).

■ USA

There is no doubt that the most important issue occupying the defense and diplomacy ministries at the beginning of the year (before the invasion escalated) was the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between the Slovak Republic and the United States of America. The aim of the agreement was to regulate the legal framework of a strengthened partnership and existing cooperation between the two countries. Although there was anticipation of a difficult debate in parliament, no one expected the launch of a disinformation campaign of such proportions. The agreement is a standard treaty between NATO allies²⁷ and is based on the 1951 NATO SOFA Status of Forces Agreement, to which the Slovak Republic and the USA are parties. The proposed treaty merely adapted the general terms to the current needs of the Slovak Republic. In the end, the approval process was successfully completed and the treaty was signed on February 4, 2022, with an effective date of April 1, 2022.²⁸

Security developments close to our borders show just how prescient the signing of the agreement was. The parliamentary speeches of opposition politicians at the end of the year and their efforts to drag Slovak citizens into the debate through scaremongering tactics, half-truths, hoaxes and disinformation showed that they were not interested in the security of Slovak citizens, but in trying to exploit their lack of information and score political points. The opposition in the Slovak public debate from non-political public figures, such as General Prosecutor Maroš Žilinka, was unprecedented.

²⁷ Defense Cooperation Agreements and similar agreements have been concluded between the US and 17 EU and NATO member states, including Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic countries. Six other countries that are members of NATO but not the EU have also signed agreements. This means that a total of 23 of the 30 NATO member countries have a DCA or similar agreement. For more see: J. Kotorová, "Pre partnerstvo a spoluprácu," [For partnership and cooperation] *Obrana*, No. 2/2022, pp. 38–9. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-22022/> (accessed on November 10, 2022).

²⁸ "Slovak Republic (22-401) – Defense Cooperation Agreement," U.S. Department of State, TIAS, Office Of Treaty Affairs, April 1, 2022. Available online: <https://www.state.gov/slovakia-22-401> (accessed on April 21, 2022).

■ Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic

In an interview for the monthly *Obrana* on Armed Forces Day, the Commander-in-Chief presented the armed forces as one of the most trustworthy institutions in the state. She called on their command to continue communicating clearly with citizens on defense issues to prevent the public from succumbing to conspiracies and misinformation. She made the point in response to the fraught debate on the DCA and the subsequent launch of Russian aggression against Ukraine. The war in Ukraine is linked to the hybrid actions of another state on Slovak territory. Combined with the erosion of the political consensus on the foreign policy direction of our country, the struggle against this is one of the greatest long-term challenges for us all.²⁹

Over the last two years, the readiness of the Slovak Armed Forces has been tested several times. In 2021, they assisted during the COVID-19 pandemic and in 2022 in addition to dealing with the pandemic, soldiers assisted the police force in dealing with migration and their primary role – defending Slovakia and its citizens – amid Russia's aggression in Ukraine.³⁰ For Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Daniel Zmeko the year 2022 was both one of the most challenging in the history of the Slovak army and a turning point in the much needed military modernization.³¹ He speaks highly of the work of the soldiers and stresses that the Slovak Armed Forces are the most important part of Slovakia's defense capability.³²

²⁹ Z. Čaputová, "Vážim si vojenskú profesionalitu, odhodlanie a oddanosť," [I respect the military's professionalism, dedication and commitment] *Obrana*, No. 9/2022, pp. 16–7. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-92022/> (accessed on December 21, 2022).

³⁰ In his assessment of the past year, General Daniel Zmeko said that the Slovak Armed Forces had helped train more than 600 Ukrainian soldiers and transport more than 11,500 tons of military materiel supplied by the Slovak and other armies through Slovak territory to Ukraine. He also stated that the assistance provided to Ukraine had no direct impact on Slovakia's defense capability. For more, see: "Armáda má za sebou prelomový rok z pohľadu nutnej modernizácie," [The army has had a breakthrough year in terms of essential modernization] *Sme.sk*, January 3, 2023. Available online: <https://www.sme.sk/minuta/23105592/armada-ma-za-sebou-prelomovy-rok-z-pohladu-nutnej-modernizacie> (accessed on January 3, 2023).

³¹ Ibid

³² "Daniel Zmeko, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, confirmed to *Sme.sk* that the army is currently renovating barracks that were supposed to be sold not long ago. He pointed to the short-sightedness of selling military infrastructure that we would otherwise have now," *Sme.sk*, January 3, 2023. Available online: <https://www.sme.sk/minuta/23105592/armada-ma-za-sebou-prelomovy-rok-z-pohladu-nutnej-modernizacie> (accessed on January 13, 2023).

Forward defense & air defense of the Slovak Republic

In the first phase of the war in Ukraine, Slovakia decided to donate its S-300 air defense system to Ukraine to defend it from Russian attack on the grounds that the Allies would help with Slovakia's air defense. Slovakia had been considering replacing the S-300 with a more modern air defense system for some time, but the main reason for doing so was ending its reliance on Russian servicing. When the Slovak defense ministry confirmed in April 2022 that Slovakia had donated its S-300 to Ukraine, two Patriot systems from Germany and one from the Netherlands had already been deployed at Sliač in Slovakia as part of NATO's Multinational Missile Defense Task Force. Later, one more Patriot battery from the USA was added to the three Patriot batteries at Sliač.

The grouping covers the Eastern flank of the Alliance from the Sliač base in its area of responsibility and is also responsible for protecting its airspace under NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defense (NATINAMDS).³³ Delays in delivering the new F-16s to Slovakia and the grounding of the MiG-29 fighters for safety reasons, problems with the servicing provided by Russia and the small number of airworthy aircraft led Slovakia to ask three neighboring NATO member states (Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) for temporary assistance in protecting Slovak airspace until receipt of the US F-16 fighters.³⁴ Agreements with the Czech Republic and Poland were signed in 2022 and Hungary is expected to join in 2023.³⁵

The arrival of the Patriot systems will not necessarily led to their permanent deployment in Slovakia. The Dutch government withdrew its Patriot system

³³ "Alianční priatelia na Sliači," [Allied friends at Sliač] *Obrana* No. 10/2022, pp.12–3. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-102022/> (accessed on January 3, 2023).

³⁴ "The Ministers of Defense of Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland signed a declaration under which the Czech and Polish Air Forces will protect Slovak airspace from 1 September 2022 to 31 December 2023, during the International Aviation Days SIAF 2022 at Malacky-Kuchyňa Air Base." For more, see: "Vzdušný priestor SR bude od 1. septembra chrániť Česko a Poľsko," [Slovak airspace will be protected by the Czech Republic and Poland from September 1st] *Infoservis*, Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, August 27, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51889-sk/vzdusny-priestor-sr-bude-od-1-septembra-chranit-cesko-a-polsko/> (accessed on October 30, 2022).

³⁵ For more, see: "Maďarsko sa pripojí k Česku a Poľsku a zapojí sa do ochrany vzdušného priestoru Slovenska," [Hungary joins Czech Republic and Poland in protecting Slovak airspace], *Infoservis*, Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, January 27, 2023. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/52469-sk/maďarsko-sa-pripoji-k-cesku-a-polsku-a-zapoji-sa-do-ochrany-vzdusneho-priestoru-slovenska/> (accessed on January 27, 2023).

after assessing the security situation in the region. In 2023, the German government will decide whether the Bundeswehr will continue to provide its Patriot system to help Slovak air defense. According to the Germans, the reason for this is the long-planned “extensive rearmament, as interoperability with the NATO integrated air defense system would otherwise be seriously compromised.”³⁶

In March 2022, the Slovak government agreed to a NATO armed forces presence on Slovak territory in response to Russian militant imperialism, amid the importance of strengthening the defense of NATO’s eastern border. The presence of the NATO multinational battle group reflects the postulate that an attack on one member is considered to be an attack on all. The multinational battalion is composed of a multinational command and staff, combat companies from the Czech Republic, Germany, the United States and Slovenia, along with combat support companies and combat support companies. It also includes a Slovak mortar platoon from the 22nd Mechanized Battalion of Michalovce. The battalion achieved full operational readiness on September 23, 2022, having performed well in the Strong Cohesion exercise.³⁷

International crisis management operations

In 2022 the Slovak Armed Forces were deployed in three main operations – NATO’s Operation Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia, under the European Union flag, as part of Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and as part of the UN’s UNFICYP force in Cyprus. In addition to these flagship operations, Slovakia has a number of troops in Iraq, Africa and the Middle East. That is unlikely to change in the near future, unless the geopolitical environment renders it paramount. At the end of November 2022, 397 servicemen and 43 servicewomen of the Slovak Armed Forces were deployed in ten foreign operations and missions.³⁸

³⁶ “Systémy Patriot na Slovensku budú musieť ísť na údržbu späť do Nemecka,” [Patriot systems in Slovakia will have to go back to Germany for maintenance] *HNonline.sk*, December 13, 2022. Available online: <https://hn24.hnonline.sk/hn24/96055967-systemy-patriot-na-slovensku-budu-musiet-ist-na-udrzbu-spaet-do-nemecka> (accessed on December 29, 2022).

³⁷ “Mnohonárodný prápor,” [Multinational Battalion] *Obrana* No. 10/2022, p. 9. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-102022/> (accessed on November 27, 2022).

³⁸ “Číslo mesiaca” [Number of the month] *Obrana* 12/2022, p. 3. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-122022/> (accessed on December 29, 2022).

All the operations are important, but for us involvement in the NATO eFP in Latvia (Camp Ādaži) is of paramount importance. The Slovak contingent has been part of this Canadian-led eFP since 2018, and under the current SRC mandate the Slovak involvement will continue until the end of the eFP. Its purpose is to strengthen defense and deterrence capabilities on the Alliance’s eastern flank and demonstrate readiness to respond to potential threats in accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

The fifth rotation of members of the Slovak Armed Forces took place in December, with the deployment in Ādaži of the 1st Firing Battery from Michalovce, consisting of 135 soldiers and nine modern Zuzana 2 self-propelled gun howitzers. The NATO battle groups are part of the largest reinforcement of NATO’s collective defense.

Defense budget

Slovakia’s defense system has been neglected for many years. But the current defense ministry leadership has committed itself to radical change, primarily increases to the defense budget, but also the adoption of strategic documents. Despite the turbulent political situation in the second half of 2022, the defense ministry tackled, or at least began to tackle three core issues: state defense, providing assistance to war-torn Ukraine and modernization. However, it is doubtful that this trend will continue after the snap elections at the end of September 2023. As the president observed,

[in] the context of the deteriorating social and economic situation, defending defense spending may become more difficult. However, it will be even more important not to ease off in communicating with the public, justifying and explaining the steps that the defense ministry and armed forces are taking. Our fellow citizens must be in no doubt that Slovakia has to invest in defense and that decisions are made transparently and professionally.³⁹

In June 2022, the Long-term Development Plan of the Ministry of Defense with an outlook to 2035⁴⁰ was approved by both the government and parliament.

³⁹ Z. Čaputová, op. cit.

⁴⁰ For more, see: “Dlhodobý plán rozvoja rezortu obrany s výhľadom do roku 2035.” [Long-term development plan of the Ministry of Defense with an outlook to 2035]. Available online: https://www.mod.gov.sk/data/files/4767_dlhodoby-plan-rozvoja-rezortu-ministerstva-obrany-s-vyhľadom-do-roku-2035.pdf (accessed on January 10, 2022).

It sets out three periods or stages for fulfilling the aims. The first milestone in the Long-term Development Plan is 2024. This stage is concerned with launching major projects to enhance the armed forces and provide the necessary infrastructure, services and resources for allies on Slovak territory. The second milestone is 2026. By the end of that year, Slovakia will have a heavy mechanized brigade. Fulfilling this commitment will require the purchase of modern equipment as well as an increase in the number of professional soldiers. The third milestone is 2035. By then it is assumed the nature of the threats and the basis of the long-term plan will have changed and so the plan will have to be revised.⁴¹

According to defense ministry estimates, building up its required capabilities and capacities will cost approximately €38 billion by 2035. Any budget shortfalls will lead to delays in achieving the milestones and possibly the failure to fulfill the capability development plans and a deterioration in existing capabilities.⁴²

After years of stagnation, the Slovak arms industry gained momentum in 2022. The top product was the Zuzana 2 self-propelled gun howitzer, which was successfully deployed in combat in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Armed Forces took delivery of the seventh of eight Zuzana 2s in November 2022 under a commercial sales contract.⁴³ Deliveries will continue, with KONSTRUKTA-Defense expected to produce a further 16 howitzers for Ukraine, funded by Denmark, Germany and Norway.

Another project, in eastern Slovakia, concerns repairs to German equipment (howitzers and anti-aircraft systems) donated to Ukraine, funded by the Germans under the Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Defense of the Federal Republic of Germany.⁴⁴

Slovak arms companies have a unique opportunity to flourish. However, merely repairing or refurbishing ex-Soviet weapon systems will not suffice. The new security situation will require innovations to old systems and the development of new weapons systems.

■ Conclusion

Despite the turbulent situations Slovakia has found itself in over the last three years, we can conclude that in security and defense it has acted in accordance with its foreign policy orientation. The evidence of this is found in the approval of the Slovak Security Strategy in 2021, the signing of the Defense Cooperation Agreement with the United States of America in 2022, the increase in the defense budget for 2023 to 2.01 per cent of GDP and, above all, the assistance provided to Ukraine as part of the fight against Russia's unprovoked aggression.

The history of the independent Slovak Republic shows that security depends, firstly, on having a functional security and defense system and, secondly, on active membership of NATO and the EU. Slovakia's ability to react quickly to all types of threats over the past two years reflects the fact that it has built a quality security and defense system. It has also impressed partners by adopting a constructive approach to handling the security and defense issues related to its NATO commitments and EU membership, as well as its activities in the V4, which it became rotating president of on July 1, 2022.

Synergy between the country's foremost political leaders (president, prime minister, foreign affairs and defense ministers) means that even the most challenging of tasks can be handled. Whether this synergy will continue in the immediate future remains to be seen after the snap elections in September 2023.

⁴¹ "Schválili plán rozvoja obrany," [Defence development plan approved] *Obrana*, No. 7/2022, p. 6. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-72022/> (accessed on January 10, 2023).

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ "Siedma Zuzana," [Seventh Zuzana] *Obrana*, No. 12/2022, p. 6. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-122022/> (accessed on January 10, 2022).

⁴⁴ "Opravy pre Ukrajinu," [Repairs for Ukraine] *Obrana*, No. 12/2022, p. 6. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-122022/> (accessed on January 10, 2022).



Veronika Oravcová

Energy security is the focus of attention again

In February 2022 the security of Europe was shaken by the unprecedented Russian invasion of Ukraine. In March the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution signed by 141 countries reaffirming “Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity” and called on Russia to “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.”¹ Right after the invasion the European Council acknowledged that Russia was “grossly violating international law and undermining European and global security and stability” and called on it to “immediately cease military actions, unconditionally withdraw all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine”.² Meanwhile EU countries and their allies (notably the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Norway) had started providing financial and humanitarian assistance (and later military equipment) and adopted several sanction packages targeting the aggressor and its ally Belarus ruled by Aleksandr Lukashenko.

The full-scale war revealed the vulnerability of the energy sector amid the hesitant approach to introducing sanctions. While EU leaders found it relatively easy to ban Russian coal, natural gas and oil sanctions led to intense debates.

¹ “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 March 2022,” United Nations General Assembly, 2022. Available online: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/293/36/PDF/N2229336.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

² “Joint statement by the members of the European Council,” European Council, 2022. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/02/24/joint-statement-by-the-members-of-the-european-council-24-02-2022/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

Moreover, nuclear fuel and the need for diversification were discussed more broadly in the media and by politicians, especially after Slovakia's opt-out for Russian planes carrying fuel for two nuclear power plants in March.³

Debates on energy security and high Russian dependency were not entirely new. In 2009 during the gas crisis, when Russia cut off natural gas supplies via Ukraine, these issues were on the table. But the situation was solved relatively quickly and several diversification projects were introduced following the launch of the EU's Projects of Common Interest.⁴ In 2022, in the shadow of the war in Ukraine, efforts to ensure security of supply whilst taking into account climate policy measures became key topics in discussions on the energy sphere and the economies of EU countries. There were also heated debates on the availability of supplies, with affordability and high energy prices dominating political discussions across Europe. One of the core issues in EU countries was how stable energy supplies could be maintained at affordable prices while pursuing climate goals.

The domestic political scene was just as turbulent with disagreements between the government and opposition as well as tensions between the coalition parties, especially between party leaders Igor Matovič (*OĽaNO – Ordinary People and Independent Personalities*) and Richard Sulík (*SaS – Freedom and Solidarity*). On September 1, 2022, SaS resigned from government and initiated a no-confidence vote. On December 15th parliament expressed no-confidence in the government of Prime Minister Eduard Heger (OĽaNO) with 78 of the 102 MPs present voting against the government. Richard Sulík, the economy minister, responsible for energy, was replaced in September by non-partisan energy analyst Karel Hirman. The incumbent prime minister, Eduard Heger, tried to avoid the prospect of an early election by negotiating a government reshuffle. He did not succeed and in January 2023 parliament voted for early elections.

³ "More nuclear fuel arrives in Slovakia from Russia," *SITA*, March 16, 2022. Available online: <https://sita.sk/venergetike/more-nuclear-fuel-arrives-in-slovakia-from-russia/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁴ "Projects of Common Interest," European Commission, 2023. Available online: https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/infrastructure/projects-common-interest_en (accessed on February 20, 2023).

■ Response of the European Union and Slovakia

European leaders responded to the Russian invasion by quickly adopting sanctions against Russia and its ally Belarus that affected companies and a number of individuals. The energy sector found itself in a paradoxical situation: on one hand countries feared that Russia would cease supplies if it proved too difficult and costly⁵ and on the other they called for strict sanctions and saw cessation of supply as an opportunity to end fossil fuel reliance.⁶ Concerns over the vulnerability of the energy sector were especially acute in Central European countries dependent on Russian gas, oil and nuclear fuel. Germany was particularly vocal – Nord Stream 2 being a prime example of dependence⁷ – along with Slovakia and Hungary, who obtained opt-outs from EU sanctions on Russian oil.

From the beginning Slovakia adopted two different political positions on energy sanctions. While the prime minister stated that Slovakia favored a complete cut off from Russian oil and gas and called for it to be substitute with nuclear and renewables,⁸ the economy minister argued that it would be catastrophic and do greater harm to industry than the Covid-19 pandemic had, arguing that the gas price was affordable, the infrastructure existed and

⁵ L. Peter, "Ukraine war: Germany fears Russia gas cut may become permanent," *BBC*, July 11, 2022. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62121702> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁶ D. Jørgensen & F. Birol, "How to cut Russian fossil fuel imports, carbon emissions and energy bills at the same time," *Euractiv.com*, March 24, 2022. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/opinion/how-to-cut-russian-fossil-fuel-imports-carbon-emissions-and-energy-bills-at-the-same-time/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁷ German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced that Germany was suspending the approval process for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline until further notice. He did so in response to Russia's decision to recognize two regions in Ukraine's Donbas. Suspending the approval process for the gas pipeline was a necessary administrative step to prevent the pipeline from being certified. This move paved the way to Germany breaking economic ties with Russia, which was previously unthinkable.

⁸ I. Jenčová, "Premiér Heger pred samitom európskych lídrov: Musíme hovoriť o úplnom odstrihnutí dodávok ruského plynu," [Prime Minister Heger before the European leaders summit: We must talk about completely cutting off Russian gas supplies] *Euractiv.sk*, March 10, 2022. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/energetika/news/premier-heger-pred-samitom-europskych-lidrov-musime-hovorit-o-uplnom-odstrihnuti-dodavok-plynu-od-ruska/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

Russia was fulfilling its commitments.⁹ There was a great deal of dispute over the Slovak position on Russian energy sources and the gas and oil sanctions. Nuclear fuel and supply were another issue that attracted debate.

Nuclear is considered to be a domestic energy source in Central and Eastern European countries, although the fuel is imported from third countries.¹⁰ The fuel for both Slovakia's nuclear power plants – Jaslovské Bohunice and Mochovce – is supplied by the Russian company TVEL. The need for fuel diversification only began to be debated properly in 2022, following the arrival in March of Russian planes carrying fuel for the nuclear power plants despite the EU's and the government's decision to close the airspace. Until then the price of the nuclear fuel had been the deciding factor. For example in 2018 the American company Westinghouse was excluded from a tender for a new supplier on the grounds of cost, while time fuel diversification was not an issue.¹¹ However, price should not be the only criterion, safety and supplier reliability should also be considered. Westinghouse has been testing nuclear fuel designed for VVER 440 reactors (found in Slovakia and other EU countries – Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland and Czech Republic). Westinghouse fuel can be used in the Czech VVER 1000 nuclear reactors at Temelín and last year they signed a contract with France's Framatome as well.¹²

In April President Vladimír Putin announced that Russia would start demanding rubles for gas sold to “enemy” countries, including EU countries, and ordered the government and the Russian central bank to find a way of altering the payment terms in Gazprom contracts from euros to rubles. Sulík, the economy minister, immediately reacted by saying Slovakia should do as

⁹ “R. Sulík tvrdí, že okamžité odstříhnutí od ruských energií by malo katastrofické následky,” [R. Sulík claims that an immediate cut off from Russian energy would have catastrophic consequences] *Trend*, March 15, 2022. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/r-sulik-tvrdi-okamzite-odstrihnutie-ruskych-energi-malo-katastroficke-nasledky> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

¹⁰ J. Osička & F. Černoch, “Anatomy of a black sheep: The roots of the Czech Republic's pro-nuclear energy policy,” *Energy Research & Social Science*, 2017, 27, pp. 9–13.

¹¹ V. Šnidl, “Američania prehrali s Rusmi súťaž o palivo pre slovenské reaktory, lobujú ďalej,” [Americans lose out to the Russians in the tender to supply fuel to Slovak reactors, but continue to lobby] *Denník N*, December 21, 2018. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/1330721/americiania-prehrali-s-rusmi-sutaz-o-palivo-pre-slovenske-reaktory-lobuju-za-druhu-sancu/> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

¹² “ČEZ, Westinghouse a Framatome uzavřely smlouvy na dodávky paliva pro Temelín,” [ČEZ, Westinghouse and Framatome concluded contracts to supply fuel for Temelín] *České noviny*, June 28, 2022. Available online: <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/cez-westinghouse-a-framatome-uzavrely-smlouvy-na-dodavky-paliva-pro-temelin/2225278> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

Russia demanded as he would not do anything that would threaten Russian supplies,¹³ although Bulgaria and Poland were among the countries that refused to do so. Other landlocked countries, Hungary and Austria, were also willing to switch to payment in rubles. After several disagreements within the EU over whether this approach violated the sanctions or not, Putin issued a decree in January 2023 allowing Gazprom gas deliveries to be paid for in foreign currency.

In May President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen presented the sixth package of sanctions against Russia, targeting oil imports and envisaging the gradual cessation of European imports of Russian oil by the end of 2022. Seaborne oil imports were also subject to sanctions, though Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic were awarded an exemption and could continue buying Russian crude oil supplied via the Druzhba pipeline until the end of 2023. The main argument for the sanctions opt-out came from the Slovnaft refinery (owned by Hungarian MOL), which stated it would need more time to adapt the technology to process a different type of oil;¹⁴ tests began back in 2016.¹⁵ Although the refinery was connected up to the Adria pipeline in 2015, it apparently lacks capacity and transmission fees are high;¹⁶ there are also technological problems with the oil processing.¹⁷

The fear that Europe would not have enough sources for secure energy supplies led countries to reconsider energy use. In general, two views were adopted: the first was to make more intensive use of domestic fossil fuels, especially coal, to meet energy demand, while the second was to speed up

¹³ T. Bakoš, “Sulík o ruskom plyne: Keď je tu podmienka platiť v rubľoch, tak plaťme,” [Sulík on Russian gas: If we have to pay in rubles, then let's pay] *Pravda*, April 3, 2022. Available online: <https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/energetika/clanok/622278-sulik-o-ruskom-plyne-ked-je-tu-podmienka-platiť-v-rubloch-tak-platme/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

¹⁴ M. Hudec, “Business as usual for Slovakia as EU oil embargo comes into effect,” *Euractiv.com*, December 6, 2022. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/business-as-usual-for-slovakia-after-eu-oil-embargo-comes-into-effect/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

¹⁵ “Slovnaft sa chystá testovať inú než ruskú ropu,” [Slovnaft is going to test non-Russian oil] *SITA*, March 1, 2022. Available online: <https://www.energia.sk/slovnaft-sa-chysta-testovat-inu-nej-rusku-ropu/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

¹⁶ “Nedostatočná kapacita ropovodu Adria môže podľa Slovnaftu ohroziť zásobovanie českého trhu z bratislavskej rafinérie,” [Slovnaft says insufficient capacity on the Adria pipeline could affect supplies from the Bratislava refinery to the Czech market] *Denník N*, February 3, 2023. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/minuta/3223168>

¹⁷ O. Világi, “Ako je to s kapacitou,” [The capacity situation] *HNonline*, May 12, 2022. Available online: <https://hnonline.sk/komentare/komentare/96017670-ako-je-to-s-kapacitou> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

domestic renewable and energy efficiency measures to save energy; only by decoupling economies from fossil fuels could energy security be achieved, which meant renewable energy and clean technologies had to play an integral role in delivering net-zero.¹⁸ Although these two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the idea of greater coal use has been criticized as undermining climate commitments. Several European countries decided to burn domestic coal again to produce electricity, despite the decision contradicting their own climate plans and EU climate goals. Countries announcing they were switching back to coal even included climate ambitious countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands or Austria. The solution was supposed to be temporary to cover household heating for the coming winter of 2022/2023. Critics argued that even a temporary return to coal could present an obstacle to global climate efforts. However, a recent analysis by the energy think tank Ember showed that having a small number of coal plants on temporary standby would have a limited impact on emissions and climate commitments.¹⁹ In Slovakia there has been discussion of reintroducing coal in electricity generation and the coal phase-out of the Nováky and Vojany power plants is continuing.

In May 2022 the European Commission presented its REPowerEU Plan as a response to the urgent need to address the unreliability of Russian energy supplies. There were three main strands to the decision to adopt REPowerEU: first, market disruptions owing to the unreliability of Russian supplies and feeding into high energy prices, second, climate commitments and third, supporting Ukraine by reducing dependency on Russian gas and oil.²⁰ Public support for the last argument can be found in the Eurobarometer conducted in April 2022, showing 85 per cent of the Europeans believe that the EU should reduce dependency on Russian gas and oil as soon as possible.²¹ REPowerEU aimed to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas by two-thirds

¹⁸ "The Energy Trilemma – Does the Need for Energy Security Derail the Energy Transition?" ABL, 2022. Available online: <https://abl-group.com/all-media/blog/the-energy-trilemma-does-the-need-for-energy-security-derail-the-energy-transition/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

¹⁹ "Coal is not making a comeback: Europe plans limited increase," Ember, 2022. Available online: <https://ember-climate.org/insights/research/coal-is-not-making-a-comeback/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

²⁰ "REPowerEU: A plan to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward the green transition," European Commission, 2022. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3131 (accessed on February 20, 2023).

²¹ "EU's response to the war in Ukraine," Eurobarometer, 2022. Available online: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2772> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

by the end of 2022 and to completely eliminate Europe's dependence on Russian gas by 2027. It focuses on two main goals: ensuring the security of gas supplies and accelerating the deployment of renewable energy sources, including energy efficiency measures²² through enhanced energy savings, diversification of supplies – especially through LNG imports and by developing the EU External Energy Strategy, speeding up renewables deployment, but also by reducing fossil fuel consumption in industry and transport and supporting further investments in smart technologies.²³ These goals follow on from the European Green Deal plans and strategies, including the Fit for 55 package draft legislation and the recovery and resilience plans adopted as part of the EU response to Covid-19 pandemic, with at least 37 per cent of investments contributing to the green transition.²⁴ By the end of the year the European Parliament and the Council had agreed the REPowerEU financing, which meant countries could include a REPowerEU chapter in their recovery and resilience plans.

■ Further gas infrastructure or the end of the fossil fuel era?

Diversification of energy imports is one of the crucial pillars in REPowerEU. Europe was at risk of industry and households being affected by energy shortages due to intermittent gas supplies from Russia and so several measures were proposed to ensure a coordinated response to possible gas outages in the winter. Firstly, European countries agreed to help their neighbors via a solidarity mechanism in the event of an emergency in which critical infrastructure lacked gas. The idea of a solidarity measure was not completely new: there is one in Article 13 of Regulation (EU) No 2017/1938 that commits

²² "REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy," Official Journal of the European Union, 2022. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A108%3AFIN> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

²³ "REPowerEU: A plan to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward the green transition," European Commission, 2022. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3131 (accessed on February 20, 2023).

²⁴ "Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility," Official Journal of the European Union, 2021. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

member states to ensuring third countries have the necessary flows to meet the gas requirements of essential customers in an emergency. However, it was not until 2022 that this discussion became possible. Solidarity is interpreted variously by different countries, politicians and stakeholders. Slovakia's economy minister Karel Hirman stated that solidarity was crucial for Slovakia to ensure sufficient energy supplies in a prolonged crisis and that meant securing LNG from other countries and filling storage tanks in readiness to help other countries.²⁵ However, solidarity requires bilateral agreements, and Slovakia has no such agreement.

Secondly, countries agreed to reduce their gas consumption by up to 15 per cent between August 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, under the Save Gas for a Safe Winter initiative. However, the goal was voluntary and Slovakia was among the countries that negotiated an exception. Economy minister Richard Sulík indicated that the exception was crucial for the industrial sector, which met with a positive response from industrial players²⁶ but he was criticized for not attempting to introduce energy efficiency measures.²⁷ Thirdly, new gas storage rules were adopted to help prepare Europe for a possible interruption in Russia gas supplies, aimed at strengthening the EU's security of gas supply ahead of the upcoming heating season. Member states' storage facilities had to be at 80 per cent capacity by November 2022 and 90 per cent in the years thereafter. That kickstarted a race between countries to fill the facilities, which were consequently relatively well prepared for the critical winter, as the gas shortage threat did not materialize. Visegrad countries managed to fill their facilities to more than 90 per cent with Poland reaching almost 100 per cent by the end of the year. However, Poland has the lowest storage level in proportion to overall gas consumption (just above 15%), while Slovakia has an overall storage capacity of 4.015 bcm, covering approximately

65 per cent of annual consumption. Although Slovakia stores gas for foreign countries, in case of emergencies, under Law on Energy 251/2012 Coll., the network operator can restrict supply and the competent authority can take over the duties of the TSO in the particular region.²⁸

Slovakia's energy security strategy from 2008 acknowledges that being highly dependent on a continuous supply of basic raw materials and the transport of non-renewable energy sources could easily threaten both economic prosperity and stability, as well as state security.²⁹ Since the adoption of the strategy new infrastructure have been built, especially in the natural gas sector. Nonetheless, even after the 2009 gas crisis the main supplier remained the same, changing only in 2022 and discussions on gas supplies were at the heart of the energy debates in Slovakia.

When it comes to gas supplies from other countries, SPP made its first purchase of 80 million m³ of LNG back in February via the terminal on the Croatian island of Krk³⁰ and entered into diversification contracts, covering more than 65 per cent of customer consumption from non-Russian sources by the end of the year. However, Slovakia was able to cover only one third of overall gas consumption with non-Russian gas in 2022.³¹ The sufficient storage capacities and mild winter meant the 2022/2023 heating season proved unproblematic.

In terms of physical infrastructure Slovakia has good gas connections with all its neighboring countries, as it engaged in a diversification program, supported by Projects of Common Interest (PCI) launched by the European

²⁵ "K. Hirman: Štáty EÚ odmietli korekčný mechanizmus tlmiači energetickú krízu," [K. Hirman: EU states reject correction mechanism to cushion energy crisis] *JOJ TV*, 2022. Available online: <https://www.noviny.sk/zahranicie/719358-k-hirman-staty-eu-odmietli-korekcnny-mechanizmus-tlmia-ci-energetic-ku-krizu> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

²⁶ "Ak sa veľké európske ekonomiky dostanú do problémov s plynom, môže to ovplyvniť aj Slovensko," [If large European economies run into gas problems, Slovakia may be affected] *RTVS*, 2022. Available online: <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2022/07/ak-sa-velke-europske-ekonomiky-dostanu-do-problemov-s-plynom-moze-to-ovplyvniť-aj-slovensko/> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

²⁷ "Priemyslu sa šetrenie plynom nedotkne. Sulík vyjednal v Bruseli pre Slovensko výnimky," [Industry will not be affected by gas savings. Sulík negotiated exemptions for Slovakia in Brussels] *tvnoviny*, 2022. Available online: <https://tvnoviny.sk/ekonomika/clanok/226530-r-sulik-v-dohode-o-znizeni-spotreby-plynu-dosiahol-pre-slovensko-vynimky> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

²⁸ A. Nosko, V. Oravcová & N. Theisen, "A spirit of solidarity? Evaluating Slovakia's potential contribution to regional and intra-EU natural gas security of supply," Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2022. Available online: <https://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Solidarity.pdf> (accessed on March, 15, 2023).

²⁹ "Energetická politika a stratégia energetickej bezpečnosti," [Energy policy and energy security strategy] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2008. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/energetika/energeticka-politika/energeticka-politika-a-strategia-energetickej-bezpecnosti> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

³⁰ "SPP prvýkrát nakúpil LNG, dodávky plynu sú bez obmedzení," [SPP has made its first LNG purchase, no limits on gas supplies] SPP, 2022. Available online: <https://www.spp.sk/spp-prvykrat-nakupil-lng-dodavky-plynu-su-bez-obmedzeni/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

³¹ D. Funtíková & T. Grečko, "Zmluva s Gazpromom platí do roku 2034, dotedy musíme za ruský plyn platiť, hovorí šéf SPP," [Gazprom contract ends in 2034, we have to pay for Russian gas until then, says head of SPP] *Denník N*, January 26, 2023. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/3210323/zmluva-s-gazpromom-plati-do-roku-2034-dovtedy-musime-za-rusky-plyn-platiť-hovori-sef-spp/?ref=inm> (accessed on March, 15, 2023).

Commission in 2013. Slovakia installed reverse flows with neighboring countries (the Czech Republic, Austria and Ukraine), completed new interconnectors with Ukraine (in 2014), Hungary (in 2015) and then Poland in October 2022, providing access to the LNG terminal in Świnoujście, with the first tender in mid-November.³² Another large diversification project is the planned Eastring pipeline to connect the Slovak transition system with Bulgaria via Hungary and Romania. Although the project was withdrawn from the PCI list, gas stakeholders began discussing its possible revival, arguing that Russian gas had to be replaced.³³ Similarly, there was discussion of expanding domestic gas extraction, which currently covers approximately one per cent of consumption. On the other hand, there were vocal calls to put an end to the fossil fuel era and ramp up energy saving measures and large scale renewables instead of focusing on new infrastructure. Both groups, however, agreed on gradually increasing the use of biogas.

■ Renewable energy as a pillar of energy security

The benefits of renewables are not just environmental, helping mitigate climate change and reduce air pollutants, but also energy security related. In countries heavily dependent on natural gas, renewables offer an alternative source of heat and electricity and can improve diversity of electricity sources and resistance to central shocks through local generation.³⁴ Indeed, there are many who say that renewables are key to resolving the energy security trilemma (affordability and access, energy security and environmental sustainability), while emphasizing that the push to achieve net-zero policies did

not cause the current energy crisis, but is the solution to it.³⁵ In Slovakia the discussion on renewables has never been so intense as in 2022 when the attention of the media and energy-consumers was focused on more intense deployment. Up until last year the renewables discourse in Slovakia was predominantly focused on the environment and to a lesser extent security. That changed with the need to reduce fossil fuel dependence, but also because of the rising energy prices and lack of information on state support for energy consumers.

Although Slovakia's energy security strategy recognized the importance of renewable energy, very little progress was made on increasing the share of renewables in final energy consumption. The strategy was published 14 years ago, but only marginal efforts were made and Slovakia is a renewables lagger among EU countries³⁶ with rather unambitious renewable targets. In Slovakia's National Energy and Climate Plan, its contribution as part of the 2030 climate and energy framework to the overall EU renewables share for 2030 is 19.2 per cent (instead of the Commission's recommended 24%).³⁷ The overall EU binding renewable energy target (Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001/EU) was at least 32 per cent. Then the Fit for 55 Package presented in July 2021 increased the target to at least 40 per cent, and REPowerEU proposes a further increase to 45 per cent by 2030. With several such changes over a relatively short period of time and the obstacles to developing renewables such as grid modernization and construction permits, it is doubtful if many countries (especially in Central and Eastern Europe³⁸) will be able to meet the more ambitious targets. Slovakia has to aim for at least 32 per cent under the Fit for 55 Package and even higher under REPowerEU. The potential for renewables deployment lies above all in district heating, but individual heating

³² "Booked capacity," Eustream, 2023. Available online: <https://tis.eustream.sk/TisWeb/#/?nav=bd.cap> (accessed on March, 15, 2023).

³³ P. Jurkovič, J. Klepáč: "Z hľadiska energetickej bezpečnosti SR netreba nahrádzať zemný plyn v energetickom mixe, ale jeho zdroj, Rusko," [J. Klepáč: In terms of Slovak energy security, it is not the natural gas in the energy mix that needs replacing, but its source, Russia] Slovgas, April 4, 2022. Available online: <https://www.slovgas.sk/aktuality/j-klepac-z-hladiska-energetickej-bezpecnosti-sr-netreba-nahradzat-zemny-plyn-v-energetickom-mixe-ale-jeho-zdroj-rusko/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

³⁴ "Contribution of Renewables to Energy Security," International Energy Agency, 2007. Available online: <https://www.iea.org/reports/contribution-of-renewables-to-energy-security> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

³⁵ "The Energy Trilemma – Does the Need for Energy Security Derail the Energy Transition?" ABL, 2022. Available online: <https://abl-group.com/all-media/blog/the-energy-trilemma-does-the-need-for-energy-security-derail-the-energy-transition/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

³⁶ "Share of energy consumption from renewable sources in Europe," European Environment Agency, 2022. Available online: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/ims/share-of-energy-consumption-from> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

³⁷ "2030 climate & energy framework," European Commission, 2023. Available online: https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2030-climate-energy-framework_en (accessed on February 20, 2023).

³⁸ M. Mišík & V. Oravcová, "Ex Ante Governance in the European Union: Energy and climate policy as a 'test run' for the post-pandemic recovery," *Energy Policy*, 2022, 167, 113076.

is also important and is highlighted in numerous government strategies.³⁹ There is unexplored potential for wind energy,⁴⁰ not to mention geothermal energy, which has great potential in Eastern Slovakia.⁴¹ Given the lack of predictable systematic legislative, regulatory and financial support, meeting this target will be prove a challenge.

There are smaller initiatives for tackling the higher fossil fuel prices and energy market instability. Companies, households, towns and regions have started to focus on the possibilities for renewables deployment. Although such initiatives are small in number, they are indicative of greater interest in energy self-sufficiency and the environmental benefits. Two companies that have made such investments are Duslo Šaľa, a fertilizer manufacturer and global supplier of rubber chemicals, and Železiarne Podbrezová, which produces steel and seamless steel pipes. Slovakia has many large industrial parks with capacious roofs, where photovoltaic units could be installed to cover part of their energy needs. Up until 2020 industrial-scale rooftop photovoltaics were not permitted, owing to the limit on grid connections (500 kW). That changed with the transposition of the Winter Package into national legislation.⁴²

The largest rooftop photovoltaic plant is to be built at Železiarní Podbrezová, with an expected total investment of €3 million and more than 6,700 photovoltaic panels and expected maximum annual electricity generation of 3,750 megawatt hours (MWh).⁴³ In October Duslo Šaľa announced plans to build a photovoltaic power plant and wind park on and near its site at an

³⁹ "Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a view to 2050," Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://www.minzp.sk/files/oblasti/politika-zmeny-klimy/ets/lts-sk-eng.pdf> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁴⁰ "Štúdiá SAPI: Vysoký potenciál rozvoja veternej energetiky ničí podnikateľské prostredie," [SAPI study: The business environment destroys high potential of wind energy development] SAPI, 2022. Available online: <https://www.sapi.sk/clanok/studia-sapi-vysoky-potencial-rozvoja-veternej-energetiky-nici-podnikatelske-prostredie> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁴¹ "Geotermálny vrt," [Geothermal well] SITA, 2022. Available online: <https://sita.sk/tag/geotermalny-vrt/> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁴² M. Sadloňová, "Aktívny odberateľ a lokálny zdroj v budúcej právnej úprave," [Active customer and local source in future legislation] *Energie-portal*, March 16, 2022. Available online: <https://www.energie-portal.sk/Dokument/aktivny-odberatel-a-lokalny-zdroj-v-buducej-pravnej-uprave-107892.aspx> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁴³ "Na strechách hál vznikne najväčšia fotovoltická priemyselná elektrárň na Slovensku," [The largest photovoltaic industrial power plant in Slovakia will be built on the roofs of the halls] *Podbrezovan*, 2022. Available online: <http://www.podbrezovan.sk/na-strechach-hal-vznikne-najvacsia-fotovolticka-priemyselna-elektren-na-slovensku/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

estimated cost of almost €100 million. It will be built on the former sewage plant, while the wind park is to be located northeast of the village of Trnovec nad Váhom, near the industrial area, and the company is also considering green hydrogen production.⁴⁴

There was also greater household demand for renewables, especially heat pumps and solar installations, supported by the Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA) under the Green Households program.⁴⁵ SIEA is involved in an Interreg Europe project to encourage technological developments in renewables and using social innovations to involve consumers.⁴⁶ Sharing best practices and experiences within local communities is key to achieving a successful energy transition and clean and decentralized sources. Pioneering examples include the first common purchase of photovoltaic devices for 250 households organized by the Consumer Protection Association, which is helping interested parties select the best quality products, guaranteeing a lower price and guiding them through the whole process of purchasing and installation.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "Duslo Šaľa chystá veľkú investíciu do zelenej energie. Do projektov naleje takmer sto miliónov eur," [Duslo Šaľa is preparing a large investment in green energy. Almost one hundred million euros is going into projects] *HNonline*, October 18, 2022. Available online: <https://hnonline.sk/finweb/ekonomika/96046864-duslo-sala-chysta-velku-investiciu-do-zelenej-energie-do-projektov-naleje-takmer-sto-milionov-eur> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁴⁵ M. Gudiak & V. Drábiková "Škrť cez rozpočet tisícok domácností. Štát zrušil milióny na podporu obnoviteľných zdrojov z hodiny na hodinu," [Budget cuts for thousands of households. The state scrapped millions for supporting renewables] *tvnoviny*, May 2, 2022. Available online: <https://tvnoviny.sk/ekonomika/clanok/168860-stat-zrusil-slubovanu-dotaci-na-kotly-na-biomasu-mracna-su-aj-nad-solarnymi-panelmi-a-teplnymi-cerpadlami> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁴⁶ "Shifting towards renewable energy for transition to low carbon energy," Interreg Europe, 2023. Available online: <https://projects2014-2020.interregeurope.eu/shrec/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁴⁷ I. Jenčová, "Spoločný nákup fotovoltiky je výhodnejší. Prvý štartuje aj na Slovensku," [Joint purchase of photovoltaics is better value. The first purchase in Slovakia will soon take place.] *Euractiv.sk*, November 2, 2022. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/budovy/news/spolocny-nakup-fotovoltiky-je-pre-ludi-vyhodnejsi-prvy-startuje-aj-na-slovensku/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

■ Energy efficiency first. Or not?

