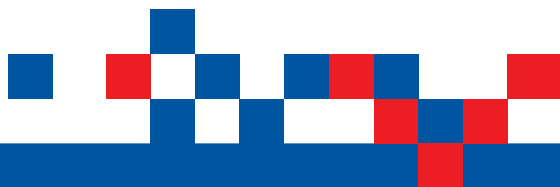


YEARBOOK OF SLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY



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Ivan Kořčok

**Slovakia in 2020
– a firmly anchored
foreign and
European policy**

“Slovakia’s place in the world today reflects the choices we made freely in 1989. They were made and have repeatedly been confirmed by our citizens.” This quote from the Slovak Government Manifesto adopted in April 2020 reflects the choices, made three decades ago, that have led to Slovakia being part of the family of free, democratic, secure, stable and prosperous European nations. The newly formed government has thus confirmed its commitment to carry out a foreign policy that reflects the interests of the Slovak people and the roots of modern Slovak statehood. After more than thirty years since the Velvet revolution, in the 2020 elections, a decisive majority of Slovak citizens called for a confident, value-based foreign policy that is firmly anchored in our membership of the EU and NATO and the values they represent and for a coherent political representation emphasizing freedom, dignity, rule of law and respect for human rights.

This has set a clear commitment for our foreign policy. Though 2020 was overshadowed by the omnipresent impact of the pandemic, we carried out a consistent foreign policy, which put fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law at the center of attention. The pandemic amplified the importance of the international human rights system as we witnessed continuous efforts to crack down on dissent, and I am proud that Slovak diplomacy did not remain silent when grave violations of human rights occurred. We owe our freedom and prosperity to the people who demanded justice, reforms and democratic government during the revolutionary days of 1989. We believe everybody is entitled to these rights and freedoms and that society is best governed under the rule of law. In 2020 Slovakia completed its three-year term in the UN Human Rights Council as Council Vice-President. It was thus our duty in 2020 to support the legitimate calls of those who demanded a free and fair electoral process, freedom of assembly and inclusive participation in public affairs – from Belarus to Xinjiang and from Hong Kong to Venezuela.

■ 2020 – the year of the pandemic

At the beginning of 2020, no one could have predicted that this year would most probably define the coming decades. The spread of the coronavirus redefined the global setup and brought countless challenges for societies and policymakers. The coronavirus pandemic brought about a sudden and deep systemic shock that hit not only healthcare, but the whole global environment, including economies, social systems, education, culture, sport and many more. Foreign policy was not left untouched either. Policymakers on all continents were faced with complex dilemmas as the world was confronted with the most profound crisis since the end of World War II.

The pandemic has changed the way we do our job. Diplomacy has moved online. Instead of introductory courtesy visits, I had to make courtesy phone calls. Computer screens replaced congress halls. It is difficult to imagine how diplomacy would have coped with such a situation in the pre-internet era. Online meetings were at least a partial substitution, but we realized more than ever that the true essence of diplomacy is discrete communication and the direct personal exchange of ideas. However, the most significant changes were taking place beyond the computer screens. The initial increase in individual approaches and protectionism was gradually replaced by more solidarity and cooperation, but multilateralism remained weakened. The great global power contest had returned in full swing.

I was sworn in as minister at the peak of the first wave of the pandemic. The very first challenge was to bring home Slovak citizens stranded abroad. It was a major effort that ended up in the largest crisis management operation since the founding of the independent Slovak Republic. We faced an unprecedented situation and a major test of our ability to provide adequate services to our citizens and I am proud that Slovak diplomacy managed to navigate the rough seas. Thanks to the enormous determination of our diplomatic and consular staff, both at home and abroad, and thanks to good international cooperation, we managed to repatriate more than six thousand Slovak citizens from 110 countries and territories. Importantly, the crisis also proved that Slovakia is a country willing to show solidarity and lend a helping hand in times of crisis. I am glad that we assisted hard-hit Italy during the turbulent first wave and I am proud that we managed to help our partners in the Western Balkans, in Eastern Europe, in Africa and in the Middle East.

■ Foreign policy starts in the neighborhood

I was equally glad that our neighbors helped us when we needed support. In particular, the medical assistance provided in the nationwide testing was very uplifting in these tough times. The pandemic thus yet again showed the value of good neighborly relations. One of the basic assumptions of my foreign policy concept is that a successful foreign policy starts in the neighborhood. We don't choose our neighbors, but we do choose our policies. And it is our basic duty to ensure that we cooperate closely with our neighbors for the benefit of our citizens. We must ensure that we make the most of our geographic proximity, that we seek productive platforms for cooperation and that we are honest and engaged partners. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of good neighborly relations again. All of a sudden, travel restrictions were imposed to curb the spread of infection, reminding us not only about the long forgotten and abandoned border posts, but most importantly about the many livelihoods and many individual stories of the cross-border commuters and students that are directly linked to free movement across our borders. It is therefore obvious that my first visits, after the travel restrictions had been lifted, would take me to neighboring countries. Our regional Visegrad cooperation proved its importance, and the Slavkov format underwent unprecedented revitalization in 2020. We even formed a new Central 5 platform to promote regional approaches to solving the many challenges the pandemic has brought to the region.

