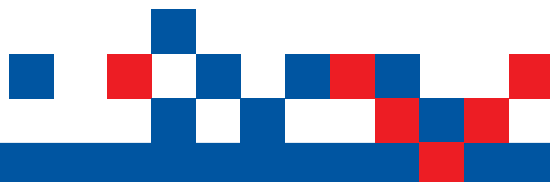


# YEARBOOK OF SLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY



**SFPA**  
Slovak Foreign Policy Association



Bratislava 2022

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# YEARBOOK OF SLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

edited by Peter Brezáni



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Ivan Koričok

Rules based  
international order  
at a time  
of great peril:  
Slovak foreign  
policy responses

The *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy* provides a good opportunity to look back and evaluate what was done in the previous year, where we succeeded and where we failed.

However, in early 2022, the world has been caught up in a spiral of orchestrated escalation that ended in unprovoked and unjustified Russian aggression against Ukraine.

It is therefore impossible to look back at 2021 without reflecting on the momentous events that, at the turn of the year, put into question the future of the global security architecture and the rules based international order as we know it.

## ■ 2021 – Prelude

The year 2021 was meant to be the post-pandemic year. That expectation was not fulfilled.

Instead of recovery, the defining features of the last year were the ongoing pandemic, instability and unpredictability. They affected not just public health, but also economic, social and political life, including foreign policy.

On the positive side, we learned to live with the pandemic to some extent. International cooperation improved and solidarity expanded. I am proud that Slovakia alone managed to share over a million vaccines both bilaterally and through COVAX.

But instead of the much expected post-pandemic economic recovery and social consolidation, we witnessed lower than expected economic growth, high inflation, accelerating energy prices, growing anxiety and discontent within societies and an increasing power contest.

In 2021, there was also growing awareness of the looming challenge of climate change and of the need to define a globally acceptable and sustainable strategy to address global warning. COP26 was, in the words of the UN Secretary General Guterres “a compromise, that reflects the interests, the conditions, the contradictions and the state of political will in the world today.” Yet, the presence of 120 world leaders and 40,000 delegates in Glasgow highlighted the urgency of joint global action.

Nevertheless, confrontation rather than cooperation dominated in 2021.

Tensions in the field of security increased not just in traditional hot-spots, but also on the very fault lines of geopolitics – from Eastern Europe to Eastern Asia.

At the end of 2021 our attention was drawn to Eastern Europe, but for most of the year the gradual geopolitical shift from the North Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific dominated. While Slovakia is not a major player in Asia or the Indo-Pacific, this geopolitical shift affects us directly as it may determine where the rules and standards of the twenty-first century will be written and where global security will be decided.

That is why we kept emphasizing the importance of working hard to maintain the transatlantic unity and cooperation. We argued that neither Europe nor America can face the mounting challenges alone. We stressed that we cannot sustain the relevance of the political West if we are divided – both domestically and internationally.

We have continuously raised our concern that the global role of the EU lags behind its potential. While still being a major economic power, significant donor and global standard-setter, the EU’s voice in the world has been decreasing.

The EU’s major efforts at the turn of the century, including the creation of the monetary union, the formation of the border-free Schengen Area, and the enlargement of the Union were followed by a decade of crises from the financial and economic crisis to the migration crisis and from Brexit to the pandemic crisis. We argued that the EU needs consolidating. It has to be able to engage in crisis management and, at the same time, make strategic long-term decisions. We need to finish the job – including the Single Market, the Economic and Monetary Union and providing a credible European perspective to our partners. But we have to be careful to avoid our usual mistake which is to focus our attention on ourselves, institutional wrangling and turf wars. In doing so we have to look beyond our everyday struggles and see the

wood for the trees and remember that our share of the global population and global GDP will keep decreasing. The unity, speed and determination that the EU showed within the first days of the Russian war against Ukraine says volumes about our potential to work together.

In 2021, geopolitics returned to our everyday lives and this trend culminated at the turn of the year.

The debate around the signing of the Defense Cooperation Agreement with the US became symptomatic of our domestic struggle in Slovakia to maintain our strategic compass.

Subsequent events have proven us right as the Russian demands tabled in December 2021 resulted in a struggle over the very nature of the European and global security architecture, our political independence and sovereign equality.

Pressure also intensified in 2021 in the field of democracy and human rights. The year 2020 had been the 15<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of decline in political rights and civil liberties at the global level, and the pandemic that followed made the situation even worse.

We reacted by adopting the Concept for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the world. I nominated a new ambassador at large for human rights. And Slovakia participated in the Summit for Democracy.

Our activities in the field of human rights and the rule of law reflect the consistency in our domestic and foreign policy priorities. They stem from our deeply held conviction that the rule of law ensures better governance, that liberal democracies provide more opportunity for innovations and the self-realization of an individual. As a result, well-governed societies reduce tensions and the potential for conflict among the population, thus ultimately providing for more security and prosperity in international relations. That is the ultimate goal of our efforts. Not to dictate choices to anyone, but to create space for free choices and to make sure that these free choices are respected. Both at the individual level and the state level.

Last but not least, our efforts in 2021 were focused on our neighborhood. Our foreign policy approach has been defined by my conviction that foreign policy begins in our neighborhood. We have maintained a high level of good neighborly relations both bilaterally and through regional formats, primarily the Visegrad Four and Slavkov cooperation. Whenever we had controversial issues, we approached them through frank and open bilateral dialogue, such as with Hungary. We paid special attention to Ukraine with the aim of

helping our neighbor to deal with multiple challenges in the field of domestic reforms, security and territorial integrity – aspirations that a revisionist external power decided to destroy.

At the same time, our foreign policy was based on the understanding that for us, as a member of the EU, the Union's neighborhood is also our own – from the Eastern partnership and the Western Balkans to the MENA region. We supported the major new tools of the EU's global action approved last year, such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the European Peace Facility and the Global Gateway.

While we welcomed the toolbox of EU neighborhood policy, we voiced our concerns over backtracking in the historically successful policy of enlargement. We advocated the need to approach our neighboring regions more strategically and less technocratically. I am convinced that the EU will not be a global player unless it convincingly and credibly addresses the challenges in its Eastern neighborhood, in the Western Balkans, the Middle East and the Sahel.

## ■ Turn of the year – Culmination

Following the numerous waves of the pandemic, we hoped that 2022 would bring an easing of the restrictions and that the world would move towards a new era, focusing on solving the main global challenges.

But it seems as if the events of 2021 – the erosion of international law, increased global competition, growing challenges to the democratic order, rising tension in the European neighborhood – predestined the beginning of 2022.

Instead of tackling the challenges that the year 2021 highlighted – health-care, climate change, technological transformation and the post-pandemic recovery, to name just the most urgent ones – we are faced with a war in Europe and the destruction of the European and global security infrastructure.

Our direct neighbor is the victim of blatant aggression because it shares our values and wants to join our family of democratic nations. Russia's requests, or rather demands, to turn back the clock of history and to ignore the strategic choices Slovakia and many other Central and Eastern European nations have made since the collapse of the Iron Curtain. A major power is attempting to make our region its zone of influence – again. The very right of nations

to independently exist is being questioned. Nuclear weapons are used as political leverage. A member of the UN SC is acting as an aggressor, instead of fulfilling its "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" under the UN Charter.

Nothing can justify Russia's unacceptable demands, nor the invasion of a neighboring country, the indiscriminate use of force and repeated threat to use force, including through its nuclear arsenal. These deeds cross all red lines and represent the flagrant violation of international law. They are a direct challenge to the European and global security architecture. In the span of a few days, the Russian political leadership has shattered everything Russia helped to build during the 70 post-war years. The Russians were co-founders of the post WWII order and were supposed to be one of its key guarantors, being one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Now Russia is destructing this order and the principles enshrined within the United Nations Charter.

## ■ 2022 – The way forward

For Slovakia, it is crucial that we keep our strategic compass firmly in our hands. With the exception of the 40 years of communism, we have always been an integral part of what is now the political West. It has always been our cultural, legal and social space and this is where we returned after the fall of communism in 1989.

Yet, while our anchor is clear and firm, our security and geopolitical environment has been fundamentally shaken. The most urgent task is to bring peace to Ukraine. The subsequent task will be to rebuild the European and global security architecture and put it on a firm footing again. For us the key elements are to:

- ensure that the territorial integrity, political independence and sovereign equality of all states is respected as required under the UN Charter;
- ensure that the threat or use of force disappears from the toolbox of interstate relations and that international disputes in the twenty-first century are settled by peaceful means;
- make sure that human rights return to the center of global attention, and reconfirm that "it is essential that human rights should be

protected by the rule of law," as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

- guarantee that both individuals and states have the right to choose their destiny.

To make it happen, we must maintain unity and further build the community of those who believe that in the twenty-first century the world should be ruled through law, not power.

The need for the unity of the free world has repeatedly been emphasized in the last couple of years. The need for democracies to consolidate their narrative and regain the hearts and minds of the people has been long overdue. Now it has become the *conditio sine qua non* of preserving our way of life and protecting the values that are dear to us.

Repairing the European and global security architecture will require an immense effort. Nevertheless, our immediate goal must be to help those suffering from the Kremlin's illegal behavior and to stop the killing and destruction in Ukraine. We, as the community of democratic nations, have put unprecedented pressure on Russia, including through crippling sanctions and by providing financial and material aid to Ukraine. It is imperative that we remain united and determined, that we do not bend, for that would have fatal consequences for Ukraine, for our region and for the democratic world as a whole.





# The Slovak Republic in the international environment



**Miroslava Pisklová**

**The year  
of the Conference  
on the Future  
of Europe and  
the pandemic recovery**

In 2021, affairs in the EU and across the entire world continued to be significantly influenced by the ongoing pandemic. While personal and political life were at least partially back to normal, the pandemic's extensive impact on the global economy became even more obvious and the EU had to focus on issues such as vaccine procurement, the post-pandemic recovery, and discussions on strategic autonomy in various areas like health, security, investments, or the production of essential commodities. The European security environment was becoming more tense, as the dispute between the EU and Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko led to thousands of migrants on the Schengen border and with the threatening build-up of Russian military forces near the Ukrainian border at the end of the year. On the other hand, President Joe Biden's arrival in the White House at the beginning of 2021 brought EU leaders hope and the prospect of rebuilding stronger transatlantic partnership, which has gained importance in the changing security environment.

This chapter will focus on the most important EU policy issues and developments of 2021 and Slovakia's role and participation in the EU. Slovakia took on a visibly active and necessary role in developing its national resilience and recovery plan and took part in the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), delayed by a year due to the pandemic. Moreover, two sets of national elections that had significance for Slovakia took place in 2021. The first was the German elections that marked the end of the Angela Merkel era and the second was the elections in the neighboring Czech Republic with the prospects of fruitful cooperation and a potentially positive impact on the Visegrad 4 and its image within the EU. This chapter will also reflect on some of Slovakia's key domestic milestones and developments, such as the government's internal conflicts and occasional blips in foreign policy orientation. These are important as they may affect the country's image among European partners.

## ■ The Slovak paradox and the promising coalition of change that became a coalition of conflict

Slovakia's pro-Western and pro-European foreign policy consensus continued in 2021 among the highest ranking political representatives who understood the most important national interests. However, when it comes to citizens' views, Slovakia seems to be a country of paradoxes. On one hand, there is the country's leadership and foreign defense ministers and their teams who are quite vocal and unambiguously pro-Western and pro-European. And that is a pleasant change after the previous leadership whose actions or statements rightfully sometimes raised eyebrows among Slovakia's European partners. On the other hand, according to the latest Eurobarometer,<sup>1</sup> only 39 per cent of Slovaks think that EU membership is a good thing.<sup>2</sup> But in a democracy if a foreign policy consensus is to last then it usually has to be in line with public opinion. The survey also found that 52 per cent of Slovaks want the European Parliament to play a less important role, which raises the question as to whether they understand that the parliament, the only institution with directly elected representatives, is there to represent their voices in the EU.

Citizens have over the years tended to perceive the EU negatively in relation to various crises (the economic, debt, migrant rises and the COVID-19 pandemic), but despite that the trend is generally positive, particularly since spring 2019. Slovakia is notorious in ranking last with only 30 per cent of citizens perceiving the EU positively, compared to the Union average of 49 per cent. Moreover, Slovaks are the least likely in the EU to support EU membership, coming in at a mere 41 per cent, while 72 per cent think the

country benefits from EU membership.<sup>3</sup> This shows that even despite the government's and president's active communication on EU affairs and their support for a common European approach to national and global challenges, there is still ample opportunity to tackle citizen distrust and help improve perceptions of the EU.

Let us now turn away from Slovak citizens' EU perceptions and support to consider the long expected "government of change," following years of social democratic rule under Robert Fico and his party Smer. In practice the new government has also been riven by internal conflict. The coalition's repetitive conflicts were played out in public with various consequences, from declining public support and growing public distrust of the authorities to the lack of confidence in the COVID restrictions and the rise in support for social democrats and extremists. The coalition's internal conflicts and on occasion the independent actions of some government leaders harmed Slovakia's image as a reliable international partner among allies.

One such example is former Prime Minister Igor Matovič, leader of the largest coalition party OĽANO, who secretly signed a contract with Russia and ordered a supply of the Russian COVID-vaccine Sputnik V in March 2021.<sup>4</sup> He did so without consulting his coalition partners, triggering a government crisis and ultimately losing his post. Moreover, the "Sputnik case" undermined the common European effort to act as a cohesive actor in the battle against the pandemic, especially in the joint vaccine procurement. Not only did Matovič break with the common EU practice of purchasing vaccines approved by the European Medical Agency (EMA) – Sputnik V has still not been approved – but he also chose to announce the vaccine's arrival in Slovakia in a most unfortunate way. The former prime minister organized a special press conference at Košice Airport, where a plane with the first Sputnik delivery arrived that evening. This not only caught his coalition partners and the Slovaks by surprise, but also sent confusing messages to European partners. There was no similar reception for the arrival of the EMA approved vaccines by Western manufacturers, and to this day no-one quite understands why

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<sup>1</sup> "Eurobarometer Wave 96. 2. Parlemeter 2021. Defending democracy, empowering citizens," *Kantar Public/European Parliament*, February 2022, pp. 9–28. Available online: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=80264> (accessed on February 28, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> This compares with 46 per cent for the same question in the 2019 Eurobarometer, before both the change of government and the pandemic. Source: "The 2019 post-electoral survey. Have European elections entered a new dimension? Eurobarometer Survey 91. 5. A public opinion monitoring study," *European Parliament*, September 2019, p. 93. Available online: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/api/deliverable/download/file?deliverableId=74390> (accessed on February 28, 2022).

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<sup>3</sup> "Eurobarometer Wave 96. 2. Parlemeter 2021. Defending democracy, empowering citizens," *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> "Sputnik dorazil na Slovensko. Korčok kritizuje Matoviča, SaS je zarazená," [Sputnik has arrived in Slovakia. Korčok criticizes Matovič, SaS is bewildered] *Pravda*, March 1, 2021. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/579627-slovaci-poletia-do-ruska-pre-vakcinu-sputnik-v/> (accessed on January, 10, 2022).

Matovič took this step. He initially announced it as a miraculous solution that would increase the vaccination rate in Slovakia by providing a wider choice of COVID vaccines. He was proved wrong, as only less than 20,000<sup>5</sup> of the over 2.5 million<sup>6</sup> Slovaks eligible for vaccination chose Sputnik and Slovakia stopped using it in August 2021 due to the low interest. Slovakia returned the vast majority of the doses and the situation triggered a serious government crisis that led to a change of prime minister. Eduard Heger took over in April 2021, and Igor Matovič became minister of finance.

## ■ General Prosecutor and the DCA

Another domestic issue that shook Slovakia's image and directly violated official foreign policy strategy and orientation was General Prosecutor Maroš Žilinka's actions at the beginning of January 2022. Žilinka eagerly criticized the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with the US, which is a standard and widely accepted agreement in other NATO member states in Europe. The general prosecutor's comments denouncing the proposed agreement prompted a society-wide discussion and led to disinformation campaigns as well as radicalized political discussion in Slovakia, an opportunity that the opposition gladly exploited. Žilinka's subsequent official visit to Moscow and his attendance at the celebrations for the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian prosecutor's office did not go unnoticed by the European Union. Again, this sent a negative message to Slovakia's allies and strategic partners and raised questions about its foreign policy orientation: Žilinka's visit took place during the tense Russian military build-up near the Ukrainian border, and he met with the Russian General Prosecutor Igor Krasnov, who was on the European sanctions list<sup>7</sup> for serious human rights violations.

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<sup>5</sup> "Na druhú dávku vakcíny Sputnik čaká šesť ľudí," [Six people are waiting for their second Sputnik jab] *Sme*, August 30, 2021. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22731740/na-druhu-davku-vakciny-sputnik-cka-sest-ludi.html> (accessed on January, 10, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> "Koronavírus na Slovensku v číslach," [Coronavirus in Slovakia in figures] Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, n.d. Available online: <https://korona.gov.sk/koronavirus-na-slovensku-v-cislach/> (accessed on January 10, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> "Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/372 amending Decision (CFSP) 2020/1999 concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses," L 71 I/6, *Official Journal of the European Union*, March 2, 2021. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021D0372&from=EN> (accessed on January 12, 2022).

Žilinka went beyond his competencies by getting involved in defense and foreign policy issues, including Heger's government foreign policy and could more broadly be seen as a threat to the unity among European partners when it comes to the EU's common approach to Russia. Although Žilinka's actions did not provoke a visible response from the EU leaders or member states, they need to be taken seriously.

It is worth noting that it was only in 2021 that the government adopted the new Slovak security and defense strategies. The new strategies are updated versions of the ones passed 16 years previously<sup>8</sup> and reflect recent changes to the security environment and international affairs and anchor Slovakia in Western structures, primarily the European Union and NATO. Instances such as those described above are unfortunate in that they raise concerns about Slovakia's foreign and security orientation.

## ■ Slovakia in the EU structures

Despite some domestic actors raising doubts about Slovakia's foreign policy and security orientation, Slovakia made an effort to portray itself as a positive actor and reliable ally more broadly within the European Union in 2021. This was especially true of Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Ivan Korčok and State Secretary Martin Klus who actively communicated Slovak European policy to the country's allies and the general public throughout the year. Crucially, Minister Korčok acted when necessary to limit the damage caused by unfortunate statements or steps taken by government members.<sup>9</sup>

During 2021, there were also interactions with EU institutions and events worth mentioning here. There were two scheduled visits by European Parliament (EP)

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<sup>8</sup> The original documents date back to 2005.

<sup>9</sup> For example Igor Matovič "welcoming" the Sputnik V vaccine to Slovakia and inappropriately joking that he would give Transcarpathian Ukraine to Russia in exchange for Sputnik V, or the Economy Minister Richard Sulík's criticism of the EU sanctions against Russia for the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

delegations to Slovakia in 2021. The first was a monitoring visit<sup>10</sup> on September 21<sup>st</sup>–22<sup>nd</sup> regarding the state of the rule of law in the country, as well as the protection of journalists. Members of the delegation met not only with government representatives and other state representatives, civil society and journalists, but also with the families of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová as part of their probe into the state of the judicial inquiry into their murder. In her closing remarks at the end of their visit, the head of the delegation, Sophie in 't Veld, praised the progress in the investigation of the journalist's murder and on the justice system reforms, but also expressed concern and asked the Slovak government to act on the continuous harassment of journalists and to counter the efforts of individuals or institutions seeking to thwart important reforms and investigations.<sup>11</sup> The second delegation took place in November, when the Slovak MEP Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová took the delegation to visit Roma villages near Košice in the east of the country and to meet with various local stakeholders. The delegation focused on the social inclusion and employment of Roma people, as well as on projects implemented in the area with support from EU funds. The delegation called for the implementation of a better system for the use of EU funds and for collaboration among the Slovak ministries to tackle the complex issue of the social inclusion of Roma communities.<sup>12</sup>

Slovak representation in the EU structures hit a high point in January 2022, when Michal Šimečka, nominated by his Renew Europe fraction, became the first ever Slovak vice-president of the European Parliament. His priorities as vice-president are to continue working actively on promoting EU values and

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<sup>10</sup> "Mission report following the ad-hoc delegation to Slovakia and Bulgaria – 21–24 September 2021," CR\1240476EN.docx, European Parliament/Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, November 17, 2021. Available online: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014\\_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/LIBE/DV/2021/11-29/MissionreportSK\\_BG\\_1240476\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/LIBE/DV/2021/11-29/MissionreportSK_BG_1240476_EN.pdf) (accessed on January 13, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> "Rule of Law in Slovakia: MEPs carried out a monitoring visit," *Press release*, European Parliament, September 22, 2021. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210922IPR13313/rule-of-law-in-slovakia-meps-carried-out-a-monitoring-visit> (accessed on January 13, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> "EP delegation: Slovak government must do more to improve inclusion of disadvantaged communities," *Press release*, European Parliament, November 5, 2021. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20211029IPR16216/slovak-government-must-do-more-for-inclusion-of-disadvantaged-communities> (accessed on January 13, 2022).

compliance with the rules and rule of law provisions.<sup>13</sup> Šimečka's election has the potential to increase the visibility of Slovakia's representation in the EU structures and to help improve the country's image in the Union.

Two Slovak MEPs with a particular interest in green policies and climate change came fairly high up the list of the 50 most active MEPs in the EU.<sup>14</sup> Michal Wiezik, who left the EPP group in 2021 to become a member of Renew Europe, ranked 10<sup>th</sup>, while Martin Hojsík from the same fraction ranked 11<sup>th</sup>. Wiezik was the most active MEP on the AGRI Committee and both were closely involved with the ENVI Committee. Slovak MEPs were also active in the ITRE and AFET committees. Overall, Slovakia was 5<sup>th</sup> most active in the parliament. Green policies and environmental protection (for example, the Farm to Fork Strategy) were the main areas of activity, but Slovak MEPs were also quite involved in the Digital Services Act, submitting the greatest number of amendments in this case.

Most of the ten Slovak MEPs engaged in the negotiations over the 2021–2027 programming period with the commission, trying to help tackle the ineffective use of EU funds in Slovakia.<sup>15</sup> They asked the European Commissioner for cohesion and reforms, Elisa Ferreira, to reconsider the non-allocation of cohesion funds to Bratislava Region.<sup>16</sup> The region has very limited options for accessing financial support from the cohesion funds due to the capital's higher GDP rate, despite the EU funds not being fully utilized by other Slovak regions. Bratislava Region will need investment in building infrastructure and to reduce the economic and social disparities in the capital and the rest of the region as these have been neglected for years.

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<sup>13</sup> "Šimečka po zvolení za podpredsedu EP: Bola to dráma, rokovalo sa do poslednej chvíle," [Šimečka after being elected EP vice-president: it was a drama, the session went on until the last possible minute] *Denník N*, January 19, 2022. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/2686237/podpredsa-euoparlamentu-simecka-moje-zvolenie-moze-pomoc-ps-budem-aktivny-aj-na-slovensku/> (accessed on January 20, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> A. Kovacs, L. Kocsis, "Eulytix annual report: European Parliament 2020–2021," *Eulytix*, 2021, p. 8–115. Available online: [https://eulytix.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Eulytix\\_report\\_20211128\\_final.pdf](https://eulytix.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Eulytix_report_20211128_final.pdf) (accessed on March 13, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> This issue will be developed further on in the chapter.

<sup>16</sup> "Slovenskí europoslanci žiadajú viac eurofondov pre Bratislavský kraj," [Slovak MEPs ask for more EU funds for Bratislava Region] *Teraz.sk/TASR*, December 10, 2021. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/zahranicie/slovenski-europoslanci-ziadaju-viac-e/596969-clanok.html> (accessed on March 14, 2022).

In the council, Slovakia's pro-European position was visible in various areas. Slovakia backed various decisions in 2021, ranging from the establishment of the RRF, measures to tackle the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including vaccination and test certificate framework, the establishment of the Just Transition Fund and loan facility, and the new EU4health Program.

In 2021, the first European agency to be set up in Slovakia was established. The European Labor Authority (ELA) is headquartered in the capital, Bratislava.<sup>17</sup> The presence of a European agency signals that the country is firmly anchored in the community and had been lacking for 17 years.

## ■ Slovak participation in the Conference on the Future of Europe

After a year's delay owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, CoFoE was finally launched in 2021, symbolically on May 9<sup>th</sup>, the Day of Europe. This large and complex democratic exercise was set up to find out what kind of Europe citizens want after Brexit, their views and preferences on the future of the EU and, if we are honest, to raise awareness of the EU and discuss its competences. This last aspect is particularly important in member states where there is low support for the EU or poor general knowledge of EU affairs. In countries such as Slovakia – a small member state, with notoriously low turnouts in the European Parliament elections<sup>18</sup> and little public interest in EU affairs, and a tendency for disinformation<sup>19</sup> and populism – the CoFoE is even

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<sup>17</sup> "European Labour Authority premises inaugurated," European Labour Authority, November 9, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ela.europa.eu/en/news/european-labour-authority-premises-inaugurated> (accessed on January 14, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> "2019 European elections results. Turnout by country (%)," European Parliament, October 22, 2019. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/> (accessed on January 17, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> As of 2020, 56 per cent of Slovak citizens are prone to believe statements containing conspiracies or false information, indicating that the Slovak general public is most vulnerable to mis- or disinformation in the region. Among the disinformation narratives, the most dominant (67 per cent) one is that the EU and "Brussels" tell Slovakia what to do without the country being able to do anything about it. (Source: D. Hajdu, K. Klingová, "Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: Slovakia," GLOBSEC, 2020, p. 15–19. Available online: [https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe\\_Slovensko\\_verzia-pre-tlac.pdf](https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe_Slovensko_verzia-pre-tlac.pdf) (accessed on January 17, 2022)). It will therefore be interesting to see whether the CoFoE in Slovakia will have an impact on these percentages in the foreseeable future.

more important and its impact will be even more interesting to observe. We are still waiting for the final results of the conference, which should be published and assessed by May, but we can look at some of the trends at the beginning of 2022.

In Slovakia, CoFoE was launched by the three highest state officials – President Zuzana Čaputová, Speaker of the National Council Boris Kollár and Prime Minister Eduard Heger – at the opening ceremony at Bratislava castle. In Slovakia CoFoE was divided into two main strands, with various other one-off events. That meant the message and interaction with citizens was diversified and the events were selected to suit the primary audience. One of the two main CoFoE pillars was the "My sme EÚ" [We are the EU] platform, part of which was a roadshow organized by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, consisting of direct discussions with citizens in the regions. Public events were held in 25 different Slovak cities in August, with debates, competitions and other programs. Citizens could discuss the future of Europe with representatives from various Slovak ministries, Slovak MEPs and MPs, local councilors, citizen delegates and public figures and influencers.

Based on the feedback from roadshow participants,<sup>20</sup> Slovaks mainly associate the EU with positive things, such as cooperation, freedom, or free movement, but there were negative emotions as well. Nonetheless 41 per cent of participants supported keeping the EU competences the way they are, 37 per cent thought they should be broadened, while 22 per cent would like them to be limited. The most important issues to be dealt with at EU level were migration, climate change, environmental challenges, health and the COVID-19 pandemic, social issues, education and youth. This suggests that at CoFoE the priorities of Slovak citizens were a mixture of current events and emotive issues that have been strongly accentuated by some politicians,<sup>21</sup> while reflecting the broader European discussion with it recent strong emphasis on for example green policies and tackling climate change. Apart from

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<sup>20</sup> "Road Show MySmeEÚ 2021 – podujatie Žilina," [We are the EU 2021 Road Show – event in Žilina] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic /Conference on the Future of Europe, September 27, 2021. Available online: <https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/OtherIdeas/f/77/meetings/52108> (accessed on January 17, 2022).

<sup>21</sup> Such as migration, which was a key issue in Slovak public discourse during the 2015 migration crisis, encouraged by some Slovak political parties. Since then migration can easily become an issue in public where there is a risk of another migration crisis, such as the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the threat of Russian–Ukrainian conflict or the crisis on the Polish–Belarusian border.

the roadshow, the Foreign Ministry organized a series of discussions with students in schools (the “Back to school” initiative), focusing the CoFoE activities on Slovak youth involvement.

The second of the two main pillars of the Slovak CoFoE was the National Convention on the EU. These expert roundtables were first set up for Slovakia’s EU accession process. They will help generate analyses and recommendations to help develop official Slovak positions on specific EU policies and its future vision of the EU. In 2021, the National Convention meetings were organized under the auspices of the foreign minister and based around the Concept of the Conference on the Future of Europe,<sup>22</sup> with around 16 topics up for consideration. Four (Digital and Green Transition; Disinformation and Populism; Single Market; Slovakia and the EU in a Global Context) were assigned to expert working groups for discussion at meetings in the eight Slovak regions organized in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA). The remaining topics were assigned to relevant ministries. Apart from the roadshow, the National Convention and discussions with students, there were various one-off events and debates. The regional Europe Direct offices as well as other organizations were involved in the arrangements.

However, there may be problems with citizen participation at the CoFoE events organized in Slovakia. During the roadshow in August 2021, 550 questionnaires were collected,<sup>23</sup> which does not seem much, nor is it a representative sample of the 5.5 million inhabitants. Moreover we have yet to see the recommendations by Slovak experts as part of the National Convention as they had not been released by the end of 2021.

Focusing on participation in the official CoFoE online platform, by November 2021 there had been 364 contributions<sup>24</sup> in total. Slovakia had 67 contributions per million inhabitants, placing it approximately in the middle of the other EU member states (Poland had the lowest number with 14 and Malta

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<sup>22</sup> “Konceptia Konferencie o budúcnosti Európy v Slovenskej republike,” [Concept of the Conference on the Future of Europe in Slovakia] LP/2020/568, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, April 21, 2021. Available online: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/-/SK/LP/2020/568> (accessed on January 17, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> M. Klus, September 2, 2021. Available online: [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=3024298194456101&id=1641391512746783](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3024298194456101&id=1641391512746783) (accessed on January 17, 2022).

<sup>24</sup> The contributions on the official CoFoE website are a mix of suggestions, comments, and events.

was most active with 180).<sup>25</sup> Focusing on the events, 157 had been registered on the platform by February 2022. The three most popular topics were climate change and environment (25), education, culture, youth and sport (16), and finally European democracy (13). We do not have the exact participant numbers, which makes it hard to provide assess CoFoE’s impact in Slovakia so far.

In Slovakia, the general public often see the EU as being far removed, do not understand how it works and are thus more easily susceptible to anti-EU populism and further integration within its structures. But that is not down to a lack of support for the EU among Slovaks as that has risen continuously since 2018.<sup>26</sup> The issue of low participation in EU affairs and active interest in them is admittedly complex and there is no easy or one-sided solution, but this trend, evidenced in the seemingly low participation in CoFoE, should serve as new impetus for the government to think about further ways to address it. Ideas that spring to mind for encouraging greater public discussion of EU affairs include wider presentation of EU successes, emphasizing EU-related issues more widely in the Slovak national curriculum, and perhaps even organizing a future event to encourage public participation in the formulation of Slovak positions.

In its annual report on Slovakia’s EU membership for 2021, the Foreign Ministry admits that “even though CoFoE brought a number of specific outputs and new procedures, it has yet to spark much interest among the people.”<sup>27</sup> According to the Ministry the ongoing pandemic is one of the reasons for this. And it is true that the pandemic restrictions have made it harder for people to enter into dialogue on visions of the Union. At the concluding

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<sup>25</sup> “Viacjazyčná digitálna platforma Konferencie o budúcnosti Európy. Tretia priebežná správa,” [CoFoE Multilingual digital platform. Third interim report] *Kantar Public* 2021. Available online: [https://futureu.europa.eu/rails/active\\_storage/blobs/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBb09NliwiZXhwlpudWxsLCJwdXliOiJibG9iX2lkIn19--4fcb2ce7f52a2c53338816278ddf-74de80d3e78/COMM-2021-00809-00-00-SK-TRA-00.pdf](https://futureu.europa.eu/rails/active_storage/blobs/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBb09NliwiZXhwlpudWxsLCJwdXliOiJibG9iX2lkIn19--4fcb2ce7f52a2c53338816278ddf-74de80d3e78/COMM-2021-00809-00-00-SK-TRA-00.pdf) (accessed on January 17, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> D. Hajdu et al., “Globsec Trends 2021: Central & Eastern Europe one year into the pandemic,” *GLOBSEC*, 2021, pp. 36–41. Available online: [https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GLOBSEC-Trends-2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GLOBSEC-Trends-2021_final.pdf) (accessed on January 17, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> “Výročná správa o členstve Slovenskej republiky v Európskej únii za rok 2021,” [Annual Report on the Membership of Slovakia in the European Union in 2021] LP/2022/50, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 31, 2022. Available online: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/SK/LP/2022/50> (accessed on February 21, 2022).

press conference<sup>28</sup> at the end of 2021, Minister Korčok presented his realistic vision and explained that in Slovakia CoFoE had not penetrated into public or political discourse as anticipated. However, he declared that the Ministry had done “its homework” well, had organized public consultations and would use the outputs to provide the impetus the EU needs.

Moreover, during the mid-term conference on CoFoE in Slovakia in January 2022, the minister mentioned that although the conference and opportunity to meet with citizens in person was restricted by the ongoing pandemic, Slovakia has sufficient data and knows which policy areas citizens thought should be addressed. He admitted that CoFoE and taking part in the discussion on the future of the EU did not attract much interest among Slovak citizens and was overshadowed by other issues (such as the DCA), but he thought that other EU member states had experienced similar problems. Korčok recognized the need to continuously remind Slovak citizens of the EU competences as well as the need to protect European values and explained that the conference is about the ability to combine vision with the real options. Martin Klus then added that even though Slovak participation in the CoFoE online platform had been low so far, especially among women, it was a challenge that the Ministry would address in the upcoming months, as the conference runs until May.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, Slovakia did comparatively well in organizing numerous events as part of CoFoE. The range of events was well thought-out and targeted various groups of citizens, by regional affiliation or age. The Foreign Ministry really tried to “do its homework” here, but the impact is questionable due to the seemingly low participation at some of the events and also on the digital platform. This remains to be seen, as we do not yet have complete reports and the platform is still open for new posts. Nevertheless, the first outputs give some idea of the trends needing to be addressed:

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<sup>28</sup> “Tlačová konferencia ministra I. Korčoka k vybraným otázkam zahraničnej politiky v roku 2021,” [Press conference by Minister I. Korčok on selected foreign policy issues in 2021] *YouTube*, December 16, 2021. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjSAZxc5t8> (accessed on January 18, 2022).

<sup>29</sup> “Občianska Európa: Strednodobé hodnotenie Konferencie o budúcnosti Európy,” [Civic Europe: Mid-term review of the Conference on the Future of Europe] *Euractiv*, January 26, 2022. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/buducnost-eu/video/obcianska-europa-strednodobe-hodnotenie-konferencie-o-buducnosti-euroopy/> (accessed on January 26, 2022).

1. Low participation of young people, women and minorities in the dialogue;
2. Slovaks actually wanted the EU to have more competences (in areas such as social affairs or health);
3. Obvious need to raise citizen awareness of EU affairs and the different national and EU competences.

These need to be addressed by competent and responsible political leaders who can identify and tackle the deficits in communicating EU issues in Slovakia. This should in turn help address the feeling that Slovaks are second-class EU citizens, be that in terms of salary or food quality.

## ■ The Slovak national recovery and resilience plan

Slovakia’s national recovery and resilience plan, submitted in April 2021, was positively assessed by European Commission and €6.3 billion in grants will be allocated to Slovakia in June 2021.<sup>30</sup> European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called the plan ambitious during her short visit to Bratislava, where she officially announced it had been approved.<sup>31</sup>

The plan reflects the priorities set out in the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation, including a sufficient focus on climate and digital objectives, and presents a set of reforms to help Slovakia overcome the crisis caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The main priorities of the Slovak recovery plan are divided into five strands – green economy (allocation of €2.301 billion); healthcare (€1.533 billion); effective public administration and digitalization (€1.11 billion); education (€892 million); and science, research and innovation (€739 million).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Next Generation EU: European Commission endorses Slovakia’s recovery and resilience plan,” *Press release*, European Commission, June 21, 2021. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_3054](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3054) (accessed on January 20, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> “Slovenský plán obnovy má zelenú, oznámila šéfká Európskej komisie,” [Slovak recovery plan given the green light, the European Commission President announced] *Sme*, June 21, 2021. Available online: <https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/22686510/europska-komisia-schvalila-slovensku-plan-obnovy.html> (accessed on January 20, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> “Plán obnovy: cestovná mapa k lepšiemu Slovensku,” [Recovery Plan: A map toward a better Slovakia] 2021. Available online: [https://www.planobnovy.sk/site/assets/files/1019/kompletny\\_plan\\_obnovy.pdf](https://www.planobnovy.sk/site/assets/files/1019/kompletny_plan_obnovy.pdf) (accessed on January 20, 2022).

Even though the commission representatives seemed satisfied with the recovery plan, the way it was created raised serious criticism domestically. Initially, it was announced that the process would be inclusive and that experts, and even the general public, would be able to participate in drawing up Slovakia's investment priorities and reforms. In practice that was not the case. Also, once the plan was published, it attracted strong criticism from the culture,<sup>33</sup> food industry, and agriculture sectors.<sup>34</sup>

In response, Lívia Vašáková, general director of the Recovery Plan Section, explained that the recovery plan had to reflect national interests, specific requirements, as well as the commission's recommendations on which areas to focus on and it had to be done on a strict budget. Therefore it was impossible to include all sectors in the plan in the way they wanted. Furthermore, Vašáková pointed out that one factor in the decision making was that some sectors, such as agriculture or the food industry, often have sufficient financing at their disposal via the regular EU funds and therefore were not prioritized in the recovery plan.<sup>35</sup> The regular funds include the structural and investment funds from the current 2021–2027 period and those not yet spent from the 2014–2020 framework, common agricultural policy, and REACT-EU. Prime Minister Heger also repeatedly supported this reasoning when addressing the criticism of the recovery plan.

Apart from overseeing the proper implementation of the reforms outlined in the plan, it will be a challenge for Slovakia to make proper use of the grants, as the country has longstanding issues in making effective use of the regular EU funds. For instance, Slovakia was not able to spend even half of the funds

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<sup>33</sup> "Takmer 650 ľudí z kultúry sa pre plán obnovy obrátilo na Európsku komisiu," [Almost 650 people from the culture industry turned to the European Commission because of the recovery plan] *Sme*, May 24, 2021. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22666471/takmer-650-ludi-z-kultury-sa-pre-plan-obnovy-obratilo-na-europsku-komisiu.html> (accessed on January 20, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> "Hegerov rezort: Agropotravinárstvo sa nenachádza ani v odporúčaní EÚ k Plánu obnovy," [Heger's ministry: Agro-food industry is not even included in the EU recommendations for the Recovery Plan] *Aktuality*, December 23, 2020. Available online: <https://www.aktualita.sk/clanok/850902/hegerov-rezort-agropotravinarstvo-sa-nenachadza-ani-v-odporucaniach-eu-k-planu-obnovy/> (accessed on January 20, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> "Vašáková: Plán obnovy nemá riešiť historické dlhy, ale posunúť Slovensko do 21. storočia," [Vašáková: The recovery plan is not supposed to tackle historical debts, but push Slovakia into the twenty-first century] *Pravda*, February 8, 2021. Available online: <https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/ludia/clanok/577169-vasakova-plan-obnovy-nema-riesit-historicke-dlhy-ale-posunut-slovensko-do-21-storocia/> (accessed on January 20, 2022).

at its disposal for the 2014–2020 programming period.<sup>36</sup> Although the final amount may rise, there has been only a slight improvement.<sup>37</sup> This prompts concern about Slovakia's ability to get the most out of the recovery plan and to use the available finances to kick start development and modernization in the areas concerned by the end of 2026, whilst also spending the regular EU funds (from the 2021–2027 programming period). On top of this, at a meeting of EU ministers with EU leaders in Lisbon in May 2021, where Slovakia was represented by Minister Veronika Remišová, it was generally acknowledged that all member states will find it hard to use the funds from the national recovery plans alongside the regular EU funds. It was pointed out that countries will need to be aware of their implementation periods, calculate ahead the increased administrative load and prevent double financing of projects.<sup>38</sup>

Slovakia started to prepare for this challenge by moving the Recovery Plan Section from the Finance Ministry to the Government Office, setting up the Government Council for the Recovery Plan,<sup>39</sup> and by analyzing potential problem areas so as to be forearmed. The Recovery Plan Section launched specialized training for ministerial staff and heads of the regional offices to explain the various steps of the plan implementation as well as the capacity

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<sup>36</sup> "Informácia o stave implementácie európskych štrukturálnych a investičných fondov v programovom období 2014–2020 (polročná)," [Information on implementation status of European structural and investment funds for the 2014–2020 programming period (mid-year)] Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, June 30, 2021. Available online: [https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/data/files/4997\\_informacia-o-stave-implementacie-esif-k-30062021\\_polrocna.pdf](https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/data/files/4997_informacia-o-stave-implementacie-esif-k-30062021_polrocna.pdf) (accessed on January 21, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> From 45 per cent to 48 per cent by the end of January 2022. Source: "European Structural and Investment Funds. Country data for Slovak Republic. ESIF 2014–2020: Implementation Progress (total cost) for Slovak Republic," European Commission, n.d. Available online: <https://cohesion-data.ec.europa.eu/countries/SK> (accessed on January 28, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> "Národné plány obnovy treba lepšie prepojiť s eurofondami, zhodli sa ministri," [Better links are required between the national recovery plans and EU funds, ministers agreed] *Euractiv*, May 21, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/ekonomika-a-euro/news/narodne-plane-obnovy-treba-lepsie-prepojit-s-eurofondami-zhodli-sa-ministri/> (accessed on January 21, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> The platform is an advisory body to link ministry representatives and those in charge of implementing the recovery plan with experts from civil society, academia, regional councils, and business associations for wider discussion. It was established in December 2021 and met for the first time in January 2022. Source: "Po prvýkrát zasadla Rada vlády pre plán obnovy, zabezpečí dialóg s odbornou verejnosťou," [Government Council for Recovery Plan met for the first time, it will ensure dialogue with experts] Government Office of Slovak Republic, January 28, 2022. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/po-prvykrat-zasadla-rada-vlady-pre-plan-obnovy-zabezpeci-dialog-s-odbornou-verejnostou/> (accessed on January 28, 2022).



and budget allocations.<sup>40</sup> Promisingly, under the current government the use of EU funds has improved by two thirds, compared to the previous one.<sup>41</sup> If this continues, it will signal better use of the financial sources available to Slovakia in the future. But it may not be enough. As the former Head of the European Commission Representation in Bratislava Ladislav Miko explained, to combine the recovery plan spending with that of the regular EU funds from both the previous and current period, Slovakia will need to quadruple its previous best spending rate. Implementation capacity will depend on the mobilization of the government and ministries, but also on the speed of the tenders and construction procedures.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of 2021, the first steps in implementing Slovakia's recovery plan indicated that the whole system would prove challenging. In order to receive the allocated funds, the country has to achieve certain milestones, such as parliamentary approval of the reforms promised in the plan. In theory, this should not be an issue as the government has a majority. In reality though, the internal coalition became embroiled in conflict again and the tensions showed that even the crucial reforms promised in the national recovery plan could easily be blocked. After some initial difficulty, the coalition managed to pass two important reforms by the end of 2021. The national park and hospital reforms were passed in December 2021 with a tight majority, despite the missing votes from the coalition party *Sme Rodina*. However, the critical judiciary reform, introducing the "court map," still has to be settled as soon as possible at the beginning of 2022. If the coalition cannot garner the

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<sup>40</sup> "Bude Slovensko čerpať plán obnovy efektívnejšie ako eurofondy? Vláda aj rezorty sa už pripravujú," [Will Slovakia use the recovery plan more effectively than the EU funds? The government and ministries are already getting ready] *Euractiv*, June 12, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/energetika/news/bude-slovensko-cerpat-plan-obnovy-efektivnejšie-ako-eurofondy-vlada-aj-rezorty-sa-uz-pripravuju/> (accessed on January 21, 2022).

<sup>41</sup> From March 2020 to December 2021, the use of EU funds increased by 68.5 per cent and the rate of spending increased by 17.6 per cent. Overall, Slovakia moved from 27<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> place among the EU member states in use of EU funds. Source: "Čerpanie európskych prostriedkov od nástupu súčasnej vládnej koalície vzrástlo o dve tretiny," [EU fund spending has risen by two thirds since the coalition took over] Government Office of Slovak Republic, January 31, 2022. Available online: <https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/cerpanie-europskych-prostriedkov-od-nastupu-sucasnej-vladnej-koalicie-vzrastlo-o-dve-tretiny/> (accessed on January 31, 2022).

<sup>42</sup> "Miko z Európskej komisie: Slovenský plán obnovy je dobrý, ale peniaze musíme čerpať štyrikrát rýchlejšie," [Miko from the European Commission: Slovak recovery plan is good, but we need to spend the money four times faster] *Denník N*, January 14, 2022. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/2678517/miko-z-europskej-komisie-slovensky-plan-obnovy-je-dobry-ale-peniaze-musime-cerpat-styrikrat-rychlejsie/?ref=inm> (accessed on January 21, 2022).

required support, Slovakia will not achieve a key recovery plan milestone, which puts the first payment of €458.3 million at risk.

In response to these developments, the Recovery Plan Section tried to find out whether the European Commission would be willing to accept changes to the national recovery plan, to prevent losing out on any of the finances allocated to Slovakia. Céline Gauer, the head of the commission's Recovery & Resilience Task Force, stressed that there could be no delay to the deadlines and nor could money allocated to one reform be transferred to another.<sup>43</sup> This is very different from the rules on the regular EU funds and so the Slovak government will have to do everything in its power to achieve the milestones set out in the recovery plan.

## ■ Importance of the 2021 German and Czech elections for Slovakia

Of the European elections in 2021, two are particularly relevant to both the future development of EU affairs and integration and to Slovakia. In September 2021, general elections were held in Germany and it was the first time since 2005 that Angela Merkel was not running for chancellor. Widely recognized as a respected and powerful figure in European politics, keeping European partners together by bringing compromises in times of crises, Merkel left a big space for someone new to fill. All of Europe watched the election results closely as Olaf Scholz from the Social Democratic party (SPD) ultimately took over.

The new German "traffic light" government, consisting of the SPD, the Greens and the pro-business liberal FPD, is strongly pro-EU oriented, with a clear focus on climate protection and boosting investment and modernization in the country. The coalition's first declarations also suggest a tougher approach toward breaches of rule of law in EU member states and called for

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<sup>43</sup> "Slovensko musí splniť to, k čomu sa zaviazalo, inak peniaze nedostane, odkázala Gauer," [Slovakia has to fulfill its promises, otherwise it will not get the money, Gauer said] *Webnoviny*, November 11, 2021. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko-musi-splnit-to-k-comu-sa-zaviazalo-inak-peniaze-nedostane-odkazala-gauer/> (accessed on January 21, 2022).

the European Commission to use all the tools that it has at its disposal.<sup>44</sup> This suggests the continuation of the dispute between the commission and Poland and Hungary, which could have implications for the Visegrad 4, which Slovakia is a member of. During his visit to Warsaw at the end of 2021, Scholz openly declared his intention to resolve the disputed issues as soon as possible,<sup>45</sup> drawing a line between his approach and Merkel's gradual search for compromise.

Furthermore, it is unfortunate that new German government lacks a clear position on Russia, which is an extremely sensitive issue due to the Russian military build-up near the Ukrainian border in connection with the finalization of the Nord Stream 2 project in Germany. All the concerned parties are following the situation closely, with the allies (the EU member states and the US) exerting pressure on Germany, while Chancellor Scholz avoids making an explicit commitment to stop Nord Stream 2 should Russia invade. This issue is of great significance to Slovakia, as open military conflict in neighboring Ukraine would mean serious instability in the region, likely resulting in a flow of migrants. If Germany takes a clear stance on the future of Nord Stream 2, it could be sufficient deterrent to Russia and help to prevent further escalation of the conflict or aggression. Apart from the geopolitical dimension, Nord Stream 2 is a contested project given the potential energy security issues and the change in supply routes, which may have a negative impact on Slovakia.<sup>46</sup>

Overall, in contrast to Merkel's compromise-oriented approach, the new German government's ambitions and drive for quicker action in shaping the future of the EU may bring positive changes more quickly. Not all of these would necessarily be appreciated by Slovakia, but in general the new German leadership has the potential to help make the EU a decisive and respected global actor, which would definitely be advantageous for all the member states, including the Slovak Republic.

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<sup>44</sup> "What's in the German coalition deal for Europe (and the UK)," *Politico*, November 24, 2021. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-elections-government-europe-olaf-scholz-angela-merkel-sdp-fdp-greens-brussels/> (accessed on January 24, 2022).

<sup>45</sup> "Leaders of Poland, Germany call for 'swift' solution to Warsaw's rule of law row with EU," *Politico*, December 12, 2021. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/scholz-morawiecki-poland-rule-of-law-conflict/> (accessed on January 24, 2022).

<sup>46</sup> "Analytik J. Badida o tom, čo prinesie Slovensku Nord Stream 2," [Analyst J. Badida on what Nord Stream 2 will bring Slovakia] *TA3*, June 11, 2019. Available online: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/152331/host-v-studiu-analytik-j-badida-o-tom-co-prinesie-slovensku-nord-stream-2> (accessed on January 24, 2022).

The second national election of significance to Slovakia in terms of future relations and European policy took place in October 2021 in the Czech Republic. It put an end to Andrej Babiš's premiership, which had attracted large-scale anti-government protests and was associated with corruption scandals and a European Commission investigation into a conflict of interest and the misuse of EU funds. Spolu, a three-party alliance led by Petr Fiala (ODS) won the election after declaring to Czech citizens, "it's time to unite this divided country and end the era of populism."<sup>47</sup> In the elections the Czech Communist Party failed to make it into parliament for the first time since the fall of the communist regime, making it a symbolic day for Czech democracy.

Importantly, the arrival of this new Czech government, with a similar outlook in many areas to the Slovak political leadership, including on the pro-European and pro-Western orientation, opens the door to more fruitful cooperation between the two countries. A case in point is the joint presidency period, as Czechia will take on the EU Council presidency in the second half of 2022, while Slovakia will be presiding over the Visegrad 4 from July 2022 to June 2023. It is up to both governments to actively communicate in the first half of 2022, look for intersecting priorities and plan the joint presidency, which will not only benefit these two countries, but also the Central European region and the EU.

Slovakia and Czechia will thus have an opportunity to unite to reduce the fragmentation of Europe and address the growing dissonance between Western and Central European states. Even if we cannot expect miracles, as the member states may continue to diverge in some areas (such as on migration policy or the two-speed Europe), it is crucial to focus on maintaining an open and honest dialogue. Cooperation between Czechia and Slovakia may be the Central European driving force that turns the V4 into a constructive partner on EU issues. Over the past few years, the V4 label has become more of a burden for Slovakia and Czechia, due to Hungarian and Polish nationalist tendencies and their dispute with the commission over the rule of law, which have long dominated the V4 narrative in the EU. During the upcoming double presidency, Slovakia and Czechia could be a positive driver within the group, or at least a kind of negotiator between Western European countries and the rest of the V4 on a variety of EU policy issues.

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<sup>47</sup> "Šéfové stran podepsali koaliční smlouvu Spolu, chtějí vyhrát volby," [Party leaders signed the Spolu coalition agreement, they want to win the elections] *České noviny*, April 11, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/sefove-stran-podepsali-koalichni-smlouvu-spolu-chteji-vyhrat-volby/2019949> (accessed on January 24, 2022).

The new Czech government will be quite different from the previous one in its position on the V4. The new Czech Minister of European Affairs, Mikuláš Bek, has already admitted that there are questions over the point of cooperating on all V4 dimensions and that he thinks the new Czech government will back the EU initiative to condition the use of EU funds on adherence to the rule of law. This would no doubt deepen the polarization within the V4. At the same time, Bek expressed the hope that the Visegrad format could move toward a brighter future following a change in leadership after the elections – elections will be held in Hungary in April 2022.<sup>48</sup>

The two prime ministers Heger and Fiala met at the beginning of January 2022, following tradition, and agreed that the proximity of the two countries should be reflected in the upcoming presidencies. Adding the Austerlitz format into the picture, Eduard Heger declared it “a great opportunity for us to set the tone and policy together in these three formats at one time, which is why we’ll work closely together to formulate common priorities.”<sup>49</sup> This could be fruitful not just for bilateral Slovak-Czech cooperation and EU policy making, but it could also help to ameliorate the perception of the V4 in the EU by working on its bad reputation stemming from the rhetoric of problem members. Even if Slovakia and Czechia do not succeed in finding common ground and understanding among the V4 countries on issues such as migration, climate change, and gender equality, they should share enough in common and that could be useful for the broader European picture and to improve the image of the group.<sup>50</sup> In the upcoming period, the Slovak and Czech position and actions towards partners in the Visegrad 4 will have the potential to shape the format into something more than a group attracting continuous criticism due to being associated with Hungarian and Polish actions.