Throughout the year households were increasingly interested in measures that could help them save energy to avoid high bills. In Europe building renovations and greater efficiency were an important topic of debate that led to several initiatives, such as the Renovation Wave Strategy, New European Bauhaus, the revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive under the Fit for 55 package and the REPowerEU plan. On the first European energy efficiency day held in October, the vice-president of the European Commission in charge of the Green Deal, Frans Timmermans, reminded participants that in the current energy crisis “the best way to act is to come together with our member states and especially with our citizens, and convince everyone that we need to save energy.”⁴⁸

At the EU level it was agreed that countries should reduce gas consumption by at least 15 per cent between August 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, as part of the REPowerEU agreement in Council Regulation (EU) 2022/1369 on coordinated gas demand-reduction measures and launch of the Save Gas for a Safe Winter initiative. Several countries have opt-outs, including Slovakia because of the size of its industrial sector and sufficient gas storage levels.⁴⁹ In January 2023 Eurostat released a document showing that natural gas consumption had dropped by 19.3 per cent from August 2022 to January 2023. The data showed that Slovakia and Malta were the only two countries to have actually increased their consumption.⁵⁰ However, the economy ministry responded by saying that the figures for previous years were inaccurate and Slovakia had in fact reduced consumption by 20 per cent.⁵¹ The drop could be partly down to several industries having to slow production because of

the high energy prices. In fact large industries made greater gas savings than households, which were given financial compensation (see the next part).⁵²

Nationally the environment ministry also set a savings target of 15 per cent and issued energy saving guidelines for public buildings.⁵³ The government commitment applied to 2,500 administrative buildings. However, despite the monthly reporting commitment, there is no data monitoring and tracking the savings.⁵⁴ Also, several bodies launched their own information energy saving campaigns, notably the Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency in conjunction with the economy ministry and government office. This topic resonated strongly in the media with energy analysts giving tips on how to reduce household and office energy bills.

Households will receive a substantial share of Slovakia’s Recovery and Resilience Plan, about €528 million for upgrading buildings under the Home Renovation program, which includes home renovation grants by 2026. These will be administered by the Slovak Environmental Agency, which is aiming to launch the first call by the end of September 2022. The grant is conditional on making at least 30 per cent primary energy savings, including home insulation, replacement of windows, replacement of heating source, green roofs, installation of shading technology and asbestos removal.⁵⁵ The €30 million allocated in the first round of the call will allow at least 2,000 applicants to renovate their homes to a maximum of €19,000 providing the renovation leads to energy savings of more than 60 per cent. There are, however, many obstacles, including the slow administration procedures.

⁴⁸ “Opening remarks: EVP Timmermans at the European Energy Efficiency Day 2022,” European Commission, 2022. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_22_6204 (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁴⁹ “Council Regulation (EU) 2022/1369 of 5 August 2022 on coordinated demand-reduction measures for gas,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2022. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/1369/oj> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁵⁰ “EU gas consumption decreased by 19%,” Eurostat, 2022. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/DDN-20230221-1> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁵¹ “Zníženie spotreby plynu Slovenska za mesiac január až na úrovni 23%,” [Slovakia’s gas consumption decreased by around 23% in January] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2023. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/top/znizenie-spotreby-plynu-slovenska-za-mesiac-január-az-na-urovni-23?undefined=undefined> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁵² T. Grečko, “Graf dňa: Pokles spotreby plynu sa spomalil. Spôsobil to chladnejšie počasie aj priaznivejšie ceny,” [Chart of the day: Decline in gas consumption has slowed. The cooler weather and more favorable prices are the cause] *Denník N*, December 9, 2022. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/3144776/graf-dna-tuhsia-zima-aj-priaznivejsie-ceny-znizili-v-novembri-uspory-plynu/> (accessed on March, 15, 2023).

⁵³ “Verejná správa ide príkladom,” [Public administration sets an example] Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://www.minzp.sk/files/aktuality/verejna-sprava-ide-prikladom.pdf> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁵⁴ R. Potočár, “Chýbajú dáta, ako úrady šetria 15% energií. Reporty mali byť každý mesiac,” [Lack of data on how government offices are making 15% energy savings. Reports are supposed to be monthly] *Energie-portal*, December, 9, 2022. Available online: <https://www.energie-portal.sk/Dokument/uspóra-energie-verejna-sprava-mzp-sr-108596.aspx> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁵⁵ “Opatrenia, na ktoré môžete získať príspevok,” [Steps for which you may qualify for help] Slovak Environment Agency, 2022. Available online: <https://obnovdom.sk/opatrenia.php#A> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

Another initiative came from President Zuzana Čaputová, who aspires to having the first climate neutral presidential office in the world before 2030. The presidential green seal initiative is intended to motivate the green renovation of public buildings and more ecological behavior. Bodies that meet the ten construction and operational criteria will receive the seal. The main criteria are energy efficiency, CO₂ emissions reduction, recycling rate, greenery and cleaner transportation.⁵⁶

■ Affordability as a crucial aspect of energy security

Last year's unprecedentedly high energy prices across Europe were the result of global increases in wholesale energy prices reflecting an uptick in international demand after the Covid-19 pandemic and exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. High energy prices and means of compensation were widely discussed in the Slovak media, with calls for the government to mitigate the impact of rising energy bills. The focus was on the slow and inefficient response and helping three groups: households, municipalities and businesses. Vulnerable groups exposed to energy poverty were a particular concern, and the Regulatory Office for Network Industries was tasked with producing a definition of this group along with targeted measures.

The energy prices and related cost of production and services attracted disagreement especially among opposition parties. Moreover Robert Fico, the leader and MPs of the opposition party *Smer-SD* (*Direction-Social Democracy*) criticized the EU sanctions against Russia, blaming them for the price increases, which is one of the narratives in pro-Russian disinformation and propaganda.⁵⁷ Similarly energy prices were exploited by *Hlas-SD* (*Voice-Social Democracy*), a political party formed by a breakaway group of *Smer-SD*. That

⁵⁶ "Získajte Prezidentskú zelenú pečat," [Obtaining the Presidential Green Seal] Presidential Office, 2022. Available online: <https://www.zelenapecat.sk/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁵⁷ D. Dinič, "Proruskí dezinformátori z vysokých cien energií obviňujú európske sankcie," [Pro-Russian disinformation agents blame high energy prices on European sanctions] *Infosecurity*, September 14, 2022. Available online: https://infosecurity.sk/dezinfo/proruski-dezinformatori-z-vysokych-cien-energiei-obvinuju-europske-sankcie-infosecurity-sk-bi-weekly-report-o-nastupujucich-dezinformacnych-trendoch-13-september-2022/?fbclid=IwAROG_Ue_r9EOlg6V-L15YBxYBcW_ONlyQOceemVzRXXJVT0Xp7lc7ffRuial (accessed on February 20, 2023).

was not surprising as back in the 2016 parliamentary elections they had campaigned under the slogan "Stable energy prices,"⁵⁸ but were also accused of distorting the regulatory framework.

Compensation for high prices was already a topic of debate, even before the onset of the full-scale war in Ukraine, and prior to the Commission issuing proposals for substituting Russian energy sources. It was fueled by proposals for introducing an excess profit tax on nuclear electricity production and trading under a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the finance minister Igor Matovič, economy minister Richard Sulík and Slovak Power Holding – a Slovenské elektrárne shareholder – in February. Despite being political rivals the two ministers reached an agreement guaranteeing a stable electricity price for all households of €61.21 euros per megawatt hour (MWh) excluding VAT until 2024.⁵⁹

However, the decision was criticized for distorting the market⁶⁰, negatively affecting company investment and targeting all households regardless of need and thereby discouraging energy savings. In fact, only half of households are willing to save energy by using efficient appliances or alternative energy sources,⁶¹ and there are remarkable voter differences in energy savings efforts.⁶² In November the government approved two decisions in the

⁵⁸ L. Praus, "Smer rozbieha na november kampaň, Fico v nej bude sám," [Smer launches its campaign in November, Fico is on his own in it] *Sme*, October 31, 2016. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20372205/smer-rozbieha-na-november-kampan-fico-v-nej-bude-sam.html> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁵⁹ "Memorandum o porozumení o implementácii mimoriadnych opatrení na elimináciu dopadu nárastu cien elektrickej energie na vybrané skupiny odberateľov," [Memorandum of understanding on the implementation of extraordinary measures to mitigate the effect of higher electricity prices on selected groups of consumers] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mfsr.sk/files/sk/media/tlacove-spravy/domacnosti-usetria-elektrine-1-miliardu-eur/memorandum-porozumeni.pdf> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁶⁰ "Analýza: Strop ceny elektriny pre domácnosti prinesie aj negatíva," [Analysis: Household electricity price ceiling will have negative effects as well] *TASR*, February 23, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/analiza-strop-ceny-elektriny-pre-doma/614118-clanok.html> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁶¹ "Prieskum: Zvýšenie cien energií zasiahlo 90 percent domácností," [Survey: Higher energy prices have affected 90 per cent of households] *Forbes*, February 20, 2023. Available online: <https://www.forbes.sk/prieskum-zvysenie-cien-energiei-zasiahlo-90-percent-domacnosti/> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁶² T. Hrivňák, "Prieskum: Voliči Smeru a Republiky sa najviac boja drahých energií, no ich šetrenie chcú bojkotovať," [Survey: Smer and Republika voters fear costly energy most but still want to boycott energy saving] *Denník N*, September 30, 2022. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/3032472/prieskum-volici-smeru-a-republiky-sa-najviac-boja-drahych-energiei-no-ich-setrenie-chcu-bojkotovat/> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

“general economic interest” to ensure the safety, regularity, quality and price of electricity supplies for Slovak households. In practice, this modified the legislative framework necessary for the introduction of the memorandum and set out electricity supply conditions, which was also approved by the European Commission. However, by the end of the year the memorandum had not been approved by the shareholders of Slovenské elektrárne.⁶³

By the end of the year the government had agreed a mechanism for financial compensation for higher energy bills. The political agreement was several months late amid a lack of clarity and certainty. Under the final agreement €360 million euros was earmarked for industry, including €40 million for 120 energy intense enterprises and €200 million euros for public administration bodies. Compensation will amount to 80 per cent of eligible costs, calculated as the difference between the purchase price and the ceiling price of €199/MWh for electricity and €99/MWh for gas. The maximum subsidy is €500 thousand per month per enterprise and €200 thousand per month for public administration bodies.⁶⁴ The economy ministry introduced several means of covering 37 per cent to 54 per cent of the electricity and gas price increases, 43 per cent on average. The compensation will be covered by state revenues and the re-allocation of EU funds (already behind schedule),⁶⁵ but energy price compensation is not a long-term solution and does not encourage energy saving, not to mention that the EU funds could be used more effectively.

Another issue raised in the energy price discussions was how best to compensate for the high living costs, as compensation for all is not a viable long-term solution; it is better to set well-targeted measures. However, to do that policymakers need to know which groups are most vulnerable to energy price rises, an issue discussed at both EU and member state level. An analysis by the European Trade Union Confederation shows that 9.5 million workers had problems paying their energy bills even before the outbreak of the

⁶³ R. Potočár, “Hirman má nový plán s cenami energií. Dohodu so Slovenskými elektrárnami stále nedotiahli,” [Hirman has a new energy price plan. No agreement has been reached with Slovenské elektrárne] *Energie-portal*, December 21, 2022. Available online: <https://www.energie-portal.sk/Dokument/ceny-energi-2023-slovenske-elektrarne-plyn-tepo-108630.aspx> (accessed on March 15, 2023).

⁶⁴ “Dotácie na energie,” [Energy subsidies] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2023. Available online: <https://energodotacie.mhsr.sk/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁶⁵ “Návrh na riešenie dopadov energetickej krízy prostredníctvom EŠIF,” [Proposal for tackling the impact of the energy crisis through ESIF] Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/27928/1> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

war in Ukraine and the rapid increase in energy prices. Workers in Greece and Estonia have to work the highest number of days to pay their annual electricity bills. Slovaks on an average salary have to work for 30 days of the year to pay their annual energy bill, the fourth highest in the EU, while those on the minimum wage have to work for 45 days.⁶⁶ By the end of the year the government had debated the materials drafted by the Regulatory Office for Network Industries and the proposed definition of energy poverty.⁶⁷ The materials that were generally positively received by energy analysts, pointed out that almost a fourth of Slovak households live in energy poverty and presented several financial, legislative and supportive measures for tackling the issue.

■ Conclusions and recommendations

2022 will go down in European history as the year that changed the way Europeans think about energy. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has hastened the need to decouple from Russian energy sources and foster the green transition. But the higher energy prices also revived debates on the importance of energy resilience and self-sufficiency. Several short-term solutions were identified, such as the re-introduction of coal in some European countries, but in the long run clean solutions must lie at the heart of national energy policy. The past year will go down in Slovak history as a year in which political disagreements prevented an effective response to the crisis and led to government price regulations that negatively affected energy savings, especially in households, and to government institutions failing to encourage investment in renewable energy sources and mass energy efficiency measures.

First, energy, like healthcare, education or social services, is not free and nor is it cheap, which brings us to the question of whether energy price compensation, including price freezes, is sustainable. The problem is that not only

⁶⁶ “Energy now costs month’s wages for low paid,” European Trade Union Confederation, 2022. Available online: <https://etuc.org/en/pressrelease/energy-now-costs-months-wages-low-paid> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

⁶⁷ “ÚRSO otvára verejné pripomienkovanie návrhu koncepcie ochrany odberateľov pred energetickou chudobou,” [ÚRSO opens public consultation on draft concept for consumer protection against energy poverty] Regulatory Office for Network Industries, 2022. Available online: <https://www.urso.gov.sk/urso-otvara-verejne-pripomienkovanie-navrhu-koncepcie-ochrany-odberatelov-pred-energetickou-chudobou/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

does compensation not encourage energy saving, it also halts new investments and energy efficiency measures, and is a cost pressure on the state budget – taxes and EU funds could be used in many other ways, including spending on climate projects. Instead of compensating all energy consumers, well-targeted measures should be deployed and here the energy poverty materials provide a good starting point. At the same time energy saving should be promoted and enhanced.

Second, energy security and decarbonization can go hand-in-hand. Indeed, they are mutually reinforcing. Back in 2009 the focus was on diversification of infrastructure; today energy efficiency measures and renewables are the center of attention. We have committed to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and these tools are means not just of achieving climate goals, but of strengthening energy security. Energy saving measures and clean technologies should be speeded-up, especially in industry, heating and transport. At the same time we should be cautious of creating new dependencies on undemocratic countries.

Third, regional cooperation is important again, especially in the gas sector, but one can also envisage regional cooperation in green solutions and technologies. We should build upon existing cooperation by using the tools we have and finding the political will to redirect our efforts into identifying the best-fitting solutions through knowledge transfer, sharing best practices and engaging in joint research programs in climate and energy.





Priorities of Slovakia's foreign policy



Tomáš Strážay

Central European challenges in Slovak foreign policy

Russia's unprecedented aggression against Ukraine, beginning on February 24, 2022, strengthened the position of Central Europe, more broadly understood, in both NATO and the EU. The countries stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea found themselves in the immediate neighborhood of the warzone in Ukraine. They rank high (per capita) in supplying military equipment and other types of assistance to Ukraine and have become transitory or target countries for temporarily displaced people from Ukraine. Last but not least, Central European countries have become enthusiastic supporters of Ukraine's ambitions to become a member of Western integrationist structures, above all the EU.

The growing influence of Central European countries in shaping EU and NATO decision-making has not, however, translated into greater regional cooperation. With the exception of the Bucharest Nine (B9) platform, which encompasses the countries on NATO's Eastern flank, the other regional formats have either been hibernating (Visegrad Group and Central Five) or making insignificant progress (Slavkov Triangle). EU and NATO decision-making has of course been attracting a great deal of attention, but the weak performance of most regional initiatives can be explained by the divergences in their positions on the war in Ukraine, particularly on providing assistance and cooperation with Russia. In this regard, Hungary has proved to be far the most deviant. The Hungarian government's position on the war and the prospects for resolution led to a deep cleavage between Hungary and Poland, who were considered close partners prior to February 24th. The shrinking possibilities of political cooperation with the Hungarian government has also had an impact on the stagnation of the regional initiatives in which Hungary participates.

On the bilateral level, besides the long-standing good relations between Slovakia and Czechia, Slovak-Polish relations are thriving. Slovak-Austrian relations continue to be good but have not produced tangible achievements. Relations with Hungary were more difficult and to some extent harked back to the past.

■ Slovakia's presidency of the Visegrad Four (V4)

The second half of 2022 was marked by Slovakia's presidencies of the Visegrad Group (V4) and Slavkov Triangle. The deepening differences between Poland, Czechia and Slovakia on one side and Hungary on the other meant that the V4 was most affected by the war in Ukraine. Despite more than 30 years together and robust sectoral cooperation, the V4 fell victim to divergences in political positions. The slowdown in cooperation was already in evidence during the Hungarian 2021/22 presidency: with substantially fewer political meetings compared to previous presidencies. In this light the V4+UK prime ministers summit can be considered an achievement¹, yet it was not followed up by a meeting with partners in the EU. During the Hungarian V4 presidency there were no V4+WB nor V4+EaP ministerials and the Slovak presidency is shaping up the same way. The V4 had long-term ambitions of strengthening cooperation in security and defense – with the V4 Battle Group being the flagship project – but, as the cancellation of the V4 defense ministers meeting in March shows, sectoral cooperation has an important political dimension as well. The meeting was cancelled because the Polish and Czech defense ministers refused to attend in disagreement at Hungarian government policy on Ukraine.²

Paradoxically, the subsequent V4 defense ministers meeting can be considered one of the highlights of the Slovak presidency, as it featured a joint action plan for enhanced defense cooperation.³ Further proof of well-functioning cooperation in security and defense can be found in the international Puma 22 military exercises held in Poland under the V4+UK and

US format in November.⁴ Visiting the exercise location, Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger met his Polish counterpart Mateusz Morawiecki and took the opportunity to thank him for the allied support shown by Poland – and the Czech Republic – in protecting Slovak airspace.⁵ But we must not forget that Hungary was also prepared to assist Slovakia.

“Business as usual” meetings between the foreign affairs ministers and parliamentary speakers were postponed, and the prime ministerial meeting added little value to V4 cooperation. The fact these meetings were arranged at all can be considered an achievement, given the deepening divergences among the V4 countries vis-à-vis the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The V4 presidents meeting was primarily focused on the war in Ukraine and the presidents condemned the aggression outright. Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová underlined the fact that all the V4 countries – including Hungary – supported the eight sanctions packages imposed by the EU, though Hungary adopted a different position on the provision of military assistance to Ukraine. Other topics discussed were illegal migration and migrants flows from the South, as well as energy and security of supply.⁶

The November V4 prime ministers meeting was marked by a bilateral dispute between Slovakia and Hungary (the “scarf affair” – see the section on bilateral relations), but nonetheless resulted in an agreement to help Hungary protect the external EU border, in response to increasing flows of migrants from the South. Other issues discussed were the energy crisis and need to assist Ukraine – on the latter the prime ministers agreed Ukraine required further financial support, although they differed on how that should be done.⁷

⁴ Puma 22 was the largest joint military exercise between the armed forces of the V4 countries in 2022. Approximately 150 professional soldiers participated from Slovakia. In total, there were about 1,700 soldiers and 300 pieces of military equipment.

⁵ “Heger at military exercise in Poland: cooperation between allied armies vital,” November 9, 2022. Available online: <https://www.tasr.sk/tasr-clanok/TASR:2022110900000392> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

⁶ “Tlačová konferencia prezidentov V4 po spoločnom summite v Bratislave,” [Press conference of the V4 presidents after the joint summit in Bratislava] October 11, 2022. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/projekt.n.sk/videos/tla%C4%8Dov%C3%A1-konferencia-prezidentov-v4-po-spolo%C4%8Dnom-summite-v-bratislave/624116109183131/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

⁷ “Samit predsedov vlád V4 v Košiciach,” [Summit of V4 prime ministers in Košice] November 24, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/samit-predsedov-vlad-v4-v-košiciach/> (accessed on February 16, 2023). See also “Premiéri V4 prisľúbili pomoc Maďarsku s nelegálnou migráciou,” [V4 prime ministers promised to help Hungary with illegal migration] November 24, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/29600/premieri-v4-prislubili-pomoc-madarsku-s-nelegalnou-migraciou/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹ “V4 + United Kingdom Joint Statement of Prime Ministers,” London, March 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=488> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

² See, for example, “Ministri obrany V4 sa v Maďarsku nestretnú, z Česka a Poľska odmietli prísť,” [The V4 defense ministers will not be meeting in Hungary, the Czechs and Poles are refusing to come] March 29, 2022. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/621707-ministri-obrany-v4-sa-v-madarsku-nestretnu-z-ceska-a-polska-odmietli-prist/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

³ “Framework for an enhanced Visegrad Group defense planning cooperation,” November 9, 2022. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=505> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

The meeting between the parliamentary speakers did not take place until February 3, 2023, because the parliamentary speakers of the Czech and Polish lower chambers were only willing to send deputy speakers in protest at Hungary's attitudes toward Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its cooperation with Russia.⁸

The informal foreign ministers meeting of December 6th was preceded by a bilateral meeting between the Slovak and Hungarian ministers, after which Slovak Foreign Minister Rastislav Káčer concluded that despite their differences the two countries had much in common.⁹ The atmosphere at the V4 meeting the next day was tense. It was evident from the post-ministerial press conference that there was a dividing line between the Czech, Polish and Slovak ministers on one side and the Hungarian minister on the other. In addition, tensions emerged at the Slovak-Hungarian bilateral level, following the decision by Hungarian Foreign Minister Szijjártó to hold a press conference with the leader of the opposition party Smer without informing the Slovak foreign minister.¹⁰

Disregarding the political issues overshadowing what was in many ways well-functioning sectoral cooperation, the most active element of Visegrad cooperation was the International Visegrad Fund, the V4's only permanent institution. Its budget was increased to €10 million and it supported a wide range of activities, both of a project and mobility nature. In short, civic Visegrad began

to supersede political Visegrad,¹¹ although the grant application process was affected by the differences among the V4 countries. For example, there was less willingness to include Hungarian partners in projects than in previous years.¹² Revealingly the V4 embassies in third countries focused their joint activities on cultural events, avoiding regular political consultations. Nonetheless it is impossible to give a full assessment of the Slovak presidency and implementation of the presidency program¹³ before the presidency comes to an end.

■ The Slavkov Triangle (S3)

Given the situation in the V4, the preferred format of regional cooperation among Slovak political leaders was the Slavkov Triangle (S3). After the change in the Czech government in 2021, Slovakia and the Czech Republic became even closer partners and both considered Austria a like-minded country.

Nevertheless, the S3 faced difficulties implementing its agenda. The S3 is generally seen as a platform for foreign minister meetings but there was no significant progress in sectoral cooperation. Nonetheless the exchange of views and coordination over the EU agenda can be considered a step forward (and in this sense the S3 replaced the V4), along with the S3's ambition to find cooperation partners outside Europe (e.g. the S3+India foreign minister meeting).¹⁴

⁸ "Predsedovia parlamentov V4 sa stretnú v náhradnom termíne," [V4 parliamentary speakers to meet on a different date] *teraz.sk*, November 23, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/predsedovia-parlamentov-v4-sa-stretnu-v/676427-clanok.html> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

⁹ "Minister Káčer po stretnutí s maďarským partnerom: Oblasť, kde sa naše názory rozchádzajú, je oveľa menej ako praktickej a pozitívnej agendy, v ktorej úzko spolupracujeme," [Minister Káčer after meeting his Hungarian partner: There are far fewer areas where our opinions differ than there are practical and positive ones where we cooperate closely] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, December 5, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/budapest-en/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=15642238 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹⁰ "Tlačová konferencia ministrov zahraničných vecí krajín V4," [Press conference of the foreign ministers of the V4 countries] December 6, 2022. Available online: <https://m.facebook.com/mzv.sk/videos/tla%C4%8Dov%C3%A1-konferencia-ministrov-zahrani%C4%8Dn%C3%BDch-vec%C3%AD-kraj%C3%ADn-v4/919644915685975/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹¹ Citizens were mentioned as a priority for the Slovak Presidency of the IVF by the state secretary Ingrid Brocková at a meeting with the director of the International Visegrad Fund Peter Mareš back in 2022. See "Štátna tajomníčka Ingrid Brocková: Stredobodom slovenského predsedníctva vo V4 budú občania našich krajín, v čom počítame aj s podporou Medzinárodného vyšehradského fondu," [State Secretary Ingrid Brocková: The focus of the Slovak V4 presidency will be the citizens of our countries, and here we are counting on the support of the International Visegrad Fund] January 21, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4774976 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹² Based on an unofficial interview between the author and a representative of the Visegrad Fund.

¹³ "Program predsedníctva Slovenskej republiky vo Vyšehradskej skupine (júl 2022 – jún 2023)," [Program of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2022–June 2023)] Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docId=494> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹⁴ "S3 countries and India want to end the war in Ukraine," *Radio Slovakia International*, January 3, 2023. Available online: <https://enr.si.rtv.sk/articles/news/313416/s3-countries-and-india-want-to-end-the-war-in-ukraine> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

The S3 presents itself as a Central European grouping that is open to cooperation with European countries, such as Moldova. On a trip to Chisinau foreign ministers Alexander Schallenberg, Ján Lipavský and Ivan Korčok demonstrated their support for Moldova's territorial integrity and EU aspirations. (The trip took place after Moldova had officially submitted its application but before it became a candidate country.) Other topics discussed were Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the impact on migration and energy security. In addition minister Korčok made a donation to the hospital in Chisinau where critically ill children from Ukraine are treated.¹⁵

The main goals of Slovakia's presidency of the S3 were unveiled at a ministerial meeting in June. Korčok stated that the main focal points were supporting Ukraine and the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU, with Austria and Slovakia helping their Czech partner to implement the presidency agenda.¹⁶ Slavkov cooperation was also discussed at a bilateral meeting between Káčer and his Austrian counterpart.¹⁷

Temporary border controls were introduced in response to migrants illegally crossing into the Czech Republic and Austria from Slovakia. The controls put Slovak citizens at a disadvantage. The increase in illegal migrants from the South was one of the issues discussed by the foreign ministers at an S3 meeting in December at Chateau Bela. Despite the urgency of the issue and the prolongation of the border controls, other issues were discussed as well, namely supporting Ukraine, enlargement policy, the Western Balkans and

¹⁵ "Rovnako ako počas pandémie COVID-19 Slovensko pomáha Moldavsku aj teraz, uviedol šéf slovenskej diplomacie," [Slovakia is helping Moldova, just as we did during the COVID-19 pandemic, said the Slovak foreign minister] April 1, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/najnovsie/korcok-sr-pomaha-moldavsku-v-utecene/623827-clanok.html> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹⁶ "Ivan Korčok: Počas nášho predsedníctva vo formáte Slavkovskej spolupráce budeme stavať na spoločných hodnotách," [Ivan Korčok: During our presidency of the Slavkov cooperation format, we will build on common values] June 20, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=12822955 (accessed on February 16, 2022).

¹⁷ "Minister Káčer vo Viedni: Rakúsko je pre nás viac ako len sused. Na ľudskej, hodnotovej, politickej a ekonomickej blízkosti chceme stavať ešte užšiu spoluprácu v regióne," [Minister Káčer in Vienna: Austria is more than just a neighbor. We want to develop even closer cooperation in the region based on our values and human, political and economic proximity] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 14, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/vieden/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=14501975 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

rule of law.¹⁸ The removal of the temporary border controls formed part of bilateral discussions between Slovakia and Austria/Czech Republic and Slovakia's representatives were ensured that the border controls were merely a temporary mechanism for stopping illegal migration.

The Czech presidency of the Council of the EU was one of the points discussed at the Central Five (C5) meeting held in April. Naturally the meeting was dominated by the issue of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, the COVID 19 pandemic and post-pandemic economic renewal were also discussed – thanks to the timing of its emergence and its focus on coordination and crisis management during the COVID 19 pandemic, the C5 was nicknamed the "pandemic format."¹⁹

■ B9 and TSI

The Russian aggression against Ukraine highlighted the importance of cooperation between the countries on NATO's Eastern flank. While some are direct neighbors of Ukraine (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania), others share a border with Russia and/or Belarus (the Baltic countries and Poland). Symbolically, Čaputová virtually attended the extraordinary NATO summit of February 25th, together with counterparts from the B9. After the meeting

¹⁸ "R. Káčer po stretnutí ministrov Slavkovského formátu: Naším hlavným záujmom je ukončenie ruskej agresie proti Ukrajine bez obmedzenia jej nezávislosti, suverenity či územnej celistvosti," [R. Káčer after the Slavkov ministerial: Our main interest is ending the Russian aggression against Ukraine without restricting independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, December 3, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=15621196 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

¹⁹ "Minister Korčok so stredoeurópskymi partnermi: Podpora Ukrajine musí byť našou hlavnou prioritou," [Minister Korčok with Central European partners: Support for Ukraine must be our main priority] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, April 12, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4848285 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

the president declared that the enthusiasm to protect their countries and citizens overshadowed any fears among the leaders of the B9 countries.²⁰

The foreign ministers meeting held in Bratislava in March underlined the allies' determination to act together to protect themselves against threats from Russia and strengthen collective defense. Ways of assisting Ukraine were discussed, included the provision of military equipment. Naturally the ministers expressed strong confidence in NATO, the most powerful defense alliance in the world. The NATO summit in Madrid and the adoption of the new Strategic Concept was one of the central points of discussion, although attention was also paid to the creation of eight NATO battle groups in the Eastern flank, including one in Slovakia. Korčok stressed the importance of improving resilience against disinformation, as all the countries are – to some degree – the target of disinformation campaigns from Russia. Whilst it is true that the public in all the B9 countries is vulnerable to such campaigns,²¹ historically a large section of the Slovak population has tended to accept Russian narratives.

Interestingly, despite the growing importance of the Central European countries, particularly Poland, in both NATO and the EU, amid the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, there has been no significant progress in the biggest regional format, the twelve-country Three Seas Initiative (TSI). The reconsideration of priorities focused attention on the EU and NATO/B9 and security issues in general, but these are not key issues in the TSI. Nonetheless progress was made on energy infrastructure, which is a top priority. The opening (albeit delayed) of the gas interconnector between Slovakia and Poland can be considered an important milestone bilaterally and regionally, as well as for Europe. The interconnector has an annual capacity of 5bcm so there is a strong security dimension as well, as it enables Central European countries to diversify gas suppliers and thereby reduce dependence on

²⁰ "Prezidentka po samite NATO: Sme jednotnejší, ako kedykoľvek predtým," [President after the NATO summit: We are more united than ever before] Office of the President of the Slovak Republic, February 25, 2022. Available online: <https://www.prezident.sk/article/prezidentka-po-samite-nato-sme-jednotnejši-ako-kedykoľvek-predtým/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

²¹ "I. Korčok so šéfmí diplomacie krajín Bukureštskej deviátky: Spoločne dnes vyzývame Rusko, aby okamžite ukončilo brutálny útok proti Ukrajine," [I. Korčok with the Bucharest Nine foreign ministers: Today we call on Russia to immediately end the brutal attack against Ukraine] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, March 31, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4836300 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

Russia. The official opening of the pipeline was attended by the prime ministers of Poland and Slovakia.²² Nonetheless this important event did not lead to Slovakia reconsidering its attitude to the TSI. Slovakia, along with Austria and the Czech Republic, has always been rather skeptical of the usefulness of the TSI, and has not followed Czechia's example in paying more attention to it. Neither has it contributed to the Three Seas Initiative Business Fund.

■ Bilateral relations

Bilateral relations with Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland can be illustrated by some of the statements made by Káčer at bilateral meetings with counterparts that aptly reflect the current state of play.

On Czech-Slovak relations Káčer said, "Slovakia does not have a closer partner than the Czech Republic."²³ At several meetings and visits by the leaders of the countries, emphasis was placed on shared interests and common values, and especially the rule of law. Speaker of the Lower Chamber of the Czech Parliament Markéta Pekarová Adamová choose to visit Bratislava for her first official trip abroad, in keeping with the tradition followed by the presidents and prime ministers of the two countries. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala travelled to Slovakia for his first official visit. Unsurprisingly, Káčer's first bilateral trip abroad was to Prague. He took the opportunity to thank the Czech Republic for leading the multinational battle group in Slovakia and for protecting Slovak air space, together with Poland.²⁴ In addition, numerous bilateral meetings were held alongside multilateral events attended by senior officials of the two republics.

²² "Premiéri Poľska a Slovenska otvorili prepojovací plynovod medzi krajinami," [The prime ministers of Poland and Slovakia opened the gas pipeline connecting the countries] August 26, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/premieri-polska-a-slovenska-otvorili-prepojovaci-plynovod-medzi-krajinami/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

²³ "Minister Rastislav Káčer v Prahe: Nemáme bližšieho partnera ako Česko. Naše unikátne vzťahy majú pri dnešných výzvach čoraz väčší strategický význam," [Minister Rastislav Káčer in Prague: We do not have a closer partner than the Czech Republic. Our unique relationships are of ever greater strategic importance given today's challenges] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 3, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/praha/press-releasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=14326340 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

²⁴ Ibid

According to Káčer, Austria is “more than a neighbor” to Slovakia.²⁵ During his bilateral visit to Vienna he and his Austrian counterpart, Alexander Schallenberg, stressed the importance of good bilateral relations, as well as the S3 format. According to the ministers, the two countries could cooperate closely on the EU integration of the Western Balkans, since the region is of strategic importance to both countries. Káčer also suggested cooperating more intensively on innovations and the green agenda, since Austria is considered a leader in both and Slovakia could learn from its neighbor.²⁶ Good neighborly relations between the two countries were in evidence during Heger’s official visit to Austria in July. Unlike Finland and Sweden Austria chose not to reconsider its neutral status in light of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. The fact that Austria is not a NATO member limits potential in security and defense cooperation with Slovakia and is the main reason why the Central European Defense Cooperation²⁷ initiated by Austria has not developed substantially. Austria’s position on nuclear energy remained unchanged, while nuclear continues to be of strategic importance for Slovakia and therefore a potential source of misunderstandings.

Káčer referred to Poland as an “anchor of strategic common sense.”²⁸ Though the defense ministry has cooperated closely with the Polish ministry for many years, attitudes to cooperation with Poland at the foreign ministry only began changing after February 24, 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine overshadowed differences between the two countries on issues like the future of the EU or rule of law. Korčok was clear that Slovakia wanted to discuss and coordinate steps with Poland on bilateral, regional and the broader international level.²⁹

²⁵ “Minister Káčer vo Viedni...,” op. cit.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ More information available at <https://cedc.info/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

²⁸ “Minister Káčer vo Varšave: Poľsko považujem za kotvu strategického zdravého rozumu. Víťam, že naša spolupráca v regióne, EÚ a NATO naberá na význame,” [Minister Káčer in Warsaw: I consider Poland an anchor of strategic common sense. I am glad to see that our cooperation in the region, the EU and NATO is gaining in importance] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 11, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/varsava/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetail-Portlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=14457090 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

²⁹ “Minister I. Korčok na rokovaní s poľským ministrom Z. Rauom: Chceme s Poľskom úzko spolupracovať a konzultovať zásadné otázky medzinárodných vzťahov, pretože Poľsko je náš kľúčový spojenec, sused a partner,” [Minister I. Korčok at a meeting with Polish Minister Z. Rau: We want to work closely with Poland and consult on key issues in international relations as Poland is a key ally, neighbor and partner] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, April 22, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/varsava/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4859117 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

The close cooperation was reflected in the number of official visits by senior officials. The ideological closeness of the Slovak and Polish governments could be seen in the embracement of new cooperation opportunities arising from the situation in neighboring Ukraine, the unconditional support for the Ukrainian government fighting Russian aggressors, the joint support for Ukraine’s EU membership perspective and cooperation on the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine³⁰ as well as closer ties between Poland and Slovakia. After a five-year break, the prime ministers and 20 government ministers met in Slovakia in April. It was only the third event of its kind since the official establishment of bilateral relations in 1993.³¹ After the meeting the prime ministers declared their strong backing for Ukraine and its EU membership perspective. Heger highlighted Poland’s role in safeguarding Slovakia’s energy security, thanks to the opening of the gas interconnector and prospect of gas deliveries via the LNG terminal on the Baltic coast.³² The importance of finding alternative oil and gas suppliers was stressed during an official visit by Polish President Andrzej Duda to Slovakia in May. It was his second trip to Slovakia in six months.³³ When meeting with Duda, Čaputová spoke highly of the contribution Poland had made to strengthening security in Central Europe and helping defend Slovak airspace.³⁴ The gas interconnector was finally opened in August, with both prime ministers in attendance. Morawiecki

³⁰ According to the state secretary of the foreign ministry Ingrid Brocková, close cooperation between Slovakia and Poland will lay the foundations of the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. See “Ingrid Brocková: Úzka koordinácia Slovenska a Poľska bude základom pre povojnovú obnovu Ukrajiny,” [Ingrid Brocková: Close coordination between Slovakia and Poland will lay the foundations of the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 19, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/varsava/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetail-Portlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4883870 (accessed on February 16, 2023).

³¹ Earlier joint government meetings were held in 2013 and 2017.

³² “E. Heger a M. Morawiecki zdôraznili pokračovanie v pomoci Ukrajine,” [E. Heger and M. Morawiecki emphasized the continuation of assistance to Ukraine] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, April 22, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/e-heger-a-m-morawiecki-zdoraznili-pokracovanie-v-pomoci-ukrajine/> (accessed on February 16, 2023). See also the Joint Prime Ministerial Statement: “Spoločné vyhlásenie pri príležitosti III. slovensko – poľských medzivládnych konzultácií,” [Joint statement on the occasion of the III. Slovakia–Poland intergovernmental consultations] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, April 22, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/spolocne-vyhlasenie-pri-prilezitosti-iii-slovensko-%E2%80%93-polskych-medzivladnych-konzultacii/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

³³ “Predseda vlády sa stretol s poľským prezidentom,” [Prime Minister met the Polish President] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, May 11, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/predseda-vlady-sa-stretol-s-polskym-prezidentom/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

³⁴ “Slovensko a Poľsko stoja za Ukrajinou,” [Slovakia and Poland stand with Ukraine] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, May 11, 2022. Available online: <https://www.prezident.sk/article/slovensko-a-polsko-stoja-za-ukrajinou/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

paid another bilateral visit to Slovakia in September, when he and his Slovak counterpart attended the 2nd Conservative Summit.³⁵

Hungarian relations were addressed at multilateral meetings attended by the two Slovak foreign ministers, Káčer and his predecessor Korčok, and their Hungarian counterpart. Budapest did not feature among Káčer's bilateral trips to neighboring countries. The Hungarian foreign minister paid an official visit to Slovakia at the beginning of December. Despite their different positions on the nature of the assistance provided to Ukraine and other issues, the Slovak minister stressed that cooperation on practical issues had been close and beneficial for both countries, especially on infrastructure and economic relations. Hungary is Slovakia's fourth most important trade partner. The Slovak minister stated that effective bilateral cooperation would benefit from both sides refraining from taking unilateral steps and instead seeking out opportunities to maintain dialogue on divisive issues.³⁶ However, just a few hours after attending a bilateral meeting with his Slovak counterpart, Szijjártó took the unilateral step of visiting the headquarters of Smer, an opposition party, and then held a press conference with the party leader Robert Fico. The upcoming V4 summit of foreign ministers was almost cancelled as a consequence.