Importantly, our accession to the EU has broadened the perspective of our neighborhood. Besides our direct neighbors we now have a European neighborhood in the East, South and the Balkans. We sought to engage and cultivate ties with our partners in these regions. Besides the material and financial aid, we supported our partners' reforms and legitimate integration aspirations and we raised several principal issues.

In particular, the Eastern Neighborhood was very fragile in 2020. Along with the long term problems – illegal annexation of Crimea, conflict in Donbas, and the number of frozen conflicts – the rigged presidential elections in Belarus and the aftermath, as well as the war in Nagorno Karabakh all further tested the stability in this region. In these situations, we could not remain silent and raised our voice to call for the respect of basic rights and freedoms such as the right to liberty, security, a free trial and freedom of expression and assembly, all of which have been systematically violated in Belarus. We also remained firm in our support for territorial integrity, political independence and respect for international law in our Eastern Neighborhood.

In the Balkans, we welcomed the NATO accession of North Macedonia and the opening of EU accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. Despite promising developments in the first half of 2020, however, we could not consent to the inclusion of sensitive bilateral historical issues in the enlargement agenda. Together with our Czech colleagues, we therefore decided to block the adoption of the draft Conclusions on the enlargement. Our intention was not to block the integration process as such. On the contrary, we were motivated out of a desire to maintain the credibility of the enlargement process and I believe that this decision will ultimately benefit all the parties involved and we will soon continue with the enlargement process.

■ EU on the path to recovery

The beginning of 2020 was marked by a sad moment when, for the first time, a member state withdrew from the EU. However, when, on January 31, 2020, the UK left the EU, little did we know that the biggest challenge of 2020 was yet to come. Under those circumstances, the fact that we ended the year with the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the recovery plan for Europe is quite an achievement.

The post-Brexit deal provides the necessary legal framework that will facilitate mutual trade in vital sectors following the end of the transition period, and limits the scope of the new barriers. We supported the deal, because we wanted to provide legal certainty to our citizens and our businesses. We believe it will provide a sound legal basis for EU–UK relations as we continue to see the UK as our close partner both in trade and the economy as well as a like-minded foreign policy partner and a key security policy ally.

Even more crucially, we concluded the year with one of the most ambitious recovery plans ever financed through the EU budget. The unveiling of the recovery plan for Europe was not only one of the defining moments of 2020, but it may well determine the years to come. In total, more than €1.8 trillion will be available for member states in the coming years and Slovakia will be entitled to resources equal to 40 per cent of its annual GDP. For the first time in its history, the EU will finance its plans by borrowing on the financial markets, this increased flexibility will enable it to address unforeseen needs in the future and the use of funds will be linked to the rule of law. But it is not just the unique quantity and quality of the plan that makes

it special. The accompanied vision to make Europe greener, more digital and more resilient could change the destiny of our continent. It is therefore crucial that these funds are spent effectively and wisely to reform and transform our societies and economies in order to improve our global competitiveness and prepare the member states and our union for the challenges to come.

■ Security is key

The pandemic has underlined the importance of a functioning security system, resilient alliances and carefully set priorities, which are necessary to maintain the security of our societies.

The pandemic has caused a crisis that goes far beyond sanitary issues. In addition, it has accelerated phenomena with which we were struggling even before the crisis, most important of which are the weakening of multilateralism and erosion of international law. As the pandemic ravaged our societies, we witnessed the growing pressures on the internal cohesion of our societies as well as partnerships abroad and the increasing number of disinformation and malign narratives. Our ministry remained at the forefront of countering these false narratives. We used our strategic communication tools and developed new ones to proactively communicate our foreign policy priorities both at home and abroad.

In this context, it is more than symbolic that we concluded the year 2020 by finalizing the new Security Strategy, and the new Defense Strategy. In the government manifesto we set an ambitious goal – to revise our Security Strategy as the basic document summarizing our vital interests and defining the allies and partners with whom we will be promoting them. I believe that is exactly what we managed to achieve. The Security Strategy accurately assesses the current challenges, defines the interests and sets our priorities. Recent dynamic developments have shown that we cannot rely on outdated policy tools and it is important that Slovakia has adequate security policy documents that reflect changes in multiple policy fields such as new technologies, disinformation and hybrid warfare.

Nevertheless, the cornerstone of our security policy remains our membership of NATO and the EU. Slovakia has kept investing in its defense, even in the current challenging economic circumstances, as we want to stand by our commitments to share the burden fairly with our allies. We know that being

a member of the transatlantic family is based on shared values and solidarity and we remain fully committed to strengthening the Alliance and sharing the cost of our security. But our ambitions go beyond just burden sharing. The complexity of the pandemic has shown that firm relations with our transatlantic partners are paramount. Despite different positions on certain issues, the EU and the US are closely linked by all major global issues such as climate change, new technologies, arms control and the pandemic. We need to communicate more and seek common solutions, because divergence between Europe and the US would only serve those who seek to divide us and undermine the international rules-based order. The EU and the US need each other. We are friends, partners and allies. We look forward to working with the new US administration and to engaging in a truly strategic and regular dialogue based on shared values.

■ 2020 a challenging year full of opportunities

The year 2020 will be remembered not only for its simple numeric. It will remain in our memories as the year of the great pandemic. Yet, it would not be fair to remember it as a dark year in Slovak foreign policy, because it was also a year in which we revived our security policy documents, it was a year in which we reinstated the foreign policy consensus among the highest-ranking state officials and it was a year in which we showed solidarity with friends and partners in Europe and overseas.

