



Scenario of Slovakia's foreign policy after the 2023 elections

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SFPA perspective

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Prior to the parliamentary elections in September 2023, Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) published three potential post-election scenarios. The first, titled *Reliable Team Member*, anticipated continuity in foreign policy, security, and European affairs. The second scenario, *Solitary Isolation*, could be considered the opposite, predicting a direct threat to the continuity of Slovakia's foreign policy and security prospects. The third scenario, *An Unpredictable Player*, incorporated selected elements from both previous scenarios.

Following the September 2023 election results, Prime Minister Robert Fico formed a government consisting of the Smer–Slovak Social Democracy, Hlas–Social Democracy, and the Slovak National Party. On November 13, the government published its Manifesto for the years 2023–2027, that is considered a fundamental document guiding the government's actions over the next four years. SFPA researchers analyzed selected parts of the government's program statement focusing on foreign, security, and energy policies, and cross-referenced them with theses outlined in the three post-election scenarios. A comprehensive analysis of selected parts of the government's program statement revealed the greatest alignment with Scenario No. 3 — *An unpredictable player*.

European Affairs

The Manifesto of the Government formally reaffirms Slovakia's foreign policy direction, deeming EU membership "irreplaceable" and considering the EU a "unique and exceptional" project. However, the government associates the EU's exceptional position with the "right" to express a "critical perspective on the functioning and activities of the European Union." Given Slovakia's declared sovereign approach to foreign policy and its orientation "to all four corners of the world," it can be inferred that there will be multiple instances where the government adopts a critical stance towards EU matters. The government takes a negative stance, for example, towards the idea of abolishing the veto power of individual EU member states and the related functioning of EU institutions. The emphasis on sovereignty in the political discourse by government parties was also anticipated by the third scenario from SFPA experts. However, it is currently uncertain to what extent Slovakia will actually implement the veto tool within EU voting in the future. The Manifesto focuses exclusively on the sovereign right of the government to oppose EU decision-making outputs, without addressing the possibility of sovereign influence on EU policies and legislation during their formulation, a right that Slovakia, like any other EU member state, possesses.

Sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine

In the context of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, Slovakia does not outright reject voting for EU sanctions against Russia or any "state in the world," as stated in the Manifesto. However, the government conditions its support on the development of analyses mapping the impacts of sanctions on Slovakia. Therefore, it can be expected that government representatives domestically will likely portray the EU's pro-sanctions position against Russia as harmful. The SFPA scenario also predicted the suspension of military assistance to Ukraine and a focus solely on providing humanitarian aid. Reducing such restrictions only at the government

level may not have an inherently negative impact on the domestic defense industry. This approach also may not significantly limit opportunities for Slovak companies to participate in the post-war recovery of Ukraine. The government attributes significant importance to this in the Manifesto, especially in light of creating the position of deputy prime minister, who will focus on both, reconstruction projects in Ukraine and “strategic initiatives of European importance” (through the establishment of a separate department). The government will consider Ukraine’s NATO membership as an unrealistic option, and in EU enlargement, it will emphasize equal opportunities for all candidate countries while rejecting any preferential treatment for Ukraine.

Security threats

The Government’s Manifesto openly addresses the issue of introducing redistributive quotas for migrants, considering illegal migration a “significant security risk” for Slovakia and its citizens. It also anticipates the need to revise contracts concluded by the previous Ministry of Defense leadership on both governmental and commercial bases, aiming to “eliminate Slovakia’s disadvantageous position.” The Manifesto avoids designating specific countries as security threats, referring to the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a “conflict in Ukraine.” In the context of these facts, an adjustment/amendment to the Security Strategy and Defense Strategy, two key documents framing Slovakia’s foreign, security, and defense policies, can be expected.