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<sup>48</sup> “Do vysoké funkce bych nikoho bez angličtiny nezaměstnal. Politici ale nejsou zaměstnanci, říká ministr Bek,” [I would never employ anyone without good English in a high ranking position. However, politicians are not employees, Minister Bek said] *Hospodářské noviny*, February 17, 2022. Available online: <https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-67017800-nesmime-se-chovat-jako-hochstapleri-s-predsednictvim-eu-jdeme-do-rizika-ale-zvlnadneme-to-rika-ministr-bek> (accessed on February 17, 2022)

<sup>49</sup> “Nový český premiér navštívil Slovensko, rokoval s Hegerom,” [The new Czech prime minister visited Slovakia, he met with Heger] *SME*, January 11, 2022. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22818559/heger-a-fiala-sa-zhodli-na-potrebe-posilnovania-vzajomnej-spoluprace.html> (accessed on January 24, 2022).

<sup>50</sup> “Visegrád má pro Česko stále smysl, jen v něm doted’ vládl populismus, tvrdí experti,” [Visegrad still makes sense for the Czech Republic, it’s just that populism has dominated in it so far, experts say] *Aktuálně.cz*, February 1, 2022. Available online: <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/visegrad-ma-pro-cesko-stale-smysl-jen-v-nem-doted-vladl-popu/r~34464fdc7e921ec8b18ac1f6b220ee8> (accessed on February 2, 2022).

## ■ Conclusion

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 proved to be full of interesting and significant developments in both Slovak domestic politics and European politics more broadly. The Conference on the Future of Europe was a prominent event, along with the creation and initial phases of the national recovery and resilience plans of the EU member states. The results of the general elections held in Germany and the Czech Republic also had an impact on Slovakia, with the Czech election bringing potential for “rebranding” the Visegrad 4.

In Slovakia CoFoE brought a wide variety of events to involve both the general public and experts in making recommendations on the future vision of the EU. Midway through CoFoE it seems that these have unfortunately not attracted the attention of the wider Slovak public and have not become part of the broader public and political discourse in the country. Nonetheless, the Foreign Ministry should have sufficient data and inputs to present them to the EU once the conference officially ends. Whatever results and ideas CoFoE brings, we have yet to see to what extent they will be translated into reality by EU representatives.

Slovakia’s foreign policy orientation and image as a reliable partner in EU affairs, generally well presented by the country’s political leaders, suffered slightly over the past year. One can only expect the opposition parties to undermine these; however, the Slovak government needs to focus on resolving internal coalition disputes so it can focus on what is important. This includes work on the national recovery plan, which is a powerful tool to help Slovakia recover from the pandemic and to implement useful reforms to modernize the country, while focusing on climate protection. The government performed quite well at the beginning of this process delivering the draft plan in a timely manner and receiving a positive assessment from the commission and launching the preparation phase. However, implementation is a significantly greater challenge awaiting the coalition in 2022 and beyond.



Pavol Baboš

# European Union in the eyes of young generation in Visegrad region

Over the last decade, both the European Union and national governments have focused attention and public policies on young people. Specific problems have been highlighted, such as job shortages, but also the rising extremism and radicalization. And of course the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has attracted much attention as well. Thanks to the European Union's intervention and specific job support mechanisms (among other things), many of the problems affecting young people are being tackled.

In Slovakia, interest in young people and their values increased, especially after the 2016 national elections, when first-time voter support helped the neo-Nazi Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) win parliamentary seats. At that time, it was the only party openly advocating that Slovakia should leave the European Union.

This study focuses on young people in the Visegrad countries and maps their attitudes, values and views as measured in summer 2021.<sup>1</sup> Based on empirical research it seeks to better understand and raise public awareness of young people's attitudes to EU membership, the benefits and disadvantages of memberships, as well as their identity vis-à-vis the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> **About the Data:** The same standardized questionnaire was used to collect empirical data in each of the seven countries surveyed in 2021. This makes it possible to compare findings across regions. In addition to the analysis of empirical data from Slovakia, this study also relies on comparisons with neighboring countries.

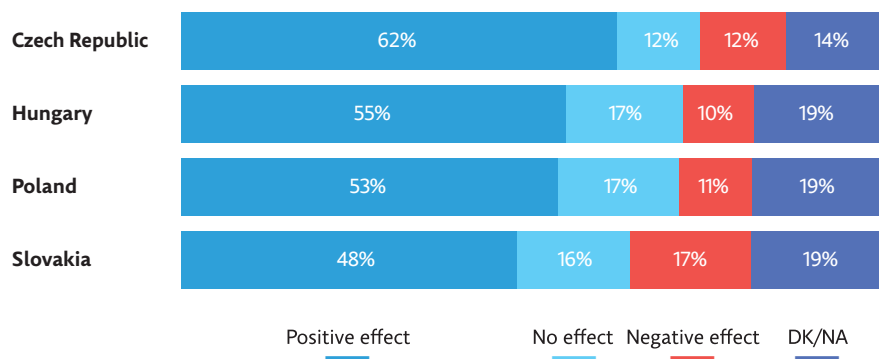
The field data was collected by Ipsos. The target population in all the countries was citizens aged 14 to 29, who have access to the Internet and speak the national language. The target sample was 1,500 respondents per country. The sampling was based on quotas broken down into age, gender, and region in order to create a sample that best reflected the target population based on the above characteristics. The central socio-demographic data was defined in advance so respondents could be directly contacted by email. Data was collected from June 10, 2021 to June 20, 2021. The empirical data collection was sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and was part of broader international research in the V4 region (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) and the Baltic States (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia). The main goal of the research project was to identify, describe and analyze current attitudes and behavioral patterns among young people.

## ■ EU membership: economic benefits

Young people in Visegrad countries think EU membership is mostly economically beneficial. Young people in the Czech Republic are most positive, with 62 per cent stating that membership has brought positive economic effects (Figure 1). Only 12 per cent of young Czechs think the negative effects outweigh the positive ones, and the same proportion believes membership has no effect. Young people in Hungary and Poland have slightly different views, but the majority think EU membership has positive economic effects. Slightly more of them hold neutral views than is the case in the Czech Republic and fewer have outright negative ones, around 10 per cent in Hungary and 11 per cent in Poland.

In Slovakia, the general trend is in line with the other countries. But it is the only country where the majority do not think EU membership has a positive effect on the economy (48 per cent). Slovakia has the largest proportion of young people who think it has negative economic effects – almost a fifth of people aged 14–29.

Figure 1. Economic of EU membership



Source: FES Youth Study 2021

As part of the survey, we asked young people to assess various aspects of the living standards in their country and in the EU. Although these are purely subjective perceptions, they show where they think the EU benefits lie and where they think their own country is more successful.

Under economy and well-being, young people assessed the following three areas: citizens' welfare, employment and equality. Table 1 shows the share of people who think these areas "very good" or "good." In almost all the countries and areas, young people judged the situation to be better in the EU than in their home country. The only exception is young Czechs' views of employment, where the situation at home is seen as being slightly better than in the EU, by three percentage points. However, in the remaining three countries the situation in the EU is perceived to be better in all areas by some distance.

Table 1. Comparison of EU and home country

	Slovakia			Czech Republic		
	At home	EU	Difference	At home	EU	Difference
<b>Citizens' welfare</b>	13%	42%	+29 p. p.	38%	55%	+17 p. p.
<b>Employment</b>	20%	49%	+29 p. p.	56%	53%	-3 p. p.
<b>Equality</b>	20%	34%	+14 p. p.	34%	39%	+5 p. p.
	Poland			Hungary		
	At home	EU	Difference	At home	EU	Difference
<b>Citizens' welfare</b>	21%	54%	+33 p. p.	14%	59%	+44 p. p.
<b>Employment</b>	30%	57%	+27 p. p.	21%	58%	+37 p. p.
<b>Equality</b>	21%	49%	+28 p. p.	17%	46%	+29 p. p.

Source: FES Youth Study 2021

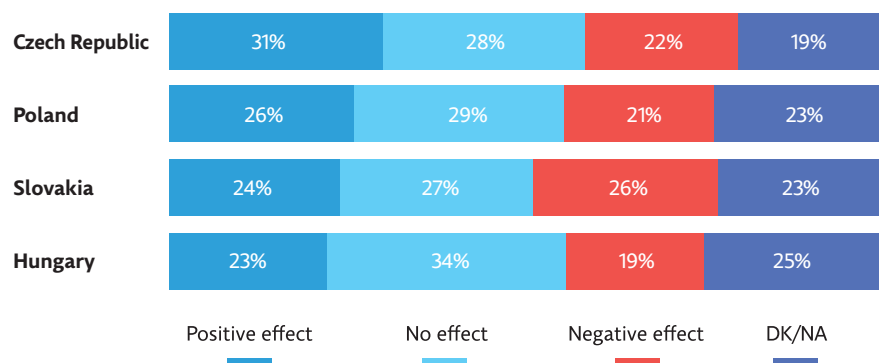
These results suggest that on average young people in the Visegrad countries think being an EU member bring benefits and positive effects. Although there is a smaller group of young people who tend to think membership has a negative effect (between 10 and 17 per cent), the overall picture shows that EU membership is largely judged to be positive in economic terms.

## ■ EU membership: political impact

In comparison to the perceived economic benefits, young people in the V4 countries view the impact on the political system quite differently. Positive assessments do not prevail in any of the four countries. Although in three of the countries there are more youngsters who rate the EU's impact more positively than negatively, they do not constitute majority. The reason for that is the considerable number of people with neutral views on the issue (in Poland, Slovakia and Hungary this is the largest group). Those who don't know or who are unable to assess the EU's impact on the political system represent another large group. In Poland, Hungary and Slovakia that means less than half of the young people are certain of their view.

Young Slovaks' assessments of the economic are most negative within the Visegrad region. Moreover, only in Slovakia do a plurality of young people assess the EU to have a negative impact on the country's political system (26 versus 24 per cent).

Figure 2. Perceived impact of EU membership on political system



Source: FES Youth Study 2021

In the survey we asked young people to assess the situation regarding specific democratic values in their home countries and in the EU. Table 2 shows the share of people who consider the situation to be "very good" or "good" in the following areas: democracy, rule of law, individual freedoms and security.

Table 2 also shows the difference in percentage points, which tells us how many more people assessed the situation to be better at the EU level than in their home country.

Table 2. Comparison of democratic values and the EU versus home country situation

	Slovakia			Czech Republic		
	At home	EU	Difference	At home	EU	Difference
<b>Democracy</b>	32%	45%	+13 p. p.	45%	52%	+7 p. p.
<b>Rule of law</b>	27%	40%	+13 p. p.	39%	46%	+7 p. p.
<b>Individual Freedom</b>	40%	51%	+11 p. p.	58%	56%	+2 p. p.
<b>Security</b>	43%	39%	-4 p. p.	66%	46%	-20 p. p.
	Poland			Hungary		
	At home	EU	Difference	At home	EU	Difference
<b>Democracy</b>	23%	47%	+24 p. p.	21%	51%	+30 p. p.
<b>Rule of law</b>	22%	42%	+20 p. p.	24%	47%	+23 p. p.
<b>Individual Freedom</b>	30%	50%	+20 p. p.	31%	56%	+25 p. p.
<b>Security</b>	41%	49%	+8 p. p.	37%	41%	+4 p. p.

Source: FES Youth Study 2021

Similarly, as in the economic field, the situation regarding democracy, rule of law and individual freedoms is perceived to be better in the EU. This holds for young people in all four countries, although the differences between the home countries and the EU vary. Young people in Hungary think there are large differences between the EU and their country, while Czech youths thought the situation was similar at both the country level and the EU level.

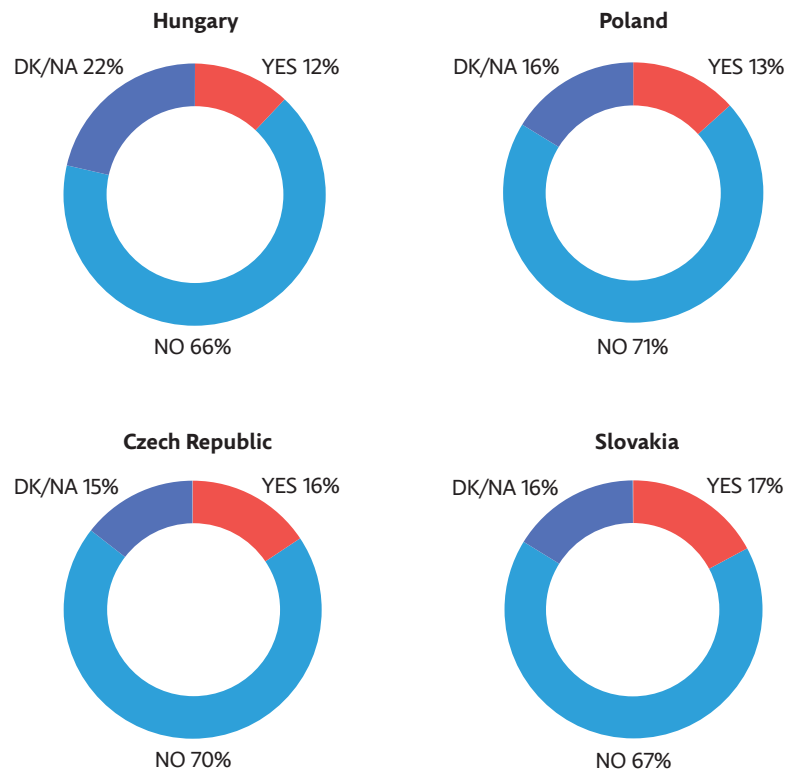
However, security was assessed differently from democracy, rule of law and individual freedom. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, young people think the security situation is better at home than in the EU. In Poland and Hungary, young people think the security situation is better in the EU but not nearly as good as democracy or individual freedom.

One factor that may have contributed to the different security perception is that public discussions on security issues have often been framed by migration and refugee issues, particularly in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

It is highly likely that the public discourse shapes young people's attitudes. Portrayals of the EU and "Brussels" as forcing countries to accept migration that would otherwise be refused could lead young people to think the home country/government provides a higher degree of security.

Admittedly, the migration crisis of 2015/2016 was negatively portrayed in Hungarian and Polish public discourse as well. However, it could be argued that Hungary had direct experience of it, unlike Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and direct experience usually lowers the impact of media discourse on attitudes. In Poland's case, security issues have traditionally had a stronger geopolitical context, and thus the migration crisis may not have impacted public attitudes as strongly as in Slovakia. However, this is a working hypothesis that requires further research to confirm it.

**Figure 3.** Vote on country's exit from the EU



Source: FES Youth Study 2021

Figure 3 shows how young people would vote in a referendum on leaving the EU. The share of votes in favor of leaving ranges from 12 per cent in Hungary to 17 per cent in Slovakia. These numbers are roughly in line with many international comparative surveys that show the share of leavers in the adult population remains below 20 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

## ■ EU trust and identity

Trust has traditionally been used as another indicator of people's affinity to the European Union. In many Central Eastern European countries trust in the EU has been higher than the trust in national political institutions, which has been taken to mean that people in these countries are supportive of membership.

Looking at young people in Visegrad countries, trust in the EU is higher than in the national governments in all four countries. The European Union enjoys the highest trust among young people in Hungary, where 42 per cent trust the EU fully or quite a lot. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic about a third of young people trust the EU, while Poland has the lowest share with 29 per cent of youth trusting the EU.

Table 3 below shows trust levels in national governments and NATO, as well as the EU. It is clear that NATO enjoys a considerable level of trust, comparable to that for the EU. In the Czech Republic even more young people trust NATO (42 per cent) than the European Union (35 per cent). A correlation analysis revealed that EU and NATO trust go hand in hand. People who tend to trust one of the institutions tend to trust the other as well. This does not hold true for the national governments. First, as clearly seen in Table 3, trust in national governments is considerably lower than trust in the EU. Second, there is no (negative) correlation between trust in the EU on the one hand and trust in the national government on the other hand.

<sup>2</sup> "Demokratie in Bewegung – Ein Jahr vor der Europawahl 2019," *Eurobarometer-Umfrage* 89. 2, February 14, 2022. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2018/eurobarometer-2018-democracy-on-the-move/report/de-one-year-before-2019-eurobarometer-report.pdf> (accessed on February 10, 2022).

**Table 3.** Trust in institutions

Trust in institutions: (Fully + Quite a lot)	European Union	National Government	NATO
Hungary	42%	17%	34%
Czech Republic	35%	6%	42%
Slovakia	32%	10%	26%
Poland	29%	9%	27%

Source: FES Youth Study 2021

In order to determine the potential sources of negative perceptions of the EU we investigated young people's self-identification with their country and the EU. As Table 4 shows, in Poland and Hungary the share of young people who see themselves as Europeans is almost the same as the proportion who feel Polish/Hungarian. The figures differ in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic, the difference is nine percentage points, and in Slovakia it is 14 points higher.

However, a further analysis shows that identifying with one's country or the European Union is not mutually exclusive. There is a considerable share of people who show very strong self-identification with both the EU and their own country. On the other hand, many people do not identify with either political community. Thus, there seems to be an underlying factor (or factors) that drive(s) young people to have either both a national and a European identity, or neither. But there is no evidence to suggest that a stronger national identity reduces trust in the EU.

**Table 4.** Self-identification with EU and country

Identity Feelings: Completely + Very much	Feel European	Feel national identity
Hungary	64%	64%
Czech Republic	63%	72%
Slovakia	51%	65%
Poland	50%	52%

Source: FES Youth Study 2021

## ■ Focused on Slovakia

Young people's attitudes to democracy and democratic processes began to attract the attention of social scientists after the 2016 elections in particular. That was when Kotleba – ĽSNS made it into parliament. Many scholars refer to it to as a right-wing extremist<sup>3</sup> or even neo-Nazi party<sup>4</sup>. In 2020 the party leader was found guilty (the final decision is still to be made) of supporting and promoting a movement aimed at the suppression of fundamental rights and freedoms. After the 2016 elections, the narrative spread that young voters were primarily responsible for the party being elected to parliament.<sup>5</sup>

Data (FES Youth Study 2021) show that young Slovaks' political preferences and their attitudes to democracy are comparable to the V4 or Baltic states average and do not reveal a strong inclination to authoritarianism. The majority of youth in all countries, except Latvia, endorsed the claim that democracy is a good form of government. In Slovakia, the proportion is 58 per cent; 10 per cent of young people disagreed completely.

We also asked young people if, under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy. In all seven countries, more young people rejected this idea than agreed with it. However, only in Slovakia and Czechia was it rejected by the majority of young people (52 per cent in Slovakia, 59 per cent in the Czech Republic). By contrast, 18 per cent of young people in Slovakia agreed with it. There are no statistically relevant differences among the age groups. This means that these attitudes do not change in the formative period and on average remain the same between the ages of 14 and 29.

At the end, we looked at the parties young people voted for in 2020 and their political preferences in the summer of 2021. The purpose was to ascertain

<sup>3</sup> T. Nociar, *Right-wing extremism in Slovakia*. Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, December 2012. Available online <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09567.pdf> (accessed on February 10, 2022).

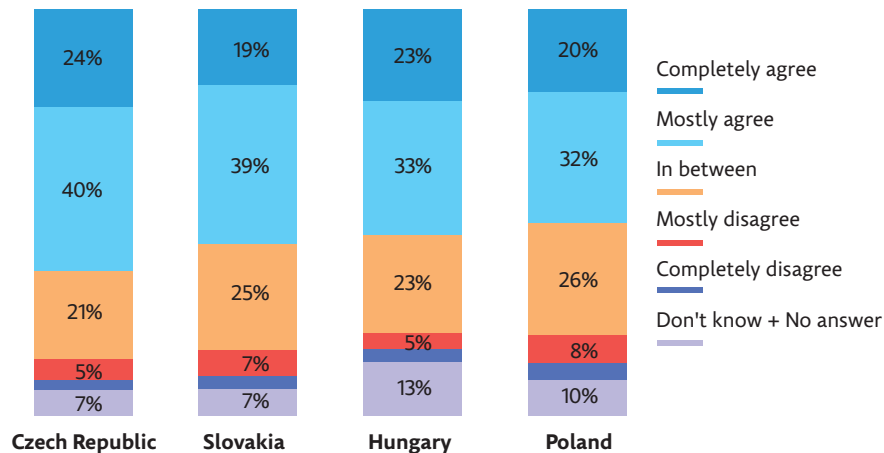
<sup>4</sup> O. Filipec, "Challenging trends within Slovak party system in the context of 2016 elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic," *Politics in Central Europe* Vol. 15, No. 1, 2019, pp. 7–34. P. Voda, A. Kluknavská, P. Spáč, "From trivialized neo-Nazis to parliament: explaining the electoral success of the extreme right Party ĽSNS in Slovakia," *Problems of Post-Communism*, 2021, Online first, pp. 1–16. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1869909> (accessed on February 10, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> O. Gyárfášová, "Radicalization of radical right: Nativist movements and parties in the Slovak political process," in *Radical Right Movement Parties in Europe*, London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 199–215.



whether the data still show growing support among youth for extremist political forces. At the time of the survey, the preferences clearly indicated that the majority of young people were inclined to support progressive political forces or forces that would like to see a different government in power from the one that took power in 2020.

**Figure 4.** Agreement with the statement that democracy is a good form of government



Source: FES Youth Study 2021

The share of young people preferring extreme right-wing political entities was smaller than in public opinion surveys of the whole adult population. Although the FES data do not allow us to determine the causes of changes in young people's political preferences, one can assume that it was down to both the stigmatization of the Kotleba – LSNS party as well as several state and NGO stakeholders focusing on educating young people.

Young people are usually spoken of as being most able to benefit from EU membership. The opportunities to study abroad under the same conditions as domestic students or offered by the open labor market are, hypothetically, benefits that can be utilized more by young people than by older generations. The high number of Slovaks living, both permanently and temporarily, in other EU member states shows that these opportunities are taken up. Based on a Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization

report: “in the past 15 years, as many as 300,000 Slovaks have left Slovakia, most commonly university educated young people under 30.”<sup>6</sup> The share of university students studying abroad is, according to OECD data, almost 20 per cent whereas the EU average has been 2 per cent over the long term.<sup>7</sup>

Among the countries studied, Slovakia has the lowest proportion of young people who think European integration has provided the country with economic benefits. More precisely, it is the only country in the Visegrad region where less than half of young people believe membership has brought economic benefits.

Regarding the impact on the political system, young people in Slovakia consider EU membership to be more negative than positive (26 vs. 24 per cent), and it is the only country with a prevailing negative view. All the remaining countries view the EU's influence on the national political system to be mostly positive, including Hungary. The relatively negative perception of the European Union is also reflected in the lack of trust in the EU.

The negative mindset of Slovak youth largely reflects the attitudes of the adult population and, in many respects, the Slovak adult population is also the most negative in the Visegrad four countries. According to the Eurobarometer of spring 2021,<sup>8</sup> the Slovak population was generally more inclined to distrust the European Union: 47 per cent compared to the 43 per cent who trust it, which is more than the Czech Republic, traditionally thought to be a Eurosceptic nation. In the same Eurobarometer, the Czech Republic had a more favorable ratio of people trusting the EU: 49 per cent of people trusted the EU and 47 per cent did not.

If we compare the demographic and socio-economic background of those who view Slovakia's membership most negatively, there is a clear pattern. On

<sup>6</sup> “Vízia a stratégia rozvoja Slovenska do roku 2030 – dlhodobá stratégia udržateľného rozvoja Slovenskej republiky – Slovensko 2030,” [Vision and strategy of development of Slovakia up to 2030 – long-term strategy for the sustainable development of the Slovak Republic – Slovakia 2030] Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Investments of the Slovak Republic, 2020, p. 13. Available online: <https://www.mirri.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Slovensko-2030.pdf> (accessed on February 10, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> “Analýza zistení o stave školstva na Slovensku: To dá rozum,” [Analysis of findings on the state of education in Slovakia: it makes sense] Bratislava: MESA10. Available online: <https://analiza.todarozum.sk/analiza-zisteni-o-stave-skolstva-na-slovensku.pdf> (accessed on February 10, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> “Public opinion in the European Union, Standard Eurobarometer 95–Spring 2021,” Eurostat: European Union 2021.

the one hand, we have people who support EU membership and see many benefits from it. These young people are, on average, financially well off, highly educated and live in urban areas. In terms of attitudes, they are less worried than average about events like experiencing physical violence or not having a job. Their trust in national institutions and the church is low but they place a lot of trust in international institutions like NATO or the EU. They value democracy highly and disapprove of bribery and tax fraud. They are very worried about broader societal issues like social injustice, corruption, the weakening of democracy and – most of all – climate change, which puts them above average.

On the other hand, people who have the most negative views on EU membership tend to exhibit the following characteristics. They value traditional values highly, such as marriage and family life. They are more likely to be Catholic. While they are no more likely than average to be financially well off, they don't struggle either. Their political involvement is high but they are anti-democratic and often approve of dictatorship. They have little trust in national institutions and even less trust in international political institutions – but they trust the church. They are more unlikely to be worried about political developments than the average person – immigration being the only exception. They perceive themselves to be extremely right-wing politically. They express nationalist views and are against abortion, homosexuality, Muslims and Roma.

## ■ Conclusion

On average young people in the Visegrad countries perceive the European Union positively. In general positive evaluations of both economic and political impact prevail over negative ones. Also when it comes to values and the qualities of the public sphere, young people think the situation in the EU is better than at home. There are only a few exceptions.

First, the security issues are judged to be better in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, than in the EU. This is most likely related to the migration-related political discourse that portrayed the EU as a threat in terms of forcing countries to accept culturally undesired migration.

Second, Slovakian youths are critical of the political impact of EU membership. Although the data cannot tell us what that means precisely, we found no

correlation with views of the economic benefits of membership, or identity issues contributing to such evaluations. Trust in the EU (and NATO) remains relatively high, and is certainly higher among young people in the Visegrad region, which is in line with results obtained by the Eurobarometer survey.

Overall, young people in Central Europe do not have considerably more negative views of the European Union than the adult population. Rather, their views and attitudes largely follow those of society in general. Therefore, there seems to be no reason to focus strategic communication of the European Union's membership and its importance to Slovakia on the young generation, at least in terms of its substance and key messages. However, the form of communication could be customized to reach young people more effectively.



Zsolt Gál

The world economy  
in 2021 – the crisis  
is over, massive  
stimulation continues  
and inflation returns

In 2021 the world economy swiftly rebounded from the historic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and most large economies reached pre-crisis GDP levels. However, in spite of the strong recovery and optimistic future growth projections, the massive monetary and fiscal stimulation continued in the developed world and in the short-term there were no signs of radical change. Unprecedented fiscal and monetary policies combined with the “re-opening momentum” (the lifting of the pandemic containment measures and resulting jumps in consumption) and some supply side problems resulted in the acceleration of inflation. The growth in consumer prices reached levels unseen in decades, far outstripping official projections. It was clear that inflation was going to be far higher and stay for longer than most economists had imagined. Normally, high inflation figures should force governments and central banks to speed up fiscal consolidation efforts and limit the expansion of the money supply through higher interest rates and by terminating “quantitative easing” (asset purchase) programs. However, this time, reactions were slow, timid and often reluctant from the very beginning and then came another unprecedented external shock: Russia’s war against Ukraine, starting in late February 2022. Bringing huge uncertainty to economic planning and projections, the war may radically change the situation again. It will probably increase the pressure on decision makers in developed countries, especially in the European Union, to further postpone or water-down the needed fiscal and monetary steps as they attempt to fight inflation and concentrate on preventing another recession. By doing this they might be able to keep Western economies afloat, but after just one year of the return to inflation they run the risk of stagflation (a combination of high inflation and economic stagnation).

## ■ The crisis is over but massive stimulation continues

In 2021 the world economy rebounded from the historic recession caused by the COVID-19 crisis better and faster than many economists had expected.<sup>1</sup> In the developed countries the fast vaccination campaigns and subsequent gradual relaxation of the pandemic restrictions, in short the “reopening momentum”, combined with the ongoing massive monetary and fiscal stimulus propelled consumer spending and thus economic growth to record levels. In its Autumn 2021 economic forecast the European Commission noted in an optimistic mood that

At almost 14% in annual terms, the rate of GDP growth recorded in the EU in the second quarter of 2021 is the highest reading in the history of the time series – exactly as high as the unprecedented GDP downfall in the same period last year, during the first wave of the pandemic... [Economic] output was in the third quarter just a notch below its pre-pandemic level. For all Member States, pre-pandemic output levels are within reach, though the recovery is set to remain uneven across countries and sectors.<sup>2</sup>

During the autumn of 2021 the EU economy was getting very close to pre-crisis levels and the US economy was already over the crisis. More precisely, according to Eurostat estimates (the statistical office of the European Union) GDP volumes in the euro area and EU remained at only 0.3 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively below the level recorded in the fourth quarter of 2019, while GDP was 1.4 per cent higher in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Regarding employment levels, the situation was similar: in the third quarter of 2021 employment in the euro area remained at 0.3 million below the level of the fourth quarter of 2019, but was 0.1 million above this level in the EU. Furthermore, all the economic projections estimated persistent and relatively high economic

expansion. For example, the above-mentioned autumn economic forecast by the European Commission projected a 4.3 per cent real GDP growth rate for the European Union, 4.5 and 4.8 per cent for the US and the UK respectively and over 5 per cent for China and India.<sup>4</sup>

According to standard economic textbooks it was time to cut back on the historically unprecedented monetary and fiscal stimulation of the economy, i.e. get rid of the zero and negative interest rates, the central banks’ large-scale asset purchase programs (“quantitative easing”) and the huge budget deficits and try a swift return to normality. Keynesian economic recipes suggest that stimulation to increase aggregate demand should only be used when economies are running below capacity and have a reservoir of unemployed people; in other words during recessions or periods of sluggish growth. Keynes advocated policies that are countercyclical: thus from late 2021 it was time to cool the economy and prevent inflation. However, in previous decades political elites had got used to deficit spending at all times, even during economic expansion – contrary to Keynes’ original ideas – and running countercyclical policies in crisis years and pro-cyclical policies in years of economic growth. Budget deficits became permanent, and a new phrase was coined to describe this phenomenon: fiscal alcoholism (György Kopits, a member of the Hungarian National Bank’s monetary council, in a 2009 Wall Street Journal article.)<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the pandemic became an excuse to lift the EU’s control mechanism for member state fiscal deficits<sup>6</sup>, and the war in Ukraine could become a new problem. The so-called Stability and Growth Pact was deactivated in consecutive steps until 2023 – for three years – but in March 2022 European Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni admitted it would be suspended, stating: “There is for now too much uncertainty,” and telling reporters that “We will need to reassess the expected deactivation of the General Escape Clause in 2023 on the basis of our spring forecast, which I will present in mid-May.”<sup>7</sup> While the EU had fiscal rules for member states until 2020, at least on paper (even if they were not effective, owing

<sup>1</sup> C. Giles, “‘The easy part is over’: uncertainty looms after world economy’s Covid rebound,” *Financial Times*, December 31, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/1769e10d-9ff6-4c4b-8c7b-0098d321cd29> (accessed on February 27, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> “European Economic Forecast, Autumn 2021,” European Commission, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> “GDP up by 2.2% and employment up by 0.9% in the euro area,” Eurostat: Euro indicators 137/2021, December 7, 2021. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11563403/2-07122021-AP-EN.pdf/83e3a25b-674c-5481-9c1b-dd0cd8d42f9e> (accessed on February 14, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> “European Economic Forecast, Autumn 2021,” op. cit., pp. 12, 18.

<sup>5</sup> E. Butler, “Fiscal alcoholism,” Adam Smith Institute, September 30, 2009. Available online: <https://www.adamsmith.org/blog/tax-spending/fiscal-alcoholism> (accessed on March 7, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Z. Gál, 2020 – an unprecedented year, in the world economy as well,” in P. Brežáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia’s foreign policy*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2021, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> J. V. Galarreta, “War brings EU closer to suspending fiscal rule again for 2023,” Bloomberg | Quint, March 2, 2022. Available online: <https://www.bloomberquint.com/onweb/war-brings-eu-closer-to-suspending-fiscal-rule-again-for-2023> (accessed on March 7, 2022).

to frequent violation and no sanctions being imposed), since then it has been running no limits on reckless government spending.

Considering the relatively long-term prospect of fiscal alcoholism, government reluctance to balance the books was not new, but what was new was the magnitude of the problem: the unprecedented size of the fiscal stimuli and the unprecedented degree of monetization by central banks. As an illustration, just look at the largest fiscal pandemic relief bailout series provided by the US federal government. In the year from March 2020, the US Congress and two successive presidential administrations passed and signed into law five COVID-19 pandemic relief bailouts: \$192 billion from the Families First Coronavirus Response Act; \$2.2 trillion from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act; \$733 billion for the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act; \$915 billion for the Coronavirus Response and Relief Act; and, finally, \$1.9 trillion for the America Rescue Plan Act of 2021.<sup>8</sup> Altogether almost \$6 trillion in “emergency” federal spending was announced in a single year. The direct discretionary fiscal support measures in America were certainly the largest compared to all other developed countries. If we take budget-relevant measures into account, i.e. additional expenditure or foregone revenue, then by September 27, 2021, they represented 25 per cent of US GDP, while in the EU countries the level typically varied between 5 and 15 per cent of GDP and a bit higher but still below 20 per cent in countries such as Japan, Canada, Australia or the UK.<sup>9</sup> If we add in the other measures announced like equity and loans and guarantees provided by governments, then Italy, Germany, the UK and Japan stand out with the total volume exceeding 35 per cent of GDP, while the US is only fifth with about 28 per cent of GDP. It is important to note that these data, originally collected by the IMF, refer to maximum volumes of announced policy measures and thus actual uptake has been substantially smaller.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the rescue packages were still gigantic and unprecedented in historic terms, especially regarding the short period of use. This is well illustrated by the huge budget deficits and consequent dramatic increase in public debt

levels (Table 1). For example, the largest economy in the globe, the United States, generated double-digit deficits in both 2020 and 2021, resulting in a 25 percentage-point growth in public debt to GDP ratio, which jumped to about 133 per cent.

**Table 1.** General government fiscal balances and gross debt levels in selected major economies and groups of countries (as a percentage of GDP, 2019–2022)

	■ Fiscal balance				■ Gross public debt			
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>World</b>	-3,6	-10,2	-7,9	-5,2	83,6	98,6	97,8	96,9
<b>Advanced Economies</b>	-3,0	-10,8	-8,8	-4,8	103,8	122,7	121,6	119,3
<b>Canada</b>	0,5	-10,9	-7,5	-2,2	86,8	117,5	109,9	103,9
<b>Euro Area</b>	-0,6	-7,2	-7,7	-3,4	83,7	97,5	98,9	96,3
<b>France</b>	-3,1	-9,2	-8,9	-4,7	97,6	115,1	115,8	113,5
<b>Germany</b>	1,5	-4,3	-6,8	-1,8	59,2	69,1	72,5	69,8
<b>Italy</b>	-1,6	-9,5	-10,2	-4,7	134,6	155,8	154,8	150,4
<b>Spain</b>	-2,9	-11,0	-8,6	-5,0	95,5	119,9	120,2	116,4
<b>Japan</b>	-3,1	-10,3	-9,0	-3,9	235,4	254,1	256,9	252,3
<b>United Kingdom</b>	-2,3	-12,5	-11,9	-5,6	85,2	104,5	108,5	107,1
<b>United States</b>	-5,7	-14,9	-10,8	-6,9	108,5	133,9	133,3	130,7
<b>Emerging Market Economies</b>	-4,7	-9,6	-6,6	-5,8	54,7	64,0	64,3	65,8
<b>China</b>	-6,3	-11,2	-7,5	-6,8	57,1	66,3	68,9	72,1
<b>India</b>	-7,4	-12,8	-11,3	-9,7	74,1	89,6	90,6	88,8
<b>Russian Federation</b>	1,9	-4,0	-0,6	0,0	13,8	19,3	17,9	17,9
<b>Brazil</b>	-5,9	-13,4	-6,2	-7,4	87,7	98,9	90,6	90,2
<b>Mexico</b>	-2,3	-4,5	-4,2	-3,5	53,3	61,0	59,8	60,1
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	-4,5	-11,3	-3,1	-1,8	22,8	32,5	29,7	30,8
<b>South Africa</b>	-4,8	-10,8	-8,4	-7,0	56,3	69,4	68,8	72,3

Note: Data for 2021 and 2022 are IMF projections.

Source: “Fiscal monitor: strengthening the credibility of public finances,” International Monetary Fund, October 2021, pp. 4–5.

In the European Union, in addition to national budgets (and deficits), we have to mention the new debt financed temporary recovery instrument, Next-GenerationEU,

which might add €806.9 billion in 2021–2026 to the regular common budget (under the 2021–2027 multiannual financial framework €1.2 trillion

<sup>8</sup> V. de Rugy, G. Jones, “Keynesian stimulus: A virtuous semicircle?” Mercatus Center at George Mason University, June 2, 2021. Available online: <https://www.mercatus.org/publications/government-spending/keynesian-stimulus-virtuous-semicircle> (accessed on March 7, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> V. Wieland, “Overview of how major economies have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic: Growth trajectories, debt sustainability and best practices,” Economic Governance Support Unit, European Parliament, 2022, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

will be spent).<sup>11</sup> The most important part, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, makes available €723.8 billion in loans (€385.8 billion) and grants (€338 billion) for member states to implement undertaken reforms and investments that are in line with the EU's priorities; like achieving climate neutrality by 2050.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in addition to national expenditures and deficits there are now supranational EU-level ones, and there the unintended consequences might add fuel to the already burning inflation.

Moreover, it is not only the size of the government relief, which has been unprecedented, but the degree of monetization by central banks as well.

The tsunami of fiscal stimulus was accompanied by bond-buying of almost equal magnitude: central banks in America, Britain, the euro zone and Japan have together bought more than \$9trn in assets.<sup>13</sup>

Large-scale central bank asset purchase programs often referred to as "quantitative easing" (QE), which consist mainly of government bonds, are a relatively recent phenomenon. The European Central Bank (ECB) was rather late to join the QE club in 2015 and for some time it lagged behind regarding the magnitude of purchased assets.<sup>14</sup> However, during the pandemic the ECB fired up its monetary rocket engines and its purchases basically equaled all new government bond issuance. In other words, it monetized all fiscal deficits and resulting new public debts in the euro zone. On top of its Public Sector Purchase Program (PSPP), which has been ongoing since 2015, it created the new Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program (PEPP) with an initial envelope of €750 billion, which was subsequently expanded to €1850 billion, representing 15.4 per cent of euro area GDP in 2019.<sup>15</sup> With this new firepower the ECB soaked

up government bonds equivalent to 78.4 per cent of the euro zone's new public debt issuance in 2020 and an estimated 108.2 per cent in 2021.<sup>16</sup> The share of public debt held by the Eurosystem (ECB plus national central banks of euro area countries) rose from 4.4 per cent at the end of 2015 to a little over 30 per cent by the end of 2021.<sup>17</sup> It was already higher than in America, where Federal Reserve Banks held 26 per cent of the US federal debt at the end of 2021,<sup>18</sup> but still well below the share of Japanese government bonds held by the Bank of Japan (BoJ), which had already reached 43 per cent in 2020.<sup>19</sup>

During the pandemic the main central banks definitely became fiscal agents to governments, ensuring the fast monetization of new debts on a colossal scale, while keeping ultra-low interest rates and low debt servicing expenditure as well. In such an environment, governments are not motivated to implement structural reforms and fiscal consolidation packages; on the contrary, they're encouraged to borrow more. To put it succinctly: "if government borrowing becomes a free lunch there is a clear disincentive to fiscal discipline."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, this behavior raises serious questions about central bank independence (from political interference) and additionally is likely to result in high inflation. It is hard to express in words the magnitude of the monetary stimulus over the last few years. Thanks to skyrocketing asset purchase programs the ECB's balance sheet jumped from 39 per cent to 67 per cent of euro area GDP between 2019 and 2021; the corresponding growth for the Fed was from 20 to 38 per cent of US GDP.<sup>21</sup> In absolute terms, the four largest central banks (Fed, ECB, BoJ and Bank of England) increased their balance sheets by \$11.1 trillion in just two years, between 2019 and 2021, from \$15.4

<sup>11</sup> "The 2021–2027 EU budget – What's new?" European Commission. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new_en) (accessed on March 17, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> "The Recovery and Resilience Facility," European Commission. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en) (accessed on March 17, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> "Has the pandemic shown inflation to be a fiscal phenomenon?" *The Economist*, December 18, 2021. Available online: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2021/12/18/has-the-pandemic-shown-inflation-to-be-a-fiscal-phenomenon> (accessed on March 7, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Z. Gál, "2020 – an unprecedented year, in the world economy as well," op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> V. Wieland, "Overview of how major economies have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Growth trajectories, debt sustainability and best practices," op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> J. de Larosière, D. Cahen, "Monetary Scoreboard, February 2022," Eurofi – The European think-tank dedicated to financial services, p. 16. Available online: [https://www.eurofi.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/macroeconomic-scoreboard\\_paris\\_february-2022.pdf](https://www.eurofi.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/macroeconomic-scoreboard_paris_february-2022.pdf) (accessed on March 10, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> "Who's buying Treasuries? Domestic vs. foreign ownership of U.S. federal debt," Federal Reserve Economic Data, The FRED® Blog. Available online: [https://fredblog.stlouisfed.org/2018/04/whos-buying-treasuries/?utm\\_source=series\\_page&utm\\_medium=related\\_content&utm\\_term=related\\_resources&utm\\_campaign=fredblog](https://fredblog.stlouisfed.org/2018/04/whos-buying-treasuries/?utm_source=series_page&utm_medium=related_content&utm_term=related_resources&utm_campaign=fredblog) (accessed on March 14, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> C. Blot, P. Hubert, "Public debt: Central banks to the rescue?" Ofce le blog, Observatoire français des conjonctures économiques, January 29, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ofce.sciences-po.fr/blog/public-debt-central-banks-to-the-rescue/> (accessed on March 14, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> J. de Larosière, D. Cahen, "Monetary Scoreboard, February 2022," op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> "Atlantic Council Global QE Tracker," Atlantic Council. Available online: <https://www.atlantic-council.org/global-qe-tracker/> (accessed on March 17, 2022).

trillion to \$26.5 trillion.<sup>22</sup> If we start counting before the great financial crisis then the cumulative increase in the balance sheet between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2021, was 892 per cent for the Fed and 540 per cent for the ECB.<sup>23</sup> Between February 2020 and November 2021, the money supply (broad measure, M3) increased by a total of 36 per cent in the US and 15 per cent in the euro area.<sup>24</sup> It is shocking that witnessing this, central bank officials were not concerned about a possible surge in inflation. With time passing, in late 2021 they acknowledged temporary and relatively modest jumps in inflation but were still reluctant to curb expansionary monetary policy. Soon after inflation returned victoriously, but it was neither modest nor temporary.

## ■ Inflation returns, German central bank “hawk” Weidmann goes

It is astonishing how most economists and central bank and government officials underestimated the coming inflation wave. As the former chair of President Barack Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers, Jason Furman – taking the US example – noted:

A survey of 36 private-sector forecasters in May revealed a median inflation forecast of 2.3% for 2021 (measured by the core personal consumption expenditures price index, the US Federal Reserve’s de facto target gauge). As a whole, the group put a 0.5% chance on inflation exceeding 4% last year – but, by the core PCE measure, it looks set to be 4.5%. The Fed’s rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee fared no better, with none of its 18 members expecting inflation above 2.5% in 2021. Financial markets appear to have missed this one as well, with bond prices yielding similar predictions. Ditto the International Monetary Fund, the Congressional Budget Office, President Joe Biden’s administration, and even many conservative economists.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> J. de Larosière, D. Cahen, “Monetary Scoreboard, February 2022,” op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> J. Furman, “Why did almost nobody see inflation coming?” *Project Syndicate*, January 17, 2022. Available online: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/2021-us-inflation-forecasting-errors-economic-models-by-jason-furman-2022-01> (accessed on February 22, 2022).

Inflation projections by the ECB and National Bank of Slovakia were similarly inappropriate, vastly underestimating the coming wave.<sup>26</sup> One of the best-known examples is the ECB’s March 2021 inflation forecast, which stated:

Overall, HICP inflation is expected to rebound sharply from 0.3 per cent in 2020 to 1.5 per cent in 2021, peaking at 2.0 per cent in the last quarter of 2021, before dropping to 1.2% in 2022 and then increasing to 1.4% in 2023.<sup>27</sup>

The reality was that by December 2021 inflation in the United States, as measured by the US consumer price index (CPI), had reached 7.0 per cent (up by 5.6 percentage points since January 2021) and the inflation in the euro area, measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), stood at 5.0 per cent (up by 4.1 percentage points since January 2021)<sup>28</sup> – and still had not peaked, as the data for January and February 2022 show a small but continuous growth in inflation.

Very few economists warned of higher inflation prior to its surge, but some can be found in the most important countries, like the US, where the most influential were former treasury secretary of the Clinton administration, Larry Summers, and former New York Fed President, Bill Dudley, and in small countries like Slovakia, where the most consistent long-term “alarmist” is an analyst at the think tank INESS, Juraj Karpiš.<sup>29</sup> Summers for instance, has called Biden’s efforts the “least responsible” macroeconomic policy in forty years and made the following comparison on National Public Radio: “If your bathtub isn’t full, you should turn the faucet on, but that doesn’t mean

<sup>26</sup> M. Vlachynský, “Drahý nový rok – Čo znamená súčasná inflácia pre blízku budúcnosť,” INESS, Bratislava, 2022, p. 14. Available online: [https://iness.sk/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/IPN/drahy\\_novy\\_rok.pdf](https://iness.sk/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/IPN/drahy_novy_rok.pdf) (accessed on February 14, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> “ECB staff macroeconomic projections for the euro area, March 2021,” ECB, March 11, 2021. Available online: [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/projections/html/ecb.projections202103\\_ecbstaff~3f6efd7e8f.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/projections/html/ecb.projections202103_ecbstaff~3f6efd7e8f.en.html) (accessed on February 14, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> S. C. Ricarte, R. Gomez-Salvador, G. Koester, “Recent inflation developments in the United States and the euro area – an update,” *ECB Economic Bulletin*, Issue 1/2022. Available online: [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/economic-bulletin/focus/2022/html/ecb.ebbox202201\\_01~4bb-2c93b96.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/economic-bulletin/focus/2022/html/ecb.ebbox202201_01~4bb-2c93b96.en.html) (accessed on March 17, 2022).

<sup>29</sup> R. Ižip, “Karpiš: Keď som hovoril o vysokej inflácii, pozerali na mňa ako na blázna. Centrálné banky sa ukážkovo mýlili. A mýliť sa môžu aj teraz,” [Karpiš: When I talked about high inflation, they looked at me like I was crazy. The central banks were spectacularly wrong. And they may be wrong now] *Trend* 07/2022, February 17, 2022. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/trend-archiv/karpiš-keď-som-hovoril-vysokej-inflácii-pozerali-mňa-ako-blázna> (accessed on February 17, 2022).

you should turn it on as hard as you can and as long as you can.”<sup>30</sup> However, there were also some economists in key positions who were ringing the alarm bell, most notably Bundesbank chief and ECB governing council member Jens Weidmann. In late 2021 he gave up his decade long fight against the ECB’s ultra-loose monetary policy and decided to step down more than five years early in his second term. As the longest-serving member of the governing council, he had frequently warned that the ECB was underestimating inflationary pressures and that its independence could be eroded because of how reliant heavily indebted governments had become on its bond-buying program to keep their borrowing costs low.<sup>31</sup> As early as in 2016, when some economists and policymakers started to talk about “helicopter money” as an instrument of last resort, Weidmann, in an interview to German newspapers, warned of the possible consequences:

Helicopter money is not manna that falls from heaven – it would actually rip huge holes in central bank balance sheets. Ultimately euro zone states and therefore taxpayers would end up having to bear the costs because there wouldn’t be central bank profits for a long time... Monetary policy is not a panacea, doesn’t replace the necessary reforms in individual countries and won’t solve all of Europe’s growth problems... I have repeatedly pointed out that the effect of ultra-loose monetary policy gets weaker the longer it lasts. At the same time it’s true that the more you accelerate, the bigger the risks and side effects become.<sup>32</sup>

Weidmann’s resignation had been a kind of last desperate attempt by a frustrated economist after a decade-long fight – often lonely and unsuccessful – in the name of German monetary orthodoxy and based on the shocking experiences of the 1920 s hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic. Weidmann was just the last in a long row of “hawkish” German central bankers to resign after opposing the ECB’s measures. His predecessor at the Bundesbank (and on the ECB’s governing council) Axel Weber quit in 2011 after fiercely

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<sup>30</sup> B. Wesbury, R. Stein, “Biden and Powell versus Summers and Dudley,” *Advisor Perspectives*, May 11, 2021. <https://www.advisorperspectives.com/commentaries/2021/05/11/biden-and-powell-versus-summers-and-dudley> (accessed on February 7, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> M. Arnold, G. Chazan, “End of an era as Bundesbank chief Jens Weidmann steps down,” *Financial Times*, October 20, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/d8b413f1-818c-4afc-8007-714209e5d66b> (accessed on February 7, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> M. Martin, T. Chopra, “‘Helicopter money’ is not manna from heaven, Bundesbank chief says,” *Reuters*, March 19, 2016. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ecb-weidmann-idUSKCNOWL05N> (accessed on February 7, 2022).

opposing the ECB’s strategy; Jürgen Stark, the ECB’s chief economist and executive board member followed soon after in protest at the massive purchases of government bonds in response to the eurozone debt crisis; and Sabine Lautenschläger resigned as an ECB executive board member in 2019, three years before her term expired and shortly after the announcement of the restart of bond purchases.<sup>33</sup> While various forms of protest in Germany became commonplace, the latter step by the ECB under Mario Draghi led to a much broader protest reaching far beyond the German border.

In September 2019 the ECB decided to cut its deposit rate to a record low of -0.5 per cent and to reactivate its €2.6tn QE program after a hiatus of nine months, at the rate of €20 billion a month, to boost flagging inflation and economic growth. This controversial decision caused unprecedented divisions: nine members of the 25-person governing council were against the package and central bank governors in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria publicly spoke out against the measures – a very unusual reaction in the conservative and closed world of central bankers.<sup>34</sup> A protest memo harshly criticizing ECB policies followed, which was signed or supported by heavyweight central bankers: Jürgen Stark and Otmar Issing, former ECB chief economists; Christian Noyer and Jacques de Larosière, former heads of the Banque de France; Klaus Liebscher, former head of the Austrian central bank; Helmut Schlesinger; former head of Germany’s Bundesbank; and Nout Wellink, former head of the Dutch central bank. Blaming the ECB for a monetary policy “based on a wrong diagnosis” (unfounded fears of deflation and misunderstanding the concept of price stability) they argued:

There is broad consensus that, after years of quantitative easing, continued securities purchases by the ECB will hardly yield any positive effects on growth. This makes it difficult to understand the monetary policy logic of resuming net asset purchases. In contrast, the suspicion that behind this measure lies *an intent to protect heavily indebted governments from a rise in interest rates is becoming increasingly well founded. From an economic point of view, the ECB has already entered the territory of monetary financing of government spending, which is strictly prohibited by the Treaty...* The longer the ultra-low or negative interest

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<sup>33</sup> M. Arnold, G. Chazan, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> D. Marsh, P. Ortlieb, “Weidmann waves the hawkish white flag,” *Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum*, October 20, 2021. Available online: <https://www.omfif.org/2021/10/weidmann-waves-the-hawkish-white-flag/> (accessed on February 8, 2022).



rate policy and liquidity flooding of markets continue, the greater the potential for a setback.<sup>35</sup>

Naturally if the measures taken in 2019 were considered out of proportion by many, continuing ultra-loose monetary policy at the end of 2021 with solid growth levels and prospects, and rising inflation, would hardly be acceptable. The departure of Weidmann, the unofficial leader of the “hawks,” signaled the end of an era in which the German-style price-stability-focused monetary orthodoxy was definitely defeated within the ECB and replaced with a much laxer new mainstream. Paradoxically, at the same time, the hawks seemed to be beginning to win the argument. In December 2021 the ECB projected the euro zone’s annual inflation for 2022 at 3.2 per cent, almost three times more than a year earlier (1.1 per cent) and acknowledged that higher inflation would last longer but still estimated that it would fall slightly below 2 per cent by the end of 2022.<sup>36</sup> More importantly, until early 2022 there had been no signs that the ECB was planning a swift and substantial change in course, i.e., the series of interest rate hikes was still not on the agenda. Only a gradual decrease – but not the complete termination – of asset purchases was announced. Unlike in the US, where the highest inflation in four decades provoked the Fed into not only starting to lift interest rates in March 2022 (the first time since 2018, by 0.25 per cent, and indicated six more increases during the year) but also into hinting that a reduction in its enormous balance sheet would come soon with details to be announced in May.<sup>37</sup> The question is whether it will be enough to stop inflation. One of the few prominent economists to rightly predict the coming inflation, Larry Summers, noted in an interview to the *Harvard Gazette* that:

I have been critical of the Fed for the better part of a year on its failure to recognize that inflation became, as of last spring, the most serious short-run threat facing the American economy, and I am very glad to see their policy pivot. They used to say that they were not going to raise

interest rates until 2024. Now, they’re saying that there will be multiple rate increases in 2022. I think that’s all to the good. But I am rather skeptical that interest rate increases that will still leave real interest rates negative – that is, interest rates below inflation rates – will be sufficient to contain inflationary pressures. I’m not sure that the policy community has fully faced the likelihood that at least some economic slowdown will be necessary if inflation is going to be contained... historically, it has been necessary to raise interest rates by several hundred basis points – several percentage points – in order to meaningfully reduce inflation.<sup>38</sup>

If Summers was right, then the ECB has been miles away from having a real chance to cut inflation to projected levels, and even the much more decisive steps of the Fed may turn out to be insufficient. The fight against inflation is unlikely to be easy, or indeed short, even in the developed world. But as always, the situation could be much worse, as some emerging markets show. Some notorious high-inflation countries like Venezuela and Argentina were joined by a relatively large economy (member of G20 group) close to the EU, Turkey, where the authoritarian president pushed his “unorthodox” monetary policy views through the national bank, pushing aside its independence. The results were the same as always. More precisely Turkey’s all-powerful President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who holds some strange theories on the link between monetary policy and inflation (read: “high interest rates beget high inflation”), began pushing for the lowest possible interest rates and sacked three central bank governors between July 2019 and March 2021 (namely, Murat Cetinkaya, Murat Uysal and Naci Agbal).<sup>39</sup> Between September and December 2021, their successor, Sahap Kavcioglu, was forced by Erdoğan to cut the basic interest rate by 500 basis points (5 percentage points) to 14 per cent as part of the so-called “New Economic Model,” while inflation was heading toward 20 per cent at the time.<sup>40</sup> One did not have to wait long for the fruits of such policies. With the interest rate frozen at 14 per cent, the consumer price index rose 54.4 per cent year on year in February 2022,

<sup>35</sup> L. Goodman, “Issing: Memorandum on the ECB’s monetary policy,” Center for Financial Stability (CFS) December 17, 2019. Available online: <https://centerforfinancialstability.org/wp/2019/12/17/issing-memorandum-on-the-ecbs-monetary-policy/> (accessed on February 7, 2022).