2020 was a difficult year, but when we were confronted with the emergency, we responded decisively. Slovakia acted as a determined and constructive team-player, thinking up new ideas and offering solutions. We were guided by the principles of democracy, freedom and respect for human rights, we remained deeply devoted to the idea of European integration and the transatlantic partnership, but most importantly, we followed the interests of our country and our people and worked for their benefit.

It is always important to see not just the challenges, but also the opportunities. We need to use the potential of the crisis in our favor and build a stronger, greener and more resilient European Union based on solidarity, good neighborly relations and respect for fundamental rights. I hope that we find joint answers to pressing global issues with our American partners and manage to revitalize the power and attractiveness of the political West and our way of

life that is linked to its liberal-democratic institutions. The post-pandemic age will bring exciting, new opportunities, but we also need to work hard on pressing global issues such as economic uncertainty, rising poverty and inequality, climate change, the health impacts of the pandemic and many more. But most importantly we need to keep advocating and promoting the interests of our citizens and of our country, as that is the primary duty of our diplomacy in the era of pandemic and beyond.





The Slovak Republic in the international environment

Juraj Hajko

Anti-corruption opposition zealot enters European politics

In 2018, Slovakia received a harsh wake-up call. The murder of a young journalist and his fiancée led to a government reshuffle. This tragic event exposed the extent of state capture and abuse of power, which then framed the election campaign. In February 2020, the election was won by opposition party *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities] (*OĽaNO*) led by Igor Matovič. This should be borne in mind when assessing the election campaign, the results and the government manifesto. As this analysis of Slovak European foreign policy in 2020 shows, the hallmarks of the year were continuity and the reestablishment of the foreign policy consensus.

The pre-election emphasis on the internal political agenda was upturned by the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic. The virus spread from the initial regional clusters to across the whole of Europe. The new government that had promised to combat the corruption and restore trust in the state institutions suddenly had to devote most of its attention to the health crisis. The new prime minister lacked international experience and suddenly found himself having to contribute and constructively engage in discussions about the handling of the pandemic at the European level.

Furthermore, difficult negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework and Next Generation EU ensued. The new Slovak government and foreign minister needed to act and could not rely on their Visegrad partners since Poland and Hungary had further exacerbated their toxic image by blocking crucial EU economic decisions. On the one hand, Slovakia distanced itself from its closest partners in the V4 and, on the other, Slovak diplomacy showed substantial support towards Belarus and North Macedonia.

■ Election campaign and its impact on Slovak EU policy

Although EU topics have yet to become fully domesticated within the Slovak political arena, we cannot deny their growing importance. Openly pro-European progressive actors won both the presidential and European Parliament elections in 2019. Both events contributed to the emphasis on the European vector of the Slovak foreign policy and climate agenda. These two topics were intensively discussed in the election campaigns in 2019 and 2020.

The majority of Slovakia's political parties are formally pro-European in attitude, with the exception of the far right *Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko* [People's Party Our Slovakia] (*ĽSNS*) and to some extent *Sloboda a solidarita* [Freedom and Solidarity] (*SaS*) and *Sme rodina* [We Are Family]. A closer look at their manifestos, however, shows that the parts of the election manifestos on European policy are rather vague.¹ The divergence between statements in the media and the parties' manifestos poses another problem, as this study shows.²

With the growing importance of EU topics and the sheer amount of transposed law, three political parties (*Smer-SD*, *Za ľudí* [For the People], *Sme rodina*) backed the decision to transfer coordination of the EU agenda from the ministry of foreign affairs to the government office (as is the situation in many other EU member states). The same trio supported the switch from unanimous voting to qualified majority voting in EU foreign policy affairs. The winner of the election, *OĽaNO*, did not adopt a clear stance on either issue.³

¹ Not to mention that some political parties did not even have a proper election manifesto (*Smer-SD*) or no manifesto at all (*ĽSNS*).

² M. Králiková, A. Világi, P. Baboš, "Stranícky euroskepticizmus pred voľbami 2020," [Party Euroskepticism in general elections 2020] Comenius University Bratislava, February 11, 2020. Available online: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3536825> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

³ For more information, consult the series of EU sectorial analysis conducted by Euractiv: "EURACTIV analýza: Európska agenda v slovenských voľbách 2020," [EURACTIV Analysis: European agenda in Slovak elections in 2020] *Euractiv*, February 11, 2020. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/buducnost-eu/news/euractiv-analyza-europska-agenda-v-slovenskych-volbach-2020/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

■ Political unrest leads to an unexpected result

The Slovak parliamentary elections took place in a turbulent political situation and an emerging pandemic. Citizens and political parties were highly motivated following the murder of Ján Kuciak and the constant flow of information about the depth of the criminal infiltration of the Slovak state apparatus.

Citizens cast their vote on February 29, 2020. The results were a debacle for the ruling coalition. The two junior parties (*Slovenská národná strana* [Slovak National Party] (*SNS*) and *Most-Híd* [Bridge]) did not pass the 5 per cent threshold and the senior party *Smer-SD* gained only 18 per cent of the voted (compared to 28 per cent in 2016).