NATO membership

The Manifesto allocates limited space to NATO membership and activities with Alliance partners. Considering this, it can be presumed that in the field of security and defense, Slovakia will not question its NATO membership. However, it may irregularly engage in activities with alliance partners and not proactively advocate for such engagement. At least some

government representatives may uncritically highlight the importance of European security and defense cooperation, potentially at the expense of developing transatlantic relations. The Manifesto, in the security-focused section, emphasizes the need to strengthen Slovakia's capabilities and ensure the preparedness of the armed forces for "new and ongoing security challenges," without emphasizing interoperability within the alliance.

Strategic communication and counter-disinformation

The government's manifesto does not dedicate any attention to combating disinformation and hybrid threats, despite this agenda being considered a priority by both the EU and NATO. In this area, a negative scenario of *Solitary isolation* may be expected. It is evident that some government representatives may sympathize with the content shared by so-called alternative media, making the disinformation ecosystem stronger, more resilient, and more popular in Slovak society with government support. Strategic communication will cease to be a priority, affecting the functioning and staffing of the so-called StratCom departments in the Government Office and other ministries. Disinformation campaigns may be quantitatively and qualitatively multiplied directly by government representatives, leading over time to a deviation from democratic values.

Bilateral relations with neighbors and regional cooperation

In bilateral relations with neighboring countries, the Manifesto emphasizes the exceptional relationship with the Czech Republic, stating that it will not allow "any danger to be exposed to this unique relationship." The relationship with Hungary is placed in a broader regional context, but it is likely that the government's positions on supporting Ukraine or emphasizing

a sovereign (foreign) policy will align with those of Hungary. The government does not negatively define any formats of regional cooperation, but it highlights the importance of the Visegrad Four in various areas of shaping the European agenda, including defense cooperation. From the government's perspective, the diversity of views among V4 countries on current foreign events, with an emphasis on the "conflict in Ukraine," should not endanger the "strategic importance of this regional grouping." How the government plans to convince the Czech Republic and Poland, which do not consider the V4 format a priority, of increased interest and activity is not mentioned in the Manifesto. This intention can be seen more as a wish than a realistic option.

Energy and climate policy

In the energy sector, an increase in state interventions and a sharpening of relations with selected energy companies can be expected. However, the Government's Manifesto does not openly state the intention to benefit for as long and as much as possible from deliveries of oil, gas, and nuclear fuel from Russia, using exemptions granted by the EU. On the contrary, the Manifesto emphasizes the need for diversification of routes, suppliers of strategic raw materials, a transition to a low-carbon economy, and, above all, increasing energy efficiency and energy savings. In the long term, the government plans to support the construction of a new nuclear source in Jaslovské Bohunice and promote the development of renewable energy sources. The government acknowledges Slovakia's commitments in the field of climate policies, but the need to move towards climate neutrality is not mentioned in the document. In the section devoted to foreign and European policy, the government adds that it will support climate protection policies that "will not drastically endanger the competitiveness of the European Union and lead to a reduction in the standard of living of the citizens of EU member countries."

Institutional matters

Within the organizational structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, the Manifesto emphasizes the strengthening of the economic dimension of diplomacy, including with countries of the “global south” or states with which Slovakia has various ties from the past. Changes in the organizational culture of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs will progress, but very slowly, meaning that measures taken will affect the level of inclusion and diversity and achieving gender parity in ambassadorial positions only to a minimal extent.

Preliminary conclusions

At the EU level, structural factors (notably membership in the eurozone) prevent Slovakia from creating an autonomous fiscal policy and directly challenging the existence of the EU and its policies. However, Slovakia may join skeptics when it comes to deepening European integration and, on the other hand, be a strong supporter of the intergovernmental approach. It can also be assumed that tension escalation with EU institutions and the activation of repressive measures by Brussels will not occur in any area of European policies. Still, Slovakia’s potential non-constructive stance on selected issues (such as the proposal to switch to qualified majority voting in the Common Foreign and Security Policy) may manifest itself as a form of marginalization within the EU. Although Slovakia will continue to present itself as a constructive partner, questioning some European solutions and blocking the implementation of selected European policies may shift it from the position of a reliable team member to that of an actor whose moves will sometimes be hard to predict, or it will at least navigate between these positions.