<sup>36</sup> “Eurosystem staff macroeconomic projections for the euro area, December 2021,” ECB, January 3, 2022. Available online: [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/projections/html/ecb.projections202112\\_eurosystemstaff~32e481d712.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/projections/html/ecb.projections202112_eurosystemstaff~32e481d712.en.html) (accessed on February 14, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> C. Smith, “Fed announces first rate rise since 2018 amid surging inflation,” *Financial Times*, March 16, 2022. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/4cd13c43-3387-4af8-9866-2d618c936d2b> (accessed on March 17, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> A. Powell, “Summers says pandemic only partly to blame for record inflation,” *Harvard Gazette*, February 4, 2022. Available online: <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/02/pandemic-only-partly-to-blame-for-record-inflation-says-lawrence-summers/> (accessed on March 17, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> M. Ucer, “Turkish Inflation and the Five Stages of Grief,” Institut Montaigne, February 25, 2022. Available online: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/turkish-inflation-and-five-stages-grief> (accessed on March 17, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

the fastest rate in 20 years, and the Turkish lira lost almost half of its value against the dollar in 2021.<sup>41</sup> Needless to say, the collapse of the lira triggered withdrawals from the banking system, bringing Turkey to the verge of a full-blown financial crisis.

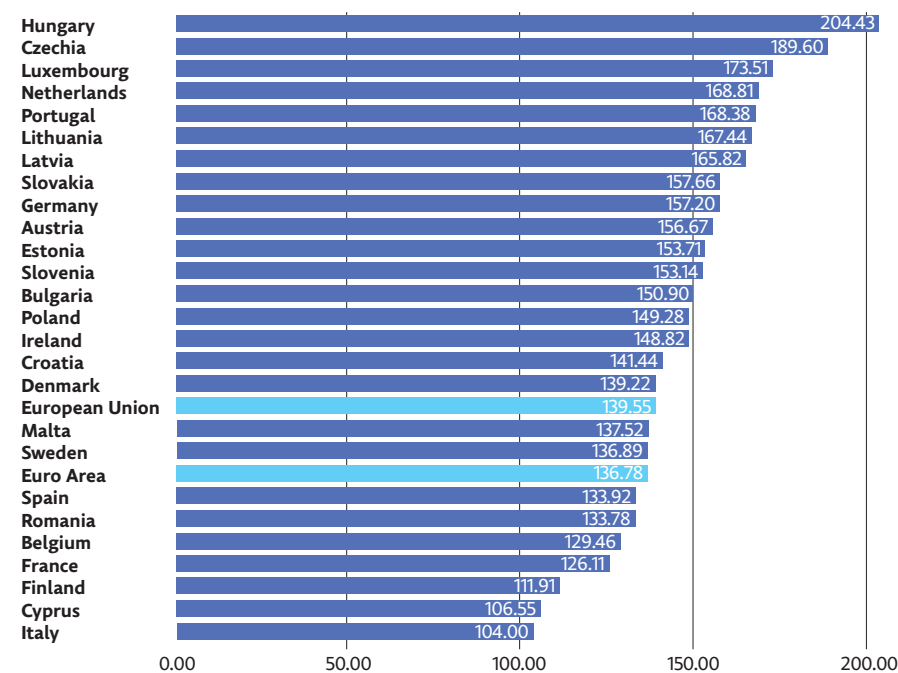
## ■ Consumer price inflation is new, asset price inflation just continues

Contrary to the consumer price inflation given in the official inflation statistics, the rise in asset prices (not included in inflation statistics) was not a new phenomenon. Property and stock prices grew almost uninterruptedly for over a decade. Looking at global annual averages, no large asset price declines have been registered since the 2008–2009 great financial crisis. According to Knight Frank, a property firm, global house price growth accelerated in 2021: the Global House Price Index that tracks the movement of average residential prices across 56 countries and territories worldwide showed 10.3 per cent in nominal growth.<sup>42</sup> The firm expects more muted growth in 2022, with real price growth already more moderate, down from 6.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2021 to 4.7 per cent in the fourth – the first time that the annual growth rate has slowed since the start of the pandemic. Another measurement, the UBS’s Global Real Estate Bubble Index pointed to accelerating real house prices in 25 global cities that experienced a 6 per cent increase from mid-2020 to mid-2021, the highest since 2014.<sup>43</sup> Of the 25 cities, 21 fell into the categories of “bubble risk” or “overvalued” in the comparison, signaling overheated global property markets.

In the European Union, the overall picture is the same: residential property price growth accelerated in 2021. In the third quarter real house prices

increased year on year by 9.2 per cent in the EU as a whole and by 8.8 per cent in the euro zone – the highest levels since the great financial crisis.<sup>44</sup> Taking a longer-term approach, from 2010 until the third quarter of 2021, in the EU, rents increased by 16 per cent and house prices by 38.7 per cent.<sup>45</sup> Compared with the declining property prices in 2010–2015, the growth since 2015 has been much stronger and accelerating (Figure 1), with some countries experiencing a doubling of house prices (Hungary) or almost a doubling (Czechia).

Figure 1. House price index in the EU, Q3 2021 compared to 2015 (2015 = 100)



Source: Eurostat

<sup>41</sup> A. J. Yackley, “Turkish inflation hits 20-year high of 54%,” *Financial Times*, March 3, 2022. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/8bdb4141-5353-426c-a260-03267999b37c> (accessed on March 17, 2022).

<sup>42</sup> K. Everett-Allen, “What happened to global house prices in 2021?” *Knight Frank Research*, March 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.knightfrank.com/research/article/2022-03-08-what-happened-to-global-house-prices-in-2021> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> “UBS Global Real Estate Bubble Index,” *UBS Insights*, October 5, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ubs.com/global/en/wealth-management/insights/2021/global-real-estate-bubble-index.html> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>44</sup> “Housing price statistics – house price index,” Eurostat. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Housing\\_price\\_statistics\\_-\\_house\\_price\\_index#Long\\_term\\_trends\\_in\\_House\\_prices\\_and\\_rents](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Housing_price_statistics_-_house_price_index#Long_term_trends_in_House_prices_and_rents) (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

The growth can be explained by several factors, like declining prices prior to 2015, the generally good economic conditions, low interest rates (not just inside the euro area), supply side problems as well as specific factors in some countries. For example, in Hungary family-support policies that provide lavish cash transfers to households buying residential properties or investing in renovations under consecutive Orbán governments certainly played a role in propelling Hungarian house price growth to the first place.

Finally, Slovakia experienced an accelerating property price boom as well. According to Slovak National Bank data, sale prices in the fourth quarter of 2021 grew by 22.1 per cent compared to the same period in the previous year, the highest rate since 2008.<sup>46</sup>

The global property boom went in parallel with the stock market boom: global stock markets closed in 2021 with double-digit gains for the third year in a row, for example the FTSE All-World share index rallied 16.7 per cent in dollar terms.<sup>47</sup> American stocks also increased to all-time highs, as the performance of the three most important stock indexes shows: S&P 500 gained 26.9 per cent, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) 18.7 per cent and the Nasdaq Composite (representing tech company shares) 21.4 per cent.<sup>48</sup> The pan-European Stoxx 600 index gained 22 per cent, its second-best performance since 2009, and Japanese stocks also enjoyed a strong year, with the Topix index rising 10.4 per cent.<sup>49</sup> However, with 2022 approaching it was gradually becoming clear that the party would soon be over. Rising inflation and the rising probability that the Fed would take away the punch bowl (i.e. end the ultra-lax monetary policy) overshadowed Wall Street. The war in Ukraine ended the bull market for a while and brought huge uncertainty to the financial system, making it extremely hard to predict the consequences.

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<sup>46</sup> "Nedostatok bytov poháňal ceny nehnuteľností na konci roku 2021," [Shortage of flats to speed up the increase in property prices at the end of 2021] National Bank of Slovakia, February 8, 2022. Available online: [https://www.nbs.sk/\\_img/Documents/\\_komentare/2022/1261\\_rk\\_cen\\_20220208.pdf](https://www.nbs.sk/_img/Documents/_komentare/2022/1261_rk_cen_20220208.pdf) (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>47</sup> J. Rennison, "Global stocks deliver third year of double-digit gains," *Financial Times*, December 31, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/e510d763-3864-421c-ba32-8653152c01c6> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>48</sup> A. Jackson, J. Schmidt, "2021 stock market year in review," *Forbes Advisor*, January 3, 2022. Available online <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/investing/stock-market-year-in-review-2021/> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>49</sup> J. Rennison, op. cit.

However, some cracks in Planet Finance were already showing in 2021, especially in China, where stock indexes ended up in minuses: Hong Kong's Hang Seng sank more than 14 per cent, and the mainland China CSI 300 index fell more than 5 per cent.<sup>50</sup>

This was strongly related to the regulatory crackdown on tech giants and a major property market crisis. The problems became apparent in September 2021 when a Chinese developer giant, and one of the world's most indebted property companies, Evergrande, admitted it could not meet parts of its huge \$300 billion debt burden or even complete the 1.6 million homes it had already taken prepayment for from its customers. Evergrande had crossed all "three red lines" set after an August 2020 meeting between the Peoples Bank of China (PBOC) and several ministries in line with the slogan "houses are for living in, not speculation" used since 2016 by government officials.<sup>51</sup> The three red lines were aimed at curbing lending to the property development sector, which by mid-2021 had accumulated \$5.2 trillion in debt. The three red lines were:

1. an asset-liability ratio (after excluding advance receipts) of no greater than 70 per cent;
2. a net debt ratio of no more than 100 per cent and
3. a cash to short-term debt ratio of one or below.<sup>52</sup>

Evergrande finally defaulted on its overseas bonds valued at \$1.2 billion in December 2021 but that was just the tip of the iceberg, since it was just one of a group of a dozen developers that have defaulted on bonds since July 2021, or have come close to it.<sup>53</sup> The developers' cash-flow and funding problems resulted in falling real estate investment, which was down 14 per cent on a year-on-year basis in December 2021. At the same time construction projects, new building starts and housing sales had collapsed and were down by 35 per cent, 31 per cent and 16 per cent respectively and average

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> A. Huld, "Explainer: what's going on in China's property market?" *China Briefing*, January 14, 2022. Available online: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/explainer-whats-going-on-in-chinas-property-market/> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> "The other crisis. China scrambles to prevent property pandemonium," *The Economist*, March 5, 2022. Available online: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/china-scrambles-to-prevent-property-pandemonium/21807940> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

house prices had started to fall for the first time since 2015.<sup>54</sup> As many developers stopped buying land, the value of parcels sold by local governments decreased by 72 per cent in January 2022 year on year – considering that land sales contributed 43 per cent of their revenues in 2021, it was a huge shortfall.<sup>55</sup> Taking into account the fact that the wider property sector (construction, development, financing) makes up an estimated 25 per cent of Chinese GDP, it is no wonder that the central government became heavily involved in Evergrande’s restructuring.

China’s looming property market problems had been known about for years as the huge accumulation of debt and increasing leverage in the corporate sector had raised increasing concern about the sustainability of the growth. By June 2021, China’s corporate debt had reached a staggering \$26.7 trillion, equivalent to 31 per cent of the global total, while US corporations at \$17.6 trillion represented 20 per cent.<sup>56</sup> China’s corporate debt-to-GDP leverage ratio of 159 per cent was one of the world’s highest – the corresponding rate in America was 85 per cent.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, research by S&P Global Ratings on a sample of over 5,700 Chinese companies showed that companies in the construction and engineering sector were the most indebted, with 91 per cent of them holding high debt, compared to the average of 58 per cent.<sup>58</sup>

Before trying to ensure a soft landing for the property sector, Chinese Communist Party officials orchestrated a regulatory crackdown on tech giants, bringing down share prices and company values and thus the personal wealth of several billionaires. It was clear for quite a long time that it was risky business being a Chinese billionaire and the same applies to celebrities and high-ranking bureaucrats or politicians. You might disappear for months or years and later end up in jail, or even being executed, or at least having to reconsider your former ideas and renounce previous criticism toward the Chinese regime and its policies. As early as in 2011 an article in China Daily,

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<sup>54</sup> C. Peltier, “China: Shaken by the real estate crisis and the Omicron variant,” BNP PARIBAS Economic Research, January 19, 2022. Available online: <https://economic-research.bnpparibas.com/html/en-US/Shaken-real-estate-crisis-Omicron-variant-1/26/2022,44951> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>55</sup> “The other crisis. China scrambles to prevent property pandemonium,” op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> “Can China escape its corporate debt trap?” S&P Global Ratings, Standard & Poor’s Financial Services LLC, October 19, 2021. Available online: [https://www.spglobal.com/\\_assets/documents/ratings/research/100620188.pdf](https://www.spglobal.com/_assets/documents/ratings/research/100620188.pdf) (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

a newspaper published by the Communist Party, pointed out that 72 of the country’s billionaires had died prematurely in the previous eight years: 15 were murdered, 17 committed suicide, seven died in accidents, 14 were executed and 19 died from diseases.<sup>59</sup> More recently, the best known of many examples, Jack Ma, founder of the e-commerce giant Alibaba.com, “went missing” for months in November 2020; regulators later fined Alibaba \$2.8 billion and the authorities prevented the \$37 billion IPO of its fintech arm, Ant Group, from taking place.<sup>60</sup> Later Alibaba pledged 100 billion renminbi (\$15.5 billion) to fund “common prosperity” initiatives up to 2025 – and that came on top of an earlier pledge of 100 billion renminbi from Tencent and 10 billion renminbi from the bosses of Pinduoduo, Xiaomi and Meituan for various social projects.<sup>61</sup> According to *Financial Times* calculations, in the summer of 2021 the combined net worth of the two dozen Chinese billionaires in tech and biotechnology had dropped 16 per cent or \$87bn after the regulatory assault on these sectors.<sup>62</sup> In the future they will probably keep in mind President Xi Jinping’s message to entrepreneurs that “thoughts and actions must be aligned with the analysis, judgment, decision-making and planning” of the Communist Party.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, there is one more side effect of the endless fiscal and monetary stimulation that is worth mentioning, namely the danger of prolonging and expanding the “zombie economy.” As government relief programs, bailouts, various types of *kurzarbeit* schemes and subsidies repeatedly save companies and banks, the “creative destruction” power of the market economy is increasingly being paralyzed. By hogging capital and workers and crowding out other businesses, zombie firms can be a drag on the broader economy.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> G. Rachman, “Why China’s elite tread a perilous path,” *Financial Times*, November 29, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/187427c5-424e-424b-bce9-62d8215ad6b4> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>60</sup> C. Campbell, “Why ‘common prosperity’ has China’s billionaires running for cover,” *Time*, September 10, 2021. Available online: <https://time.com/6095560/china-common-prosperity/> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> H. Lockett, “China’s tech tycoons lose \$87bn of wealth after Beijing crackdown,” 2021 *Financial Times*, August 9, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/7e6f9a08-37be-4ab3-ae15-953533ab33b5> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> F. Duncan, “Rise of the living dead – zombie firms may hold the global economy back,” *Intuition*, April 20, 2021. Available online: <https://www.intuition.com/rise-of-the-living-dead-zombie-firms-may-hold-the-global-economy-back/> (accessed on March 21, 2022).

Additionally, in a low interest rate environment the zombification problem remains largely hidden: rolling over troubled debts may keep the banks' balance sheets healthy on paper, but such debts will likely prove to be ultimately unrepayable over the longer term.<sup>65</sup> Naturally, interest rate hikes may lead to a cascading series of zombie firm failures, with potentially dire consequences for the financial system. The above-mentioned problems on the Chinese property market could be interpreted as an example here, as many of the developers with their ballooning debts are strongly reminiscent of the zombie economy.

## ■ Conclusions

All the risks of the post-pandemic recovery are likely to stay with us in 2022 and the war in Ukraine is likely to amplify most of them. China's ongoing property market crisis is still largely unresolved; the collapse of Evergrande and similar highly indebted developer companies could still become a Lehman moment for the Chinese economy and contagion could spread to local governments, the financial sector and the stock markets. Even in the most favorable scenario this would very likely contribute to the drag on the second largest economy in the world. Some smaller, but still relevant, emerging market players could face another round of a full-blown financial crisis with high inflation, currency depreciation, fiscal sustainability problems (including sovereign debt defaults) and a banking crisis – including Ukraine and Russia this time. The war in Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions against Russia are amplifying all the supply side problems that are fueling global inflation, like supply chain disruptions, transport-route bottlenecks and energy, commodity and food shortages. On the other hand, they are putting upward pressure on public expenditure especially in the European Union, where the increase in long neglected defense spending has suddenly become a top priority, and the same applies to energy sector investments aimed at reducing the high dependence on Russia. The chances of another postponement to the necessary fiscal consolidation are rising every day.

With growth prospects going down and inflation going up the nightmare of stagflation is knocking on the doors of the world economy. The main central

banks and governments have maneuvered themselves into a trap: in order to stop the spiral of inflation they should increase interest rates, end quantitative easing and cut budget deficits; in order to keep economies and the stock and property markets afloat they should do just the opposite. They cannot do both at the same time. This is especially true of the European Union and the ECB. By returning to normality (basic interest rates above actual inflation) the latter is risking another round of sovereign debt crisis on the Mediterranean periphery of the euro zone, never mind a recession. With further inaction or slow and timid reactions the ECB risks inflation getting out of control; balancing between the two solutions may result in both problems at the same time. The ECB leadership may interpret the inflation problem as mainly being supply side driven: caused by shortages, bottlenecks and supply chain disruptions. Consequently, it may assume that the gradual resolution of these problems inflation will return it to target (2 per cent a year) after a temporary hike and so it will not need to make decisive and radical changes to monetary policy, just cautious fine-tuning. However, when prices are rising across the economy, along with consumer prices, commodity prices, producer prices and stock and property prices, not to mention the accelerating growth, it is hard to believe that all these developments are mere coincidence, given the previous and ongoing unprecedented fiscal and monetary stimuli. Adding the projection that supply side problems are going to deepen rather than disappear, the time has come for a radical shift in ECB policies. Otherwise, it risks falling short of its single delegated mission: ensuring price stability in the euro area. Additionally, member state governments need a credible timetable for fiscal consolidation that is controlled and enforced by the European Commission. The inflation genie is already out of the bottle, a concentrated effort is needed and that will lead to painful adjustment. Nothing less than the credibility of the EU's monetary union is at stake. The year 2022 is going to be decisive in economic terms as well.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid



Veronika Oravcová

# 2021 in climate and energy policy: catching up after the pandemic pause

In 2021 the world had still not got over the COVID-19 pandemic, but the implementation of the vaccination programs had led to the easing of most of the restrictive measures. Countries were pursuing economic recovery, which led to increased energy demand and emissions. While in 2020 we witnessed the largest relative fall in emissions since the second world war thanks to the restrictive measures, 2021 was the year with the largest single emissions increase since the carbon-intensive economic recovery after the global economic and financial crisis.<sup>1</sup> Within the EU the increased global demand for energy was mirrored in sharp energy price increases, which was a prominent issue in Slovakia, especially in the second half of 2021. But we also witnessed the green efforts of the EU, which took advantage of the pandemic crisis to push forward its decarbonization agenda and develop brand new tools to support the green transition. The key EU policies were the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the proposed Fit for 55 package.

## ■ Green aspects as a crucial feature of Recovery and Resilience Facility

In 2021 the member states agreed the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which lies at the heart of Next Generation EU, a temporary recovery instrument under which €672.5 billion will be made available in loans and grants to support reforms and investments aimed at mitigating the economic and

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<sup>1</sup>“Global CO2 emissions rebound by nearly 5% in 2021, approaching the 2018–2019 peak,” International Energy Agency, 2021. Available online: <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-review-2021/co2-emissions> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

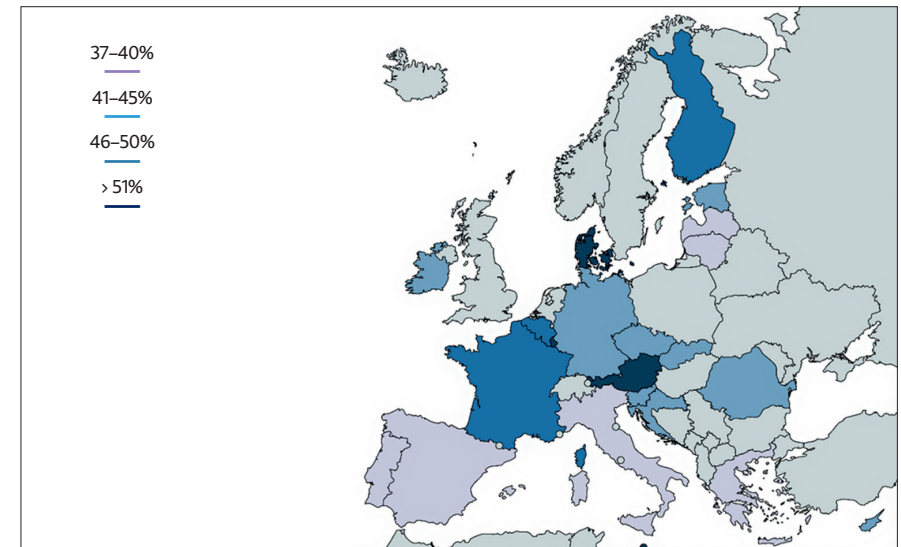
social impact of the pandemic. To benefit from the financial support, member states had to draw up national Recovery and Resilience Plans setting out a package of reforms and public investment projects to be implemented by 2026. By the end of 2021, all member states had submitted their plans with the exception of the Netherlands. The EC approved all these plans apart from Bulgaria's, Hungary's, Poland's and Sweden's. According to Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of February 12, 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility, 37 per cent of the investment should be spent on the green transition and climate-friendly measures and 20 per cent on digital transformation.<sup>2</sup>

Slovakia was among the first EU countries to finish and submit its Recovery Plan to the Commission within the deadline, by the end of April 2021. The plan was approved on June 21<sup>st</sup> – within the two months set out in the RRF Regulation. Discussions were held with the Commission during the drafting, and Slovakia tried to address the country-specific recommendations arising from the European Semester and all the proposed investments were subjected to a strict Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) assessment,<sup>3</sup> which may have contributed to the relatively smooth approval. Although the plans should have been assessed within two months, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Sweden are still awaiting approval and the first payments. The member states' plans differ in structure and priorities, but all are structured around the six pillars – green transition, digital transformation, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, social and territorial cohesion, health, and economic, social and institutional resilience and next generation policies. The Slovak plan contains 58 reforms and 58 investments. The green expenditures are concentrated into these components: renewable energy capacities, energy efficiency, greening of private and public buildings (including hospitals and schools), developing new infrastructure for electric vehicle charging points,

public transport, the decarbonization of industry and climate change adaptation measures.<sup>4</sup>

The Slovak Recovery Plan was drawn up under the Ministry of Finance, but once Minister Eduard Heger (OĽaNO party) became prime minister on April 1, 2021 the whole Recovery Plan Section was moved to the Government Office. Compared to neighboring countries, Slovakia is the only country where responsibility for the Recovery Plan lies with the Prime Minister's Office. In the Czech Republic responsibility for the Recovery Section lies with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in Hungary with Technology and Innovation and in Austria and Poland with the Ministry of Finance. The Slovak model could be considered to offer advantages during the implementation phase, in terms of better coordination with the other ministries.

**Map 1.** Percentage of green expenditures allocated by member states



Source: Author, based on data from the Recovery and Resilience Plans, created in mapchart.net

<sup>2</sup> "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 February 15, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> T. Grečko, "Pred plánom obnovy by mali rešpekt Dzurinda aj Mikloš, vraví Lívia Vašáková, ktorá koordinovala prípravu," [Dzurinda and Mikloš would have been in awe of the recovery plan, said Lívia Vašáková, who coordinated the drafting] *Denník E*, April 29, 2021. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/2371110/pred-planom-obnovy-by-mali-respekt-dzurinda-aj-miklos-vra-vi-livia-vasakova-ktora-robila-na-plane-obnovy/> (accessed on March 09, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> "Plán obnovy," [Recovery Plan] Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.planobnovy.sk/kompletny-plan-obnovy/zelena-ekonomika/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

However, the ministries retain responsibility for the implementation. In the Czech Republic and Hungary, the Recovery Plans come under the ministries responsible for energy, which may facilitate the implementation of green policies.

Green and digital expenditures were key indicators in the Commission's assessment process that led to the approval of the plans. So far all the countries have met these requirements but as we can see from the map countries differ in the percentage allocated to green expenditures. Countries with the highest green expenditures are Luxembourg (61 per cent), Austria, Denmark (both 59 per cent) and Malta (53.8 per cent). Whereas southern countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) together with Latvia and Lithuania allocated up to 40 per cent of expenditure to green measures (see Map 1).

The Commission was prevailing optimistic about the agreement on the member states' green and digital recovery, with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen noting in relation to the Slovak plan that "...the plan represents a significant effort by Slovakia to address the challenges it faces and ensure nobody is left behind as we secure the green and digital transitions..." Further positive feedback came from Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni, who said Slovakia's "...ambitious plan will help to boost investment in renewable energy, sustainable transport and decarbonization in the Upper Nitra region."<sup>5</sup> But critical voices could also be heard, especially at the national level.

The allocation of green expenditures, particularly the renewable energy component of €232 million was criticized as lacking in ambition. As green electricity producers put it:

...the allocation of €220 million is not enough compared to the importance that this chapter of the plan should have. Slovakia should be significantly more ambitious in the green transformation financed by the recovery and resilience plan...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "NextGenerationEU: European Commission endorses Slovakia's recovery and resilience plan," European Commission, 2021. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/Commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_3054](https://ec.europa.eu/Commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3054) (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> "Výrobcovia zelenej elektriny navrhujú zvýšiť podporu z Plánu obnovy na 450 mil. eur," [Green electricity producers propose to increase support from the Recovery Plan to 450 million euros] *Energieportal*, March 18, 2021. Available online: <https://www.energie-portal.sk/Dokument/vyrobcovia-zelenej-elektriny-navrhuju-zvysit-podporu-z-planu-obnovy-na-450-mil-eur-106973.aspx> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

Indeed, the green dimension of the Recovery Plan should follow the climate and energy targets by taking into account the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). In Slovakia's case the NECP is far from ambitious regarding renewables deployment. But there are two problems. First, Slovakia has been criticized for not being ambitious enough in its NECP and thereby unable to meet the 2030 renewables target calculated using the formula in Annex II of the Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 (Governance Regulation) – its proposed 19.2 per cent is below the recommended 24 per cent. Second, the Recovery Plan drew on this document, which is already out of date and does not reflect more recent climate policy developments, such as the adoption of the Climate Law, under which EU institutions and member states are obliged to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

During the first year of the implementation of the green transition pillar reforms the most discussed issue in the media and political discourse was the national park reform. This reform falls under the Climate Change Adaptation chapter of the Recovery Plan and was the work of the Environment Ministry. The debate over the adaptation of the reform resulted in a disagreement between the Environment Ministry led by Ján Budaj and the Agriculture Ministry led by Samuel Vlčan (both OĽaNO party members) over the transfer of the administration of state-owned land under the Environment Ministry. Consequently a memorandum of cooperation was signed on October 25<sup>th</sup> "to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts between conservationists and foresters."<sup>7</sup>

The reform garnered support from scientists at the Slovak Academy of Sciences and universities across Slovakia as well as from more than 56,000 citizens in the Let's Free the National Parks petition<sup>8</sup> and from Prime Minister Eduard Heger and President Zuzana Čaputová. The formal adoption of the reform – the approved parliamentary amendment to the Nature and Landscape Protection Act was passed by the National Council of the Slovak Republic on December 14, 2021. One governing coalition party, *Sme rodina* [We

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<sup>7</sup> "Ministri Budaj a Vlčan uzavreli historickú dohodu, ktorá prispeje k reforme národných parkov a rozvoju slovenského vidieka," [Ministers Budaj and Vlčan conclude a historic agreement that will contribute to the reform of national parks and the development of the Slovak countryside] Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.minzp.sk/spravy/ministri-budaj-vlcan-uzavreli-historicku-dohodu-ktora-prispeje-k-reforme-narodnych-parkov-rozvoju-slovenskeho-vidieka.html> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> "Oslobodíme Národné Parky," [Let's Free the National Parks] 2021. Available online: <https://oslobodme.sk/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).



are family], did not vote in favor, claiming that “people living in the countryside will be negatively affected in terms of work and finances” and “promised to stand up for the more than 2.5 million people living in rural areas who have a problem with this reform.”<sup>9</sup> The reform comes into effect on April 1, 2022, the administration of state-owned land will be transferred to the national park administrations of Tatra National Park (TANAP), Pieniny National Park (PIENAP) and Slovenský Raj National Park [Slovak Paradise]. The administration of state-owned land with grade 4 and 5 protection will also come under the national parks. The transfer of the state administration of protected land with grade 3 and below is subject to the so-called zoning process that should be completed by the end of 2022.

Another debated issue was energy efficiency improvement in buildings, more specifically, houses. Under the Recovery Plan €500 million will be allocated between 2022 and 2026 to support home renovations in at least 30,000 homes making primary energy savings of at least 30 per cent. The savings should be achieved mainly through roof renovations, external insulation, replacement of windows and doors and the installation of low-emission heat sources, including low-emission gas condensation boilers.<sup>10</sup> Although the idea of improving the thermal properties of homes complies with the “energy efficiency first” principle, the national criticism was twofold: questioning the advisability of promoting natural gas boilers and second, the lack of an energy poverty target.<sup>11</sup> Replacing natural gas boilers may be tempting, but it does not fit in with the idea of the long-term decarbonization strategy, which is renewables deployment and it is also unlikely people will be willing to pay for natural gas if they are using cheaper options (wood or even garbage). The effect of these reforms on low-income households was also questioned, as the subsidy program for the renovation of houses did not tackle energy poverty, even though the Commission was pushing it as one of its main objectives.

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<sup>9</sup> “Sme rodina nepodporí reformu národných parkov,” [Sme rodina will not support the national park reform] *Pravda*, November 3, 2021. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/605973-sme-rodina-nepodpori-reformu-narodnych-parkov/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> “Recovery Plan,” Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.planobnovy.sk/site/assets/files/1019/kompletny-plan-obnovy.pdf> (accessed on March 09, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> I. Jenčová, “Budaj: Chceme dostať peniaze na obnovu budov bližšie k ľuďom,” [Budaj: We want to get the money to renovate buildings closer to the people] *Euractiv.sk*, March 24, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/budovy/news/budaj-chceme-dostat-peniaze-na-obnovu-budov-blizsie-k-ludom/> (accessed on March 09, 2022).

## ■ Record-breaking rise in energy prices

Just as energy (especially natural gas) demand rebounded following the 2020 lockdowns, the European Union faced extremely high gas and electricity prices. Several factors can be identified behind the high prices: first and most important is the increased demand due to the rapid economic recovery, especially in Asian countries. Reasons for the increase in demand for natural gas are predictions of a colder winter and therefore higher heating consumption, the gradual decline of coal in European countries, lower wind farm production and the reduction of European gas production in some countries, such as Netherlands, the largest domestic gas producer in the EU. Moreover, the European carbon price also rose sharply, but the effect of the gas price increase on the electricity price is nine times larger than the impact of the carbon price increase.<sup>12</sup> Although there were also those who argued that the price rises were a result of the ongoing green transition, the majority of analysts agreed with the executive director of the International Energy Agency, who said “recent increases in global natural gas prices are the result of multiple factors, and it is inaccurate and misleading to lay the responsibility at the door of the clean energy transition.”<sup>13</sup>

But the rising energy prices are complicating the EU’s climate policy, especially because of the rising carbon permits. The EU’s Emissions Trading System (ETS) covers over 10,000 power plants and industrial installations with no choice but to compete in the world’s largest carbon market. Starting in January the ETS reached a historical maximum and so the trend continued for the whole year. The rapid economic recovery and energy demand pushed January’s carbon price of €30 to almost €90 in mid-December (see Figure 1), making things particularly difficult for countries heavily dependent on fossil fuels, such as Poland. While Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki blamed the energy price crisis on the EU climate policy, the EU estimated

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<sup>12</sup> “Energy prices: Commission presents a toolbox of measures to tackle exceptional situation and its impacts,” European Commission, 2021. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/Commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_5204](https://ec.europa.eu/Commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5204) (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> “Statement on recent developments in natural gas and electricity markets,” International Energy Agency, 2021. Available online: <https://www.iea.org/news/statement-on-recent-developments-in-natural-gas-and-electricity-markets> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

that ETS permits contributed to just over 20 per cent of the overall increase.<sup>14</sup> Another issue that contributed to the energy market uncertainties was gas storage, with facilities less full than usual at the end of the year. According to data from Gas Infrastructure Europe, storage levels were only 74 per cent compared to 94 per cent in the same period last year, and Europe was not well prepared for the heating season. Moreover, Russia redirected part of its gas supplies to Asian countries due to growing demand there, while reducing supplies via its traditional routes through Belarus and Ukraine. That is one reason why 42 MEPs sent a letter to the Commission in September asking it to investigate whether Gazprom was deliberately manipulating gas prices. They said the company had refused to book gas transport capacities through existing pipelines, and they were suspicious of its “efforts to pressure” Europe into agreeing to launch its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline more quickly.<sup>15</sup> Slovak MEP Martin Hojsík (Progressive Slovakia/Renew Europe) agreed that Gazprom was trying to obtain a permit sooner for the operation of Nord Stream 2.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the year, the German regulator suspended certification of the pipeline because it did not comply with European legislation. It has to meet two conditions: unbundling – where the pipeline operator and the supplier have to be two separate entities, which is not the case with the Swiss company AG Nord Stream 2 – and third-party access to the network, which is disputed.

From Slovakia’s perspective, rising energy prices became one of the issues in the political struggle between the coalition and opposition parties. The opposition parties led by *Smer-SD* [Direction-SD] convened an extraordinary parliamentary session to try to force the government to stop the rapid increase in energy prices from January 2022.<sup>17</sup> Minister of Economy Richard Sulík [Freedom and Solidarity] blamed the previous Robert Fico governments

<sup>14</sup> “Why Europe’s energy prices are soaring and could get much worse,” *euronews*, October 28, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/10/28/why-europe-s-energy-prices-are-soaring-and-could-get-much-worse> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> K. Abnett, “Group of EU lawmakers seeks probe of Gazprom’s role in gas price surge,” *Reuters*, September 17, 2021. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/group-eu-lawmakers-seeks-probe-gazproms-role-gas-price-surge-2021-09-17/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> E. Frantová, “Hojsík: Je len jedna krajina, kde sú spaľovacie motory zelenšie ako e-autá,” [Hojsík: There is only one country where internal combustion engines are greener than e-cars] *Sme.sk*, October 15, 2021. Available online: <https://index.sme.sk/c/22762397/hojsik-za-ceny-energii-nemozu-emisne-povolenky.html> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> “Fico: Smer-SD chce mimoriadnu schôdzu k energiám najneskôr 31. augusta,” [Fico: Smer-SD wants an extraordinary meeting on energy no later than August 31] *Teraz*, August 23, 2021. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/fico-smer-sd-chce-mimoriadnu-schodzu-k/571795-clanok.html> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

for the high electricity prices, a result of high subsidies for solar power plants, unnecessary coal mining in Horná Nitra region and the overpriced completion of the third and fourth units of the nuclear power plant in Mochovce.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1.** EU carbon permits (price in €/tons)



Source: tradingeconomics.com

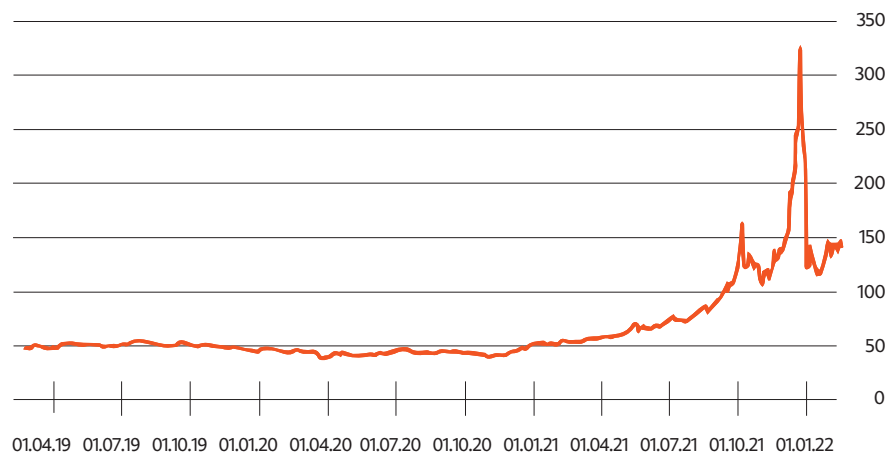
At the end of the year the Office for the Regulation of Network Industries (ÚRSO) stepped in and managed to reduce the overall increase in electricity costs for Slovak households in 2022 by regulating network fees and especially by reducing the operational tariff (TPS) by 33 per cent, which helped mitigate the effect of the increase in electricity prices on the stock exchanges on the final electricity price.<sup>19</sup> In 2022 regulated electricity prices were approximately at the pre-pandemic level for many households in 2020.

<sup>18</sup> “Sulík: Za drahú elektrinu je zodpovedný Robert Fico,” [Sulík: Robert Fico is responsible for the expensive electricity] *Rtvs*, August 27, 2021. Available online: <https://spravy.rtvsk.sk/2021/08/sulik-za-drahu-elektrinu-je-zodpovedny-robert-fico/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> “Úrad pre reguláciu sieťových odvetví pre rok znížil náklady na distribúciu a prenos elektriny,” [The Office for the Regulation of Network Industries has reduced the cost of electricity distribution and transmission] December 31, 2021. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/urso-pre-rok-2022-znizil-tps-naklady-distribuciu-prenos-elektriny> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

A household survey on energy prices was conducted at the end of the year by AKO research agency. The results showed that more than half of respondents in Slovakia were willing to pay over ten percent more for energy if it led to a reduction in greenhouse gas emission. One third of the respondents would accept up to 25 per cent higher energy bills, while less than 7 per cent of respondents would be willing to pay by more than 25 per cent. Respondents were also asked what their preferred heat source would be if they replaced their boiler. More than a third (34.8 per cent) mentioned solar panels (for hot water only), followed by natural gas condensing boiler (29.5 per cent) and heat pump (17.7 per cent). However, about a fifth would still prefer coal or wood boilers.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 2.** Average electricity price on PXE Prague Stock Exchange (price in €/MWh)



Source: kurzy.cz

<sup>20</sup> "Väčšina Slovákov je ochotná si za bezemisné energie priplatiť do 10 percent ceny, tvrdí analýza," [Most Slovaks are willing to pay up to an additional 10 percent of the price for zero-emission energy, according to the analysis] *Trend*, December 27, 2021. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/vacsina-slovakov-je-ochotna-bezemisne-energie-priplatit-10-percent-ceny-tvrdi-analyza> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

However, a bigger problem with the growing energy prices affected cities and municipalities that provided public services and were not regulated in the same way as households. They have to find energy suppliers themselves and then enter into a contract, which most find challenging as electricity has more than tripled in price since the beginning of the year (see Figure 2) and gas has more than quadrupled. Therefore, the municipalities were calling on parliament to deal immediately with the extreme rise in energy prices, as mayors of the cities whose contracts with gas or electricity suppliers were about to expire would be forced to pay higher prices under a new contract for the next year's supplies.<sup>21</sup>

High energy prices were also high on the agenda of industrial players in Slovakia, where energy intense companies, such as cement, iron and steel, aluminum and fertilizer producers, were calling for government compensation. This was reflected in a dispute between the environment and economy ministries over the Environment Fund and compensation for industrial players. Major industrial companies, through their unions, asked the government to increase the support they receive through the Environmental Fund, pointing out that state support had been constantly declining, despite the fact that Environmental Fund revenues from the sale of emission allowances were growing.<sup>22</sup> The Economy Ministry shared this view but the Environment Ministry called for a systematic revision of compensation for industry, saying that emission allowances revenue should be aimed "...primarily at greenhouse gas emission reductions, renewable energy sources, afforestation and carbon sequestration, or making better use of low-emission modes of transport."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> D. Haraksin, "Samosprávy sú na kolenách. Zapríčinil to extrémny nárast cien," [Local governments are on their knees. This has been caused by extreme price rises] *Noviny JOJ*, October 22, 2021. Available online: <https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/638919-samospravy-su-na-kolenach-zaprincnil-to-extremny-narast-cien> (accessed on October 22, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> "State support is declining. Industry is asking for higher enviro contributions," *Trend*, October 7, 2021. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/trend-archiv/podpora-stutu-klesa-priemysel-ziada-vyssie-enviroprispevky> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> I. Jenčová, "Rezort životného prostredia odkazuje priemyslu: Envirofond nie je bankomat," [Ministry of Environment tells industry: Envirofond is not an ATM] *Euractiv*, October 05, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/dekarbonizacia-priemyslu/news/rezort-zivotneho-prostredia-odkazuje-priemyslu-envirofond-nie-je-bankomat/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

## ■ Nuclear and gas as the focal point

But it was not just energy prices that were the subject of the media and political discourse, climate and energy policy were the focal point. The main concern was the EU taxonomy, a classification system listing environmentally sustainable economic activities that will help to achieve the objectives set out in the European Green Deal, based on Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment. The key elements of the regulation are setting “environmentally sustainable investments” and six climate objectives: climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, the transition to a circular economy, pollution prevention and control, and the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.<sup>24</sup> As stated by the Commission the EU taxonomy

would provide companies, investors and policymakers with appropriate definitions for which economic activities can be considered environmentally sustainable. In this way, it should create security for investors, protect private investors from greenwashing, help companies to become more climate-friendly, mitigate market fragmentation and help shift investments where they are most needed.<sup>25</sup>

Under the Taxonomy Regulation, the Commission had to come up with a list of environmentally sustainable activities by stipulating the technical screening criteria for each environmental objective through delegated acts. This attracted the attention of all member states and energy companies.

Within the EU there were questions about whether nuclear energy and natural gas should be classified as sustainable sources. Slovakia’s position was clear, as both of these sources are crucial to the country, although its view on natural gas was more cautious, favoring use being limited to the transition period. As State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy Karol Galek put it, “the sources

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<sup>24</sup> “Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2020. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020R0852> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>25</sup> “EU taxonomy for sustainable activities,” European Commission, 2021. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities_en) (accessed on February 15, 2022).

that contribute to the stability of the electricity market, which is nuclear and, in a transitional period, natural gas, cannot be ignored at EU level.”<sup>26</sup> Among the EU countries there is no agreement on the future of nuclear energy, and there is unlikely to be one in the near future – quite the opposite. The Commission’s assessment from the Joint Research Center’s workshop concluded that nuclear has no greater impact on the environment and human health than the other activities in the taxonomy. The Commission launched an in-depth work assessment on whether nuclear energy should be included in the EU taxonomy of environmentally sustainable activities. A technical report on the “Do No Significant Harm” aspects of nuclear energy concluded in favor of nuclear: “nuclear power is a safe, low-carbon energy source comparable to wind and hydropower, and as such, it qualifies for a green investment label under the EU’s green finance taxonomy.”<sup>27</sup> Subsequently a letter – signed by the environment/energy ministers of Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, and Spain – pointed to “shortcomings” in the report.<sup>28</sup>

Slovakia, together with the other Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland), joined the pro-nuclear coalition led by France, seeing nuclear as an indispensable source for meeting decarbonization goals. The Slovak government is unanimous on nuclear, considering it key for achieving climate goals, as stated clearly by Prime Minister Heger: “Nuclear energy, which, unlike gas, is a low-emission source, will have a decisive impact on meeting the ambitious climate goals to which Slovakia has committed itself at European level.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Galek apeluje na doplnenie taxonómie: Jadro a zemný plyn prispievajú k stabilite,” [Galek calls for additions to the taxonomy: Nuclear and natural gas will contribute to stability] *Energieportal*, October 28, 2021. Available online: <https://www.energie-portal.sk/Dokument/galek-apeluje-na-doplnenie-taxonomie-jadro-a-zemny-plyn-prispeju-k-stabilite-107553.aspx> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> F. Simon, “Germany leads call to keep nuclear out of EU green finance taxonomy,” *Euractiv*, July 2, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/germany-leads-call-to-keep-nuclear-out-of-eu-green-finance-taxonomy/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>29</sup> “Heger: Po oznámení o taxonómii čakáme povolenie kritérií aj pre jadro,” [Heger: After announcing the taxonomy, we are waiting for the criteria for the nuclear] *TASR*, April 21, 2021. Available online: [https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/heger-po-oznameni-o-taxonomii-eu-o/543557-clanok.html?utm\\_source=teraz&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=click&utm\\_content=undefined](https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/heger-po-oznameni-o-taxonomii-eu-o/543557-clanok.html?utm_source=teraz&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=click&utm_content=undefined) (accessed on February 15, 2022).

## ■ Fit for 55 – green revolution?

The Recovery and Resilience Facility was not the only closely watched topic of the climate and energy discussion. The European Climate Law, agreed by the European Parliament and the European Council, makes the EU's climate neutrality target legally binding, and raises the 2030 ambition by setting a target of at least 55 per cent net emission reductions by 2030 compared to 1990.<sup>30</sup> Therefore in July the European Commission presented an extensive legislative package of climate and energy sector reforms, called Fit for 55. The name refers to the EU's more ambitious plan to cut emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030 compared to the original 40 per cent. The Fit for 55 package is a set of proposals to revise and update EU legislation and to put in place new initiatives to ensure that EU policies are in line with the climate goals agreed by the council and the European parliament.

The debate over the Fit for 55 package has been launched and it is clear that it will have a huge impact on the economy, as it includes several legislative proposals and policy initiatives that will affect various sectors. The proposals lay out substantial changes to the existing EU emissions trading scheme (EU ETS), raise the greenhouse gas emissions reduction target, strengthen the contribution of the land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector and increase the current EU-level target for renewable energy sources and energy efficiency and alternative fuels infrastructure, update the rules on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for cars and vans, and revise energy taxation, the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), fuels and the Social Climate Fund.<sup>31</sup>

The measures contained in the package elicited intense discussion, especially in post-communist countries worried about further price increases. A broadly shared concern was the social impact of the package on vulnerable groups, particularly in member states where households or industries are still heavily reliant on fossil fuels.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Fit for 55 package under the European Green Deal," European Parliament, 2021. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-european-green-deal/package-fit-for-55> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> "Fit for 55," European Council, 2021. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/sk/policies/green-deal/eu-plan-for-a-green-transition/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> J. Valero, "Green package unleashes criticism against von der Leyen inside the college," *Euractiv*, July 14, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/green-package-unleashes-criticism-against-von-der-leyen-inside-the-college/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

Right after the release of the document, several member states and actors expressed their immediate concerns. The carbon border levy, the first of its kind in the world, would apply to six sectors: electricity, iron and steel, aluminum, fertilizers, and cement. While the external border tariff is aimed at ensuring that importers of foreign goods pay the same carbon price as EU manufacturers. German industry expressed concern at the mechanism, arguing that it was "associated with considerable legal as well as bureaucratic hurdles."<sup>33</sup>

On the other side, France agreed the mechanism was "essential to ensure the effectiveness of our policies to combat climate change by preventing carbon leakage."<sup>34</sup> However, it is skeptical of other measures in the package and concerned about extending the carbon market to the building and transport sectors, as the costs would be borne not only by the poorest households, but also the middle class, and feared that the EU carbon market reform could lead to a return of the 2018 Yellow Vest movement in France, which saw protests against the increase in fuel taxes.<sup>35</sup>

In Slovakia discussion on the package was not as intense as with the Recovery Plan and highlighted both the opportunities for the country and the risk of higher costs. State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy Karol Galek said, "the current level of ambition of the EU's energy and climate goals for 2030 is already associated with huge investment challenges. The new targets raise the financial requirements."<sup>36</sup> He thought the proposed Fit for 55 package both increased the overall climate goal but also made it harder to fulfill. In the intensive negotiations at EU level, he called on the member states for

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<sup>33</sup> N. J. Kurmayer, "German industry worried about EU carbon market reform, sceptical of CBAM," *Euractiv*, July 16, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/german-industry-worried-about-eu-carbon-market-reform-sceptical-of-cbam/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> C. Bauer-Babef, "France sceptical about extending carbon pricing to buildings, transport," *Euractiv*, July 20, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/france-sceptical-about-extending-carbon-pricing-to-buildings-transport/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> "V súvislosti s riešením klimatických zmien stojíme podľa K. Galeka pred bezprecedentnou výzvou," [According to K. Galek we are facing an unprecedented challenge in tackling climate change] Ministry of Economy of SR, 2021. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/top/v-suvisslosti-s-riesenim-klimatickych-zmien-stojime-podla-k-galeka-pred-bezprecedentnou-vyzvou> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

flexibility and to take account of national differences.<sup>37</sup> Economy Minister Richard Sulík criticized the package, saying that 55 per cent of it was down to political rather than expert pressure, for “it is not business people who sit in parliament but eco-terrorists.”<sup>38</sup> He thought Slovakia should adapt to it and wait until Brussels reviewed its decisions in light of the consequences.<sup>39</sup> The Economy Ministry’s position on the package is crucial, as a large part of the decarbonization agenda comes under their portfolio, including the creation of the NECP, but it has no clear vision or systematic policy measures for decarbonizing and achieving climate goals. Also, there is great resistance against the deployment of renewables, such as cancelled auctions, insistence on non-binding targets and the large deployment of biomass as the share of renewables. On the other side, a fellow member of Freedom and Solidarity, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs Martin Klus, considered the package to be one of the largest, most important and most ambitious packages among the European Union’s legislative proposals in recent years. He declared that the Ministry would take a responsible approach to setting Slovakia’s priorities, to what it wants to promote during the negotiations in Brussels and to how it wants to meet the EU’s climate goals.<sup>40</sup>

The Environment Ministry opted for more positive discourse towards the package as well, with State Secretary Michal Kiča considering it a “great opportunity” and stating that the goals of carbon neutrality and green transformation of the economy were key for the Slovak Republic.<sup>41</sup> But he also

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<sup>37</sup> “Galek: Plyn a jadrová energia budú musieť byť súčasťou dekarbonizácie,” [Galek: Gas and nuclear energy will have to be part of decarbonization] *Teraz*, January 24, 2022. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/najnovsie/galek-plyn-a-jadrova-energia-budu-mus/606629-clanok.html> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> “Priemysel na odchode? Medzinárodná konferencia – záznam,” [Industry on the way out? Report from the International Conference] INESS, September 20, 2021. Available online: <https://iness.sk/sk/priemysel-na-odchode-medzinarodna-konferencia-zaznam> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> “Je zbytočné bojovať proti tomu, čo prichádza z EÚ. Treba sa prispôbiť, tvrdí Sulík,” [It is useless fighting against things from the EU. We have to adapt to them, says Sulík] *HNonline*, September 09, 2021. Available online: <https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/8756518-je-zbytocne-bojovat-proti-tomu-co-prichadza-z-eu-treba-sa-prisposobit-tvrdi-sulik> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> “M. Kiča: Balík návrhov Fit for 55 je pre SR veľkou príležitosťou,” [M. Kiča: The Fit for 55 package is a great opportunity for the Slovak Republic] *Teraz*, September 22, 2021. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/m-kica-balik-navrhov-fit-for-55-je/578315-clanok.html> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>41</sup> “M. Kiča: Balík návrhov Fit for 55 je pre SR veľkou príležitosťou,” [M. Kiča: The Fit for 55 package is a great opportunity for the Slovak Republic] *Teraz*, September 22, 2021. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/m-kica-balik-navrhov-fit-for-55-je/578315-clanok.html> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

emphasized the social side and the importance of passing measures that will not exacerbate energy poverty.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Prime Minister Eduard Heger welcomed the proposal but also drew attention to the risk of it increasing the cost of the green transition and wondered whether the proposed compensation was enough: “questions also remain as to whether the creation of a new socio-climate fund with a completely new governance structure is the most effective response to preventing households at risk of poverty from higher energy bills.”<sup>43</sup>

To help support Slovakia’s climate goals, in September the NGO sector set up the Climate Coalition, aiming to support the implementation of the package. According to the Climate Coalition, one of the big problems is that responsibility for the climate agenda is scattered across the ministries and coordination of the preparation of measures is weak. To succeed Slovakia has to prioritize the climate crisis, cooperate in setting legislation and show political will. According to environmental organizations, without good cooperation with the state it will prove impossible to implement a comprehensive package of measures at the national as well as regional level.<sup>44</sup> In industry, the package was received positively by Volkswagen Slovakia, part of the global Volkswagen Group which welcomed the EC’s proposed direction in environmental protection. According to the carmaker, the Fit for 55 legislative package shows that the Commission acknowledges the seriousness of the situation and is now converting the Green Deal theory into practice and sees the new goals as achievable.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Rada ministrov EÚ pre životné prostredie: klimatická reforma nesmie viesť k energetickej chudobe,” [EU Council of Ministers for the Environment: Climate reform must not lead to energy poverty] Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.minzp.sk/spravy/rada-ministrov-eu-zivotne-prostredie-klimaticka-reforma-nesmie-viest-k-energetickej-chudobe.html> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>43</sup> “Slovensko víta legislatívny balík „Fit for 55”,” [Slovakia welcomes “Fit for 55” legislative package] Government of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/slovensko-vita-legislativny-balik-%e2%80%9efit-for-55-%e2%80%9c/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>44</sup> “Slovensko čaká veľa práce na ochrane klímy. Vzniká Klimatická koalícia,” [Slovakia has a lot of work to do to protect the climate. The Climate Coalition is being set up] Climate Coalition, 2021. Available online: <http://klimatickakoalicia.sk/vznika-klimaticka-koalicia/> (accessed on February 15, 2022).