By contrast, *OĽaNO* won the election with 25 per cent. Founded as a protest and anti-corruption movement, *OĽaNO* more than doubled its results in the election in 2016 (11 per cent) and won despite the polls having shown only single digit support in the months preceding the election, except for February 2020. The fallout of the anti-government protests and several serious scandals affecting the coalition led by *Smer-SD* undoubtedly helped to mobilize Slovak voters.

We should also mention *PS-Spolu* [Progressive Slovakia-Together], a liberal and most openly pro-European political coalition that did not meet the 7 per cent threshold required for coalitions, having received 6.96 per cent. The failure of *PS-Spolu* was rather surprising given that they had won both the European and presidential elections in 2019.

Nevertheless, *OĽaNO* eventually formed a fairly euro-optimistic coalition after the election regardless of some of the personnel nominations and steps assessed here. Ivan Korčok, former state secretary and former Slovak ambassador to the EU, became the foreign minister. The openly pro-EU *Za ľudí* formed part of the coalition and secured a brand new ministry led by Veronika Remišová, which embarked on centralizing the EU funds agenda. Last but not least, Tomáš Valášek, former Slovak ambassador to NATO and director

of Carnegie Europe, became the chairman of the ministry's European Affairs Committee, replacing the controversial MP Ľuboš Blaha.⁴

■ Old-new foreign minister

In April 2020, Ivan Korčok became the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic as a nominee of junior coalition party SaS. As former State Secretary he already had ministerial experience. He had deputized for Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák when the latter served as President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly from September 2017 to September 2018. Before that, Korčok had served as an ambassador in the USA and Germany, and he has substantial experience of European affairs. Korčok led the Permanent Representation of Slovakia in Brussels for six years and managed the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2016. He was joined by two states secretaries at the ministry – SaS MP Martin Klus and professional diplomat Ingrid Brocková. Some other important embassy nominations will be mentioned later in the chapter.

Korčok's nomination by SaS was certainly not expected. Korčok had been a State Secretary in the *Smer-SD* government and had openly supported further EU integration and Slovakia being part of the "EU core." Richard Sulík, SaS leader, and MEP until 2019, is known for his Euroskepticism and warned integration may not always benefit Slovakia.⁵

⁴ Although Blaha was the chairman of the committee, he was known for his harsh criticism of the EU and soft spot for Russia. In May 2019, just a few weeks before the elections to the European parliament, he called the EU "a bunch of losers" on his official Facebook account. His statement was later condemned by then Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini who considered the EU Slovakia's natural habitat. "Pellegrini sa pustil do Blahu za status na Facebooku, v ktorom nazýva Európsku úniu bandou 'lúzrov,'" [Pellegrini bashed Blaha for his Facebook status where he called the EU a bunch of losers] *SITA*, May 16, 2019. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/pellegrini-sa-pustil-do-blahu-za-status-na-facebooku-v-ktorom-nazyva-europsku-uniu-bandou-luzrov/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

⁵ "Byť v jadre EÚ znamená byť od začiatku súčasťou debaty o jej budúcej podobe, tvrdí Korčok," [Being in the EU core means taking part in the discussion on its future from the very beginning] *SITA*, September 24, 2017. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/byt-v-jadre-eu-znamenava-byt-od-zaciatku-sucastou-debaty-o-jej-buducej-podobe-tvrdi-korcok/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

The SaS leader balanced out Korčok's nomination by appointing his party colleague Martin Klus who specialized in foreign policy and became lead coordinator of EU policies at the ministry (a so-called sherpa). Klus ultimately ended up being sidelined due to disputes between *OLaNO* and SaS about the pandemic measures. Prime Minister Igor Matovič intentionally did not invite Klus to the European Council in October 2020, although it has been the custom to do so.⁶

■ First steps by the new head of diplomacy

In his first statement, Korčok promised to pursue Slovak national interests in cooperation with traditional foreign partners and allies. With the ongoing pandemic, he was keen to emphasize his responsibility for crisis management and consular assistance.⁷ Indeed, the ministry organized more than four thousand repatriations by plane and bus, and helped nearly two thousand citizens return to Slovakia in the first three months of the new government.⁸ Slovak diplomacy was also active in the most pressing foreign policy issues. It joined the UK in criticism of China's policy in Hong Kong and recognized Juan Guaidó as Acting President of Venezuela. But EU policy towards Venezuela later changed and Guaidó is no longer referred to as president.⁹

⁶ "Premiér nevezme Klusa do Bruselu, nemá dôvod byť ústretový voči SaS," [Prime minister won't take Klus to Brussels as he has no reason to show be accommodating towards SaS] *Sme*, October 14, 2020. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22510225/premier-nevezme-klusa-do-bruselu-nema-dovod-byt-ustretovy-voci-sas.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

⁷ "Novým ministrom zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí SR sa stal dlhoročný diplomat Ivan Korčok," [Experienced diplomat Ivan Korčok is the new Slovak minister of foreign and European affairs] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, April 8, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/novym-ministrom-zahranicnych-veci-a-europskych-zalezitosti-sr-sa-stal-dlhorocny-diplomat-ivan-korcok?p_auth=kkA8ZnBO&_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2F (accessed on February 21, 2021).