The summit of the V4 prime ministers on November 24th had an important bilateral dimension. In response to prime minister Orbán's actions in what became known as the scarf affair, in which he was seen wearing a scarf featuring a map of Greater Hungary at the football stadium in Budapest, Heger presented him with a scarf bearing the Slovak national symbols. Both Orbán and Hungarian government policy were mentioned in the conclusions of a bilateral meeting between Čaputová and Duda. The presidents expressed disappointment in Orbán's policy on the conflict in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia on the grounds it weakened the EU's unity. They also argued that it went against the main principle of the V4, which is to help unify Europe.³⁷

³⁵ "Predseda vlády SR Eduard Heger sa stretol s poľským premiérom Mateuszom Morawieckim," [Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger met with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, September 19, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/predseda-vlady-sr-eduard-heger-sa-stretol-s-polskym-premierom-mateuszom-morawieckim/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

³⁶ "Minister Káčer po stretnutí s maďarským partnerom: Oblasťí...", op. cit.

³⁷ "Slovensko a Poľsko stoja za Ukrajinou," op. cit.

Hungarian President Katalin Novák visited Slovakia twice. She attended a V4 presidential meeting, but her official visit to Slovakia in September was of greater significance bilaterally. Besides the discussion on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, migration, the national minorities and regional cooperation, at a meeting with her Slovak counterpart Novák requested Slovakia's support in seeking to maintain access to the EU funds. She also met Heger, who noted that Hungary and Slovakia differed on the sanctions against Russia and solutions to the energy crisis but also stressed the positive aspects of the bilateral agenda and cooperation, including respect for national minorities.³⁸

Contrary to expectation, Novák did not attend the 30th anniversary celebrations of Slovak independence organized by Čaputová's presidential office, and was the only leader of a neighboring country not to do so. She sent her apologies, citing other obligations.

■ Remaining challenges

The challenging security situation in Slovakia's neighborhood requires solutions that are compatible with the policy of allies in the EU and NATO and countries in the direct neighborhood. There are three challenges worth further analysis.

The first challenge is related to domestic policy. Maintaining the foreign policy consensus on political priorities after the September parliamentary elections is of utmost importance for Slovakia. As in other Central European countries, Slovakia has the privilege of making its own choices, without being pushed by external actors. Citizens express their preferences in elections. An incoming government that changed foreign policy priorities – including support for Ukraine and relations with Russia – would create new cleavages in the region and would have an impact on the EU and NATO.

The second challenge concerns Slovak–Hungarian bilateral relations. A number of politicians in both countries have returned to the language of the

³⁸ "Predseda vlády SR Eduard Heger sa stretol s maďarskou prezidentkou Katalin Novákovou," [Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger met with Hungarian President Katalin Novák] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, September 30, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/predseda-vlady-sr-eduard-heger-sa-stretol-s-madarskou-prezidentkou-katalin-novakovou/> (accessed on February 16, 2023).

1990s and 2000s, when emotions and verbal ping-pong dominated, rather than a sober, pragmatic search for issues of common interest. Slovakia and Hungary have not progressed in the reconciliation process, which is a problem in itself. The fact that the Hungarian community is not represented in the Slovak parliament further complicates the situation. Differences in Slovak and Hungarian foreign and European policy, and between Hungary and Slovakia, not to mention other countries in the region, will probably continue, whatever the new Slovak government is. And that will continue to wreak havoc on regional cooperation, especially within the V4. It is worth noting that at one time the V4 played a positive role in moderating tensions between Slovakia and Hungary, but that role seems to have disappeared, at least for the moment.

The third challenge is regional cooperation. The practically non-existent political cooperation within the V4, the modest results of the S3 despite high expectations and the lack of substance in the C5, meant that Slovakia finds itself without a viable regional format. (B9 is viable, but is more initiative-based and security-oriented.) Of course, ad hoc coalitions with different countries are always an option, but they cannot replace regional platforms that include neighboring countries. With Poland playing an increasing role in the region and the intensification of Polish-Slovak bilateral relations, Slovakia could reconsider its hesitant position on the Three Seas Initiative, especially when it comes to the future development of Central Europe. It cannot replace any of the above-mentioned regional formats but could bring added value for Slovakia, under the condition that it pursues sectoral cooperation within the EU and does not become a political bloc.



Alexander Duleba

Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022: a credibility test for Slovakia

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, marks a milestone in Europe's development since the end of the Cold War. Neither European security (military and/or energy) nor the continuation of European integration based around the European Union and NATO will be the same after the war. Of course, how the war ends matters because there are still two basic scenarios of Europe's post-war development in play. If Russia succeeds, Europe will go back several decades to the pre-Caribbean crisis era, to a situation in which a new European war will threaten to break out on the old NATO and EU border with the USSR, but this time with Putin's Russia. If Ukraine succeeds, the West's border will move to Kursk, Voronezh and Rostov-on-Don, i.e., to where no one would have seen or wanted it before February 24, 2022. However, regardless of how the war ends, February 24, 2022, represents a watershed moment after which the dynamics of the European continent, including its eastern post-Soviet part, will differ from previous assumptions and expectations. All European political actors (but also others) were forced into facing the war head-on and taking a stand. War offers no other option, and the Slovak Republic is no exception.

The war has rewritten the plans to upgrade Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations prepared for times of peace and agreed at a joint meeting between the prime ministers of Slovakia and Ukraine, Eduard Heger and Denys Shmyhal, in Uzhhorod in November 2021.¹ At that meeting, the Ukrainian government accepted the Slovak proposal to upgrade bilateral relations, and both parties agreed to coordinate steps in implementing it, as the new stage in cooperation involved some 20 ministries and state agencies on both sides. The Slovak government adopted an implementing resolution containing specific

¹ J. Marušiak, "Eastern policy of the Slovak Republic: the end of an era," in P. Brezáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign policy 2021*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, pp. 124–39.

tasks for the ministries and state agencies involved on January 12, 2022. The agreed cooperation concerned Slovakia's support for the implementation of Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU, reforming the work of four bilateral intergovernmental commissions (economic cooperation, cross-border cooperation, national minorities and cooperation in science and research) and the creation of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) on the common border with the participation of two Slovak regions (Prešov and Košice) and three Ukrainian regions (Transcarpathian, Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv).²

In January and February 2022, intensive negotiations took place within eight established bilateral working groups on cooperation between the Slovak and Ukrainian authorities to help Ukraine implement the provisions of the most complicated sectoral parts of the Association Agreement. The agreements were drafted and Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal was expected to pay an official visit to Bratislava in early March 2022, at which the agreements were to be signed and implementation was to begin. Although the Russian attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, led to the implementation of the November 2021 Uzhhorod agreements being suspended, it did not change the strategic approach of the Slovak government led by Eduard Heger to relations with Ukraine.³

In contrast to the discordant position of the Slovak Republic on the Russian occupation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, launched in 2014,⁴ this time, in 2022, the state leaders, government and the majority of MPs held a clear and unambiguous position on Russia's military aggression against Ukraine: Slovakia condemned the Russian invasion and provided support to Ukraine.

² "Uznesenie vlády SR k návrhu na ďalší rozvoj vzťahov a spolupráce Slovenskej republiky s Ukrajinou č. 17 z 12. januára 2022" [Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic on the proposal for further development of relations and cooperation between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine no. 17 of 12 January 2022] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Resolution/19799/1> (accessed on March 1, 2023).

³ For an explanation of the Heger government's strategic approach to relations with Ukraine, including the rationale behind the proposal to upgrade bilateral relations agreed at the November 2021 prime ministerial talks in Uzhhorod, see A. Duleba, *Bilaterálne vzťahy SR s Ukrajinou a prognóza ich vývoja v strednodobej perspektíve. Návrh stratégie rozvoja vzťahov s Ukrajinou* [Bilateral relations between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine and prognosis of their medium-term development. Draft strategy for the development of relations with Ukraine] *Studies on International Issues a17*, Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2021.

⁴ See e.g., A. Duleba, "Slovakia's Eastern Policy in 2019: the ruling coalition in cacophony," in P. Brezáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2019*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2022, pp. 81–94.

■ Response to Russia's military aggression

On the day of the aggression, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic summoned the Ambassador of the Russian Federation in strong protest at the military attack on Ukraine. Even before the start of the Russian aggression, the ministry sent a note of protest to the Russian embassy setting out Slovakia's rejection of Russia's decision to recognize the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as independent entities. According to the Foreign Minister of the Slovak Republic Ivan Korčok, Russia was in flagrant violation of international law and the principles of the UN Charter, and its actions posed a threat to European security.⁵

On the very first day of the war, Slovakia's leaders immediately condemned the Russian aggression. President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová stated, "I strongly condemn the illegal aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. I express my full support and solidarity with the Ukrainian people, as well as the country's leadership and President Zelensky." Boris Kollár, Speaker of the Parliament and leader of the coalition party *Sme rodina*, added, "I strongly condemn the military aggression of the Russian Federation against the sovereign state of Ukraine. I consider it an unacceptable, unjustifiable and unprecedented step. It is a flagrant violation of international law and the territorial integrity of our neighbor." Prime Minister Eduard Heger said, "The Government of the Slovak Republic resolutely condemns the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his government. All the casualties that this war brings will be his casualties and he will be held accountable for this before the public around the world. The Slovak Republic stands with the Ukrainian people who are suffering. The Government of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with its NATO and European Union allies, will assist in Ukraine's self-defense against the Russian aggressor and push for the fighting to end. Peacemaking is the absolute priority. Today, however, we know that it can only be achieved by democratic states wielding military superiority over dictatorships and despots and retaliation to aggression acting as a strong deterrent." The leaders of the other coalition parties Igor Matovič (*OĽaNO*),

⁵ "Slovensko si predvolalo ruského veľvyslanca, Korčok označil konanie Putina za hrozbu pre európsku bezpečnosť," [Slovakia summons Russian ambassador, Korčok calls Putin's actions a threat to European security] *SITA Webnoviny*, February 24, 2022. Available online: <https://sita.sk/rusko-hruba-porusilo-medzinarodne-pravo-a-principy-charty-osn-zareagoval-korcok/> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

Richard Sulík (*SaS*) and Veronika Remišová (*Za ľudí*) commented in much the same spirit. A similar position was taken by the leader of the opposition party *Hlas-Social Democracy* and former Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini (2018–2020) who said,

The political party *Hlas* unequivocally condemns Russia's attack on Ukraine. We consider it an unprecedented act that contravenes the fundamental principles of international law and the UN Charter. We stand in solidarity with Ukraine which tried to calm the situation up until the last moment.⁶

On the opposite side of the opinion spectrum are two opposition parliamentary parties, *Smer-Social Democracy* and *Republika*. *Smer-SD* leader and several-time Prime Minister Robert Fico (2006–2010, 2012–2018) declared that he considered the use of aggressive military force to achieve Russian objectives a flagrant violation of international law, but he also said that he sympathized with Putin's policy, just as he had when he was Prime Minister:

The Russian Federation, having regained its position of great power, has decided to address the threat to its own national interests with military force. The Russian Federation has no wish to go along with the further expansion of NATO and the reinforcement of the security of neighboring countries at Russia's expense,

said Fico who believes that the conflict in Ukraine is of no concern to either the European Union or NATO. "This is a purely American-Russian affair," he noted. "It is in Slovakia's national interest not to be part of this conflict and not to contribute to further increasing tensions. Slovakia has no reason to feel threatened by the imminent military conflict," he said. Like Robert Fico, Milan Uhrík, leader of the far-right *Republika*, emphasized from the onset of the Russian aggression against Ukraine that Slovakia should under no circumstances help Ukraine by supplying weapons, as that would further escalate the military conflict and lead to Slovakia being dragged into the war.⁷

⁶ For an overview of statements made by Slovak politicians during the first day of the Russian aggression, see L. Osvaldová, "Zo strany Ruska je to neospravedlniteľný barbarský čin, hovorí Heger. Smer zatiaľ mlčí (reakcie slovenských politikov)," [This is an inexcusable barbaric act on Russia's part, Heger says. Smer remains silent so far (reactions of Slovak politicians)] *Denník N*, February 24, 2022. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/2735509/zo-strany-ruska-je-to-neospravedlnitelny-barbarsky-cin-hovori-heger-smer-zatial-mlci-reakcie-slovenskych-politikov/> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

⁷ For Milan Uhrík's statement during the first day of the Russian aggression, see *ibid.*

It was expected that *Smer-SD* and *Republika*, who had long expressed sympathy with Putin's foreign policy, would adopt such a position. But there was a significant shift in the position of the opposition party *Hlas*, which had joined forces with *Smer-SD* and *Republika* at the beginning of February 2022 to fight against the signing of the bilateral defense cooperation agreement between the Slovak Republic and the US, which, among other things, allows the US military to use Slovakia's military airports at Kuchyňa and Sliač.⁸ At the end of 2022, *Hlas* changed its position on the defense agreement with the US, no longer considering it disadvantageous for the Slovak Republic.⁹

In the end, after the many years of Fico governments, a clear majority of the coalition and opposition political parties in the parliament unequivocally condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Parliament passed a resolution on February 16, 2023, repeatedly condemning the Russian aggression against Ukraine, labeling the Russian regime a terrorist and the Russian Federation a state sponsor of terrorism. That was despite Eduard Heger's coalition government having lost its parliamentary majority for domestic political reasons, and failing to survive a vote of no confidence against it on December 15, 2022, and continuing to govern on the basis of the president's authority until early elections in September 2023.¹⁰

Since the first days of the war, Slovakia has supported Ukraine in its struggle against the Russian aggression and its efforts to restore state sovereignty and integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. In 2022 Slovakia passed this historic test with dignity.

⁸ "Šikana za schválenie obrannej dohody. Smer, Republika i Hlas šíria mená poslancov, polícia už monitoruje ich domovy," [Bullied for approving the defense deal. Smer, Republika and Hlas are spreading the names of MPs, the police are already monitoring their homes] *Postoj*, February 11, 2022. Available online: <https://www.postoj.sk/98937/poslanci-ktori-hlasovali-za-obrannu-dohodu-s-usa-celia-vyhrazkam?page=6961> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

⁹ T. Kyseľ, "Hlas sa nepridáva k Smeru a pri zmluve s USA otáča. Nechce ju rušiť a tvrdí, že neznamená vznik vojenskej základne," [Hlas won't not join Smer and is turning on the US agreement. It does not want to cancel it and says it does not mean the creation of a military base] *Aktuality.sk*, November 3, 2022. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/s6ZIEZI/hlas-sa-nepridava-k-smeru-a-pri-zmluve-s-usa-otaca-nechce-ju-rusit-a-tvrdi-ze-neznamena-vznik-vojenskej-zakladne/> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

¹⁰ "NR SR: Poslanci uznesením opätovne odsúdili ruskú agresiu na Ukrajinu," [National Council of the Slovak Republic: MEPs reiterate their condemnation of Russian aggression in Ukraine] National Council of the Slovak Republic, February 16, 2023. Available online: <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=udalosti/udalost&MasterID=56319> (accessed on March 3, 2023).

■ Support for Ukraine

Political support and bilateral contacts

Support for Ukraine's European integration had been one of the Heger government's three priority areas in bilateral relations even before the start of the war.¹¹ On February 28, 2022, a few days after the start of the Russian aggression, Ukraine applied for EU membership.¹² The Slovak Prime Minister was the first leader of an EU member state to make suggestions as to how EU partners could handle Ukraine's EU integration process. He presented his proposals at the first informal summit of EU leaders held after the start of the Russian aggression, in Versailles on March 10–11, 2022. The proposal, drafted by his team of advisors, consisted of three main parts: immediate measures (including granting Ukraine candidate status, trade liberalization and integration into the EU energy system for electricity and natural gas), governance of the integration process (institutional measures on the EU side, including allowing Ukraine access to institutions in the form of observer status) and financial measures (including the establishment of a fund to provide immediate wartime assistance or relief and support for the post-war reconstruction and EU-accession related reforms).¹³

The main argument the Slovak Prime Minister made in favor of supporting Ukraine's European integration was that after the war the EU would have no choice other than to agree to the gradual full integration of Ukraine if it wanted to stabilize Eastern Europe over the long term and prevent new conflicts. The future shape of national budgets is also at stake; a Russian victory would inevitably mean militarization and more spending on defense and less on modernization projects. The exact opposite is also true: if Ukraine succeeds in its defensive war against Russian aggression there will be more opportunities for investing in modernization projects in all European countries.

¹¹ "Uznesenie vlády..." op. cit.

¹² V. Yeysmunt, "Ukrayina podala zayavku na vstup do YeS. Shcho tse oznachaye?" [Ukraine applies to join the EU. What does it mean?] *Zakhid.net*, February 28, 2022. Available online: https://zakhid.net/ukrayina_podala_zayavku_na_vstup_do_yes_n1537131 (accessed on March 3, 2022).

¹³ "The EU Plan for Ukraine – Slovak Proposal." Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, March 2022.

Between the Versailles summit and the European Council meeting of June 23–24, 2022, in Brussels, Heger held two rounds of one-to-one offline and online negotiations with member state leaders to convince them of the necessity of the EU granting Ukraine candidate status. The coordination of the meetings with all member states at prime minister, head of state and foreign minister level was agreed between the Office of the Prime Minister, the President's Office and the foreign ministry, with the aim of reaching a consensus among member states on granting candidate status to Ukraine before the June European Council. In March, at the time of the Versailles Summit, the decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine was unanimously supported by around 10 member states. Slovakia's diplomatic activities did much to help achieve consensus among the 27 member states and finally the positive decision of the European Council, approved at its meeting on June 23, 2022.¹⁴

Thanks to the role Prime Minister Heger played in building consensus among EU member states, he was given the opportunity to join the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, on their trip to Kiev in early April 2022. In Kyiv the joint program with von der Leyen and Borrell consisted of a visit to the town of Bucha, where Russian occupation troops had committed atrocities against the civilian population, and a joint meeting with President Volodymyr Zelensky, his Chief of Staff Andrii Yermak, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and other members of the Ukrainian government. In addition, Heger held separate meetings with Zelensky and Shmyhal. The agenda covered support for Ukraine's European integration, the supply of military equipment and weapons, humanitarian assistance, including hosting war refugees from Ukraine in Slovakia, Ukrainian grain exports and cooperation in the import/export of electricity. During his visit, Heger announced the delivery of the S-300 air defense system to Ukraine. The Slovak Republic, together with the Czech Republic (delivery of tanks), thereby became the first NATO member countries to supply heavy military equipment to Ukraine in the first months of the war. Zelensky thanked Slovakia for its support to Ukraine: "I would like to thank the Slovak people and the Slovak Prime Minister not for the future, but for the present, for what they are doing for us during the war. Fully supporting us, our position, condemning the aggression of the Russian Federation not only in words, but also in deeds." President

¹⁴ "European Council Conclusions, 23–24 June 2022," Council of the European Union, June 24, 2022.

Zelensky also noted that he would not disclose the details of this support, emphasizing the historical importance of the assistance.¹⁵

At the end of May, President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová visited Kyiv. Like Prime Minister Heger, she announced another significant contribution to the defense of Ukraine – the delivery of eight modern Zuzana 2 howitzers. During her visit, she held talks with President Zelensky, Prime Minister Shmyhal and Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament Ruslan Stefanchuk. She visited Borodyanka and Irpin, liberated Ukrainian towns in the Kyiv region that survived the horrors of the Russian occupation.¹⁶ In addition, she took up the opportunity offered by the leadership of the Ukrainian parliament to address the members of parliament and the Ukrainian people. In her speech, President Čaputová outlined the main planks of Slovakia's approach to the Russian aggression against Ukraine: unequivocal condemnation of Russian aggression and full support for Ukraine during the war, the post-war reconstruction and European integration.¹⁷

The fifth hybrid meeting of the bilateral Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Industrial and Scientific-Technical Cooperation was another key event in bilateral relations in 2022. In November the interministerial working groups met to discuss the sectorial agenda. And on November 7th a narrower offline meeting was held in Uzhhorod on the sidelines of a business mission organized by SARIO in cooperation with the Slovak economy ministry. Despite the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine, the Slovak government decided to resume the activities of the commission, the fourth session having been postponed in 2013. Under the *Smer-SD* governments led by Robert Fico and subsequently Peter Pellegrini (2012–2020) the commission became less active following the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014. At the Uzhhorod talks in 2022 the delegations were led by Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic Karel Hirman and Deputy Minister of Energy of Ukraine

¹⁵ "Zelensky podyakuvav Slovachchyni za pidtrymku ta dopomohu Ukraini zbrojeyu," [Zelensky thanks Slovakia for supporting and helping Ukraine by supplying weapons] *Ukrinform*, April 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3452639-zelenskij-podakuvav-slovaccini-za-pidtrimku-ta-dopomogu-ukraini-zbroeu.html> (accessed on March 3, 2023).

¹⁶ "Slovensko stojí pri vás, pán prezident, vyhlásila Čaputová v Kyjeve," [Slovakia stands with you, Mr. President, declared Čaputová in Kyiv] *Aktuality.sk*, May 31, 2022. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/GPAQvMy/slovensko-stoji-pri-vas-pan-prezident-vyhlasila-caputova-v-kyjeve/> (accessed on March 3, 2023).

¹⁷ "Prejav prezidentky SR v Najvyššej rade Ukrajiny, Kyjev, 31. 5. 2022," [Speech by the President of the Slovak Republic in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Kyiv, 31. 5. 2022] Office of the President of the Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://www.prezident.sk/page/prejav/> (accessed on March 3, 2023).

Yaroslav Demchenkov. The items on the agenda were the possibility of Slovakia helping Ukraine keep its energy system running amid the massive targeted missile attacks that began on October 10, 2022, mutual strategic interests and cooperation in various energy areas, such as gas, oil, electricity and nuclear energy. "I can assure Ukraine that we will continue to provide the assistance that we can provide and that is needed by the citizens of Ukraine. Likewise, Ukraine can count on our support in the fight against aggression by the Russian Federation, in the fight for independence, and in protecting war refugees, especially women and children. We are also counting on cooperation in the field of trade and industry and in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine," said Hirman during the talks in Uzhhorod.¹⁸

In 2022 top-level activities in bilateral relations included the visit to Kyiv by three Slovak government ministers – Minister of Foreign Affairs Rastislav Káčer, Minister of Defense Jaroslav Naď and Minister of Economy Karel Hirman – on December 8th. The ministers attended a reception with President Zelensky and First Deputy Speaker of Parliament Oleksandr Kornienko, a meeting with Prime Minister Shmyhal and a separate one with ministerial colleagues in the Ukrainian government. The ministers announced further assistance for Ukraine – 300 generators, hot air heaters, warm clothes and blankets for civilians affected by the Russian missile attacks, including assistance for the Ukrainian Armed Forces (Božena mine clearance system, bulletproof vests and winter gear). President Zelensky noted that Slovakia was the eighth largest aid donor in terms of GDP: "People remember. We will remember your help. And maybe the time will come – God forbid it should happen, we know what war is, we wish you only peace – but Ukraine will always help the Slovak Republic for the help you have given us."¹⁹ The President of Ukraine awarded the Slovak Defense Minister the Order of Yaroslav the Wise, Second Degree, which is given to citizens of other countries for extraordinary service to Ukraine and its people.²⁰

¹⁸ "Obnova Ukrajiny témou slovensko-ukrajinskej delegácie v Užhorode," [Reconstruction of Ukraine is the topic of the Slovak-Ukrainian delegation in Uzhhorod] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, November 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/press/slovensko-ukrajinska-delegacia-diskutovala-o-plane-obnovy-ukrajiny-v-uzhorode> (accessed on March 3, 2022).

¹⁹ "Traja slovenskí ministri navštívili Ukrajinu. Zelenskyj im ďakoval za pomoc," [Three Slovak ministers visited Ukraine. Zelensky thanked them for their help] *RTVS*, December 8, 2022. Available online: <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2022/12/traja-slovenski-ministri-navstivili-ukrajinu-zelenskyj-im-dakoval-za-pomoc/> (accessed on March 3, 2023).

²⁰ "Minister Naď si v Kyjeve prevzal vyznamenanie od prezidenta Zelenského," [Minister Naď receives a medal from President Zelensky in Kyiv] *Sme*, December 8, 2022. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23090395/minister-nad-si-v-kyjeve-prevzal-vyznamenanie-od-prezidenta-zelenskeho.html> (accessed on March 3, 2023).

With Slovakia's leaders and ministers visiting Kyiv and the ongoing provision of military and humanitarian aid since the beginning of the Russian aggression, Slovakia's reputation among Ukrainian politicians, professionals and the wider public is back to levels last seen 30 years ago. Dmytro Tuzhanskyi, a Ukrainian analyst, alluding to the attitude of previous *Smer-SD* governments to Ukraine stated:

A country [Slovakia – ed.] with some of the strongest pro-Russian sentiment among the population, but with a pro-European and friendly government. Before February 24, hardly anyone would have dared to predict that it would be modest Slovakia that would support Ukraine as consistently and without alternative as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Poland. Both with weapons and politically. However, this is no accident. It is important for Kyiv to understand this not only to appreciate the support, but also to develop it into a new strong alliance with one of its western neighbors among the EU and NATO members.²¹

Military assistance

In the very first days of the Russian invasion, Slovakia started supplying artillery ammunition and fuel to the Armed Forces of Ukraine.²² The country contributed 120 mm and 122 mm artillery ammunition (for Grad artillery systems) and 155 mm ammunition (for howitzers supplied by NATO countries), fuel for heavy combat equipment, aviation gasoline, anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, small arms, warm military clothing and other military materiel. By the end of the first month of the war, Slovakia was the first partner country to have supplied Ukraine with an air defense system (S300-PMU). The delivery of the S-300 broke the ice on NATO countries sending heavy combat equipment, and Ukraine's political and military leadership conveyed its gratitude

²¹ D. Tuzhanskyi, "Rozvorot vid RF: yak Slovacchyna stala odnym iz holovnykh soyuznykiv Kyryeva," [Turning away from Russia: How Slovakia became one of Kyiv's main allies] *Yevropeyska pravda*, June 7, 2022. Available online: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/06/8/7140833/> (accessed on March 3, 2023).

²² "Slovakia to send artillery ammunition, fuel worth 11 mln euros to Ukraine," *Reuters*, February 26, 2022. Available online: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/slovakia-to-send-artillery-ammunition-fuel-worth-11-mln-euros-to-ukraine/articleshow/89850308.cms> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

and appreciation to Slovakia.²³ The delivery of the S-300 system to Ukraine was made possible by an agreement with Slovakia's NATO allies, namely the Netherlands, Germany and the US, which provided four Patriot air defense systems, including crews, for the defense of Slovak airspace. "The Patriot systems will be on Slovak territory as long as we need them," announced Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad'.²⁴

A key contribution was the delivery of eight units of the Zuzana 2 self-propelled howitzer, one of the top weapons in this category, along with the provision of training in Slovakia for Ukrainian crews. The howitzers were part of a government order for Slovak army supplies in 2018, but in view of the Russian aggression the decision was taken to send them to Ukraine in 2022, the year the army received them. In June 2022 a bilateral agreement was signed for the delivery of the howitzers, which was then reimbursed through the EU's *European Peace Facility*, established so EU member states could provide military assistance to Ukraine. As the Zuzana 2 howitzers have proved their worth in combat, the Ukrainian Armed Forces have expressed interest in additional units. The Slovak manufacturer Konštrukta Defence has begun production on a further 16 Zuzana 2 howitzers for Ukraine, ordered by the governments of Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany. In addition, the Konštrukta Defence plant in Moldava nad Bodvou is arranging for the BRDM-2 armored vehicles Germany supplied to Ukraine to be repaired. In mid-December 2022, a special maintenance unit was set up at the army base in Michalovce for repairing Western military equipment damaged in the fighting in Ukraine (mainly howitzers and anti-aircraft systems). German is responsible for financing and the implementation of the repairs, while Slovakia is providing the premises and basic infrastructure for the operation.²⁵

²³ "Zelenskyy skazav slovatskim deputatam: rosiyski okupanty nesut zi soboyu zlo. Dyakuyu, Slovacchyna, inshi mozhut vchytyisia u vas," [Zelensky told Slovak MPs: Russian occupiers bring evil with them. Thank you, Slovakia, others can learn from you] *Refresher*, May 12, 2022. Available online: <https://refresher.sk/114885-zelens-kyj-skazav-slovac-kym-deputatam-rosijs-ki-okupanty-nesut-z-soboyu-zlo-djakuju-slovaccyna-insi-mozut-vchytyisia-u-vas> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

²⁴ J. Brezáni, "Pomoc zo Slovenska/System S-300 sme darovali Ukrajine. Na Slovensku ho nahradí štvrtý Patriot," [Aid from Slovakia/S-300 system donated to Ukraine. It will be replaced by the fourth Patriot in Slovakia] *Denník Postoj*, April 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.postoj.sk/103323/dnes-treba-vediet> (accessed on March 4, 2022).

²⁵ D. Hutko, "Húfnice, vrtuľníky, transportéry aj S-300. Aký je slovenský účet za vojenské dary pre Ukrajinu?" [Howitzers, helicopters, transports and S-300s. What is the Slovak bill for military donations to Ukraine?] *Pravda*, January 10, 2023. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/653129-hufnice-vrtulniky-transportery-aj-s-300-aky-je-slovensky-ucet-za-obranu-pomoc-ukrajine/> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

In addition to the Zuzana 2 howitzers and S-300 air defense system, Slovakia provided Ukraine with four units of the Božena mine clearance system, five combat helicopters (4x Mi-7 and 1x Mi-2) and 30 BVP-1 armored infantry vehicles. Under the *ringtausch* program, Germany compensated Slovakia for the delivery of 30 BVP-1 infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine by delivering 15 modern Leopard 2A4 battle tanks to Slovakia, the first of which was delivered to Slovakia in December 2022. The compensation program for supplying older weapon systems that can be immediately deployed by the Ukrainian Armed Forces in combat operations without training being required has also been used by Germany in cooperation with, for example, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Greece.²⁶ Discussions began at the beginning of 2023 on Slovakia's next potential contribution to Ukraine's defense, the delivery of 10 MiG-29 fighter jets, recently withdrawn from its active military arsenal.²⁷

From the beginning of the Russian aggression on February 24th until the end of 2022, Slovakia had supplied Ukraine with weapons and military equipment worth approximately €170 million and had received commercial orders (for howitzers and military repairs) worth approximately €148 million.²⁸ Slovakia does not have a large army nor a huge stockpile of weapons and military materiel. Nevertheless, cooperation with NATO member countries has enabled it to mobilize its capabilities and help enhance Ukraine's ability to counter the Russian military aggression.

Humanitarian aid

From the beginning of the Russian aggression until the end of November 2022, more than a million Ukrainian war refugees had crossed the Slovak-Ukrainian border, most of them transiting the country before seeking temporary refuge in other EU countries. By the end of November 2022, 102,600 Ukrainian citizens, mostly women with children, had applied for and been granted

temporary refuge in Slovakia.²⁹ Their basic needs, including accommodation, food, medical and social care, are being met by the government, in agreement with the European Commission, through a €530 million allocation from the EU funds that Slovakia had not used from the previous 2014–2020 financial perspective. The funds are also used to reimburse property owners who have provided housing for refugees and to help local governments, schools and kindergartens provide schooling for Ukrainian refugee children. *School to Go*, an online education platform developed in Slovakia to provide Ukrainian refugee children with access to online education in Ukrainian regardless of their country of placement, is funded this way. By the end of November 2022, 14,800 Ukrainian refugees had found work in Slovakia.³⁰

In addition to assistance for war refugees from Ukraine in Slovakia, in 2022 the government delivered humanitarian aid to Ukraine worth €9.3 million (850 tons of emergency humanitarian aid) and contributed €1.6 million to the international humanitarian organizations and local NGOs operating in Ukraine providing aid to people in need. The *SlovakAid* program supported four humanitarian aid projects implemented in various regions of Ukraine (from Transcarpathia to Dnipropetrovsk region) with a total value of €1.3 million.³¹ Slovakia signed up to the Paris Mechanism (46 countries and 24 international organizations), established at the international donor conference in Paris on December 13, 2022, to coordinate international assistance to Ukraine to help inhabitants cope with the winter of 2022–2023 (known as the “winterization” of Ukraine). The Paris Mechanism was the international community's response to Russia's massive missile attacks against Ukraine's energy infrastructure which began on October 10, 2022, aimed at disrupting electricity, heat, and water supplies to Ukrainian households. A total of 46 countries and 24 international organizations pledged more than €1 billion at the Paris conference to

²⁹ “Mnohí utečenci sa na Slovensku zamestnali. Obsadzujú dlhodobu voľnú pozíciu,” [Many refugees have found employment in Slovakia. They are filling positions that have long been vacant] *TA3*, December 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/253479/mnohi-utecenci-z-ukrajiny-sa-na-slovensku-zamestnali-obsadzuju-dlhodobu-vone-pozicie> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

³⁰ “Slovensko poskytne Ukrajine pomoc viac ako 530 miliónov eur zo zdrojov EÚ,” [Slovakia to provide more than €530 million aid Ukraine from the EU funds] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, April 4, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/slovensko-poskytne-ukrajine-pomoc-viac-ako-530-milionov-eur-zo-zdrojov-eu/> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

³¹ “Slovenská pomoc Ukrajine v číslach: patríme medzi svetových lídrov,” [Slovak aid for Ukraine in figures: we are among the world leaders] *RTVS*, February 23, 2023. Available online: <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2023/02/slovenska-pomoc-ukrajine-v-cislach-patrime-medzi-svetovych-lidrov/> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ “Zelenský oficiálne požiadal Hegera o dodanie stíhačiek MiG-29,” [Zelensky officially asked Heger to deliver MiG-29 fighters] *Trend*, February 9, 2023. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/zelenskyj-oficialne-poziadala-hegera-dodanie-stihaciek-mig-29> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

²⁸ D. Hutka, op. cit.

help Ukraine cope with the humanitarian situation during the winter.³² Under the Paris Mechanism, Slovakia pledged the following supplies as part of its Ukrainian assistance during the winter of 2022–2023: 300 generators, 360 heaters, 70 voltage converters, 875 extension cables, tools, and equipment to repair damaged gas infrastructure, 3,000 packages of basic hygiene products, 8,700 medical kits, 12,940 blankets, thermal clothing, basic food products, temporary shelters and so on. Fully or partly state-owned companies contributed to the government's winter aid for Ukraine. In 2022 it supplied winterization aid of €2.7 million.³³ In addition to the government aid, private Slovak companies supplied Ukraine with nine transformers and 126 generators.³⁴

Slovak NGOs were able to collect and deliver a larger volume of humanitarian aid to Ukraine than the Slovak government. The leading organizations include the NGO People in Need (Človek v ohrození), which was able to collect €10 million for humanitarian aid to Ukraine and war refugees in Slovakia during 2022. The NGO A Smile as a Gift (Úsmev ako dar) has been helping send humanitarian aid to Ukraine since the start of the war, delivered by 130 trucks, two aircraft and three ocean-going ships. In total, it has delivered up to 800 tons of humanitarian aid to Ukraine.³⁵ *Ambrela*, a platform for Slovak development organizations, represents 23 Slovak NGOs that have been collecting and delivering humanitarian aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Slovak NGOs associated within this platform have delivered 5,000 tons of humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the ten months following the Russian invasion (February–December 2022). It is worth approximately €9.82 million. The aid included non-perishable foods, medical supplies and medicines, hygiene items, utensils, warm blankets and solid fuel.³⁶

³² "Countries at Paris aid conference pledge €1 billion for Ukraine," *France 24*, December 14, 2022. Available online: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20221213-live-paris-hosts-conference-to-help-ukraine-make-it-through-winter-rebuild> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

³³ "Pledge form: Slovakia. International Conference 'Standing with the Ukrainian People,' Paris, December 13, 2022," Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, December 2022.

³⁴ *ECHO response to the Ukrainian crisis. Energy Sector. G7 Principals Meeting on Ukraine Support*, 09/02/23.

³⁵ "Slovensko patrí v celosvetovom meradle k top desiatim krajinám v pomoci Ukrajine, hodnota sa pohybuje v miliónoch," [Slovakia ranks among the top ten countries globally in aid to Ukraine, the value is in millions] *SITA*, February 23, 2023. Available online: <https://sita.sk/organizacia-clovek-v-ohrozeni-poskytla-na-pomoc-ukrajine-viac-ako-sedem-milionov-eur-na-slovensku-aj-integruje-odidencov/> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

³⁶ "Mimovládky zo SR doručili na Ukrajinu 5000 ton humanitárnej pomoci," [Slovak NGOs delivered 5000 tons of humanitarian aid to Ukraine] *Teraz.sk*, December 23, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/spravny/mimovladky-zo-sr-dorucili-na-ukrajinu/683096-clanok.html> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

Excluding the humanitarian aid provided to Ukraine by Slovak NGOs, Slovakia ranks 11th in the volume of government military and humanitarian aid provided to Ukraine from January 2022 to January 2023 per share of GDP (Estonia – 1.07 per cent, Latvia – 0.98 per cent, Lithuania – 0.65 per cent, Poland – 0.63 per cent, USA – 0.37 per cent, Bulgaria – 0.36 per cent, Norway – 0.36 per cent, Great Britain – 0.32 per cent, Canada – 0.26 per cent, Czech Republic – 0.24 per cent, Slovakia – 0.22 per cent).³⁷ In terms of both the political support and military and humanitarian aid, in 2022 the government passed with dignity the credibility test posed by the Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

Preparing for the post-war reconstruction

At the international donor conference held in Lugano on July 4–5, 2022, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal unveiled the Ukraine Recovery Plan following the Russian military aggression. The plan consists of 24 sectoral programs and envisages investments of \$750 billion to repair the damage caused by the war and rebuild the country.³⁸ In subsequent months, discussions were held about the institutional arrangements for managing the international assistance for Ukraine both during and after the war. These were concluded in November 2022 with an agreement to set up the *International Donor Platform* at the G7+Ukraine level to coordinate international assistance for Ukraine.³⁹ International organizations and Ukraine's partner countries began work on their own contribution to the recovery and post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

The Slovak involvement in the reconstruction of Ukraine is being coordinated by "Team Ukraine," set up under the Corps of Advisors to Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, the Office of Government. The Corps of Advisors

³⁷ "Total bilateral aid commitments to Ukraine as a percentage of donor gross domestic product (GDP) between January 24, 2022, and January 15, 2023, by country," *Statista Research Department*, February 21, 2023. Available online: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1303450/bilateral-aid-to-ukraine-in-a-percent-of-donor-gdp/> (accessed on March 4, 2023).

³⁸ "Ukraine's National Recovery Plan," National Recovery Council, July 2022; see also "Outcome document of the Ukraine recovery conference URC2022: 'Lugano Declaration' (Lugano, 4-5 July 2022)," *reliefweb*, July 6, 2022. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/outcome-document-ukraine-recovery-conference-urc2022-lugano-declaration-lugano-4-5-july-2022> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

³⁹ *G7 Presidency Proposal: Donor Coordination Platform for the Governance of the Reconstruction of Ukraine*. Berlin: G7 Germany, November 2022.

started to hold regular interministerial meetings to coordinate the activities of ministries and state institutions involved in providing assistance to Ukraine in the short term (e.g., winterization, humanitarian aid) and medium term (recovery and reconstruction). The team produced a working document entitled "Proposal for the involvement of the Slovak Republic in the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine." It is based on a survey of Slovak organizations interested in participating in the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine via a questionnaire published on the website of the Office of the Government. The document is continuously updated with offers from Slovak organizations.⁴⁰

The questionnaire was published on July 7, 2022, on the day of the roundtable on Slovakia's involvement in the reconstruction of Ukraine initiated by Prime Minister Eduard Heger. The roundtable was attended by representatives of umbrella business associations, central government bodies, regional and local government and non-governmental organizations. By the beginning of February 2023, 310 Slovak organizations had expressed an interest in being involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine and presented offers via the questionnaire: 269 businesses (86.8 per cent), 20 NGOs (6.5 per cent), 14 regional and local governments (2 regions, 6 cities, 2 municipalities, 4 organizations under the jurisdiction of regional governments) (4.5 per cent), 5 public administration organizations (1.6 per cent) and 2 universities (0.6 per cent).⁴¹ The proposal for Slovakia's involvement in the recovery of Ukraine follows the sectoral structure of the Ukraine Recovery Plan presented at the Lugano Conference. According to the bids presented, Slovak organizations have the capacity to provide goods and services in the 24 sectoral areas identified by the Ukrainian government for the post-war reconstruction of the country. The proposal includes offers from companies and organizations that did not fill in the questionnaire but informed the Office of Government of their interest in participating.