<sup>45</sup> “Ekologické ciele balíka Fit for 55 sú podľa Volkswagenu dosiahnuteľné,” [According to Volkswagen, the environmental goals of the Fit for 55 package are achievable] *Teraz*, July 17, 2021. Available online: [https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/ekologicke-ciele-v-baliku-fit-for-55-s/563545-clanok.html?utm\\_source=teraz&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=click&utm\\_content=undefined](https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/ekologicke-ciele-v-baliku-fit-for-55-s/563545-clanok.html?utm_source=teraz&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=click&utm_content=undefined) (accessed on February 15, 2022).

Other industrial players, such as U.S. Steel Košice and the Association of Slovak Cement Producers welcomed the CBAM proposal in particular, but in contrast to the Fit for 55 proposal they called for the system for allocating free allowances to be retained as well.

## ■ Conclusions

High energy prices and supply issues have exposed a number of problems in the gas sector and in the energy sector as a whole. These are the dependence on raw material imports from third countries, as well as energy poverty and the use of fossil fuels. The discussion on natural gas and oil imports from third countries is particularly relevant at the time of writing (March 2022) with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has revealed the extreme vulnerability of the European energy system. Back in 2021 many pointed out that the crisis was an opportunity to increase the share of renewables and, of course, improve energy efficiency. Decarbonization efforts were overshadowed by the debate on high prices and the debate on the Fit for 55 package did not gain enough attention in Slovakia, but Slovakia should adopt clear positions during the negotiations over the specific legislative proposals. Renewables deployment and energy efficiency measures are crucial not only from the perspective of decarbonization but of energy security as well.

If Slovakia wants to continue using nuclear energy in the future, more investment in research is crucial. Worldwide there is talk of smaller nuclear installations that could replace the large power plants in existence today, but Slovakia is not keeping up with these trends. Small reactors open up opportunities to reduce construction time and approval permits and could provide the necessary flexibility for the grid. According to a report by the International Energy Agency, in 2040 three-quarters of the existing nuclear power plants will be at the end of their life, over 50 years old, and will need to be replaced. And what we are also seeing, in the case of the completion of the Slovak Mochovce nuclear plant, or the construction of the Hungarian Paks 2 plant, is the high costs of construction and the constant extension of deadlines, which are, of course, another problem.



Vladimír Tarasovič

# Euro-Atlantic context of security and defense policy in 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic spilled over from 2020 into 2021. When the crisis occurred in 2020, it took countries by surprise. What initially started as a health crisis soon triggered an unprecedented economic and social catastrophe as well, with major geopolitical ramifications.<sup>1</sup> In 2021 the pandemic continued in much the same way. After a calm summer, the situation across the world deteriorated again, and the European Council had to address the worsening epidemiological situation in the EU and the impact of the emergence of the Omicron variant in December.<sup>2</sup> The situation in Slovakia was not very different from in the other Euro-Atlantic countries, but it is true to say that less time was required to restart the pandemic crisis management than in the previous year. With regard to security and defense policy, the year 2021 was supposed to be a year of discussion for both the EU and NATO, prior to them creating their respective strategies for 2030. The European Council's view was that only global cooperation based on trust and mutual assistance could overcome the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

In defense cooperation, the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) had already sparked a renaissance. On the back of increases in defense spending to meet the 2 per cent goal agreed within NATO, the EUGS has not only led to the pooling and sharing of member states' capability development plans, monitored by the European Defense Agency through the Coordinated Annual

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<sup>1</sup> D. Fiott, M. Zeiss, *EUISS Yearbook of European Security 2021*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), December 10, 2020, Available online: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/yearbook-european-security-2021>, (accessed on February 19, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> "European Council meeting (16 December 2021) – Conclusion," EUCO 22/21, CO EUR 19 CONCL 6, December 16, 2021. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/12/17/european-council-conclusions-16-december-2021/>, European Council, (accessed on January 12, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid



Review on Defense (CARD) to rationalize military spending and identify possible collaborative projects.<sup>4</sup> But the new *élan* has also produced a slow but steady dynamic in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) toward improving the capabilities and interoperability of European armed forces.<sup>5</sup>

## ■ EU Strategic Compass

The objective of the Strategic Compass is to propose operational guidelines to enable the EU to become a more fully fledged security provider. The top agenda of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) in 2021 was the finalization of the EU strategy paper, called “Strategic Compass.” Over the past twenty years, the European Union has enhanced its role as a security and defense actor. The EU has proven its ability to deploy civilian and military missions and operations to its near and wider neighborhoods. Since the early 2000 s, CSDP has evolved from a political concept on paper into more than thirty civilian and military deployments. Today, the CSDP can claim its own autonomous decision-making apparatus and nascent command and control (C2) facilities. While it is true that many EU missions and operations are conducted in relatively low-intensity environments, deployments are varied and tackle a range of tasks such as capacity building, military training, border monitoring and naval operations.<sup>6</sup>

According to many experts, while the EU has come a long way in the security and defense domain, there is still progress to be made and specific considerations to be taken into account.

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<sup>4</sup> S. Blockmans, “The EU’s Strategic Compass: A guide to reverse strategic shrinkage?” The Estonian Foreign Policy Institute (EFPI), March 10, 2022. Available online: <https://icds.ee/en/the-eus-strategic-compass-a-guide-to-reverse-strategic-shrinkage/> (accessed on January 12, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> According to Blockmans, more than a third of the 61 projects benefit from seed money drawn straight from the EU’s general budget and are managed by the Commission’s new Directorate General for Defense Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) through the European Defense Fund (EDF).

<sup>6</sup> D. Fiott, ed., *The CSDP in 2020: The EU’s legacy and ambition in security and defence*. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, March 2020. Available online: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/csdp-2020> (accessed on January 12, 2022); D. Fiott, G. Lindstromeds, “Strategic compass, New bearings for EU security and defence?” EU Institute for Security Studies, *Chailot Paper* No. 171, December 2021, p. 4. Available online: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/strategic-compass> (accessed on January 12, 2022).

In the face of an increased global instability, growing strategic competition and complex security threats, the EU will take more responsibility for its own security and in the field of defense, pursue a strategic course of action, and increase its capacity to act autonomously. The EU will promote its interests and values, reinforce its resilience and preparedness to tackle security threats and challenges effectively, and continue to work towards global peace and security.<sup>7</sup>

In June 2020, the member states tasked the High Representative with starting a two-year reflection process to develop the “Strategic Compass” to guide the implementation of the security and defense dimension of the EU Global Strategy.<sup>8</sup> For that reason, the EU started a deep and hard discussion about the Strategic Compass – the first white paper on defense. After more than a year of discussions, the EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell presented the draft document to defense and foreign ministers in Brussels on November 15, 2021.

The document lays out a common strategic vision for EU security and defense and sets achievable and practical objectives along with a timeline. With the right mechanisms to measure progress, such as an annual progress report by the European Council, it will amount to a real road map. There will be strong incentives to follow up on the commitments, as the document will be endorsed by the heads of state and government and will leave room for potential revisions.<sup>9,10</sup>

The document identifies four strands of work that are key to the assignment at hand: how the EU manages crisis; how it enhances resilience; capability development; and strategic partnerships.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the strategic partnerships, the EU needs to build and strengthen reliable partnerships. Potentially following a new EU–NATO joint statement

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<sup>7</sup> “European Council meeting (16 December 2021) – Conclusion,” op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> S. Blockmans, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> M. Jourdain, “The EU’s Strategic Compass is a defining moment for European defense,” Atlantic Council, February 1, 2022. Available online: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-eus-strategic-compass-is-a-defining-moment-for-european-defense/> (accessed on February 20, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> The final text of the Strategic Compass is supposed to be presented to the European Council on March 23–24, 2022, but given the volatility of international affairs further changes to the text are unlikely and the adoption process may well have to be postponed.

<sup>11</sup> S. Blockmans, op. cit.

on cooperation, the Strategic Compass should demonstrate that strategic autonomy goes hand-in-hand with strengthening cooperation with partners. In that regard, both NATO's Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass are institutional instruments that define ambitions for renewed NATO–EU cooperation.<sup>12</sup>

As the EU and NATO represent the most solid geopolitical area of security and stability, Slovakia – a member of both institutions – has to successfully balance and operate according to the pillars of its MoD: American continental protection through NATO, and European autonomy. Nevertheless, the current security challenges facing Slovakia and Europe demand a series of innovative policies and military capabilities if Slovakia is to protect and defend its vital interests in preparation for future crises.<sup>13</sup>

Slovakia was very active and supportive during the discussions about the EU's Strategic Compass. The Minister of Defense of the Slovak Republic stated that the EU's Strategic Compass

is designed to guide us in difficult times, including in terms of defense and security, common instruments and procedure. However, its effectiveness depends on the unity of the EU and the will of individual member states to participate in it. Slovakia subscribes to this initiative and actively participates in the discussion in favor of quality output for all of us.<sup>14</sup>

The European Council endorsed the Strategic Compass at the meeting in Brussels on March 24 and 25, 2022. The Strategic Compass

provides the strategic guidance for the next decade and defines a coherent set of actions, ways and means, and clear targets required for this new impetus by: a) enabling the European Union to act more quickly and decisively when facing crises; b) securing our interests and protecting our citizens by strengthening the European Union's capacity to

anticipate and mitigate threats; c) stimulating investment and innovation to jointly develop the necessary capabilities and technologies; d) deepening our cooperation with partners to achieve common goals.<sup>15</sup>

According to the State Secretary Martin Klus of the Foreign Ministry, Slovakia backs the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), which gives citizens of EU member states an opportunity to have their say on current issues. (The conclusions of the conference are to be summarized in May 2022.<sup>16</sup>)

## ■ Events that have most affected NATO in 2021

2021 has been a very challenging year for NATO. On the one hand, the Alliance concluded projects in which it had been participating for a long time and, on the other hand, new aspects of its future were revealed. According to Lucia Yar, an expert at *Euractiv.sk*, the events that affected the Alliance most in 2021 were the new US administration's focus on China, the June summit and the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the growing European defense ambitions and the worst relations with Russia since the Cold War.<sup>17</sup>

Following the 2020 US election, President Joe Biden took office in January 2021. The former senator and vice president is a well-known proponent of transatlantic relations, and many European allies saw this as the best thing for saving NATO. European leaders reacted very positively after Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the EU Commission, stated:

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<sup>15</sup> "European Council meeting (24 and 25 March 2022) – Conclusions," EUCO 1/22, CO EUR 1, CON-CL 1, March 25, 2021. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/55082/2022-03-2425-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>/ European Council, (accessed on March 26, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> "Francúzske predsedníctvo v EÚ sa zameria na pandémiu, bezpečnosť či kultúru," [French EU presidency to focus on pandemics, security and culture] January 11, 2022. Available online: <https://www.partnerskadohoda.gov.sk/francuzske-predsednictvo-v-eu-sa-zameria-na-pandemiu-bezpecnost-ci-kulturu/> (accessed on March 26, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> L. Yar, "Päť udalostí, ktoré formovali NATO v roku 2021," [Five events that shaped NATO in 2021] *Euractiv.sk*, December 29, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/obrana-a-zahranicie/news/pat-udalosti-ktore-formovali-nato-v-roku-2021/> (accessed on January 13, 2022).

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<sup>12</sup> M. Jourdain, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> R. Hilton, "Stronger together – Slovakia: A new castle strategy for 2021," February 15, 2021. Available on: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/stronger-together-slovakia-new-castle-strategy-2021>, (accessed on March 26, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> "Slovensko podporuje iniciatívu Strategický kompas Európskej únie, vyhlásil Naď," [Slovakia supports the EU's Strategic Compass initiative, said Naď] *HNonline*, November 15, 2021, (accessed on November 16, 2021).

After four years where transatlantic relations often were strained, this new dawn in America is the moment we've been waiting for so long. Europe is ready for a new start with our oldest and most trusted partner.

And UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

As I said when I spoke with him on his election as president, I look forward to working with him and with his new administration, strengthening the partnership between our countries and working on our shared priorities from tackling climate change, building back better from the pandemic and strengthening our transatlantic security.

Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier called Inauguration Day a "good day for democracy" and French President Emmanuel Macron used his message to welcome the United States back into the Paris Climate Agreement.<sup>18</sup>

During President Biden's visit to Europe in spring 2021, he signaled that "America was back" with a clear vision for NATO and that he was seeking European partners' support. The US president's recommitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is premised on the expectation that NATO will address the country's current and future strategic concerns, in a security and geopolitical environment that has dramatically changed these last twenty years.<sup>19</sup> In his speeches, Biden has acknowledged that the United States is committed to developing relations in the Alliance, but made it clear that it is not withdrawing from its policy toward China in the Indo-Pacific region. In order to recalibrate NATO for the great power competition, the US is likely to promote new formats of cooperation between transatlantic and transpacific partners. This transregional approach could be implemented via the establishment of strategic dialogues between NATO and key Indo-Pacific powers, as well as through regional groupings such as the Quad<sup>20</sup> or the

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<sup>18</sup> G. Davies, "World leaders react to Joe Biden's inauguration," *ABC News*, January 20, 2021. Available online: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/european-leaders-uk-russia-react-president-elect-joe/story?id=75365270> (accessed on March 11, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> A. de Hoop Scheffer, M. Quencez, "The US in NATO: adapting the Alliance to new strategic priorities," Research Division – NATO Defense College, *NDC Policy Brief*, No. 17, October 2021. Available online: <https://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=0>, (accessed on January 25, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), colloquially the Quad or QUAD, is a strategic security dialogue between Australia, India, Japan and the United States that is maintained through talks between member countries.

recently created AUKUS<sup>21</sup> partnership. The integration of the various US alliances and partnerships into a coherent coalition of actors who share an interest in containing China is one of Washington's long-term objectives.<sup>22</sup>

Regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan, NATO was not ready for the early exit agreed between the Taliban and then US President Trump.<sup>23</sup> The negotiations within the Alliance in the first quarter of 2021 were difficult and mainly concerned the way in which the withdrawal would take place. In February 2021, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO would not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan "before the time is right", adding that the Taliban must do more to meet the terms of the 2020 peace agreement with the United States first.<sup>24</sup> It was therefore surprising when NATO announced on April 14, 2021, that it was officially leaving Afghanistan after almost two decades on September 11, 2021. The departure of NATO troops as well as Afghan NATO associates took place amid chaos for the duration of the leaving operation. In spring, NATO had 16,500 troops in the country. About 13,000 of them belonged to the United States, some of whom were active in the original Enduring Freedom anti-terrorist operation, i.e. outside NATO structures. The US and coalition forces had planned to withdraw by September 11, 2021, but the Western countries received an ultimatum from the Taliban to evacuate by August 31<sup>st</sup>. The decision to withdraw Slovak soldiers, 24 of whom were in Resolute Support in the final phase, fell on April 14<sup>th</sup>. They were all home by June 16<sup>th</sup>. In this tense situation the subsequent evacuation via two flights in August of Slovak citizens and cooperating Afghans was organized by Slovak soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> AUKUS originated on September 15, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> A. de Hoop Scheffer, M. Quencez, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> The NATO-led mission Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan was launched on January 1, 2015, following the completion of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. Its aim was to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions. NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan (2015–2021), September 13, 2021, Available online: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_113694.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_113694.htm) (accessed on November 6, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> "NATO will leave Afghanistan when 'time is right': Stoltenberg," *Al Jazeera*, February 15, 2021. Available online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/15/nato-will-leave-afghanistan-when-time-is-right-stoltenberg?msclkid=76e7054faa8911eca2ce21be435479f0>, (accessed on January 21, 2022).

<sup>25</sup> P. Vitko, "Ozveny z Afganistanu," [Echoes from Afghanistan] *Obrana* 10/2021, p. 23. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-102021/> (accessed on January 11, 2022).

The 2021 NATO Summit in Brussels was already the 31<sup>st</sup> meeting of its kind, again in-person, thanks to the improving pandemic situation. The program for heads of state for the first time with Joe Biden and the last time with Angela Merkel was more than extensive.<sup>26</sup> The leaders approved the NATO 2030 Agenda – a framework for further discussions on how to adapt the Alliance to new challenges and threats.

At the Extraordinary NATO Summit in Brussels on March 24, 2022, the Alliance decided:

In response to Russia's actions, we have activated NATO's defense plans, deployed elements of the NATO Response Force, and placed 40,000 troops on our eastern flank, along with significant air and naval assets, under direct NATO command supported by Allies' national deployments. We are also establishing four additional multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. We are taking all measures and decisions to ensure the security and defense of all Allies across all domains and with a 360-degree approach. Our measures remain preventive, proportionate, and non-escalatory. We will now accelerate NATO's transformation for a more dangerous strategic reality, including through the adoption of the next Strategic Concept in Madrid.<sup>27</sup>

After an extensive debate at both national and alliance level, the Alliance's new strategic concept was adopted at the Madrid Summit in June 2022.

One very important point of the summit was a discussion about various ways in which China presents a challenge for the Alliance. Several aspects of China's behavior – not necessarily of a military nature – may have an impact on NATO and its members. First, there are Beijing's attempts to integrate Chinese technology companies into the digital infrastructure of Western countries, and thereby influence them. The second issue is China's growing interest in investing in Europe's critical infrastructure. Chinese state-owned companies are showing a high level of interest in ports – particularly in European countries, such as Germany (Hamburg), Greece (Piraeus), the Netherlands (Rotterdam) or Spain (Bilbao). It remains to be seen whether NATO countries will still be able to rely on the use of these ports should the Alliance have to defend Europe. Third, Chinese cyberattacks, as well as other forms

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<sup>26</sup> L. Yar, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> According to the NATO Schedule for 2022 the NATO summit will be held in Madrid on June 29–30, 2022.

of military-technical espionage, on European and American companies have increased massively over the last years. In the past, cyber-attacks from China focused primarily on economic targets. Since 2019, cyber espionage on political targets suspected to be by Chinese actors has been observed. Fourth, the greatest concern is the increasing cooperation between China and Russia.<sup>28</sup>

Relations between the Alliance and Russia slumped to their worst level since the Cold War in 2021. The multiple expulsions of diplomats on both sides culminated in the withdrawal of diplomatic accreditations of eight Russian personnel from the NATO mission. According to allies, they were intelligence officers, an accusation which Russia rejected, before suspending its entire mission to NATO in November 2021. However, little contact had taken place on the Brussels–Moscow axis for two years because Russia had refused to enter into dialogue on the grounds that the first intended point of the talks was Ukraine and the situation in Crimea. In view of Russia's long-standing actions toward Ukraine, as well as regular large-scale exercises near the borders of NATO member states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland), the Alliance continued to maintain its troops in 2021 as part of the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in order to deter Russia from hostile activity. Slovakia joined the eFP two years ago, deploying one battery of self-propelled Zuzana 2000 cannon howitzers. At the end of November 2021, the battery in Latvia was replaced by the modernized Zuzana 2 howitzers.<sup>29</sup>

The relationship between Russia and NATO gradually deteriorated until December, when Russia put forward a highly contentious list of security guarantees it said it wanted the West to agree to in order to lower tensions in Europe and defuse the crisis over Ukraine, including many elements that had already been ruled out. The demands included a ban on Ukraine joining NATO and a limit to the deployment of troops and weapons on NATO's Eastern Flank, in effect a return to the 1997 stationing of NATO forces, before eastward expansion.<sup>30</sup> Russia sent similar demands to the USA.

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<sup>28</sup> M. Kaim, A. Stanzel, "The rise of China and NATO's new Strategic Concept," Research Division – NATO Defense College, *NDC Policy Brief*, No. 4, February 2022. Available online: <https://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=0> (accessed on January 25, 2022).

<sup>29</sup> "Army sent cannon Zuzana 2 howitzers to Latvia," *SITA News Agency*, November 28, 2021. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22792568/armada-poslala-do-lotysska-kanonove-hufnice-zuzana-2.html>, (accessed on December 30, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> A. Roth, "Russia issues list of demands it says must be met to lower tensions in Europe," *The Guardian*, December 17, 2021. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/17/russia-issues-list-demands-tensions-europe-ukraine-nato> (accessed on January 15, 2022).

The discussions on so-called European strategic autonomy launched when Donald Trump was in the White House have borne fruit in the form of security cooperation projects, including investments in science and research in defense, and the joint development of systems and technology. The European Union, like NATO, has been preparing its own strategic document (Strategic Compass), which it discussed last year. (See Strategic Compass for more).

NATO allies, including 21 who are also EU members (in 2021 NATO membership was discussed in countries that decided not to join NATO years ago, including Sweden and Finland), worked on their own strategy paper in parallel. This is the most important NATO document after the founding treaty. Many see duplication in the two processes and warn against creating EU structures that already exist in NATO and against both the secession from the Alliance and the division of the EU. Others talk about the opportunity to strengthen cooperation between the EU and NATO, as both organizations have different roles and competences.

Part of the Alliance statement reads:

Our measures remain preventive, proportionate, and non-escalatory. We will now accelerate NATO's transformation for a more dangerous strategic reality, including through the adoption of the next Strategic Concept in Madrid. In light of the gravest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades, we will also significantly strengthen our longer-term deterrence and defense posture and will further develop the full range of ready forces and capabilities necessary to maintain credible deterrence and defense. These steps will be supported by enhanced exercises with an increased focus on collective defense and interoperability.<sup>31</sup>

## ■ Slovak Armed Forces

The Slovak Armed Forces are well prepared to defend the country and to engage in crisis management (COVID-19, refugee crisis, etc.). In particular, the deployment of Slovak soldiers within the Enhanced Forward Presence (Latvia) demonstrates the training level of selected units. In addition to its

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<sup>31</sup> "Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government," NATO, *Press Release* (2022) 061, Brussels, March 24, 2022. Available online: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_193719.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_193719.htm) (accessed on March 25, 2022).

activities under the auspices of NATO and the EU, in 2021 Slovakia participated in the UN-led mission in Cyprus. The Slovak Armed Forces have been deployed in Cyprus under the UNFICYP mission since 2018. According to UN Deputy Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN welcomed the deployment of 240 members of the Slovak Armed Forces in Cyprus as part of the UNFICYP mission. The Slovak contingent performs operational tasks in Sector 4, with Slovakia assuming full responsibility in 2018.<sup>32</sup>

Most importantly, Slovaks have finally understood the importance of having an army that can engage in domestic crisis management and defend the country. This is shown in public opinion polls conducted in October 2021.

## ■ Conclusion

The transatlantic community assumed that 2021 would be a year devoted to ending or suppressing the COVID-19 pandemic and discussions on the future of NATO and the EU CSDP. After many years of complacency regarding dangers to the transatlantic community, politicians, soldiers and experts faced security challenges that forced them to sit around the discussion table and deal with them seriously. At the turn of 2021 and 2022, it became clear that the transatlantic security discussion had come too late, but on the other hand, decisions were taken without undue delay. The almost consistent progress of Slovak political elites helped as well. Russia, which has been seen as a challenge in recent years, has become a threat to the transatlantic space.

Slovakia has been very active in the formal and informal discussions about the future of NATO and the EU and that proved true in 2021 as well.

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<sup>32</sup> "Pod záštitou OSN," [Under the UN umbrella] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, *Obrana* 1/2021, p. 6. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/obrana-12021/> (accessed on January 29, 2021).





# Priorities of Slovakia's foreign policy



Tomáš Strážay

# The metamorphoses of Central Europe

The political landscape of Central Europe underwent certain changes in the last year. These included the creation of the new Slovak government in 2020 and its facelift in 2021, but also the establishment of the Czech government following the October 2021 elections. In addition, Austria faced political challenges with the appointment of the new Austrian chancellor. In Poland parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2023, and in Hungary elections will take place on April 3, 2022.

The changing political dynamics in the region have also had an impact on regional cooperation. The V4 is still considered a useful format in all the Visegrad countries, but Slovakia and the Czech Republic also see the Slavkov triangle as an increasingly important format. Meanwhile, Poland underlines the primacy of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), while both Slovakia and Czech Republic are “hesitant” members. Nonetheless the 3SI is included in this analysis as it has become one of the most visible formats of regional cooperation in the EU.

Russia’s aggression against Ukraine will affect Central Europe as well. The common challenges facing the Central European countries, such as the influx of refugees from Ukraine, economic difficulties and problems related to the delivery of gas and oil from Russia require prompt answers. The unity showed by the EU on the sanctions against Russia and its condemnation of the aggression pretty much rules out the possibility of any of the Central European countries seeking different options in response to these challenges. The metamorphosis of Central Europe is therefore expected to continue.

## ■ Political map of the region and the implications for regional cooperation

In the last two years (2020–2021), the Central European region has seen a change of government in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The new government in Slovakia, the outcome of the parliamentary elections in 2020 (there was a government reshuffle in spring 2021, but with no major impact on performance, especially in foreign policy) has been following through on its intention to be a responsible and predictable partner in both European and international relations. In Central Europe, Slovakia continues to participate in the Visegrad Four, which is considered a useful tool for strengthening regional cooperation, but the emphasis is also on developing partnerships with other states and regional groupings. In this respect, Slovakia's position converges with that of the Czech Republic in the Central European region and is based on several pillars. In addition to the V4, it is building balanced relations with Germany and Austria, including deepening cooperation in the Slavkov format.

The change of government in the Czech Republic stemming from the elections in October 2021 is evident in foreign policy through the change in style of policy implementation rather than a more fundamental reassessment of priorities. The European agenda is even more concentrated in the government office, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic is responsible "only" for the implementation of foreign policy. When it comes to regional cooperation, the new Prime Minister Fiala is expected to exploit the V4 trademark significantly less than his predecessor. The new government "inherited" a bilateral dispute with Poland over mining in the Turów mine on the Czech–Polish border. Despite the ruling of the Court of Justice of the EU in favor of the Czech Republic, a compromise agreement still needs to be reached. The Czech Republic will have its second presidency of the Council of the EU in 2022, which will largely set the tone for the country's foreign policy.

In Poland, the largest country in the region, the government led by the Law and Justice party (PiS) has continued with proposals for legislative measures that increased tensions with the EU institutions. Especially in the autumn months, we witnessed an escalation of the confrontational rhetoric of government officials in relation to the EU. This primarily concerned a controversial judiciary reform that involves reducing the independence of the courts, i.e. politicization, and the reform of the so-called media law, which aims to

significantly curtail the influence of foreign owners on the media in Poland. Despite the turbulence within the government, the result of PiS disputes with smaller parties, the prospect of early elections is unlikely (it is not in the interests of either the government party or the opposition). At the European level, more precisely within the European Parliament, the Polish ruling party PiS has links with the largest Czech coalition party ODS as they are both members of the ECR faction (European Conservatives and Reformists). A Slovak party, Freedom and Solidarity (SAS), that has been in government since 2020 is also a member of the ECR.

The continuous increase in tensions with the EU institutions is also evident in relations with Hungary, which has become Poland's closest partner. The suspension of FIDESZ's (Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's party) membership of the EPP, has led to its marginalization in Europe, as its ambition to create a new EP faction with Polish PiS and the Italian League of the North remains unfulfilled. Hungary is facing parliamentary elections on April 3, 2022, in which a coalition of opposition parties has a chance of booting out the ruling party (having been in power for three election cycles). Even if this were to happen, the diversity of the pre-election coalition parties is no guarantee of stable governance, quite the opposite.

The increase in tensions in Slovak–Hungarian relations, influenced by several factors, cannot be neglected either. Slovak–Hungarian bilateral relations proved to be the most sensitive of Slovakia's bilateral relations with neighboring countries and therefore deserve special attention. Over the last decade, Slovak domestic and foreign policy did not pay adequate attention to Hungary's so-called national policy, which Hungary has long pursued outside the political and institutional frameworks of foreign policy. Previous governments and ministers in Slovakia have primarily argued in favor of improving the culture of communication with their Hungarian counterparts, while issues (such as dual citizenship) have remained unresolved for a long time. Despite the fact that this national policy applies to nationals and territory in neighboring states, Hungary has continued to implement it unilaterally, without respecting the need to communicate with the Slovak Republic. Compared to the past, however, it no longer simply focuses on the issues of culture, education and citizenship but is also interested in shaping social and economic conditions in ethnically mixed regions in neighboring countries. This is not just about building infrastructure in southern Slovakia but also about buying real estate and agricultural land in the region. The purchase of agricultural land via a special fund set up in Hungary was the impetus for the intensification of the dialogue between Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok and



his Hungarian counterpart Péter Szijártó.<sup>1</sup> Efforts to clarify such procedures ultimately resulted in the repeal of the Hungarian government's resolution on the purchase of land in neighboring countries. However, one cannot exclude the possibility of Hungary pursuing similar goals by other means, so there is a need for permanent intensive dialogue at governmental and non-governmental levels but also a combination of both. There is also the possibility of creating dialogue – supporting institutions, as in Czech–German and Polish–German relations.

There is an increasingly diverse range of regional initiatives in Central Europe, and hence the question of which formats should be prioritized. This process is visible throughout the region and has an impact on the V4, which has been the preferred format for regional cooperation for Slovakia. The political polarization within the V4 became even more evident after the elections in the Czech Republic in autumn 2021. It is questionable whether the polarization, which gained significant momentum after 2015, is limited to that period or whether it will have a longer-term impact on relations within the region and Visegrad cooperation as such. Related to this is the question of how Slovakia can capitalize on the V4.

## ■ V4 as functional regional initiative

The V4 commemorated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021. On the political level, the most important event connected with the V4 anniversary was the meeting of the V4 prime ministers in February 2021, preceded by the summit of the presidents. Since Poland had the V4 presidency at that time, the presidential meeting was organized on the Hel peninsula, while the prime ministers met

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<sup>1</sup> See “Minister I. Korčok: Dobré vzťahy s Maďarskom sú mojou prioritou. Ale podpory musia byť transparentné a poskytovať sa na základe dohodnutých pravidiel,” [Minister I. Korčok: Good relations with Hungary are my priority. But support must be transparent and provided on the basis of agreed rules] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 10, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/lw1p-pvnScIPx/content/minister-i-korcok-dobre-vztahy-s-madarskom-su-mojou-prioritou-ale-podpory-musia-byt-transparentne-a-poskytovat-sa-na-zaklade-dohodnutych-pravidiel?p\\_p\\_auth=zjFx8gLi&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lw1p-pvnScIPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky\\_spravy%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9%26strana%3D2](https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1p-pvnScIPx/content/minister-i-korcok-dobre-vztahy-s-madarskom-su-mojou-prioritou-ale-podpory-musia-byt-transparentne-a-poskytovat-sa-na-zaklade-dohodnutych-pravidiel?p_p_auth=zjFx8gLi&_101_INSTANCE_lw1p-pvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9%26strana%3D2) (accessed on February 17, 2022).

in Cracow. The adoption of the prime ministers' joint declaration has particular value, as it hints at the future development of Visegrad cooperation.<sup>2</sup> However, the joint statement was not added to the list of Visegrad declarations adopted at key moments for the V4. It remains unchanged, featuring the “founding” declaration from 1991, the one adopted just after the accession of the V4 countries to the EU in 2004 (Kroměříž Declaration), as well as the one adopted on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the V4 (Bratislava Declaration from 2011)<sup>3</sup>. Solidarity within the group, one of the leading principles of the V4 since its establishment, was demonstrated by the V4 prime ministers in relation to the involvement of Russian military intelligence operatives in the explosion at the Vrbětice ammunition depot in 2014. The heads of the governments issued a statement strongly condemning the illegal and violent actions carried out by the Russian intelligence operatives and announced they would take measures – together with other EU countries – to reinforce resilience.<sup>4</sup>

The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the V4 could, at least on a symbolic level, have been imprinted by Slovakia's forthcoming presidency of the V4 (July 2022–June 2023). But there was no attempt to reflect the results achieved so far, nor a summary of the lessons learnt in the three decades of the V4. The attempt to figuratively return the V4 to the “roots” that characterized the emergence of the V4 could be one of the presidency's leitmotifs. Related to this is the need to update the procedural level of cooperation, in which the need to redefine the “guidelines” that frame Visegrad cooperation plays an important role. As the most recent set of “guidelines” on V4 cooperation in selected sectors was adopted in the year of the V4 countries' accession to the EU, an update or revision seems appropriate. Although this is envisaged in the Joint Declaration of the prime ministers of February 2021 with regard

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<sup>2</sup> “Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the Occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Visegrad Group,” Cracow, February 17, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2021/declaration-of-the-prime> (accessed on March 1, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> All three declarations are available on the Visegrad Group website – see Visegrad Group website. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations> (accessed on March 1, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> “Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group on the solidarity with the Czech Republic regarding recent actions by the Russian Federation,” April 26, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2021/declaration-of-the-prime-210426> (accessed on March 1, 2022).

to selected issues, changes in foreign policy, the economic environment and, above all, the security environment require a more comprehensive revision. The Slovak Presidency of the V4 could follow up on this document in an effort to update the “guidelines.” The presidency’s symbolic leitmotif aimed at returning to the V4 roots could be effectively complemented by other principles, including

1. continuity, not only with the previous presidency or presidencies, but also with the original goals and intentions of the V4, as formulated in the Visegrad Declaration of 1991;
2. flexibility, perceived as the ability to identify challenges and respond to them promptly;
3. innovation, in terms of suggesting solutions to important issues that will add value for the EU as a whole and last but not least
4. openness, related to the need to create synergies with other regional groupings and the development of cooperation with V4+ partners.

In terms of content priorities, the V4 concentrated on the sectoral agenda (e.g. the development of TEN-T networks, cooperation in economic and financial policies, migration and border management in the context of the instrumentalization of migration by the Belarusian regime), as well as development cooperation in the V4+ format.<sup>5</sup> In the context of the latter, the meeting of the V4 foreign ministers and US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken could be mentioned, together with the second V4+Korea summit.<sup>6</sup> Meetings also took place in the V4+Western Balkan and V4+Eastern Partnership (EaP) formats.<sup>7</sup> Cooperation in implementing the priorities of the EU’s EaP program should remain a common priority for the V4 countries, though the whole EaP concept will need to be reconsidered in the light of the recent developments in Ukraine. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has further

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<sup>5</sup> See the Visegrad Group website, “From the Visegrad Group” section. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/from-the-visegrad-group> (accessed on March 1, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> See “US Secretary Blinken’s meeting with V4 foreign ministers Petříček, Szijjarto, Rau, and Korčok,” March 23, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/us-secretary-blinkens> (accessed on March 1, 2022); and “Second V4 + Korea Summit in Budapest,” November 4, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/second-v4-korea-summit> (accessed on March 1, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> See “Joint Statement of the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group on the Eastern Partnership,” April 29, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2021/joint-statement-of-the> (accessed on March 1, 2022); and “Joint Statement of the ministers of foreign affairs of the Visegrad Group countries on the Western Balkans,” June 28, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2021/joint-statement-of-the-210629> (accessed on March 1, 2022).

underlined relations with EaP countries, especially Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which have applied for EU membership. Attention is now focused on how to end the conflict, but it is clear that the procedures on how the three countries will move closer to the EU will have to be redefined, and this will probably apply to enlargement policy as well. However, support for the adoption and implementation of the Association Agreements and the DCFTA with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well as cooperation with Armenia in selected areas, as defined in the Eastern Partnership Summit Declaration of December 2021, should be recalled. Cooperation in mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in EaP countries is another possibility. The ultimate priority of the V4 states is to continue supporting Ukraine’s stability, democratic development and territorial integrity, as well as steps that lead to intensification of cooperation with the EU.

### ■ S3 as a useful tool for regional cooperation

S3 is considered to be an important format for cross-border cooperation with the Czech Republic and Austria. Attention is often drawn to the like-mindedness of the three participation countries on selected aspects of the EU-related agenda. The different structural characteristics of the participating countries affect the positions S3 countries hold on sectoral policies, whether that is defense and security (Austrian neutrality, Slovak and Czech NATO membership) or energy policy (importance of nuclear energy in the Slovak and Czech energy mixes vs Austria’s negative stance). However, it is natural for the countries to hold diverse positions in selected areas and, given the informal nature of cooperation, does not affect activities within this format (it is also characteristic of other regional cooperation formats, including V4).

Although at the time of its creation, the S3 format was presented as a project of three governments with social democratic forces occupying a dominant position, all three partners have declared an interest in continuing cooperation even after the change in government in each of these countries. The political project has thus been transformed into an intergovernmental initiative in recent years. This creates the prospect of the S3 continuing, regardless of the government composition in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria.

In 2021 Slovakia continued to view S3 as one of the two most important regional formats in Central Europe (alongside the V4). Besides issues like digitalization, the post-COVID-19 recovery or support for the European

perspective of the Western Balkans, the S3 opened a new chapter of cooperation in the Eastern dimension of EU Policy. Just a few weeks before the outbreak of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the S3 foreign ministers visited Ukraine, including the line of contact between Ukrainian government troops and Russian-backed separatists in the Eastern Ukrainian conflict region of Donbass. Their joint trip to Ukraine was a sign of Central European solidarity with Ukraine and a tangible contribution to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Eastern Ukraine. During their visit the S3 foreign ministers met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Prime Minister Denys Smyhal, and Chairman of the Parliament Ruslan Stefanchuk.<sup>8</sup> Taking into consideration the developments in Ukraine and Eastern Europe generally, the stabilizing role of the S3 might be of added value in the future. Alongside the Western Balkan dimension, the S3 could therefore aim to develop its “Eastern” dimension.

The S3 is open to cooperation with other actors, primarily in the EU and neighboring regions. Nevertheless, thus far insufficient attention has been paid to the need to find synergies with other regional initiatives, and this applies to the V4 as well. S3 cooperation needs to be open to other initiatives and groupings in the EU, which could be one of the priorities of Slovakia’s Presidency of the S3 (July 2022–June 2023). The simple fact that Slovakia has the V4 and S3 presidencies at the same time provides opportunities for closer cooperation and synergies between the two formats. Also, the V4+Austria format has been searching for its focus for a long time and Slovakia’s forthcoming V4 presidency could help. Potential intensification of cooperation could come with the concurrent Slovak presidencies of the S3 and V4 and the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half

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<sup>8</sup> “Ministri zahraničných vecí v Kyjeve: Ukrajina, rovnako ako každá iná krajina, musí mať právo sama sa rozhodovať o svojej zahraničnej orientácii, pričom napätie a nezhody treba riešiť dialógom, za rokovacím stolom,” [Foreign ministers in Kyiv: Ukraine, like any other country, must have the right to decide its own foreign orientation, with tensions and disagreements to be resolved through dialogue, at the negotiating table] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 8, 2022. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/ministri-zahranicnych-veci-v-kyjeve-ukrajina-rovnako-ako-ka-zda-ina-krajina-musi-mat-pravo-sama-sa-rozhodovat-o-svojej-zahranicnej-orientacii-pricom-na?p\\_p\\_auth=2KOr5r16&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lw1ppvnScIPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky\\_spravy%3D2022%26mesiac%3D1%26strana%3D2](https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/ministri-zahranicnych-veci-v-kyjeve-ukrajina-rovnako-ako-ka-zda-ina-krajina-musi-mat-pravo-sama-sa-rozhodovat-o-svojej-zahranicnej-orientacii-pricom-na?p_p_auth=2KOr5r16&_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3D2022%26mesiac%3D1%26strana%3D2) (accessed on February 25, 2022). See also “A strong signal of Central European solidarity: Foreign Minister Schallenberg travels to Ukraine with Slavkov colleagues,” Federal Ministry, Republic of Austria, February 7, 2022. Available online: <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/the-ministry/press/news/2022/02/a-strong-signal-of-central-european-solidarity-foreign-minister-schallenberg-travels-to-ukraine-with-slavkov-colleagues/> (accessed in February, 2022).

of 2022. Although, given the Czech Republic’s “honest broker” position, we should not expect a preference for a regional agenda at the EU level, but intersections between the agendas of both presidencies could be identified, which would create opportunities to further strengthen cooperation within the S3.

## ■ Three Seas Initiative (3SI) – still too hot to handle?

Although Slovakia has participated in the 3SI from the outset, it has tended to view it as just another platform for communicating joint regional priorities. Zuzana Čaputová, who replaced Andrej Kiska as President of the Slovak Republic in 2019, spoke at the virtual 3SI summit organized by Estonia in October 2020. Her message underlined the importance of cooperation and coordination among European countries, as the pandemic has severely affected the economies of the 3SI countries. Similarly to her predecessor, she assured the participants that Slovakia “will support every initiative that will enhance connectivity within the European Union and will be governed by its principles and policies.”<sup>9</sup> President Čaputová, however, did not attend the 2021 summit organized by Bulgaria.

In Slovakia, the 3SI has remained a topic for discussion among a very limited number of stakeholders directly connected to the initiative, including the Office of the President, Finance Ministry and Foreign Ministry. Slovakia still ranks among the most hesitant participating countries in the 3SI, strongly opposing attempts – overt or covert – to transform the 3SI into a political block. There is also a preference for the existing model of the rotating quasi-presidency.<sup>10</sup> The idea of establishing a permanent 3SI secretariat is seen as an attempt to strengthen the institutional structure of the initiative and is therefore not supported.<sup>11</sup> Priority is given to the economic dimension

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<sup>9</sup> “Three Seas Virtual Summit, the Presidents’ virtual panel,” *Youtube video*, October 19, 2020. Available online: <https://bit.ly/3vhFQVM> (accessed on February 17, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Representative of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic in discussion with the author, April 14, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Representative of the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic in discussion with the author, April 19, 2021.

of cooperation. Therefore, the Finance Ministry plays the most important role, while the Foreign Ministry has highlighted the economic orientation of the 3SI.<sup>12</sup> But Slovakia has not contributed to the 3SI Development Fund, not even the minimum €20 million.

Besides other factors behind Slovakia's low level involvement in the 3SI and the Investment Fund, there is doubt as to whether the Investment Fund would bring added value. As there are no "country envelopes" in the Investment Fund, there is no guarantee invested funds would return to Slovakia through the supported projects. In addition, Slovakia is in quite a comfortable situation when it comes to funding different kinds of projects, as massive EU funding has been secured for at least the next six years. The problem is rather the lack of viable projects that could be financed through the EU funds. Changes to the list of priority projects regarding the 3SI Investment Fund should, however, make the projects Slovakia proposes more competitive and feasible. If this is accompanied by more intensive private investor involvement, Slovakia's hesitance on contributing to the Investment Fund might be reconsidered relatively soon, as technically it meets all the requirements. The Investment Fund could become a valuable source for financing different projects after 2027, when Slovakia will probably be a net contributor to the EU budget. The attractiveness of the 3SI in the eyes of the Slovak stakeholders could be increased by more intensive involvement of the United States in the initiative, which would also include some financial backing. More intensive participation by Germany in the 3SI and German investors in the Investment Fund would also be welcome.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Videokonferencia ministrov zahraničných vecí krajín Trojmorja," [Videocall of Three Seas Initiative foreign ministers] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 30, 2020. Available online: <https://bit.ly/3hXnAgr> (accessed on February 17, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> See also V. Dostál, T. Strážay, Z. Végh, *The perspective of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia on the Three Seas Initiative*, Association of International Affairs, June 24, 2021. Available online: [https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AMO\\_The\\_Perspective\\_on\\_the\\_3SI.pdf](https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AMO_The_Perspective_on_the_3SI.pdf) (accessed on February 17, 2022).

## ■ Regional cooperation in the shadow of Russia's aggression against Ukraine

The unprecedented invasion of Ukraine by Russia has meant the outbreak of open warfare in the neighborhood of Slovakia and other Central European countries. So far, it is impossible to predict how the conflict will evolve, let alone how it will end. However, it is clear that it will have consequences not just for Europe and the European Union, including Central Europe, but also the global environment.

However, even after the first week of the conflict partial conclusions can be drawn and some of the implications for Slovakia and its Central European neighbors named. The EU's unanimous support for the introduction of sanctions against Russia prompts cautious optimism about the process of deepening European integration. For the first time in its history, the EU has decided to provide military assistance directly to another country. The debate on the EU's strategic autonomy, or rather the strengthening of the EU's position in security and defense within the global environment, has thus taken on much more realistic contours than ever before. The question remains as to whether such unequivocal support for common positions in the EU is merely a response to moments of crisis, or whether it could be more permanent.

Another consequence of the Russian aggression is that open supporters of Russia and President Putin in the region almost immediately changed their views, or at least modified them. A politician who radically changed his mind is Czech President Miloš Zeman, who has become an outspoken critic of Vladimir Putin. Prime Minister Orbán, on the one hand, who has cooperated closely with President Putin for several years, has refused to directly support Ukraine by providing military equipment and has raised concerns about the effects of the conflict on the Hungarian community living in Transcarpathia, and especially the continued implementation of energy projects with Russian support, particularly the PAKS nuclear power plant. On the other hand, Hungary did support strengthening sanctions in the EU against Russia's actions and did not veto the EU's common positions, making way for assistance for a large number of refugees from Ukraine. The issue of coordinating the integration of migrants from Ukraine into Polish, Slovak, Hungarian and Czech society could become a key topic on the Visegrad agenda in the coming months. The nature of the conflict and the destruction of the basic infrastructure means that refugees will be hosted in the V4 countries for a long time to

come. This issue could form part of the agenda for a broader V4+ format (co-operation could be extended to Romania and the Baltic States in particular).

Poland, as the largest country in the region, is playing a key role in delivering aid to Ukraine (including military aid). There has been intensified discussion in Poland about its integration into the eurozone, as membership could provide the country with additional security guarantees, including economic and currency stability. More than ever before, President Andrzej Duda has played an integrative role in Polish society, consulting developments in Ukraine with representatives across the political spectrum. The importance of Poland as a European security actor, which is firmly anchored in the North Atlantic Alliance, has also grown – its leadership of the Eastern Flank of NATO cannot be doubted in the future. As Poland is Slovakia's second largest neighboring country – and the largest of the EU or NATO members, Slovakia could consider creating a bilateral platform for more intensive communication with Poland on various areas of common interest.

As for the impact of developments in Ukraine on the regional formats, the Bucharest Nine (B9), which brings together nine countries on NATO's Eastern Flank, has certainly strengthened. Given the likely longer nature of the conflict, one can assume that the intensification in cooperation and coordination within this format will continue, with the B9 being an essential tool for developing transatlantic relations, including EU–US relations. Another format that could potentially strengthen its position is the V4. Not just in the area of crisis management, mentioned above, but also, for example, in coordinating development aid for Ukraine or contributing to the discussion on redefining EU enlargement policy (also in view of the EU membership applications submitted by Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova). Intensification of cooperation with Ukraine may become a more important cooperation area within the Slavkov format, which has recently begun profiling in this area. For both formats, there is an opportunity to involve other countries (V4+ and S3+) in cooperation.

## ■ Conclusions

As a consequence of the recent developments in Ukraine, the program priorities for the forthcoming 2022/23 Slovak V4 Presidency should refer to the EU common position on Russia. It is about supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity and having a sanctions mechanism to respond to flagrant violations of international law by Moscow. Russia and China are important trading partners for the EU, including the V4 countries, but they are also challenging the multilateral system, which the EU considers crucial to maintaining its stability and prosperity.

Although the V4 countries differ in degree of EU integration – Slovakia remains the only country to use the common European currency – structural differences of this type do not constitute a major obstacle to the development of cooperation in areas where the V4 countries find common interests. Rather the obstacle is the growing differences in political issues and priorities, especially in matters concerning the rule of law – this reduces the V4's relevance as a collective actor and the reputation of the group in the EU institutions. A proven way to bridge internal differences in political issues is to be more active in the non-political, practical dimension of cooperation, emphasizing the soft aspects. These include cooperation in public diplomacy, which has not yet been sufficiently developed within the V4, as well as education, especially universities, support for joint scientific projects, student and expert mobility, and various types of cultural activities. The International Visegrad Fund plays a particularly important role in these activities, and its effective and politically independent operation should be considered an automatic priority for V4.

Given the low level of institutionalization, the V4 could form flexible alliances and projects with other states. Unlike other regional cooperation formats, the V4 is characterized by a high intensity of contacts both at the highest political level (prime ministers, presidents, parliamentary president), as well as at the sectoral level, which includes lower levels of government, professional chambers, civil society structures, local governments and academic institutions. The "practical" dimension of cooperation represents the most significant added value for the Visegrad Group compared to other regional formats, including the S3 and S3I.

In regional cooperation, the recommendation is to continue profiling the V4 as an initiative aimed at developing sectoral cooperation, while maintaining the political dimension and cooperation within the European agenda where

possible, given the complementarity of positions. In turn, the S3 should be profiled as a priority-oriented format on selected parts of the European agenda and cross-border cooperation. However, duplication should be avoided, which should also be taken into account in the forthcoming programs of the two presidencies. Both formats should remain open to cooperation with external actors, preferably among EU member states, and with the EU's Eastern Neighborhood and the Western Balkans. In the case of the V4, the recommendation is to develop proven partnerships with non-European partners, such as Japan or Korea, as these provide an important platform for overcoming the consequences of the group's internal differences. Likewise, cooperation with the United Kingdom, which is no longer a member of the EU but remains a major overseas European country, could provide new impetus to the development of the V4+ format in the longer term. However, given its focus, the S3 should have a narrower remit and focus exclusively on the European area.

The Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2022 and its program will provide opportunities for overlap with the forthcoming programs of the Slovak presidencies of the V4 and S3. The Slovak presidencies should thus complement the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, not just in terms of the sectoral agenda, but also political priorities. In this context one should not overlook the fact that in the coming months and years developments in Central Europe, the EU and the global environment will be affected by the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict caused by Russia's unwarranted invasion of Ukraine.



Juraj Marušiak\*

# Eastern policy of the Slovak Republic – the end of an era

Slovakia's relations with Eastern European states have evolved in the context of the growing conflict between Russia and the West, as well as the increasing Russian pressure on Ukraine, which resulted in Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Whereas in the past Slovakia sought cooperation with all the former USSR states, with governments paying considerable attention to building pragmatic relations with Russia as the minimum, the Russian–Ukrainian conflict took on such a dimension that in 2021 the continued efforts aimed at “Eastern multivectoralism,” in other words the “two track” Eastern policy,<sup>1</sup> became impossible. In that year Slovak foreign policy was characterized by intense work to build Slovak–Ukrainian relations, with the dynamism in bilateral relations with Russia and Belarus weakening after the change of government in Slovakia in 2020, and especially after the appointment of Eduard Heger as prime minister in April 2021.