⁸ "Korčok: Boj o financie z EÚ začína," [The battle for EU money begins] *TASR*, July 16, 2020. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/i-korcok-boj-o-financie-z-eu-sa-zac/480913-clanok.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

⁹ "EU no longer recognizes Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president," *Euronews*, January 7, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/2021/01/07/eu-no-longer-recognises-juan-guaido-as-venezuela-s-interim-president> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

Together with other member states, Slovakia decided not to recognize¹⁰ Alexander Lukashenko as Belarusian President and supported EU sanctions against the regime following the rigged elections and brutal police beatings of citizens engaging in protest. Slovakia made the world headlines when Belarusian Ambassador to Slovakia Igor Alexandrovich Leshchenya¹¹ became the first Belarus diplomat to support the anti-government protestors and criticize the police raids.

It is worth pointing out the extraordinary step Slovakia took together with Czechia, both known for their support of the EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. They blocked the EU Council conclusions on enlargement¹² mainly because of the doubt cast on North Macedonian history in the council conclusions as a result of Bulgarian antipathy toward its western neighbor.

■ Restored unity in foreign policy

On the occasion of Europe Day, May 9th, Slovakia's three most senior officials signed a joint *Declaration on Foreign, European and Security Policy*.¹³ The declaration emphasizes the importance of EU and NATO membership. The president, speaker of parliament and prime minister¹⁴ called for Slovakia to

¹⁰ "Slovakia will not recognise Lukashenko as Belarusian president," *The Slovak Spectator*, September 23, 2020. Available online: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22494903/slovakia-will-not-recognise-lukashenko-as-belarusian-president.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

¹¹ "He supported the protesters: The Belarusian ambassador to Slovakia now steps down," *The Slovak Spectator*, August 18, 2020. Available online: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22469888/belarusian-ambassador-to-slovakia-steps-down.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

¹² "The Czech Republic and Slovakia have blocked EU Council conclusions on enlargement," *European Western Balkans*, December 18, 2020. Available online: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/12/18/the-czech-republic-and-slovakia-have-blocked-eu-council-conclusions-on-enlargement/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

¹³ "Joint declaration on Europe Day," May 9, 2020. Available online: <https://www.prezident.sk/article/najvyssi-ustavni-cinitelia-podpisali-spolocne-vyhlasenie-ku-dnu-europy/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

¹⁴ However, the speaker of parliament, Boris Kollár, has a somewhat different view on the EU compared to the president and prime minister. Kollár, a "Europe of Nations" fan, entered into partnership with Italian far-right leader Matteo Salvini and invited Marine Le Pen to visit Slovakia. "Boris Kollár: V jednote je sila, preto sme vstúpili do hnutia Európa národov a slobody," [Boris Kollár: We joined Europe of Nations and Freedom because strength lies in numbers] *Sme rodina*, May 13, 2019. Available online: <https://hnutie-smerodina.sk/aktuality/boris-kollar-v-jednote-je-sila-preto-sme-vstupili-hnutia-europa-narodov-slobody/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

play an active role in the EU and to domesticate EU policies. They pledged to maintain the fundamental freedoms for Slovak citizens and to pursue solidarity and responsibility in line with EU membership. They also agreed to support a European budget aimed at environmental and digital transformation, competitiveness, and last but not least that would provide a sufficient sum for the development of Slovak infrastructure.

The declaration also called for the rapid adoption of the security and defense strategy. This objective was fulfilled in January 2021, when both strategies were adopted by the Slovak parliament; the latter even by the vast majority of MPs including those from the opposition parties (108 out of 150 MPs).

Both strategies desperately needed updating. The previous ones date back to 2005. Even though both documents are of crucial importance to foreign policy, it took 16 years to come up with new strategies that reflect all the major changes in politics, security and defense.

Of course, implementation will be of crucial importance too. The three most high-ranking officials adopted a similar declaration in 2017 and reiterated their support for it in 2019. In reality, there was no consensus mainly because of the then speaker of parliament Andrej Danko. Despite the declaration, he repeatedly met with Russian officials on the EU sanction list, and visited Belarus's autocratic president Alexander Lukashenko whom he invited to the commemoration of the Slovak National Uprising.¹⁵

■ Government manifesto and its consequences

The government manifesto, reflecting the election manifestos and political situation in Slovakia, focused on fighting corruption, rule of law, security and economic issues. In addition, a substantial part of the document was dedicated to regional development, digitization, ecology and foreign policy. The manifesto declared Slovakia's intention was to use the EU funds effectively

¹⁵ Danko visited Moscow five times in 2019. Miroslav Lajčák, the then Foreign Minister, acknowledged that he did not approve of his behavior as it signaled a disunited foreign policy and contradicted the consensus.

and transparently.¹⁶ A major government objective was to negotiate the best conditions for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027. The manifesto indicated that investment in education, science, environment, agriculture and infrastructure would be a priority. As can be seen, digitalization and climate change were not included, despite being the main areas of investment in the Next Generation EU (NGEU) fund.

The Slovak government stressed its Euro-Atlantic orientation and adherence to rules and solidarity under its EU membership. On one hand, the manifesto emphasized the further development of bilateral ties with traditional partners, especially the Visegrad Group (V4), but in a constructive manner towards the EU as a whole. On the other hand, the manifesto stated that Slovakia will try to establish closer relations with some other states.

This point became particularly important during the discussions on the conditionality of EU funds based on the rule of law. The instrument provoked further tension between the European Commission and some member states on the one hand and Poland and Hungary on the other. When the two Visegrad partners blocked the approval of NGEU and the MFF because of the conditionality clause, pressure was evident in the Slovak governing coalition as well.

Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok later distanced Slovakia from Budapest and Warsaw and dismissed their arguments against the rule of law mechanism. But, he denied that the V4 could split over the disagreements since the group regularly discusses issues they do not necessarily agree on.¹⁷ Tomáš Valášek, chairman of parliament's European Affairs Committee, went one step further. He called for Slovakia to cut its ties to "toxic Visegrad" and continue strengthening ties with some other EU member states, a reference to the manifesto.¹⁸ The new government declared it would pay particular attention to the European Green Deal, update the national energy and climate plan, and support

decentralization of the energy sector. Slovakia backed the 55 per cent target for the cut in CO₂ emissions and carbon neutrality by 2050 but together with Czechia argued that nuclear energy would remain a substantial part of the energy mix.

■ Slovakia still in the spotlight for Kuciak's murder and justice reform

The murder and later the trial of the murderers of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová pushed Slovakia into the European spotlight. Along with Malta, in relation to the murder of journalist Daphne Galicia, Slovakia had to face heavy criticism over the state of media freedom and journalists' safety. The trial received international attention and came under the close scrutiny of the European Parliament (EP) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

The EP continued its oversight through the monitoring group¹⁹ under the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE).²⁰ Slovak Justice Minister Mária Kolíková twice held a videoconference with the MEPs from the monitoring group in 2020. She attended the first one in June with the Prime Minister Igor Matovič.

Kolíková explained her planned justice reforms to the MEPs. These contained several changes such as a new territorial division of the courts, the introduction of an age cap for judges and checks on their asset disclosures and a brand new Supreme Administration Court. She argued that the reforms were demanded by the judges, although ultimately they protested against

¹⁶ "Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky," [Program Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic] Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24756/1> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

¹⁷ "Slovensko sa postavilo proti Maďarsku a Poľsku. Korčok nerozumie ich blokovaní miliard," [Slovakia opposed Hungary and Poland. Korčok does not understand why they are blocking billions] *Aktuality*, November 19, 2020. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/841523/slovensko-sa-postavilo-proti-madarsku-a-polsku-korcok-nerozumie-ich-blokovanu-miliard/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

¹⁸ "Ešte to chvíľu potrvá, no náš vplyv v EÚ rastie," [It will take a while but our power in the EU is growing] *Sme*, November 30, 2020. Available online: <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/22545593/este-to-chvilu-potrva-no-nas-vplyv-v-eu-rastie.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

¹⁹ "LIBE Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Monitoring Group (DRFMG)," European Parliament. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/libe-democracy-rule-of-law-and-fundament/product-details/20190103CDT02662> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

²⁰ The monitoring group was founded in 2018 following the murders of two journalists, Ján Kuciak, and Daphne Galizia from Malta.

the court reform,²¹ and were in line with the international recommendations. She assured them that all the changes would abide by the EU rule of law principles and somehow distanced herself from the justice reforms in Hungary and Poland. She also stated that she had consulted her steps with the European Commission and Council of Europe.²²

■ Division in Visegrad

Slovakia repeatedly distanced itself from its Visegrad partners Hungary and Poland in 2020, mainly due to the rule of law mechanism being attached to the spending of EU funds. The Slovak foreign and justice ministers rejected the Hungarian initiative to create a parallel V4 rule of law mechanism. Korčok and Kolíková strongly opposed the project and even called it the political misuse of the Visegrad group brand.²³

Visegrad cooperation was questioned again when Hungary and Poland blocked both the recovery fund and the Multiannual Financial Framework due to the rule of law conditionality. They objected that the instrument could be misused on ideological grounds. Slovakia, together with Czechia, criticized the veto and dismissed their objections.²⁴

²¹ "Proti novej súdnej mape je aj Združenie sudcov Slovenska, podporilo otvorený list sudcovského zboru," [Slovak Association of Judges is against the new court map and supported the open letter] *SITA*, January 20, 2021. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/proti-novej-sudnej-mape-je-aj-zdruzenie-sudcov-slovenska-podporilo-otvoreny-list-sudcov/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

²² "M. Kolíková diskutovala s poslancami EP o reforme justície," [Kolíková discussed the justice reforms with MEPs] *TASR*, November 27, 2020. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/m-kolikova-diskutovala-s-poslancami-e/510669-clanok.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

²³ "Kolíková a Korčok reagujú na iniciatívu maďarskej ministerky spravodlivosti o vytvorení profesorskej a juniorskej siete V4," [Kolíková and Korčok react to Hungarian justice minister's initiative to found a professor and junior V4 network] *SITA*, November 7, 2020. Available online: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/kolikova-a-korcok-reaguju-na-iniciativu-madarskej-ministerky-spravodlivosti-o-vytvoreni-profesorskej-a-juniorskej-siete-v4/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

²⁴ "Rule of law causes cracks in Visegrad Four," *Euractiv*, November 19, 2020. Available online: https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/rule-of-law-causes-cracks-in-visegrad-four/ (accessed on February 21, 2021).