The Slovak offer was presented to the Ukrainian government prior to a meeting of the bilateral Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation,

⁴⁰ "Dotazník: Zapojenie slovenských subjektov do povojnovej obnovy Ukrajiny," [Questionnaire: involvement of Slovak entities in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://formulare.vlada.gov.sk/obnova-ukrajiny/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁴¹ *Proposal for the involvement of the Slovak Republic in the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine*. Bratislava: Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, February 2023.

held in hybrid format in November 2022. On December 8, 2022, Karel Hirman, the Economy Minister and co-chair of the intergovernmental commission, visited Kyiv and signed the Minutes for the commission meeting, including provisions on cooperation in post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.⁴² The Team Ukraine at the Office of Government has been communicating about Ukraine's needs with representatives from the Ukrainian government's Office for Reforms, which is responsible for further elaboration of the Ukraine Recovery Plan, including Slovakia's involvement in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

■ Economic consequences

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has had negative economic consequences for the whole world and particularly European countries, reliant for many years (since the oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970s) on a stable energy supply from the Soviet Union and, later, Russia. Although Russian and Ukrainian foreign trade accounts for only about 3 per cent of total world trade, Russia has a significant share of the energy market and Ukraine of the global grain market.⁴³ Slovakia has not escaped the negative economic impact of Russia's war against Ukraine either. In 2022 its foreign trade recorded a negative balance (€4.3 billion) for the first time in 14 years.⁴⁴ One of the main reasons for this was the growth in energy and food prices in 2022 as a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which caused high inflation and a slowdown in economic growth in the eurozone. It cost Slovakia roughly twice as much to import energy sources in 2022 as it did in 2021.⁴⁵

Energy prices started rising in 2021 because of the economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic, but the launch of Russian aggression against

⁴² "Protocol of the fifth session of the Joint Commission on economic, industrial, and scientific-technical cooperation between Ukraine and the Slovak Republic," Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, December 8, 2022.

⁴³ Z. Darvas, C. Martins, "The impact of the Ukraine crisis on international trade," *Bruegel*, 20 December 2022. Available online: <https://www.bruegel.org/working-paper/impact-ukraine-crisis-international-trade> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁴⁴ "Záporné saldo zahraničného obchodu SR stúplo vlni až na 4,3 mld. Eur," [Slovakia's negative foreign trade balance rose to €4.3 billion last year] *Teraz.sk*, February 8, 2023. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/zaporne-saldo-zahranicneho-obchodu-s/692958-clanok.html> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁴⁵ "Frankfurtské hářky," [Frankfurter Sheets] National Bank of Slovakia, May 2022. Available online: <https://nbs.sk/vojna-a-dopady-na-ekonomiku/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

Ukraine in February 2022 added new momentum. EU countries imposed unprecedented economic sanctions on Russia to limit its state budget revenues and thereby its ability to finance the war against Ukraine.⁴⁶ EU member states decided to reduce Russian natural gas and oil imports, which are the main sources of its export revenues. Given Russia's relatively high share of oil (24.8 per cent) and gas (39.3 per cent) supplies to the EU before the war (data are for 2021), the markets became uncertain as to whether the EU and its member states would be able to compensate for the shortfall. This uncertainty, arising from the need to relatively quickly and radically rethink and adapt its approach to energy supplies that had worked reliably for decades, drove energy commodity prices on European markets to all-time highs in the summer and autumn of 2022. By the end of the third quarter of 2022, the EU had managed to reduce the share of Russian natural gas supplies by 24 per cent (to a 15 per cent share of all third country imports) and the share of oil supplies by 15 per cent (to a 14.4 per cent share of all third country imports).⁴⁷

Unlike the oil trade, natural gas was not included in the EU sanctions policy. Russia however, decided to use gas supplies to Europe as a foreign policy tool to undermine European countries' support for Ukraine. From the start of the military aggression against Ukraine, it began gradually reducing gas supplies to Europe, completely stopping supplies via both the Nord Stream pipeline (via the Baltic Sea to Germany) and the Yamal pipeline (via Belarus to Poland) in August and September, leaving only the route via Turkey and, paradoxically, Ukraine and Slovakia operational. Many European countries simply had no choice but to replace Russian gas supplies. They succeeded mainly thanks to the dramatic increase in liquefied gas supplied from the US, Qatar and Nigeria, as well as pipeline supplies from Norway, Algeria and other countries. In November 2022, the share of Russian natural gas in total EU gas imports had decreased to 12.9 per cent.⁴⁸ Thanks to the extraordinary measures taken by

⁴⁶ "Sanctions adopted following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine," European Commission, 2023. Available online: https://finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-and-world/sanctions-restrictive-measures/sanctions-adopted-following-russias-military-aggression-against-ukraine_en#overview-of-sanctions-in-place (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁴⁷ S. Yanatma, "Europe's 'energy war' in data: How have EU imports changed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine?" *Euronews*, February 24, 2023. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/02/24/europes-energy-war-in-data-how-have-eu-imports-changed-since-russias-invasion-of-ukraine> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁴⁸ "Infografika – Odkiaľ pochádza plyn využívaný v EÚ?" [Infographic – Where does EU gas come from?] Council of the European Union, January 7, 2023. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/sk/infographics/eu-gas-supply/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

the state-owned SPP, Slovakia substantially reduced the share of Russian gas in domestic consumption (90 per cent before the war). In 2022, 32 per cent of Slovakia's gas supplies came from Norway via Germany and the Czech Republic (contract expires at the end of 2023) and 34 per cent of its liquefied gas supplies from the US and Qatar (via terminals in Croatia, Italy, Belgium and the UK); the share of Russian gas consumed in Slovakia fell below the threshold of 10 per cent.⁴⁹

At the end of the 2022–2023 winter heating season, it was obvious that European countries had successfully tackled the Russian gas blackmail, and the situation on energy commodities market was stabilizing. Thanks to the very warm winter, gas storage facilities in European countries were fuller than usual at the end of the heating season, and gas and electricity prices started to fall sharply in January 2023. Gas prices fell from their peak in August 2021 (€317/MWh) to 75 per cent in January 2023 (€77/MWh) and are now lower than they were before the Russian aggression against Ukraine.⁵⁰ The predictions of Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council and former president of Russia, that the European consumer price of natural gas would reach \$5,000 per thousand cubic meters by the end of 2022, assuming, of course, that an agreement would be reached with Russia and that support would end for Ukraine, have not come true (in January 2023 the price dropped below \$500 per thousand cubic meters).⁵¹

Even though Europe survived the energy war with Russia in the winter of 2022–2023, it continues to pay an economic price for Russia's war against Ukraine in the form of high inflation, which will only decline gradually, and slower economic growth. However, it is an incomparably lower price for Europe, and thereby Slovakia, compared to the cost of Russia winning the war against Ukraine.

⁴⁹ "Slovensko znížilo závislosť na ruskom plyne o 66%, povedal Sulík," [Slovakia has reduced its dependence on Russian gas by 66%, said Sulík] *tyždeň*, May 27, 2022. Available online: <https://www.tyzden.sk/politika/85116/slovensko-znizilo-zavislost-na-ruskom-plyne-o-66--oznamil-sulik/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁵⁰ T. Bakoš, "Sledujeme masívny pokles cien plynu a elektriny. Kde sa až zastaví?" [We are seeing a massive drop in gas and electricity prices. Where does it stop?] *Pravda*, January 10, 2023. Available online: <https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/energetika/clanok/653028-sledujeme-masivny-pokles-cien-plynu-a-elektriny-tri-scenare-ako-sa-moze-vyvijat-rok-2023/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁵¹ Shustrova, M., "Vpervye s augusta 2021 goda gaz v Yevrope stoit meneye \$500," [For the first time since August 2021, gas in Europe costs less than \$500] *Gazeta.ru*, March 3, 2023. Available online: <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2023/03/03/16339999.shtml> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

■ Public opinion

One month before the start of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine on January 19–26, 2022, the agency Focus conducted a representative public opinion poll for *TV Markíza*, in which it surveyed the views of the Slovak public on the following question: “Who do you think is to blame for the rising tensions on the Russia–Ukraine border and in the Baltics – Russia or the United States and NATO?” The result was 44.1 per cent of respondents thought that the United States and NATO were to blame for the tensions between Ukraine and Russia, while 34.7 per cent identified Russia as the originator of the tensions, and 21.2 per cent answered “don’t know.”⁵² The day after the Russian aggression began against Ukraine, AKO conducted a representative poll for the daily *Hospodárske noviny*, asking the public who was responsible for the outbreak of the war: 62 per cent of respondents held Russia responsible for the war in Ukraine; 25 per cent thought the US was responsible for the conflict; 8.9 per cent of respondents considered NATO to be responsible, 7.8 per cent Ukraine and 5 per cent the EU; 16 per cent of respondents were unable to express an opinion.⁵³

What is particularly remarkable about the results of these two polls on essentially the same question (who is responsible for the escalation of tensions and the outbreak of war) is that almost a quarter of the Slovak public had completely changed their minds within a month. That shows that a significant part of the Slovak public has no real opinion on key issues in international relations or Slovak foreign policy interests, or can change its opinion completely in a very short period of time. In other words, a quarter, if not more, of the Slovak public is ripe for manipulation through (dis)information. The fact that the Slovak public is much more prone to believing disinformation and conspiracy theories compared to the public in neighboring countries is an empirically and scientifically proven phenomenon. But it also means that the Slovak public is much more likely to accept Russian narratives on interna-

tional events, including the war in Ukraine, which call into question Ukraine, Slovakia’s Western allies, NATO and the EU, and ultimately the policies of the Slovak government.⁵⁴ This poses a risk to Slovakia’s national security.

It is also interesting to observe the shift in the Slovak public’s views on Ukrainian war refugees, which was positive in the first weeks of the military conflict but became increasingly rejectionist. In March 2022, the Institute of Social Sciences at the Slovak Academy of Sciences conducted a representative public opinion poll on Slovak public attitudes to Ukrainian war refugees in Slovakia. Almost 40 per cent of respondents agreed that “refugees from Ukraine should have the right to apply for asylum in Slovakia with no time limit,” 35 per cent were undecided and 25 per cent disagreed. Almost half of the respondents could not decide whether they agreed with the view that “the Slovak government should provide financial support to asylum seekers while their applications are being assessed;” 30 per cent of respondents agreed and over 20 per cent disagreed. More than half of respondents (over 50 per cent) agreed that “refugees from Ukraine whose asylum applications are granted should have the right to bring close family members.” Over 30 per cent of respondents agreed that “refugees from Ukraine should be allowed to come to Slovakia for a short time to work and then be required to return home.” Conversely, 40 per cent of respondents agreed that “refugees from Ukraine should be allowed to come to Slovakia for a longer period of time to have a chance to settle and integrate.”⁵⁵

Other opinion polls have pointed to growing concerns among the Slovak public about the reception of Ukrainian refugees. The findings of a representative public opinion poll organized by the Milan Šimečka Foundation in cooperation with Focus in June 2022 showed growing concern among the Slovak public that the government’s long-term refugee support would come at the expense of the local population. Nevertheless, Slovaks are willing to accept refugees from Ukraine but think that they have to adapt to Slovak society and not be too different. According to the survey findings, up to 81.2 per cent of respondents agreed that helping people fleeing Ukraine came at the

⁵² “Prieskum: Slováci vinia za napätie na východe viac NATO a USA ako Rusko,” [Poll: Slovaks blame NATO and the US more than Russia for tensions in the East] *Sme*, January 30, 2022. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22830637/prieskum-slovaci-vinia-za-napatie-na-vychode-euroopy-viac-nato-a-usa-nez-rusko.html?ref=av-center> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁵³ “Prieskum: Za vojnu na Ukrajine je podľa väčšiny zodpovedné Rusko,” [Poll: majority think Russia is responsible for the war in Ukraine] *Sme*, February 26, 2022. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22849948/prieskum-ukrajina-vojna-rusko-nato-usa.html> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁵⁴ See e.g., D. Hajdu, K. Klingová, “Perception of democracy and conspiracies in Slovakia,” *Globsec*, September 2020. Available online: <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/perception-democracy-and-conspiracies-slovakia> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁵⁵ J. Papcunová, “Aká je verejná mienka o prijatí utečencov z Ukrajiny?” [What is public opinion on accepting refugees from Ukraine?] *Spoločenskovedný ústav CSPV SAV, v.v.*, April 26, 2022. Available online: https://www.sav.sk/?lang=sk&doc=services-news&source_no=20&news_no=10320 (accessed on March 5, 2023).

expense of the Slovak population. A quarter of respondents (25.3 per cent) said that they would never accept people fleeing Ukraine in the country.⁵⁶ This data shows, above all, the government's failure to communicate and explain to the public that they are not being disadvantaged: the financial resources for supporting Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia fleeing the Russian aggression do not come from the state budget and so could not be used to benefit foreign citizens to the detriment of Slovak citizens. They come from the EU funds from the 2014–2020 financial perspective that Slovakia was unable to use and would have had to return anyway, i.e. the government could not have used them for anything else.

The findings of a Eurobarometer survey conducted in October and November 2022 are also interesting. They show that Slovakia is among the EU member states with the lowest support for the provision of joint European assistance to Ukraine. According to the survey, 49 per cent of respondents in Slovakia approve of EU assistance, with only Greece and Bulgaria (48 per cent each) coming lower; by comparison, 68 per cent of respondents in the Czech Republic, 85 per cent in Poland, 59 per cent in Hungary and 60 per cent in Austria support the joint European assistance for Ukraine. The EU average is 74 per cent, with Sweden and Finland leading the ranking (97 per cent and 95 per cent).⁵⁷ The Eurobarometer findings are consistent with those of a representative opinion poll conducted by Globsec in cooperation with Focus at the end of September 2022. The poll surveyed the views of the Slovak public on the question: "How would you like the war in Ukraine to end?" Overall, almost half of the respondents (47 per cent) wanted Ukraine to win the war. Only about one-fifth of the population (19 per cent) wants Russia to win, and about a quarter of the population do not care, have no opinion or did not want to answer. Greater levels of apathy were observed among younger generations: 33 per cent of respondents aged 18–34, 23 per cent of respondents aged 35–54 and 19 per cent of respondents over 55 answered "I don't care". In terms of electoral preferences, *Republika* voters (55 per cent) favor a Russian victory. *Smer-SD* voters also incline more strongly towards Russia (36 per

cent), and there was a greater degree of apathy (34 per cent of respondents answered "I don't care"). Among voters of other parties, most respondents favored a Ukrainian victory.⁵⁸

This overview of public opinion polls shows that almost half of Slovak citizens (47–49 per cent) are clearly on the side of Ukraine, hoping it will win the war and support the Slovak government's approach to Russia's war in Ukraine, with the exception of its approach to Ukrainian refugees, where about 40 per cent of citizens have a positive attitude on the long-term support for war refugees. On the other hand, roughly a fifth of Slovak citizens want the exact opposite, i.e., they want Russia to win, and a quarter clearly reject the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees. Another quarter of the Slovak public has no opinion or may change its opinion at any time. The contest over this last quarter of citizens may decide the early parliamentary elections to be held in September 2023, as Slovakia's position on the Russian–Ukrainian war will undoubtedly be one of the key issues of the election campaign.

■ Instead of a conclusion

Thanks to the unequivocal position of the Heger coalition government and president Zuzana Čaputová and, let us also add, about half of citizens, Slovakia's eastern policy in 2022 has passed the credibility test presented by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. In terms of the military and humanitarian aid provided (as a share of GDP), Slovakia has become one of the largest supporters of Ukraine in its fight against the Russian occupiers for national sovereignty, freedom and its European perspective.

Slovak diplomats played an important role in building consensus among EU member states on granting candidate status to Ukraine at the June 2022 European Council. The decision to supply Ukraine with the S-300 PMU air defense system at the end of March and beginning of April 2022 broke the ice in other Western partner countries and their attitudes to supplying heavy combat equipment to Ukraine. In both cases, Ukraine's top officials, professionals and

⁵⁶ M. Dedinský, "Vojna na Ukrajine: Čo si myslia Slováci o ukrajinských utečencoch?" [War in Ukraine: what Slovaks think about Ukrainian refugees] *Aktuality.sk*, September 13, 2022. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/PSqXkGs/vojna-na-ukrajine-co-si-myslia-slovaci-o-utecencoch-z-ukrajiny-prieskum/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁵⁷ "Slovensko patrí medzi štáty, v ktorých je najnižšia podpora spoločnej európskej pomoci pre Ukrajinu," [Slovakia is among the countries with the lowest support for joint European assistance to Ukraine] *Denník N*, December 14, 2022. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/3151831/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁵⁸ D. Hajdu, "Nový prieskum: Obyvatelia Slovenska chcú vo vojne častejšie výhru Ukrajiny, nie Ruska," [New poll: more Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war than Russia] Globsec, October 4, 2022. Available online: <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/press-releases/novy-prieskum-obyvateelia-slovenska-chcu-vo-vojne-castejsie-vyhru-ukrajiny> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

the general public expressed their gratitude and special appreciation that Slovakia was able to set the basic tone for Western allies on such issues of vital importance to Ukraine. Not since 1993 has Slovakia had such a good reputation in Ukraine.

However, there are doubts about the sustainability of Slovakia's current approach and policy towards the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Eduard Heger's government lost its parliamentary majority in December 2022 and, until the early elections in September 2023, is governing under the authority of the president, who can revoke it at any time. Parliament voted against the government in a vote of no confidence, which means it has limited powers and cannot take major decisions on domestic and foreign policy issues. Russia's war against Ukraine will clearly become one of the main topics in the campaign ahead of the early September elections. The opposition, led by *Smer-SD* and *Republika*, is clearly opposed to the Heger government's Ukrainian policy and will do everything it can to polarize society on this issue and win the support of disaffected citizens, whose discontent may not in fact be related to the government's foreign policy. As evidenced in the public discourse on the Heger government's desire to send MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine at the end of 2022 and early 2023, when the opposition, led by *Smer-SD* and *Republika*, clamored that the caretaker government had limited powers and no right to do so. If *Smer-SD* finds itself in government after the September 2023 elections, Slovakia's eastern policy will once again be discordant. Slovakia may even move closer to Hungary's stance under Orbán on the Russia-Ukraine war.

Although roughly half of Slovak citizens agree with the Heger government's policy on Ukraine, the other half is open to adopting the opposite pro-Russian narrative. The potential "Hungarization" of Slovakia's eastern policy, or the likelihood of it being fulfilled, not to mention the results of the parliamentary elections, will depend, among other things, on the result of the fighting in Ukraine ahead of the September parliamentary elections in Slovakia. Not since 1993 have the results of parliamentary elections in Slovakia been so dependent on the outcome of war as in 2023 and the war in its direct neighborhood.



Western Balkans and Slovak foreign policy 2022 in hindsight

Ján Cingel

■ An overview of the Western Balkans in 2022

The year 2022 was dominated by the unprecedented and unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The consequences of the major global disruption were of course felt in the Western Balkan countries (WB6) too and shaped relations. The WB6 were quick to denounce Russia's aggression against Ukraine and supported the initial resolutions of the UN General Assembly calling on Russia to stop the military invasion and immediately withdraw from Ukrainian territory.¹ But when it came to imposing sanctions on Russia in line with the EU and US sanction mechanisms they were much slower and there was a lack of unity.

Indeed Montenegro did not impose sanctions until May 2022² and was criticized for being the last NATO member country to do so. There were also serious questions as to the extent to which the government was enforcing the sanctions, having been caught up in the quagmire of internal politics amid the turbulence of 2022. Serbia is still resisting pressure from EU and other Western partners to impose the sanctions against Russia, as is Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH).³ The Serbian government has chosen not to take part

¹ See "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 March 2022," ES-11/1, March 2, 2022. Available online: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/tmp/8064557.31391907.html> (accessed on March 5, 2023); "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 24 March 2022," ES-11/2, March 24, 2022. Available online: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/301/67/PDF/N2230167.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

² Initial announcements as early as March 2022, but the technical launching took longer than expected.

³ As of February 28, 2023.

in the sanctions against Russia, but the situation in BIH is different. The federal BIH level, representing (the majority of) the country's Bosniaks and Croats, supports the sanctions but Republika Srpska, representing the majority of Serbs in the country, vetoed the sanctions against Russia. Sanctions are a federal competence and cannot be delegated to a lower rung. As a result, BIH, thanks to Republika Srpska, is one of only two countries in Europe, west of Belarus, that have not imposed sanctions against Russia over its aggression against Ukraine. The other country is Serbia. This stance is out of kilter with foreign policy in EU member countries, despite both Serbia and BIH having declared that EU membership is a strategic foreign policy goal.

All in all, when looking back at 2022, despite the progress achieved in Albania, Kosovo,⁴ Montenegro and North Macedonia, as acknowledged in the European Commission progress reports for 2022,⁵ the dominant political and economic characteristics of the WB6 are stagnation, emigration (especially among young people and/or skilled workers), state capture by ethno-nationalist authoritarian leaders, the omnipresent corruption and deadlock on the frozen conflicts in BIH and Kosovo. Many of these problems were exacerbated in 2022 – especially the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo that again escalated over car license plates and personal identity documents.

■ Outstanding issues that resonated in the Western Balkans in the year 2022

Apart from Russia's aggression in Ukraine, there was a series of disruptive events and activities that contributed to the instability in the Western Balkans. These were either the result of external actors exploiting ingrained problems and divisions in the region or among the public in certain countries or of internal actors with their own malign agendas using hybrid tools and means to achieve their goals.

⁴ Slovakia does not officially recognize the independent state of Kosovo; however, in this analysis Kosovo will be referred to as a sovereign state as it is recognized as such by the majority of EU member countries.

⁵ See Progress report published under Strategy and Reports at https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en (accessed on March 3, 2023).

The hybrid threats disrupting the stability and undermining the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan region were the subject of a research project by the Strategic Analysis think tank supported by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. It summarized the threats and connected the dots between various state and non-state actors attempting to capitalize on the instability in the Western Balkans.⁶

While the main problems in the region are endogenous, many were exacerbated by malign Russian influence seeking to weaken or simply embarrass the EU and NATO in their own "backyard." Russia's trade with the WB6 is small, but its media, diplomatic influence and Orthodox kinship penetrates deep into some Balkan communities. Most importantly, it is by far the biggest energy supplier and so could cause severe economic and societal damage should it turn off the gas taps. Serbia and BIH are 90 per cent and 100 per cent dependent on Russian gas.⁷

When analyzing developments in 2022, we can identify three flashpoints in the Balkans that threatened the region's overall stability: the risk of the Bosnian Serb entity in northern Kosovo making good on its threat to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the political instability in Montenegro.

Managed tension, which is a tool favored by some political leaders in the region (escalate to de-escalate) for maintaining power and control over narratives, always has the potential to veer out of control. Especially where there are malign external actors, such as Russia, that could exploit the tension and turn a controlled escalation into chaos with unpredictable outcomes for security in the region. The possibility of armed conflict in the region still cannot be ruled out. War is just being waged by different means. The potential for conflict is not limited to regular armies and security forces; there are plenty of guns in private hands in BIH, Serbia and Kosovo. Too many people across the region are being brainwashed by populist irresponsible political leaders and consequently feel threatened and that they need to protect themselves from their ethnically or religiously distinct neighbors.

⁶ See more on Analysis of hybrid threats in the Western Balkans region – implications for Slovakia project by Strategic Analysis online: <https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/analysis-of-hybrid-threats-in-the-western-balkans-region-implications-for-slovakia/> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

⁷ P. Taylor, "Seize the geopolitical moment: the Western Balkans and European security," Friends of Europe, December 7, 2022, p. 25. Available online: <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/seize-the-geopolitical-moment-the-western-balkans-and-european-security/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

The exodus of predominantly younger people of working age from the region has raised the average age across the region, and older people tend to be more conservative and get their news from traditional state-controlled media such as TV or radio. On the other hand, members of the younger generation who have decided to remain in the region too often fall prey to extreme nationalist influencers and groups using modern communication channels to build on fears and uncertainties by blaming everything on “those who are different.”

Northern Kosovo saw tension escalate in the fall of 2022 over Kosovo car license plates, when the local Serb community refused to use the plates issued by the Kosovar authorities and Kosovo Serbs boycotted Kosovar institutions. In protest they resigned from their jobs in the Kosovo public administration and law enforcement. The situation escalated, with roadblocks being erected around the Serbian majority municipalities in the North, and the Kosovar law enforcement bodies and KFOR mission trying to maintain public order. Senior politicians in both countries exacerbated the already heated situation with their uncompromising nationalist rhetoric. Serbia poured more oil on the fire when it requested NATO to allow them to deploy up to 1,000 Serbian soldiers and police officers in northern Kosovo. Naturally NATO allies rejected the request in January 2023.

Some KFOR contributing countries, such as Croatia, North Macedonia and Slovenia, boosted troop numbers in order to keep the peace and ensure civilian safety in Kosovo regardless of ethnic background. Croatia for instance tripled its numbers.⁸ It is also worth noting that a handful of countries that do not recognize the independent state of Kosovo have sent troops to the mission – the most prominent being the EU and NATO members Greece and Romania, with over 100 soldiers and 65 soldiers respectively. In addition, outside NATO, Armenia and Moldova sent 40 soldiers each.⁹ Slovakia withdrew from KFOR before the end of 2010 in a move that was widely seen as hasty and flawed at best.

The possibility of Slovak soldiers returning to the NATO mission in Kosovo despite Slovakia’s non-recognition policy have been variously discussed and analyzed, including in the January 2022 SAIS Johns Hopkins University-led

⁸ “Croatia’s strengthening of its KFOR presence sparked tensions in the region,” *European Western Balkans*, May 18, 2021. Available online: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/05/18/croatias-strengthening-of-its-kfor-presence-sparked-tensions-in-the-region/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

⁹ See “Facts and Figures,” Kosovo Force. Available online: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/10/pdf/2022-10-KFOR-Placemat.pdf (accessed on March 5, 2023).

paper entitled “From crisis to convergence: a strategy to tackle instability in the Balkans at its source.”¹⁰ It has been argued that Slovakia’s position on Kosovo’s independence may resonate, especially with the Serbian minority in Kosovo who would trust Slovak (or Greek or Romanian) soldiers to protect their cities, villages and places of worship, which could improve the safety and security of everyone in Kosovo. However, given the Slovak political situation with early elections looming in the second half of 2023, the situation is unlikely to change any time soon. Nonetheless this highly symbolic act is being considered by some actors and the next Slovak government should do likewise.

The tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina decreased somewhat after peaking in December 2021. Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik appeared to be shellshocked by Russia’s blatant violation of international norms and invasion of Ukraine. In the first months of 2022, he was “missing in action,” trying to cope with the reality of one patron, Russia, engaging in a full-fledged war and another, Serbia, holding a general election in April 2022. However, he quickly jumped on the Russian narratives and continued to engage in inflammatory rhetoric in pursuit of votes ahead of the BIH general elections in October 2022. Before the elections and in the midst of Russia’s aggressive war, he met with Putin in Moscow in September 2022, probably to solidify his home support and power base. Tensions rose again at the end of 2022 when Dodik organized the “traditional” public celebrations on January 9th, “Republika Srpska Day,” marking the day in 1992 when Bosnian Serbs declared their own state in Bosnia and Herzegovina, triggering a devastating four-year war in which over 100,000 people were killed and millions were left homeless. In 2015 BIH’s constitutional court banned the holiday, ruling that it discriminated against the other ethnic parts of BIH. Despite the ban, Dodik still celebrates the day, holding large military style parades. In 2022 the parade took place in Banja Luka, the capital of Republika Srpska. But in January 2023 the parade was held in Eastern Sarajevo, a part of Republika Srpska that is surrounded by neighborhoods and villages inhabited by Bosniaks and other ethnic groups. This apparent provocation was aimed at whipping up ethno-nationalist tensions during the long process of forming the BIH government and the governments of the other entities following the elections. The reaction from the EU was decidedly weak, consisting of a rebuke for Dodik’s Moscow visit and the January 9th parade.

¹⁰ “From crisis to convergence. A strategy to tackle instability in the Balkans at its source,” January 11, 2022. Available online: https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final-Production-Version-From-Crisis-to-Convergence_Final.pdf (accessed on March 5, 2023).

In 2022 Montenegro staggered from one political crisis to another. Once the perceived WB6 frontrunner in EU integration, it succumbed to internal political struggles following the elections in the summer of 2020, with the political situation further deteriorating in 2021. It was thought that the way out of the political stalemate was a minority government, but that did not materialize. Instead, a reshuffle led to a vote of no-confidence in the pro-Serbian government led by Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapić on February 7, 2022. A broad coalition was formed with pro-European Dritan Abazović at its head that took office on April 28th. But even that did not last long, falling in a no-confidence vote on August 20, 2022. Since then the caretaker government under the leadership of Dritan Abazović has been awaiting a political solution.¹¹ Presidential elections will be held on March 19, 2023, and expectations are high.

The political polarization has led to interethnic tension, previously unknown in Montenegro. Some communities have started more vocally declaring allegiance to ethnic groups, especially Serbs and Montenegrins, and clashed on multiple occasions in 2021 and 2022. Ethno-nationalist and populist politicians have (ab-)used these (newly found) interethnic divisions to gain political points in the ongoing internal political struggle that has lasted for well over two and half years.

Two other issues deserve attention in this review of the year 2022 in the Western Balkans. The first is the *Serbia-led Open Balkan Initiative summit* of September 2022 in Belgrade where three participating countries, Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia, signed new agreements expanding cooperation. The agreements relate to food security, energy and mining cooperation, an inter-operational civil emergencies plan and cinematography and audiovisual activities. Before the summit, Abazović, then prime minister of Montenegro, attempted to persuade some coalition partners that Montenegro should join the initiative. However, most of Montenegro's political elites consider it a Serbian project aimed at strengthening influence in the region and duplicating EU integration, as the standards diverge from those required of EU candidate countries. That also discourages the Bosniak leadership in the BIH Trio Presidency from participating in the initiative, although it would be welcomed by the Republika Srpska leadership. Kosovo is not even in the game, as Serbia does not recognize its independence, and the current Kosovo

¹¹ As of February 2023.

administration is highly suspicious of the true nature of the initiative's goals. There is a lack of clarity on where the EU stands on this issue – some countries supporting it out of their own interests, such as Hungary, while others are more nuanced or even dismissive. Slovakia should analyze the impact of the Open Balkan Initiative on EU integration efforts in the Western Balkans, consider its own position, and then clearly articulate that to partners in the EU and in the Balkans. It should lead the efforts and discussions within the EU to try to find a common position on the Open Balkan Initiative to ensure it does not conflict with the EU enlargement process.

The second issue, *illegal migration*, echoed strongly in Slovakia in the fall of 2022. In that year the number of illegal migrants arriving via the “Balkan route” and apprehended in Slovakia far exceeded those in 2015/16, when irregular migration peaked in the rest of Europe. It caused a slight rift in relations between Slovakia and its western neighbors – Austria and Czechia – who opted to partially close the border and install border controls in response to the high influx of illegal migrants entering from Slovakia and Hungary. The source of this “2022 wave of illegal migration” was twofold. The first was the weak controls on the Bulgarian–Turkish border, via which the predominantly Syrian and Afghan migrants were trying to get out of Turkey, through Bulgaria and Serbia, and on to Western Europe. The second source was Serbia. Its visa-free regime and direct flights with various countries in Asia and Africa (that do not recognize Kosovo independence) attracted people from Iran, Pakistan, India but also Morocco, Tunisia, Burundi and Turkey, who could fly to Belgrade without a visa and then attempt to cross the Schengen border into Hungary. Often they were successful. Towards the end of 2022 the EU put pressure on Serbia to cancel at least some of the visa-free regimes and align its policy with the EU's visa policy on third countries.¹²

¹² S. Dragojlo, “Serbia ends visa-free regimes with Tunisia and Burundi,” *Balkan Insight*, October 25, 2022. Available online: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/10/25/serbia-ends-visa-free-regimes-with-tunisia-and-burundi/#:~:text=The%20main%20countries%20from%20which,and%20India%2C%20but%20also%20Turkey> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

■ EU enlargement: A merit-based process or a strategic question?

The accession of the Western Balkan countries is a long-term strategic priority of the European Union. One can argue that several enlargement policy milestones were passed in 2022. According to EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi,¹³ the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally changed the world and the European security environment. More than ever before, enlargement policy has proved to be a geostrategic investment in long-term peace, security and stability. Arguably, last year the EU overcame several enlargement deadlocks and delivered momentous political messages that reflected its genuine commitment to making full EU membership reality for all six Western Balkan countries. EU leaders reaffirmed their unequivocal commitment to EU enlargement at the Tirana summit with WB6. However, despite the significant developments in enlargement policy, there are few tangible results, especially for the citizens of the Western Balkan region. In fact the accession process has become more onerous and the EU seems ever more distant. That could encourage some to build closer ties with other actors.

One of the most significant milestones of 2022 was reached in July under the Czech Presidency at the intergovernmental conference with Albania and North Macedonia. Following the two-year-long deadlock sprung by the first French veto and by Bulgaria later preventing them from advancing in the integration process, both countries were finally given the green-light to open accession negotiations.

In September 2022 the EU launched its screening process, which is the first step in accession negotiations for both countries. However, the final deal, which drove Bulgaria to lift its veto, left a bitter taste in the mouth of Macedonian leaders as progress on its EU path is still dependent on satisfying Bulgarian demands. That could prove challenging as constitutional amendments are required. As of February 2023, the North Macedonian constitution still has to be amended and with it the prospect of further delay. Moreover Bulgaria is facing yet another early election on April 2, 2023, its fifth in the

past three years. Meanwhile, there is no political or indeed public consensus on constitutional amendments in North Macedonia. Hence, it may be premature to declare the July summit a success.

To cast more light on this requires us to briefly return to the origins of the bilateral dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, namely the deadlock caused by Bulgaria vetoing the opening of accession talks in the unanimous vote by member countries. In fact the dispute is mainly a consequence of disagreements on shared history and cultural issues that go far beyond these events, but that is not the topic of this chapter. Bulgaria used its veto power in response to North Macedonia's alleged non-compliance with the Friendship Agreement¹⁴ signed by Bulgaria and North Macedonia in 2017. Bulgaria accused North Macedonia of disrespecting the shared culture and history and argued that it should officially recognize the Bulgarian minority and the "origin" of the Macedonian language. It is worth noting that this occurred only two years after the 27-year-long dispute with Greece was resolved by signing the Prespa Agreement, which led to the country's name change.

In an attempt to resolve the stalemate and Bulgaria's veto, in 2022 Emanuel Macron introduced the French proposal during the French Presidency of the Council of the EU. Besides the general disappointment among the public and political elites in North Macedonia, the veto affected Albania's progress on its EU path, despite both governments having delivered the expected results. That is because North Macedonia and Albania had been coupled together under the parallel track approach. Slovakia was against decoupling, as proposed by several states and the European Commission, arguing that the two countries should stick to the initial plan of progressing together. The aim of the proposal was to lift Bulgaria's veto and find a solution to the ongoing bilateral dispute. The French Proposal therefore contained several points requiring constitutional amendments to the preamble. Although the National Assembly of North Macedonia officially approved the French Proposal, it has not yet garnered the necessary support from two-thirds of the MPs to amend the constitution.¹⁵ Overall, the case of North Macedonia shows that compliance with EU conditionality need not guarantee approval of a country's advance on its EU path.

¹³ See video of commissioner Oliver Varhelyi. Available online: https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/committee-on-foreign-affairs_20221012-1315-COMMITTEE-AFET (accessed on March 5, 2023).

¹⁴ "Bulgaria and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Treaty of friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia," Skopje, August 1, 2017. Available online: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/No%20Volume/55013/Part/I-55013-08000002804f5d3c.pdf> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

¹⁵ As of February 2023.

In 2022 the European Council made the unexpected but substantial decision of granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, while Georgia became a potential candidate. In doing so the EU officially recognized that the future of these countries lies within the EU. Admittedly, granting candidacy is merely the first key step toward EU membership and joining can take years. Rapid progress and overall success are not guaranteed, as the case of WB6 demonstrates quite clearly. However, the decision sent a strong, albeit symbolic political message, considering the current circumstances and immediate need for stability and peace.

Yet, granting candidacy to Ukraine and Moldova was not equally positively received everywhere. Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered immense disillusionment at being neglected despite six years having passed since it submitted its official application to join the EU in 2016. Although BIH had not delivered the needed reforms, it was seen as a betrayal by the public and politicians alike. Particularly given that Bosnia and Herzegovina had also been affected by war. The decision not to grant candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina provoked criticism across the EU and WB6. Later, in October, the European Commission recommended that member states award candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina under the condition that in addition to the original 14 priorities in the 2019 report, it implements a further eight steps pertaining to the judiciary, rule of law, fight against corruption and organized crime, migration and fundamental rights.

Finally, in December 2022, the member states unanimously decided to grant candidate status to BIH as well. The European Union had done its homework, while trusting that the country's political elites to show commitment to advancing along the EU pathway. According to Josep Borrell,¹⁶ the decision was taken for the people of BIH and now it is up to political leaders to turn the ambition into reality through decisive reforms. To sum up, BIH's newly acquired candidate status will be predominantly perceived as a political message and means of incentivizing further reforms in the country. It was high time the step was taken, given the declining support for EU membership among citizens, disappointment over Ukraine and Moldova being granted

¹⁶ "EU candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina: a message to the people and a tasking for politicians," *EEAS Press Team*, December 19, 2022. Available online: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-candidate-status-bosnia-and-herzegovina-message-people-and-tasking-politicians-0_en (accessed on March 5, 2023).

an accelerated process, the recent political turmoil and last but not least, the security threat invoked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the question remains, "has the EU missed the momentum of the candidacy being able to trigger changes in BIH?"

During the Czech Presidency, the inaugural meeting on the French initiative, the European Political Community (EPC), was held in Prague on October 6th. Forty-four European countries attended, including all EU members and the WB6. Although there was an expectation that the summit would consider enlargement and the whole process, it did not in fact do so. The greatest achievement of the very first summit of the EPC was that it actually took place and that so many European leaders attended.

■ The year 2022 in the Western Balkans in hindsight and looking ahead to upcoming Slovak foreign policy challenges

This assessment of 2022 would not be complete without mentioning some of the other key events that shaped the region. Given the Yearbook's focus, we will now highlight some of the foreign affairs aspects of bilateral relations between Slovakia and the WB6.

The Western Balkans remained a foreign policy priority for the Slovak Republic in 2022. Senior officials at the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs paid a number of state visits to Western Balkan countries and spoke in favor of the need for EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. In practical terms though, common sense tells us that "the policy priority is where the money lies," which is not fully convergent with the declared priority. Moreover 2022 was the last year of Western Balkan eligibility for Slovakia's Official Development Assistance (*SlovakAid*). In 2022 it was decided that the WB6 would be excluded from the main grant scheme. So at the beginning of 2023 the region was no longer a regional priority for *SlovakAid*. Slovak embassies in the region can still award mini-grants to local recipients under the *SlovakAid* brand, but with a much more limited and localized impact. "Delegated development cooperation" comes under *SlovakAid* as well, but it is not a systemic tool directly associated with the Slovak Republic as the main donor enabling change/development through allocating money. This type of mechanism does not have such an impact both in terms of results/outcomes and visibility of the Slovak brand.

The new medium-term Official Development Assistance (ODA) strategy for the years 2024–2030 is currently under discussion and should be adopted before the end of 2023. The Western Balkans is not among the eligible regions for development assistance. That is logical to the extent that the Western Balkans is now much more developed; nonetheless *SlovakAid* could still support technical assistance and assistance within the EU and NATO accession processes. That could perhaps be done through mechanisms other than development assistance/cooperation, but assistance should be provided to the region. The funding decrease will automatically reduce the visibility of Slovakia and Slovak organizations in a region that has been a Slovak foreign policy priority region for decades.

Another, related, questionable decision is the removal of the economic diplomat posting at the Slovak embassy in Belgrade, Serbia. Over the past three years the foreign ministry has pushed for more substantive economic diplomacy to improve Slovak exports to key regions around the world. That is a logical and important goal in modern diplomacy. One of the regions where there is room for improvement in trade, export and investment is the Western Balkans, especially given its relative geographical closeness and, therefore, lower logistics costs, among other things. However, the Slovak embassies in the region are understaffed and struggle to cope with the daily workload, including consular affairs, as the region is becoming a popular tourist destination among Slovaks. That leaves less room for pursuing business opportunities around the region. The last economic diplomat post in the region – in Belgrade – was terminated under savings measures, despite contradicting the overall policy goal, which is to achieve higher trade volumes, ideally export surpluses and identify investment opportunities for Slovak businesses. There should be at least one (ideally two) “roving” economic diplomats, perhaps stationed in Belgrade with responsibility for economic diplomacy with the WB6.