The disintegration of the foreign policy consensus among the political parties continued, with issues related to Slovakia's “eastern” policy becoming the source of disagreements not only between coalition and opposition but also within the coalition. These were instrumentally exploited by some actors, leading to a serious coalition crisis in February–March 2021. More than in previous years, crisis events relating to relations with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus have highlighted the limits of Slovak foreign policy in defending interests not closely coordinated within the European Union and NATO.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Marušiak, “Slovakia's Eastern policy – from the Trojan horse of Russia to ‘Eastern multivectoralism,’” *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. XII, No. 1–2, 2013, pp. 42–70; A. Duleba, “Slovakia's Eastern policy in 2020: good start with a bad end,” in P. Brezáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2020*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2021, p. 125.

Multilaterally, the most important event was the preparations for the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit on December 15, 2022, and here Slovakia coordinated its approach with the V4 countries. On relations with Russia, the V4 heads of diplomacy agreed on the need to maintain mutual communication, but without making concessions or compromises on issues of principle and the values of democracy and the rule of law. They supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine and described the human rights violations in Belarus as unacceptable.<sup>2</sup> As part of the preparations for the EaP Summit, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Ivan Korčok visited the participating countries, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. Negotiations with Azerbaijan in particular were focused on strengthening bilateral economic cooperation. However, the EU Eastern Partnership Summit, held on December 15, 2021, took place in the shadows of escalating tensions on the Russian–Ukrainian border amid the concentration of Russian troops. The results of the summit were received with dissatisfaction in Ukraine, as there was no decision on the prospects of Ukraine’s accession to the EU, merely on transition assistance.<sup>3</sup>

## ■ Relations with Russia – from stagnation to disaster

In 2021, the governments of Igor Matovič and Eduard Heger clearly emphasized Slovakia’s Euro-Atlantic orientation in security issues, in contrast to the governments dominated by Smer–SD before 2020. They also paid greater attention to building relations with Ukraine. This inevitably led to a significant deterioration in relations with Russia. The Russian side was aware of this and in December 2021 when receiving his credentials from Ambassador Ľubomír Reháč, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin described the

bilateral relations as “limited.”<sup>4</sup> The change of government in 2020, but also the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, led to weaker bilateral ties. An attempt was made to revive them in the form of a meeting between the respective foreign ministers held on the initiative of Minister Korčok during the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2021. The negotiation topics were the economic consequences of the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline for Slovakia and Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov invited Korčok to visit Moscow.<sup>5</sup>

Despite a substantial shift in the formulation of Slovakia’s Eastern policy priorities, the Russian card was used instrumentally in internal political struggles between the coalition and the opposition and within the ruling coalition. In relation to Russia, one can even speak of the complete breakdown of Slovakia’s political consensus, with most of the opposition parties, namely Smer–SD led by Robert Fico, the extreme right-wing ĽSNS (People’s Party Our Slovakia) and the splinter group Republika (Republic) led by Milan Uhrík, following a political line that rejects any criticism of Russia’s foreign policy, even to the point of directly supporting Russia’s international activities.

The ruling coalition’s political line was called into question by the decision of the then Prime Minister Igor Matovič and health minister Marek Krajčí (both from OĽaNO, *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities]) to purchase the Sputnik V vaccine, which was not approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), without the knowledge of the coalition partners. This incident led to the collapse of the government coalition and the resignation of the Prime Minister Igor Matovič and health minister Marek Krajčí. A new government headed by the then finance minister Eduard Heger was established on April 1, 2021.<sup>6</sup> Replacing the prime minister meant the government coalition could be restored to its original composition, while preserving the foreign policy priorities.

<sup>2</sup> “Korčok: Východné partnerstvo je dôležité pre susedskú politiku EÚ,” *Teraz.sk*, April 29, 2021. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/zahranicie/korcok-vychodne-partnerstvo-je-strat/545403-clanok.html> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> K. Nieczypor, “Eastern Partnership summit: Kyiv’s growing disappointment.” Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, December 17, 2021. Available online: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2021-12-17/eastern-partnership-summit-kyiv-growing-disappointment> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> “Putin: pri zhelanii Slovakii Rossija gotova k vozobnovleniju konstruktivnogo vzaimodeistviya,” [Putin: if Slovakia wishes, Russia is ready to restore the constructive cooperation] *TASS*, December 1, 2021. Available online: [https://tass.ru/politika/13080077?utm\\_source=google.com&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=google.com&utm\\_referrer=google.com](https://tass.ru/politika/13080077?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com) (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> “Minister Ivan Korčok rokoval v New Yorku so šéfom ruskej diplomacie Sergejom Lavrovom,” [Minister Ivan Korčok held a meeting with the head of Russian diplomacy Sergey Lavrov] *Denník N*, September 23, 2021. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2548956/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> A. Duleba, “Slovakia’s Eastern Policy in 2020...,” op. cit., pp. 126–7.



In terms of relations with Russia, the Vrbětice incident became a test for the new government. The Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš issued a report on April 17, 2021, stating that members of the Russian security services GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces) were involved in the explosions at an ammunition depot in Vrbětice (Vlachovice village, Zlín district) in 2014, acting foreign minister of the Czech Republic Jan Hamáček announced the expulsion of 18 Russian diplomats. Slovakia expressed solidarity with Czechia and expelled three Russian diplomats – employees of the Russian embassy in Bratislava – who were suspected of collaborating with the Russian secret services.<sup>7</sup> Minister Korčok, contacted the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group. Subsequently, on Slovakia's initiative the foreign ministers of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary "expressed solidarity with recent steps conducted by the Czech Republic."<sup>8</sup> On April 26, 2021, the prime ministers of the V4 countries conveyed their solidarity with the Czech Republic. They condemned this "yet another deplorable act of aggression and breach of international law committed by Russia on European soil."<sup>9</sup> Spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry Mariya Zakharova rebutted Slovakia's steps, stating "there is no solidarity. It has been replaced by a kind of vassal ideology."<sup>10</sup>

Among other states Slovakia was critical of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which would allow gas to be transported directly from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea, bypassing states such as Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine. Nonetheless the head of Slovak diplomacy welcomed the agreement between Germany and the US of July 2021 that would allow the pipeline to be launched without US sanctions. According to Korčok, it would renew transatlantic

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<sup>7</sup> "Do výbuchu ve Vrbětčích byli zapojení ruští agenti, oznámil Babiš. Česko jich osmnáct vyhostí," [Russian agents were involved in the explosion in Vrbětice. Czechia will expel 18 of them] *Česká televize, ČT 24*, April 18, 2021. Available online: <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/3299339-do-vybuchu-municniho-arealu-ve-vrbeticich-byly-podle-zjisteni-ceskych-bezpecnostnich> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> "Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 states," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland, April 19, 2021. Available online: <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/statement-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-v4-countries> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> "Declaration of the Prime Ministers of Visegrad Group on the solidarity with the Czech Republic regarding recent actions of Russian Federation," *Visegrad Group*, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2021/declaration-of-the-prime-210426> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> "Briefing by Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, April 29, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/1420601/](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1420601/) (accessed on March 16, 2022).

cooperation, which he described as "a fundamental security interest of Slovakia."<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, despite commitments to financially compensate Ukraine for the loss of gas transit revenues, the foreign ministers of Poland and Ukraine, Zbigniew Rau and Dmytro Kuleba, described the launch as a "political, military and energy threat to Ukraine and Central Europe," which would also "increase Russia's potential to destabilize the security situation in Europe and strengthen the divisions between NATO and the European Union member states."<sup>12</sup> Slovak business representatives reacted negatively to the agreement as well. According to Jozef Hrabina, chief analyst of the Council of Slovak Exporters, both the restricted gas transport via the existing pipeline through Ukraine and Slovakia and the possible monopolization of gas transit through Germany in the EU presented a risk to Slovakia.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of bilateral economic cooperation, the most significant event in Slovak–Russian relations was the session of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation on November 11–12, 2021.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "The Position of the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Korčok, on the Joint Statement of the USA and Germany in Support of Ukraine and the Energy Security of Central and Eastern Europe in Connection with the Completion of the Nord Stream 2 Gas Pipeline," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, July 22, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/oLViwP07vPxv/content/stanovisko-ministra-zahranicnych-veci-a-europskych-zalezitosti-sr-ivana-korcoka-k-spolocnemu-vyhlaseniu-usa-a-nemecka-na-podporu-ukrajiny-a-energetick/10182](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset_publisher/oLViwP07vPxv/content/stanovisko-ministra-zahranicnych-veci-a-europskych-zalezitosti-sr-ivana-korcoka-k-spolocnemu-vyhlaseniu-usa-a-nemecka-na-podporu-ukrajiny-a-energetick/10182) (accessed on March 16, 2022)

<sup>12</sup> I. Jenčová, N. J. Kurmayer, "Spojené štáty a Nemecko sa dohodli o Nord Stream 2. Ukrajine to chcú vynahradiť," [United States and Germany agree on Nord Stream 2] *Euractiv.sk*, July 22, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/energetika/news/spojene-staty-a-nemecko-sa-dohodli-o-nord-stream-2-ukrajine-to-chcu-vynahradiť/> (accessed on March 16, 2022); "Joint statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Zbigniew Rau on Nord Stream 2," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, July 21, 2021. Available online: <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/spilna-zayava-ministra-zakordonnih-sprav-ukrayini-dmitra-kulebi-ta-ministra-zakordonnih-sprav-polshchi-zbignyeva-rau-shchodo-pivnichnogo-potoku-2> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> J. Hrabina, "Nord Stream 2 bude: čo to pre Slovensko znamená?" [Nord Stream 2 will happen. What does it mean for Slovakia?] *Webnoviny.sk*, July 28, 2021. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/venergetike/nord-stream-2-bude-co-to-pre-slovensko-znamená/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> "Informácia o priebehu a výsledkoch 21. zasadnutia Medzivládnej komisie pre hospodársku a vedecko-technickú spoluprácu medzi Slovenskou republikou a Ruskou federáciou v dňoch 11. – 12. novembra 2021 v Bratislave," [Information and results of the 21st session of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Scientific Cooperation between Slovakia and Russian Federation, November 11–12, 2021 in Bratislava] UV-5773/2022, 64th session of the government, Office of Government of the Slovak Republic, February 23, 2022. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/26959/1> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

The discussions covered energy issues, including nuclear energy, industry, military-technical cooperation, education, science and technology, as well as standardization, metrology and conformity assessments. The negotiations were aimed at overcoming the negative trends: almost 90 per cent of Slovakia's Russian imports are energy raw materials and ore and concentrates are another key import. The Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic identified building relations with individual regions in the Russian Federation as a priority. As of November 2021, agreements on Joint Commissions of the Slovak Ministry of Economy have been concluded with the governments of the two largest Russian cities – Moscow and St. Petersburg – as well as with 16 other regions. The main Slovak foreign direct investments were the Matador Automotive plants in Nizhnyi Novgorod, Grafobal Group in Rostov on Don and OFZ Istebné in Novokuznetsk. Chirana+ started production in 2019 under its Slovak–Russian joint venture and expanded production capacity in 2021. Slovakia's representatives expressed interest in continuing long-term cooperation in “reliable gas and oil supplies” and transit to other European states, highlighting the superior relations in the oil sector. Both sides expressed an interest in the creation of the Slovak–Russian Association of Universities.

Relations with Russia also featured in domestic political debates on other issues. For example, the bilateral agreement on defense cooperation between Slovakia and the US, which was opposed by all the opposition parties. They argued that it presented a threat to national sovereignty and for example, Republika, warned of a possible military conflict with Russia. At its rally on November 17, 2021, former Slovak Prime Minister Ján Čarnogurský (1991–1992) criticized the sanctions against both Russia and President Alexander Lukashenko's regime in Belarus: “We cannot get along without Russia, which is able to provide support even to states like Slovakia.”<sup>15</sup>

In terms of relations with Russia, Central and East European societies were divided in 2021. According to a survey on the image of Russia in post-communist states,<sup>16</sup> up to 45 per cent of the region's population believed that NATO was deliberately provoking Russia by encircling it with military bases. While

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<sup>15</sup> “Minúta,” [Minute] *Denník N*, November 17, 2021. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2614566/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> D. Milo, “The image of Russia in Central & Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Russia: Mighty Slavic brother or hungry bear nextdoor?” *Globsec*, April 12, 2022. Available online: <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Image-of-Russia-Mighty-Slavic-Brother-or-Hungry-Bear-Nextdoor.pdf> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

40 percent held the opposing view that Russia was responsible for provoking NATO by instigating conflicts in Eastern Europe. Most people living in the region (56 per cent) did not feel threatened by Russia. Slovakia, together with Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, was included among the so called “bear huggers,” i.e. states expressing favorable views and sharing a high level of affinity towards Russia, partly in reference to Slavic heritage. Pro-Russian sentiments were most common in Slovakia of all the Central Eastern European states that are members of NATO and the EU.

As many as 42 per cent of Slovak respondents considered Russia an important strategic partner, a view that was especially common among those aged 65 and over (47 per cent) and less so among those aged 18–24 (29 per cent). Up to 61 per cent of respondents believed that Russia did not pose a danger to the country, while only 20 per cent thought the opposite. In Slovak public opinion, there was a dominant victimization discourse about Russia, under which Western powers often unjustly accused Russia of unlawful or fraudulent behavior (50 per cent). Only 39 per cent of respondents believed that “Russia is behaving aggressively against its neighbors and tries to weaken the EU and NATO.” As many as 56 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that NATO is deliberately provoking Russia by encircling it with military bases, while only 41 per cent agreed with the view that Russia was deliberately provoking NATO by instigating conflicts in Eastern Europe. Paradoxically, despite the victimization narratives, as many as 50 per cent of Slovak citizens thought that Russia's military power was far greater than that of any other country in the world, and only 47 per cent believed that to be true of the US. In terms of affiliation though, belonging to the West (29 per cent) was more prevalent in Slovakia than belonging to the East (11 per cent).

Other states, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and North Macedonia, were among the so-called beer feeders according to the survey; their inhabitants assessed Russia pragmatically, although they were inclined to accept some Russian narratives, but not the thesis of “Slavic brotherhood” and a common cultural or historical heritage. Poland and Hungary were classified as beer sceptics, i.e. not perceiving Russia as an important strategic partner. In these countries, the perception that Moscow was a threat prevailed.

In 2021, on the eve of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, the Slovak public still had illusions about being able to occupy a position “somewhere between” the West and the East, of building “friendly pragmatic” relations with Russia, or even viewing Russia as a peaceful actor and a victim of the West's aggressive policy. These public sentiments were copied by the political parties, with the “Russian question” dividing coalition and opposition

parties alike. The securitization of Russian relations gradually dominated the Slovak government discourse, but at the same time the ruling coalition still created opportunities for pragmatic cooperation on economic issues. This was evident in the words of State Secretary Martin Klus, who, referring to the experience of the 1990 s in December 2021, expressed the desire that “Russia could be not only a trading partner, but also a friend and an ally” so long as it didn’t conduct hybrid warfare.<sup>17</sup>

## ■ Ukraine – striving for a new opening

The governing coalition had already signaled its interest in strengthening relations with Ukraine when adopting the 2020 and 2021 Government Manifesto declaring its commitment to support Ukraine’s transformation, European perspective and territorial integrity.<sup>18</sup> This trend was kick-started by the visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Bratislava in September 2021, the first official visit by a Ukrainian head of state since 2011.

However, given the tensions in relations between Ukraine and Russia, security issues have become a key topic in bilateral Slovak–Ukrainian relations. The Slovak side has repeatedly stressed its support for Ukraine’s independence and territorial integrity, in bilateral negotiations and in multilateral fora, such as in connection with the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the occupation of Crimea, which Slovakia considers to be a violation of international law. At the heads of state level, Slovakia’s support for Ukraine’s efforts to become a member of the EU was expressed in a joint declaration on support for Ukraine’s European perspective by President Zuzana Čaputová and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Climate Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, on November 2, 2021.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Klus si želá dobré vzťahy s Ruskom, Slovensko nebude tolerovať hybridnú vojnu,” [Klus wants good relations with Russia, Slovakia will not tolerate hybrid war] *Webnoviny.sk*, December 23, 2021. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/klus-si-zela-dobre-vztahy-s-ruskom-slovensko-nebude-tolerovat-hybridnu-vojnu/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> “Programové vyhlásenie vlády SR,” [Government Manifesto] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2020, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> “Ukraine and Slovakia signed a declaration recognizing the European perspective,” *UATV*, November 2, 2021. Available online: <https://uatv.ua/en/ukraine-and-slovakia-signed-a-declaration-recognizing-the-european-perspective/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

A key event in bilateral Slovak–Ukrainian relations was the visit of Prime Minister Eduard Heger to Kyiv on May 28, 2021, during which Heger held talks with his Ukrainian counterpart Denis Shmyhal. He also met with President Zelensky and President of the Verkhovna Rada Dmytro Razumkov. Besides Foreign Minister Korčok, the delegation included Defense Minister Jaroslav Naď and State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy Ján Oravec. The composition of the delegation determined the topic of the joint negotiations, while the timing of the new prime minister’s visit, who took office after the government crisis, symbolized the importance of the neighborhood with Ukraine in the foreign policy of the Heger government. Ukraine was the third neighboring country after the Czech Republic and Austria that Heger visited as prime minister. The Prime Minister expressed his support for the reform process in Ukraine, stressing the need to improve the business environment. Slovakia has repeatedly expressed its support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

However, Heger’s visit also covered issues of economic cooperation. Ukraine confirmed its interest in cooperating with Slovakia on maintaining the Russian gas transit through the two countries, under threat from the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Both sides described it a “geopolitical” project and demanded guarantees that at least 50 billion m<sup>3</sup> of gas would be transported annually through the two countries after the completion of NS2.

Further topics of discussion included cooperation in hydrogen production and supply, the construction of logistics parks and labor migration. Concerning specific projects, cooperation in rail transport, logistics and transport infrastructure was discussed. The prime ministers agreed on the construction of a terminal on the Slovak–Ukrainian border, possibly in Dobrá near Čierna and Tisou. Ukrainian Prime Minister Shmyhal expressed an interest in joint border and customs controls with Slovakia and the creation of a working group for the construction of logistics parks. The Ukrainian side raised the issue of holding a meeting of the Slovak–Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Scientific and Technological Cooperation, and the prime ministers tentatively agreed to hold it in the fourth quarter of 2021. Given that the commission last met in 2011, this was a significant gesture confirming both sides’ interest in intensifying relations.

Another important part of the agenda in Heger’s negotiations with his Ukrainian counterparts was the issue of military-security cooperation, not only in connection with the blocking of negotiations on the regulation of the conflict in Donbas by the Russian Federation in the Normandy Four

format as well as in the Trilateral Contact Group. Ukrainian President Zelensky expressed interest in Slovakia's Božena demining system.<sup>20</sup>

The meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Scientific and Technological Cooperation, which was to be organized by the Ukrainian side, had to be postponed to the spring of 2022. Prime Minister Heger visited Ukraine again with a working visit to Uzhhorod on November 12, 2021. He and Ukrainian Prime Minister Shmyhal signed a joint statement on the prospects for cooperation. The Slovak prime minister affirmed that Slovakia respects the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and does not recognize the Russian occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and the city of Sevastopol. The prime ministers agreed to strengthen cooperation within the Crimean platform.

The prime ministers agreed to intensify cooperation as part of Ukraine's pathway to European and Euro-Atlantic integration, aimed at further deepening Ukraine's political association and economic integration with the EU, and specifically in relation to implementation of the Association Agreement. The prime ministers were therefore keen to underline the importance of the Joint Declaration on Recognition of the European perspective for Ukraine signed on November 2, 2021. They also stressed the strategic nature of bilateral cooperation in the field of energy and energy security and reaffirmed their common interest in further deepening cooperation in the transportation and transit of oil and natural gas and in Ukraine's integration into the European electricity and gas market, including synchronizing Ukraine's power grid with ENTSO-E and Ukraine's gas system with ENTSO-G. Slovakia pledged to help Ukraine integrate with the EU, for example with implementation of industrial product standards and roaming. Last but not least, the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian negotiations covered the implementation of the September 2021 agreement on the operation of Uzhhorod airport, where aircraft use part of Slovak airspace, and the possibility of a joint approach to facilitate the

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<sup>20</sup> "Informácia o priebehu a výsledkoch oficiálnej návštevy delegácie Slovenskej republiky vedenej predsedom vlády Slovenskej republiky Eduardom Hegerom na Ukrajinu dňa 28. 5. 2021," [Information and the results of the official visit of the delegation of the Slovak Republic led by Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic Eduard Heger to Ukraine, May 28, 2021] UV-11387/2021, 18th session of the government, Office of Government of the Slovak Republic, June 23, 2021. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/26144/1> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

transit of container trains from China through the territory of both countries.<sup>21</sup> One of the outcomes of Prime Minister Heger's visit to Uzhhorod was the approval of a proposal for the further development of relations and cooperation between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine at the government meeting on January 12, 2022. It is conceptual and contains the short- and medium-term priorities of relations between Slovakia and Ukraine, with the following main priorities:

- a. support for reforms and cooperation in the implementation of Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU;
- b. streamlining the work of bilateral intergovernmental and joint commissions;
- c. development of cross-border cooperation at regional level.<sup>22</sup>

The proposal is based on more extensive analytical and policy materials produced by the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, and, in addition to identifying Slovakia's interests in relation to Ukraine, includes a proposed strategy for the development of relations with its eastern neighbor in the medium term.<sup>23</sup> Priorities in the economic and security spheres are of crucial importance. Another important step was the decision made by the deputies of Košice self-governing region in December 2021 to initiate a feasibility study for the extension of the D1 highway from Bidovce to the Ukrainian border.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Joint Statement by Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal and Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic Eduard Heger," Governmental Portal, November 12, 2021. Available online: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/spilna-zayava-premyer-ministra-ukrayini-denis-shmigalya-ta-premyer-ministra-slovakoyi-respubliki-eduarda-gegera> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> "Návrh na ďalší rozvoj vzťahov a spolupráce Slovenskej republiky s Ukrajinou," [Proposal for further development of relations and cooperation between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine] UV-346/2022, 52nd session of the government, Office of Government of the Slovak Republic, January 12, 2022. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/26824/1> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> A. Duleba, *Bilaterálne vzťahy SR s Ukrajinou a prognóza ich vývoja v strednodobej perspektíve*. [Bilateral relations between Slovakia and Ukraine and medium-term forecast] Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> "Košický kraj vypracuje štúdiu o diaľnici D1 na Ukrajinu. Vláda sa už potom nebude mať na čo vyhovárať," [Košice Region will produce a study on the D1 motorway to Ukraine. Then the government will have no excuse] *Webnoviny*, December 21, 2021. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/nasadoprava/kosicky-kraj-vypracuje-studiu-o-dialnici-d1-po-ukrajinu-vlada-sa-uz-potom-nebude-mat-na-co-vyhovarat/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

At the multilateral level, Slovakia sought to involve Ukraine in a newly established regional initiative, namely the Central Five. For the first time Foreign Minister D. Kuleba attended the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and Slovakia, on May 12–13, 2021, in Bratislava. The purpose of the invitation was to engage non-V4 countries such as Austria and Slovenia in discussions on the future of the Eastern Partnership, as well as on developments in the Donbas conflict and Euro-Atlantic cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

The year 2021 represented a significant breakthrough in Slovak–Ukrainian relations, not only in terms of the intensity of bilateral contacts, but also in terms of efforts to define Slovak foreign policy priorities vis-à-vis Ukraine and plan the implementation. Both governments took important steps to specify the long declared interest of both sides to strengthen cooperation in individual sectors. Specific issues in cross-border cooperation, including improving transport links between the two countries, were discussed. Both governments sought to transform Slovak–Ukrainian relations from a transformation assistance provider – recipient relationship, or partner providing assistance and support to Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia, to a relationship of equal partners discussing common interests. In 2021, the Slovak government sought to make relations with Ukraine more systematic, as evidenced in the appointments of Slovakia’s leading expert on Ukrainian affairs, Alexander Duleba, as Adviser to the Prime Minister on Relations with Eastern European States, with a primary focus on Ukraine, as of September 1, 2021, and Eduard Buraš as Adviser to the Prime Minister on Cross-Border Cooperation, with a primary focus on relations with Ukraine, as of January 1, 2022. However, rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine, as well as Russia and the West, have meant that, despite these intentions, security issues have been most visible on the day-to-day agenda.

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<sup>25</sup> “Minister Ivan Korčok in Talks with His Partners from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, and Ukraine: Close regional cooperation is the way to an earlier return to the safe cross-border movement of people and to economic recovery after the end of the pandemic,” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 13, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/oLViwP07vPxv/content/minister-ivan-korcok-na-rokovani-s-partnermi-z-ceska-madarska-rakuska-a-slovinska-a-ukrajiny-uzka-regionalna-spolupraca-je-cestou-k-skorsiemu-navratu/10182](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset_publisher/oLViwP07vPxv/content/minister-ivan-korcok-na-rokovani-s-partnermi-z-ceska-madarska-rakuska-a-slovinska-a-ukrajiny-uzka-regionalna-spolupraca-je-cestou-k-skorsiemu-navratu/10182) (accessed on March 16, 2022).

## ■ Frozen relations with Belarus

After the suppression of civic protests in Belarus against the falsification of the presidential elections in 2020, opportunities for Slovak–Belarusian bilateral cooperation reduced to a minimum. Mutual relations were affected in particular by the forced landing of a civilian plane flying from Athens to Vilnius at Minsk airport in May 2021 under the “politically motivated pretext of a terrorist threat”; the real reason being the detention of opposition journalist Raman Pratasevich and his girlfriend. On behalf of the Slovak government Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok protested against this act to the Chargé d’affaires of Belarus in Bratislava.<sup>26</sup> At the EU Foreign Affairs Council, Slovakia backed sanctions against Belarusian regime officials and companies responsible for the incident.<sup>27</sup> However, the division in Slovak society over “Eastern politics” was in evidence when the deputy leader of the opposition party Smer–SD Ľuboš Blaha claimed, in line with the Belarusian state media, that Pratasevich was a member of the neo-Nazi Azov unit fighting in Ukraine. A view shared by the columnist Eduard Chmelár.<sup>28</sup>

In November 2021, Slovakia supported Poland in a dispute with Belarus over the refugee crisis on the Belarus border with the EU, with State Secretary of the Ministry of Defense Marián Majer accusing Belarus of using refugees as a “tool of hybrid warfare” against the EU. The V4 prime ministers

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<sup>26</sup> Z. Gálisová, “Rezort diplomacie si predvolal bieloruského chargé d’affaires,” [Foreign Ministry summoned Belarusian chargé d’affaires] *TV Noviny.sk*, May 24, 2021. Available online: <https://tvnoviny.sk/domace/clanok/132929-rezort-diplomacie-si-predvolal-bieloruskeho-charge-d-affaires> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> “Martin Klus: With the sanctions aimed at those standing behind the brutality of Lukashenko’s regime and supporting it, the EU sends another signal of hope and support to the citizens of Belarus,” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 21, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/oLViwP07vPxv/content/martin-klus-sankciami-voci-tym-ktori-stoja-za-brutalitou-lukashenkovo-rezimu-a-podporuju-ho-vysiela-eu-dalsi-signal-nadeje-a-podpory-pre-obyvatelov-bi/10182](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset_publisher/oLViwP07vPxv/content/martin-klus-sankciami-voci-tym-ktori-stoja-za-brutalitou-lukashenkovo-rezimu-a-podporuju-ho-vysiela-eu-dalsi-signal-nadeje-a-podpory-pre-obyvatelov-bi/10182) (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> V. Šnidl, “Facebookom sa šíri kompro na bieloruského novinára, na hajlujúcich mužov sa nepodobá,” [Kompromat on the Belarusian journalist is spreading on Facebook, he doesn’t look like the Nazi salute men] *DenníkN*, May 26, 2021. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/2405116/facebookom-sa-siri-kompro-na-bieloruskeho-novinara-na-hajlujucich-muzov-sa-nepodoba-ani-vizualne/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

expressed solidarity with Poland and Heger offered Poland assistance in protecting its borders.<sup>29</sup>

## ■ Instead of a conclusion – the shift to a new paradigm in Slovakia's Eastern policy

At the turn of 2021 and 2022 and particularly in light of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, Slovakia's eastern policy options changed from the ground up. The ultimatums, disguised as "draft agreements," that the Russians sent to the US<sup>30</sup> and NATO<sup>31</sup> on December 17, 2021, amounted not just to a demand against further NATO enlargement, but also for NATO to return to its pre-May 1997 state, before the signing of the NATO–Russia Founding Act. These proposals alone meant a fundamental change to the security position of Slovakia and the other NATO member states in Central and Eastern Europe, and yet Russia did not even consider giving them an opportunity to comment on them.

Subsequent developments demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of Slovakia's "Eastern policy," among other things. They revealed just how vulnerable Slovakia's international position would be if it were not part of the EU and NATO, but also the limits of an independent multi-vectoral approach towards Eastern Europe. But it also exposed the divisions in Slovak society. The opposition parties, especially Smer–SD, ĽSNS and Republika, denied there was any possibility of Russian aggression against Ukraine until the last moment; instead, they accused the West, NATO and the Slovak government

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<sup>29</sup> "Slovensko plne podporuje Poľsko a využívanie utečencov proti Únii je neakceptovateľné, skonštatoval Majer," [Slovakia fully supports Poland and using refugees against the Union is unacceptable, Majer said] *Webnoviny*, November 10, 2021. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko-plne-podporuje-polsko-a-vyuzivanie-utecencov-proti-unii-je-neakceptovatelne-skonstatoval-majer/> (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>30</sup> "Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, December 17, 2021. Available online: [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en) (accessed on March 16, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> "Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, December 17, 2021. Available online: [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en) (accessed on March 16, 2022).

of having aggressive intentions. As late as the end of January 2022, according to a Focus poll, as many as 44 per cent of respondents blamed the US for escalating tensions on the Ukrainian-Russian border, while almost 33 per cent blamed Russia. After the outbreak of the war, opinions changed radically. According to an AKO poll of February 25, 2022, as many as 62 per cent of the population held Russia responsible for the war, while 25 per cent held the US responsible. Other culprits included NATO (8.9 per cent), Ukraine (7.8 per cent) and the EU (5 per cent).<sup>32</sup> Although the majority of MPs from the opposition parties Smer–SD and Hlas–SD voted in favor of the resolution condemning Russia's aggression, ĽSNS and Republika MPs and some prominent Smer–SD MPs did not participate in the vote (Ľuboš Blaha, Ladislav Kamenický, Dušan Jariabek, Ján Podmanický), unlike party leader Robert Fico. This suggests that in the future, despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, "eastern policy" may remain the subject of internal political conflicts. On the other hand, the arrival of more than 200,000 war refugees (as of March 2022) triggered an unprecedented wave of solidarity with Ukraine and its citizens.

Consequently, the aggression against Ukraine has virtually minimized the possibility of pragmatic cooperation with Russia. The best response to the current security situation seems to be a policy aimed at intensifying cooperation with Ukraine both bilaterally, in cooperation with neighboring states (e.g. the S3 foreign ministers' visit to Ukraine on February 10, 2022), and as an EU and NATO member. The war, which is not only an act of aggression by a great power against a significantly weaker neighbor but is presented by the Russian president as part of the conflict between Russia and the West, will force Slovakia to rethink its starting points on external security but also energy policy, internal security, foreign trade, food security and international migration. The EU's eastern border has definitively ceased to be a border of peaceful cooperation; on the contrary, the conflict between Russia and the West is likely to continue over the long-term. For the first time since the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, accompanied by military clashes, Slovakia is exposed to war in its immediate neighborhood, and again (like in 1968) the source of aggression is Russia, or rather its predecessor – the USSR.

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<sup>32</sup> P. Blaško, "Exkluzívny prieskum pre HN: Slováci otočili. Väčšina ľudí si myslí, že za vojnu môže Rusko," [Exclusive survey for HN: Slovaks have changed their mind. Most people think Russia is to blame for the war] *Hospodárske noviny*, February 26, 2022. Available online: <https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/22558282-prieskum-vojna-na-ukrajine-kto-je-zodpovedny> (accessed on March 16, 2022).



Július Lőrincz

# Western Balkans - cold currents in the enlargement process

Year after year, this chapter of the *Yearbook of Slovak Foreign Policy* could begin by saying that the Western Balkans are at the forefront of Slovak diplomacy's efforts to build up the state's position and pursue its interests in international relations. It is a point keenly made by Slovakia's state representatives and all the key foreign ministers, from Eduard Kukan, the father and creator of Slovak diplomacy – who died recently, to Miroslav Lajčák, Ján Kubiš, Mikuláš Dzurinda, and the current Minister, Ivan Korčok.

Crucially though they don't just talk about it but act on it in both their political and professional work, together with the apparatus of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Partner countries, both internationally and specifically in the Western Balkans, are well aware of this. It has long been emphasized in Slovakia's foreign and European policy strategies that it is in Slovakia's interests to achieve stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans, along with the application of EU values and norms, and of course full EU integration as soon as is possible.

Support for the transformation of the Western Balkan countries, a basic prerequisite to the fulfillment of Euro-Atlantic ambitions, is one of the main priorities of Slovak foreign policy. The Foreign Ministry has therefore welcomed both the European Commission's proposal to modify the accession process procedures and the new methodology aimed at improving the dynamism and efficiency of the enlargement process. This new stage in the potential EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, alongside efforts to revive the stagnant dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, should demonstrate the EU's capacity to advance European integration in the south-east of the continent, against the disintegrative hegemonic efforts of both Russia and China in the region. And, in tandem with the heightened American interest in stabilizing the region, it should give new impetus to Euro-Atlantic integration. In this geopolitical context, and with its knowledge of the region

and sustained engagement in the Western Balkans, Slovakia has a significant role to play.

Throughout 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok, and state secretaries Ingrid Brocková, and Martin Klus have been very active in raising the question of the Western Balkans' EU enlargement in bilateral contacts and multilateral fora. This has not been easy given the ongoing pandemic, which sometimes drastically limited communication options even in the sphere of diplomacy.

In May, at the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels, Minister Korčok was able to get a substantive discussion on the Western Balkans on the agenda. The last time it was discussed in this format was almost two years ago. He pointed out that it did not just concern our neighbors but also the European area, where we want stability, security, and closer cooperation, and where we need to be a leader.<sup>1</sup>

But it also means, for example, that the Union must not allow bilateral issues to delay the accession process, as is the case in relations between Bulgaria, an EU member state, and North Macedonia (an EU candidate country). The opening of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia (and Albania, as it and Macedonia are in a "common package") has frequently been postponed. The Slovak diplomatic corps, in cooperation with Czech partners, has taken decisive action in this direction. In an interview with the European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Oliver Várhelyi, Korčok

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<sup>1</sup> Minister Ivan Korčok stressed that enlargement policy remains a key EU instrument but the question is its effective use. The new methodology for the accession process was supposed to make it more dynamic, but so far the opposite is happening. Minister Ivan Korčok stated "We should develop relations with the countries of the Western Balkans also beyond the framework of the accession process. We should not reduce our communication with our partners in the Western Balkans to technical negotiations. Regarding the issues of foreign policy, we should hold a debate in the spirit of partnership with the countries of the Western Balkans. If the EU wishes to be a global player, it must be a clear-cut leader in its own neighborhood," See "Minister I. Korčok at the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers in Brussels: 'If the EU wishes to be a global player, it must be a clear-cut leader in its own neighborhood; this is particularly valid for the Western Balkans,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 10, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-korcok-na-rokovani-ministrov-zahranicnych-veci-v-bruseli-ak-chce-byt-eu-globalnym-hracom-musi-byt-jednoznacnym-lidrom-vo-svojom-susedstve-oso/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D4%26strana%3D2](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-korcok-na-rokovani-ministrov-zahranicnych-veci-v-bruseli-ak-chce-byt-eu-globalnym-hracom-musi-byt-jednoznacnym-lidrom-vo-svojom-susedstve-oso/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D4%26strana%3D2) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

stressed that the accession process should not be burdened by unresolved bilateral issues between states. It must not become hostage to them.<sup>2</sup>

In October 2021, after the EU–Western Balkans summit in Brdo pri Kranji, Slovenia, Prime Minister Eduard Heger was delighted that the word "enlargement" appeared in the joint declaration, which he considered to be a significant step forward compared to the previous summits in Zagreb and Sofia.

There is strong determination to continue the accession negotiations, to help as much as possible to keep them on track. Because enlarging the EU to include the Western Balkans is crucial for the future of Europe.<sup>3</sup>

## ■ Weak ambitions of the summit in Slovenia

Of course, the joy not only of the Slovak delegation but also the other participants of the Brdo pri Kranji summit at the word "enlargement" appearing in the final document does not point to any great ambitions in the accession process. The first such summit in Thessaloniki in 2003 was far more ambitious, with delegates adopting a declaration stating "the future of the Balkans lies in the European Union." In last year's joint declaration the important words were "that the EU must maintain and deepen its development, ensuring the capacity to integrate new members," i.e. the Western Balkan enlargement was not the priority. Rikard Jozwiak, a well-known columnist and

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<sup>2</sup> Minister Ivan Korčok stated, "This approach is harmful and demotivating. However, we are ready to negotiate further and seek an acceptable solution that is in line with the objectives of the new methodology agreed by all member states in March 2020 – namely to ensure a more dynamic and credible accession process." See "Minister Ivan Korčok in talks with European Commissioner Oliver Várhelyi: 'The accession process to the European Union must not be made a hostage to bilateral disputes,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 11, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-ivan-korcok-v-rozhovore-s-eurokomisarom-oliverom-varhelyim-pristupovy-proces-do-europskej-unie-sa-nesmie-stat-rukojemnikom-bilateralnych-spor/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D0%26strana%3D2](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-ivan-korcok-v-rozhovore-s-eurokomisarom-oliverom-varhelyim-pristupovy-proces-do-europskej-unie-sa-nesmie-stat-rukojemnikom-bilateralnych-spor/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D0%26strana%3D2) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> "Premiér: Summit bol dôležitý, vo vyhlásení sa objavilo slovo rozširovanie," [Prime minister: The summit was important, the word enlargement appeared in the declaration] *TASR*, October 6, 2021. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/premier-summit-bol-dolezity-vo-vyhlase-sa-objavilo-slovo-rozsirovanie/> (accessed on March 9, 2022).



specialist on European issues, noted that this was an attempt to reassure skeptics in France, Denmark, and the Netherlands. It is the equivalent of saying “we have many internal issues in the EU that we have to deal with, so please do not bother us with questions about membership.” It is telling that at the summit they immediately rejected Slovenia’s attempt to give the remaining six Western Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Northern Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo) at least some kind of timeframe for their membership prospects. So, is there any point in convening annual enlargement summits – as the EU has committed to doing – when they make almost no progress?<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the key issue at the moment remains drafting and adopting the EU negotiating framework on the substance of the accession process and deciding the date for the first EU–North Macedonia–Albania intergovernmental conference. It has been pending for almost two years and so far we have seen only promises and several postponements. The decision is also extremely important for maintaining the credibility of the Union. That is why, for example, last November in Paris, at a meeting on the French Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2022, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Affairs, Martin Klus, reminded his French counterpart, Clément Beaune, that Slovakia views enlargement policy as a strategic EU instrument. It has to be said in dialogue with the French diplomatic representative because France is an important EU country that has proved reluctant on EU enlargement. Enlargement was once the EU’s most successful policy, but today it is a source of frustration: “The opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia should be carried out without further delay, as both countries have already met the requirements.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R. Jozwiak, “Samo nemojte pitati za EU članstvo,” [Just don’t ask about EU membership] *Radio Free Europe*, October 7, 2021. Available online: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/samit-eu-zapadni-balkan-brdo-kod-kranja/31496337.html> (accessed on March 9, 2022). Jozwiak has been working for many years on the problems of the functioning and enlargement of the European Union and especially the Western Balkans. Significantly, his writing is often published with the disclaimer that his views “do not necessarily reflect the views of Radio Free Europe.” This is also the case with the quote on the EU–Western Balkans summit in Slovenia in October 2021.

<sup>5</sup> “Martin Klus in Paris: ‘During its EU Council Presidency, France can count on Slovakia, as a constructive partner, to find solutions that benefit citizens,’” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, November 27, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-parizi-francuzsko-moze-aj-pocas-predsednictva-rady-eu-pocitat-so-slovenskom-ako-s-konstruktivnym-partnerom-pri-hladani-rieseni-v-prospec/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D10](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-parizi-francuzsko-moze-aj-pocas-predsednictva-rady-eu-pocitat-so-slovenskom-ako-s-konstruktivnym-partnerom-pri-hladani-rieseni-v-prospec/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D10) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

## ■ Slovak diplomacy

Let us turn to how Slovak diplomacy tackled this issue in 2021 in direct cooperation with the two Western Balkan countries. In June, the heads of the foreign ministries of Slovakia and North Macedonia, Ivan Korčok and Bujar Osmani, met in Bratislava, where they opened the North Macedonian embassy in Slovakia. Minister I. Korčok expressed Slovakia’s support for the earliest possible commencement of EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia and reaffirmed his readiness to continue sharing Slovakia’s experience of the Euro-integration process along with its successful project, the Slovak National Convention on the EU. The project is being implemented in both North Macedonia and Albania in 2021–2023. At the end of 2021, a videoconference plenary session was held in Tirana. It was organized by the European Movement in Albania in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), with financial support from SlovakAid.<sup>6</sup>

A key moment was the working visits of State Secretary Martin Klus in April–May 2021, first to North Macedonia, and then to Albania, where he met and held talks with a wide range of political and social leaders. He underlined that their future lies in the European Union and that the project of a united Europe will never be complete without the Western Balkans. He reminded them that progress in the key areas of the rule of law, the fight against corruption, and media freedom will be particularly important in the accession process.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Minister Ivan Korčok: ‘The opening of the Embassy of North Macedonia in Bratislava is a confirmation of the excellent relations between our countries,’” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 15, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-korcok-otvorenie-velvyslanectva-severneho-macedonska-v-bratislave-je-potvrdenim-vyborych-vztahov-nasich-krajin/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D5%26strana%3D2](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-korcok-otvorenie-velvyslanectva-severneho-macedonska-v-bratislave-je-potvrdenim-vyborych-vztahov-nasich-krajin/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D5%26strana%3D2) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> “Martin Klus: ‘We support accession negotiations with North Macedonia and are counting on its European future. The Western Balkans need to be integrated into the EU as soon as possible,’” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, April 30, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-skopje-podporujeme-pristupove-rokovania-so-severnym-macedonskom-a-pocitame-s-jeho-europskou-buducnostou-zapadni-balkan-treba-integrovat/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D3](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-skopje-podporujeme-pristupove-rokovania-so-severnym-macedonskom-a-pocitame-s-jeho-europskou-buducnostou-zapadni-balkan-treba-integrovat/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D3) (accessed on March 9 2022); “Martin Klus in Tirana: ‘Albania’s getting closer to the European Union would strengthen the stability of the Western Balkans region and open up many opportunities for Slovakia as well,’” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 1, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-tirane-priblizenie-albanska-k-europskej-unii-by-posilnilo-stabilitu-regionu-zapadneho-balkanu-a-otvorilo-mnozstvo-prilezitosti-aj-pre-sl/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D4%26strana%3D3](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-tirane-priblizenie-albanska-k-europskej-unii-by-posilnilo-stabilitu-regionu-zapadneho-balkanu-a-otvorilo-mnozstvo-prilezitosti-aj-pre-sl/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D4%26strana%3D3) (accessed on March 9 2022).

In July, the dialogue continued in Bratislava at a meeting between Martin Klus and the Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to the Slovak Republic, Enkeleda Mërkuri. The Slovak Foreign Ministry also been active on the Western Balkans in regional fora such as the Visegrad Four (V4) or Slavkov Triangle (S3). In the S3, for example, Slovakia and the Czech Republic interact with Austria, the latter being not only a long-standing supporter of EU integration of the Western Balkans but also one of the most important investors in the region.

## ■ Stagnation in the expansion process

Despite the stagnation of the enlargement process, complicated by the international crisis caused mainly by the escalation of Russia's aggression toward Ukraine, the European Union, NATO, and the USA, the accession process in the Western Balkans has not frozen over completely, but it is being exposed to cold currents. Regarding Serbia, the European Commission has not opened a single chapter of its accession process in two years, and in Montenegro, following the change of government triggered by the parliamentary elections in August 2020, the accession process has essentially come to a standstill, although it has been the most successful so far – it has opened all 33 chapters of the accession negotiations and provisionally closed three. The political polarization that was already leaving its mark before the 2020 parliamentary elections has been exacerbated in the post-election period, i.e. in 2021 and the first months of 2022. Relations between politicians and in society generally, along with the mistrust within the new government, have deteriorated and destabilized the overall internal political situation with consequences for Montenegro's external relations.

Looking at the Western Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina is perhaps least ready to begin the EU accession process. There is no coherent, unifying vision on the organization and future of the country, which is both disintegrated and dysfunctional. In the second half of 2021, there was a strengthening in threats and actions by the ruling nationalist political stream in Republika Srpska, one of the two entities comprising Bosnia and Herzegovina, aimed at administrative moves (especially in the sphere of justice, security, and military structures) toward separation. These actions are associated in particular with Milorad Dodik, the dominant figure among the nationalist forces in Republika Srpska, and one of the three members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the collective head of state.

This trend and painful problem is perhaps even more complex than the disagreements in relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The existing tensions escalated in September 2021, with disagreements over the use of car registration numbers to the extent that armed forces were deployed on or near the border (administrative line), with the Kosovo police on one side and the Serbian army on the other. The air force is also involved on the Serbian side. The Russian Ambassador to Serbia, Aleksandr Bocan Kharchenko, accompanied by the Minister of Defense, Nebojsa Stefanovic, and his military attaché, Major-General Aleksandr Zinchenko, visited the nearby Serbian army base at Rudnica in support.

On September 30, 2021, Miroslav Lajčák, the European Union's Special Representative for the Serbia–Kosovo and Western Balkans Dialogue was finally able to post on Twitter: "Belgrade and Pristina have reached an agreement on the resolution of the crisis in the north of Kosovo." After two days of intensive talks, he and his Serbian and Kosovo counterparts agreed on de-escalation and a way forward. The working groups from the EU and the two countries should finally agree on a solution to the problem within six months, i.e. by April 2022.<sup>8</sup>

As far as Slovakia's contribution to the efforts to achieve a solution to these problems in the Western Balkans is concerned, bilateral contacts between key figures in Slovak foreign policy and their counterparts in Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have undoubtedly played an important role.

In July 2021, the President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanović, visited Slovakia and held talks with Korčok. These were dominated by the further deepening of Slovak–Montenegrin relations, including the strengthening of the economic dimension and the EU integration of Montenegro and other Western Balkan countries, the situation in the region, and the fight against COVID-19. Assessing the situation in the Western Balkans, the Slovak foreign minister expressed concern about the rise of nationalism in the region, including in Montenegro, and attempts to redraw the borders in the Western Balkans.

In this context, President Djukanović said, among other things, that the country had also lost more investors and business, without which there can

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<sup>8</sup> "Dogovoreno raspoređivanje KFOR-a na Jarinju i Brnjaku," [Agreed KFOR deployment to Jarinje and Brnjak] *Slobodna Evropa*, September 30, 2021. Available online: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-kosovo-brisel-sever-kriza/31485447.html> (accessed on March 9, 2022).

be no dynamic development, and that Montenegro is losing speed and time on the road to membership in the European Union.<sup>9</sup>

Further discussion on details of the cooperation between Slovakia and Montenegro, especially regarding EU integration took place during State Secretary Martin Klus's working visit to Podgorica. He assured his hosts that Slovakia would continue to be one of the most vocal supporters of Montenegro and other Western Balkan countries on their EU pathway.<sup>10</sup>

Bilateral contacts with Serbia were strongly in evidence last year at the ministerial level. At the invitation of Minister Korčok, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Nikola Selaković arrived in Bratislava at the end of October. The two ministers assessed cooperation, agreeing that there was still room to strengthen economic and trade cooperation.

In terms of trade exchange and especially investment activities of Slovak companies, Serbia is Slovakia's most important partner in the region. At the same time, we are convinced that mutual trade has room for further growth, there are many untapped business opportunities in sectors where Slovakia has something to offer to Serbia,

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<sup>9</sup> We want to translate our excellent relations with Montenegro into concrete projects of economic cooperation and Slovak investments. President Djukanović thanked Slovakia for its long-standing support for the Euro-integration ambitions. On the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of Montenegro's independence, he recalled the historic contribution of Slovak diplomacy to the regaining of the country's independence. He also thanked for the selfless assistance of the Slovak Republic, which since the beginning of the pandemic has exceeded €100 000 and has been directed mainly to the health sector. See "Minister Ivan Korčok: 'We wish to translate our excellent relations with Montenegro into concrete projects for economic cooperation and Slovak investments in the country,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, July 16, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-ivan-korcok-vyborne-vztahy-s-ciernou-horou- chceme-pretavit-do-konkretnych-projektov-ekonomickej-spoluprace-a-slovenskych-investicii-v-krajine/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D6](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-ivan-korcok-vyborne-vztahy-s-ciernou-horou- chceme-pretavit-do-konkretnych-projektov-ekonomickej-spoluprace-a-slovenskych-investicii-v-krajine/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D6) (accessed on March 9 2022).

<sup>10</sup> State Secretary Martin Klus in Podgorica told his partners that Euro-integration is "a path to greater stability and a strong application of democratic values...Slovakia will not only support you in this, but also share our experience if you wish, in order to avoid the mistakes that have been made" See "State Secretary Martin Klus in Podgorica: 'Slovakia will continue to be one of the most vocal supporters of Montenegro and the other countries of the Western Balkans on their path to the EU,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, July 21, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/statny-tajomnik-martin-klus-v-podgorici-slovensko-bude-aj-nadalej-jednym-z-najhlasnej-sich-podporovatelov-ciernej-hory-a-dalsich-krajin-zapadneho-balka/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D6](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/statny-tajomnik-martin-klus-v-podgorici-slovensko-bude-aj-nadalej-jednym-z-najhlasnej-sich-podporovatelov-ciernej-hory-a-dalsich-krajin-zapadneho-balka/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D6) (accessed on March 9 2022).

Minister Korčok said. The partners also discussed the current situation in the region, including the state of the Belgrade–Pristina dialogue, which is led by EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the accession process, the European Union's intergovernmental conferences with Montenegro and Serbia at the end of 2021 were important in taking stock of the status of integration. The Slovak Republic was actively represented at these forums by State Secretary Klus.

At the EU–Montenegro Intergovernmental Conference it was noted, among other things, that Montenegro is formally furthest along in the EU integration process and is the leader among the Western Balkan countries. However, one cannot underestimate the harm the internal political instability is doing to the country's international position. It has been impossible to find an effective government line-up, even within the ruling majority, capable of, among other things, leading the country's integration and reform process.

At the EU–Serbia Intergovernmental Conference, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić reported that her country had so far opened 22 chapters of the accession process (including Cluster 4, to be opened in December 2021 using the new methodology approved by the European Commission in early 2020). Two chapters have been provisionally closed by Serbia so far. Cluster 4 includes the previous four chapters of the accession process – transport, energy, trans-European networks, and the environment with climate change. In contact with its Serbian partners, Slovak diplomats continually point out that the rule of law and human rights and freedoms are the cornerstones of successful EU enlargement. In light of this, recent actions by political leaders in Serbia can be seen positively – the referendum on constitutional changes paved the way to reducing political influence in the judiciary and to an independent judiciary, including judges and prosecutors. Positive changes have

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<sup>11</sup> Minister Korčok stated, "The Slovak Republic supports the continuation of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, as well as the full implementation of all commitments based on the agreements reached. We expect that the dialogue will result in a legally binding agreement that will clearly define the relationship between the two parties." See "Minister Ivan Korčok: 'Serbia is our biggest trade partner in the region, it is also in our interest to support its future membership in the EU,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 28, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-i-korcok-srbsko-je-nasim-najvacsim-obchodnym-partnerom-v-regione-je-aj-v-nasom-zaujme-podporovat-jeho-buduce-clenstvo-v-eu/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-i-korcok-srbsko-je-nasim-najvacsim-obchodnym-partnerom-v-regione-je-aj-v-nasom-zaujme-podporovat-jeho-buduce-clenstvo-v-eu/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9) (accessed on March 9 2022).

also been achieved through efforts to establish a democratic dialogue on holding parliamentary elections.<sup>12</sup>

The European Parliament's mediation mission, led by the EP rapporteur on Serbia, Slovak MEP Vladimír Bilčík, played a key role here. The remarkable Slovak diplomat Eduard Kukan made a valuable contribution to this four-member mission. Thanks to his proverbial ability to overcome barriers and pave the way for understanding, even with partners with whom he did not always share common views.<sup>13</sup> For several months, the mission held a dialogue on the floor of the Serbian Parliament with the opposition, which had boycotted the previous parliamentary elections. As a result, the majority of the opposition decided not to boycott the elections this time, and they drew up a plan of 16 measures to ensure fair elections. Bilčík assesses the whole process as "a positive step forward ahead of the April elections in Serbia." He described the media as polarized but said public radio and television had improved. The presidential elections, early parliamentary elections, and regional elections in Belgrade are to be held on April 3, 2022.