Germany adopted a more neutral stance towards Budapest and Warsaw and managed to come up with a compromise deal. The rule of law conditionality remained unchanged but Hungary and Poland were allowed to challenge its legality first in the EU's top court.²⁵

The German approach helped to avoid any escalation and ultimately led to a generally accepted solution. It sparked the question of whether it was desirable and strategic for Slovak diplomacy to overtly criticize its Visegrad partners for vetoing it. The fact that the compromise was found only a few days later and was championed by one of Slovakia's closest partners (Germany) may leave one wondering about the logic behind the decision. Were we witness to an attempt to distance ourselves from our "toxic" Visegrad partners? Did this actually bring any benefits regarding other Slovak partners in the EU? These questions need to be discussed in light of the fact that both Visegrad and Germany are considered close partners in the government manifesto.

■ Opposition zealot turned prime minister faces the pandemic

As mentioned above, *OLaNO* partly won the elections thanks to the public outrage caused by the murder of the young journalist and the state capture blamed on the previous government. Matovič ascended to power as the icon of the anti-mafia struggle and the fiercest instigator against *Smer-SD*.

After the elections, he celebrated the victory and endlessly repeated that he had outperformed the polls. But his well-known weaknesses appeared very soon. The symbol of the strong political opposition, who had built his image on personal attacks and conflicts, suddenly had to become a manager and constructive leader. He had not even shown any sign of wanting to become

²⁵ "EU leaders back deal to end budget blockade by Hungary and Poland," *Politico*, December 10, 2020. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/deal-reached-to-unblock-eu-budget-and-recovery-fund/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

prime minister until a few days before the election.²⁶ The worsening of the pandemic that was already spreading across Europe in spring proved to be a grand hurdle for Matovič. Not only was he forced to deal with an unprecedented health crisis, but he had to tackle the economic consequences on both the Slovak and European levels. The prime minister lacked the relevant political experience needed for the negotiations on the EU budget and the most ambitious recovery plan the EU has ever proposed – Next Generation EU.

■ Next Generation EU for next generation Slovakia

The new government decided to transform the former junior ministry for investment into a larger ministry combining investment, digitalization and regional development, and with responsibility for the spending of EU funds lying with Veronika Remišová. Since Slovakia has not been effective enough in spending the funds and has suffered as a consequence of additional self-imposed administrative barriers, Remišová decided to reform the whole system. This is even more important now because under NGEU the financial resources are much greater and will therefore require the faster implementation of bigger projects.

Remišová presented an ambitious reform that consisted in concentrating the management of EU funds within her ministry for the next programming period 2021–2027. She elicited a strong backlash by reducing the role of the health and culture ministries and the regions in managing the funds.²⁷ Not only did the regions not admit they were causing delays to the projects, they explained that they had been helping by administering the lower level of the process and were in direct contact with the remote parts of Slovakia.

²⁶ "Finálová debata Denníka N: Matovič už otvorene hovorí o ambícii byť premiérom," [DenníkN final debate: Matovič now openly admits his ambition to become prime minister] *DenníkN*, February 24, 2021. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/1770772/finalova-debata-dennika-n-matovic-uz-otvorene-hovori-o-ambicii-byt-premierom/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

²⁷ "Ministerstvá a kraje ostro kritizujú Remišovej návrh novej architektúry eurofondov," [Ministries and regions sharply critical of Remišová's new EU funds management proposal] *Euractiv*, November 20, 2020. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/ekonomika-a-euro/news/ministerstva-a-kraje-ostro-kritizuju-remisovej-navrh-novej-architektury-eurofondov/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

After weeks of haggling over the ratio of loans, grants and conditionality, EU leaders finally agreed on the € 750 billion NGEU fund. Now it was up to member states to come up with reforms that could be financed via the reconstruction program, bearing in mind that 50 per cent of the overall amount had to be used to support modernization, mainly related to climate change and digitalization. Every member state was tasked to come up with a draft recovery and resilience proposal and send it to the European Commission between October 2020 and April 2021. In fact, according to economic experts, what Slovakia needed was economic, healthcare and education reforms instead. Along with justice, these were the hottest topics of the election campaign.

Matovič wanted to create a suitable plan that would reflect both Slovak interests and EU priorities. He promised to hold 30 livestreamed public debates with key stakeholders throughout the summer at Bratislava Castle.²⁸

None of the debates in fact took place and Matovič was accused of being secretive about the proposal. He should have been focusing on the pandemic, but succumbed to micromanagement and social media engagement instead. We got some gist of the plans in September, when the key ministers discussed the topic at the Central European Energy Conference.²⁹ The Finance Ministry finally published the proposal³⁰ on December 22nd after several drafts had already been leaked to the media. Slovakia aligned its priorities with the Commission's guidelines and allocated the majority of the funds to environmental issues, innovations, digitalization and education.³¹

²⁸ "I. Matovič o reformnom lete a troch slovenských ranách," [Matovič on the summer of reforms and three hits for Slovakia] *TV Markíza*, July 9, 2020. Available online: <https://fb.watch/3s8p9vW-8fh/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

²⁹ "CEEC2020 Conference report," Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2020. Available online: https://ceec.sk/data/ReportCEEC2020_EN_web.pdf (accessed on February 21, 2021).