This goes hand in hand with yet another foreign policy priority – support for EU and NATO enlargement – including in the Western Balkans region. Foreign ministry heads were speaking in the right places at the right time and lending importance and credit to the EU enlargement changes that took place in 2022. Prime Minister Eduard Heger attended the first ever EU–Western Balkan summit, which was actually held in the Balkans, in Tirana, Albania, on December 6th. Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok attended the Prespa Forum Dialogue in Ohrid, North Macedonia, on June 17th, where he expressed support for opening negotiation talks with Albania and North Macedonia. Then on July 19th, State Secretary Ingrid Brocková attended the intergovernmental conference on the EU accessions of Albania and North Macedonia, under the

Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, which started the overdue process of talks with these two countries. Later on September 7, 2022, President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová visited North Macedonia on her first official visit to the Western Balkans to support the EU integration process in the region and to encourage them on their European pathways. North Macedonia was deliberately selected as it is the most promising, yet most problematic, candidate country in the region. The Office of the President of the Slovak Republic departed from the foreign policy tradition of visiting the biggest country first – in this case Serbia – partly because the Office of the President of Serbia had invited the Slovak president. But it also sent a clear message that the president was unwilling to “reward” Serbia for its behavior in the region and for not being a constructive partner to the EU.

One cannot talk about the support for the Western Balkans’ EU integration without mentioning the Slovak experience and know-how that is shared through the National Convention on the EU in Albania and North Macedonia, organized by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association in partnership with local partners and key stakeholders.

The National Convention on EU integration in Albania (2021–2023)¹⁷ is organized by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association in cooperation with the European Movement of Albania and continued in 2022 with working group meetings on negotiating Chapters 1, 3, 11, 12, 20, 23, and 24. Altogether 11 working group meetings were held during the year with the aim of helping Albania on its EU integration path through sharing Slovak experience and know-how. The project is supported by *SlovakAid*.

The National Convention on the EU in North Macedonia (2017–2022) is organized by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association in cooperation with the European Movement of North Macedonia with the support of *SlovakAid* and USAID.¹⁸ In 2022 the fifth plenary conference was held at the Parliament of North Macedonia. There were also five working group meetings on negotiating Chapters 1, 3, 4 and six to share Slovak experience on areas such as justice reform, agriculture and regional development.

¹⁷ For more see the website of the National Convention platform <http://eurokonventa.al/en/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

¹⁸ For more information about the National Convention on the EU in North Macedonia, please visit the platform website nkeu.mk (accessed on March 5, 2023).

Bratislava was the location of high-level discussions about the Western Balkans and European integration as part of the GLOBSEC 2022 panel discussion “Now or never: unlocking the European future for Western Balkans,” attended by President of Montenegro Milo Đukanović, Prime Minister of Kosovo Albin Kurti, Prime Minister of North Macedonia Dimitar Kovachevski and EU Special Representative for the Belgrade–Prishtina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák.¹⁹

Albania appointed its ninth president since the reestablishment of democracy in the country. Former defense chief Bajram Begaj took office in July 2022. Presidents are appointed by the National Council (the Albanian parliament) and are primarily ceremonial. Last year Albania was shaken by social tensions that led to a series of protests and demonstrations, starting in March and escalating in August and then November. The protests were over fuel and food prices, the rising cost of living, poverty and the emigration of predominantly young people to the UK, resulting in a mini migration crisis. The protesters appealed to the government to tackle poverty, steep prices and corruption. On a more positive note, Albania finally started its accession negotiations for EU membership, as explained in detail above.

The main event in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022 was the elections that took place at all levels of governance on October 2nd. The elections were marked by the controversial decision by the international community’s high representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Christian Schmidt, who, using his Bonn powers amended the election law just hours after the polling stations had closed on election day, claiming that his steps improved the functionality of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁰ He was criticized for this, especially by Bosniak leaders and some sections of civil society in BiH as well as experts abroad. His steps were, however, supported by the leading international actors responsible for peace and stability in BiH. Nonetheless, the damage was done, further harming the reputation of the Office of the High Representative in BiH as an impartial balancer in the country and calling into question his legitimacy.

¹⁹ For more about the Globsec 2022 see <https://forum2022.globsec.org/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMzzy6Dlpa4> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

²⁰ See “Measures to improve federation functionality,” OHR, February 10, 2022. Available online: <http://www.ohr.int/measures-to-improve-federation-functionality/> (accessed on March 5, 2023) as well as “Statement by the High Representative Christian Schmidt: Functionality Package,” February 10, 2022. Available online: <http://www.ohr.int/statement-by-high-representative-christian-schmidt-functionality-package/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

Turning to bilateral relations between Slovakia and BiH in 2022, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Ingrid Brocková, visited BiH on May 25–27th. On June 8th a delegation of the parliamentary Defense and Security Committee, consisting of Juraj Krupa, Gábor Grendel and Anna Andrejiová visited BiH, where they met with the (then) defense minister of BiH and commander of the EUFOR/Althea mission and visited Slovak soldiers deployed on the mission. In October a new Slovak ambassador to BiH was appointed. Having reached the end of his tenure, Ambassador Martin Kačo, an excellent Balkanist, was replaced with another professional Slovak diplomat with a good knowledge of the Balkan region, Ambassador Roman Hlobeň.

Kosovo was in the spotlight in 2022 amid the deterioration of relations with Serbia and the escalation of tension over Kosovo car license plates, as described above.

A potential solution to the long-lasting conflict between Serbia and Kosovo is the Franco-German Proposal aimed at supporting the EU-led normalization dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, resolving the dispute and facilitating progress on EU membership. However, its success and thereby conflict resolution depends firstly on political will and secondly on the diplomatic skills of all parties involved.

Kosovo has met all its visa liberalization benchmarks, but the EU still has to deliver on its side of the deal. In November 2022 the EU agreed that visa liberalization for citizens of Kosovo would enter into force on January 1, 2024. The date barely raised an eyebrow in Kosovo, as it had met the technical criteria years ago and the move was seen as long overdue.

In addition the National Assembly of Kosovo approved a resolution requesting the Government of Kosovo to begin NATO accession negotiations, a move that did not go down well in Serbia nor among some NATO members that do not recognize Kosovo. In December 2022 Kosovo formally applied for candidacy status to the EU to prove its readiness and dedication to achieving a European future. But the fact that five member states, including Slovakia, still do not recognize Kosovo’s independence impedes efforts to progress in integration.

Bilateral relations between Kosovo and Slovakia are still limited owing to the fact that Slovakia does not recognize Kosovo. But that did not preclude unofficial visits on both sides. First, Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger met with President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani on the sidelines of the Prague summit of the European Political Community. Second, in October, Minister of Defense

of Slovakia Jaroslav Nad' visited Kosovo to commemorate the victims of the tragedy in which a plane carrying 42 Slovak soldiers returning from duty with the KFOR mission crashed in 2006. The visit was not an official state visit but Nad' met unofficially with leaders of the Kosovo administration. Later, in November, Faruk Geci visited Slovakia at the invitation of the Strategic Analysis Think Tank, Director of Policy at the Ministry of Defense of Kosovo, where he met unofficially with his counterpart Martin Sklenár, Slovakia's Director General of Defense Policy.²¹

In Montenegro, besides the deepening polarization and political scuffles, local elections were held on October 23rd, in which the parties in the current government coalition performed well, despite it having fallen several months previously. Support declined in the regions for the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), the party of the current president of Montenegro, Milo Djukanović, who lost a considerable number of municipal council seats. Hence the upcoming presidential elections on March 19, 2023, may present a challenge to the long-standing ruling party in Montenegro. Incumbent President Djukanović running for reelection.

The dynamic bilateral relations between Montenegro and Slovakia continued at the same pace in 2022, with the Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok visiting Montenegro on June 15–16, 2022. He conveyed Slovakia's support for Montenegro's EU integration. He met with President Milo Djukanović and Speaker of Parliament Danijela Djurović. President Milo Djukanović visited Slovakia in June 2022 when he attended the GLOBSEC 2022 conference.

In North Macedonia there was a government reshuffle at the turn of the year and for most of 2022 it was embroiled in a disagreement over history and identity with neighboring Bulgaria. The government was willing to amend article one of the constitution on minorities to include Bulgarian and other minorities, as requested by Bulgaria. However, it requires a constitutional majority, which has so far proved lacking.²² The government needs at least six votes from the opposition, but in the summer of 2022 the latter swore it would not support such a move. The government can expect a great deal of political bargaining in 2023 as well. The nationalist opposition organized a series of

²¹ More on discussion "Current defense and security challenges in the Western Balkans," organized by the Strategic Analysis think-tank available at <https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/current-defense-and-security-challenges-in-the-western-balkans/> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

²² As of February 2023.

demonstrations in July and during the October visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Protests rocked the current administration in response to the sharp price increases and amid general dissatisfaction with the snail-pace of the adoption of reforms and changes needed to address social and economic problems.

Bilateral relations between Slovakia and North Macedonia were dynamic as well, with the above-mentioned visit by the Slovak President and Ivan Korčok's visit of June 2022, when he attended the 2nd annual international conference of the Prespa Forum. In May 2022 State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia Zoran Popov visited Slovakia, where he met with his counterpart State Secretary Martin Klus.

In Serbia parliamentary and presidential elections were held in April 2022. Although Aleksandar Vučić was comfortably reelected as president, his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) lost its absolute majority in parliament but is still the dominant party in the country. The opposition remains weak and divided. The extreme right and ultra-nationalist opposition is in ascent, causing concern. The negotiations to form a government coalition dragged on until October, when the new government cabinet under the "old" Prime Minister, Ana Brnabić, took office.

Since Serbia is the largest and economically strongest WB6 country, it naturally attracts the most attention from EU countries. Serbia's foreign affairs moves were closely monitored as President Vučić's "multivector" foreign policy has changed little since the Russian invasion and the annexation of parts of Ukraine. It acted as if it was still a non-aligned country that could play the great powers off against each other. But instead of there being just the Soviet Union and the West, there are now many more players Serbia can and tries to play with – the EU, the US, Russia, China, Turkey and other smaller ones. Appeasing Vučić's Serbia helps no-one, including the people of Serbia.

Furthermore, Serbia is projecting its malign influence on its neighbors, which does little for the region's stability. The EU should be much more assertive toward Serbia and play on, for example, Vučić's fear of missing out, as was the case in the run up to the Tirana EU–WB6 summit on December 6th. Vučić announced that he would not be attending the summit in protest at the EU's response to Nenad Rašić's appointment as a Kosovo government minister, which he strongly denounced. Hours before the summit, however, he changed his mind, probably out of fear that he might miss out on the opportunity and the financial assistance for Serbia that the EU promised to the WB6 to weather the ongoing energy crisis.

The media in Serbia are firmly in the hands of the ruling party – spreading talk of war about Kosovo and repeating Russian narratives about Ukraine, which merely serves to deepen tensions in society. In November 2022 *Russia Today Balkans* launched operations from Belgrade joining another Russian media outlet *Sputnik* that has been active in Serbia since 2014. Apart from that Russia owns one of Serbia's most prominent Novosti newspapers. The propaganda is affecting public opinion and Serbs are the least enthusiastic nation about EU membership in the Balkan region. According to the annual Balkan Barometer in 2022, only 31 per cent of Serbs think EU membership would be good for them and over 41 per cent think Serbia will never join the EU.²³

In 2022 Serbia became a safe haven for Russians fleeing their country due to the war and, later in the year, mobilization. As many as 140,000 Russians live in Serbia, most of them in Belgrade.²⁴ Serbia is one of the very few countries to maintain direct flights with Moscow. The flights are always full despite the very high prices and many Russians use them to travel onward from Serbia to Europe. Also, according to the Serbian Business Registry Agency,²⁵ over 4,200 Russian-owned companies were registered in Serbia in 2022 alone, compared with only 159 in 2021. Many Russians have moved their businesses to Serbia so as to avoid the bans and sanctions imposed on Russia. Serbia is also being used for the reexport of goods to Russia and possibly to evade sanctions. Serbia's exports to Russia rose by 16 per cent on 2021 (\$1.19 bil. vs \$0,998 bil.),²⁶ which is the highest figure in the history of modern Serbia (since 2006). All these aspects should be carefully considered when evaluating the role of Serbia in the Western Balkans.

²³ See Balkan Public Barometer website for more. Available online: <https://www.rcc.int/balkan-barometer/results/2/public> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

²⁴ Numbers vary in the sources as people come and go.

²⁵ See the official Serbian Business Registry Agency website for more: <https://apr.gov.rs/registers/companies.1786.html> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

²⁶ See "Serbia exports to Russia," Trading Economies. Available online: <https://tradingeconomics.com/serbia/exports/russia> (accessed on March 2, 2023).

■ Instead of a conclusion

To conclude, the year 2022 in the Western Balkans was undoubtedly one of key events and noteworthy milestones, especially in terms of the countries' EU aspirations. However, they still face the same EU integration challenges. Besides the internal domestic turmoil in practically all the WB6 in 2022 and questions over alignment with the EU joint actions against Russia, the same old concerns reared their head in EU progress assessments – the judiciary, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organized crime, media freedom and freedom of speech. Finally, amid the exceptional circumstances of 2022, the EU sent a clear message that the future of the WB6 lies in the EU. It wants to be perceived as reliable and the region's main partner, not just in further integration. Regardless of the EU's strategic intentions, it undoubtedly succeeded in overcoming the most severe deadlocks, and further progress will depend primarily on local elites and their willingness and ability to deliver the necessary reforms.

The Western Balkan region is geographically close to Slovakia and should unquestionably remain a Slovak foreign policy priority. However, beyond the rhetoric it should be treated as a genuine priority in terms of resources – financial and personnel.

Russia's war in Ukraine has brought about many significant changes in the geopolitical landscape of Europe. It also caused a rift in the Visegrad Group, with Hungary hesitant to send more substantive assistance Ukraine and stopping short of declaring support for the administration in Kyiv. But many of the arguments emanating from Budapest on the war in its eastern neighbors are very similar to those coming from Moscow. Slovakia is currently presiding over the V4 group, which is an increasingly challenging task. The V4 is probably not the best political platform for fostering cooperation in the Western Balkan countries, as Hungary has its own interests in the region and is pursuing them relentlessly, investing significant amounts of money, as well as political and diplomatic capital. It tends to support like-minded autocratic wannabes like Vučić in Serbia or Dodik in BiH, who copy Orbán and his policies. Such an axis of assistance and mutual political support does not inspire confidence among EU member countries more skeptical of enlargement policy.

Slovakia should follow its neighbors – Austria and Poland – and join the Berlin Process, which is currently the most practical initiative for the Balkans, with the most tangible results such as a €1 billion energy support package announced at the Berlin Process summit in November 2022 in Berlin. The Berlin

Process appears to be fostering true regional cooperation in the Western Balkans that is less exclusive and opaque than the Open Balkan Initiative.

Slovakia has been contributing to the stability of the region through active diplomacy, development cooperation and international crisis management missions. It will be crucial for the Slovak foreign ministry to keep pace of developments in the Western Balkans, which have picked up speed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Underestimating that could hurt us economically, diplomatically and in "hard security" terms, as witnessed during the "migration crisis" last year and the massive disinformation operations proliferating in our info-sphere.



Matej Šimalčík

Slovakia and the Asia-Pacific amidst the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Over the years, Slovakia's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region has been shaped by a combination of international (structural) and domestic (political) factors. As highlighted in previous *Yearbooks*,¹ Slovakia's position in global value chains, along with the political preferences of various domestic stakeholders, have significantly influenced the geographical and thematic dimensions of its Asia-Pacific policy.

The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the political changes resulting from the February 2020 general election marked the beginning of a transition away from a traditionally pragmatic, economy-centric approach to East Asia, particularly China. This shift was aimed at striking a balance between economic interests, national security, democratic values and human rights. The new approach follows on from the growing realization that the geopolitical and geo-economic focal points were gradually shifting away from the transatlantic to the Indo-Pacific region.

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Given that Slovakia is one of the countries in NATO's and EU's eastern flank that borders Ukraine, it was inevitable that Putin's aggression would profoundly affect all dimensions of Slovak foreign and security policy. Slovakia's interactions with the Asia-Pacific states have also been directly and indirectly influenced by these developments.

In general, two main trends have emerged in Slovakia's relations with the Asia-Pacific region, both of which are connected to the repercussions of the Russian aggression:

¹ See e.g. M. Šimalčík, "Slovakia in East Asia: No longer naive, still not committed," in P. Brezáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2020*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2021, pp. 172–88.

- a redirection of Slovak diplomatic efforts toward Ukraine, resulting in less of a focus on the Asia–Pacific region;
- the emergence of new cooperation opportunities, particularly in the defense and humanitarian aid sectors.

■ Decline in attention

Despite several years of progressively acknowledging the significance of the Asia–Pacific region in international affairs,² 2022 saw a notable decline in attention paid to the area.

Slovakia currently lacks a formalized Asia–Pacific strategy or a plan for building relations with individual states in the region. This shortcoming persists despite the creation of a strategic document for the region being identified as a priority in the 2021 foreign-policy plan.³ Consequently, Slovakia’s approach to the region has been marked by improvisation and a lack of coherence.

Three main developments illustrate this decline in attention: the closure of the Slovak embassy in Australia, a lack of engagement under the V4+ format and a minimal number of visits to the region by high-ranking Slovak officials.

In 2022 Slovakia decided to close its embassy in Canberra, which had managed diplomatic relations with Australia, New Zealand and several other Pacific countries. In its place, a new General Consulate was established in Sydney to handle consular relations, while the Tokyo embassy, located nearly 8,000 kilometers away (over 9,000 kilometers from New Zealand), assumed responsibility for the remainder of the diplomatic agenda and relations with other Southern Hemisphere countries.

² See e.g. “Strategic foresight for the foreign and European policy of the Slovak Republic: Risks and opportunities for Slovakia in a transforming world,” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/sk/diplomacia/zahranicna-politika> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

³ “Zahraničná a európska politika Slovenskej republiky v roku 2021: Slovensko a svet v čase pandémie,” [Foreign and European policy of the Slovak Republic in 2021: Slovakia and the world at the time of the pandemic] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/4238286/2021-Zahrani%C4%8Dna-a-%20europska-politika-SR-v-roku-2021.pdf/063025ca-14fa-4298-b240-4ee01c50339b> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

At a December 2022 meeting between State Secretary of the foreign ministry Ingrid Brocková and Australian Ambassador Richard Sadleir, the increase in trade exchanges between Slovakia and Australia was acknowledged. Slovak representatives expressed a desire to attract Australian investments and diversify exports beyond the automotive industry.⁴ However, the closure of the Slovak embassy undermines these aspirations for improved economic relations.

Australia’s growing role as a global security actor should also be considered, particularly given the escalating strategic rivalry between the West and China. At the 2022 NATO Madrid Summit, Australia was elevated to a key Indo-Pacific partner. Additionally, Australia is one of the most active of the non-NATO countries supporting Ukraine’s defense against Russian aggression. The decision to close the Slovak embassy seems short-sighted in light of these developments.

In July 2022 Slovakia assumed the rotating year-long presidency of the Visegrad Four. The presidency program indicated the intention was to “continue cooperation with third partners such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Israel and will seek the possibility of establishing parallel cooperation with other interested countries (e.g., Singapore, India).”⁵

However, despite this declaration, no high-level meetings with Japan or South Korea were arranged under Slovakia’s V4 presidency. This is in contrast to Slovakia’s last V4 presidency (2018/2019), during which several high-level meetings were held under the V4+Japan and V4+South Korea frameworks. The V4+ format has been an important instrument for Slovakia to foster relations with East Asia, enabling engagement with high-level officials from Japan and South Korea, which would prove more challenging if conducted on a strictly bilateral basis. Given the economic importance of both Japan and South Korea to Slovakia, the lack of engagement under the V4+ framework represents a missed opportunity. With the government of Eduard Heger now

⁴ “Ingrid Brocková prijala veľvyslancov Dánska a Austrálie,” [Ingrid Brocková received the ambassadors of Denmark and Australia] *Press release*, Consulate General of the Slovak Republic in Sydney, January 31, 2023. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/gksydney/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=15782429 (accessed on March 20, 2023).

⁵ “Programme of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2022–June 2023),” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=493> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

a caretaker government following a parliamentary vote of no-confidence in December 2022, the chances of rectifying this during the second half of the Slovak V4 presidency seem limited.

Moreover, Slovakia has been relatively passive in developing bilateral relations with Asia-Pacific countries. The few high-profile visits to the region by Slovak officials further underscores the dwindling attention paid to this part of the world. In 2022 the only high-level visits to the Asia-Pacific region were made by State Secretary of the foreign ministry Martin Klus (to Indonesia and Malaysia),⁶ State Secretary of the defense ministry Marian Majer (to Malaysia for the Defense Services Asia expo in Kuala Lumpur)⁷ and Minister of Defense Jaroslav Nad' (to South Korea in September 2022).⁸

■ China, a security threat?

Prior to the war in Ukraine, there was a growing awareness within Slovak foreign and security policy circles of the escalating security risks posed by China and its presence in Slovakia.

⁶ "Martin Klus v Indonézii: Slovensko ponúka unikátne príležitosti aj štvrtej najľudnatejšej krajine sveta," [Martin Klus in Indonesia: Slovakia offers unique opportunities to the fourth most populous country in the world] Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Jakarta, April 22, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/sk/web/jakarta/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4858955 (accessed on March 20, 2023). "Martin Klus v Malajzii: Vďaka obojstrannému záujmu vidím veľký potenciál na posilnenie slovensko-malajzijskej spolupráce a prehĺbenie vzťahov v prospech občanov oboch krajín," [Martin Klus in Malaysia: Thanks to mutual interest, I see great potential for strengthening Slovak-Malaysian cooperation and deepening relations for the benefit of the citizens of both countries] Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Jakarta, April 20, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/sk/web/jakarta/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4856436 (accessed on March 20, 2023).

⁷ "MO SR chce s Malajziou rozvíjať užšie vzťahy v oblasti obrany" [Slovak Ministry of Defense wants to develop closer defense relations with Malaysia] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, March 30, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51287-sk/mo-sr-chce-s-malajziou-rozviat-uzsie-vztahy-v-oblasti-obrany/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

⁸ "Slovensko podpísalo s Južnou Kóreou memorandum o porozumení," [Slovakia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with South Korea] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, September 21, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51992-sk/slovensko-podpisalo-s-juznou-koreou-memorandum-o-porozumeni/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

The "2021 Security Strategy" acknowledged that China was a partner, competitor and a systemic rival, in line with EU policy. It also recognized that at the time Slovakia lacked economic security defense mechanisms, such as inbound investment screening.⁹

The economic security risks associated with China were increasingly highlighted in public communications by Slovak intelligence services. For instance, the 2021 Annual Report of the Slovak Information Service (SIS), published in June 2022, highlighted attempts by Chinese actors to infiltrate and gain influence in the academic and business sectors.¹⁰ Notably, at least 28 academic institutions (universities or Slovak Academy of Sciences research institutes) maintain 136 relationships with Chinese partners, primarily in STEM fields. Nearly 60 per cent of Slovak academic institutions cooperating with China have ties with at least one Chinese university linked to the People's Liberation Army, amounting to 28 per cent of all connections.¹¹

In response to these concerns, Slovakia adopted the "Action Plan for the Coordinated Fight against Hybrid Threats 2022–2024" on March 31, 2022. This cabinet-level security policy planning document was approved just one week after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, with the war significantly accelerating the adoption process.¹² Although the primary motivation was to address subversive Russian activity, the action plan also tackled hybrid threats posed by China, including establishing a due diligence and risk assessment mechanism for universities' international cooperation and enhancing financial transparency. The action plan also reiterates the need for a comprehensive

⁹ "Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky," [Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/4263_210128-bezpecnostna-strategia-sr-2021.pdf (accessed on March 20, 2023).

¹⁰ "Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2021," [Slovak Information Service Report 2021], Slovak Information Service, 2022. Available online: <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

¹¹ M. Šimalčík, A. Kalivoda, "Slovakia: Tech-focused cooperation with hints of thought work," *China Europe Academic Engagement Tracker*, 2022. Available online: <https://academytracker.ceias.eu/articles/5d7SPSPnC72O4D98wKAmjk> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

¹² "Akčný plán koordinácie boja proti hybridným hrozbám posilní odolnosť štátu a spoločnosti voči hybridnému pôsobeniu" [The action plan for coordinating the fight against hybrid threats will strengthen the resistance of the state and society to hybrid action] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, March 31, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51291-sk/akcny-plan-koordinacie-boja-proti-hybridnym-hrozbam-posilni-odolnost-statu-a-spolocnosti-voci-hybridnemu-posobeniu/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

inbound investment screening regime and links it to corporate beneficial ownership transparency.¹³

Although implementation of the risk assessment mechanism for academic international cooperation has been slow, Slovakia did adopt a new FDI screening regime toward the end of the year, which took effect on March 1, 2023. The new law promises a more diligent and fairer system for reviewing inbound investment in Slovakia compared to the previous legal framework.¹⁴

Despite the more nuanced conceptual understanding of the economic hybrid threats linked to China, there have been moves that increase Slovakia's economic dependence on China. Considering Slovakia's position in global value chains, China is a significant source of final demand for intermediary products, even though these products are not directly exported to China. Slovakia's final demand exposure to China accounts for 5.3 per cent of Slovak exports, 83 per cent higher than bilateral exports.¹⁵

This indicates that Slovakia's relations with China are heavily influenced by decisions made in Berlin. Therefore, Slovakia has to maintain an open dialogue with Germany so economic policy on China is more closely aligned with Slovakia's interests.¹⁶ This factor has been largely absent from the domestic debate on China policy.

While the 2021 National Security Strategy acknowledges that economic dependencies on certain states can be exploited as a form of hybrid warfare,¹⁷ Slovakia's dependence on China in fact increased in 2022. A significant factor in the increased exposure to China is the planned investment by Volvo, a subsidiary of Chinese automaker Zhejiang Geely, in the e-mobility sector.

¹³ "Akčný plán koordinácie boja proti hybridným hrozbám 2022 – 2024," [Action plan for coordinating the fight against hybrid threats 2022–2024] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, 2022 Available online: <https://www.nbu.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/AKCNYPPLAN-KOORDINACIE-BOJA-PROTI-HYBRIDNYM-HROZBAM.pdf> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

¹⁴ M. Šimalčík, "Toward a robust screening regime," *Chasing Corrosive Capital*, January 16, 2023. Available online: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/toward-robust-screening-regime-matej-%25C5%25A1imal%25C4%258D%25C3%25ADk/?trackingId=mqZD%2FFI5SXyl%2FusTqplRUw%3D%3D> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

¹⁵ M. Šebeňa, T. Chan, M. Šimalčík, "The China factor: Economic exposures and security implications in an interdependent world," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, March 2023. Available online: https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEIAS_Exposures-paper_FINAL.pdf (accessed on March 20, 2023).

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ "Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky," op. cit.

Interestingly, despite Volvo being owned by a Chinese shareholder, the investment was publicly seen as Swedish rather than Chinese. This suggests a degree of strategic ignorance persists in Slovakia on economic policy and the potential geo-economic implications.

The investment will further increase Slovakia's automotive sector's dependence on China, particularly in the critical e-mobility sector. Even before this investment, automaker Volkswagen Bratislava had already been disproportionately reliant on the Chinese market, generating 25 per cent of its revenue there (as of 2021), more than in Germany or the USA.¹⁸

■ Defense cooperation with Asia-Pacific

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had repercussions beyond Eastern Europe. As the Russian defense industry is primarily fueling the country's war efforts in Ukraine, there has been a decline in Russian military exports, including to Southeast Asia.

Between 2020 and 2021 Russia was the leading arms exporter to Southeast Asia, particularly to Vietnam, and to a lesser extent, Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia.¹⁹ However, due to a combination of factors such as domestic demand in Russia, international sanctions, poor battlefield performance and increasing Chinese influence over Russia, demand for Russian weapons in Southeast Asia is expected to decline.²⁰

With the increasingly tense security environment in Southeast Asia, a growing demand for weapons supplies to countries in the region is anticipated. Given Russia's incapacity to meet this demand, opportunities may arise for other suppliers, including Slovakia.

¹⁸ "Pohľad do spätného zrkadla: Výročná správa 2021," [A look in the rearview mirror: Annual Report 2021] Volkswagen Slovakia, 2022. Available online: https://sk.volkswagen.sk/content/dam/companies/sk_vw_slovakia/podnik/vyrocná_správa_2021_v2.pdf (accessed on March 20, 2023).

¹⁹ I. Storey, "The Russia-Ukraine war and its potential impact on Russia's arms sales to Southeast Asia," ISEAS, May 5, 2022, Available online: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-47-the-russia-ukraine-war-and-its-potential-impact-on-russias-arms-sales-to-southeast-asia-by-ian-storey/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²⁰ Ibid

In this context, it is worth noting that the defense ministry has emerged as a significant driver of interactions with Asian states, demonstrating a growing interest in entering the Asian defense market.

Following the Defense Services Asia expo in Kuala Lumpur attended by state secretary Marian Majer and Slovak companies, reports indicate that Malaysia is considering purchasing 16 to 18 EVA self-propelled howitzers. Further details on the licensing, off-sets and involvement of Malaysian contractors are not yet available. Similar opportunities may arise with Indonesia, which has been expressing interest in defense cooperation with Slovakia for some time.²¹

Opportunities for defense cooperation also exist on the import side, as well as in broader security policy consultation and coordination. During his September 2022 visit to South Korea, defense minister Naď and his Korean counterpart Lee Jong-sup signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the two countries' security dialogue.²² South Korea has also expressed interest in contributing to modernizing the Slovak military,²³ with prospects increasing in light of Western military depletion and production reaching full capacity due to support for Ukrainian defense efforts.²⁴ Potential areas of cooperation include South Korea supplying light training aircraft or drones.²⁵

²¹ F. Hardman Lea, "Southeast Asia, the market for Slovak defence exports?," Institute for Central Europe, 2022, Available online: <http://iceoz.eu/en/southeast-asia-the-market-for-slovak-defence-exports/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²² "Slovensko podpísalo s Južnou Kóreou memorandum o porozumení," [Slovakia signed a memorandum of understanding with South Korea] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, September 21, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51992-sk/slovensko-podpisalo-s-juznou-koreou-memorandum-o-porozumeni/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²³ "Rokovanie národného riaditeľa pre vyzbrojovanie a veľvyslanca Južnej Kórey potvrdilo ochotu spolupracovať v oblasti obrany a podpory obranného priemyslu" [Meeting between the National Armaments Director and the Ambassador of South Korea confirmed the willingness to cooperate in defense and defense industry support] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, May 25, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51524-sk/rokovanie-narodneho-riaditeľa-pre-vyzbrojovanie-a-velvyslanca-južnej-korey-potvrdilo-ochotu-spolupracovat-v-oblasti-obrany-a-podpory-obranneho-priemyslu/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²⁴ "Nato's weapons stockpiles need urgent replenishment," *Financial Times*, January 31 2023, Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/55b7ba35-6beb-4775-a97b-4e34d8294438> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²⁵ A. Matyšák, "Južná Kórea vyzbrojuje svet. Nakúpi minister Naď v Soule stíhačky?" [South Korea is arming the world. Will Minister Naď buy fighter jets in Seoul?] *Pravda*, September 29, 2022, Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/641169-južna-korea-vyzbrojuje-svet-nakupi-minister-nad-v-soule-stihacky/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

Slovak defense companies were also present at the DefExpo-2022 in India,²⁶ which could become another market for Slovak defense companies. However, as several countries in the region have not condemned Russian aggression, and some even tacitly support Russia,²⁷ Slovakia must remain vigilant. It is essential to ensure that no defense-related exports are re-exported to Russia or other countries, where they may be used in the perpetration of mass atrocities (e.g., Myanmar).

■ Helping Taiwan to break away from isolation

In addition to the military cooperation, the Russian aggression in Ukraine has led to humanitarian collaboration with East Asian states. This has been particularly evident in the case of Taiwan, which, due to its complex international position, has relied on Ukraine's neighbors to facilitate the delivery of aid to Ukraine and its refugees.

Immediately following the invasion, Slovakia, alongside Poland, helped evacuate 22 Taiwanese nationals and their spouses from Ukraine.²⁸ Slovakia, Poland, Czechia, Latvia and Romania played crucial roles in managing and distributing aid provided by Taiwan, as evidenced by data collected by the EU-Taiwan Tracker database.²⁹ In Slovakia, this activity was conducted through governmental, municipal and NGO-level initiatives.

²⁶ "Slovenské spoločnosti rokovali na 12. veľtrhu obrannej techniky – DefExpo 2022," [Slovak companies negotiated at the 12th defense technology fair – DefExpo 2022] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 24, 2022, Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=14904504 (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²⁷ A. Gerstl, M. Šimalčík, eds, "Mixed reactions to the Russian war against Ukraine in the Indo-Pacific: Views of governments and civil society," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2023. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/indopacific-views-of-russian-aggression/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²⁸ "22 Taiwanese evacuated from Ukraine arrive in Poland, Slovakia," *Focus Taiwan*, February 27, 2022, Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/641169-južna-korea-vyzbrojuje-svet-nakupi-minister-nad-v-soule-stihacky/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

²⁹ "EU-Taiwan Tracker," Central European Institute of Asian Studies. Available online: <https://eutwtracker.ceias.eu/tracker> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

The first shipment of Taiwanese aid to Ukraine delivered via Slovakia arrived on March 15, 2022, and consisted of 100 tons of medical material and \$1.5 million in financial aid, which was transferred to Kyiv the following day. To further support Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, Taiwan donated \$250,000 to the Bratislava municipal government and an additional \$150,000 to the Ukraine–Slovakia Initiative NGO. The largest donation came in the form of a deposit to the Mutual Assistance Fund, a Slovak government-organized initiative, by the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, amounting to nearly € 2 million.³⁰

By actively supporting Ukraine’s defense efforts, Taiwan is demonstrating to the Slovak public that it is a democratic partner with shared values, warranting a deepening of relations. This sense of shared values is an important factor motivating parliamentary diplomacy focused on Taiwan. In 2022 parliamentarians were active in supporting Taiwan’s participation in international organizations such as the WHO, ICAO, INTERPOL or UNFCCC.³¹

Additionally, at the governmental level, Slovakia and Taiwan signed the Arrangement on Judicial Cooperation in Civil and Commercial Matters. While this has political implications, it is also a vital precursor to improving legal certainty as the foundation for further economic relations. Slovakia was the first EU member state to sign such an agreement with Taiwan.³²

Thanks to these efforts, Slovakia is currently among the most active EU member states in promoting deeper relations with Taiwan.³³ Consequently, new opportunities for economic cooperation with Taiwan are emerging, such as the establishment of Taiwan Capital’s Central and Eastern Europe Investment Fund worth \$200 million, with approximately 60 per cent to 80 per cent

earmarked for Slovakia, alongside Czechia and Lithuania. The fund’s first investment in Slovakia, closed in early January 2023, provided \$8 million to the robotics company Photoneo.³⁴

■ Outlook

This chapter has shown that while Slovakia is able to make progress by building relationships with individual countries in the Asia–Pacific region, more significant advancements are being hindered by the absence of a comprehensive strategy to the region as a whole and the efficient allocation of limited resources.

To improve resource allocation and, thereby, enhance diplomacy toward the Asia-Pacific region, Slovakia should employ a strategic approach, beginning with the adoption of a comprehensive strategy for the Asia–Pacific region that clearly defines Slovakia’s interests and strategic objectives. These objectives can then be further operationalized through sector-specific and country-specific action plans.

By establishing a well-structured strategy, Slovakia will be able to prioritize and streamline its diplomatic efforts, facilitating more effective engagement with the region. This strategic approach will enable it to better navigate the complex geopolitical landscape, capitalize on emerging opportunities and address potential challenges. Ultimately, a comprehensive strategy will contribute to Slovakia’s ability to foster stronger and more productive relationships with the Asia–Pacific region, advancing its national interests and promoting regional stability.

Whether Slovakia manages to adopt such a strategy in 2023 will be an important indicator of whether it is able to adapt to the changing geopolitical reality in which the Asia–Pacific region will be at the forefront of global affairs.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ M. Šimalčík, D. Remžová, “Slovakia: A pragmatic enthusiast,” in M. Šimalčík, A. Gerstl, D. Remžová, eds, *Beyond the Dumpling Alliance: Tracking Taiwan’s relations with Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava: Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2023. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/beyond-the-dumpling-alliance/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

³² “Taiwan, Slovakia ink arrangement on judicial cooperation in civil, commercial matters,” *Taiwan Today* June 9, 2022, Available online: <https://www.taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=2&post=220284&unitname=Politics-Top-News&postname=Taiwan%2C-Slovakia-ink-arrangement-on-judicial-cooperation-in-civil%2C-commercial-matters> (accessed on March 20, 2023); M. Šimalčík, “Extraditions and legal cooperation: next frontier of Taiwan’s outreach to Europe?” *Central European Institute of Asian Studies*, August 8, 2022. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/taiwan-europe-extradition/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

³³ M. Šimalčík, A. Gerstl, D. Remžová, eds, op. cit.

³⁴ M. Strong, “Taiwan Central and Eastern Europe Investment Fund launches project in Slovakia,” *Taiwan News*, January 1, 2023, Available online: <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4770568> (accessed on March 20, 2023).





Slovakia's foreign policy tools



War in Ukraine and Slovak development cooperation in 2022

Daniel Kaba

The Collins Dictionary's word of the year for 2022 is "permacrisis," "a term that perfectly embodies the dizzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another, as we wonder bleakly what new horrors might be around the corner."¹

Regardless of whether we call it a compounded continued crisis or a polycrisis,² it has without doubt become a permacrisis.

In 2022 the external factors of the permacrisis had the most dramatic impact on Slovak internal affairs since independence 30 years ago. Despite multiple warnings such as the Russian invasion of Donbas in 2014, the refugee crisis in 2016 or the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Slovakia was unprepared for the crisis.

The war in Ukraine has had profound implications for the energy crisis and affected the cost of living for many in Slovakia. It has also revealed the true extent of the influence of disinformation, including Russian propaganda, and further polarized Slovak society. Most undiplomatically, it has revealed the capacities and weaknesses in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and deeply embedded systemic flaws in humanitarian aid, which has not been a government priority for many years.

At the international and European level the Russian invasion of Ukraine created the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis in Europe since world war

¹ D. Shariatmadari, "A year of 'permacrisis,'" *Collins Dictionary*, November 1, 2022. Available online: <https://blog.collinsdictionary.com/language-lovers/a-year-of-permacrisis/> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

² "Polycrisis" – a cluster of related global risks with compounding effects, such that the overall impact exceeds the sum of each part. See "Global Risks Report 2023," World Economic Forum, January 11, 2023. Available online: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2023/digest> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

two – 8 million refugees and 5 million internally displaced persons. Almost 18 million people are still in need of humanitarian aid.³

It is a far reaching crisis that has exacerbated inequalities and food insecurity around the globe and has to some extent overshadowed other major crises such as in Yemen, the DRC, Syria and elsewhere.

The first section of this chapter provides insights into how the Slovak humanitarian aid system responded to the mega crisis in Ukraine. The second describes what happened in other areas of Slovak development cooperation in 2022 and the effect of the war in Ukraine on the ODA system. In the conclusion the author discusses ways of strategically shaping ODA, the overall funding situation and predictions for 2023.

■ Slovak humanitarian response to the crisis in Ukraine

Aid figures

In 2022 Slovakia provided Ukraine with official humanitarian aid worth €9 million, in contrast to the €16 million fundraised by civil society. Comparisons with other donor countries, especially neighboring states, also point to a lack of interest in supporting humanitarian work. According to the Kiel Institute's donor tracker, Slovakia ranked 27th in the world⁴ in the provision of humanitarian aid to its neighbor Ukraine. By comparison Slovakia's other neighbor, Czechia, provided 12 times that (€106 mln.) in humanitarian commitments. Even considering that the Czech economy is twice the size of the Slovak one, the amount of aid is still six times larger.

The €9 million includes financial assistance provided to the international organizations UNHCR, OHCHR, WFP, IOM and UNICEF and to local Ukrainian NGOs. It also includes the *SlovakAid* humanitarian projects and material aid shipped by several ministries.

³ "Ukraine Emergency Situation Report #17 (15March 2023)," UNFPA, March 16, 2023. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-emergency-situation-report-17-15-march-2023> (accessed on February 25, 2023).

⁴ "Ukraine Support Tracker," Kiel Institute for the World Economy. Available online: <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

In military commitments (0.215 per cent of GDP) Slovakia comes 7th. Although important, military aid cannot replace humanitarian aid (0.009 per cent of GDP)⁵ or vice versa⁶. Both are needed. Humanitarian aid is needed by the civilians who remain trapped in the conflict affected areas. Failure to provide it would mean hundreds of thousands more would be badly affected by lack of access to healthcare, water and sanitation, shelter, food, psychosocial support and education and many would be forced to leave Ukraine to flee to neighboring countries, including Slovakia.

Civil society and state cooperation

The response can be divided into three intertwined streams of aid, namely the immediate assistance provided on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, material aid shipped to Ukraine by multiple civil society organizations, volunteers and informal initiatives including the official ODA provided by Slovak bodies and the implementation of humanitarian projects managed and staffed by Slovak humanitarian organizations and local partners in Ukraine. Not all the aid is counted in the official ODA. The three streams differed in terms of factors and dynamics such as the level of cooperation among key actors, resource mobilization and so on throughout the year.

Despite the dire humanitarian situation caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine there were some positives such as the rapid response, numbers volunteering and the generosity displayed in fundraising.