The European 'Commission's report on Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2021 was highly critical. The assessments were worse than for any other country in the region. The commission's experts saw no progress in the fight against corruption and organized crime nor in public procurement and warned that the legislative and executive powers had little influence on the country's affairs due to both the political polarization and the negative effects of the pandemic. On the positive side, Bosnia and Herzegovina has stepped up their efforts to manage the migration situation, but there is still a lack of systematic effort

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<sup>12</sup> "Martin Klus in Brussels: 'We welcome the shift of Montenegro and Serbia in the accession negotiations with the EU. Slovakia's experience shows that reforms will improve the lives of citizens,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, December 14, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-bruseli-vitame-posun-ciernej-hory-a-srbska-v-pristupovych-rokovaniach-s-eu-skusenosti-slovenska-dokazuju-ze-reformy-zlepsia-zivot-obcانو/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D11](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-bruseli-vitame-posun-ciernej-hory-a-srbska-v-pristupovych-rokovaniach-s-eu-skusenosti-slovenska-dokazuju-ze-reformy-zlepsia-zivot-obcانو/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D11) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> "Bilčík ocenio da ima pozitivnog napretka u Srbiji pred izbore u aprilu," [Bilčík praised the progress made in Serbia ahead of the elections in April] *Slobodna Evropa*, January 29, 2022. Available online: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bilcik-srbija-izbori-uslovi/31677287.html> Besides Bilčík, the mission members were Slovenian politician Tanja Fajon and two former MEPs Knut Fleckenstein and Eduard Kukan, who died suddenly shortly after returning to Bratislava from Belgrade. It was his last working trip in the service of the European Parliament. (accessed on March 9, 2022).

in this regard. According to State Secretary Klus, progress on the European integration process in particular, would help to address the situation not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but across the Western Balkans. He believes that the European project will not be complete until the Western Balkan countries are part of it. This can only be achieved by maintaining an intensive and balanced political dialogue with the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this context, the state secretary welcomed Sarajevo's decision to establish a Bosnia and Herzegovina consulate in Bratislava.<sup>14</sup>

In the Western Balkans, and particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the news that the European military force in Sarajevo, EUFOR Althea, will be reinforced has been positively received. In addition to the existing 500 troops from 19 countries, another 600 will come from Bulgaria, Austria, Romania, and Slovakia. The rationale for behind this is:

The deteriorating security situation at international level could potentially trigger instability in BaH. This is a prudent measure that reflects the clear commitment of the EU and EUFOR to safeguarding the integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Security analysts stress that the EU is not strengthening its military presence in the country because of the war in Ukraine but primarily because of the separatist-motivated actions of the ruling circles in Republika Srpska, which are an unconstitutional attempt to transfer state powers to Republika Srpska. In January 2021, the Slovak authorities approved an increase in the size of both the Slovak military contingent in the country and the reserve force for Operation EUFOR Althea. During his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, State Secretary Martin Klus stressed that Slovakia cares about the peaceful future and prosperity of the country so is lending a helping hand.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Martin Klus in Sarajevo: 'The vivid memories of the war show how fragile peace is and how important the stability is that European integration can bring,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, July 22, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-sarajeve-zive-spomienky-na-vojnu-dokazuju-aky-krehky-je-mier-a-aka-dolezita-je-stabilita-ktorou-moze-priniest-eurointegracia/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D6](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-v-sarajeve-zive-spomienky-na-vojnu-dokazuju-aky-krehky-je-mier-a-aka-dolezita-je-stabilita-ktorou-moze-priniest-eurointegracia/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D6) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> "EUFOR-u stiže pojačanje u BiH zbog prijetnji iznutra, ne spolja," [EUFOR gets reinforcements in B&H because of the threat from within, not because of the threat from without] *Slobodna Evropa*, February 25, 2022. Available online: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/nato-eufor-bih-bosna-rs-rusija-ukrajina/31723464.html> (accessed on March 9, 2022).

## ■ Western Balkans at the Svetoslav Bombik Analytical Days

The launch of the Svetoslav Bombik Analytical Days in October 2021 is a remarkable initiative by the Foreign Ministry in cooperation with a group of NGOs and experts led by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA). The two-day expert discussions on the analysis of ten areas of Slovak foreign policy had been prepared by experts in the previous months of the year. The whole event was part of the process of creating the Medium-term Strategy of the Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic for the fourth decade in the history of Slovakia as a separate, independent, and democratic state. The strategic document will be finalized in 2023. At the opening of the event, State Secretary Ingrid Brocková said that the new platform was intended to provide an in-depth expert discussion on key issues in Slovak foreign and European policy. She added that “the involvement of the non-governmental sector in this effort is not only a sign of our openness but also of our respect for the expert capacity found in our NGOs, think tanks and academia.”<sup>16</sup>

The Western Balkans was the subject of one of the 10 analyses. The conclusions and recommendations for the Slovak diplomatic corps and other relevant actors stressed that

the costs of non-enlargement of the Union in the Western Balkans will be very high in the security, geopolitical and economic spheres. The vacuum created by the EU’s inaction will be filled by other players, which is contrary to the interests of both the EU and Slovakia; the Union should avoid such a scenario by all means. Therefore, the: enlargement of the Union should be the subject of a permanent political, diplomatic

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<sup>16</sup> The Analytical Days were named after Svetoslav Bombik, one of the leaders of the student movement in November 1989 and founder of the Slovak Institute of International Studies. In 1990, he became the youngest MP. In his professional work on foreign policy, he emphasized Slovakia’s attachment to the values of an integrating free and democratic Europe and to Central European cooperation. He died tragically in 1995. See “The Foreign Ministry opens the first year of Svetoslav Bombik’s Analytical Days,” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 18, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/rezort-diplomacie-otvoril-historicky-prvy-rocnik-analytickych-dni-svetoslava-bombika/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9%26strana%3D2](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/rezort-diplomacie-otvoril-historicky-prvy-rocnik-analytickych-dni-svetoslava-bombika/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9%26strana%3D2) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

and social dialogue at EU level, and the Slovak Republic should also prioritize it within the multilateral and regional formats existing within the EU, in the functioning of which it participates (the informal group of ‘friends of enlargement,’ but also the Slavkov format or the Visegrad Four). It is crucial that ‘all actors in the European Union realize that enlargement is not just a topical issue for those joining the Union, but a strategic solution for Europe.’

The issue of Kosovo features among the other eight proposals stemming from the Western Balkans analysis. The introduction to the relevant section states that

given the factual consensus on the fulfillment of the conditions for visa liberalization with Kosovo, Slovakia, together with the other countries of the informal group of ‘friends of enlargement,’ should advocate the earliest possible visa liberalization. In the framework of the bilateral relationship with Pristina, Slovakia could consider giving Kosovo the possibility to establish a representative office on Slovak territory if Pristina officially requests it.

Kosovo has a similar office in Greece, which, together with Slovakia, is reluctant to recognize Kosovo’s unilaterally declared independence. Its establishment would therefore not affect Slovakia’s position on this issue.

Here we should remember that the Slovak position on Kosovo, which it claims is consistent based on the principles of international law, emphasized in political circles, does not in fact hold. In 2010, after an in-depth examination of Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, the International Court of Justice ruled by 10 votes to 4 that the declaration of independence was not in breach of international law and, therefore, not in breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 1999. The decisions of the International Court of Justice, although not binding, are an essential part of international law.

Belgrade’s assessments of the Slovak Republic could be “improved” by strengthening economic relations and contacts with Kosovo, expert exchanges, intensifying cooperation between civil societies supporting Kosovo’s entry into regional and international organizations where it makes pragmatic sense (e.g. Interpol – more effectively fighting against internationally organized crime), as well as the already mentioned support for EU visa liberalization. For they would understand that our support is not given automatically, is not unconditional, and is not a blank check for all Belgrade’s actions vis-à-vis Kosovo or any other of its neighbors.

In this context, the authors of the proposal recommend, for example, considering the possibility of Slovakia rejoining the KFOR mission. Events over the past year have highlighted the importance of the KFOR mission in Kosovo in preventing inter-ethnic tensions. Sadly, the state of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina does not give hope that the situation will improve. Strengthening the KFOR mission with the presence of the Slovak Republic in its ranks, therefore, makes sense. Moreover, the KFOR mission in Kosovo is accepted by Serbia, where it is seen primarily in the context of providing physical security for the Serbian minority in Kosovo. Members of the Slovak Armed Forces could be involved in protecting the Serbian civilian population and religious buildings and monuments in Kosovo, relying on the trust of the (minority) civilian population as well as on minimal differences in language and communication.

According to the analysis, such an approach by the Slovak Republic would win political and diplomatic points in both Belgrade and Pristina, but above all in Brussels and Washington; diplomatic capital that could be wisely used to pursue other foreign policy objectives.

## ■ Economic diplomacy

The analysis of the Western Balkans, as the basis of the Medium-Term Strategy of the Foreign and European Policy, could not, of course, ignore the economic aspect of Slovakia's relations with the Western Balkan countries and the related economic diplomacy. The recommendations state,

it is urgent for Slovakia to break the current low level of economic cooperation and to engage in the effective use of the European Union's investment aid to the Western Balkan countries (to reach a value of €20 billion over the next ten years; €9 billion by the end of the current European Commission's mandate in 2024).

Hence the economic dimension of diplomacy probably needs to be strengthened, either by sending economic diplomats to the individual countries or by creating the post of regional economic diplomat(s). These should be part of the communication and coordination system between the Foreign Ministry and business circles; when nominating the diplomats, the possibility of involving local experts working in the Western Balkans with links to Slovakia should also be considered.

How can we raise Slovak commercial interest in doing business in the Western Balkan countries, with the emphasis on investments of a longer-term nature? This challenge could partially be met by organizing a Western Balkans Investment Forum in Bratislava, where potential investors could obtain information about the region as a whole (including on the politics and potential risks), as well as the differences between the countries.

In this context, the first Export Forum of Economic Diplomacy held at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in September 2021 was important, as the aim is for it to become a systemic platform for economic diplomacy and for the annual exchange of views on the setting, priorities, and instruments of Slovakia's export policy. It should focus on the Western Balkans as well of course.

Minister Ivan Korčok, who opened the event, observed that "2020 and 2021 will go down in history as the years of the pandemic. But they are also years of challenges and new opportunities. Every crisis forces us to come up with new ideas, new visions, innovations. The Export Forum is one of these ideas."<sup>17</sup>

The forum was followed a month later by a meeting between Minister Ivan Korčok and Eximbanka on mutual cooperation and coordination in promoting the export activities of Slovak companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises. Ivan Korčok assured Eximbanka that the Ministry was prepared to participate in the coordinated effort and to respond flexibly to the needs of the business sector.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Minister Ivan Korčok Opens the first ever Export Forum of Economic Diplomacy," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, September 28, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-ivan-korcok-otvoril-historicky-prve-exportne-forum-ekonomickej-diplomacie/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D8](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-ivan-korcok-otvoril-historicky-prve-exportne-forum-ekonomickej-diplomacie/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D8) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> "Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Korčok, after an interview with representatives of EXIMBANKA SR: 'Our common goal is close cooperation and support for Slovak exporters,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 29, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-zahranicnych-veci-a-europskych-zalezitosti-sr-ivan-korcok-po-rozhovore-s-predstavitelmi-eximbanky-sr-nasim-spolocnym-cielom-je-uzka-spoluprac/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-zahranicnych-veci-a-europskych-zalezitosti-sr-ivan-korcok-po-rozhovore-s-predstavitelmi-eximbanky-sr-nasim-spolocnym-cielom-je-uzka-spoluprac/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D9) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

In addition to the SHP Celex paper mills near Banja Luka in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a frequently mentioned successful Slovak project of economic cooperation in the Western Balkans, last year there was an opportunity to mention two other successful investments in the Vojvodina towns of Sombor and Subotica. In November 2021, Slovak Ambassador to Serbia Fedor Rosocha and Serbian Minister of Economy Andjelka Atanasković visited Blackhorse in Sombor and Tatravagonka Bratstvo in Subotica, both of which have Slovak owners.

Since 2020, when an insolvent Blackhorns was taken over by Slovak owners, the company has managed to stabilize and start growing. This year, they plan to invest €3 million in the expansion and modernization of local battery production. Tatravagonka Bratstvo in Subotica has also managed to resurrect the almost bankrupt company and is now one of the largest producers of freight wagons in Europe. After building a new production hall in 2019, the company plans to continue expanding production and employ more people. The Serbian economy minister described Tatravagonka Bratstvo as a great example of successful Slovak–Serbian cooperation.<sup>19</sup>

It is worth mentioning that while the trade turnover between Slovakia and Serbia was €677.3 million in 2020, Hungary's turnover with Serbia was €1.994 billion.<sup>20</sup> Slovakia's turnover with Serbia has been at basically the same level for some years now, but the turnover between Hungary and Serbia has doubled over the past ten years. Hungary immediately recognized Kosovo's independence and this does not seem to have hindered mutual trade and economic cooperation with Serbia. Slovakia, on the other hand, has not recognized Kosovo, but has not received any benefit from Serbia in return.

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<sup>19</sup> "Veľvyslanec Fedor Rosocha a ministerka hospodárstva Srbskej republiky Andjelka Atanasković spoločne navštívili závody slovenských vlastníkov," [Ambassador Fedor Rosocha and the Minister of Economy of the Republic of Serbia Andjelka Atanasković jointly visited the plants of Slovak owners] *Ambasada Slovačke u Srbiji*, November 6, 2021. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/SlovakEmbassySerbia/posts/252658066898937> (accessed on March 9, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Speech by Serbian Foreign Minister Nikola Selaković after talks with his Hungarian counterpart Péter Szijjártó. "Egyre több magyar beruházás Szerbiában," [More and more Hungarian investments in Serbia] *Hungarian Agriculture*. April 17, 2021. Available online: <https://magyarmezogazdasag.hu/2021/04/17/egyre-tobb-magyar-beruhazas-szerbiaban>. (accessed on March 9, 2022).

## ■ Nationalist revival

The year 2021 was characterized by the rise of nationalist tendencies in the Western Balkans, eliciting memories of the tragic 1990s and the bloody and tragic break-up of Yugoslavia, marked by war, ethnic cleansing, mass murder, and genocide among the public, and views and assessments by political scientists, journalists, intellectuals and the middle class.

The growing nationalism, the ideas of border changes, the tensions in the Western Balkan states are irresistibly reminiscent of the 1990s, and any relativization of the seriousness of the situation would be wrong and dangerous,

warned some 250 intellectuals from the region and beyond in an appeal sent in May to the leaders of the European Union, the United States and the governments of the NATO member states. One of the signatories of the appeal, the well-known journalist and university professor Dinko Gruhonjić, observed that

Russia, through Belgrade and its satellite Republika Srpska, is spreading a morbid influence on the region, which is very much to the liking of some local nationalists... We can all remember that this has cost us over 130,000 dead, millions displaced and tens of thousands maimed and raped.<sup>21</sup>

This aspect of developments in the Western Balkans has also been noted by the heads of Slovak diplomacy and non-governmental organizations. In 2021, at bilateral talks with Western Balkan and European partners and multilaterally they could be heard urging for further EU enlargement, a strategic foreign policy task.

At the November meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, Minister Ivan Korčok welcomed the fact that the member-state foreign ministers were once again focusing on the Western Balkans after six months, especially given the

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<sup>21</sup> "Zapadnom Balkanu prijeti probudeni nacionalizam," [The Western Balkans are threatened by an awakened nationalism] *Slobodna Evropa*, May 5, 2021. Available online: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/apel-intelektualci-zapadni-balkan-nacionalizam/31239455.html> (accessed on March 9, 2022).

negative developments in the region. The ministers agreed on the need for more EU involvement in the countries of the region.<sup>22</sup>

The pandemic may have hit the NGO sector hardest in 2021, as it minimized contacts between organizations in partner countries, which moved online. Nevertheless, they have made their voices heard through their activities in support of the transition and reform processes, as well as expanding European integration to the Western Balkans. The National Convention on the European Union, which has become an important export of Slovakia's know-how in the Western Balkans (in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia), remains an effective tool for promoting the EU's pro-integration policies in the region. Thanks to the initiative and dedication of the SFPA and the Foreign Ministry, a Think Balkans delegation consisting of representatives of the foreign ministries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and four representatives of Balkan NGOs paid a working visit to Slovakia. The main objective of the project is to exchange experiences and establish cooperation and communication between the Think Visegrad consortium of the Visegrad Four NGOs and the organizations in the Western Balkans associated with the Think Balkans project.

## ■ Western Balkans in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine beginning on February 24, 2022, has been condemned by all the Western Balkan states, including Serbia, as a flagrant violation of international law. Moreover, all of them voted in favor of the UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian invasion. However,

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<sup>22</sup> Minister Ivan Korčok stated, "The situation in the region is tense. The EU has the tools at its disposal to make a positive impact on developments in the region. We can no longer afford to waste time, we must take concrete action and fulfill the commitments we have made to the people of the region; the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia is one of them." See "Minister Ivan Korčok at the EU Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels: 'We need to intensify the EU presence in the Western Balkans and also be more visible in the region,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, November 15, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current\\_issues/-/asset\\_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-zahranicnych-veci-a-europskych-zalezitosti-sr-ivan-korcok-na-zasadnuti-rady-eu-pre-zahranicne-veci-v-bruseli-potrebuje-zintenzivnit-pritomn/10182?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_lrJ2tDuQdEKp\\_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D10%26strana%3D2](https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-zahranicnych-veci-a-europskych-zalezitosti-sr-ivan-korcok-na-zasadnuti-rady-eu-pre-zahranicne-veci-v-bruseli-potrebuje-zintenzivnit-pritomn/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D10%26strana%3D2) (accessed on March 9, 2022).

Serbia did not support the wide range of sanctions against Russia, despite being in the process of applying for EU membership, with the related expectations of foreign policy alignment. Hence it is becoming increasingly difficult for it to sustain its position of having one foot in the pro-Russian court and the other in the pro-Euro-integration one. The other candidate country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, has not accepted sanctions against Russia either, given that Republika Srpska refuses to do so. However, sanctions have been introduced by the EU candidate countries – Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia – and by Kosovo, which is in the process of implementing an association agreement with the EU. Similarly, Russian aircraft have not been banned from the airspaces of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kosovo is a special case as its airspace is controlled by the international KFOR force, led by NATO and under a UN mandate. Since KFOR is there primarily to ensure safety and freedom of movement in Kosovo, the mission commander decided not to close Kosovo's airspace to Russia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed his country's application to join the European Union on February 28, 2022. At the same time, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia (joined by Hungary) proposed that the Council of the European Union should urgently recognize Ukraine as a candidate for EU membership. The idea raised sympathy, but also several questions, for example about the state of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. In addition to the understandable difficulty of meeting the membership criteria, it is also testament to the bureaucratic delays to the accession process. This can be seen for example in the long-standing failure to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, even though these states have already effectively fulfilled the requirements. The current crisis caused by Russia's brutal aggression underlines the importance of real dynamism in the Union's enlargement in the Western Balkans. It is a strategic matter, as emphasized in Slovakia's foreign policy. One option is to adopt some degree of flexibility on Ukraine, for example, in the form of a strategic and privileged partnership, which could be investigated and developed as quickly as possible. However, the situation certainly represents an opportunity and a challenge to quickly overcome the stagnation in the overall enlargement process, particularly with regard to the Western Balkans.





Matej Šimalčík

# Walking the tightrope: Slovakia's balancing act in the Taiwan Strait

Cross-Strait relations between China and Taiwan were one of the most volatile hotspots of global tensions. Beijing's increasingly hostile rhetoric and military posturing toward Taipei, including repeated violations of Taiwan's air defense identification zone, exacerbated the tensions, which became one of the defining points of the power competition between the US and China.

At the same time, Taiwan managed to improve its international standing by fostering relations with several partners in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), including Slovakia. CEE thus became an area over which Taiwan and China competed for international recognition.

However, even though CEE became an area of stiff competition between China and Taiwan, that does not mean that Slovakia lacks agency nor that it does not pursue its own interests vis-à-vis various East Asian countries.

As this competition was unfolding, Slovakia's attempts to balance the two sets of relations and maximize the associated benefits, while minimizing the potential economic and diplomatic costs, became a defining feature of Slovakia's foreign policy, not just toward the two countries but toward East Asia as such.

Interactions with the rest of the region remained rather limited due to the ongoing negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of material and financial resources, and the overall lack of strategy toward the region. As a result, even though economic relations with South Korea and Japan are far more beneficial than those with Taiwan and China,<sup>1</sup> relations with these

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<sup>1</sup> 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. 172–188.

two East Asian democracies remained rather static throughout 2021. This is all the more striking given the continuing shift of the global geopolitical and geo-economic centers of gravity toward the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, this chapter focuses on Slovak-Taiwanese and Slovak-Chinese relations as these were the most dynamic relations with East Asian states in 2021.

## ■ Trajectories of change

As was observed in the previous edition of the *Yearbook*, changes in domestic perceptions of East Asian countries, coupled with the domestic political transition that occurred in Slovakia in 2020, were the key drivers of Slovakia's relations with East Asian countries and ongoing policy shifts.<sup>3</sup>

These two trends had the greatest impact on Slovakia's policies toward China and, in extension, Taiwan as well, given that perceptions of the two countries are closely tied to domestic political and ideological cleavages, as well as the geopolitical anxiety regarding Russia.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of public opinion, these cleavages can easily be observed when we compare perceptions of China and Taiwan among Slovaks identifying with the global West and East (Figure 1 & Figure 2). Those that identify with the West have a significantly more negative view of China than those that identify with the East. Conversely, they have a more positive view of Taiwan.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1. Public perception of China by respondent identification with global West or East<sup>6</sup>

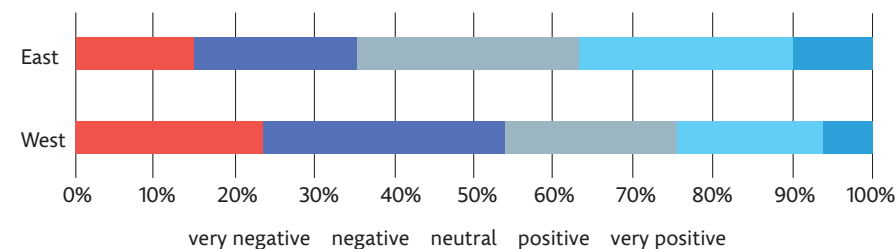
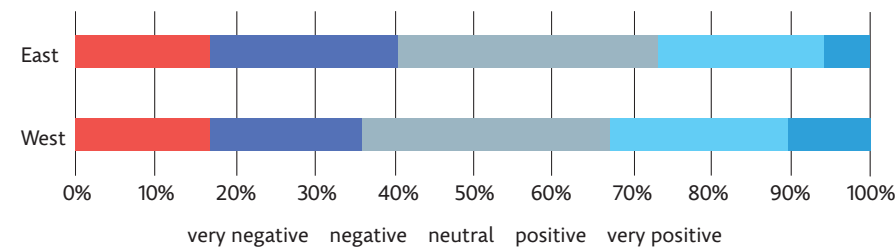


Figure 2. Public perception of Taiwan by respondent identification with global West or East<sup>7</sup>



This polarization of views of China and Taiwan is evident among the political class as well. Politicians' views on China can be classified into three distinct groups. Based on their overall views of China and the determinants of these views, we can talk about pragmatic supporters, ideological supporters, and ideological opponents.<sup>8</sup> In terms of China policy, the 2020 political transition resulted in pragmatic supporters (accentuating economic cooperation) being replaced by ideological opponents (who recognize the necessity of addressing security concerns as well as broader concerns over democracy and human rights). While the policy ramifications of this change could be seen in 2020, they became fully visible during 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> M. Šimalčík, "Image of China in Slovakia: ambivalence, adoration, and fake news," op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Although in the short term this process may be affected by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which started in February 2022, in the long term, it seems improbable that the continuing shift of the global geopolitical and geo-economic centers of gravity towards the Indo-Pacific region will be reversed.

<sup>3</sup> M. Šimalčík, "Slovakia in East Asia: no longer naive, still not committed," op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> P. Gries, R. Turcsányi, "The East is red...Again! How the specters of communism and Russia shape Central and Eastern European views of China," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* Vol. 55, No. 1, 2022, pp. 1-23; M. Šimalčík, "Image of China in Slovakia: ambivalence, adoration, and fake news," *Asia-Europe Journal*, 19, 2021, pp. 245-58.

<sup>5</sup> R. Turcsányi et al., "Sinophone Borderlands Europe Survey," [dataset] Palacký University Olomouc, 2020.

## ■ Taiwan: A new beginning in mutual relations

Throughout 2021, Slovakia continued to display an interest in developing relations with Taiwan, following its initial overtures in 2020. Hence we can conclude that in 2021 the biggest breakthroughs in mutual relations were made since 2003, when the Taipei Representative Office in Bratislava and Slovak Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei were opened.<sup>9</sup> Slovakia thus joined the European avant-garde of CEE states, alongside Czechia and Lithuania, that took a pro-active approach to relations with Taiwan.

The highlight of the renewed interest in mutual relations was the mutual high-level visits that occurred toward the end of the year.

In October, Bratislava was unofficially visited by Joseph Wu, the Foreign Minister of Taiwan, who was on a tour of European countries with whom relations had become particularly cordial in the past few years. Just a few days before Wu's arrival, Bratislava hosted a trade delegation of Taiwanese businesses co-led by Minister of National Development Kung Ming-hsin and Minister of Science and Technology Wu Tsung-tsong.<sup>10</sup>

After months of planning, this was reciprocated by a delegation of Slovak businesses, scientists, and public officials led by Karol Galek, State Secretary at the Ministry of Economy. The delegation was the largest and highest-ranking visit from Slovakia to the self-ruling island.<sup>11</sup>

During the two visits, cooperation was initiated in several areas. Numerous memoranda of understanding on cooperation were signed by the two sides.

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<sup>9</sup> E. Rejtová, "Slovensko–taiwanské vzťahy: Prečo Slovensko tak dlho váhalo?" [Slovakia–Taiwan relations: Why did Slovakia hesitate for so long?] in K. Kironská, E. Rejtová, eds, *Ázijský šampión: Všetko čo potrebujete vedieť o súčasnom Taiwane*. [Asian Champion: all you need to know about contemporary Taiwan] Bratislava: HADART Publishing, 2021, pp. 175–95.

<sup>10</sup> "Pocítite následky, vyhráža sa Čína Slovensku aj Česku," [There will be consequences, China threatens Slovakia and the Czech Republic] *Sme*, October 29, 2021. Available online: <https://svet.sme.sk/c/22773820/pocitite-nasledky-taiwanska-navsteva-na-slovensku-a-v-cesku-nahnela-cinu.html> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> "Slovakia delegation's Taiwan visit welcomed by MOFA," *Taiwan Today*, December 6, 2021. Available online: <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=2&post=211610> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

These included areas like semiconductors, smart cities, high-tech industries, supply chain resilience, research and development, trade, investment, and tourism.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout 2021, semiconductor supply chain disruptions continued to affect the Slovak automotive industry. Several automakers located in Slovakia announced production disruptions due to the shortage of semiconductors caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

In efforts to overcome this problem, cooperation in semiconductors and attempts to attract relevant Taiwanese investment was particularly high on the Slovak agenda. However, given Slovakia's size, lack of qualified labor, and the costs of establishing a semiconductor supply chain in Europe, some reality checks are in order. There is intra-EU competition over attracting Taiwanese (or other) investment in the semiconductor industry. Given the existing competition, potential investors will be considering state aid offers, among other things, which will put pressure on public finances. This may be somewhat remedied by the recently adopted European Chips Act, which aims to stimulate €43 billion in private and public investment in the semiconductor supply chain.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, localizing an entire semiconductor supply chain seems unlikely. A more realistic expectation would be the emergence of a decentralized supply chain within the EU, where different countries would play different roles in the production process. This possibility was already hinted at by Taiwanese representatives. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that such an approach would be in line with Taiwanese interests to make semiconductor-related investments in all countries that have adopted particularly pro-Taiwanese policies in the past year, thus solidifying the partnership.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Taiwan and Slovakia ink 7 MOUs, pave way for closer ties," *Focus Taiwan*, October 23, 2021. Available online: <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202110230004> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. "Trnavská automobilka zastaví výrobu, dôvodom sú najmä polovodiče," [Trnava automobile factory stops production, the main reason is semiconductors] *Trend*, June 5, 2021. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/trnavska-automobilka-zastavi-vyrodu-dovodom-su-najma-polovodice> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> "Digital sovereignty: Commission proposes Chips Act to confront semiconductor shortages and strengthen Europe's technological leadership," European Commission, February 8, 2022. Available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_729](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_729) (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> "Taiwan uvažuje pri výrobe čipov o spolupráci so Slovenskom," [Taiwan considers cooperation with Slovakia in chip production] *Trend*, November 25, 2021. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/it-taiwan-uvazuje-pri-vyrobe-cipov-spolupraci-aj-slovenskom> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

Beyond economic cooperation, Slovakia and Taiwan also made progress in political relations, signing the Arrangement on Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters, which provides for reciprocity in extradition and preliminary detentions of sentenced and indicted persons. From the Taiwanese perspective, the agreement presents an important milestone as it shields Taiwanese nationals from the risk of being extradited to China,<sup>16</sup> a problem that has repeatedly occurred around the world.<sup>17</sup> From the Slovak perspective, this was a rare example of a formalized agreement with Taiwan that does not directly deal with the economic agenda, signifying a maturing relationship with Taiwan.

With regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare sector cooperation became an important aspect of the relationship. During the summer of 2021, when COVID-19 transmissions were peaking in Taiwan, it faced a serious shortage of vaccines caused by delays in production, China's pressure on vaccine producers, and domestic political conflicts.<sup>18</sup> Against this backdrop, Slovakia pledged a donation of 10,000 vaccine doses in July and an additional 150,000 doses in September.<sup>19</sup>

The donation turned out to be an important example of Slovakia's use of soft power in Taiwan. Following the announcement of the donation, the Taiwanese repeatedly expressed their gratitude, such as by lighting up the Taipei 101 skyscraper in the Slovak colors, as well as greater media coverage of Slovakia in Taiwanese media. This provides new opportunities for advancing Slovakia's interests in Taiwan, especially in promoting exports.

Given the quasi-diplomatic relations with Taiwan, under which Slovakia does not officially recognize the country under its One-China Policy, the development of alternative approaches to building relations may be an asset. To this

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<sup>16</sup> "Extradition treaties shield Taiwanese," *Taipei Times*, August 7, 2021. Available online: <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2021/08/07/2003762162> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> "China's hunt for Taiwanese overseas: The PRC's use of extradition and deportation to undermine Taiwanese sovereignty," *Safeguard Defenders*, November 30, 2021. Available online: <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/new-investigation-exposes-prc-hunting-taiwanese-overseas> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> R. Shemakov, "Taiwan confronts a serious vaccine shortage," Council on Foreign Relations, June 30, 2021. Available online: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/taiwan-confronts-serious-vaccine-shortage#:~:text=While%20Taiwan%20has%20pre%2Dordered,the%20population%20by%20year's%20end> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> "Slovakia to ship COVID vaccine donation to Taiwan; doses increased," *Focus Taiwan*, September 24, 2021. Available online: <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202109240017> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

end, a Slovakia–Taiwan 1.5 Track Dialogue was launched in 2021, a collaborative effort between the Central European Institute of Asian Studies and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association aimed at promoting policy-focused debates among Slovak and Taiwanese policymakers and experts. The pilot meeting of the 1.5 Track Dialogue included discussions on the disruption and resilience of global supply chains and the spread of disinformation and other hybrid threats.<sup>20</sup>

## ■ China: One step forward, two steps back?

Slovakia's approach to China has traditionally rested on a combination of bilateral relations and promotion of interests via multilateral fora and regional cooperation platforms, such as the 16+1 platform or the EU–China dialogue.<sup>21</sup>

In 2021, Slovakia's relations with China were impacted by two main events – the decline of the 16+1 platform and China's asymmetric sanctions against European leaders, including Slovak ones. Naturally, the strengthening in relations with Taiwan affected the relations, although China's reaction remained largely rhetorical, beyond the economic repercussions (unlike in Lithuania's case).

The annual 16+1 summit was held in February 2021. The summit, the first since the start of the pandemic (the 2020 summit that was to be hosted in Beijing was postponed indefinitely), came at a crucial time for Beijing, when China's relations with the EU and USA, along with EU–USA relations, were undergoing significant changes following Joe Biden's inauguration as the US President. The increasingly negative perception of China and growing calls for EU–USA coordination to deal with the challenges posed by China meant the latter had to swiftly show the region and the world that it was maintaining

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<sup>20</sup> "Slovak–Taiwan 1.5 Track Dialogue (event summary & recommendations)," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, Slovak Foreign Policy Association, March 19, 2021. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/slovak-taiwan-1-5-track-dialogue-event-summary-recommendations/> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>21</sup> M. Šimalčík, "Vzťahy medzi Čínou a Slovenskom: Je Čína vytúžená alternatíva alebo hrozba pre demokraciu?" [China–Slovakia relations: Is China a desirable alternative or a threat to democracy?] in K. Kironská, R. Turcsányi, eds, *Supervelmoc? Všetko čo potrebujete vedieť o súčasnej Číne*. [Superpower: All you need to know about China today] Bratislava: HADART Publishing, 2020.

its presence despite the pandemic. As a result, the platform was boosted from the Chinese end, with President Xi Jinping presiding over the summit, rather than Prime Minister Li Keqiang. However, of the participating states, only five CEE countries were represented by their president. Six countries (including Slovakia) maintained the status quo and sent their prime ministers. The remaining six countries (all EU members) downgraded their participation and sent ministers only. Countries that downgraded their participation faced last-minute pressure from Beijing to send representatives “at an appropriate level” or pre-record videos by the leadership.

Slovakia was represented at the summit by then Prime Minister Igor Matovič, even though he had originally hinted that he would not attend and would prefer to deal with China through the EU-wide 27+1 format. After Slovakia signed the Slovakia–China protocol on lamb and goat meat exports, Matovič changed his mind and attended the meeting. This reflected the “sticks and carrots” strategy that China deploys toward Slovakia and other V4 countries.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the Slovak government’s official communique later clarified that it saw the 17+1 format as “supplemental” to the EU–China dialogue.<sup>23</sup>

Past summits have always ended with the adoption of the Guidelines, a document summing up the activities of the past year and proposing areas of cooperation for the coming period. After the 2021 online summit, only the “Beijing Action Plan” was adopted. Compared to the draft Guidelines that were circulated by Beijing, the Action Plan is a much-abridged version. Numerous activities proposed by Beijing did not make the final cut of the document. The Action Plan focuses primarily on the non-EU states of the Western Balkans, while downgrading the importance of the V4 (with Slovakia barely getting a mention) and neglecting the Baltic states entirely.

In the past a crucial point of the guidelines was that they announced the next venue for the summit. No such item was included in the Action Plan, and no

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<sup>22</sup> I. Karásková, A. Bachulska, B. Kelemen, T. Matura, F. Šebok, M. Šimalčík, “China’s sticks and carrots in Central Europe: The logic and power of Chinese influence,” Association for International Affairs, 2020. Available online: [https://mapinfluence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Chinas-Sticks-and-Carrots-in-Central-Europe\\_policy-paper\\_A4\\_-interaktivni\\_03-1.pdf](https://mapinfluence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Chinas-Sticks-and-Carrots-in-Central-Europe_policy-paper_A4_-interaktivni_03-1.pdf) (accessed on March 15, 2022)

<sup>23</sup> “Predseda vlády I. Matovič o vzťahoch s Čínou: Napriek rozdielom, len otvorená myseľ a spolupráca naše vzťahy posunie dopredu,” [Prime Minister I. Matovič on relations with China: Despite the differences, only an open mind and cooperation will advance our relations] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, February 9, 2021. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk//predseda-vlady-i-matovic-o-vztahoch-s-cinou-napriek-rozdielom-len-otvorena-mysel-a-spolupraca-nase-vztahy-posunie-dopredu/> (accessed on March 15, 2022)

venue had been announced for the next summit by the end of the year. As a result, the 16+1 platform appears to have entered a phase of dormancy. Given that the platform was designed primarily to serve Chinese interests, its potential future renewal will most likely depend on what approach China decides to take when interacting with CEE countries.<sup>24</sup>

Slovakia’s relations with China were also affected by the reciprocal sanctions put in place by the EU and China in April 2021. The EU adopted sanctions against four Chinese officials and one entity over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities. This was the first time the EU had deployed sanctions against Chinese officials since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. In response, China adopted an asymmetric response, both in the volume and breadth of the adopted countermeasures. China sanctioned ten individuals and four entities. Unlike the EU sanctions, China’s targeted European civil society and academia. The Chinese sanctions targeted five MEPs (including Slovak MEP Miriam Lexmann) and three MPs from the Netherlands, Belgium, and Lithuania. The sanctions apply to the entire Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament (DROI) and the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the European Union (PSC), two individual researchers, and two think tanks.

This resulted in a political freeze of the negotiations on the EU–China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, though the technical dialogue is ongoing.

Despite these developments, there was some progress in economic relations over the year. Promoting agricultural exports has been a mainstay in Slovak economic diplomacy toward China. As already mentioned, Slovakia and China signed a protocol on lamb exports in 2021. This followed the sign of the protocol on milk exports during the 2019 summit of 16+1 in Dubrovnik. A similar protocol on pork exports did not come to fruition due to Slovakia’s inability to suppress the spread of the African Swine Flu on its territory.

Nevertheless, it remains doubtful as to what kind of economic benefits can be reaped from the agricultural exports to China. First, agriculture represents only a minor part of Slovakia’s economy, both in terms of GDP share

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<sup>24</sup> “CEEasia Briefing special issue: The 17+1 online summit: A debacle for Beijing?” Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2021. Available online: <https://mailchi.mp/2e90dbf33357/ceea-sia-17plus1> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

and employment.<sup>25</sup> Second, exports are subject to a rigorous certification process. Third, agricultural exports are low-value products compared to other Slovak exports to China (especially cars, which are the dominant export).<sup>26</sup>

For Slovakia, economic interaction with China has been closely linked to the development of train links. From a regional perspective, Slovakia has played a marginal role compared to Poland or Hungary, being mostly a transit country rather than a final destination. This began to change somewhat in 2020 when a new transport route between Xian and Dunajská Streda was launched (following the failed Dalian–Bratislava route). In 2021, a train transporting bottled mineral water produced in Slovakia was launched from Dunajská Streda. However, it illustrates the above-mentioned problem of the low value of agricultural products – it was estimated that a full load of bottled mineral water equaled the cost of exporting three to five cars from Slovakia to China.<sup>27</sup>

To further promote the development of rail transport via Slovakia, the Ministry of Transport planned to launch a state aid scheme to reduce transportation costs and make Slovakia more competitive compared to its neighbors.<sup>28</sup> One can question whether this is a suitable response. First, it would be better to negotiate with neighbors to secure market conditions without having to provide anti-competitive state aid. The risk is that in providing state aid for rail freight Slovakia would be using public funds to finance the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative and China's associated geopolitical ambitions.

Furthermore, train connections to China via Slovakia are always subject to the volatile situation on the Russian–Ukrainian border. In the past, transport almost came to a complete halt due to tensions between Russia and Ukraine,

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<sup>25</sup> M. Šimalčík, "Na čom stojí Pellegriniho čínsky sen," [What is the basis of Pellegrini's Chinese dream] Central European Institute of Asian Studies, November 28, 2018. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/sk/na-com-stoji-pellegriniho-cinsky-sen/> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> R. Turcsányi, M. Šebeňa, A. Kalivoda, M. Šimalčík. *Budúcnosť hospodárskych vzťahov Slovenska a Číny: Priame a nepriame vplyvy Číny na slovenskú ekonomiku*. [The future of economic relations between Slovakia and China: the direct and indirect impacts China has on the Slovak economy] Bratislava: Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2021. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/sk/medzi-bri-a-cai-buducnost-hospodarskych-vztahov-slovenska-a-ciny/> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> "Ministerstvo dopravy chce prilákať nákladné vlaky s tovarmi z Číny dotačnou schémou," [Ministry of Transport wants to attract freight trains with goods from China through a subsidy scheme] *Trend*, September 28, 2021. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/ministerstvo-dopravy-chce-prilakat-nakladne-vlaky-tovarmi-ciny-dotacnou-schemou> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

with businesses preferring the safer route via Poland and Belarus.<sup>29</sup> While this was later resolved and transport via Ukraine became feasible again (Xian–Dunajská Streda being the case in point), the events of 2022 highlight this problem and the potential impact on the future development of rail freight transport to China. Following the Russian aggression against Ukraine, all the railway links between Russia and Ukraine have been destroyed, making train transport from Slovakia to China impossible.<sup>30</sup>

Besides the limited economic engagement with China, further steps were taken to safeguard Slovakia against potential security risks. This reflects the policy shift on China described above that came about following the 2020 general elections. China receives repeated mention in the revamped Security Strategy and intelligence service reports<sup>31</sup> and China-related risks feature in the draft Action Plan for the Coordination of the Fight against Hybrid Threats by the Ministry of Defense.<sup>32</sup> The Action Plan (pending governmental approval) includes specific measures targeting corrosive capital and influence over the media or academic sector. This is illustrative of the emerging recognition in the Slovak security apparatus that China uses a whole-of-society approach to promote its interests abroad, which the Slovak Intelligence Service warned against in its 2020 Annual Report.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Z Číny prišli aj prázdne vlaky len kvôli dotáciám, hovorí bývalý šéf prekladiska na východe," [Empty trains came from China just because of the subsidies, says former head of the transshipment yard in the east] *Denník E*, February 13, 2020. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/1739150/z-ciny-prisli-aj-prazdne-vlaky-len-kvoli-dotaciam-hovori-byvaly-sef-prekladiska-na-vychode/> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>30</sup> "Railway between Ukraine and Russia completely destroyed," *RailFreight.com*, February 26, 2022. Available online: <https://www.railfreight.com/beltandroad/2022/02/26/railway-between-ukraine-and-russia-completely-destroyed/?gdpr=accept> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> For a summary of the official discourse on the security aspects of relations with China see M. Šimalčík, "Slovakia: changing approach to China driven by domestic political change," *China's Engagement in Central and Eastern European Countries*, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy, 2021. Available online: <https://www.aies.at/publikationen/2021/china-engagement-europe.php> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> See "LP/2021/720 Akčný plán koordinácie boja proti hybridným hrozbám na roky 2022 až 2024," [LP/2021/720 Action Plan on hybrid threats coordination] *Slov-Lex*, December 8, 2021. Available online: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/SK/LP/2021/720> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

<sup>33</sup> "Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2020," [Report on the activities of the Slovak Information Service in 2020] Slovak Intelligence Service, December 2021. Available online: <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html> (accessed on March 15, 2022).

## ■ Balancing relations with Beijing and Taipei

Developments in Slovakia's relations with both Taiwan and China in 2021 were part of the broader trends that can be observed throughout the CEE. On the one hand, there is growing skepticism and recognition of security risks vis-à-vis China, coupled with the need to react to ongoing human rights abuses in China. On the other hand, there is a desire for deeper economic engagement with Taiwan.

While these two trends hold for many of the CEE countries (especially Slovakia, Lithuania, Czechia, Poland, and Slovenia), significant differences remain at the tactical level. Slovakia took a largely pragmatic approach to its relationship with Taiwan in an attempt to balance it against conflicting interests toward China.

Thus, the cooperation with Taiwan was primarily tactical, rather than consisting of grand gestures. It seems to have successfully mollified China, whose responses were mostly limited to rhetorical warnings, without grave economic consequences.<sup>34</sup>

Slovakia's experience stands in stark contrast to Lithuania's. After Lithuania announced its exit from the 16+1 platform and started engaging with Taiwan, even allowing the "Taiwan Representative Office" to be set up in Vilnius (a notable development since under the status quo it would have been called the Taipei Representative Office), Beijing issued a robust response aimed not only at the limited bilateral economic exchanges, but also Lithuania's position within global value chains, by pressurizing multinational corporations into cutting ties with Lithuania if they wish to preserve their position on the Chinese market.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> E. Rejtová, "Chinese Media Watch: By visiting Taiwan, Slovakia is taking the Lithuanian road," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, December 22, 2021. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/chinese-media-watch-slovakia-delegation-taiwan/> (accessed on March 15, 2022); E. Rejtová, "Chinese Media Watch: Joseph Wu's visit to Europe advocates secessionist ideas," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, November 17, 2021. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/chinese-media-watch-joseph-wu-visit-to-europe/> (accessed on March 15, 2022)

<sup>35</sup> "China pressures Germany's Continental to cut out Lithuania – sources," *Reuters*, December 17, 2021. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/exclusive-china-asks-germanys-continental-cut-out-lithuania-sources-2021-12-17/> (accessed on March 15, 2022)

The difference in the Chinese response can be best explained by the extent to which the countries focus on practical aspects of cooperation with Taiwan or engage in symbolic activities that China interprets as violations of its imagined sovereignty and core interests.<sup>36</sup>

It remains to be seen whether Slovakia will manage to maintain the China-Taiwan balancing act. As I finalize this chapter in March 2022, China is supporting Russia in its war against Ukraine, claiming that Russia had legitimate security concerns and blaming the West for the war. This puts China at great odds with Slovakia and other CEE countries that see Russian aggression as the most prominent security threat they are facing. Should China's behavior persist, it will further damage the remnants of its goodwill left in the CEE (however small they might be) and reinforce the view that China is a revisionist power that is helping erode the rules-based world order on which small state security has been based since the end of Cold War.

## ■ Next steps for Slovak policy on East Asia

Despite the dynamic developments in Slovak relations with China and Taiwan, it would be a mistake to say that East Asia occupies a position of great importance in Slovak foreign policy. Overall the approach toward East Asia continues to be plagued by a plethora of problems which were outlined in more detail in previous issues of the *Yearbook*.<sup>37</sup>

To resolve these problems and ensure relations with East Asia develop in a steady and sustainable manner, Slovakia ought to observe the following recommendations:

- Slovakia should formulate a regional strategy for the development of relations with East Asian countries. As a follow-up, measurable goals

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of Chinese core interests see M. Šimalčík, "Čína vo svete: Nová hodvábná cesta k svetovej dominancii?" [China in the world: A new silk road to world dominance] in K. Kirovská, R. Turcsányi, eds, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> M. Šimalčík, "Slovakia in East Asia: no longer naive, still not committed," op. cit.; M. Šimalčík, "Slovak relations with East Asia: A lost decade?," in P. Brežáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2019*, Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2020, pp. 109–21.

and key performance indicators should be defined to ensure relations develop at a steady pace.

- While relations with East Asian states have mostly been focused on the economic side, political relations have tended to be neglected. Developing political relations should be a crucial part of the Slovak strategy toward the region, especially with democratic states.
- As China is increasingly seen as a security risk and actor that is engaging in hybrid warfare, Slovakia should tap into the regional experience of like-minded partners to see how they respond to the various challenges posed by China. This would allow Slovakia to promote a better-tailored security policy, one that is well-equipped to handle the specific nature of China's hybrid warfare.
- In recognition of the challenges posed by the lack of material and personnel, which harms its ability to sustainably develop relations with China, Slovakia should embrace non-traditional diplomatic tools to improve its standing with East Asian partners. An example of such an approach would be to establish and foster 1.5 track dialogues with like-minded democratic partners in East Asia (as an independent civil society is a prerequisite).







# Slovakia's foreign policy tools



# Slovak development cooperation in 2021

Daniel Kaba

The year 2021 brought several major milestones in the development cooperation sector both at home and abroad. Some implications are not clearly visible at first glance and still need to be unpacked and properly digested for future strategies and planning.

There were good reasons to believe that COVID-19 was a wake-up call and that the shock of the first pandemic year would be replaced by efforts – as the saying goes, no one is saved from COVID-19 unless we are all saved. However, the ability and willingness of the Slovak administration to reform the system, adopt new strategies, incorporate agility and lean management, proactively regroup capacities and test new tools and approaches turned out to be rather subdued.

The EU neighborhood and beyond proved to be more fragile than expected, with several crises looming or deepening that require a shift in the mindset and approach of the Slovak ODA architecture.

The end of 2021 marks the midterm of the current government, i.e. the period in which most reforms usually take place. The administration did of course have to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic; nonetheless its attempts at improvements should be considered in the light of the government manifesto.

Below ODA is considered from three different perspectives.

The first is the major external developments and humanitarian changes in the EU neighborhood and in SlovakAid partner countries and how these have shaped the Slovak development system. The second is how the Slovak aid architecture reacted and future implications. The third, more domestic perspective, is whether it is possible to break the action–reaction circle in order to create potential for a proactive systemic approach.

The article presents these three perspectives in relation to the following areas: ODA financing, COVID-19, geographic priorities and LDCs, fragility and humanitarian aid and civil society.

The author looks at the Irish case as it is a pioneer in focusing on LDCs and providing robust funding to and through NGOs, whilst being a similarly sized country to Slovakia in terms of population and territory – to name but a few reasons.

## ■ ODA financing: clutching at straws

In 2021 total Slovak spending on ODA equaled €127 million, or 0.13 per cent of GNI, with bilateral aid of €30 million. Although both figures seem ambitious, a closer look provides a more realistic picture.

Total aid is stagnating, which may be partly down to the COVID-19 economic impacts, but more worryingly the quality of the funding did not improve either. The funding is fragmented across many partner countries and there are no new tools or significant improvements in e.g. speed, flexibility and effectiveness.

The ratio slightly increased in favor of bilateral aid versus multilateral (24 per cent vs 76 per cent) but that is mostly financial contributions and has no positive implications for SlovakAid programs and projects. Disregarding the inflated aid (€0.9 million in in-donor refugee costs, €1 million in debt relief and COVID-19 related activities (€11.3 million), bilateral aid is only €16.8 million or 14 per cent of total aid. This imbalance not only stands out against the percentages for the majority of DAC OECD members but leaves the Slovak Republic with very limited space to significantly boost its international programs.

In contrast Ireland had a total spend of 53 per cent (€458 million) on bilateral aid in 2020 and 47 per cent (€409 million) on multilateral partners, showing that it is possible to balance the part that is the sole discretion of the donor state against its binding financial contributions to international organizations.

**Table 1.** Inflated aid components and genuine bilateral aid (in €million)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
In donor refugee costs	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.9
Imputed student costs	1.6	1.7	1.4	
Security	8.75			

<b>Debt relief</b>			16.6	0.96
<b>Vaccines</b>				11.3
<b>Total inflated and vaccines</b>	10.8	2.3	18.9	14.0
<b>Genuine bilateral aid</b>	17.5	17.0	14.5	16.0
<b>Total bilateral aid</b>	28.3	19.4	33.3	30.0

Let's have a look at Ireland's GNI and the nominal value of the ODA. In 2019 Ireland had a GNI of \$341 billion against Slovakia's \$174 billion, which is only twice the size, but the nominal value of total Irish ODA was seven times higher than for Slovakia, i.e. €867 million versus €127 million.

**Table 2.** Bilateral aid, multilateral aid and total aid (in €million)

	2019	2020	2021
<b>Bilateral aid</b>	19.4	33.3	30.0
<b>Multilateral</b>	84.24	90.1	97.4
<b>EU</b>	72.94	80.2	84.5
<b>Others</b>	11.3	10.9	12.9
<b>Genuine total aid</b>	101.2	105.6	113.4
<b>Total aid</b>	103.5	124.5	127.4
<b>Total aid per cent GNI</b>	0.11	0.14	0.13

Almost every year total aid remains at around the same level thanks to a different inflated aid component or non-systemic element. In 2021 it was vaccine donations.

The Slovak manifesto commitment was “to accelerate the increase in financial resources for bilateral development cooperation activities.” But the Foreign Ministry, as Slovak ODA coordinator, still has no plan on the table for achieving this. Needless to say, the previous plan created in 2019 had been drawn up under the previous government and so was not binding, nor it did it contain any practical actions and measures and it was adopted in totally different non-COVID-19 circumstances.

The state budget for 2021–2023 below offers a murky vision of future funding. There is also a question mark over the amount of funding under the Foreign Ministry.

**Table 3.** ODA State Budget (in € m)

	2021	2022	2023
Foreign Ministry/ SAIDC	8.9	7	7
Interior Ministry	1.9	1.9	1.9
Education Ministry	2.1	2	2.1
Finance Ministry	7.6	8.3	9

Source: "Zameranie dvojstrannej rozvojovej spolupráce SR na rok 2021," [Bilateral development cooperation in 2021] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2021, p. 14. Available online: <https://slovakaid.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Zameranie-ODA-SR-2021.pdf> (accessed on March 12, 2022).

## ■ COVID-19 – did anti-vaxxers unintentionally support ODA?

COVID-19 related SAIDC activities totaled €11.3 million, of which vaccine donations account for €9.4 million.