Public solidarity broke all records in previous international disasters or crises and to some extent made it easier for the humanitarian NGOs as they did not have to rely on the slow bureaucratic processes of official humanitarian aid under *SlovakAid*. Thanks to individual donors and private companies civil society organizations were able to fundraise close to €17 million in 2022.^{7,8}

Civil society was quick to respond: literally hours after the invasion on February 24, 2022 humanitarian and other NGOs, volunteers and informal initiatives began providing humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing the

⁵ Ibid

⁶ According to the Kiel Institute donor tracker, in Czechia the ratio between military aid and humanitarian aid is 4:1 whereas in Slovakia it is 24:1.

⁷ According to data collected by the Office of Civil Society.

⁸ Only one member of Ambrela, People in Need Slovakia, managed to fundraise €10 million.

horror of the war in Ukraine on both sides of the border crossing points at Vyšné Nemecké and Ublá. They provided shelter, food, healthcare, psychosocial support and transportation and also coordinated volunteers and mobilized resources. At the peak approximately 15,000 people a day were crossing the border into Slovakia. To a large extent Slovak NGOs and volunteers replaced the state, which lacked strategic planning and coordination, resource management and logistics including material aid. After several weeks had passed, the state began to manage the situation more systematically and appointed a coordinator for cooperation between civil society and the state.

Another positive move was the memorandum signed in November 2022 between the interior ministry and 11 Slovak NGOs. It relates to cooperation in tackling the emergency situation caused by the arrival of large numbers of people from Ukraine as the armed conflict in Ukraine escalated. According to the interior ministry: “the main motivation for creating the memorandum was the situation at the beginning of 2022, following the Russian military invasion of Ukraine which revealed major shortcomings for which the state was not prepared.”⁹ That same month the Slovak government adopted a contingency plan to tackle the emergency situation relating to the mass arrival of residents of Ukraine.¹⁰ The plan is for October 2022 to March 2023 but could be replicated and used in future. Hence there are opportunities for cooperation between state and civil society and it sets a good precedent for the continuation of efforts to improve the humanitarian aid system and thereby strengthen Slovakia’s resilience.

⁹ “Minister vnútra podpísal memorandum o spolupráci s neziskovými organizáciami pri riešení mimoriadnej situácie v súvislosti so situáciou na Ukrajine,” [The Minister of the Interior signed a Memorandum on Cooperation with non-profit organizations in solving the emergency situation in connection with the situation in Ukraine] Interior Ministry of the Slovak Republic, November 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=minister-vnutra-podpisal-memorandum-o-spolupraci-s-neziskovymi-organizaciami-pri-rieseni-mimoriadnej-situacie-v-suvislosti-so-situaciou-na-ukrajine> (accessed on February 12, 2023) The memorandum clearly sets out the competences of the interior ministry and NGOs, mainly the coordination and provision of humanitarian aid, recruitment, training and coordination of volunteers, material and technical assistance from the ministry, mutual information sharing on activities and plans, and linked to the contingency plan adopted by the government.

¹⁰ “Kontingenčný plán Slovenskej republiky pre riešenie mimoriadnej situácie v súvislosti s hromadným prílevom obyvateľov Ukrajiny na územie Slovenskej republiky spôsobeným eskaláciou ozbrojeného konfliktu na území Ukrajiny pre obdobie október 2022 – marec 2023,” [Contingency plan of the Slovak Republic for solving the emergency situation in connection with the mass influx of Ukrainians to the territory of the Slovak Republic caused by the escalation of the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine for the period October 2022 – March 2023] Interior Ministry of the Slovak Republic, October 26, 2022. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/27750/1> (accessed on February 12, 2023).

State unprepared to provide large amounts of material aid

Slovakia provided 850 tons of official material aid to Ukraine. Another 2,500 tons of material aid was shipped through the SK UCPM hub near Košice, used exclusively by international organizations and other donor countries. In stark contrast, civil society organizations transported 11,000 tons of material aid to Ukraine.¹¹ Of that Slovak humanitarian organizations in Ambrela transported 4,150 tons worth €22 million.

In the early phase of the crisis in particular, there was a lack of coordination of the humanitarian aid crossing the border. To effectivize the supply of humanitarian aid, a humanitarian corridor was opened up to convey material aid through the Slovak-Ukrainian border crossing points coordinated by Ambrela in cooperation with the Office for Civil Society. The corridor was located at Vyšné Nemecké and Ublá and has been partially successful.

Inflexibility of the official response

On February 25th, Ambrela – a development organization platform – sent an open letter¹² to the prime minister and foreign minister appealing for extra funding for direct humanitarian interventions and for Slovak humanitarian NGOs to be included in the response. The letter was endorsed by dozens of the largest Slovak NGOs and platforms across civil society. The government responded by allocating €1.5 million. Given the absence of a rapid response mechanism and the ministry’s inability to launch rapid humanitarian calls for proposals and its decision not to channel the money to Ukrainian NGOs, much of the funding was used by other ministries for procuring and shipping material aid to Ukraine. Other instruments of humanitarian aid such as

¹¹ This contains the data relating to CSOs included in the data collection by the Office for Civil Society.

¹² “Výzva občianskeho sektora vláde SR k poskytovaniu humanitárnej pomoci Ukrajine,” [Appeal of the civil society to the Slovak government to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine] Ambrela, February 25, 2022. Available online: <https://ambrela.org/spravy/vyzva-obcianskeho-sektora-vlade-sr/> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

financial contributions or material aid are important but cannot replace the multiple benefits and added value of humanitarian projects.¹³

The first call for proposals for humanitarian projects was issued by *SlovakAid* on May 24th, three months after the Russian invasion in February 2022. There are many examples of other countries that were able to mount a more rapid response. In the Czech Republic¹⁴ for instance the call for proposals was published on March 9th.

Not only was the Slovak response extremely slow but there was also a failure to use the extra three months from February to May to make quick fixes to the extremely outdated system of official humanitarian aid. As a result the ministry de facto maintained the status quo without attempting to

- improve the management of *SlovakAid* humanitarian projects governed by guidelines primarily meant for development cooperation projects rather than a dynamically changing humanitarian environment;
- reduce the bureaucratic administration of *SlovakAid* grants;
- bring official humanitarian aid including *SlovakAid* grants more in line with the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship.¹⁵

¹³ "AidWatch2022," Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations, 2022, p. 43. Available online: https://ambrela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Ambrela_report_Aidwatch_za_rok_2021.pdf (accessed on February 4, 2023). "The projects enable the involvement of Slovak entities in development cooperation. From the donor's point of view, they represent the greatest degree of administrative, financial and content control, provide accessible data for monitoring and evaluation and are far more transparent in allocating funds and on subsequent implementation compared to other ODA mechanisms such as financial contributions. Unlike the latter, projects can be programmed and compared to other SAIDC instruments. In practice most lay the foundations for maintaining and improving the development cooperation system. It also enables Slovak and non-Slovak organizations and donors to gain experience, create partnerships, apply to develop Slovak know-how and enhance the visibility of the *SlovakAid* brand in partner countries. Last but not least they also help with the retention of experienced workers." (accessed February 5, 2023).

¹⁴ "Humanitární dotace k naléhavé pomoci Ukrajině – vyhlášení," [Humanitarian subsidies for urgent aid to Ukraine – announcement] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, March 9, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/rozvojova_spoluprace/humanitarni_pomoc/projekty/humanitarni_dotace_k_nalehave_pomoci.html (accessed on February 5, 2023).

¹⁵ "24 principles and good practice of humanitarian donorship," Good Humanitarian Donorship. Available online: <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html> (accessed on February 6, 2023).

The current system does not adhere fully to the principle that the donor state should strive to ensure flexible and timely funding, allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to needs, strive to ensure predictability and flexibility in funding and systematically consider the use of cash transfers alongside other modalities according to the situation. Despite civil society having spent many years pointing out the need to include cash transfers in *SlovakAid* projects, that has still not been put in place. Slovakia has long been a member of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) and so has had time to align its humanitarian aid system with the principles enshrined in the GHD.

Quick fixes and donor fatigue: what lies in the future?

Unlike the array of legislative initiatives relating to the Ukrainian crisis, no attempt was made to adopt legislation to improve the Slovak humanitarian aid system. Not even at the non-statutory level.

In autumn 2022 the foreign ministry rejected civil society's suggestion, represented by Ambrela and the Office for Civil Society, that the evaluation committee should consider humanitarian project proposals within one month rather than two.¹⁶

As the crisis continued, donor fatigue began to set in toward the end of the year.

Therefore in spring Ambrela sent a letter to the foreign and finance ministers suggesting ways of preventing and/or mitigating donor fatigue. The tax exemption applies only to material aid donated to the interior ministry and transported out of Slovakia. The letter stated:

Taking into account the huge disparity between needs and financing, as well as the risk of fatigue in businesses showing huge levels of solidarity that may not continue over the medium and long term, we suggest the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic make the following changes to § 19 2) (u)

¹⁶ MFA non-statutory rules on grants. Ambrela's remaining three proposals were accepted via the interministerial legislation procedure – (i) donors must ensure project proposals are evaluated by external assessors, (ii) donors have to provide the applicant with details of the project proposal evaluation on request, (iii) donors are responsible for ensuring there is no conflict of interest. All three proposals would improve the transparency of the *SlovakAid* grant program.

of Income Tax Act no. 595/2003 Coll. and § 47 13) of Act on value added tax no. 222/2004 Coll.:

- all services and financial donations should be made tax-deductible expenses (not just material donations), (services such as logistics and aid transportation shipping services to Ukraine are in high demand and this amendment would allow greater business financial involvement and produce synergy effects in combination with NGO fundraising; entrepreneurs could file such financial gifts as a tax expense);
- NGOs (not just the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic) should be able to be donation recipients (this would considerably speed up aid and raise effectiveness);
- the Slovak Republic should be considered an authorized territory for the use of donations (today online territories outside Slovakia are eligible, which could present an obstacle given the high number of Ukrainian refugees or persons with temporary protection in need of help);
- There has been no progress so far. It would be useful if the state could fund some research or data collection on the amount of aid collectively provided by the private sector in funding, services and goods.

There is no funding mechanism for ensuring the humanitarian aid system has enough of the right type of funding. The existing system whereby donors can donate through taxes is not geared up for humanitarian crises, where rapidity and flexibility are of the utmost importance. Unless the Slovak government tackles the situation directly, one can expect donor fatigue to continue and even worsen.

■ Other parts of Slovak development cooperation

Slovak ODA in 2022: comfortably coming last

According to the preliminary data, in 2022 Slovak official development cooperation totaled €162.86 million or 0.15 per cent of GNI. This puts Slovakia among the last 30 donor countries in the DAC OECD.¹⁷ Even similarly sized countries like Slovenia (0.19 per cent) or Portugal (0.18 per cent) are ahead

¹⁷ The data may be adjusted slightly in June 2023, but no major corrections are expected.

of Slovakia. The increase in the volume of ODA is so slow that Slovakia will not meet its international commitment of 0.33 per cent ODA/GNI by 2030, or indeed until after 2060.¹⁸

Besides the quantity, the quality of bilateral aid is an equally worrying trend. The multilateral aid of €124.4 million. It includes contributions to the EU (€108 mil.), World Bank (€5.9 mil.), UN (€4.8 million) and others (€5.8 million). Although bilateral aid increased last year from €31 million to €38.4 million, this was mainly due to non-systematic elements that cannot be strategically programmed. The bilateral aid largely consists of two streams. The first is the financial contributions to various international organizations and programs that for several reasons do not come under multilateral aid. The second could be called “what’s left over,” which does not require major resources, effort or systemic changes on the Slovak side. Therefore it is easier to donate something that does not cost us a lot. In the pre-pandemic year for instance there was €16 million in old Czechoslovak debt relief to indebted countries and more recently in vaccines that cannot be used in Slovakia. The largest inflated bilateral aid component, the vaccine donation for 2022 was worth €15 million or close to 1.4 million vaccine doses. Hence there is a need to invest in designing new instruments to meet current needs; in other words, to qualitatively upgrade strategic partnerships, create a humanitarian fund, matching funds and accelerate cooperation between CSOs and businesses.

According to the Kiel Institute’s rough baseline estimate for the world economy, Slovakia was expected to come third in terms of in-donor refugee costs at 0.6 per cent of GDP. That is approximately €0.5 billion, or 50 times more than the humanitarian aid provided to Ukraine. Nevertheless the foreign ministry chose not to inflate Slovak ODA with the enormous in-donor refugee costs as the Kiel institute had predicted, reporting only €1.1 million in-donor refugee costs. This is a positive move and the thinking behind this decision could be replicated in other parts of ODA.

¹⁸ “AidWatch2020,” Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations, 2020, p. 18. Available online: https://ambrela.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Ambrela_Aidwatch_2020_WEB.pdf (accessed on February 6, 2023). ODA has increased by 0.05 per cent over the last 10 years. The rate of increase has not significantly changed in the last two years.

Inflation: diminishing value of support

In 2022 inflation skyrocketed, breaking new records and climbing to 13.2 per cent in June. The cumulative effect since 2009 and specific effects of it in 2021 and 2022 have reduced the value of Slovak ODA by a quarter. The foreign ministry gave no indication of attempting to mitigate it itself or in response to appeals from civil society. At the project management level the SAIDC raised the threshold slightly for project staff costs. But that is not enough and the ministry needs to adopt a proactive approach. The situation in *SlovakAid* partner countries is not good either. In Kenya, inflation held at 6 per cent in 2021, but reached almost 10 per cent in 2022.¹⁹ Moldova has had record inflation since 2007. In January 2022 inflation rose from 16 per cent to 34 per cent.²⁰ In Georgia it grew by 4.5 per cent year-on-year to over 9.5 per cent in 2021.

Combined with the small nominal budgetary support of ODA, the lukewarm response from the foreign ministry places a serious burden on the capacities of Slovak actors and there is a risk of the real impact of the *SlovakAid* interventions in partner countries being decimated.

Positive moments

The good news is that after two years, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SAIDC issued a call for strategic partnerships for Kenya in sectors education and health with a grant of up to €1 million over a four-year implementation period. However, this time the devil is not in the detail but in the main contours: it is not clear how it will differ from other grants (for instance it could be dedicated to providing scope for capacity building, testing, creating partnerships with other donors) or to what extent it is just the budgetary multiplication of small grants by four or five spread over a longer period.

SlovakAid embarked on its first ever EU project under the delegated competence and pillar assessment. The SAIDC issued a €0.8 million grant for EU support for local media in Moldova. After some initial stumbling blocks the

¹⁹ "Kenya Inflation Rate," Trading Economics. Available online: <https://tradingeconomics.com/kenya/inflation-cpi> (accessed on January 20, 2023).

²⁰ "Moldova Inflation Rate," Trading Economics. Available online: <https://tradingeconomics.com/moldova/inflation-cpi> (accessed on January 20, 2023).

SAIDC applied the more effective donor-implementor relation building EC rules to project management and it was launched in autumn 2022. There are other potential projects in the pipeline for Serbia, Kenya and South Africa.

SlovakAid interventions – increase with a hazy future

There was a significant increase in the funding allocated to the *SlovakAid* grants. Compared to 2021 the increase was €1.2 million, which represents an increase of 28 per cent. Although this initially seemed to be positive, it is in fact a decrease on the financial allocation for existing SAIDC grants in *SlovakAid* partner countries. The increase was a result of the provision of €1.3 million in humanitarian aid for Ukraine and a new instrument – a strategic partnership for Kenya (€600,000 budgeted for 3 years).

Along with the other underlying factors this translated into a decrease, with a 43 per cent year-on-year decrease in projects approved for the Western Balkans, 81 per cent for Kenya, 40 per cent for Moldova and 52 per cent for global education.

This was despite the applicant interest in *SlovakAid* calls for proposals (number of submitted vs. unapproved projects) and the "money saving" due to there being no call for proposals for Sub-Saharan Africa (€200,000 in 2021) and the cancellation of the call for development cooperation for Ukraine (€400,000).

Part of the budget allocated for other *SlovakAid* projects went to the humanitarian aid for Ukraine and the strategic partnership for Kenya. But of course the issue is not whether the support for Ukraine should be substantially increased at the expense of another *SlovakAid* program country. Ukraine needs an enormous amount of humanitarian aid. At the same time though to preserve the good results and consistency of *SlovakAid* interventions elsewhere, the political leadership at the ministry need to ensure as far as possible that Slovakia's bilateral aid is increased, even if it is just for the sake of the humanitarian aid for Ukraine, the sustainability of Slovak ODA in partner countries and fulfilling its commitment in the government manifesto.

In 2020 only €300,000 was newly-allocated funding for Ukraine from outside the annually approved SAIDC grant budget.

The message is clear and simple. There is no potential for further cuts to the SAIDC grant budget. Otherwise, exacerbated by inflation, the system will

soon collapse and the cost/benefit ratio and continuation of the *SlovakAid* programs in several partner countries will be at serious risk.

The effect of the war in Ukraine on the Slovak development cooperation system

As one would expect the mega crisis in neighboring Ukraine led to pressure to shift resources, attention and expertise away from other *SlovakAid* partner countries and toward Ukraine and away from development cooperation and toward humanitarian aid.

There was no competition over funding for humanitarian and military aid, but the prime minister, government, parliament, president's office and the foreign ministry were all primarily focused on military aid. And understandably so, but there has to be a balance. Strategic communication on the humanitarian aid by these and other stakeholders has been completely overshadowed by the military aid. As a consequence it is harder to create an environment favorable to increasing both the volume and quality.

Another effect is the shift in geographic focus. The war in Ukraine is clearly a factor here and the ministry has tended to focus more on what remains of the Eastern Partnership and the threat in that region. Then there is the unrelated continuation of a broader process that started two years ago. The ministry has been striving to follow the recommendations of the DAC OECD peer review suggesting it focuses on a limited number of partner countries. Other actors including civil society and the finance ministry have also pushed for a more distinct geographic focus. However, there has been little progress in dialogue in the absence of clear reasoning from main coordinator, the foreign ministry, on the changes suggested and a reliance on the vague overarching motto "because of political priorities." Which political priorities? Whose political priorities? How will these interact with the goals of Slovak development cooperation? Besides the geopolitics, there is competition over the same resources for development cooperation from civil society and academia, businesses working in development cooperation and economic diplomacy. The author both supports and agrees with the idea that *SlovakAid* interventions should be more narrowly focused: more effective resource use can be achieved with a smaller number of partner countries. But the way this has been done in recent years raises concerns. With South Sudan's removal from the partner list, the closure of the Slovak embassy in Addis Ababa and the decision to discontinue *SlovakAid* grant projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya was the only African country left. But at the end of 2022 in light of the developments in Ukraine, the ministry began to consider cutting Slovak

development interventions in Ukraine based on "political priority" reasoning and deprioritizing the status of Kenya from program to partner country. The decision has not been made yet and requires discussion. The ministry has long argued for *SlovakAid* interventions in sub-Saharan Africa on the grounds of preventing migration by tackling it in the countries of origin. There is only one Slovak embassy in the region and of all the *SlovakAid* partner countries Kenya has the largest number of active Slovak civil society organizations. Although Kenya is a middle income country. Many parts of it are very underdeveloped with part of the population living in poverty with limited or no access to basic services. Kenya has a per capita GDP of €2,000. By comparison the per capita GDP for Moldova and Georgia is €5,000.

For businesses involvement, development cooperation is sometimes the only entry point and there is no point throwing away all the good that has been done over the last 10 years and more.

The humanitarian mega crisis in Ukraine has enormous implications for food security globally and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

With Kenya and its neighbors suffering the worst drought in recent history and a hunger crisis, Slovakia should step up its efforts and not diminish its presence.

■ Conclusion: internalization vs. internationalization

The largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since world war two has not led to any major government attempts to modernize the Slovak humanitarian aid system, apart from some minor exceptions.

Despite expectations that the humanitarian aid would attract stronger political support and attention in strategic communication, it has been marginalized by the dominance of the political and military aspects of the conflict. According to the UN OCHA 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan,²¹ the international community is trying to raise \$3.9 billion to cover aid for over 11 million

²¹ "Ukraine: Humanitarian Response Plan (February 2023)," *Relief Web*, February 15, 2023. Available online: https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-response-plan-february-2023-enuk?_gl=1*g5gbmm*_ga*MzlyMjl5MTcxLjE2NjkyNDI5NTQ.*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY3ODAxNzMwNi45LjEuMTY3ODAxNzMzOC4yOC4wLjA (accessed on February 20, 2023).

people – out of nearly 18 million people in need. It is both important and in the interests of Slovakia to step up humanitarian efforts and become a more supportive international partner.

Slovak ODA desperately needs a modern humanitarian system if it is to become a good international partner and for its own resilience and safety. Rather than a large-scale whole government approach seeking to fully integrate the domestic and foreign side of the humanitarian aid system, having a group of the most active actors design one or two rapid response instruments may prove more doable. This could then be followed up by legislation and sufficient funding.²²

The humanitarian aid for Ukraine could be used as a starting point in negotiations for a mandatory long-term increase (including inflation-indexed) in bilateral aid. In this sense 2022 was a missed opportunity but it is worth fighting for it in 2023.

Strategic communication and the ability to engage in continual high-level policy dialogue with all partners is crucial for spearheading these goals. The ministry has created and/or supported several good high-level policy platforms for strategic dialogue such as Globsec, Export Forum and Human Forum, but surprisingly there is no forum for systemic dialogue and political support in the area of development cooperation.

This is despite the ministry (i) being the national coordinator with the strongest mandate, (ii) the largest part of its budget going on development cooperation (€13 million in 2021), (iii) it having a special development cooperation agency – the SAIDC – in contrast to other areas, (iv) development cooperation being the foreign policy area with the largest civil society community by far. That is why the Ambrela Development Forum was set up in May, 2022, with more than a hundred participants from 25 countries.

There are good intentions and there are things that need completing and fine-tuning, such as the strategic partnership instrument in order to pay off and areas that need more political drive such as the humanitarian aid strategy, which is in limbo, or value based initiatives that do not report in-donor refugee costs (which would inflate ODA by at least €100 million, having a close to 40 per cent share of total ODA) that needs to be replicated in other parts of the Slovak ODA system.

²² The author shared some practical ideas in the previous *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy*.

Table 1. Effects of policy and management decisions on the Slovak ODA system

deterioration	damage control	improvement
<p>Related to Ukraine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ unprepared humanitarian response on the border ■ very little humanitarian funding for Ukraine (Slovakia 28th as per cent of GDP) ■ no significant new funds for <i>SlovakAid</i> humanitarian projects (most resources pulled from other countries and previous savings) ■ very low to zero strategic communication on humanitarian aid ■ no Lex Ukraine to enable short or midterm quick fixes ■ personnel and expert capacities not boosted ■ lack of willingness to accelerate implementation of the humanitarian <i>SlovakAid</i> project ■ no or limited adherence to Good Humanitarian Donorship, including but not limited to cash assistance, flexible funding 	<p>Related to Ukraine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ limited effort to set up humanitarian corridor 	<p>Related to Ukraine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ MoU between interior ministry and 11 CSOs ■ government adopted contingency plan ■ public solidarity, fundraising, volunteering ■ rapid response by CSO at the border ■ support from businesses ■ amount of material aid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ missed opportunity to raise bilateral aid at the political level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ publication of results of application process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ launch of first SAIDC EU delegated cooperation project in Moldova launched. ■ appetite and action steps for obtaining more EU delegated competence funding (Serbia, Kenya and South Africa)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ no response to historic inflation (except on the SAIDC project management side) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ strategic partnership to be launched for first time (Kenya)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ no continuity in humanitarian strategy 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ value based approach that does not count extremely high in-donor refugee costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ inflated aid close to 50 per cent of bilateral aid 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ cooperation between MFA and CSO at Ambrela Development Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Slovak commitment of 0.33 per cent of GNI increasingly under threat 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No LDC project/program country 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ODA report not presented to parliament 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ drop in predictability and consistency 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ dwindling budget for the program country Kenya 		

Much of the above illustrates the low ownership of development cooperation at the national level. That means that one of the main drivers of the ODA system is Slovakia's international commitments or obligations to others, rather than a conscious mature awareness, and internalization rather than internationalization. In this sense internalizing means understanding that a thriving ODA system is and should be in Slovakia's national interests. In other words, development cooperation is an important foreign policy instrument and something that we should want for the value of it rather than something the international community wants us to do.





Annexes

4

A chronology of important events in Slovak foreign policy in 2022

January 3 ▪ Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Ivan Korčok and his American counterpart Anthony Blinken speak on the phone about the situation in Ukraine. Korčok welcomes the fact that the United States is actively involving other NATO member countries in bilateral negotiations with the Russian Federation.

January 6 ▪ Minister Korčok states that he is following the developments in Kazakhstan with great concern. Commenting on the large-scale protests, he calls for the tensions to be handled democratically.

January 11 ▪ President Zuzana Čaputová receives Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala in Bratislava. They discuss bilateral relations and pressing issues such as high inflation. Fiala meets with Prime Minister Eduard Heger and Speaker of the National Council Boris Kollár.

January 12 ▪ Minister Korčok attends the NATO–Russia Council meeting. He calls for open dialogue and greater predictability in relations with Russia. Korčok also stresses that certain principles cannot be negotiated.

January 13 ▪ Secretary-General of OECD Mathias Cormann joins Prime Minister Heger in Bratislava to talk about a recent survey conducted in Slovakia. Heger draws particular attention to the importance of education.

January 17 ▪ Minister Korčok meets the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He says Slovakia is ready to deepen cooperation and open a new chapter in Slovak-Saudi relations. He notes the importance of the dialogue on human rights.

January 18 ▪ President Čaputová receives Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament Markéta Pekarová Adamová in Bratislava. Prime Minister Heger attends as well.

Prepared by Tomáš Čorej of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, based on data from the websites of the President of the Slovak Republic, the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, National Council of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, and the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic.

January 18 ▪ State Secretary Martin Klus meets his Slovenian counterpart Gašper Dovžan. They attend a discussion with students of a bilingual gymnasium in Bratislava. They discuss EU membership and the situation on the Russian–Ukrainian border.

January 26 ▪ The Slovak Republic delivers another shipment of humanitarian aid to Lebanon. The donation is a response to the alarming social, economic and political crisis in the country.

January 27 ▪ Following discussions with his Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte, Prime Minister Heger calls for the de-escalation of tensions on the Russian–Ukraine border. Rutte stresses the need for a unified signal in relations with Moscow.

January 31 ▪ Minister Korčok holds negotiations with the Czech Minister for European Affairs Mikuláš Bek in Bratislava. He is keen to emphasize that both republics support compliance with the rule of law in European policy.

February 1 ▪ Prime Minister Heger speaks with European Chief Prosecutor Laura Codruța Kövesi via a video call. He congratulates her on her appointment and says he is confident her investigations will be of a high standard.

February 2 ▪ State Secretary Ingrid Brocková attends a meeting of the UN Group of Friends of Meditation in New York. She points out that meditation is a crucial tool for preserving peace and helping save lives.

February 4 ▪ Zuzana Čaputová meets with Vice President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans at the Presidential Palace. They discuss the latest developments in the region and the Fit-for-55 package. Prime Minister Heger and Timmermans talk about the national recovery plan.

February 4 ▪ Minister Korčok and Minister of Defense Naď sign the Slovak-US Defense Cooperation Agreement in Washington, D.C. After months of intense, passionate national debate, they declare it a key step for Slovak security.

February 4 ▪ President Čaputová and her Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy speak on the phone. Zelenskyy thanks Slovakia for providing continuous support amid concerns about an attack by Russia.

February 7 ▪ Minister Korčok pays a visit to Ukraine. He talks about the horrors in the eastern part of the country, where war broke out eight years ago. Korčok notes that Slovakia has been helping the local population for a long time now.

February 8 ▪ State Secretary Brocková opens an online conference with Slovak water management entities operating in the Central Asian region, aimed at exchanging experience and providing support. The Slovak ambassadors in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are among those who join the meeting.

February 9 ▪ President Čaputová ratifies the Slovak–US Defense Cooperation Agreement. She sees it as a framework for deepening Slovakia's defense partnership with the United States and an important means of boosting common security.

February 10 ▪ Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, seasoned diplomat and member of the European Parliament Eduard Kukan dies at 82. Minister Korčok states that Kukan played a crucial role in building the foundations of Slovak foreign policy, including EU and NATO accession. President Čaputová recalls that he always acted with prudence, calm and grace. The government holds a minute of silence in his honor.

February 16 ▪ The Slovak government decides to send two Božena demining systems and medical equipment to Ukraine. Minister Korčok says it is a responsible step as part of Slovakia's ambitions to help improve its eastern neighbor's defense capabilities.

February 16 ▪ The Presidential Palace is lit up in Ukraine's national colors in solidarity with Ukraine, where it is Unity Day.

February 19 ▪ Minister Korčok warns that the situation in Donbas is continuing to escalate. He reiterates that only the Russian Federation can stop this "dangerous gamble."

February 21 ▪ Minister Korčok holds talks with his Saudi partner, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. He announces that Slovakia will open an embassy in Riyadh to deepen Slovak-Saudi relations.

February 21 ▪ The Slovak Republic rejects the Russian Federation's decision to recognize the separatist enclaves in Eastern Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs says it is unacceptable and directly contradicts Russia's proclaimed interest in seeking a constructive diplomatic dialogue. Prime Minister Heger calls President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and assures him of Slovakia's support for Ukraine.

February 22 ▪ The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs delivers a protest note to the Russian embassy. It reiterates that Russia's recognition of the separatist republics is a clear violation of international law. Prime Minister Heger adds that Russia's actions will not lead to peace or prosperity.

February 23 ▪ State Secretary Brocková receives the Dutch ambassador Gabriell Sancisi. Brocková observes that Slovakia and the Netherlands are opening a new chapter in bilateral cooperation.

February 24 ▪ The Russian Federation launches a war of aggression against Ukraine. The Slovak Republic condemns the invasion in the strongest terms. The foreign ministry deems the attack to be unprovoked, unfounded and unjustified. It is a severe violation of international law. President Čaputová talks with her Ukrainian partner Volodymyr Zelenskyy and describes it "an unimaginable intervention in the functioning of the world until now." Prime Minister Heger calls it "an inexcusable barbaric act."

February 25 ▪ The Slovak parliament condemns the Russian aggression against Ukraine and calls on Russia to immediately cease its military operations.

February 28 ▪ Minister Korčok and his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock talk on the phone. The ministers agree that Russia must end its military action immediately, unconditionally withdraw all its armed forces from Ukrainian territory and fully respect its territorial integrity.

March 2 ▪ Minister Korčok receives the Ukrainian Ambassador Yuri Mushka. He condemns the Russian invasion and calls on global help for Ukraine.

March 2 ▪ The UN General Assembly adopts a resolution condemning the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Minister Korčok welcomes the decision and stresses that Slovakia voted in favor.

March 3 ▪ President Čaputová welcomes President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen to Bratislava. After the talks, Čaputová states that the European Union stands by Slovakia and will help it provide aid to Ukrainians fleeing the war.

March 2 ▪ Speaker of the National Council Boris Kollár and his Ukrainian counterpart Ruslan Stefanchuk speak on the phone. Kollár says that Slovakia will help Ukraine for as long as is needed.

March 9 ▪ During his visit to London, Prime Minister Heger meets with his UK counterpart Boris Johnson. Heger informs him about the situation on the Slovak–Ukrainian border and Johnson declares he is willing to help.

March 10 ▪ President Čaputová has a phone conversation with her Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy. He repeatedly thanks her for the help his country is receiving.

March 10 ▪ State Secretary Klus holds talks in Israel and Palestine on bilateral relationships and further cooperation. He reiterates that Israel is a crucial political and economic partner in the Middle East. Klus assures his Palestinian partners of continued support for development projects.

March 12 ▪ Minister Korčok talks with his Palestinian counterpart Riyad Al Malki. Slovakia donated 200,000 vaccines to Palestine and continues to show support and solidarity in difficult times.

March 14 ▪ Prime Minister Heger and State Secretary Klus pay a visit to the Vatican. Pope Francis receives Heger in an audience at the Apostolic Palace. The Prime Minister raises the issue of the Russian war.

March 14 ▪ President Čaputová receives Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Yair Lapid. The two talk primarily about the international situation and the Russian war against Ukraine.

March 16 ▪ Prime Minister Heger holds talks with his Spanish partner Pedro Sánchez. The two discuss Ukraine, refugees and energy prices. Heger says that Spain is an important partner and points out that more than 12,000 Slovaks live there.

March 16 ▪ Via a phone call, President Čaputová and American Vice President Kamala Harris talk about the war against Ukraine. Vice President Harris acknowledges the help Slovak citizens are providing to Ukrainians.

March 17 ▪ President Čaputová welcomes Lloyd Austin, the American Secretary of Defense, in Bratislava. Čaputová praises the unity in NATO.

March 28 ▪ State Secretary Brocková begins a working trip to Kenya, which has long been one of Slovakia's development partners. Brocková meets Kenyan Treasury Secretary Ukur Yatani and her counterpart Raychelle Omama

March 28 ▪ During his visit to Bratislava, Latvian President Egils Levits meets with President Čaputová. Among other issues, they discuss the situation in the Eastern Neighborhood. Levits also meets Prime Minister Heger and they talk about the war and diversifying energy sources.

March 29 ▪ State Secretary Klus visits Sofia to meet his Bulgarian counterparts Irena Dimitrova and Vasil Georgiev. They discuss the ongoing war against Ukraine as well as hybrid threat issues and the future of Europe.

March 30 ▪ Minister Korčok travels to Vilnius and meets his Lithuanian partner Gabrielius Landsbergis. He states that Slovakia and Lithuania stand united in supporting Ukraine. The ministers also discuss bilateral cooperation, trade and innovations.

April 8 ▪ President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen is accompanied by Prime Minister Heger on a historic visit to Kyiv. During a meeting with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, he affirms that Ukraine's home is in the EU and reiterates that Ukraine's fight is also a fight for European values.

April 11 ▪ Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo pays a working visit to Bratislava to meet his counterpart Zuzana Čaputová. The two presidents talk about combatting disinformation, unity within Euroatlantic structures and other issues.

April 12 ▪ During her visit to Zagreb, State Secretary Brocková says that Slovakia is more than prepared to share its eurozone and Schengen experience with Croatia.

April 13 ▪ Minister Korčok holds talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and President Isaac Herzog in Jerusalem. The talks reflect the warm Slovak–Israeli relations.

April 20 ▪ President Čaputová visits Italy to meet her counterpart Sergio Mattarella. They discuss bilateral relations, the ongoing war against Ukraine and the need to further protect democracy and the rule of law within the European Union.

April 20 ▪ State Secretary Klus pays a working visit to Kuala Lumpur. He talks with his Malaysian counterpart Kamarudin Jaffar and confirms his interest in deepening bilateral relations for the benefit of citizens of both countries.

April 24 ▪ President Čaputová welcomes German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Košice. She points out that the world has fundamentally changed since their last meeting in Bratislava eight months previously. Čaputová views Germany as a neighboring state, although the two countries do not share a border.

April 26 ▪ In an online video, President Čaputová chastises Russian soldiers for committing violence against women. "You justify your invasion by talking of liberation. How were you intending to liberate Tatiana from Irpin, killed by a Russian grenade along with her two children?" she asks.

April 27 ▪ Deputy Prime Minister Veronika Remišová pays a working visit to the United Nations in New York. She meets Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed with whom she discusses the progress on implementing Agenda 2030.

May 6 ▪ Speaker of the National Council Kollár welcomes a delegation of Ukrainian MPs to the parliament. Kollár declares he is proud of Slovakia's stance on the conflict.

May 9 ▪ Zuzana Čaputová receives Jill Biden, the First Lady of the United States, at the Presidential Palace. The meeting is indicative of the Slovak-US friendship.

May 10 ▪ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addresses the Slovak parliament. He asks Slovakia to be Ukraine's voice in the EU and highlights the importance of sanctions in the energy sector.

May 12 ▪ Minister Korčok travels to Marakshesh and talks with representatives of the largest Moroccan business confederation in Casablanca. Afterward, he meets his Moroccan partner Nasser Bourit.

May 12 ▪ President Čaputová maintains communication with President Zelenskyy. The two Presidents discuss Ukraine's European perspective.

May 12 ▪ State Secretary Klus stresses that North Macedonia is an important partner in the Western Balkans. After talks with his counterpart Zoran Popov in Bratislava, he declares that North Macedonia's European integration should be a strategic priority for the European Union.

May 16 ▪ State Secretary Brocková travels to Iran to hold talks with her counterpart Ali Bagheri Kani and discuss the negotiations on the nuclear deal.

May 17 ▪ Minister Korčok states that Slovakia will firmly support Finland and Sweden in their decision to join NATO.

May 17 ▪ Prime Minister Heger and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz speak on the phone. They discuss energy prices and the situation in Ukraine. Scholz declares that Germany is ready to help Slovakia with gas supplies.

May 19 ▪ President Čaputová arrives in Bern, where she meets her partner Ignazio Cassis and Swiss government representatives. Čaputová underlines that both countries face similar challenges including the pandemic, climate change, the energy crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

May 20 ▪ While on a trip to Turin, State Secretary Klus welcomes the quick expulsion of Russia from the Council of Europe. He reiterates the importance of peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

May 24 ▪ Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Samuel Vlčan pays a working visit to Israel. He holds bilateral negotiations with his counterpart Oded Forer and visits the Volcani Center – Agricultural Research Organization.

May 25 ▪ While on a visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, State Secretary Brocková expresses concern at the negative trends and stagnation in integration efforts. Brocková holds talks with the representatives of the three constitutive nations.

May 27 ▪ In Výrava, a village near the Slovak-Polish border, Prime Minister Heger declares that the gas interconnector between the two countries is operational. It will be crucial to the security of the Slovak gas supply.

May 27 ▪ Honoring the 80th anniversary of Operation Anthropoid, Defense Minister Nad' visits Prague to meet his Czech partner Jana Černochová. He says that Jan Kubiš and Jozef Gabčík's fight for national liberation shall never be forgotten.

May 31 ▪ President Čaputová pays a visit to Ukraine to see the horrors of the Russian war crimes at Irpin and Borodanka. She meets her counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv and delivers a speech in the Ukrainian Parliament.

June 2 ▪ Minister Nad' receives his Greek counterpart Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos at the defense ministry in Bratislava. He notes that Slovakia and Bulgaria face similar issues and acknowledges the good bilateral relations between the countries.

June 3 ▪ Minister Ivan Korčok welcomes his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaisankar, who is visiting Slovakia for the first time. The two ministers speak warmly of the friendly relations between the two countries and stress the importance of democracy, human rights and the international law order.

June 6 ▪ President Čaputová receives her Montenegrin counterpart Milo Đukanović and they discuss the situation in Ukraine and the rule of law. They talk about Montenegro's EU accession process, among other things.

June 6 ▪ Bulgarian Defense Minister Dragomir Zakov travels to Bratislava where he meets with Minister Nad'. The main issues discussed are the security situation relating to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and current processes at the level of the Euro-Atlantic community.

June 20 ▪ President Čaputová has a phone conversation with the Portuguese head of state Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. The energy crisis in Europe is the main topic of discussion. President De Sousa supports Slovak efforts to diversify natural gas supplies.

June 21 ▪ Following a General Affairs Council session in Luxembourg, State Secretary Klus says that Ukraine should be a member of the European Union. Klus reiterates that the enlargement process is the most important instrument for supporting democratic change.

July 7 ▪ Minister Korčok welcomes the newly elected President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate of the Republic of Italy Stefania Craxi. The two talk mainly about the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

July 7 ▪ State Secretary Brocková attends a round table discussion on Slovak engagement in the restoration of Ukraine. She states that every crisis is also an opportunity and that Slovakia is willing to help Ukraine in this regard.

July 8 ■ State Secretary Klus meets Latvia's Vice President of the Ministry of Finance Mindaugas Liutvinskis and they discuss bilateral relations and cooperation within NATO and the EU. Klus states that both countries need to do more work on getting financial assistance for Kyiv.

July 13 ■ Minister Korčok travels to Budapest to attend a C5 press conference, an informal grouping. He rejects the idea that sanctions will prolong the war and reiterates that if Ukraine were to stop fighting, it would mean the end of Ukraine.

July 14 ■ After a meeting with his counterpart Yeo Seung-bae in Bratislava, State Secretary Klus reflected on the growing economic ties between the Republic of Korea and Slovakia. He welcomed the new investments by a Korean company in Vlkanová, near Banská Bystrica.

July 20 ■ The Slovak government approves the proposal to ratify the NATO accession protocols for Finland and Sweden. Minister Korčok welcomes the decision and reiterates that both countries entered into decision freely.

July 25 ■ After meeting with Graham Stuart, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office of the UK, State Secretary Klus expressed his interest in strengthening bilateral cooperation with the United Kingdom. The two representatives welcome the progress on Finland and Sweden joining NATO.

July 25 ■ Minister Naď receives his British counterpart Ben Wallace in Bratislava, the first visit by a British defense minister to Slovakia since Slovakia's NATO accession. The ministers talk about several issues including the results of the recent NATO summit in Madrid.

July 26 ■ Minister Korčok receives his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock in Bratislava. He states that Germany is a crucial ally of Central Europe. The two representatives sign the Declaration on Enhanced Dialogue for 2022–2024.