According to the Foreign Ministry, Slovakia donated 1,810,00 vaccine doses (comprising 1,140,000 doses of Janssen, AstraZeneca or Moderna donated via COVAX at the recommended \$6.72 proxy price; 610,000 doses of AstraZeneca at a €2.90 unit price, donated bilaterally and 60,700 doses of Moderna at a €19.35 unit price, donated bilaterally).<sup>1</sup>

As of December 31, 2021, only 2.7 million people had been vaccinated using 6.5 million doses (49 per cent of the population).<sup>2</sup>

On one side the ability of the Slovak Republic to share excess vaccines can be seen as a positive move. On the other hand the EU did not manage to change the intellectual property rights in order to enable vaccine production in the

<sup>1</sup> "Advance questionnaire on main ODA aggregates," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, March 27, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> "Our world in data." Available online: <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?zoomToSelection=true&time=2021-12-26&facet=none&pickerSort=asc&pickerMetric=location&Metric=People+vaccinated+%28by+dose%29&Interval=Cumulative&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=~SVK> (accessed on February 28, 2022).

Global South. Slovakia's position on this is not clear. How factors such as expiration date, use monitoring, a possible lack of syringes and so on affected the effectiveness of vaccine donations has yet to be explored.

The figures above show that the high proportion of unvaccinated people in Slovakia including anti-vaxxers contributed to the 7 per cent of total ODA, although the exact extent of this is difficult to measure. It could a unique example of excess public goods being used as ODA and that creates mixed feelings.

The vaccine donations boosted the LDCs far up the SlovakAid OECD DAC reporting. The following section unpacks what happened to the geographic priorities, including the LDCs.

## ■ Geographic priorities: Phasing out or when push comes to shove?

This part depicts significant changes in the list of SlovakAid partner countries that deserve to be addressed in more detail. Why it is more accurate to present Ethiopia as a non-long-term planned decision and the journey in Afghanistan as letting an intervention slowly die out rather than the proper phasing-out that would be thoroughly justified and politically and financially backed up and what are the motivations for that?

At first glance the motivations appear simple – a combination of a complex worsening crisis and small donor resources spread thinly. A closer look reveals more pertinent issues such as the need to determine all of the following – identity, ambitions, goals, national interests, geographic distance, historical and cultural aspects, diaspora links and how the SlovakAid projects fits into the larger picture of the main donors (including the EU, be they joint programming, trust funds or more recently Team Europe Initiatives) – in relation to a given partner country.

The year was not only marked by the notorious evacuation of military and Western personnel from Kabul in August 2021 but was also a farewell for the SlovakAid endeavor in Afghanistan that had started in 2003. Although 20 years looks impressive on a timeline, the truth is that over the past ten years the SlovakAid presence had dwindled and was limited to a few micro-grants and a single project supported annually. With no embassy or resources to provide for the implementers and the deteriorating security situation on the ground it was probably an inevitable step.

Part of the motivations back then on the Slovak side can be linked to the war on terror led by the USA after 9/11 in 2001. Nonetheless one cannot exclude the possibility that Afghanistan may again receive financial aid in the future, but that will be mainly through UN organizations and on a small scale. Afghanistan started as a partner country, continued as a program country for two strategic cycles (ten years) and from 2019 onward was on the brink of being delisted.

In 2021 the SAIDC published zero calls for proposals for Afghanistan. There were several good projects by Slovak implementers, including NGOs, but the Slovak journey poses questions about how a donor like Slovakia should strategically choose work in a complex and remote crisis without prior historical attachments, with almost no diaspora and robust funding.

Some similarities as well as differences can be drawn in Ethiopia's case. The main difference is that unlike with Afghanistan there were some good reasons to expect the SlovakAid presence would grow, albeit slowly but steadily. It was only added to the list recently in 2019 (whole story here<sup>3</sup>) and was the only least developed (LDC) partner country in Africa with a Slovak embassy. The interest of the Slovak implementers, both NGOs and businesses, was increasing modestly and there were historical links with former Czechoslovakia. The security element is of a different essence from in Afghanistan – in general the risks are more acceptable for operating in. However, the conflict in Tigray and economic impact of COVID-19 on ODA finances may have outweighed the reasons for continuing.

Some of the last dregs of the official SlovakAid active approach to responding to the pressing humanitarian crisis in Tigray could be seen in the joint efforts of the Slovak NGOs' fundraising and awareness raising campaign "Together for Ethiopia" that ran in March and April. Close to €100,000 was raised including €20,000 provided by SlovakAid. Although initially planned as a matching fund, the Foreign Ministry's approach did not allow for the potential to be fully maximized.

The humanitarian crisis in Tigray was probably the death knell of the SlovakAid presence in Egypt. At the end of 2021 the Foreign Ministry announced it would close down the Slovak embassy in Addis and remove Ethiopia from the partner country list.

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<sup>3</sup> Ethiopia was not among the partner countries in the first program cycle (2003–2008) but became one starting in 2009–2013, only to be delisted in 2014–2018 and then back in 2019–2023.

With some simplification we can conclude that the withdrawal from Afghanistan could have happened years ago, while the decision on Ethiopia could have been postponed and properly phased out.

Towards the end of the year the Foreign Ministry confirmed it would abandon the regional approach to Sub-Saharan Africa. Given that scarce resources are being fragmented over a number of countries, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea are not expected to be seen on the list any time soon.

The lack of funding and fragmentation was stressed by the CSOs before the regional approach was adopted in 2019. Unless otherwise funded, SlovakAid decision projects could affect the scaling up potential and/or sustainability of projects.

The above not only means that Slovakia currently has no single LDC among its partners (with the exception of vaccine donations) but also that in general its focus has shifted even more onto Europe.

The case of Ireland shows that it is possible to focus on LDCs: nine out of the top ten IrishAid partner countries (in 2020) were: Ethiopia (€39.6 million), Mozambique (€25.7 million), Tanzania (€22.9 million), Uganda (€22.7 million), Malawi (€20.8 million), Sierra Leone (€14.6 million), Zimbabwe (€8.7 million), Palestine (€8.6 million), South Sudan (€8.6 million).<sup>4</sup>

The vaccines donated were worth €5.2 million, making the Slovak annual contribution to the LDCs probably one of the highest in its ODA history, although one can hardly see this as systemic and potentially replicable in the future.

On the other hand, keeping 24 explicit partner countries on the ODA list without a significant budget increase makes no sense for a small donor like Slovakia.

The Foreign Ministry made a move both toward the DAC OECD recommendations and a geographic focus in practical terms. It remains to be seen to what extent this was a strategic step or a mere reaction of the when push comes to shove type.

But part B remains open. So, after saying what we don't want to do and where we do not want to work, we need to take stock on what, where and how Slovakia wants to do its international cooperation. The debate on geographic

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<sup>4</sup> "Irish Aid. Annual Report 2020," Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 90. Available online: <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/publications/Irish-Aid-Annual-Report-2020.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2022)

priorities (where) needs to be coupled with the question of the Slovak Republic's role in both humanitarian and development aid.

## ■ Fragility, resilience and humanitarian aid

Although the EU has been the world's leading humanitarian actor, providing some 36 per cent of global humanitarian assistance,<sup>5</sup> the gap between humanitarian needs and the available funding has been increasing. According to UN OCHA over the past 10 years the number of people in need has increased dramatically from \$62 million to \$235 million.<sup>6</sup>

The EU vicinity and beyond is becoming more fragile and that is having an increasing effect on Slovakia.

Examples include the brutal oppression of civil society in Belarus, continuing with the refugee crisis artificially triggered by the Lukashenko regime on the Polish/Belarus border and the conflict in Donbas, Ukraine, continuing with minor skirmishes ravaging the lives of its inhabitants.

In the EU's southern neighborhood, Lebanon sank deeper into poverty with barely any reforms after a year-long political stalemate. After unsuccessful attempts by two designated prime ministers since the blast in Beirut port, the third prime minister designate in a row managed to form a government in the summer. Meanwhile in Ethiopia, a SlovakAid partner country, the horrendous conflict in Tigray took a high toll on the lives of civilians.

The evacuation of Western personnel from Kabul marked the end of the SlovakAid endeavor in Afghanistan. When it comes to irregular migration, according to Frontex, the total number of irregular arrivals in Europe via the Mediterranean route increased to 65,000 arrivals and via the Western Balkan route to 60,000 crossings.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In 2020, the EU and member states combined allocated funding of €7.577 billion. See "Humanitarian aid contribution." Available online: <https://fts.unocha.org/> (accessed March 2, 2022)

<sup>6</sup> See "Global Humanitarian overview 2021," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2021.

<sup>7</sup> "EU external borders in 2021: Arrivals above pre-pandemic levels," Frontex, January 11. Available online: <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-in-2021-arrivals-above-pre-pandemic-levels-CxVMNN> (accessed March 4, 2022)

With fragility on the increase Slovakia needs to take stock on how it can adapt its policies to help its neighborhood become more resilient and to diminish the negative effects of conflicts, hybrid warfare, disinformation, climate change, economic and supply chain, energy dependency and refugee crises.

The experience in Afghanistan, the reaction to the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia, the change in the SlovakAid call for proposals on Ukraine from humanitarian to development aid pose serious questions about Slovakia's capacities and ambitions in humanitarian aid. Besides the lack of funding, one of the reasons the SlovakAid humanitarian quest in South Sudan seems to be coming to an end is the alleged limitation of having no presence on the ground and the complications of working from a distance from Nairobi. Having a presence in the field is indisputably an element that needs to be taken into consideration in the future strategy.

In 2021 SlovakAid allocated €1 million in humanitarian grants for Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. It is not clear why the COVID-19 humanitarian grants in 2020 were not repeated in 2021 nor has there been a proper explanation as to why the evaluation process that took ten days could not be replicated as a good lesson learnt.

The Slovak humanitarian aid system is outdated, with limited strategic, financial, personnel and expert capacities. The Mechanism of Humanitarian Aid document is from 2006 and does not reflect the current situation. Having a humanitarian aid strategy is among the goals of the Slovak medium-term strategy for development cooperation. At the end of 2020 the Foreign Ministry rightly created a working group under the ODA coordination committee and the first meeting took place in November 2020. That same year Ambrela presented its recommendations and published a participatory review of Slovak Humanitarian Aid. In the first half of 2021 the process slowed significantly with a working group lying idle.

The process resumed in September 2021 and in spite of the relatively intense meetings of the working group, the process has been affected by inter-ministerial misunderstandings about the process and structure of the strategy. The lack of facilitation and leadership contributed to too. The state of progress since December 2021 is unknown.

Although Slovakia cannot compete with other donors in terms of funding volume, it can work on identifying and building up its comparative advantage. This could potentially oscillate around three building blocks: overall rapid response, flexibility in project implementation and filling the gaps in the large stakeholder environment. In other words: small but quick and flexible

might be the way forward. Obviously this does not exclude a dialogue on what the sectoral or crosscutting focus could be.

As food for thought, the three examples below are worth exploring.

The Humanitarian Programme Plan (HPP) started by IrishAid in 2009 supports humanitarian interventions in situations of protracted, predictable and recurring crises and aims to strengthen the partnership with humanitarian NGOs and promote humanitarian responses that build resilience and lay the groundwork for sustainable development. It incorporates elements of preparedness, disaster risk reduction and early recovery.<sup>8</sup>

Another IrishAid scheme is the Emergency Response Fund Scheme (ERFS) founded in 2007. It pre-positions funds with participating NGOs at the beginning of the year to enable them to respond quickly and appropriately to humanitarian crises during the initial weeks after the onset of an emergency. Another added value besides the quick response is the financial leverage it can create. The ratio funding per project is €100,000 but since 2014 it has funded more than 200 humanitarian interventions in over 47 countries and provided funding worth over €21 million.<sup>9</sup>

Another example is the Start Fund<sup>10</sup> – the first multi-donor pooled fund managed exclusively by NGOs. Although recently decentralized into several hubs that are geographically not overlapping with the SlovakAid partner countries the very idea of providing rapid financing to underfunded small to medium scale crises, spikes in chronic humanitarian crises, and acting in anticipation of impending crises and filling a critical gap in humanitarian financing may be worth exploring.

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<sup>8</sup> See more at “Humanitarian Programme Plan,” IrishAid. Available online: <https://www.irishaid.ie/what-we-do/responding-to-emergencies/ngofunding/> (accessed March 5, 2022)

<sup>9</sup> See more at “Emergency Response Fund Scheme (ERFS),” IrishAid. Available online: <https://www.irishaid.ie/what-we-do/responding-to-emergencies/ngofunding/> (accessed March 5, 2022)

<sup>10</sup> The Start Fund is collectively owned and managed by Start Network’s members, and supported by the governments of the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Jersey and the IKEA Foundation. Projects are chosen by local committees, made up of staff from Start Network members and their partners, within 72 hours of an alert. This makes the Start Fund the fastest, collectively-owned, early response mechanism in the world. For more see: <https://startnetwork.org/start-fund> (accessed March 4, 2022)

## ■ Civil society and the SlovakAid partnership

Civil society and NGOs are a longstanding SlovakAid partner. In 2021 they ran programs and projects in more than 30 countries but they also faced multiple challenges such as, but not limited to, the COVID-19 impact on their operations and effects on fundraising capacities.

In January and February, the SAIDC published 11 calls for proposals with a total allocation of €4.3 million. The majority of the implementers are NGOs. In 2021, 21 grantees started 47 projects in 16 SlovakAid partner countries.

However, in the 2013–2021 year-on-year comparison, there was no significant increase in the grant budget for NGOs, although total aid increased from €64 million to €127 million and bilateral aid went from €12 million to €30 million. This is undoubtedly the Achilles heel in the SlovakAid and NGO partnership.

Compared to 2020, when there was an exceptional increase in the grant budget, this represents a decrease of approximately €1.24 million (21.83 per cent). The planned grant budget versus real spending ratio in the calls for proposals improved annually as follows: €4.3 million versus €4 million in 2021 and €5.6 million versus €4.6 million in 2020.

It is not clear how the Foreign Ministry reallocate funds from NGO accessible grants to financial contributions nor to what extent the Annual Bilateral Aid Program budget can be relied on or how binding it is.

Similarly, no one knows how the grant budget is reallocated among calls for proposals. Last year an extra €250,000 was relocated to the Western Balkans (six unapproved applications) but not to e.g. Ukraine (12 unapproved project applications).

The grant budget for Kenya, a program country, is continually being decreased. It reached €500,000 (of seven applications three were approved). The maximum budget decreased from €250,000 to €200,000 only.

On the positive side the grant budget was not reduced in light of the COVID-19 economic impact.

In Ireland 22 per cent (€187 m) of total ODA was channeled to and through NGOs in 2020. This is in stark contrast to less than 4 per cent of funding being

channeled through Slovak NGOs in 2021. Core support from IrishAid to NGOs equals €92 million versus €0.05 million from SlovakAid. IrishAid project type interventions amounted to €141 million.

## ■ Conclusion

Although painful for some implementers, reducing the partner country list to 14 countries was necessary to avoid Slovak ODA crumbling away.

Two essential ingredients are consistency and predictability.

The geographic consistency is illustrated by Ethiopia: it was not among the partner countries in the first programmatic cycle (2003–2008), became one in 2009–2013, only to be delisted in 2014–2018 and back on again in 2019–2023. Now it is off the list.

In terms of tools it would be extremely helpful if the Slovak Republic could position itself as a modern donor with a flexible rapid onset humanitarian cycle. When it comes to reforming the humanitarian system this does not necessarily imply a huge increase in funding.

The whole development cooperation community needs genuine bilateral aid funding to be increased. A very useful first step would be to create and approve a realistic plan for increasing the Slovak development cooperation budget.

It would also be worth exploring whether it is possible to systematically link Slovakia's bilateral and multilateral development cooperation, so there is more of a connection between its activities and the EU and other EU member states' activities, be that in TEI or the new 2021–2027 program cycle.

Last but not least, a very practical and welcome step would be to introduce a strategic dialogue, based on data and evaluations and focused on results, with the main actors of development cooperation in the Slovak Republic so everyone is clear on the priorities for the given year, how these will be achieved and so continuous progress tracking can be put in place.

**Table 4.** Effects of policy and management decisions on the Slovak ODA system

deterioration	damage control	improvement
No Strategy on Humanitarian Aid	No significant cuts to the SlovakAid grants	SAIDC signed an agreement to implement its first EU delegated cooperation project in Moldova. This will be the very first EU delegated cooperation project for SAIDC and the agency will be the lead partner.
Humanitarian capacities not boosted		Focus on human rights and democracy in public discourse and PR by the MFA
10 day evaluation period of humanitarian projects not replicated from 2020		Timeline of SAIDC calls for proposals published beforehand
No call for strategic partnerships		Pre-deployment consultations between diplomats and CSOs
Slovak commitment to 0.33 per cent GNI increasingly threatened		Mid-term evaluation of the 5 year Strategy for development
No institutional or core support for NGOs to counterbalance COVID-19 impacts		Visits by the State Secretary to Lebanon, Moldova and Georgia
Inflated aid and vaccines accounting for 18 per cent of total ODA		Results of (un)successful applications published
No LDC project/ program country		
CSO mandatory matching not canceled or diminished in spite of economic impacts of Covid-19		
No clear explanation on merging development cooperation and economic diplomacy into one section at the MFA		
No analysis on ODA business		
No plan for ODA business		
No ODA report presentation to parliament		







Annexes

4

# A chronology of important events in Slovak foreign policy in 2021

*January 11* ▪ Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Ivan Korčok has a phone call with Olivér Várhelyi, the European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement. The main topic of discussion is the European Union's enlargement process. Minister Korčok emphasizes that the accession process must not be "held hostage to bilateral issues between member states and candidates."

*January 21* ▪ State Secretary Martin Klus has a video conference with Nikola Dimitrov, the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia. Klus states that the reforms and ending the disputes between the Western Balkan countries are in Slovakia's best interests. Consequently, the state secretary says, Slovakia supports their accession to the European Union.

*January 21* ▪ Minister Korčok meets his Czech counterpart Tomáš Petříček and Austrian counterpart Alexander Schallenberg. The ministers agree on a series of intensive discussions within the Slafkovsky format.

*January 22* ▪ State Secretary Ingrid Brocková welcomes the fact that the United States has rejoined the Paris Agreement on climate change. Brocková represents Slovakia at a meeting of representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the European Union and John Kerry, First United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate.

*January 22* ▪ Defense Minister Jaroslav Naď has a video call with his Israeli counterpart Benny Gantz. The aim of their conversation is to start the processes needed to procure the new 3D radar systems for the Slovak Armed Forces.

*January 22* ▪ At the meeting of the UN Security Council, Minister Korčok condemns the persecution of Belarusian journalists.

*January 26* ▪ Prime Minister Igor Matovič congratulates Kaja Kallas on being the first woman to become Prime Minister of Estonia. Matovič says Slovakia is looking forward to working with Estonia in NATO and the European Union.

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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 28* ■ State Secretary Brocková and her Ukrainian counterpart Emine Dzhaparova open the 6<sup>th</sup> Slovak–Ukrainian forum, which takes place online. The main topics of the forum are the Crimean Platform and further deepening bilateral relations, with an emphasis on the energy sector.

*January 28* ■ The Slovak Parliament approves the new defense and security strategies. 108 MPs vote in favor of the defense strategy and 77 MPs support the new security strategy.

*February 8–10* ■ Ivan Korčok pays a three-day visit to the Western Balkans. He visits North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania. Korčok claims that of all the candidate countries in the region, Montenegro has made the most progress on the European Union accession process. During the visit, the minister delivers humanitarian aid including lung ventilators.

*February 15* ■ President Zuzana Čaputová commemorates the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Visegrad Declaration along with the presidents of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary at the summit on Hel Peninsula in Poland.

*February 15–16* ■ Minister Korčok visits the capitals of Poland, Croatia, Romania and Ukraine. In Kyiv, he stresses Slovakia's full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

*February 17* ■ Prime Minister Matovič says that Visegrad Group cooperation is a necessity, not a choice. The V4 prime ministers meet in Krakow along with President of the European Council Charles Michel to discuss the pandemic situation.

*February 19* ■ President Zuzana Čaputová has a video conversation with President of Austria Alexander Van der Bellen. They discuss developments in the coronavirus crisis. They also speak about global developments, the climate crisis and vaccinations.

*March 1* ■ Minister Korčok accepts an invitation from his Slovenian counterpart Anže Logar and participates in negotiations with representatives of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia. The foreign ministers discuss cross-border coordination to fight the pandemic and the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

*March 4* ■ Minister Korčok says that Hungary should not interfere in Slovakia's internal affairs. He was responding to a request from Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó to discuss the Slovak State Citizenship Act. At the same time, Korčok confirms that he is interested in having good neighborly relations.

*March 4* ■ Prime Minister Matovič apologizes to Ukraine for his joke about Zakarpattia. He declares that Slovakia's stance on Ukraine's territorial integrity is clear and unchanged.

*March 7* ■ Slovakia will be receiving 15,000 AstraZeneca doses from France, Prime Minister Matovič confirms. He thanks France for its "gesture of friendship and European solidarity."

*March 12* ■ State Secretary Brocková speaks at the UN Security Council about the situation in Crimea. She says that the illegal annexation and deteriorating situation require a response from the international community.

*March 16* ■ Minister Korčok pays a visit to Turkey. He starts his working day by paying tribute to Alexander Dubček in the street that bears his name. After the negotiations with his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, he reaffirms that it is in both countries' interest to cooperate in resolving global issues.

*March 16* ■ Minister Korčok visits Azerbaijan. He notes that despite the geographical distance, Slovakia is interested in further cooperation, especially in trade. Korčok adds that Slovakia strongly supports a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

*March 23* ■ Minister Korčok holds talks with his counterparts in the Visegrad Group and US State Secretary Anthony Blinken. Blinken emphasizes the importance of NATO and Korčok welcomes the new US administration's ambition to deepen defense cooperation with the V4 countries.

*March 23* ■ Minister Naď announces that Slovakia is to purchase 17 radars from Israel at a cost of €148.2 million. Naď says this is an important day for the security and defense of Slovakia.

*March 18* ■ President Čaputová has a video call with President of Slovenia Borut Pahor. The main topic of conversation is the recent developments in the pandemic. President Čaputová emphasizes the importance of cooperation, solidarity and the unity of the European Union.

*April 12* ■ State Secretary Brocková is concerned about the deepening humanitarian crisis and the critical situation in the Tigray region. The Ministry of Foreign and European affairs is therefore joining the *Together for Ethiopia* initiative to raise funds for acute humanitarian needs.

*April 18* ■ Slovak officials, including the president, prime minister and foreign minister express their support for the Czech Republic in relation to the suspected involvement of the Russian secret services in the 2014 deadly explosion in Vrbeřice. Minister Korčok emphasizes that Czechia is Slovakia's closest neighbor and ally.

*April 21* ■ Ivan Korčok meets Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias in Athens. He congratulates Greece on its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. He also visits the Eleonas refugee camp in Athens and says that Slovakia is prepared to contribute one million euros "to help mitigate some of the negative impacts of migration."

*April 27* ■ President Čaputová has a video conversation with her German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier. She thanks him for Germany's support for the additional re-distribution of vaccines within the European Union. The presidents discussed combating intolerance on the Internet.

*April 27* ▪ Newly appointed Prime Minister Eduard Heger meets President of the European Council and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen for the first time. Heger says that Slovakia's recovery plan has attracted positive feedback.

*April 27* ▪ Minister Korčok visits Germany and holds discussions with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. Korčok and Maas reaffirm the close cooperation between the two countries. They also discuss the ongoing pandemic, Ukraine and the accession processes of the Western Balkan countries.

*April 27* ▪ Prime Minister Heger and Minister Naď meet NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels. Stoltenberg welcomes Slovakia's increased spending on defense.

*April 27* ▪ State Secretary Brocková pays a working visit to Serbia to hold talks with her counterpart Nemanja Starović. Brocková re-affirms Slovakia's interest in continuing to provide cooperation and expert assistance to Serbia in relation to its European integration ambitions. During the second day of her visit, Brocková spends time in the Slovak minority centers in Serbia, namely the towns of Kovačica, Bački Petrovac and Novi Sad.

*April 28* ▪ Minister Korčok receives the new Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jakub Kulhánek. The two discuss the bilateral relations of the two countries and touch upon security challenges.

*April 30–May 1* ▪ During his visit to northern Albania and Macedonia, State Secretary Klus expresses his clear support for the early start to their accession talks with the European Union.

*May 5* ▪ Prime Minister Heger talks to his Austrian counterpart Sebastian Kurz. Among the topics they discuss are mutual economic cooperation, border measures and nuclear energy.

*May 6* ▪ Ivan Korčok pays a working visit to Rome where he meets his Italian counterpart Luigi Di Maio. The two sides agree that they want to intensify bilateral cooperation.

*May 9* ▪ President Čaputová, Prime Minister Heger, Chairman of the National Council Kollár and Minister Korčok open the Conference of Europe's Future at Bratislava Castle. The president stresses that "the European Union is us."

*May 9* ▪ Martin Klus participates in an informal meeting of the General Affairs Council in Coimbra, Portugal. He points out that the European Union must exploit the potential of the single market and competitiveness rather than pursuing protectionist and interventionist policies.

*May 17* ▪ Eduard Heger has a video conference with Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel. Apart from the pandemic situation and the vaccinations, they discuss the current political situation in Slovakia and Germany.

*May 20* ▪ Minister Korčok holds negotiations with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi regarding the situation in Israel and

Gaza. Korčok states that Israel has the right to self-defense but calls for proportionality in the use of force and for the safety of civilians.

*May 20* ▪ As part of her visit to Lebanon, State Secretary Brocková hands over more than €200,000 in humanitarian aid to a hospital in Beirut. She states that Slovakia will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the region.

*May 10* ▪ President Čaputová takes part in the Bucharest Nine online summit held with the participation of the US President Joe Biden and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. President Čaputová highlights the importance of the B9 in relation to the security threats on the NATO's eastern wing.

*May 10–11* ▪ President Čaputová pays a visit to Denmark. During the first day of her visit, she meets Crown Prince Frederik and participates in the Copenhagen Democracy Summit. During the second day of her visit, President Čaputová meets Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. Both sides re-affirm their interest in strengthening the partnership.

*May 12* ▪ President Čaputová delivers a video speech at the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> Delphi Economic Forum. She notes the world has changed radically and touches upon the topics of the environment and health.

*May 28* ▪ Prime Minister Heger travels to Kyiv where he states that Ukraine is an important neighbor, partner and friend to Slovakia. Minister Naď says that Slovakia is ready to intensify cooperation with Ukraine in the defense industry, science and research, and training.

*June 2–4* ▪ Together with Economy Minister Richard Sulík, Minister Korčok participates in the 24<sup>th</sup> International Economic Forum in Petersburg. They hold discussions with Minister of Science and Higher Education Valery Walkov and Alexey Miller, CEO of the energy company Gazprom.

*June 6* ▪ Prime Minister Heger welcomes the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira. Heger states that Slovakia wants to use the Recovery Plan as effectively as possible. The meeting was also attended by Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization Veronika Remišová.

*June 6* ▪ Ivan Korčok travels to Paris to meet Secretary of State for European Affairs, Clément Beaune. The two men discuss the forthcoming French Presidency of the Council of the EU and bilateral relations. Korčok opens an event held in memory of Štefan Osuský.

*June 14* ▪ President Čaputová participates in the NATO summit in Brussels. The leaders of the member states discuss the new strategic concept.

*June 15* ▪ Minister Korčok and his counterpart Bujar Osmani officially open the Embassy of the Republic of North Macedonia in Bratislava. Korčok states that it testifies to the excellent relations between the two countries.

*June 15* ▪ President Čaputová meets Polish President Andrzej Duda and her Croatian counterpart Zoran Milanović. The main topic of the conversation with President Duda is the internal political situation in Slovakia and Poland. President Čaputová speaks with President Milanović mainly about the recent NATO summit.

*June 21* ▪ President Čaputová is received by President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen who confirms that Slovakia's Recovery Plan has been approved. The president notes that Slovakia is one of the first EU countries to have its plan approved. Prime Minister Heger adds that the most difficult part is still to come – the implementation of the plan.

*June 25* ▪ Ingrid Brocková pays a working visit to Austria. Among other things, she discusses digitalization, industrial transformation and dual education. Brocková says that Austria is in many ways an inspiration for Slovakia.

*June 28* ▪ Ivan Korčok opens the new Štefan Osuský Summer School of Diplomacy. Its main objective is to stimulate young people's interest in what is happening in foreign policy.

*June 29* ▪ State Secretary Brocková re-opens the Honorary Consulate in Naples headed by Stefania Girfatti for Campania and Calabria. In addition to cooperation in tourism and trade, she also sees potential in cultural and educational cooperation.

*June 29* ▪ Prime Minister Heger pays a visit to Budapest to meet his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orbán. The two leaders agree on the European Union integration of the Western Balkans, migration and cooperation in the Visegrad Group. Orbán notes that relations between Hungary and Slovakia have never been so good.

*June 30* ▪ President Čaputová meets the Slovak ambassadors of the European Union countries. She emphasizes the importance of the rule of law and democratic values for Slovakia.

*July 7* ▪ During his visit to Baku, State Secretary Klus reaffirms Slovakia's interest in continuing to strengthen bilateral relations with Azerbaijan. He says the dynamic nature of the region makes it attractive to Slovak entrepreneurs.

*July 8* ▪ Minister Korčok attends the international Dubrovnik Forum 2021 where he meets his Croatian counterpart Andreja Metelko-Zgombić. They mainly focus on the ongoing summer season and the measures to control the spread of the Delta variant.

*July 8* ▪ Korčok congratulates the new Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and looks forward to strengthening the Slovak-Israel partnership and dialogue.

*July 12* ▪ Korčok says he that he is expecting the results of the investigation into the death of Slovak citizen Ján Chovanec. He therefore calls for a meeting with his Belgium counterpart Sophie Wilmès. He emphasizes the good bilateral relations between Slovakia and Belgium.

*July 12* ▪ The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs announces the opening of the Slovak Institute in Jerusalem.

*July 15* ▪ President Čaputová is received by President of Montenegro Milo Djukanović. The presidents speak about the integration of Montenegro and the enlargement of the European Union to include the Western Balkan countries.

*July 16* ▪ Minister Korčok welcomes President of Montenegro Milo Djukanović to Bratislava. Djukanović thanks Slovakia for her long-term support for his country's integration ambitions. Korčok says that Montenegro is not just a Slovak ally but also a friend.

*July 22* ▪ State Secretary Klus recalls the Bosnian War during his visit to Sarajevo. He highlights the fragility of peace and emphasizes the importance of the stability that integration into European structures will bring.

*July 25* ▪ President Čaputová participates in the opening ceremony of the Salzburg Festival at the invitation of her Austrian counterpart Alexander Van der Bellen.

*August 4* ▪ Minister Korčok states that the way Hungarian representatives are addressing historical issues contradicts efforts to ensure good bilateral relations with Slovakia. His comments are a response to Hungarian Speaker of Parliament László Kövér's demand that Slovakia apologize for the Beneš Decrees.

*August 19* ▪ Twenty people are evacuated from Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power. Sixteen are Slovak citizens and their families and four are Afghani citizens who cooperated with the Slovak army.

*August 23* ▪ Slovakia joins the European Union members in their effort to support third countries by delivering vaccines. Slovakia donates 60,000 AstraZeneca vaccines to Ukraine and 10,000 to Montenegro.

*August 31* ▪ Minister Korčok thanks the Slovak firefighters who helped fight the devastating fires in Greece. He awards them a Golden Plaque for spreading Slovakia's good reputation abroad. Earlier Prime Minister Heger thanked the firefighters as well.

*August 30* ▪ Slovakia successfully evacuates another 28 people from Afghanistan. Prime Minister Heger says that while the first mission was "a big success," this is "an even bigger one."

*September 2* ▪ President Čaputová receives German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The presidents agree that Germany is an important strategic and economic partner for Slovakia.

*September 9* ▪ Speaker of the National Council Boris Kollár welcomes Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag Andreas Norlén. The two men discuss deepening mutual cooperation. Kollár considers Sweden an inspiration because of its advanced democracy. Norlén is received by Prime Minister Heger as well.

*September 12–15* ▪ Pope Francis arrives in Bratislava. Altogether, he spends four days in Slovakia. He visits Prešov, Košice and Šaštín.

*September 14* ■ Ivan Korčok pays his first official visit to Armenia. In Yerevan, he meets his counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan. The talks are focused mainly on bilateral cooperation, with the emphasis on trade and economy.

*September 15* ■ At the invitation of his Moldovan counterpart Deputy Prime Minister Nicu Popescu, Korčok visits Chisinau for the first time. He supports Moldova on what he says is a similar path to the one recently taken by Slovakia.

*September 16* ■ State Secretary Martin Klus attends the opening of the Slovak Roundabout in Krakow. Klus notes that it is testimony to the friendship and good cooperation between Slovakia and Poland.

*September 20* ■ Slovakia sends humanitarian aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and migration crisis. The material aid is funded by the Ministry of the Interior and is worth more than €35,000.

*September 21–22* ■ Ivan Korčok has talks with his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. They discuss the future of Afghanistan and stabilizing the region. He later meets other foreign ministers: the Qatari Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, the Palestinian Minister Riyad al-Maliki, the Georgian Minister David Zalkaliani and Russian Minister Sergey Lavrov.

*September 21* ■ President Čaputová delivers a video speech at the UN General Assembly. The main topics are the climate crisis, rule of law and the undermining of the international order.

*September 28* ■ In Belgrade, Minister Naď states that Slovakia's friendship and cooperation with Serbia is based on solid foundations and cultural and historical ties. After the meeting with his Serbian counterpart Nebojša Stefanović, Naď says he welcomes the fact that European integration remains a top priority for the Serbian government.

*September 28* ■ Minister Korčok opens the first ever Export Forum of Economic Diplomacy. It is intended to provide an economic diplomacy platform for the annual exchange of views on Slovakia's export policy priorities.

*September 30* ■ Prime Minister Heger travels to Athens where he holds talks with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of Greece. In addition to bilateral relations, the two leaders discuss climate change.

*October 7* ■ President Čaputová discusses the role of female political leaders with Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou. The presidents also touch upon the climate crisis and women's rights in Afghanistan.

*October 7* ■ Jaroslav Naď holds talks with his French counterpart Florence Parly in Paris. Naď sees France as an important European partner and says the aim of his visit is to intensify the strategic framework for defense cooperation between the two countries.

*October 10* ■ Minister Korčok welcomes Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó to Bratislava. He asserts that having good relations with Hungary is a priority but emphasizes the importance of transparency when extending government programs to Slovakia.

*October 10* ■ On the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rebuilding of the Mária Valéria Bridge, Prime Minister Korčok meets his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orbán. Heger notes that Slovakia is keen for relations with Hungary to be based on mutual respect.

*October 11* ■ Ivan Korčok pays a visit to Kazakhstan, an important partner in Central Asia. He observes that the high level of mutual relations does not extend sufficiently to the business sector.

*October 12* ■ Korčok unveils a monument in Nizhny Novgorod on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Alexander Dubček.

*October 13* ■ Speaker of the National Council Kollár makes his first official visit to Poland. In Warsaw, he is welcomed by President Andrzej Duda and Marshal of the Sejm Elżbieta Witek. Kollár and Witek discuss the pandemic and developing interparliamentary cooperation.

*October 14* ■ President Čaputová visits Ljubljana at the invitation of her Slovenian counterpart Borut Pahor. The presidents talk about strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. Moreover, they discuss the European Union enlargement process and the pandemic.

*October 14* ■ Prime Minister Heger participates in the opening of the Slovak pavilion at EXPO 2020. He meets Minister of Finance of the United Arab Emirates Sheik Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum with whom he talks about deepening cooperation in business, technology, tourism and other sectors.

*October 17–18* ■ Minister Korčok makes his first official visit to Tbilisi to meet Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani. Korčok notes that the Georgian decision to build relations between Georgia and NATO is a matter of free choice. He also emphasizes the importance of reforms, especially in the judiciary.

*October 18–19* ■ The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs launched the very first annual Svetoslav Bombík Analytical Days. The objective is to facilitate an in-depth debate on key issues in Slovak foreign and European policy, and involve the non-governmental sector.

*October 19* ■ Korčok pays a visit to Azerbaijan where he meets President Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister Ali Asadov, Economy Minister Mikhail Dzhubarov and his Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov. Korčok speaks highly of the economic cooperation between the two countries.

*October 19* ■ Minister Korčok accepts an invitation from his Austrian counterpart to attend discussions with the representatives of Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovenia. The main topic of the meeting is the pandemic. They also discuss developments in the Eastern Neighborhood.

*October 29* ■ At the invitation of Minister Korčok, Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Selaković travels to Bratislava. The two men discuss bilateral relations and note there is room for improvement. Korčok considers Serbia to be Slovakia's biggest trade partner in the Western Balkans.

*October 31–November 2* ▪ President Čaputová attends the UN Climate Change Conference. In her speech, she voices young people's concerns. She refers to a survey showing that up to 42 per cent of young Slovaks are extremely worried about the impacts of climate change.

*November 4* ▪ The Visegrad Group leaders meet South Korean President Moon Jae-in. Prime Minister Heger states Slovakia and South Korea share common values such as democracy, the free market and rule of law.

*November 9* ▪ President Čaputová welcomes Polish President Andrzej Duda and expresses her full support for Poland over the escalating tensions on the Polish-Belarusian border. President Čaputová also raises the issue of the rule of law and the European Union institutions.

*November 11* ▪ Minister Korčok attends the Sir Bani Yas Forum Conference focused on security in the Middle East. During the event, held in the United Arab Emirates, Korčok meets his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

*November 11* ▪ President Čaputová pays a visit to the Czech Republic where she meets her counterpart Miloš Zeman. On the same day, she is awarded the Silver Commemorative Medal of the Czech Senate.

*November 12* ▪ Prime Minister Heger visits Uzhhorod where he meets his Ukrainian counterpart Denys Shmyhal. The two men sign a joint declaration on cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region.

*November 16* ▪ State Secretary Klus opens the Honorary Consulate of the Slovak Republic in Vilnius, which will serve the whole of Lithuania. Vilnius was the last European capital without an official Slovak mission.

*November 23* ▪ Eduard Heger holds talks with Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg. The main topic discussed is the epidemiological situation in Austria and the associated measures.

*November 23* ▪ State Secretary Brocková visits Moldova to take part in the project *Digital talents for Moldova – Slovakia for talents: Job mobility program for ICT graduates between Slovakia and Moldova*. The aim is to help Moldovan talents improve their professional skills in the Slovak work environment.

*November 29* ▪ President Čaputová participates in the V4 summit in Budapest. The presidents agree to support vaccinations and express their support for Poland, Latvia and Lithuania in relation to the crisis on the Belarusian border.

*December 9* ▪ President Čaputová takes part in the online Summit for Democracy. She emphasizes the importance of judicial reform, the fight against corruption, transparency in commercial transactions and the freedom of the media. The President is accompanied by Minister Korčok.

*December 9* ▪ The V4 prime ministers invite French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss migration, the rule of law and nuclear energy. Among other things, Heger emphasizes the importance of carbon neutrality targets.

*December 17* ▪ Minister Korčok holds discussions with the Georgian Defense Minister Juansher Burchuladze. Korčok praises the progress that Georgia has made so far in its integration efforts and the reform of the armed forces. The two men also discuss the escalating situation on the Russian–Ukrainian border.

*December 20* ▪ President Čaputová visits Slovak soldiers at Camp Adazi in Latvia. The aim of her visit is to show appreciation for their contribution to the good reputation of Slovakia abroad.

*December 20* ▪ Minister Korčok welcomes the new Czech Foreign Affairs Minister Jan Lipavský. He emphasizes the unique relations between the two countries.



# Treaties, agreements, conventions published in 2021

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Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

## ■ Presidential treaties and agreements

1. Agreement for the termination of bilateral investment treaties between the member states of the European Union  
(Brussels, May 5, 2021, published under No. 12/2021 Z. z.)
2. Extension of the European Cooperating State Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the European Space Agency signed in Bratislava on 16 February 2015  
(Bratislava, February 4, 2021, published under No. 122/2021 Z. z.)
3. Headquarters Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the European Labour Authority  
(Bratislava, October 4, 2021, published under No. 365/2021 Z. z.)
4. Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Sultanate of Oman on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income  
(Muscat, March 25, 2018, published under No. 548/2021 Z. z.)

## ■ Governmental treaties and agreements

1. Amendments to the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Indonesia on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income  
(published under No. 11/2021 Z. z.)
2. Amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Greece on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income  
(published under No. 448/2021 Z. z.)
3. Amendments to the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Croatia on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income  
(published under No. 449/2021 Z. z.)



4. Amendments to the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and Hungary on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income (published under No. 450/2021 Z. z.)
5. Amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Malaysia on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income (published under No. 451/2021 Z. z.)
6. Amendments to the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Estonia on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income (published under No. 499/2021 Z. z.)
7. Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Malta on mutual protection of classified information (Brussels, February 22, 2021, published under No. 162/2021 Z. z.)
8. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on determining the conditions of use of the designated part of the airspace of the Slovak Republic in relation to the provision of air traffic services by the designated Ukrainian air navigation services provider at Uzhhorod International Airport (Bratislava, September 24, 2020, published under No. 227/2021 Z. z.)
9. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Montenegro on the settlement of the debt of the Republic of Montenegro towards the Slovak Republic (Podgorica, October 26, 2020, published under No. 311/2021 Z. z.)
10. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Hungary on cooperation in the field of military aviation (Bratislava, November 30, 2020, published under No. 321/2021 Z.z.)
11. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Poland regarding cooperation in military aviation (Warsaw, July 8, 2020, published under No. 322/2021 Z.z.)

## ■ Ministerial treaties and agreements

1. Agreement on education, language learning, university and scientific cooperation between the Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic for 2021–2024 (Bratislava, December 7, 2021, published under No. 22/2021 Z. z.)
2. Protocol on grant between the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and International Francophone Organisation (Bratislava, March 18, 2021, published under No. 306/2021 Z. z.)

3. Amendments Protocol on grant between the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and International Francophone (Bratislava, September 17, 2021)
4. Agreement between the Presidium of the Police Force of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the National Police Headquarters of Hungary on amending the Agreement between the Presidium of the Police Force of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the National Police Headquarters of Hungary on joint patrols in the territory of Hungary within the framework of joint operations of 19 October 2015 (Tat, November 18, 2021, published under No. 498/2021 Z. z.)

## ■ Multilateral treaties and agreements

1. Amendments to the Regulations under the Protocol relating to the Madrid Agreement concerning the International Registration of Marks (Geneva, October 3 2019, published under No. 6/2021 Z. z.)
2. Amendments to the Regulations under the Protocol relating to the Madrid Agreement concerning the International Registration of Marks (Geneva, September 24 2020, published under No. 7/2021 Z. z.)
3. Amendments to the Implementing Regulations to the European Patent Convention (Munich, December 15, 2020, published under No. 13/2021 Z. z.)
4. 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 (published under No. 43/2021 Z. z.)
5. Amendments to the Implementing Regulations to the European Patent Convention (Munich, December 15, 2020, published under No. 112/2021 Z. z.)
6. Protocol Amending the Agreement on the Establishment and Operation of the International Bank for Economic Cooperation of 22 October 1963 (as amended by the Protocol of 18 December 1970, the Protocol of 23 November 1977 and the Protocol of 18 December 1990) and the Statute of the International Bank for Economic Cooperation (as amended by the Protocol of 18 December 1970, the Protocol of 23 November 1977 and Protocol of 18 December 1990) (Warsaw, November 25, 2014, published under No. 136/2021 Z. z.)
7. Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, of the one part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the other part (Brussels, November 22 2017, published under No. 139/2021 Z. z.)
8. Protocol Amending the title of the European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (May 13 2019, published under No. 165/2021 Z. z.)

9. Amendments to Annexes A and B to the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods (January 1, 2021, published under No. 166/2021 Z. z.)
10. Amendments to the Regulations annexed to the European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways (AND) (published under No. 331/2010 Z. z.) (January 1, 2021, published under No. 225/2021 Z. z.)
11. Modifications to the Regulations concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail (January 1, 2021, published under No. 226/2021 Z. z.)
12. Protocol No. 15 amending the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Strasbourg, June 24, 2013, published under No. 251/2021 Z. z.)
13. Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Kyiv, October 9, 2018, published under No. 383/2021 Z. z.)

and Additional Protocol between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Croatia on Amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Croatia on the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments (published under No. 69/1999 Zb. and 453/2009 Z. z.) (November 13, 2020, published under No. 20/2021 Z. z.)

6. Agreement between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Republic of Finland for the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 478/1991 Z. z.) (December 1, 2020, published under No. 21/2021 Z. z.)
7. Agreement between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Republic of Austria for the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 454/1991 Zb.) (June 1, 2021, published under No. 200/2021 Z. z.)
8. Agreement between the Government of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the promotion and protection of investments with Protocol to the Agreement between the Government of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 646/1992 Zb.) (July 1, 2021, published under No. 382/2021 Z. z.)

## ■ Terminated treaties and agreements

1. Agreement between the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Kingdom of Denmark for the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 575/1992 Z. z.) (November 13, 2020, published under No. 16/2021 Z. z.)
2. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria for promotion and reciprocal protection of investments and Additional Protocol to Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria for promotion and reciprocal protection of investments (published under No. 144/1995 Z. z. and 101/2007 Z. z.) (December 13, 2020, published under No. 17/2021 Z. z.)
3. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Malta for the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 290/2000 Z. z.) (November 28, 2020, published under No. 18/2021 Z. z.)
4. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of Hungary for the promotion and protection of investments (published under No. 70/1999 Z. z.) (November 13, 2020, published under No. 19/2021 Z. z.)
5. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Croatia on the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments



# Structure of the state administration authorities acting in international and European affairs in 2021

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As of February 2022

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Zuzana Čaputová

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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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Eduard Heger (since April 1, 2021)

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Richard Sulík

### ■ Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Informatization

Veronika Remišová

### ■ Deputy Prime Minister

Štefan Holý

### ■ Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance

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▪ **President**

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# List of the embassies in the Slovak Republic

as of January 2022

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	–	Na Karlovce 1387/6 160 00 Praha 6 Czech Republic	
The Republic of Albania	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 16 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Enkeleda Merkuri</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
People's Democratic Republic of Algeria	1. 1. 1993	Rudolfingerasse 18 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Fauzia Mebarki</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Principality of Andorra	3. 6. 1996	Kärtnerring 2 A/13 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Enric Tarrado Vives</b> Ambassador-Designate
The Republic of Angola	30. 9. 1993	Seilerstätte 15/1/10 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Mariano João Baptista</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Argentine Republic	1. 1. 1993	Lugeck 1–2/7/44 A A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Gustavo Eduardo Ainchil</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Armenia	14. 11. 1993	Hadikgasse 28 1140 Vienna Austria	<b>Armen Papikyan</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Commonwealth of Australia	1. 1. 1993	Gertrude-Froehlich- Sandner-Str. 2 1100 Vienna Austria	<b>Richard Traves Sadleir</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Cooperative Republic of Guyana	–	Guyana High Commission 3 Palace Court Bayswater Road W2 4LP London United Kingdom	<b>Frederick Hamley Case</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Azerbaijan	27. 11. 1993	Hügelgasse 2 A-1130 Vienna Austria	<b>Galib Israfilov</b> 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	<b>Abdulla Abdullatif Abdulla</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The People's Republic of Bangladesh	3. 3. 1993	Peter-Johan-Straße 50 1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Muhammad Abdul Muhith</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Belgium	1. 1. 1993	Schönburgstrasse 10 1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Ghislain D'Hoop</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Benin	19. 1. 1993	Englerallee 23 D-14159 Berlin Germany	<b>Josseline Marie Louise da Silva Gbony</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Belarus	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 5 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Denis Sidorov</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Plurinational State of Bolivia	5. 3. 1993	Prinz-Eugen-Strasse 18 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>María Lourdes Espinoza Patino</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1. 1. 1993	Opletalova 27 110 00 Praha Czech Republic	<b>Martina Mlinarević</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Botswana	–	6 Stratford Place W1C 1AY London United Kingdom	<b>Roy Warren Blackbeard</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federative Republic of Brazil	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 47 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Eduardo Gradilone</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Bulgaria	1. 1. 1993	Kuzmányho 1 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Vasil Petkov</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Burkina Faso	1. 8. 1997	Strohgasse 14c A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Dieudonné Kere</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Burundi	29. 6. 1999	Berliner Strasse 36 D-10715 Berlin Germany	<b>Else Nizigama Ntamagiwo</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	–	Neulinggasse 29/6/20 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>A. Georgette M'Brah</b> First Advisor
The Republic of Cyprus	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Nicos P. Nicolaou</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Chad		Lepsiusstrasse 114 D-12165 Berlin Germany	<b>Mariam Ali Moussa</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Czech Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 8 P. O. Box 208 810 00 Bratislava	<b>Tomáš Tuhý</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Montenegro	1. 1. 1993	Lothringerstrasse 14–16 1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Marija Lakić Barfus</b> First Counsellor

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	<b>Alfred Tapia</b> Chargé d'affaires
The People's Republic of China	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 8 b 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Sun Lijie</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Denmark	1. 1. 1993	Führichgasse 6 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>René Rosager Dinesen</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Representation of European Commission in the SR	–	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Vladimír Šucha</b> Chargé d'affaires
European Parliament Information Office	–	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Robert Sermek</b> Director
The Arab Republic of Egypt	1. 1. 1993	Panská 14 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Bassem Mohamed Abdel-Alim Khalil</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Ecuador	1. 1. 1993	Andrássy út 20.1/2. 1061 Budapest Hungary	<b>Ivan Fernando Garces Burbano</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Estonia	1. 1. 1993	Wohlebengasse 9/12 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Toomas Kukk</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	–	Boothstrasse 20a D-12207 Berlin Germany	<b>Mulu Solomon Bezuneh</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Philippines	1. 1. 1993	Donau City Strasse 11 A-1220 Vienna Austria	<b>Ivan Frank M. Olea</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Finland	1. 1. 1993	Hellichova 1 118 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Jukka Uolevi Pesola</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The French Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 7 812 83 Bratislava 1	<b>Pascal Le Deunff</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of the Gambia	18. 8. 1995	Avenue F. D. Roosevelt 126 1050 Brussels Belgium	<b>Jaiteh Teneng</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Ghana	–	Na Zatorce 89/6 160 00 Praha 6 – Bubeneč Czech Republic	<b>Manu Owusu</b> Charge d'affaires
Georgia	25. 11. 1993	Michalská 9 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Revaz Beshidze</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Guatemala	15. 4. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/ A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Manuel Estuardo Roldán Barillas</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Guinea	16. 3. 1993	Jägerstrasse 67–69 DE-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Mamadou Bouliwel Sow</b> 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	<b>Malam Djassi</b> Ambassador Designated
The Hellenic Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 4 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Georgios Dimitriadis</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of the Netherlands	1. 1. 1993	Fraňa Kráľa 5 811 05 Bratislava 1	<b>Gabriella Sancisi</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Honduras		Cuxhavener Strasse 14 DE-10555 Berlin Germany	<b>Christa Castro Varela</b> Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Croatia	1. 1. 1993	Mišikova 21 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Aleksandar Heina</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of India	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 4 811 08 Bratislava	<b>Vanlalhuma</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Indonesia	1. 1. 1993	Brnianska 31 811 04 Bratislava 1	<b>R. Pribadi Sutiono</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Iraq	1. 1. 1993	Johannesgasse 26 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Baker Fattah Husen</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of Iran	1. 1. 1993	Jauresgasse 9 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Dermot McGauran</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Iceland	1. 1. 1993	Naglergasse 2/3/8 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Thórir Ibsen</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Israel	1. 1. 1993	Slávičie údolie 106 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Eitan Levon</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Jamaica	1. 1. 1993	Schmargendorfer Str. 32 D-12159 Berlin Germany	<b>Deniese Ava-Lou Sealey</b> Chargé d'affaires
Japan	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné nám. 2 813 27 Bratislava	<b>Makoto Nakagawa</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Yemen	1. 1. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 18 – 20 1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Haytham Abdulmomen Shoja 'Aadin</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	3. 3. 1993	Rennweg 17/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Leena Al-Hadid</b> Ambassador Designated
The Republic of South Africa	1. 1. 1993	Sandgasse 33 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Rapulane Sydney Molekane</b> Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Cambodia	–	Benjamin-Vogelsdorf Str. 2 D-13187 Berlin Germany	<b>Savny Phen</b> 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	<b>Cheryl Cruz</b> Chargé d'affaires
The State of Qatar	–	Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Sultan Salmeen S. B. Almansouri</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Kazakhstan	1. 1. 1993	Schottenring 10 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Dinara Izanova</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Kenya	1. 1. 1993	Kancelária v Bratislave Gunduličova 6 811 05 Bratislava	<b>Stella Mokaya Orina</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Kyrgyz Republic	1. 1. 1993	Andromeda Tower Donau-City Str. 6 1220 Vienna Austria	<b>Bakyt Alievic Jusupov</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Colombia	1. 1. 1993	Invalidenstrasse 3/8 1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Miguel Camilo Ruiz Blanco</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Congo	30. 6. 1998	Stadiongasse 6–8/15 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Jacques Yvon Ndovhu</b> Ambassador Designated
The Democratic Republic of the Congo	18. 2. 1993	Wallstrasse 69 D – 10179 Berlin Germany	<b>Mibanga Ngala-Mulumbwa Badidike Benoit-Labre</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Soukenická 34/1765 110 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Byeongdo Lee</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Štúrova 16 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Ju Won Chol</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Costa Rica	6. 10. 1993	Na Větru 395/18 162 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Herbert Daniel Espinoza Solano</b> Consul General, Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Cuba	1. 1. 1993	Flussgasse 7 A-1020 Vienna Austria	<b>Yamila Sonia Pita Montes</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Kuwait	1. 1. 1993	Somolického 1/A 811 05 Bratislava	<b>Essa Y. K. E. Alshamali</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	–	Lodná 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Sithong Chitnhothin</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Lesotho	8. 5. 1995	Sommerhaidenweg 43 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Malikopo Patricia Rakootje</b> 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	<b>Ibrahim Assaf</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Libya	1. 1. 1993	Révova 45 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Khaled Salem Shaban</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Lithuania	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Donatas Kušlys</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Latvia	1. 1. 1993	Stefan Esders Platz 4 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Guna Japiņa</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	1. 1. 1993	Sternwartestrasse 81 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Marc Ungeheuer</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of North Macedonia	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 387/14, 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Evgenija Ilieva</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Madagascar	16. 2. 1996	Koursovoy Per. 5 119 034 Moscow Russian Federation	<b>Florence Isabelle Rafaramalala</b> Chargé d'affaires
Hungary	1. 1. 1993	Štefánikova 1 811 05 Bratislava	<b>Tibor Pető</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Malaysia	1. 1. 1993	Floridsdorfer Hauptstrasse 1–7 A-1210 Vienna Austria	<b>Mohd Ibrahim</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Malawi	–	Westfälische Strasse 86 D-10709 Berlin Germany	<b>Michael Barth Kamphambe Nkhoma</b> Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Mali	–	Ambasciata del Mali Via Antonio Bosio 2 00161 Roma Italia	<b>Aly Coulibaly</b> Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Opernring 5 11010 Vienna Austria	
The Kingdom of Morocco	1. 1. 1993	Hasenauerstrasse 57 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Azzeddin Farhane</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of Mauritania	–	Kommandantenstrasse 80 D-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Mohamed Mahomud Ould Brahim Khilil</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Republic of the Union of Myanmar	–	Kneza Miloša 72 11000 Belgrade Serbia	<b>Thurain Thant Zin</b> Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Moldova	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/10 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Dorina Roman</b> Chargé d'affaires
Mongolia	1. 1. 1993	Na Marně 5 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Davaasambu Uugunbsayar</b> Charge d'affaires

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	<b>Nada Kruger</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Republic of Germany	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 10 813 03 Bratislava	<b>Barbara Wolf</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nepal	4. 3. 1994	Guerickestrasse 27 D-10587 Berlin Germany	<b>Ram Kaji Khadka</b> Ambassador Designated
The Federal Republic of Nigeria	1. 1. 1993	Rennweg 25 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Suleiman Dauda Umar</b> 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	<b>Tatiana Daniela García Silva</b> Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Norway	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Terje Theodor Nervik</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
New Zealand	1. 1. 1993	Mattiellistrasse 2–4/3 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Brian Hewson</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Sultanate of Oman	3. 1. 1993	Wahringer Strasse 2–4/24–25 A-1090 Vienna Austria	<b>Yousuf Ahmed Hamed Aljabri</b> Ambassador Designated
The Islamic Republic of Pakistan	1. 1. 1993	Hofzeile 13 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Aftab Ahmad Khokher</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Palestine	1. 1. 1993	Gorkého 3 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Attalla S. A. Qubia</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Panama	–	Goldschmiedgasse 10/403 1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Milton Cohen Henriquez Pagés</b> attaché
The Republic of Paraguay	8. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/7 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Juan Francisco Facetti</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Peru	1. 1. 1993	Mahlerstrasse 7/22 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Claudia Elizabeth Guevara de la Jara</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Poland	1. 1. 1993	Paulínyho 7 814 91 Bratislava	<b>Krzysztof Strzałka</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Portugal	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 16 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Fernando Manuel de Jesus Teles Fazendeiro</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Austria	1. 1. 1993	Astoria Palace Hodžovo námestie 1/A 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Margit Bruck-Friedrich</b> 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	<b>Călin Fabian</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Russian Federation	1. 1. 1993	Godrova 4 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Igor Borisovič Bratčikov</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Rwandese Republic	–	Jägerstrasse 67–69 D-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Igor Cesar</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of El Salvador	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/2/1 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Ramiro Recinos Trejo</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of San Marino	1. 1. 1993	Palazzo Begni Contrada Omerelli 31 47890 San Marino Italy	<b>Dario Galassi</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	16. 6. 1995	Formanekgasse 38 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Abdullah bin Khaled bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud</b> 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 Moscow Russian Federation	<b>John Bobor Laggah</b> Advisor
The Republic of Singapore	12. 2. 1993	MFA, Tanglin 2 48163 Singapore	<b>Chay Wai Chuen</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Slovenia	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 5 813 15 Bratislava 1	<b>Gregor Kozovinc</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Federal Republic of Somalia	–	Simferopolsky Bulvar 7a-145 117 556 Moscow Russian Federation	<b>Mohamed Mahmoud Handule</b> Ambassador Designated
The United Arab Emirates	3. 1. 1993	Chimanistrasse 36 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Ahmed Hasan Alsehhi</b> Charge d'affaires
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Panská 16 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Nigel Marcus Baker</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United States of America	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo námestie 4 811 02 Bratislava 1	<b>Bridget Ann Brink</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United Mexican States	1. 10. 1993	Rennngasse 5 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Luis Javier Campuzano Piña</b> 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	<b>Momčilo Babić</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Democratic Socialist republic of Sri Lanka	15. 2. 1993	Weyringergasse 33–35 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Majintha Jayasinghe</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Sudan	27. 7. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 29/5 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Elsadig Mohamed A. E. M. Ahmed</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Holy See	1. 1. 1993	Nekrasovova 17 811 04 Bratislava 1	<b>Andriy Yevchuk</b> Apostolic Nuncio
The Kingdom of Eswatini	–	Avenue Winston Churchill 188 1180 Brussels Belgium	
The Syrian Arab Republic	1. 1. 1993	Daffingerstrasse 4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	<b>Bassam Ahmad Nazim Al Sabbagh</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Spain	1. 1. 1993	Prepoštská 10 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Lorea Arribalzaga Ceballos</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Switzerland	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 06 Bratislava 1	<b>Alexander Hoffet</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Sweden	1. 1. 1993	Liechtensteinstrasse 51 A-1090 Vienna Austria	<b>Annika Markovic</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Tajikistan	–	Hutweidengasse 47 1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Idibek Kalandar</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Italy	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 49 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Catherine Flumiani</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United Republic of Tanzania	1. 1. 1993	Eschenallee 11 D-14050 Berlin Germany	<b>Abdallah Saleh Possi</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Togo	–	Grabbeallee 43 13156 Berlin Germany	<b>Komi Bayedze Dagoh</b> Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Thailand	1. 1. 1993	Cottagegasse 48 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Morakot Sriswasdi</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Tunisia	1. 1. 1993	Nárcisz Utca 36 Budapest Hungary	<b>Mohamed Ali Ben Habib</b> Advisor
The Republic of Turkey	1. 1. 1993	Holubyho 11 811 03 Bratislava 1	<b>Yunus Demirer</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Turkmenistan	1. 1. 1993	Argentinerstrasse 22/II/EG A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Silapberdi Ashirgeldivevich Nurberdiyev</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

■ Country	■ Start of diplomatic relations	■ Address of embassy	■ In charge of embassy (LoC)
Ukraine	1. 1. 1993	Radvanská 35 811 01 Bratislava 1	<b>Jurij Muška</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Uganda	–	Axel-Springer Str. 54° C-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Mercel Robert Tibaleka</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	–	Mahlerstrasse 11/2/2 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Juan Carlos Ojeda Viglione</b> Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Uzbekistan	20. 1. 1993	Pötzleinsdorfer Strasse 49 A-1180 Vienna Austria	<b>Rustamdjan Khakimov</b> Chargé d'affaires
The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/1/1.1 A-1040 Vienna Austria	<b>Dulfa Dalila Hernández Medina</b> Charge d'affaires
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 15 811 08 Bratislava	<b>Tuan Nguyen</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Zambia	5. 1. 1993	Axel-Springer Str. 54 A D-10117 Berlin Germany	<b>Anthony L. Mukwita</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Zimbabwe	3. 3. 1993	Chemin William Barbery 271292 Chambésy Geneva Switzerland	<b>Chalwe Lombe</b> Advisor
Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Kapitulská 9 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Alfred Prinz von Schönburg-Hartenstein</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary



# List of consulates in the Slovak Republic

as of January 2022

▪ State	▪ Address of the consulate in the SR	▪ Consul
The Republic of Azerbaijan	Klobučnícka 4 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Džalal Gasymov</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Armenia	Ventúrska 1 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Bagrat Hakobyan</b> Honorary Consul
The Commonwealth of the Bahamas	Ventúrska 10 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Michal Lazar</b> Honorary Consul
The People's Republic of Bangladesh	Pod záhradami 41 841 01 Bratislava	<b>Štefan Petkanič</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Belgium	Moskovská 13 811 08 Bratislava	<b>Bart Waterloos</b> Honorary Consul
Belize	Krajná ulica 56C 821 04 Bratislava	<b>Miroslav Strečanský</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Belarus	Osadská 679/15 028 01 Trstená	<b>Marián Murín</b> Honorary Consul
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tureň 385 903 01 Tureň	<b>Munir Pašagić</b> Honorary Consul
Montenegro	Zelená 2 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Rudolf Autner</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Chile	Kĺzavá 31/C 831 01 Bratislava	<b>Jaroslav Šoltys</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Denmark	Bajkalská 5/A 831 03 Bratislava	<b>Michal Lörincz</b> Honorary General Consul
Dominican Republic	Einsteinova 9 851 01 Bratislava	<b>Dušan Dvorecký</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Estonia	Drieňová 3 821 01 Bratislava	<b>Peter Pochaba</b> Honorary Consul
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	Bojnická 3 831 04 Bratislava	<b>Girma Belay</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Philippines	Cesta na Senec 15725/24 830 06 Bratislava	<b>Pavol Konštiak</b> Honorary General Consul
French Republic	Hlavná 104, 040 01 Košice	<b>David Mortreux</b> Honorary Consul
French Republic	M. R. Štefánika 52 036 01 Martin	<b>Grégory Delton</b> 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	Moyzsova 5 811 05 Bratislava	<b>Karol Kállay</b> Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Finland	Žriedlová 12–14, 040 01 Košice	<b>Rastislav Puchala</b> Honorary Consul
Georgia	Orlové 116 017 01 Považská Bystrica	<b>Nodari Giorgadze</b> Honorary Consul
Georgia	Másiarska 57/A 040 01 Košice	<b>Franco Pigozzi</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Ghana	Palisády 31 811 06 Bratislava	<b>James Arthur</b> Honorary Consul
Hellenic Republic	Hlavná 20 040 01 Košice	<b>Liberios Vokorokos</b> Honorary Consul
Hungary	949 01 Nitra, Kupecká 9	<b>Jozef Gál</b> Honorary Consule
The Kingdom of The Netherlands	Košická 44 P. O. Box 21080 01 Prešov	<b>Matúš Murajda</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Iceland	Palisády 39 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Pavol Čekan</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Iceland	M.R. Štefánika 66 036 01 Martin	<b>Erika Hlašová</b> Honorary Consul
The State of Israel	Garbiarska 5 040 01 Košice	<b>Peter Frajt</b> Honorary Consul
Jamaica	Porubského 2 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Marián Valko</b> Honorary Consul
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	Račianska 96 831 02 Bratislava	<b>Jaroslav Rebej</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Cabo Verde	Dvořákovo nábrežie 8/A 81102 Bratislava	<b>Štefan Czucz</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of South Africa	Fraňa Kráľa 1 851 02 Bratislava	<b>Milan Lopašovský</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Korea	Dolný val 5 010 01 Žilina	<b>Oldřich Kovář</b> Honorary Consul
The Kyrgyz Republic	Miletičova 1 821 08 Bratislava	<b>Tibor Podoba</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Colombia	AC Diplomat Palisády 29/ A 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Anton Siekel</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Costa Rica	Palisády 56 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Tomáš Chrenek</b> Honorary Consul
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	Panská ulica 27 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Bounthong Bounthong</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Lithuania	Za záhradami 16 900 28 Zálesie	<b>Marián Meško</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Latvia	Krmanova 1 040 01 Košice	<b>Miroslav Repka</b> Honorary Consul
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Prievozská 4/A 821 09 Bratislava	<b>Peter Kriško</b> Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Jašíkova 2 821 03 Bratislava	<b>Igor Junas</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Madagascar	V záhradách 4 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Peter Brudňák</b> Honorary Consul

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The Republic of Maldives	Lazaretská 29 811 09 Bratislava	<b>Andrej Maťko</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Mali	Mikulášska 3 – 5 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Eugen Horváth</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Malta	Palisády 33 811 06 Bratislava	<b>Martin Hantabál</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Morocco	Krajná 86 821 04 Bratislava	<b>Ľubomír Šidala</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Moldova	Zámocká 16 811 01 Bratislava	<b>Antonio Parziale</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Moldova	Hlavná 81 040 11 Košice	<b>Ján Varga</b> Honorary Consul
Mongolia	Národná trieda 56 040 01 Košice	<b>Peter Slávik</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Namibia	Zadunajská cesta 8 851 01 Bratislava	<b>Karol Biermann</b> Honorary Consul
The Federal Republic of Germany	Priemyselná 14 010 01 Žilina	<b>Peter Lazar</b> Honorary Consul
New Zealand	Dvořákovo nábrežie 10 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Peter Korbačka</b> Honorary Consul
The Sultanate of Oman	Sasinkova 12 811 08 Bratislava	<b>Oskár Világi</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Paraguay	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Martin Šamaj</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Peru	Tuhovská 5 831 07 Bratislava	<b>Andrej Glatz</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	Svätoplukova 28 812 08 Bratislava	<b>Milan Majtán</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	Nám. osloboditeľov 1 031 01 Liptovský Mikuláš	<b>Tadeusz Frackowiak</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	ul. Hlavná 139 080 01 Prešov	<b>Ján Hudacký</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	ul. Puškinova 1 040 01 Košice	<b>Konrad Schenfeld</b> Honorary Consul
Romania	Kapitulská 1 974 01 Banská Bystrica	<b>Ladislav Reháč</b> Honorary Consul
Romania	Nám.sv. Mikuláša 2 064 01 Stará Ľubovňa	<b>Marián Gurega</b> Honorary Consul
Russian federation	Komenského 3 974 01 Banská Bystrica	<b>Juraj Koval</b> Honorary Consul
Russian federation	Bytčická 16 010 01 Žilina	<b>Ján Majerský</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of El Salvador	Záhradnícka 62 82108 Bratislava	<b>Igor Moravčík</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Senegal	Kálov 655/10 010 01 Žilina	<b>Souleymane Seck</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Seychelles	Pod Strelnicou 161/1 040 18 Nižná Hutka	<b>Wanda Adamík Hrycová</b> Honorary Consu
The Republic of Sierra Leone	Partizánska 16 811 03 Bratislava	<b>Branislav Hronec</b> Honorary General Consul

■ State	■ Address of the consulate in the SR	■ Consul
The United Mexican States	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Václav Míka</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Serbia	Jesenského 12 040 01 Košice	<b>Eva Dekanovská</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Serbia	Pavla Mudroňa 12 036 01 Martin	<b>Mojmír Vrlík</b> Honorary Consul
The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	<b>Peter Gabalec</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Spain	Hutnícka 1 040 01 Košice	<b>Daniel Lučkanič</b> Honorary Consul
Switzerland	Vajanského 10 080 01 Prešov	<b>Helena Virčíková</b> Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Sweden	Tomášikova 30 821 01 Bratislava	<b>Vladimír Kestler</b> Honorary General Consul
The Kingdom of Thailand	Viedenská cesta 3–7 851 01 Bratislava	<b>Alexander Rozin</b> Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago	Nobelova 34 831 02 Bratislava	<b>Roman Danda</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Turkey	Kuzmányho 16 974 01 Banská Bystrica	<b>Vladimír Soták</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Turkey	Mlynská ulica 2 040 01 Košice	<b>Štefan Melník</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Tunisia	P. Mudroňa 5 010 01 Žilina	<b>Patrik Rapšík</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uganda	Ružová dolina 25 821 09 Bratislava	<b>Andrej Brna</b> Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Budovateľská 29 093 01 Vranov nad Topľou	<b>Stanislav Obický</b> Honorary Consul
Ukraine	P. O. Hviezdoslava 22 052 01 Žilina	<b>Jaroslav Šutarík</b> Honorary Consul
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	Trnkova 46 851 10 Bratislava	<b>Milan Beniak</b> Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uzbekistan	Hotel Park Inn by Radisson Danube Rybné námestie 1811 02 Bratislava	<b>Ľudovít Černák</b> Honorary Consul
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	Hlavná 70 040 01 Košice	<b>Rastislav Sedmák</b> Honorary Consul





# List of the embassies of the Slovak Republic, permanent missions, consulates general, Slovak institutes abroad

as of January 2022

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	<b>Tomáš Felix</b> 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	<b>Michal Kováč</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Addis Abeba	Djibouti Republic, Ethiopia, Central African Republic	Yeka Sub-City, Woreda 13 Kebele 20/21, House No.: P7 CARA-VIL Compound Addis Abeba Ethiopia	<b>Drahomír Štos</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ankara	Turkey	Atatürk Bulvarı 245 06692 Ankara Turkey	<b>Ján Pšenica</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Athens	The Hellenic Republic (Greece)	Georgiou Saferi 4 Palaio Psychiko 154 52 Athens Greece	<b>Iveta Hricová</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Baku	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan 90 A Nizami Landmark III 1010 Baku Azerbaijan	<b>Milan Lajčiak</b> Charge d'Affaires a. p. Head of the Mission
Bangkok	Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar	South Sathorn Road 25 10 120 Bangkok The Kingdom of Thailand	<b>Jaroslav Auxt</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Beijing	China, Mongolia	Ritan Lu, Jianguomen Wai 100 600 Beijing People's Republic of China	<b>Dušan Bella</b> Chargé d'affaires
Beirut	Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria	Weavers Center, 14th fl. Clemenseau Street Beirut Lebanon	<b>Marek Varga</b> Head of the Mission
Belgrade	Serbia	Bulevar umetnosti 18 110 70 Novi Beograd Serbia	<b>Fedor Rosocha</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Berlin	Germany	Hildebrandstraße 25 10785 Berlin Germany	<b>Maroš Jakubócy</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

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Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Bern	Switzerland, Liechtenstein	Thunstrasse 63 3074 Muri Bern Switzerland	<b>Alexander Micovčín</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Brasília	Brazil, Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Surinam, Guyana	SES, Avenida das Nações, Qd. 805, Lote 21 B CEP 70 200-902 Brasília, Brazil	<b>Milan Zachar</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Brussels	Belgium, Luxemburg	Avenue Moliere 195 1050 Brusel Belgium	<b>Peter Kormúth</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Budapest	Hungary	Stefánia út 22 – 24. 1143 Budapest XIV Hungary	<b>Pavol Hamžík</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Buenos Aires	Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay	Figueroa Alcorta 3240 Buenos Aires Argentina	<b>Rastislav Hindický</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Bucharest	Romania	Strada Otetari 020 977 Bucharest Romania	<b>Karol Mistrík</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Cairo	Egypt, Chad, Yemen, Lybia, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Tunisia	3 Adel Hosein Rostom Cairo Egyp	<b>Valér Franko</b> Ambassador
Canberra	Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua-New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	47 Culgoa Circuit, 2606 Canberra Australia	<b>Tomáš Ferko</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Chisinau	Moldova	A. Sciusseva 101 Chisinau Moldova	<b>Dušan Dacho</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Copenhagen	Denmark	Vesterled 26 – 28 2100 Copenhagen Denmark	<b>Miroslav Wlachovský</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Delhi	India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan	50-M, Niti Marg, Chanakyapuri 110 021 New Delhi India	
Dublin	Ireland	80 Merrion Square South Dublin 2 Ireland	<b>Igor Pokojný</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Hague	Netherlands	Parkweg 1 2585 Den Haag Netherlands	<b>Juraj Macháč</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Hanoi	Vietnam	12 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan Ba Dinh District Hanoi Vietnam	<b>Pavol Svetík</b> 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	<b>Roman Hošťák</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Helsinki	Finland, Estonia	Vähäniittyntie 5 00570 Helsinki Finland	<b>Slavomíra Mašurová</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Jakarta	Brunei, East Timor, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore	alan Profesor Mohammad Yamin 29 103 10 Jakarta Indonesia	<b>Jaroslav Chlebo</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Kuwait	Kuwait, Bahrein, Qatar	Block No. 2, Street No. 16 Villa No. 22 131 23 Area Surra Kuwait	<b>Igor Hajdušek</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Kyiv	Ukraine	Jaroslavov val 34 019 01 Kyiv Ukraine	<b>Marek Šafin</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Lisbon	Portugal	Avenida da Liberdade 200 1250-147 Lisbon Portugal	<b>Oldřich Hlaváček</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
London	The United Kingdom	25, Kensington Palace Gardens W8 4QY London The United Kingdom	<b>Róbert Ondrejcsák</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ljubljana	Slovenia	Bleiweisova 4 1000 Ljubljana Slovenia	<b>Peter Zelenák</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Madrid	Spain, Andorra, Morocco	C/Pinar, 20 28006 Madrid Spain	<b>Jaroslav Blaško</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Mexico City	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize	Julio Verne 35 11560 Mexico City Mexico	<b>Terézia Šajgalíková</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Minsk	Belarus	Volodarskogo 6 220 030 Minsk Belarus	<b>Katarína Žáková</b> Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Moscow	Russian Federation	J. Fučíka 17/19 115127 Moscow Russian Federation	<b>Lubomír Reháč</b> 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	<b>Katarína Žuffa Leligdonová</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nicosia	Cyprus	Kalamatas Street No. 4 2002 Nicosia Cyprus	<b>Ján Škoda</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nur-Sultan	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	Samal 12, Z10F1M5, Nur-Sultan Kazakhstan	<b>Milan Kollár</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Oslo	Norway, Iceland	Thomas Heftyes gate 24 N-0244 Oslo Norway	<b>Roman Bužek</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ottawa	Canada	50 Rideau Terrace K1M 2A1 Ottawa, Ontario Canada	<b>Vít Kozíak</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Paris	France, Monaco, Algeria	125 rue du Ranelagh 75016 Paris France	<b>Igor Slobodník</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Podgorica	Montenegro	Crnogorskih Srdara 5 81000 Podgorica Montenegro	<b>Boris Gandel</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

■ Embassy	■ Accredited	■ Address	■ Head of the Embassy
Prague	Czech Republic	Pelléova 12 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	<b>Rastislav Káčer</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Pretoria	South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe	930 Arcadia Street Arcadia 0083 Pretoria South Africa	<b>Monika Tomašovičová</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Pristina	Serbia (Kosovo)	Selim Berisha 11, Dragodan, 10000 Pristina Kosovo Serbia	<b>Fedor Rosocha</b> Head of the branch office
Riga	Latvia, Lithuania	Smilšu iela 8 1050 Riga Latvia	<b>Ladislav Babčan</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Rome	Italy, Malta, San Marino	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144VI/A00194 Rome Italy	<b>Karla Wursterová</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Trnovska 6 710 00 Sarajevo Bosnia and Herzegovina	<b>Martin Kačo</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Skopje	FYROM (Macedonia)	Budimpeštanska 39 1000 Skopje North Macedonia	<b>Henrik Markuš</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Sofia	Bulgaria	Blv. Janko Sakazov 9 1504 Sofia Bulgaria	<b>Manuel Korček</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Seoul	South Korea, North Korea	28, 10gil Hannamdae-ro Yongsan-gu Seoul South Korea	<b>Ján Kuderjavý</b> Head of the Mission
Stockholm	Sweden	Arsenalsgatan 2/3 TR 10 388 Stockholm Sweden	<b>Martina Balunová</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Taipei (Slovak economic and cultural office)	Republic of China (Taiwan)	333 Keelung Road 110 Taipei Taiwan	<b>Martin Podstavek</b> Head of the Mission
Tashkent	Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Kichik Beshjogoch 38 100070 Tashkent Uzbekistan	<b>Ján Bóry</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tehran	Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan	72 Moghadassi St., Niavaran St., 1971836199 Tehran Iran	<b>Ladislav Ballek</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tel Aviv	Israel, Palestine	Jabotinsky 37 6459 Tel Aviv Israel	<b>Igor Maukš</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tirana	Albania	Rruga Skenderbej 8 Tirana Albania	<b>Peter Spišiak</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tbilisi	Georgia	13 Mtskheta Str., Apt. 23, 0179 Tbilisi Georgia	<b>Pavel Vízdal</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

■ Embassy	■ Accredited	■ Address	■ Head of the Embassy
Tokyo	Japan, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau	2-11-33, Moto-Azabu Minato-ku 106-0046 Tokyo Japan	<b>Marián Tomášik</b> Head of the Mission
Vatican (The Holy See)	Vatican (The Holy See), Sovereign Military Hospitalier Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144 00135 Rome Vatican	<b>Marek Lisánsky</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Vienna	Austria	Armbrustergasse 24 A-1190 Vienna Austria	<b>Peter Mišík</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Warsaw	Poland	Litewska 6 00-581 Warsaw Poland	<b>Andrej Droba</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Washington	USA	3523 International Court NW 20008 Washington D. C. USA	<b>Radovan Javorčík</b> Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Zagreb	Croatia	Prilaz Gjüre Deželica 10 10000 Zagreb Croatia	<b>Peter Susko</b> Ambassador
Yerevan	Armenia		<b>Miroslav Hacek</b> 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	<b>Radomír Boháč</b>
PM EU Brussels	Avenue de Cortenbergh 107 1000 Brussels Belgium	<b>Petra Vargová</b>
PM NATO Brussels	Boulevard Leopold III NATO HQ 1110 Brussels Belgium	<b>Peter Bátor</b>
PM OECD Paris	28, Avenue d'Eylau 750 16 Paris France	<b>František Ružička</b>
PM UN New York	801 Second Avenue 10017 New York USA	<b>Michal Mlynár</b>
PM UN Geneva	9, Chemin de l'Ancienne Route 1218 Grand Saconnex Switzerland	<b>Dušan Matulay</b>
PM Council of Europe Strasbourg	1 Rue Ehrmann 67000 Strasbourg France	<b>Oksana Tomová</b>
PM UNESCO Paris	1, rue Miollis 757 32, Paris France	<b>Igor Slobodník</b>

## ■ Consulates General

■ State	■ Address	■ Consul Genral
The People's Republic of China	1375 Huaihai Central Road 2 00031 Shanghai	<b>Ivana Vala Magátová</b>
Hungary	Derkovits sor 7 5600 Békéscsaba	<b>Emil Kuchár</b>
Poland	Św. Tomasza 34 31027 Cracow	<b>Tomáš Kašaj</b>
Russian Federation	Orbeli č. 21/2 194 223 Saint Petersburg	<b>Igor Derco</b>
USA	801 Second Avenue, 12th Floor New York, N.Y. 10017	<b>Milan Vrbovský</b>
Germany	Vollmannstrasse 25d 819 25 Munich	<b>František Zemanovič</b>
Turkey	3. Levent Bambu Sokak No: 6343 30 Istanbul	<b>Veronika Lombardini</b>
Ukraine	Lokoty 4 880 00 Uzhhorod	<b>Pavol Pánis</b>

## ■ Slovak Institutes

■ Name	■ Address	■ Head
Slovak Institute Berlin	Hildebrandstr. 25 10785 Berlin Germany	<b>Ivo Hanuš</b>
Slovak Institute Budapest	Rákóczi út. 15 H-1088 Budapest Hungary	<b>Ildiko Síposová</b>
Slovak Institute Jerusalem	19 King David St, 9410143, Jerusalem, Izrael	<b>Jakub Urik</b>
Slovak Institute Moscow	Ul. 2 Brestská 27 125-056 Moscow Russia	<b>Peter Feranec</b>
Slovak Institute Paris	125 Rue de Ranelagh F-75016 Paris France	
Slovak Institute Prague	Nám. Republiky 1037/3 110 00 Praha 1 Czech Republic	<b>Vladimír Valovič</b>
Slovak Institute Rome	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144 00135 Rome Italy	<b>Lubica Krénová</b>
Slovak Institute Warsaw	Krzywe Kolo 12/14a PL-00 270 Warsaw Poland	<b>Adrián Kromka</b>
Slovak Institute Vienna	Wipplingerstrasse 24–26 A-1010 Vienna Austria	<b>Igor Skoček</b>



# List of consulates of the Slovak Republic headed by the honorary consuls

as of January 2022

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Albania	Tirana	<b>Faik Dizdarii</b> Honorary Consul
Argentina	La Plata	<b>Eduardo Kabát</b> Honorary General Consul
Armenia	Yerevan	<b>Gagik Vladimirovič Martirosian</b> Honorary Consul
Australia	Brisbane	<b>Michal Horvath</b> Honorary Consul
Australia	Melbourne	<b>Eugénia Mocnay</b> Honorary Consul
Australia	Sydney	<b>Edita Berntsen</b> Honorary Consul
Australia	Perth	<b>Pavol Faix</b> Honorary Consul
Austria	St. Pölten	<b>Veit Schmid-Schmidfelden</b> Honorary Consul
Austria	Linz	<b>Harald Papesch</b> Honorary Consul
Austria	Salzburg	<b>Gerald Hubner</b> Honorary Consul
Austria	Eisenstadt	<b>Alfred Tombor</b> Honorary Consul
Austria	Graz	<b>Friedrich Wolfgang Sperl</b> Honorary Consul
Bahames	Nassau	<b>Isacc Chester Cooper</b> Honorary Consul
Bangladesh	Dhaka	<b>Miran Ali</b> Honorary Consul
Belgium	Antwerp	<b>Gunnar Riebs</b> Honorary Consul General
Belgium	Gent	<b>Arnold Vanhaecke</b> Honorary Consul
Belgium	Mons	<b>Peter De Nil</b> Honorary Consul
Belarus	Brest	<b>Ivan Michailovič Kozič</b> Honorary Consul

Prepared by Tomáš Čorej, Slovak Foreign Policy Association  
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Medjugorje	<b>Rajko Zelenika</b> Honorary Consul
Brazil	Belo Horizonte	<b>Renato Werner Victor de Queiroz</b> Honorary Consul
Brazil	Joinville	<b>Ernesto Heinzelmann</b> Honorary Consul
Brazil	Rio de Janeiro	<b>Mohamad Faiçal Mohamad Said Hammoud</b> Honorary Consul
Bulgaria	Varna	<b>Edita Blagoevova</b> Honorary Consul
Comoros	Moroni	<b>Mohamed Zamine Sondarjee</b> Honorary Consul
Czech Republic	Brno	<b>Jaroslav Weigl</b> Honorary Consul
Croatia	Split	<b>Goran Morović</b> Honorary Consul
Chile	Santiago	<b>Paul Nador</b> Honorary Consul
China	Hong Kong	<b>Willy Lin</b> Honorary Consul
Cyprus	Limassol	<b>Angelos Gregoriades</b> Honorary Consul
Denmark	Aarhus	<b>Claus Jørgen Søgaard Poulsen</b> Honorary Consul
Egypt	Alexandria	<b>Mohamed Moustafa el Naggar</b> Honorary Consul
Estonia	Tallinn	<b>Even Tudeberg</b> Honorary Consul
Ethiopia	Addis Abeba	<b>Feleke Bekele Safo</b> Honorary Consul
Philippines	Cebu City	<b>Antonio N. Chiu</b> Honorary Consul
Finland	Teerijärvi	<b>Mikael Ahlbäck</b> Honorary Consul
France	Grenoble	<b>Menyhért Kocsis</b> Honorary Consul
France	Lille	<b>Alain Bar</b> Honorary Consul
France	Marseille	<b>Marc-André Distanti</b> Honorary Consul
Greece	Chania	<b>Stavros Paterakis</b> Honorary Consul
Greece	Thessaloniki	<b>Konstatinos Mavridis</b> Honorary Consul
Greece	Patras	<b>Phaedon Couniniotis</b> Honorary Consul
Greece	Pireus	<b>Michael Bodouroglou</b> Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Georgia	Tbilisi	<b>Besarion Kvartskhava</b> Honorary Consul
Germany	Leipzig	<b>Albrecht Heinz Tintelnot</b> Honorary Consul
Germany	Bad Homburg	<b>Imrich Donath</b> Honorary Consul
Germany	Hamburg	<b>Michael Stein</b> Honorary Consul
Germany	Hildesheim	<b>Dirk Bettels</b> Honorary Consul
Germany	Stuttgart	<b>Cristoph Goeser</b> Honorary Consul
Guatemala	Guatemala	<b>Mario Fernando Montúfara Rodrigues</b> Honorary Consul
Guinea	Conakry	<b>Boubakar Lombonna Diallo</b> Honorary Consul
Netherlands	Eindhoven	<b>Gerardus Hendrik Meulesteen</b> Honorary Consul
Netherlands	Groningen	<b>Denisa Kasová</b> Honorary Consul
India	Bangalore	<b>Chirankandath Joseph Roy</b> Honorary Consul
India	Mumbai	<b>Amit Choksey</b> Honorary Consul
Ireland	Galway	<b>Lorraine Higgins</b> Honorary Consul
Iceland	Reykjavík	<b>Runólfur Oddsson</b> Honorary Consul
Israel	Haifa	<b>Josef Pickel</b> Honorary Consul
Israel	Ha Sharon	<b>Karol Nathan Steiner</b> Honorary Consul General
Israel	Jerusalem	<b>Martin Rodan</b> Honorary Consul
Italy	Forli	<b>Alvaro Ravaglioli</b> Honorary Consul
Italy	Milan	<b>Luigi Cuzzolin</b> Honorary Consul
Italy	Florence	<b>Massimo Sani</b> Honorary Consul
Italy	Naples	<b>Stefania Girfatti</b> Honorary Consul
Italy	Torino	<b>Giuseppe Pellegrino</b> Honorary Consul
Jamaica	Kingston	<b>Christopher Richard Issa</b> Honorary Consul
Japan	Osaka	<b>Shiro Murai</b> Honorary Consul
Japan	Kirishima	<b>Masahiro Yamamoto</b> Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Japan	Utsunomiya	<b>Eichii Ishikawa</b> Honorary Consul
Yemen	Sana'a	<b>Adel Mohamed Al Huraibi</b> Honorary Consul
Jordan	Amman	<b>Khaldun A. Abuhassan</b> Honorary General Consul
South Africa	Cape Town	<b>Geoffrey Leighton Ashmead</b> Honorary Consul
South Africa	Johannesburg	<b>Juraj Michlo</b> Honorary Consul
Canada	Calgary	<b>Eva Hadzima</b> Honorary Consul
Canada	Montreal	<b>Dezider Michaletz</b> Honorary Consul
Canada	Vancouver	<b>Pavol Hollosy</b> Honorary Consul
Canada	Toronto	<b>Michael Martinček</b> Honorary Consul
Kazakhstan	Karaganda	<b>Alexej Petrovič Nefjodov</b> Honorary Consul
Kazakhstan	Öskemen	<b>Ajdar Jerežerpovič Mambetkazijev</b> Honorary Consul
Kenya	Mombasa	<b>Christoph Modigell</b> Honorary Consul
Kyrgyzstan	Bishkek	<b>Igor Konstantinovič Gusarov</b> Honorary Consul
South Korea	Soul	<b>Nan Se Gum</b> Honorary Consul
Laos	Vientiane	<b>Vongnam Vongvilay</b> Honorary Consul
Lebanon	Beirut	<b>Samir Doumet</b> Honorary Consul
Lithuania	Vilnius	<b>Ramūnas Petravičius</b> Honorary Consul
Luxembourg	Luxembourg	<b>Giancarlo d'Elia</b> Honorary Consul
North Macedonia	Skopje	<b>Vlade Stojanovski</b> Honorary Consul
Madagaskar	Antananarivo	<b>Ismael Danilhoussen</b> Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Kota Kinabalu	<b>Khen Thau Wong</b> Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	<b>Tan Sri Tee Keat Ong</b> Honorary Consul
Malta	Valletta	<b>Godwin Edvard Bencini</b> Honorary Consul General
Morocco	Casablanca	<b>Kamil Ouzzani Touhamy</b> Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Mauritius	Port Louis	<b>Yatemani Gujadhur</b> Honorary Consul
Mexico	Cancún	<b>Francisco Edmundo Lechón Rosas</b> Honorary Consul
Mexico	Monterrey	<b>Jorge García Segovia</b> Honorary Consul
Moldova	Chisinau	<b>Iurie Grigore Popovici</b> Honorary Consul
Nepal	Kathmandu	<b>Pasang Dawa Sherpa</b> Honorary Consul
Nigeria	Lagos	<b>Ramesh Hathiramani</b> Honorary Consul
Nicaragua	Managua	<b>Bergman Castillo</b> Honorary Consul
Norway	Drammen	<b>Zuzana Opavská Wahl</b> Honorary Consul
Norway	Bergen	<b>Torbjørn Haaland</b> Honorary Consul
New Zealand	Auckland	<b>Peter T. Kiely</b> Honorary Consul
Oman	Muscat	<b>Mohammed S. Al-Harthy</b> Honorary Consul
Pakistan	Lahore	<b>Muhammad Malik Asif</b> Honorary Consul
Palestine	Betlehem	<b>George Suliman Malki Jabra</b> Honorary Consul
Panama	Panama	<b>Julio César Benedetti</b> Honorary Consul
Paraguay	Cuidad del Este	<b>Charif Hammoud</b> Honorary Consul
Paraguay	Asunción	<b>Alex Hammoud</b> Honorary Consul
Peru	Lima	<b>Víctor Andrés Belaunde Gutiérrez</b> Honorary Consul
Poland	Bydhost	<b>Wiesław Cezary Olszewski</b> Honorary Consul
Poland	Gliwice	<b>Marian Czerny</b> Honorary Consul
Poland	Poznań	<b>Piotr Stanisław Styczynski</b> Honorary Consul
Poland	Rzeszow	<b>Adam Góral</b> Honorary Consul
Poland	Sopot	<b>Jerzy Leśniak</b> Honorary Consul
Poland	Wroclaw	<b>Maciej Kaczmarek</b> Honorary Consul
Poland	Zakopané	<b>Wiesław Tadeusz Wojas</b> Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Portugal	Faro	<b>Rui Marques Dias Gomes</b> Honorary Consul
Portugal	Funchal	<b>Roberto Rodrigo Vieira Henriques</b> Honorary Consul
Romania	Salonta	<b>Miroslav Iablonsik</b> Honorary Consul General
Russian Federation	Astrachan	<b>Vladimir Stepanovič Sinčenko</b> Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Omsk	<b>Jurij Viktorovič Šapovalov</b> Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Krasnojarsk	<b>Valerij Alexandrovič Gračev</b> Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Ekaterinburg	<b>Alexander Petrovič Petrov</b> Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Vladivostok	<b>Apres Gvidonovič Voskanian</b> Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Perm	<b>Boris Abramovič Švajcer</b> Honorary Consul
Saudi Arabia	Jeddah	<b>Saeed Omar H. Balubaid</b> Honorary Consul
Seychelles	Victoria	<b>Joseph France Albert</b> Honorary Consul
Serbia	Niš	<b>Stela Jovanović</b> Honorary Consul
Sri Lanka	Colombo	<b>Mahen Roshan Andrew Kariyawasan</b> Honorary Consul
Sudan	Khartoum	<b>Nasreldin Ibrahim Shulgami</b> Honorary Consul General
Syria	Latakia	<b>Anas Dib Joud</b> Honorary Consul
Spain	Barcelona	<b>Joan Ignacio Torredemer Galles</b> Honorary Consul General
Spain	Santa Cruz de Tenerife	<b>Francisco José Perera Molinero</b> Honorary Consul
Spain	Malaga	<b>Jesús García Urbano</b> Honorary Consul
Spain	Zaragoza	<b>José Javier Parra Campos</b> Honorary Consul
Sweden	Göteborg	<b>Carl Magnus Richard Kindal</b> Honorary Consul
Sweden	Luleå°	<b>Jonas Lundström</b> Honorary Consul
Switzerland	Zurich	<b>Leonz Meyer</b> Honorary Consul
Tanzania	Dar es Salaam	<b>Moustafa Hassanali Khataw</b> Honorary Consul
Togo	Lomé	<b>Viwoto James Victor Sossou</b> Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Turkey	Bursa	<b>Hüseyin Özdilek</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Izmir	<b>Selçuk Borovali</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Trabzon	<b>Suat Gürkök</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Kayseri	<b>Osman Güldüoğlu</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Antalya/Manavgat	<b>Dr. Şükrü Vural</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Mersin	<b>Emir Bozkaya</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Tekirdağ	<b>Levent Erdoğan</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Kusadasi	<b>Tevfik Bağcı</b> Honorary Consul
Turkey	Izmit	<b>Onur Sümer</b> Honorary Consul
Uganda	Kampale	<b>Abel M. S. Katahoire</b> Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Kharkov	<b>Viktor Vasiljevič Popov</b> Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Velykyi Bereznyi	<b>Oleg Ivanovič Adamčuk</b> Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Odesa	<b>Mykhaylo Viktorovič Muzalev</b> Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Velikyj Bereznyj	<b>Oleg Ivanovič Adamčuk</b> Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Glasgow	<b>Craig Murray</b> Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Belfast	<b>Thomas Sullivan</b> Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Cardiff	<b>Nigel Bruce Harold Payne</b> Honorary Consul
Uruguay	Montevideo	<b>Matias Balparda</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Detroit	<b>Edward Zelenak</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Indianapolis	<b>Steve Zlatos</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Kansas City	<b>Ross P. Marine</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Dallas	<b>Martin Valko</b> Honorary Consul
USA	North Miami	<b>Cecilia F. Rokusek</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Pittsburgh	<b>Joseph T. Senko</b> Honorary Consul



▪ State	▪ Consulate	▪ Consul
USA	San Francisco	<b>Barbara M. Pivnicka</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Naperville	<b>Rosemary Macko Wisnosky</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Boston	<b>Peter Mužila</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Denver	<b>Gregor James Fasing</b> Honorary Consul
USA	Lafayette	<b>Zoltán Gombos</b> Honorary Consul
Uzbekistan	Taskhent	<b>Vasily Shimko</b> Honorary Consul
Venezuela	Caracas	<b>Manuel Antonio Polanco Fernández</b> Honorary Consul
Vietnam	Ho Chi Minh City	<b>Huy Ho</b> Honorary Consul General



# 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 2022

▪ Name	▪ Field	▪ Adress	▪ Webpage
A.D.E.L. – Association for Development, Education	youth development, cross-border cooperation	Černyševského 10 851 01 Bratislava	<a href="http://www.adelslovakia.org/">http://www.adelslovakia.org/</a>
ADRA	development cooperation	Cablkova 3 821 04 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.adra.sk/">https://www.adra.sk/</a>
Africké kultúrne, informačné a integračné centrum (African Cultural, Information and Integration Center)	cultural cooperation and integration	Ružinovská 1 821 02 Bratislava	<a href="http://www.akiic.sk/">http://www.akiic.sk/</a>
AI Nova	cultural heritage and active citizenship	Prostredná 64 900 21 Svätý Jur	<a href="https://ainova.sk/">https://ainova.sk/</a>
Amazi	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Sološnická 20 841 04 Bratislava	<a href="https://amazi.sk/">https://amazi.sk/</a>
Ambrela	development cooperation	Miletičova 7 821 08 Bratislava	<a href="https://ambrela.org/">https://ambrela.org/</a>
Amnesty International Slovakia	human rights	Štefánikova 16 811 04 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.amnesty.sk/">https://www.amnesty.sk/</a>
Bratislava Policy Institute	liberal democracy and European integration	Klariská 14 811 03 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.bpi.sk/">https://www.bpi.sk/</a>
CARDO – Národné dobrovoľnícke centrum	development cooperation and volunteering	Tomášikova 3 821 01 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.dobrovolnictvo.sk/">https://www.dobrovolnictvo.sk/</a>
Centrum národov Slovensko	the ideas of UN Charter	Kuzmányho 3 974 01 Banská Bystrica	<a href="https://cnsoz.eu/">https://cnsoz.eu/</a>
Centrum pre európsku politiku (Center for European Policy)	active citizenship and the youth	Panenská 30 811 03 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.cep.sk/">https://www.cep.sk/</a>
Centrum pre filantropiu (Center for Philanthropy)	charity and development cooperation	Baštová 343 811 03 Bratislava	<a href="https://cpf.sk/">https://cpf.sk/</a>
Človek v ohrození (People in Need)	development cooperation and humanitarian aid	Baštová 5 811 03 Bratislava	<a href="https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/">https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/</a>
Evanjelická diakonia ECAV na Slovensku	development cooperation and humanitarian aid	Palisády 46 811 06 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.diakonia.sk/">https://www.diakonia.sk/</a>

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■ Name	■ Field	■ Adress	■ Webpage
Evanjelická diakonia ECAV na Slovensku	development cooperation and humanitarian aid	Palisády 46 811 06 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.diakonia.sk/">https://www.diakonia.sk/</a>
eRko	development cooperation	Miletičova 7 821 08 Bratislava	<a href="https://erko.sk/">https://erko.sk/</a>
EUROIURIS – Európske právne centrum (European Legal Center)	European law	Na Vřšku 6 811 02 Bratislava	<a href="https://ja-sr.sk/euroiuris-europске-pravne-centrum">https://ja-sr.sk/euroiuris-europске-pravne-centrum</a>
EuroPolicy	European Union and its policies	Maróthyho 6 811 06 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.europolicy.sk/">https://www.europolicy.sk/</a>
Fórum pre medzinárodnú politiku (International Politics Forum)	foreign politics	L. Fullu 23 841 05 Bratislava	<a href="http://mepoforum.sk/">http://mepoforum.sk/</a>
Globsec	international security and sustainability	Vajnorská 100/B 831 04 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.globsec.org/">https://www.globsec.org/</a>
Habitat for Humanity	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Zochova 6 811 03 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.habitat.org/">https://www.habitat.org/</a>
Hekima	fighting poverty	Donnerova 35 841 04 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.hekima.sk/">https://www.hekima.sk/</a>
Inštitút pre kultúrnu politiku (Institute for Cultural Policies)	cultural policy	Štefánikova 25 811 05 Bratislava	<a href="http://ikp.sk/en">http://ikp.sk/en</a>
Inštitút pre strednú Európu (Institute for Central Europe)	Slovakia and Europe	Banskobystrická 7403 811 06 Bratislava	<a href="https://iceoz.sk/">https://iceoz.sk/</a>
Integra	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Dobšinského 14 811 05 Bratislava	<a href="https://integra.sk/">https://integra.sk/</a>
Karpatská nadácia (The Carpathian Foundation)	education, cross-border cooperation, especially with Ukraine	Letná 27 040 01 Košice	<a href="https://karpatskanadacia.sk">https://karpatskanadacia.sk</a>
Liga za ľudské práva (Human Rights League)	assistance to refugees and development cooperation	Račianska 80 831 02 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.hrl.sk/">https://www.hrl.sk/</a>
Live AID International	volunteering and development cooperation	Lachova 7 851 03 Bratislava	<a href="http://www.live-aid.org/">http://www.live-aid.org/</a>
Magna	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Štefánikova 19 811 05 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.magna.com/">https://www.magna.com/</a>
Medzinárodný republikánsky inštitút (International Republican Institute)	freedom and democracy	Tallerova 2 811 02 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.iri.org/">https://www.iri.org/</a>
Nebo nad Afrikou	humanitarian aid in Africa	Hokovce 145 935 84 Hokovce	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Nebo-nad-Afrikou-101546895446360/">https://www.facebook.com/Nebo-nad-Afrikou-101546895446360/</a>
PDCS	conflict resolution and education	Štúrova 13 811 02 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.pdcs.sk/">https://www.pdcs.sk/</a>

■ Name	■ Field	■ Adress	■ Webpage
Savio	development cooperation	Miletičova 7 821 08 Bratislava	<a href="https://savio.sk/">https://savio.sk/</a>
Slovenská akademická asociácia pre medzinárodnú spoluprácu (Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation)	international cooperation	Križkova 9 811 04 Bratislava	<a href="http://www.saac.sk/">http://www.saac.sk/</a>
Slovenská humanitná rada (Slovak Humanitarian Council)	humanitarian aid	Budyšínska 1 831 03 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.shr.sk/">https://www.shr.sk/</a>
Slovenská katolícka charita (Caritas Slovakia)	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Kapitulská 18 814 15 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.charita.sk/">https://www.charita.sk/</a>
Slovenská spoločnosť pre medzinárodné právo SAV (Slovak Society of International Law)	international law	Klemensova 19 813 64 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.ssmpp-ssil.org/kontakt/">https://www.ssmpp-ssil.org/kontakt/</a>
Slovenská spoločnosť pre zahraničnú politiku (Slovak Foreign Policy Association)	foreign and European policy, security policy, development cooperation	Staromestská 6 811 03 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.sfpa.sk/">https://www.sfpa.sk/</a>
Slovenské centrum pre komunikáciu a rozvoj (Slovak Centre for Communication and Development)	development cooperation and education	Pražská 11 811 04 Bratislava	<a href="https://sccd-sk.org/">https://sccd-sk.org/</a>
Slovenský červený kríž (Slovak Red Cross)	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Grösslingová 24 814 46 Bratislava	<a href="https://redcross.sk/">https://redcross.sk/</a>
Slovenský inštitút pre bezpečnostnú politiku (Slovak Security Policy Institute)	security and defense	Na vřšku 8 811 01 Bratislava	<a href="https://slovaksecurity.org/">https://slovaksecurity.org/</a>
Strategic Analysis	Western Balkans and South Caucasus	Tolstého 5 811 06 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/">https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/</a>
STRATPOL	European security	Štúrova 3 811 02 Bratislava	<a href="https://stratpol.sk/">https://stratpol.sk/</a>
Stredoeurópska nadácia (Central European Foundation)	cultural heritage	Sasinkova 12 811 08 Bratislava	<a href="http://www.cef.sk/">http://www.cef.sk/</a>
Stredoeurópsky inštitút ázijských štúdií (Central European Institute of Asian Studies)	Central European engagements with Asia	Murgašova 2 811 04 Bratislava	<a href="https://ceias.eu/">https://ceias.eu/</a>
Unicef	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Michalská 7 811 01 Bratislava	<a href="https://www.unicef.sk/">https://www.unicef.sk/</a>
Živica	development cooperation and humanitarian assistance	Račianska 78 831 02 Bratislava	<a href="https://zivica.sk/">https://zivica.sk/</a>



# List of publications and online sources on foreign and European policy, security policy and international law

as of January 2022

■ 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 2021

as of January 2022

▪ Mission	▪ Country	▪ Armed forces members	▪ Police force members	▪ Civilian experts
<b>▪ UN</b>				
UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)	Cyprus	240	6	
UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization)	Syria, Israel	3		
<b>▪ NATO</b>				
NMI (NATO Mission Iraq)	Iraq	13		
eFP (Enhanced Forward Presence)	Latvia	131		
Resolute Support	Afghanistan	18		
<b>▪ EU</b>				
EUFOR Althea (European Union Force Althea)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	41		
EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia)	Georgia	1	6	
EJAM (European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine)	Ukraine		2	1
EUBAM (EU Border Assistance Mission in Moldova)	Ukraine/Moldova		1	
EUTM (European Union Training Mission in Mali)	Mali	4		
EUTM RCA (European Union Training Mission in the Central African Republic)	Central African Republic	2		
EUNAVFOR MED Irini	Central Mediterranean	2		
EUCAP	Somalia		1	
EULEX	Kosovo		3	
<b>▪ OSCE</b>				
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 Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic





About authors

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### ■ Pavol Baboš

is a researcher at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. His main research area is Euroscepticism and voting behavior. He regularly publishes in international academic journals and helps popularize science in the Slovak media. He has substantial experience of working with multinational European research consortia, and has taught social science methodology at Comenius University in Bratislava and Bologna University, Italy.



### ■ 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)

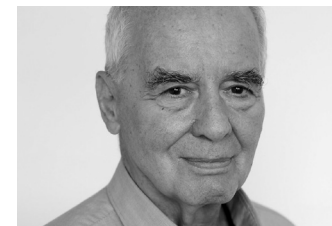


### ■ Ivan Korčok

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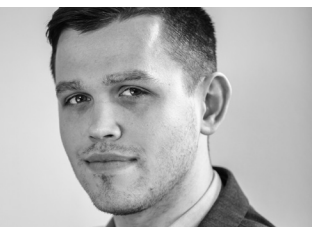
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