July 27 ■ State Secretary Klus welcomes a delegation of Slovaks living in Serbia to the ministry. They discuss further support for infrastructure projects in Serbia and plans to establish a cultural center in Novi Sad.

August 9 ■ Minister Korčok marks the second anniversary of the marred presidential elections in Belarus. Slovakia insists on the immediate release of political prisoners and condemns the attack against Ukraine.

August 24 ■ State Secretary Klus pays a working visit to Athens to meet his Greek partner Miltiadis Varvitsiotis. Among other issues, they discuss the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the energy crisis and the current situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

August 26 ■ The prime ministers of Poland and Slovakia officially open the gas interconnector which will mean the region can be supplied with gas from several directions. Prime Minister Morawiecki and Prime Minister Heger consider it a great success.

September 6 ■ During her visit to Athens, President Čaputová meets her Greek counterpart Katerina Sakellariopoulou and Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Representatives of both states discuss the possibility of using LNG terminals to improve energy security.

September 8 ■ Prime Minister Heger travels to Rome to meet with his Italian counterpart Mario Draghi. He stresses that Italy is a key partner regarding the diversification of gas supply sources.

September 9 ■ President Čaputová issues a statement about the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Čaputová describes Elizabeth II as a strong woman and a mother, a ruler and a leader.

September 9 ■ In his first call with a foreign partner since taking office, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Rastislav Káčer talks with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba. Káčer tells him that Ukraine can continue to rely on robust bilateral assistance.

September 9 ■ Zuzana Čaputová travels to North Macedonia for talks with her counterpart Stevo Pendarovski and Prime Minister Dimitar Kovačevski about the ongoing energy crisis.

September 13 ■ Minister Naď holds talks with his Montenegrin partner Raško Konjević. Naď welcomes the close bilateral relations and says that the Western Balkans region is important for European stability.

September 19 ■ On the occasion of the 77th UN General Assembly in New York, Minister Káčer talks with his European partners. He reaffirms the continuation of Slovakia's foreign policy position vis-à-vis the Russian war against Ukraine. President Čaputová meets with Secretary-General António Guterres.

September 19 ■ President Heger welcomes his Polish partner Mateusz Morawiecki to Bratislava, where he attends the Conservative Summit. The main items on the agenda are the situation in Ukraine and energy prices.

September 28 ■ Minister Korčok receives his Belgian counterpart Hajia Lahbib in Bratislava. He notes that Belgium is a major investor in Slovakia and underlines the unifying values of democracy and the rule of law. He also raises the issue of the ongoing investigation into the death of Jozef Chovanec, a Slovak Citizen, in 2018.

September 28 ■ President Čaputová ratifies the NATO accession protocols of Finland and Sweden on Slovakia's behalf.

September 30 ■ Prime Minister Heger welcomes Hungarian President Katalin Novák. They discuss bilateral relations, cooperation within the EU and economic issues relating to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

October 3 ■ In response to the illegal recognition of Ukrainian territories, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs summons a representative of the Russian Federation. Slovakia condemns the repeated violations of international law. President Čaputová is a signatory of the joint statement of the head of states of the Central and Eastern European NATO countries condemning the Russian attempts.

October 3 ▪ On his first bilateral foreign trip since taking office, Minister Rastislav Káčer describes the Czech Republic as Slovakia's closest partner. In Prague, he and his counterpart Jan Lipavský discuss the strategic partnership between the two nations.

October 5 ▪ State Secretary Brocková holds discussions with her Kazakh counterpart Roman Vasilenko in Bratislava. She welcomes the fact that both sides believe respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Ukraine's, are fundamental principles.

October 10 ▪ Following discussions with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Minister Káčer calls for unity ahead of a difficult winter for Ukraine. He emphasizes that the Alliance has not been faced with a bigger threat than Russia since the Cold War.

October 11 ▪ The meeting of the Presidents of the V4 countries is held at the Primate's Palace in Bratislava. The presidents talk about the energy crisis and the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine.

October 11 ▪ Minister Káčer undertakes his second bilateral foreign trip since assuming office. In Warsaw, he describes Poland as a font of strategic common sense and welcomes its assistance in protecting Slovak air space.

October 12 ▪ The UN General Assembly demands that Russia reverse course on the illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories. Slovakia is one of the 143 countries voting for the resolution that calls on Russia to withdraw its forces immediately, completely and unconditionally.

October 14 ▪ Minister Rastislav Káčer travels to Vienna to meet his Austrian counterpart Alexander Schallenberg. He notes that Slovak-Austrian relations are underpinned by geographical proximity strong as well as historical, economic and personal ties.

October 19 ▪ President Čaputová delivers a speech in the European Parliament. Addressing the MEPs, she calls for democracy and European values. She condemns the terrorist attack in an LGBTI+ bar in Bratislava as an attack on equality, tolerance and respect for human rights.

October 24 ▪ State Secretary Brocková opens a business forum in Mexico City and signs a memorandum of cooperation with the Mexican Ministry of Economy. She hopes it will provide an impetus for accelerating more enhanced relations.

October 25 ▪ Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Slovakia Peter Pčolinský attends a summit of the International Crimea Platform in Zagreb. The flagship topic is expressing clear support for Ukraine.

October 27 ▪ On a visit to Buenos Aires, State Secretary Brocková stresses the potential for closer cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean. Among other partners, she meets with her Uruguayan counterpart Carolina Ache Batlle.

October 27 ▪ Icelandic President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson visits Bratislava at the invitation of his Slovak counterpart Zuzana Čaputová. The two presidents discuss a wide range of issues, including geothermal energy and minority rights. Jóhannesson meets Prime Minister Heger to talk about renewables.

November 7 ▪ State Secretary Andrej Stančík travels to Sofia to participate in the Central European Initiative meeting. He states that Russia's aggression threatens the security architecture of Europe. Diplomats also discuss the European perspectives of the Western Balkan countries.

November 10 ▪ Prime Minister Heger travels to Helsinki for talks with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö. He conveys Slovakia's unequivocal support for Finland's NATO accession.

November 11 ▪ During her visit to Malta, State Secretary Brocková calls for a European solution to illegal migration. She talks with Permanent Secretary of the Maltese Ministry of Foreign, European Affairs and Trade Christopher Cutajar about migration, the rule of law and trade relations.

November 11 ▪ Prime Minister Heger visits Tallin, where he and his Estonian counterpart Kaja Kallas appeal for assistance for Ukraine. Heger names several areas that Slovakia and Estonia think hold potential for cooperation, including digitalization and e-government.

November 21 ▪ Shortly after two accidental missile hits in Poland, Heger holds talks in Den Haag. Both he and his counterpart Mark Rutte are of the view that Slovakia and the Netherlands need to strengthen defense cooperation.

December 1 ▪ State Secretary Brocková receives a delegation from Cambodia. She raises issues such as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the political situation in Southeast Asia and bilateral relations.

December 2 ▪ Minister Káčer addresses the OSCE Ministerial Council in Łódź. He says that we are facing the most serious challenge to the European security architecture and the post-World War II order.

December 5 ▪ Minister Káčer welcomes his Hungarian counterpart Péter Szijjártó to Bratislava. The two representatives discuss current bilateral, regional and European challenges. Káčer points out that there are far fewer issues on which Slovak and Hungarian views diverge than there are practical areas of cooperation.

December 8 ▪ Minister Káčer, Minister Naď and Minister of Economy Karel Hirman travel to Kyiv to meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov. Since the beginning of the invasion, Slovakia has donated aid of approximately €170 million and continues to provide help.

December 8 ▪ During his visit to Stockholm, State Secretary Stančík underlines that cohesion and solidarity will be key to the EU's success in the following six months. He holds talks with his Swedish counterparts Jan Knutsson and Christian Danielsson.

December 10 ▪ Pope Francis receives President Čaputová and Radoslava Trokšiarová, one of the victims of the terrorist attack in the LGBTI+ bar Tepláreň. President Čaputová observes that Pope Francis has fond memories of his visit to Slovakia last year.

December 15 Minister Naď welcomes his Swedish counterpart Pála Jonson. The two ministers talk about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, bilateral cooperation and enforcement, and Sweden's NATO accession.



Treaties, agreements, conventions published in 2022

Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

■ Presidential treaties and agreements

Agreement on defense cooperation between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the United States of America
(Washington, February 3, 2022, published under No. 89/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine on amendment of the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine on the local border traffic of 30 May 2008
(Bratislava, April 16, 2019, published under No. 148/2022 Z. z.)

Partnership Agreement on relations and cooperation between the European Union and its member states, of the one part, and New Zealand, of the other part
(Brussels, October 5, 2016, published under No. 263/2022 Z. z.)

Framework Agreement between the European Union and its member states, of the one part, and Australia, of the other part
(Manila, August 7, 2017, published under No. 370/2022 Z. z.)

■ Governmental treaties and agreements

Amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Hungary on the operation, maintenance and reconstruction of road border bridges and sections of border roads on the common state border, signed on 14 September 2017 in Budapest
(Bela, October 7, 2021, published under No. 29/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on economic cooperation
(Baku, October 19, 2021, published under No. 157/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the United States of America concerning security measures for the protection of classified information
(Bratislava, May 13, 2022, published under No. 241/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Argentine Republic on a working holiday programme
(Buenos Aires, May 5, 2022, published under No. 260/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement on the Central and Eastern IMF constituency for 2022–2032
(Bratislava, June 29, 2022, published under No. 371/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Armenia on economic cooperation
(Yerevan, April 8, 2022, published under No. 514/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments to the Agreement between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Kingdom of Spain on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income
(published under No. 283/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments to the Agreement between Slovak Republic and the Republic of Bulgaria on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income
(published under No. 372/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments to the Agreement between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the People's Republic of China on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income
(published under No. 373/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments to the Agreement between Slovak Republic and the Republic of South Africa on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income
(published under No. 513/2022 Z. z.)

■ Ministerial treaties and agreements

Amendment No. 3 to the Agreement between the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia on mutual visa representation
(published under No. 261/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania on deployment of Lithuanian Police Officers to the territory of the Slovak Republic
(Prague, July 11, 2022, published under No. 262/2022 Z. z.)

■ Multilateral treaties and agreements

Common regulations under the Lisbon Agreement for the protection of appellations of origin and their international registration and the Geneva act of the Lisbon Agreement on appellations of origin and geographical indications
(Geneva, October 7, 2021, published under No. 13/2022 Z. z.)

Regulations under the Protocol relating to the Madrid Agreement concerning the international registration of marks
(Geneva, October 7, 2021, published under No. 14/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments of the Text of and Annexes I, II, III, IV, VI a VIII to the 1998 Protocol on persistent organic pollutants to the 1979 Convention on long-range transboundary air pollution
(Geneva, December 18, 2009, published under No. 17/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments of the Text of and Annexes other than III and VII to the 1998 Protocol on heavy metals to the 1979 Convention on long-range transboundary air pollution
(Geneva, December 13, 2012, published under No. 18/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments and additions to the Agreement on international railway freight communications (SMGS)
(Warsaw, November 6, 2020, published under No. 45/2022 Z. z.)

Rules relating to fees of the European patent convention as adopted by decision of the Administrative Council of the European Patent Organisation
(Munich, December 15, 2021, published under No. 110/2022 Z. z.)

Council of Europe Convention on an integrated safety, security and service approach at football matches and other sports events
(Saint-Denis, July 3, 2016, published under No. 149/2022 Z. z.)

Protocol amending the European Landscape Convention
(Strasbourg, August 1, 2016, published under No. 239/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments and additions to the Agreement on International Railway Freight Communications (SMGS)
(Warsaw, November 5, 2021, published under No. 240/2022 Z. z.)

Amendments to the Regulations under the Patent Cooperation Treaty
(October 8, 2021, published under No. 259/2022 Z. z.)

Modifications to RID (Annex and Appendix C of the Convention)
(published under No. 515/2022 Z. z.)

■ Terminated treaties and agreements

European Convention on spectator violence and misbehaviour at sports events and in particular at football matches
(October 1, 2022, published under No. 149/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany on the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 573/1992 Zb.)
(June 9, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Government of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Government of the Hellenic Republic on the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 363/2000 Z. z.)
(October 29, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Kingdom of Spain on the promotion and protection of Investments (published under No. 647/1992 Zb.) (October 10, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the French Republic on the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 453/1991 Zb.) (August 28, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Latvia on the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 26/1999 Z. z.) (February 28, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Kingdom of the Netherlands on the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 569/1992 Zb.) (March 31, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Poland on the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 27/1997 Z. z.) (April 4, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)

Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Slovenia on the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 89/1999 Z. z.) (March 10, 2021, published under No. 47/2022 Z. z.)



Structure of the state administration authorities acting in international and European affairs in 2022

As of February 2023

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Zuzana Čaputová

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■ Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic

Boris Kollár

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Prepared by Tomáš Čorej, Slovak Foreign Policy Association

Source: websites of the bodies and agencies of the Government of the Slovak Republic

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■ Prime Minister

Eduard Heger (as of December 15th serving as Interim Prime Minister after government lost a no-confidence vote in parliament)

■ Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy

Richard Sulik (until September 15)

■ Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Informatization

Veronika Remišová (as of December 15th serving as Interim Deputy Prime Minister)

■ Deputy Prime Minister

Štefan Holy (as of December 15th serving as Interim Deputy Prime Minister)

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■ Minister

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Rastislav Káčer (since September 13th, as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ State Secretaries

Martin Klus (until September 28th)
Ingrid Brocková
Andrej Stančík (since September 29th)

■ Secretary General of the Ministry

Pavol Sýkorčín, tel.: +421259783301, pavol.sykorcin@mzv.sk

■ Directorate-General of Minister

Director General: Denisa Koterec Frelichová, tel.: +421259783051,
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Diplomatic Protocol

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Department of Analysis and Policy Planning

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Inspection Department

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Head of the Department: Jana Tomková, tel.: +421259783161, jana.tomkova@mzv.sk

Communication Department

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Consular Department

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Division of Internal Audit

Head of Division: Ivan Škorupa, tel.: +421259783035, ivan.skorupa@mzv.sk

■ Directorate-General for Political Affairs

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Common Foreign and Security Policy Department

Head of the Department: Matúš Bušovský, tel.: + 421259783410,
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Transatlantic Relations and Security Policy Department

Head of the Department: Norbert Brada, tel.: + 421259783480,
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Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus and Central Asia Department

Head of the Department: Michal Slivovič, tel.: +421259783430,
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South-Eastern Europe and Turkey Department

Head of the Department: Eva Ponomarenková, tel.: +421259783441,
eva.ponomarenkova@mzv.sk

Asia, Pacific and Latin America Department

Head of the Department: Marek Repovský, tel.: +421259783451,
marek.repovsky@mzv.sk

Middle East and Africa Department

Head of the Department: Valér Franko, tel.: +421233358240, valer.franko@mzv.sk

■ Directorate General for European Affairs

Director General: Tomáš Kozák, tel.: +421259783501, tomas.kozak@mzv.sk

Department for General Affairs and Relations with EU Institutions

Head of the Department: Iveta Hricová, tel.: +421259783580, iveta.hricova@mzv.sk

Department of Neighbor States, Regional Cooperation and Other European States

Head of the Department: Ladislav Babčan, tel.: +421259783541,
ladislav.babcan@mzv.sk

Department of European Union Member States

Head of the Department: Katarína Jurisová, tel.: +421259783511,
katarina.jurisova@mzv.sk

Department of the EU Law

Head of the Department: Peter Lysina, tel.: +421259783503, peter.lysina@mzv.sk

Department of European politics

Head of the Department: Ivan Kováč, tel.: +421259783560, ivan.kovac@mzv.sk

■ Directorate-General for International Organisations and Human Rights

Director General: Juraj Podhorský, tel.: +421259783601, juraj.podhorsky@mzv.sk

Department of the UN and International Organizations

Head of the Department: Peter Hulényi, tel.: +421259783610, peter.hulenyi@mzv.sk

Department of Disarmament and Counter-terrorism

Head of the Department: Rastislav Križan, tel.: +421259783620, rastislav.krizan@mzv.sk

Human Rights Department

Head of the Department: Soňa Danová, tel.: +421259783770, sona.danova@mzv.sk

International Law Department

Head of the Department: Peter Klanduch, tel.: +421259783711, peter.klanduch@mzv.sk

■ Personnel Office

Director General: Dušan Krištofík, tel.: +421259782101, dusan.kristofik@mzv.sk

Headquarters Personnel and Payroll Department

Head of the Department: Zuzana Warderová, tel.: +421259782120, zuzana.warderova@mzv.sk

Foreign Personnel and Payroll Department

Head of the Department: Oľga Beňová, tel.: +421259782130, olga.benova@mzv.sk

Human Resources Management Department

Head of the Department: Juraj Ješko, tel.: +421259782110, juraj.jesko@mzv.sk

Diplomatic Academy

Head of the Department: Monika Tomašovičová, tel.: +421259782140, monika.tomasovicova@mzv.sk

■ Directorate-General for Economics and General Administration

Director General: Silvia Hríbová, tel.: +421259782801, silvia.hribova@mzv.sk

Finance Department

Head of the Department: Ivana Čermáková, tel.: +421259782810, ivana.cermakova@mzv.sk

Public Procurement Department

Head of the Department: Adriana Gajdošová, tel.: +421259782890, adriana.gajdosova@mzv.sk

Accounts and Properties Reporting Department

Head of the Department: Andrea Ondrišeková, tel.: +421259782700, andrea.ondrisekova@mzv.sk

Investments and Real Estate

Head of the Department: Eva Bezáková, tel.: +421259782850, eva.bezakova@mzv.sk

Building Management and Services Department

Head of the Department: Petra Pabišová, tel.: +421259782850, petra.pabisova@mzv.sk

■ Directorate-General for Information Technology and Security

Director General: Rastislav Kubán, tel.: +421259782001, rastislav.kuban@mzv.sk

Department of Security

Head of the Department: Katarína Hanzalová, tel.: +421259782050, katarina.hanzalova@mzv.sk

Department of Administration and Operation of Information and Communication Technologies

Head of the Department: Vladimír Kopecký, tel.: +421259782080, vladimir.kopecky@mzv.sk

Department of Electronization Services and Processes

Head of the Department: Vladimír Ježek, tel.: +421259782090, vladimir.jezek@mzv.sk

Department of Cyber and Information Security

Head of the Department: Martin Kalinka, tel.: +421259782010, martin.kalinka@mzv.sk

■ Directorate-General for Economic and Development Cooperation

Director General: Lucia Kišš, tel.: +421259783801, lucia.kiss@mzv.sk

Department of Global Economic Policies

Head of the Department: Manuel Korček, tel.: +421259783830, manuel.korcek@mzv.sk

Business Center Department

Head of the Department: Branislav Pochaba, tel.: +421259783890, branislav.pochaba@mzv.sk

Department for Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

Head of the Department: Maroš Mitrík, tel.: +421259783640, maros.mitrik@mzv.sk

■ MINISTRY OF ECONOMY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Mlynské nivy 44, 827 15 Bratislava 212

tel.: +421248541111

www.mhsr.sk

■ Minister

Richard Sulík (until September 13th)

Karel Hirman (since September 13th, as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ State Secretaries

Ján Oravec (until September 28th)

Karol Galek (until September 28th)

Peter Švec (since September 28th)

Peter Gerhart (since September 28th)

■ MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Kutuzovova 8, 832 47 Bratislava

tel.: +421960112233

www.mosr.sk, mod.gov.sk

■ Minister

Jaroslav Naď (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ State Secretary

Marián Majer

■ MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Pribinova 2, 812 72 Bratislava

tel.: +421250941111, +421250944397

www.minv.sk

■ Minister

Roman Mikulec (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Jan Lazar (until May 4)
Vendelin Leitner (until November 9)
Tomáš Oparty (since May 4)
Lubomír Šablica (since November 9)

■ **MINISTRY OF FINANCE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Štefanovičova 5, 817 82 Bratislava
tel.: +421259581111
www.mfsr.sk, www.finance.gov.sk

■ **Minister**

Igor Matovič (until December 23rd)
Eduard Heger (since December 23rd, serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Marcel Klimek
Ľuboš Jančík

■ **MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Námestie SNP 33, 813 31 Bratislava
tel.: +421220482111
www.culture.gov.sk, www.mksr.sk, mksr@culture.gov.sk

■ **Minister**

Natália Milanová (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Radoslav Kutaš
Viera Leščáková

■ **MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Limbová 2, 837 52 Bratislava 37
tel.: +421259373111
www.health.gov.sk, office@health.gov.sk

■ **Minister**

Vladimír Lengvarský (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Róbert Babela
Lenka Dunajová Družkovská

■ **MINISTRY OF LABOUR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND FAMILY
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Špitálska 4, 6, 8, 816 43 Bratislava
tel.: +421220460000
www.employment.gov.sk

■ **Minister**

Milan Krajniak (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Juraj Káčer
Soňa Gaborčáková

■ **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND SPORT
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Stromová 1, 813 30 Bratislava
tel.: +421259374111
www.minedu.sk

■ **Minister**

Branislav Grohling (until October 4th)
Ján Horecký (since October 4th, as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Svetlana Sithová (until September 21st)
Ivan Husár (until September 21st)
Ľudovít Paulis (until September 21st)
Slavomír Partila (since October 17th)
Michal Fedák (since November 7th)

■ **MINISTRY OF JUSTICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Župné námestie 13, 813 11 Bratislava
tel.: +421288891111
www.justice.gov.sk

■ **Minister**

Mária Kolíková (until September 13th)
Viliam Karas (since September 13th, as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Ondrej Dostál (since April 4th – until September 21st)
Peter Sepeši (since October 12th)
Edita Pfundtner (since November 1st)

■ **MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Nám. Ľ. Štúra 1, 812 35 Bratislava
tel.: +421259561111
www.enviro.gov.sk, www.minzp.sk

■ **Minister**

Ján Budaj (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Juraj Smatana
Michal Kiča

■ **MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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■ **Minister**

Samuel Vlčan (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Martin Kováč (since September 22nd)
Henrich Haščák

■ **MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND CONSTRUCTION
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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www.telecom.gov.sk

■ **Minister**

Andrej Doležal (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Katarína Bruncková
Jaroslav Kmeť

■ **MINISTRY OF INVESTMENTS, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND INFORMATIZATION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Štefánikova 15, 811 05
Bratislava tel.: +421220928149
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■ **Minister**

Veronika Remišová (as of December 15th serving as Interim Minister)

■ **State Secretaries**

Dušan Velič
Ján Hrgaš

■ **ANTIMONOPOLY OFFICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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tel.: +421222122110
www.antimon.gov.sk

Chairman: Tibor Menyhart, tel.: +421248297230, predseda@antimon.gov.sk

■ **STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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tel.: +421250236222
www.statistics.sk

Chairman: Peter Peňko, tel.: +421250236334, peter.petko@statistics.sk



List of the embassies in the Slovak Republic

as of January 2023

▪ Country	▪ Start of diplomatic relations	▪ Address of embassy	▪ In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	–	Nad Šárkou 1512/63 160 00 Praha 6 Czech Republic	
The Republic of Albania	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 16 811 01 Bratislava	Enkeleda Merkuri Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
People's Democratic Republic of Algeria	1. 1. 1993	Rudolfingergasse 18 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Fauzia Mebarki Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Principality of Andorra	3. 6. 1996	Kärtnering 2 A/13 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Enric Tarrado Vives Ambassador-Designate
The Republic of Angola	30. 9. 1993	Leonard Bernstein Straße 10 A-1220 Vienna Austria	Teodolinda Rosa Rodrigues Coelho Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Argentine Republic	1. 1. 1993	Lugeck 1–2/7/44 A A-1010 Vienna Austria	Gustavo Eduardo Ainchil Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Armenia	14. 11. 1993	Hadikgasse 28 1140 Vienna Austria	Armen Papikyan Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Commonwealth of Australia	1. 1. 1993	Gertrude-Froehlich- Sandner-Str. 2 1100 Vienna Austria	Richard Traves Sadleir Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Cooperative Republic of Guyana	–	Guyana High Commission 3 Palace Court Bayswater Road W2 4LP London United Kingdom	Frederick Hamley Case Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Azerbaijan	27. 11. 1993	Hügelgasse 2 A-1130 Vienna Austria	Rovshan Nusrat oglu Sadigbayli Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Prepared by Tomáš Čorej, Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Kingdom of Bahrain		Klingelhöfstrasse 7 10785 Berlin Germany	Abdulla Abdullatif Abdulla Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The People's Republic of Bangladesh	3. 3. 1993	Peter-Johan-Straße 50 1190 Vienna Austria	Muhammad Abdul Muhith Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Belgium	1. 1. 1993	Schönburgstrasse 10 1040 Vienna Austria	Caroline Vermuelen Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Benin	19. 1. 1993	Englerallee 23 D-14159 Berlin Germany	Josseline Marie Louise da Silva Gbony Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Belarus	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 5 811 02 Bratislava 1	Ihar Liatun Chargé d'affaires
The Plurinational State of Bolivia	5. 3. 1993	Prinz-Eugen-Strasse 18 A-1040 Vienna Austria	María Lourdes Espinoza Patino Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1. 1. 1993	Opletalova 27 110 00 Praha Czech Republic	Martina Mlinarević Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Botswana	–	6 Stratford Place W1C 1AY London United Kingdom	Roy Warren Blackbeard Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federative Republic of Brazil	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 47 811 06 Bratislava	Gradilone Neto Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Bulgaria	1. 1. 1993	Kuzmányho 1 811 06 Bratislava 1	Vasil Petkov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Burkina Faso	1. 8. 1997	Strohgasse 14c A-1030 Vienna Austria	Dieudonné Kere Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Burundi	29. 6. 1999	Berliner Strasse 36 D-10715 Berlin Germany	Else Nizigama Ntamagiro Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	–	Neulinggasse 29/6/20 A-1030 Vienna Austria	A. Georgette M,Brah First Advisor
The Republic of Cyprus	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 01 Bratislava	Nicos P. Nicolaou Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Chad		Lepsiusstrasse 114 D-12165 Berlin Germany	Mariam Ali Moussa Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Czech Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 8 P. O. Box 208 810 00 Bratislava	Tomáš Tuhý Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Montenegro	1. 1. 1993	Lothringerstrasse 14–16 1030 Vienna Austria	Marko Stevanovic Chargé d'Affaires

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Chile	1. 1. 1993	Lugeck 1/311 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Alfred Tapia Chargé d'affaires
The People's Republic of China	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 8 b 811 02 Bratislava 1	Sun Lijie Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Denmark	1. 1. 1993	Führichgasse 6 A-1010 Vienna Austria	René Rosager Dinesen Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Representation of European Commission in the SR	–	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	Vladimír Šucha Head of Representation
European Parliament Information Office	–	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	Robert Sermek Director
The Arab Republic of Egypt	1. 1. 1993	Panská 14 811 01 Bratislava	Bassem Mohamed Abdel-Alim Khalil Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Ecuador	1. 1. 1993	Goldschmiedgasse 1010 Vienna Austria	Mireya del Carmen Munoz Mera Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Estonia	1. 1. 1993	Wohlebengasse 9/12 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Merle Pajula Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	–	Boothstrasse 20a D-12207 Berlin Germany	Mulu Solomon Bezuneh Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Philippines	1. 1. 1993	Donau City Strasse 11 A-1220 Vienna Austria	Pasi Tuominen Designated Ambassador
The Republic of Finland	1. 1. 1993	Hellichova 1 118 00 Prague Czech Republic	Irene Susan B. Natividad Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The French Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 7 812 83 Bratislava 1	Pascal Le Deunff Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of the Gambia	18. 8. 1995	Avenue F. D. Roosevelt 126 1050 Brussels Belgium	Jaiteh Teneng Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Ghana	–	Na Zatorce 89/6 160 00 Praha 6 – Bubeneč Czech Republic	James Komla Nyasembi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Georgia	25. 11. 1993	Michalská 9 811 01 Bratislava	Revaz Beshidze Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Guatemala	15. 4. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/ A-1040 Vienna Austria	Manuel Estuardo Roldán Barillas Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Guinea	16. 3. 1993	Jägerstrasse 67–69 DE-10117 Berlin Germany	Aboubacar Sidy Konate Charge d'affaires

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Guinea-Bissau	–	Kronenstrasse 72 DE-10117 Berlin Germany	Malam Djassi Ambassador Designated
The Hellenic Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 4 811 01 Bratislava 1	Maria Spyrokosta Chargé d'Affaires
The Kingdom of the Netherlands	1. 1. 1993	Fraňa Kráľa 5 811 05 Bratislava 1	Gabriella Sancisi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Honduras		Cuxhavener Strasse 14 DE-10555 Berlin Germany	Christa Castro Varela Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Croatia	1. 1. 1993	Mišikova 21 811 06 Bratislava 1	Aleksandar Heina Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of India	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 4 811 08 Bratislava	Apoorva Srivastava Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Indonesia	1. 1. 1993	Brnianska 31 811 04 Bratislava 1	R. Pribadi Sutiono Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Iraq	1. 1. 1993	Johannnesgasse 26 1010 Vienna Austria	Baker Fattah Hussien Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of Iran	1. 1. 1993	Jauresgasse 9 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	Dermot McGauran Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Iceland	1. 1. 1993	Naglergasse 2/3/8 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Kristín A. Árnadóttir Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Israel	1. 1. 1993	Slávičie údolie 106 811 02 Bratislava	Eitan Levon Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Jamaica	1. 1. 1993	Schmargendorfer Str. 32 D-12159 Berlin Germany	Deniese Ava-Lou Sealey Chargé d'affaires
Japan	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné nám. 2 813 27 Bratislava	Makoto Nakagawa Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Yemen	1. 1. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 18 – 20 1030 Vienna Austria	Haytham Abdulmomen Shoja 'Aadin Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	3. 3. 1993	Rennweg 17/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Rana Abida Counselor
The Republic of South Africa	1. 1. 1993	Sandgasse 33 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Rapulane Sydney Molekane Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Cambodia	–	Benjamin-Vogelsdorf Str. 2 D-13187 Berlin Germany	Savny Phen Ambassador Designated

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Cameroon	–	Ulmenallee 32 D-14050 Berlin Germany	
Canada	1. 1. 1993	Laurenzerberg 2 A-1010 Vienna Austria Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	Troy Barry Lulashnyk Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Qatar	–	Schottenring 10 1010 Vienna Austria	Sultan Salmeen S. B. Almansouri Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Kazakhstan	1. 1. 1993	Kancelária v Bratislave Červeňova 14 811 03 Bratislava Slovenská republika	Tolezhan Barlybayev Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Kenya	1. 1. 1993	Andromeda Tower Donau-City Str. 6 1220 Vienna Austria	Stella Mokaya Orina Chargé d'affaires
The Kyrgyz Republic	1. 1. 1993	Invalidenstrasse 3/8 1030 Vienna Austria	Bakyt Alievic Jusupov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Colombia	1. 1. 1993	Stadiongasse 6–8/15 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Miguel Camilo Ruiz Blanco Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Congo	30. 6. 1998	Wallstrasse 69 D – 10179 Berlin Germany	Serge Michel Odzocki Ambassador Designated
The Democratic Republic of the Congo	18. 2. 1993	Soukenická 34/1765 110 00 Prague Czech Republic	Mibanga Ngala-Mulmr Wa Badidike Benoit-Labre Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Štúrova 16 811 02 Bratislava	Byeongdo Lee Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Na Větru 395/18 162 00 Prague Czech Republic	Ju Won Chol Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Costa Rica	6. 10. 1993	Flussgasse 7 A-1020 Vienna Austria	Herbert Daniel Espinoza Solano Consul General, Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Cuba	1. 1. 1993	Somolického 1/A 811 05 Bratislava	Rafael Paulino Pino Bécquer Ambassador Designated
The State of Kuwait	1. 1. 1993	Lodná 2 811 02 Bratislava	Essa Y. K. E. Alshamali Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	–	Sommerhaidenweg 43 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Vandy Boutsady First Secretary
The Kingdom of Lesotho	8. 5. 1995	Via Serchio 8 001 98 Rome Italy	Malikopo Patricia Rakootje First Secretary

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Lebanese Republic	1. 1. 1993	Oppolzergasse 6/3 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Ibrahim Assaf Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Libya	1. 1. 1993	Révova 45 811 02 Bratislava	Khaled Salem Shaban Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Lithuania	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Donatas Kušlys Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Latvia	1. 1. 1993	Stefan Esders Platz 4 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Guna Japiņa Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	1. 1. 1993	Sternwartestrasse 81 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Jean Graff Ambassador Designated
The Republic of North Macedonia	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 387/14, 811 01 Bratislava	Evgenija Ilieva Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Madagascar	16. 2. 1996	Koursovoy Per. 5 119 034 Moscow Russian Federation	Florence Isabelle Rafaramalala Chargé d'affaires
Hungary	1. 1. 1993	Štefánikova 1 811 05 Bratislava	Tibor Pető Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Malaysia	1. 1. 1993	Floridsdorfer Hauptstrasse 1–7 A-1210 Vienna Austria	Mohd Ibrahim Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Malawi	–	Westfälische Strasse 86 D-10709 Berlin Germany	Michael Barth Kamphambe Nkhoma Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Mali	–	Ambasciata del Mali Via Antonio Bosio 2 00161 Roma Italia	Aly Coulibaly Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Opernring 5 11010 Vienna Austria	Simon Cachia Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Morocco	1. 1. 1993	Hasenauerstrasse 57 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Azzeddin Farhane Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of Mauritania	–	Kommandantenstrasse 80 D-10117 Berlin Germany	Mohamed Mahomud Ould Brahim Khilil Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Republic of the Union of Myanmar	–	Kneza Miloša 72 11000 Belgrade Serbia	Thurain Thant Zin Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Moldova	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/10 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Dorina Roman Chargé d'affaires
Mongolia	1. 1. 1993	Na Marně 5 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	Damdin Gansukh Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Namibia	9. 12. 1997	Zuckerandlgasse 2 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Nada Kruger Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Republic of Germany	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 10 813 03 Bratislava	Barbara Wolf Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nepal	4. 3. 1994	Guerickestrasse 27 D-10587 Berlin Germany	Ram Kaji Khadka Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Republic of Nigeria	1. 1. 1993	Rennweg 25 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Suleiman Dauda Umar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Republic of the Niger	–	Machnowerstraße 24 D-14165 Berlin Germany	
The Republic of Nicaragua	5. 1. 1993	Joachi-Karnatz-Alle 45 10557 Berlin German	Tatiana Daniela García Silva Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Norway	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	Alex Vodicka Winther Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
New Zealand	1. 1. 1993	Mattiellistrasse 2–4/3 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Brian Hewson Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Sultanate of Oman	3. 1. 1993	Wahringer Strasse 2–4/24–25 A-1090 Vienna Austria	Yousuf Ahmed Hamed Aljabri Ambassador Designated
The Islamic Republic of Pakistan	1. 1. 1993	Hofzeile 13 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Aftab Ahmad Khokher Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Palestine	1. 1. 1993	Gorkého 3 811 01 Bratislava	Attalla S. A. Qubia Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Panama	–	Goldschmiedgasse 10/403 1010 Vienna Austria	Luis Alberto Campana Boluarte Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Paraguay	8. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/7 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Juan Francisco Facetti Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Peru	1. 1. 1993	Mahlerstrasse 7/22 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Darío Ernesto Chirú Ochoa Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Poland	1. 1. 1993	Paulínyho 7 814 91 Bratislava	Krzysztof Strzałka Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Portugal	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 16 811 01 Bratislava	Fernando Manuel de Jesus Teles Fazendeiro Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Austria	1. 1. 1993	Astoria Palace Hodžovo námestie 1/A 811 06 Bratislava	Margit Bruck-Friedrich Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
Romania	1. 1. 1993	Fraňa Kráľa 11 811 05 Bratislava	Călin Fabian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Russian Federation	1. 1. 1993	Ulica Borisa Nemcova 4 811 06 Bratislava 1	Igor Borisovič Bratčikov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Rwandese Republic	–	Jägerstrasse 67–69 D-10117 Berlin Germany	Igor Cesar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of El Salvador	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/2/1 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Ramiro Recinos Trejo Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of San Marino	1. 1. 1993	Palazzo Begni Contrada Omerelli 31 47890 San Marino Italy	Dario Galassi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	16. 6. 1995	Formanekgasse 38 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Abdullah bin Khaled bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Senegal	–	Klingelhöferstrasse 5 D-10785 Berlin Germany	
The Republic of Seychelles	–	51, Avenue Mozart 75016 Paris France	
The Republic of Sierra Leone	–	Rublevskoe šosse 26/1 121615 Moscov Russian Federation	John Bobor Laggah Advisor
The Republic of Singapore	12. 2. 1993	MFA, Tanglin 2 48163 Singapore	Chay Wai Chuen Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Slovenia	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 5 813 15 Bratislava 1	Stanislav Raščan Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Federal Republic of Somalia	–	Simferopolsky Bulvar 7a-145 117 556 Moscov Russian Federation	Mohamed Mahmoud Handule Ambassador Designated
The United Arab Emirates	3. 1. 1993	Chimanistrasse 36 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Ahmed Hasan Alsehhi Charge d'affaires
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Panská 16 811 01 Bratislava 1	Nigel Marcus Baker Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United States of America	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo námestie 4 811 02 Bratislava 1	Gautam A. Rana Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United Mexican States	1. 10. 1993	Rennngasse 5 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Luis Javier Campuzano Piña Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Serbia	1. 1. 1993	Búdkova 38 811 04 Bratislava 1	Marija Barlović Chargé d'affaires
The Democratic Socialist republic of Sri Lanka	15. 2. 1993	Weyringergasse 33–35 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Majintha Jayasinghe Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Sudan	27. 7. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 29/5 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Elsadig Mohamed A. E. M. Ahmed Chargé d'affaires
The Holy See	1. 1. 1993	Nekrasovova 17 811 04 Bratislava 1	Nicola Girasoli Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Eswatini	–	Avenue Winston Churchill 188 1180 Brussels Belgium	
The Syrian Arab Republic	1. 1. 1993	Daffingerstrasse 4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Hasan Khaddou Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Spain	1. 1. 1993	Prepoštská 10 811 01 Bratislava 1	Lorea Arribalzaga Ceballos Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Switzerland	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 06 Bratislava 1	Peter Nelson Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Sweden	1. 1. 1993	Liechtensteinstrasse 51 A-1090 Vienna Austria	Annika Markovic Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Tajikistan	–	Hutweidengasse 47 1190 Vienna Austria	Idibek Kalandar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Italy	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 49 811 06 Bratislava	Catherine Flumiani Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United Republic of Tanzania	1. 1. 1993	Eschenallee 11 D-14050 Berlin Germany	Abdallah Saleh Possi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Togo	–	Grabbeallee 43 13156 Berlin Germany	Komi Bayedze Dagoh Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Thailand	1. 1. 1993	Cottagegasse 48 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Morakot Sriswasdi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Tunisia	1. 1. 1993	Nárcisz Utca 36 Budapest Hungary	Abdelkarim Hermi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Turkey	1. 1. 1993	Holubyho 11 811 03 Bratislava 1	Yunus Demirer Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Turkmenistan	1. 1. 1993	Argentinerstrasse 22/II/EG A-1040 Vienna Austria	Berdimyrat Sahetmyradov Chargé d'affaires
Ukraine	1. 1. 1993	Radvanská 35 811 01 Bratislava 1	Nataliia Nykyforak Chargé d'affaires

■ Country	■ Start of diplomatic relations	■ Address of embassy	■ In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Uganda	–	Axel-Springer Str. 54° C-10117 Berlin Germany	Mercel Robert Tibaleka Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	–	Mahlerstrasse 11/2/2 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Juan Carlos Ojeda Viglione Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Uzbekistan	20. 1. 1993	Pötzleinsdorfer Strasse 49 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Rustamdjan Khakimov Chargé d'affaires
The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/1/1.1 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Dulfa Dalila Hernández Medina Charge d'affaires
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 15 811 08 Bratislava	Tuan Nguyen Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Zambia	5. 1. 1993	Axel-Springer Str. 54 A D-10117 Berlin Germany	Chalwe Lombe Advisor
The Republic of Zimbabwe	3. 3. 1993	Chemin William Barbery 271292 Chambésy Geneva Switzerland	Taonga Mushayavanhu Ambassador Designated
Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Kapitulská 9 811 01 Bratislava	Alfred Prinz von Schönburg-Hartenstein Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary



List of consulates in the Slovak Republic

as of January 2023

▪ State	▪ Address of the consulate in the SR	▪ Consul
The Republic of Azerbaijan	Klobučnícka 4 811 01 Bratislava	Džalal Gasymov Honorary Consul
The Republic of Armenia	Ventúrska 1 811 01 Bratislava	Bagrat Hakobyan Honorary Consul
The Commonwealth of the Bahamas	Ventúrska 10 811 01 Bratislava	Michal Lazar Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Belgium	Moskovská 13 811 08 Bratislava	Bart Waterloos Honorary Consul
Belize	Krajná ulica 56C 821 04 Bratislava	Miroslav Strečanský Honorary Consul
The Republic of Belarus	Osadská 679/15 028 01 Trstená	Marián Murín Honorary Consul
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tureň 385 903 01 Tureň	Munir Pašagić Honorary Consul
Montenegro	Zelená 2 811 01 Bratislava	Rudolf Autner Honorary Consul
The Republic of Chile	Kĺzavá 31/C 831 01 Bratislava	Jaroslav Šoltys Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Denmark	Bajkalská 5/A 831 03 Bratislava	Michal Lörincz Honorary General Consul
Dominican Republic	Einsteinova 9 851 01 Bratislava	Dušan Dvorecký Honorary Consul
The Republic of Estonia	Drieňová 3 821 01 Bratislava	Peter Pochaba Honorary Consul
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	Bojnická 3 831 04 Bratislava	Girma Belay Honorary Consul
The Republic of Philippines	Cesta na Senec 15725/24 830 06 Bratislava	Pavol Konštiak Honorary General Consul
French Republic	Hlavná 104, 040 01 Košice	David Mortreux Honorary Consul
French Republic	M. R. Štefánika 52 036 01 Martin	Grégory Delton Honorary Consul

Prepared by Tomáš Čorej, Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The Republic of Finland	Moyzesova 5 811 05 Bratislava	Karol Kállay Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Finland	Žriedlová 12–14, 040 01 Košice	Rastislav Puchala Honorary Consul
Georgia	Orlové 116 017 01 Považská Bystrica	Nodari Giorgadze Honorary Consul
Georgia	Másiarska 57/A 040 01 Košice	Franco Pigozzi Honorary Consul
The Republic of Ghana	Palisády 31 811 06 Bratislava	James Arthur Honorary Consul
Hellenic Republic	Hlavná 20 040 01 Košice	Liberios Vokorokos Honorary Consul
Hungary	949 01 Nitra, Kupecká 9	Jozef Gál Honorary Consule
The Kingdom of The Netherlands	Košická 44 P. O. Box 21080 01 Prešov	Matúš Murajda Honorary Consul
The Republic of Iceland	Palisády 39 811 06 Bratislava	Pavol Čekan Honorary Consul
The Republic of Iceland	M.R. Štefánika 66 036 01 Martin	Erika Halašová Honorary Consul
The State of Israel	Garbiarska 5 040 01 Košice	Peter Frajt Honorary Consul
Jamaica	Porubského 2 811 06 Bratislava	Marián Valko Honorary Consul
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	Račianska 96 831 02 Bratislava	Jaroslav Rebej Honorary Consul
The Republic of Cabo Verde	Dvořákovo nábrežie 8/A 81102 Bratislava	Štefan Czucz Honorary Consul
The Republic of South Africa	Fraňa Kráľa 1 851 02 Bratislava	Milan Lopašovský Honorary Consul
The Republic of Korea	Dolný val 5 010 01 Žilina	Oldřich Kovář Honorary Consul
The Kyrgyz Republic	Miletičova 1 821 08 Bratislava	Tibor Podoba Honorary Consul
The Republic of Colombia	AC Diplomat Palisády 29/ A 811 06 Bratislava	Anton Siekel Honorary Consul
The Republic of Costa Rica	Palisády 56 811 06 Bratislava	Tomáš Chrenek Honorary Consul
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	Panská ulica 27 811 01 Bratislava	Bounthong Bounthong Honorary Consul
The Republic of Lithuania	Za záhradami 16 900 28 Zálesie	Marián Meško Honorary Consul
The Republic of Latvia	Krmanova 1 040 01 Košice	Miroslav Repka Honorary Consul
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Prievozská 4/A 821 09 Bratislava	Peter Kriško Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Jašíkova 2 821 03 Bratislava	Igor Junas Honorary Consul
The Republic of Madagascar	V záhradách 4 811 02 Bratislava	Peter Brudňák Honorary Consul

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The Republic of Maldives	Lazaretská 29 811 09 Bratislava	Andrej Matko Honorary Consul
The Republic of Mali	Mikulášska 3 – 5 811 02 Bratislava	Eugen Horváth Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Morocco	Krajná 86 821 04 Bratislava	Ľubomír Šidala Honorary Consul
The Republic of Moldova	Zámocká 16 811 01 Bratislava	Antonio Parziale Honorary Consul
The Republic of Moldova	Hlavná 81 040 11 Košice	Ján Varga Honorary Consul
Mongolia	Národná trieda 56 040 01 Košice	Peter Slávik Honorary Consul
The Republic of Namibia	Zadunajská cesta 8 851 01 Bratislava	Karol Biermann Honorary Consul
The Federal Republic of Germany	Priemyselná 14 010 01 Žilina	Peter Lazar Honorary Consul
New Zealand	Dvořákovo nábrežie 10 811 02 Bratislava	Peter Korbačka Honorary Consul
The Sultanate of Oman	Sasinkova 12 811 08 Bratislava	Oszkár Világi Honorary Consul
The Republic of Paraguay	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	Martin Šamaj Honorary Consul
The Republic of Peru	Tuhovská 5 831 07 Bratislava	Andrej Glatz Honorary Consul
The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	Svätoplukova 28 812 08 Bratislava	Milan Majtán Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	Nám. osloboditeľov 1 031 01 Liptovský Mikuláš	Tadeusz Frackowiak Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	ul. Hlavná 139 080 01 Prešov	Ján Hudacký Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	ul. Puškinova 1 040 01 Košice	Konrad Schönfeld Honorary Consul
The Republic of El Salvador	Záhradnícka 62 82108 Bratislava	Igor Moravčík Honorary Consul
The Republic of Senegal	Kálov 655/10 010 01 Žilina	Souleymane Seck Honorary Consul
The Republic of Seychelles	Pod Strelnicou 161/1 040 18 Nižná Hutka	Wanda Adamík Hrycová Honorary Consu
The Republic of Sierra Leone	Partizánska 16 811 03 Bratislava	Václav Mika Honorary Consul
The United Mexican States	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	Václav Mika Honorary Consul
The Republic of Serbia	Jesenského 12 040 01 Košice	Eva Dekanovská Honorary Consul
The Republic of Serbia	Pavla Mudroňa 12 036 01 Martin	Mojmír Vrlík Honorary Consul
The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	Peter Gabalec Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Spain	Hutnícka 1 040 01 Košice	Daniel Lučkanič Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Address of the consulate in the SR	■ Consul
Switzerland	Vajanského 10 080 01 Prešov	Helena Virčíková Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Sweden	Tomášikova 30 821 01 Bratislava	Vladimír Kestler Honorary General Consul
The Kingdom of Thailand	Viedenská cesta 3–7 851 01 Bratislava	Alexander Rozin Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago	Nobelova 34 831 02 Bratislava	Roman Danda Honorary Consul
The Republic of Tunisia	P. Mudroňa 5 010 01 Žilina	Patrik Rapšík Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uganda	Ružová dolina 25 821 09 Bratislava	Andrej Brna Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Budovateľská 29 093 01 Vranov nad Topľou	Stanislav Obický Honorary Consul
Ukraine	P. O. Hviezdoslava 22 052 01 Žilina	Jaroslav Šutarík Honorary Consul
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	Trnkova 46 851 10 Bratislava	Milan Beniák Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uzbekistan	Hotel Park Inn by Radisson Danube Rybné námestie 1811 02 Bratislava	Ľudovít Černák Honorary Consul
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	Hlavná 70 040 01 Košice	Rastislav Sedmák Honorary Consul



List of the embassies of the Slovak Republic, permanent missions, consulates general, Slovak institutes abroad

as of January 2023

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Abuja	Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon, Gabon, Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Mali, Liberia, Togo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Côte d'Ivoire	21st Crescent Off Constitution Avenue Abuja Nigeria	Tomáš Felix Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Abu Dhabi	The United Arab Emirates	Capital Plaza, Office Tower Khalifa Bin Zayed Street Office 14-01, Abu Dhabi The United Arab Emirates	Michal Kováč Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ankara	Turkey	Atatürk Bulvarı 245 06692 Ankara Turkey	Ján Pšenica Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Athens	The Hellenic Republic (Greece)	Georgiou Saferi 4 Paláio Psychiko 154 52 Athens Greece	Marcela Hanusová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Baku	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan 90 A Nizami Landmark III 1010 Baku Azerbaijan	Milan Lajčák Charge d'Affaires a. p. Ambassador
Bangkok	Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar	South Sathorn Road 25 10 120 Bangkok The Kingdom of Thailand	Jaroslav Auxt Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Beijing	China, Mongolia	Ritan Lu, Jianguomen Wai 100 600 Beijing People's Republic of China	Peter Lizák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Beirut	Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria	Weavers Center, 14th fl. Clemenseau Street Beirut Lebanon	Marek Varga Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Belgrade	Serbia	Bulevar umetnosti 18 110 70 Novi Beograd Serbia	Fedor Rosocha Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Berlin	Germany	Hildebrandstraße 25 10785 Berlin Germany	Maroš Jakubócy Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Prepared by Tomáš Čorej, Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Bern	Switzerland, Liechtenstein	Thunstrasse 633074 Muri Bern Switzerland	Alexander Micovčín Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Brasília	Brazil, Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Surinam, Guyana	SES, Avenida das Nacões, Qd. 805, Lote 21 B CEP 70 200-902 Brasília, Brazil	Milan Zachar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Budapest	Hungary	Stefánia út 22 – 24. 1143 Budapest XIV Hungary	Pavol Hamžík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Buenos Aires	Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay	Figuerola Alcorta 3240 Buenos Aires Argentina	Rastislav Hindický Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Bucharest	Romania	Strada Otetari 020977 Bucharest Romania	Peter Hatiar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Cairo	Egypt, Chad, Yemen, Lybia, Mauritania, Oman, Sudan, Tunisia	3 Adel Hosein Rostom Cairo Egypt	Lenka Miháliková Ambassador
Chisinau	Moldova	A. Sciuzeva 101 Chisinau Moldova	Pavol Ivan Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Copenhagen	Denmark	Vesterled 26 – 28 2100 Copenhagen Denmark	
Delhi	India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan	50-M, Niti Marg, Chanakyapuri 110021 New Delhi India	Róbert Maxián Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Dublin	Ireland	80 Merrion Square South Dublin 2 Ireland	Andrej Droba Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Hague	Netherlands	Parkweg 1 2585 Den Haag Netherlands	Juraj Macháč Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Hanoi	Vietnam	12 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan Ba Dinh District Hanoi Vietnam	Pavol Svetík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Havana	Antigua a Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Saint Lucia, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago	Calle 66, No. 521 Entre 5 B y 7, Miramar, Playa Havana Cuba	
Helsinki	Finland, Estonia	Vähäniityntie 5 00570 Helsinki Finland	Slavomíra Mašurová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Jakarta	Brunei, East Timor, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore	alan Profesor Mohammad Yamin 29 103 10 Jakarta Indonesia	Jaroslav Chlebo Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Kyiv	Ukraine	Jaroslavov val 34 019 01 Kyiv Ukraine	Marek Šafín Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Lisbon	Portugal	Avenida da Liberdade 200 1250-147 Lisbon Portugal	Tibor Králik Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
London	The United Kingdom	25, Kensington Palace Gardens W8 4QY London The United Kingdom	Róbert Ondrejcsák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ljubljana	Slovenia	Bleiweisova 4 1000 Ljubljana Slovenia	Peter Zelenák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Madrid	Spain, Andorra, Morocco	C/Pinar, 20 28006 Madrid Spain	Juraj Tomaga Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Mexico City	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize	Julio Verne 35 11560 Mexico City Mexico	Terézia Šajgalíková Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Minsk	Belarus	Volodarskogo 6 220 030 Minsk Belarus	Katarína Žáková Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Moscow	Russian Federation	J. Fučíka 17/19 115 127 Moscow Russian Federation	Ľubomír Rehák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nairobi	Kenya, Comoros, Burundi, Congo, Seychelles, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda, Tansania, Eritrea, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo	Jakaya Kikwete Rd., 00100 Nairobi Kenya	Katarína Žuffa Leligdonová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nicosia	Cyprus	Kalamatas Street No. 4 2002 Nicosia Cyprus	Martin Bezák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Astana	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	Samal 12, Z10F1M5, Astana Kazakhstan	Robert Kírnág Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Oslo	Norway, Iceland	Thomas Heftyes gate 24 N-0244 Oslo Norway	Roman Bužek Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ottawa	Canada	50 Rideau Terrace K1M 2A1 Ottawa, Ontario Canada	Vít Koziak Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Paris	France, Monaco, Algeria	125 rue du Ranelagh 75016 Paris France	Igor Slobodník Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Podgorica	Montenegro	Crnogorskih Serdara 5 81000 Podgorica Montenegro	Boris Gandel Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Prague	Czech Republic	Pelléova 12 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Pretoria	South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe	930 Arcadia Street Arcadia 0083 Pretoria South Africa	Vladimír Grác Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Prishtina	Serbia (Kosovo)	Selim Berisha 11, Dragodan, 10000 Pristina Kosovo Serbia	Rastislav Kostilník Head of the Liaison Office
Riga	Latvia, Lithuania	Smilšu iela 8 1050 Riga Latvia	Ladislav Babčan Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Riyadh	Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Kuwait and the State of Qatar		Rudolf Michalka Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador
Rome	Italy, Malta, San Marino	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144VI/A00194 Rome Italy	Karla Wursterová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Trnovska 6 710 00 Sarajevo Bosnia and Herzegovina	Roman Hlobeň Ambassador
Skopje	FYROM (Macedonia)	Budimpeštanska 39 1000 Skopje North Macedonia	Henrik Markuš Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Sofia	Bulgaria	Blv. Janko Sakazov 9 1504 Sofia Bulgaria	Vasil Grivna Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Seoul	South Korea, North Korea	28, 10gil Hannamdae-ro Yongsan-gu Seoul South Korea	Ján Kuderjavý Ambassador
Stockholm	Sweden	Arsenalsgatan 2/3 TR 10 388 Stockholm Sweden	Ľubomír Čaňo Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tashkent	Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Kichik Beshjogoch 38 100070 Tashkent Uzbekistan	Ján Bóry Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tehran	Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan	72 Moghadassi St., Niavaran St., 1971836199 Tehran Iran	Ladislav Ballek Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tel Aviv	Israel, Palestine	Jabotinsky 37 6459 Tel Aviv Israel	Igor Maukš Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tirana	Albania	Rruga Skenderbej 8 Tirana Albania	Peter Spišiak Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tbilisi	Georgia	13 Mtskheta Str., Apt. 23, 0179 Tbilisi Georgia	Pavel Vízdal Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tokyo	Japan, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau	2-11-33, Moto-Azabu Minato-ku 106-0046 Tokyo Japan	Marián Tomášik Head of the Mission

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Vatican (The Holy See)	Vatican (The Holy See), Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144 00135 Rome Vatican	Marek Lisánsky Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Vienna	Austria	Armbrustergasse 24 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Peter Mišík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Warsaw	Poland	Litewska 6 00-581 Warsaw Poland	Andrea Elscheková Matisová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Washington	USA	3523 International Court NW 20008 Washington D. C. USA	Radovan Javorčík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Zagreb	Croatia	Prilaz Gjüre Deželica 10 10000 Zagreb Croatia	Peter Susko Ambassador
Yerevan	Armenia	Ul. 36 Sayat Nova Ave 0025 Yerevan Armenia	Miroslav Hacek Charge d'Affaires a. p. Head of the Mission

■ Permanent Missions

■ Permanent mission	■ Address	■ Head of the Mission
PM International Organizations Vienna	Blaastraße 34 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Peter Mišík
PM EU Brussels	Avenue de Cortenbergh 107 1000 Brussels Belgium	Petra Vargová
PM NATO Brussels	Boulevard Leopold III NATO HQ 1110 Brussels Belgium	Peter Bátor
PM OECD Paris	28, Avenue d'Eylau 750 16 Paris France	František Ružička
PM UN New York	801 Second Avenue 10017 New York USA	Michal Mlynár
PM UN Geneva	9, Chemin de l'Ancienne Route 1218 Grand Saconnex Switzerland	Dušan Matulay
PM Council of Europe Strasbourg	1 Rue Ehrmann 67000 Strasbourg France	Oksana Tomová
PM UNESCO Paris	1, rue Miollis 757 32, Paris France	Anna Plassat Muriňová

■ Consulates General

■ State	■ Address	■ Consul Genral
The People's Republic of China	1375 Huaihai Central Road 2 00031 Shanghai	Ivana Vala Magátová
Hungary	Derkovits sor 7 5600 Békéscsaba	
Poland	Św. Tomasza 34 31027 Cracow	Tomáš Kašaj
Russian Federation	Orbeli č. 21/2 194 223 Saint Petersburg	Igor Derco
USA	801 Second Avenue, 12th Floor New York, N.Y. 10017	Milan Vrbovský
Germany	Vollmannstrasse 25d 819 25 Munich	Jozef Korček
Turkey	3. Levent Bambu Sokak No: 6343 30 Istanbul	Veronika Lombardini
Ukraine	Lokoty 4 880 00 Uzhhorod	Pavol Pánis

■ Slovak Institutes

■ Name	■ Address	■ Head
Slovak Institute Berlin	Hildebrandstr. 25 10785 Berlin Germany	Zuzana Megová
Slovak Institute Budapest	Rákóczi út. 15 H-1088 Budapest Hungary	Ildiko Síposová
Slovak Institute Jerusalem	19 King David St, 9410143, Jerusalem, Izrael	Jakub Urik
Slovak Institute Moscow	Ul. 2 Brestská 27 125-056 Moscow Russia	Peter Feranec
Slovak Institute Paris	125 Rue de Ranelagh F-75016 Paris France	Jana Kňážková
Slovak Institute Prague	Nám. Republiky 1037/3 110 00 Praha 1 Czech Republic	Vladimír Valovič
Slovak Institute Rome	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144 00135 Rome Italy	Lubica Krénová
Slovak Institute Warsaw	Krzywe Kolo 12/14a PL-00 270 Warsaw Poland	Adrián Kromka
Slovak Institute Vienna	Wipplingerstrasse 24–26 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Igor Skoček



List of consulates of the Slovak Republic headed by the honorary consuls

as of January 2023

▪ State	▪ Consulate	▪ Consul
Albania	Tirana	Faik Dizdarii Honorary Consul
Argentina	La Plata	Eduardo Kabát Honorary General Consul
Armenia	Yerevan	Gagik Vladimirovič Martirosian Honorary Consul
Australia	Brisbane	Michal Horvath Honorary Consul
Australia	Melbourne	Eugénia Mocnay Honorary Consul
Australia	Perth	Pavol Faix Honorary Consul
Austria	St. Pölten	Veit Schmid-Schmidfelden Honorary Consul
Austria	Linz	Harald Papesch Honorary Consul
Austria	Salzburg	Gerald Hubner Honorary Consul
Austria	Eisenstadt	Alfred Tombor Honorary Consul
Austria	Graz	Friedrich Wolfgang Sperl Honorary Consul
Bahames	Nassau	Isacc Chester Cooper Honorary Consul
Bangladesh	Dhaka	Miran Ali Honorary Consul
Belarus	Brest	Ivan Michailovič Kozič Honorary Consul
Belgium	Antwerp	Gunnar Riebs Honorary Consul General
Belgium	Gent	Arnold Vanhaecke Honorary Consul
Belgium	Mons	Peter De Nil Honorary Consul

Prepared by Tomáš Čorej, Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Belize	Belize	Carlo Arguelles Honorary Consul
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Medjugorje	Rajko Zelenika Honorary Consul
Brazil	Belo Horizonte	Renato Werner Victor de Queiroz Honorary Consul
Brazil	Joinville	Ernesto Heinzelmann Honorary Consul
Brazil	Rio de Janeiro	Mohamad Façal Mohamad Said Hammoud Honorary Consul
Brazil	São Paulo	Luciano Meschini Giugliano Honorary Consul
Bulgaria	Varna	Edita Blagoevova Honorary Consul
Canada	Calgary	Eva Hadzima Honorary Consul
Canada	Montreal	Dezider Michaletz Honorary Consul
Canada	Vancouver	Pavol Hollosy Honorary Consul
Canada	Toronto	Michael Martinček Honorary Consul
Comoros	Moroni	Mohamed Zamine Sondarjee Honorary Consul
Czech Republic	Brno	Jaroslav Weigl Honorary Consul
Croatia	Split	Goran Morović Honorary Consul
Chile	Santiago	Paul Nador Honorary Consul
China	Hong Kong	Willy Lin Honorary Consul
Cyprus	Limassol	Angelos Gregoriades Honorary Consul
Denmark	Aarhus	Claus Jørgen Søgaard Poulsen Honorary Consul
Ecuador	Quito	Esteban Casares Benítez Honorary Consul
Egypt	Alexandria	Mohamed Moustafa el Naggar Honorary Consul
Estonia	Tallinn	Even Tudeberg Honorary Consul
Ethiopia	Addis Abeba	Feleke Bekele Safo Honorary Consul
Finland	Teerijärvi	Mikael Ahlbäck Honorary Consul
France	Grenoble	Menyhért Kocsis Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
France	Marseille	Marc-André Distanti Honorary Consul
Greece	Chania	Stavros Paterakis Honorary Consul
Greece	Thessaloniki	Konstatinos Mavridis Honorary Consul
Greece	Patras	Phaedon Couniniotis Honorary Consul
Greece	Pireus	Michael Bodouroglou Honorary Consul
Georgia	Tbilisi	Besarion Kvartskhava Honorary Consul
Germany	Leipzig	Albrecht Heinz Tintelnot Honorary Consul
Germany	Bad Homburg	Imrich Donath Honorary Consul
Germany	Hamburg	Michael Stein Honorary Consul
Germany	Hildesheim	Dirk Bettels Honorary Consul
Germany	Stuttgart	Cristoph Goeser Honorary Consul
Guatemala	Guatemala	Mario Fernando Montúfara Rodrigues Honorary Consul
Guinea	Conakry	Boubakar Lombonna Diallo Honorary Consul
Iceland	Reykjavík	Runólfur Oddsson Honorary Consul
India	Bangalore	Chiriankandath Joseph Roy Honorary Consul
India	Mumbai	Amit Choksey Honorary Consul
Iraq	Erbil	Sherin Jawdat Ibrahim Barzanjy Honorary Consul
Ireland	Galway	Lorraine Higgins Honorary Consul
Israel	Haifa	Josef Pickel Honorary Consul
Italy	Forli	Alvaro Ravaglioli Honorary Consul
Italy	Milan	Luigi Cuzzolin Honorary Consul
Italy	Florence	Massimo Sani Honorary Consul
Italy	Torino	Giuseppe Pellegrino Honorary Consul
Jamaica	Kingston	Christopher Richard Issa Honorary Consul
Japan	Osaka	Shiro Murai Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Japan	Kirishima	Masahiro Yamamoto Honorary Consul
Japan	Utsunomiya	Eichii Ishikawa Honorary Consul
Jordan	Amman	Khaldun A. Abuhassan Honorary General Consul
Kazakhstan	Karaganda	Alexej Petrovič Nefjodov Honorary Consul
Kazakhstan	Öskemen	Ajdar Jerežerpovič Mambetkazijev Honorary Consul
Kenya	Mombasa	Christoph Modigell Honorary Consul
Kyrgyzstan	Bishkek	Igor Konstantinovič Gusarov Honorary Consul
South Korea	Soul	Nan Se Gum Honorary Consul
Laos	Vientiane	Vongnam Vongvilay Honorary Consul
Lebanon	Beirut	Samir Doumet Honorary Consul
Lithuania	Vilnius	Ramūnas Petravičius Honorary Consul
Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Giancarlo d'Elia Honorary Consul
North Macedonia	Skopje	Vlade Stojanovski Honorary Consul
Madagaskar	Antananarivo	Ismael Danilhousen Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Kota Kinabalu	Khen Thau Wong Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	Tan Sri Tee Keat Ong Honorary Consul
Malta	Valletta	Godwin Edvard Bencini Honorary Consul General
Morocco	Casablanca	Kamil Ouzzani Touhamy Honorary Consul
Mauritius	Port Louis	Yatemani Gujadhur Honorary Consul
Mexico	Cancún	Francisco Edmundo Lechón Rosas Honorary Consul
Mexico	Monterrey	Jorge García Segovia Honorary Consul
Moldova	Chisinau	Iurie Grigore Popovici Honorary Consul
Nepal	Kathmahandu	Pasang Dawa Sherpa Honorary Consul
Netherlands	Eindhoven	Gerardus Hendrik Meulesteen Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Netherlands	Groningen	Denisa Kasová Honorary Consul
Nigeria	Lagos	Ramesh Hathiramani Honorary Consul
Nicaragua	Managua	Bergman Castillo Honorary Consul
Norway	Drammen	Zuzana Opavská Wahl Honorary Consul
Norway	Bergen	Torbjørn Haaland Honorary Consul
New Zealand	Auckland	Peter T. Kiely Honorary Consul
Oman	Muscat	Mohammed S. Al-Harthy Honorary Consul
Pakistan	Lahore	Muhammad Malik Asif Honorary Consul
Palau	Koror	Danka Ledgerwood Honorary Consul
Palestine	Betlehem	George Suliman Malki Jabra Honorary Consul
Panama	Panama	Julio César Benedetti Honorary Consul
Paraguay	Cuidad del Este	Charif Hammoud Honorary Consul
Paraguay	Asunción	Alex Hammoud Honorary Consul
Peru	Lima	Víctor Andrés Belaunde Gutiérrez Honorary Consul
Philippines	Cebu City	Antonio N. Chiu Honorary Consul
Poland	Bydhost	Wiesław Cezary Olszewski Honorary Consul
Poland	Gliwice	Marian Czerny Honorary Consul
Poland	Poznań	Piotr Stanisław Styczynski Honorary Consul
Poland	Rzeszow	Adam Góral Honorary Consul
Poland	Sopot	Jerzy Leśniak Honorary Consul
Poland	Wroclaw	Maciej Kaczmarek Honorary Consul
Poland	Zakopané	Wiesław Tadeusz Wojas Honorary Consul
Portugal	Faro	Rui Marques Dias Gomes Honorary Consul
Portugal	Funchal	Roberto Rodrigo Vieira Henriques Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Portugal	Riberia Grande	Zuzana Pinčáková da Silva Vieira Honorary Consul General
Portugal	Funchal	Roberto Rodrigo Vieira Henriques Honorary Consul
Romania	Salonta	Miroslav Iablonsik Honorary Consul General
Portugal	Faro	Rui Marques Dias Gomes Honorary Consul
Romania	Salonta	Miroslav Iablonsik Honorary Consul General
Russian Federation	Astrachan	Vladimir Stepanovič Sinčenko Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Omsk	Jurij Viktorovič Šapovalov Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Krasnojarsk	Valerij Alexandrovič Gračev Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Ekaterinburg	Alexander Petrovič Petrov Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Vladivostok	Apres Gvidonovič Voskianian Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Perm	Boris Abramovič Švajcer Honorary Consul
Saudi Arabia	Jeddah	Saeed Omar H. Balubaid Honorary Consul
Seychelles	Victoria	Joseph France Albert Honorary Consul
Serbia	Niš	Stela Jovanović Honorary Consul
South Africa	Cape Town	Geoffrey Leighton Ashmead Honorary Consul
South Africa	Johannesburg	Juraj Michlo Honorary Consul
Sri Lanka	Colombo	Mahen Roshan Andrew Kariyawasan Honorary Consul
Sudan	Khartoum	Nasreldin Ibrahim Shulgami Honorary Consul General
Syria	Latakia	Anas Dib Joud Honorary Consul
Spain	Santa Cruz de Tenerife	Francisco José Perera Molinero Honorary Consul
Spain	Malaga	Jesús García Urbano Honorary Consul
Spain	Zaragoza	José Javier Parra Campos Honorary Consul
Sweden	Göteborg	Carl Magnus Richard Kindal Honorary Consul
Sweden	Luleå	Jonas Lundström Honorary Consul
Switzerland	Basel	Ruben Masar Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Switzerland	Zürich	Leonz Meyer Honorary Consul
Tanzania	Dar es Salaam	Moustafa Hassanali Khataw Honorary Consul
Togo	Lomé	Viwoto James Victor Sossou Honorary Consul
Turkey	Bursa	Hüseyin Özdilek Honorary Consul
Turkey	Izmir	Selçuk Borovali Honorary Consul
Turkey	Trabzon	Suat Gürkök Honorary Consul
Turkey	Kayseri	Osman Güldüoğlu Honorary Consul
Turkey	Manavgat	Dr. Şükrü Vural Honorary Consul
Turkey	Mersin	Emir Bozkaya Honorary Consul
Turkey	Tekirdağ	Levent Erdoğan Honorary Consul
Turkey	Kusadasi	Tevfik Bağci Honorary Consul
Turkey	Izmit	Onur Sümer Honorary Consul
Uganda	Kampale	Abel M. S. Katahoire Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Kharkov	Viktor Vasiljevič Popov Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Odesa	Mykhaylo Viktorovič Muzalev Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Velikij Bereznyj	Oleg Ivanovič Adamčuk Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Glasgow	Craig Murray Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Belfast	Thomas Sullivan Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Cardiff	Nigel Bruce Harold Payne Honorary Consul
Uruguay	Montevideo	Matias Balparda Honorary Consul
USA	Atlanta	John W. Woodward Honorary Consul
USA	Detroit	Edward Zelenak Honorary Consul
USA	Indianapolis	Steve Zlatos Honorary Consul
USA	Kansas City	Ross P. Marine Honorary Consul
USA	Dallas	Martin Valko Honorary Consul

▪ State	▪ Consulate	▪ Consul
USA	Los Angeles	Ben H. Lyon Honorary Consul
USA	North Miami	Cecilia F. Rokusek Honorary Consul
USA	Pittsburgh	Joseph T. Senko Honorary Consul
USA	San Francisco	Barbara M. Pivnicka Honorary Consul
USA	Naperville	Rosemary Macko Wisnosky Honorary Consul
USA	Boston	Peter Mužila Honorary Consul
USA	Denver	Gregor James Fasing Honorary Consul
USA	Lafayette	Zoltán Gombos Honorary Consul
USA	Taskhent	Vasily Shimko Honorary Consul
USA	Caracas	Manuel Antonio Polanco Fernández Honorary Consul
USA	Ho Chi Minh City	Huy Ho Honorary Consul General
Yemen	Sana'a	Adel Mohamed Al Huraibi Honorary Consul



List of non-governmental organizations working in the field of foreign and security policy, development cooperation and humanitarian assistance and international law

as of January 2023

■ Name	■ Field	■ Address	■ Webpage
A.D.E.L. – Association for Development, Education	youth development, cross-border cooperation	Černyševského 10 851 01 Bratislava	http://www.adelslovakia.org/
ADRA	development cooperation	Cablkova 3 821 04 Bratislava	https://www.adra.sk/
Africké kultúrne, informačné a integračné centrum (African Cultural, Information and Integration Center)	cultural cooperation and integration	Ružinovská 1 821 02 Bratislava	http://www.akiic.sk/
Al Nova	cultural heritage and active citizenship	Prostredná 64 900 21 Svätý Jur	https://ainova.sk/
Amazi	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Sološnická 20 841 04 Bratislava	https://amazi.sk/
Ambrela	development cooperation	Miletičova 7 821 08 Bratislava	https://ambrela.org/
Amnesty International Slovakia	human rights	Štefánikova 16 811 04 Bratislava	https://www.amnesty.sk/
Bratislava Policy Institute	liberal democracy and European integration	Klariská 14 811 03 Bratislava	https://www.bpi.sk/
CARDO – Národné dobrovoľnícke centrum	development cooperation and volunteering	Tomášikova 3 821 01 Bratislava	https://www.dobrovolnictvo.sk/
Centrum národov Slovensko	the ideas of UN Charter	Kuzmányho 3 974 01 Banská Bystrica	https://cnsoz.eu/
Centrum pre európsku politiku (Center for European Policy)	active citizenship and the youth	Panenská 30 811 03 Bratislava	https://www.cep.sk/
Centrum pre filantropiu (Center for Philanthropy)	charity and development cooperation	Baštová 343 811 03 Bratislava	https://cpf.sk/
Človek v ohrození (People in Need)	development cooperation and humanitarian aid	Baštová 5 811 03 Bratislava	https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/
Evanjelická diakonia ECAV na Slovensku	development cooperation and humanitarian aid	Palisády 46 811 06 Bratislava	https://www.diakonia.sk/

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■ Name	■ Field	■ Adress	■ Webpage
Evanjelická diakonia ECAV na Slovensku	development cooperation and humanitarian aid	Palisády 46 811 06 Bratislava	https://www.diakonia.sk/
eRko	development cooperation	Miletičova 7 821 08 Bratislava	https://erko.sk/
EUROIURIS – Európske právne centrum (European Legal Center)	European law	Na Vřšku 6 811 02 Bratislava	https://ja-sr.sk/euroiuris-europske-pravne-centrum
EuroPolicy	European Union and its policies	Maróthyho 6 811 06 Bratislava	https://www.europolicy.sk/
Fórum pre medzinárodnú politiku (International Politics Forum)	foreign politics	L. Fullu 23 841 05 Bratislava	http://mepoforum.sk/
Globsec	international security and sustainability	Vajnorská 100/B 831 04 Bratislava	https://www.globsec.org/
Habitat for Humanity	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Zochova 6 811 03 Bratislava	https://www.habitat.org/
Hekima	fighting poverty	Donnerova 35 841 04 Bratislava	https://www.hekima.sk/
Inštitút pre kultúrnu politiku (Institute for Cultural Policies)	cultural policy	Štefánikova 25 811 05 Bratislava	http://ikp.sk/en
Inštitút pre strednú Európu (Institute for Central Europe)	Slovakia and Europe	Banskobystrická 7403811 06 Bratislava	https://iceoz.sk/
Integra	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Dobšinského 14 811 05 Bratislava	https://integra.sk/
Karpatská nadácia (The Carpathian Foundation)	education, cross-border cooperation, especially with Ukraine	Letná 27 040 01 Košice	https://karpatskanadacia.sk
Liga za ľudské práva (Human Rights League)	assistance to refugees and development cooperation	Račianska 80 831 02 Bratislava	https://www.hrl.sk/
Live AID International	volunteering and development cooperation	Lachova 7 851 03 Bratislava	http://www.live-aid.org/
Magna	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Štefánikova 19 811 05 Bratislava	https://www.magna.com/
Medzinárodný republikánsky inštitút (International Republican Institute)	freedom and democracy	Tallerova 2 811 02 Bratislava	https://www.iri.org/
Nebo nad Afrikou	humanitarian aid in Africa	Hokovce 145 935 84 Hokovce	https://www.facebook.com/Nebo-nad-Afrikou-101546895446360/
PDCS	conflict resolution and education	Štúrova 13 811 02 Bratislava	https://www.pdcs.sk/

■ Name	■ Field	■ Adress	■ Webpage
Savio	development cooperation	Miletičova 7 821 08 Bratislava	https://savio.sk/
Slovenská akademická asociácia pre medzinárodnú spoluprácu (Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation)	international cooperation	Križkova 9 811 04 Bratislava	http://www.saac.sk/
Slovenská humanitná rada (Slovak Humanitarian Council)	humanitarian aid	Budyšínska 1 831 03 Bratislava	https://www.shr.sk/
Slovenská katolícka charita (Caritas Slovakia)	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Kapitulská 18 814 15 Bratislava	https://www.charita.sk/
Slovenská spoločnosť pre medzinárodné právo SAV (Slovak Society of International Law)	international law	Klemensova 19 813 64 Bratislava	https://www.ssmpp-ssil.org/kontakt/
Slovenská spoločnosť pre zahraničnú politiku (Slovak Foreign Policy Association)	foreign and European policy, security policy, development cooperation	Staromestská 6 811 03 Bratislava	https://www.sfpa.sk/
Slovenské centrum pre komunikáciu a rozvoj (Slovak Centre for Communication and Development)	development cooperation and education	Pražská 11 811 04 Bratislava	https://sccd-sk.org/
Slovenský červený kríž (Slovak Red Cross)	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Grösslingová 24 814 46 Bratislava	https://redcross.sk/
Slovenský inštitút pre bezpečnostnú politiku (Slovak Security Policy Institute)	security and defense	Na vřšku 8 811 01 Bratislava	https://slovaksecurity.org/
Strategic Analysis	Western Balkans and South Caucasus	Tolstého 5 811 06 Bratislava	https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/
STRATPOL	European security	Štúrova 3 811 02 Bratislava	https://stratpol.sk/
Stredoeurópska nadácia (Central European Foundation)	cultural heritage	Sasinkova 12 811 08 Bratislava	http://www.cef.sk/
Stredoeurópsky inštitút ázijských štúdií (Central European Institute of Asian Studies)	Central European engagements with Asia	Murgašova 2 811 04 Bratislava	https://ceias.eu/
Unicef	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Michalská 7 811 01 Bratislava	https://www.unicef.sk/
Živica	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Račianska 78 831 02 Bratislava	https://zivica.sk/



List of publications and online sources on foreign and European policy, security policy and international law

as of January 2023

■ Online Publication	■ Publisher
CEIAS Considers	CEIAS
Euractiv	EURACTIV Slovakia
MepoForum	Fórum pre medzinárodnú politiku
Zahraničná politika	SFPA

■ Publication	■ Publisher
Almanach	Faculty of International Relations, University of Economics in Bratislava
Asian and African Studies	Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences
Euro–Atlantic quarterly	Slovenská atlantická komisia
Fórum cudzích jazykov, politológie a medzinárodných vzťahov	College Danubius
Medzinárodné vzťahy	Faculty of International Relations, University of Economics in Bratislava
Obrana	Ministry of Defence
Studia Politica Slovakia	Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences
Svet a my	The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
Political Sciences	Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Matej Bel University

Prepared by Tomáš Čorej, Slovak Foreign Policy Association



Slovakia's participation in foreign military operations and observer missions in 2022

as of January 2023

▪ Mission	▪ Country	▪ Armed forces members	▪ Police force members	▪ Civilian experts
▪ UN				
UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)	Cyprus	240	6	
UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization)	Syria, Israel	2		
▪ NATO				
NMI (NATO Mission Iraq)	Iraq	5		
eFP (Enhanced Forward Presence)	Latvia	131		
Resolute Support	Afghanistan	18		
NATO Headquarters	Sarajevo	1		
▪ EU				
EUFOR Althea (European Union Force Althea)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	53		
EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia)	Georgia	1	6	
EUBAM (EU Border Assistance Mission in Moldova)	Ukraine/Moldova		1	
EUTM (European Union Training Mission in Mali)	Mali	5		
EUNAVFOR MED Irini	Central Mediterranean	2		
▪ OSCE				
SMM (Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine)	Ukraine		2	12
OSCE Mission in Serbia	Serbia			1
OSCE Mission in North Macedonia	North Macedonia			1
OSCE Mission in Kosovo	Kosovo			1

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic





About authors

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■ Ján Cingel

is the founder and CEO of Strategic Analysis Think Tank, a foreign affairs and security think tank established in Slovakia in 2020 that focuses mainly on the EU's close neighborhood – the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries. A former research fellow and head of the European Neighborhood Program at the GLOBSEC Policy Institute, Ján's areas of expertise are the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, radicalization, violent extremism, NATO and EU integration issues and processes. Before joining the Slovak NGO sector, he worked at the bilateral relations office within the Defense Policy, International Relations and Legislation Department of the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic. He was one of the co-founders of the Bratislava Global Security Forum – GLOBSEC (in 2005). He graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, with an MA in International Relations and Diplomacy. (jan.cingel@strategicanalysis.sk)



■ Alexander Duleba

graduated from the National Taras Shevchenko University of Kyiv in 1989. In 1990–1993, he worked at the University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik in Prešov. From May 1993 to August 1995, he was an analyst for the MFA's Slovak Institute for International Studies. In September 1995, he began working at the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, and in May 2000, became director (until September 2019) and head of the Eastern Europe research program. He received a PhD from the Institute for Political Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 1998, an Assistant Professor (doc.) degree from the Comenius University in Bratislava in 2009 and a Professor degree from Masaryk University in Brno in 2019. Since May 2010 he has taught at Prešov University. (duleba@sfp.sk)



■ Zsolt Gál

is assistant professor at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava. He holds an MA degree in Political Science from the department and a PhD degree in Economics from Corvinus University in Budapest, Hungary. His research interests include public finances, economic aspects of European integration, economic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and international migration. He teaches several courses in these fields at Comenius University. He is the author of the book *The 2007–2009 financial crisis: what went wrong and what went different?* (2011) and his work has been published in several edited volumes and academic journals. (zsolt.gal@uniba.sk)

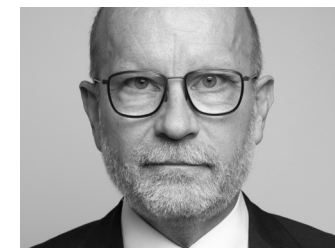
■ Daniel Kaba

studied international public law at the University of Vienna, specializing in human rights and law at the University of Comenius in Bratislava. In the past ten years he has been active in development cooperation and humanitarian aid, working as a project manager, trainer, director of ADRA Slovakia and led a team implementing projects in Kenya, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Lebanon among others. Currently he works as an executive secretary for the Ambrella Platform for Development Organizations. His main focus is policy & advocacy and partnerships. He has also provided inputs for strategic documents such as the Act on Official Development Cooperation and Medium Term Strategy for Development Cooperation 2019–2023. (daniel.kaba@ambrella.org)



■ Rastislav Káčer

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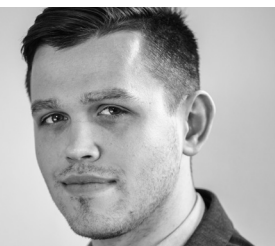
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