³⁰ "Predstavujeme ďalšie detaily Plánu obnovy," [We are introducing another details of Recovery Plan] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, December 22, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/media/tlacove-spravy/predstavujeme-dalsie-detaily-planu-obnovy.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

³¹ In 2021, Matovič proposed completely changing the Slovak recovery and resilience plans. He wanted to allocate the funds, based not on the priorities of the ministries but on a ratio corresponding to the election results. The proposal was rejected outright by the coalition partners. "Sulík: Deliť peniaze z plánu obnovy podľa výsledku volieb je hlúposť," [Sulík: Dividing up money for the New Generation EU fund according to the election results makes no sense] *TASR*, February 18, 2021. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/rsulik-delit-peniaze-z-planu-obnovy/528940-clanok.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

■ Slovakia and the Conference on the Future of Europe

Although the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) did not start in May 2020, nor even by the end of year, the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Ministry organized an online webinar³² about it. The webinar consisted of two panels of political representatives and experts from NGOs and academia. Several proposals were made on how to engage citizens in an interactive discussion about the EU. The foreign ministry briefly presented their plan, which consisted of several large citizen discussions at Slovak universities in the regions and expert platforms for approximately ten specific EU topics.³³

The Foreign Ministry unveiled its conception of Slovakia's approach to CoFoE in December 2020. It is based on older formats such as the #WeAreEU (#MySmeEÚ) public debates and the National Convention for expert and academic communities. The participative formats and interactive discussions discussed during the SFPA conference were not included.

Although CoFoE had originally been meant to start in May 2020, it was still on hold at the end of January 2021. The delay on the European level was mainly due to the pandemic and inter-institutional quarrels about the leadership of CoFoE that has fallen short of the sort of political attention French president Emmanuel Macron had wished for. Even Germany was not able to overcome the stalemate and focused on financial affairs and the rule of law conditionality mechanism instead.

³² "Slovensko a Konferencia o budúcnosti Európy," [Slovakia and the Conference on the Future of Europe] Slovak Foreign Policy Association, November 23, 2020. Available online: <http://www.sfpa.sk/event/slovensko-a-konferencia-o-buducnosti-euro-py/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

³³ "Konferencia o budúcnosti Európy môže byť pre Slovensko príležitosťou," [Conference on the Future of Europe could be an opportunity for Slovakia] *Zahraničná politika*, November 24, 2020. Available online: <https://zahranicnapolitika.sk/konferencia-o-buducnosti-euro-py-moze-byt-pre-slovensko-prilezitostou/> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

■ New diplomatic appointments

Slovak diplomacy in Brussels had undergone a major reshuffle. First of all, Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the EU Peter Javorčík left his position after five years of service. He was appointed as the new Director-General for Transport, Energy, Environment and Education at the Council of the EU secretariat.³⁴

The EU ambassador position was vacant for nearly four months until finally taken up by skilled EU diplomat Petra Vargová, who served as Javorčík's deputy. Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok considers her to be one of Slovakia's most competent diplomats.³⁵ The Slovak embassy is therefore currently led by a woman for the first time since joining the EU in 2004. Moreover, with Mária Malová as deputy head of mission responsible for COREPER I, both Slovakia's top EU representatives in Brussels are in the hands of female ambassadors.

Last but not least, head of the Permanent Delegation to NATO Radovan Javorčík became the ambassador to the USA and was replaced by Peter Bátor, who had previously served as a foreign policy advisor to President Zuzana Čaputová.

■ Concluding remarks and recommendations

To a large extent, Slovak EU policy in 2020 has shown continuity with 2019 and the previous government. However, Slovak diplomacy has adopted a more critical approach towards its closest partners in the V4. It is worth reflecting on that given that Ivan Korčok was State Secretary at the Foreign Ministry under the previous government that favored more intensive coordination of the V4.

³⁴ "Javorčík bude generálnym riaditeľom na Generálnom sekretariáte Rady EÚ," [Javorčík will become the Director-General at the Council Secretariat] *TASR*, June 26, 2020. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/brief-p-javorcik-bude-generalnym-ri/476772-clanok.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

³⁵ "Stálou predstaviteľkou SR pri EÚ bude P. Vargová," [Petra Vargova will become Slovakia's Permanent Representative to EU] *TASR*, December 2, 2020. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/spravy/stalou-predstavitelkou-sr-pri-eu-bude/511551-clanok.html> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

The anti-corruption opposition leader of *OLaNO* Igor Matovič unexpectedly became prime minister despite lacking international experience. His emphasis on domestic policy, namely fighting corruption and state capture, was soon overshadowed by the pandemic that required far-reaching decisions on both the national and EU level. New Generation EU brought even greater pressure to improve the effectiveness of spending EU funds. The year 2020 also saw a reshuffle of the Slovak diplomatic missions in Brussels.

- The Slovak government should adopt a complex long-term EU strategy that defines its priorities beyond the single election cycle and focus on the key current EU agenda;
- Slovak diplomacy needs to reflect on its place within the V4 and consider a more diplomatic approach towards Hungary and Poland (similar to Germany) if it has no other closer partners in the EU;
- if Slovak diplomacy intends to build closer partnerships in addition to the current allies, as mentioned in the government manifesto, it should be more transparent about the process;
- Slovak justice must show EU partners it is able to ensure the fair trial and conviction of those undermining the independence of the courts, prosecutors, police and freedom of media. Together with transparent justice reforms, this could send a positive signal from the region of Central and Eastern Europe;
- substantial effort at the governmental level must be invested in overcoming the administrative barriers that slow down the use of EU funding but in cooperation with the regions that play an important role in the process;
- since NGEU represents an unprecedented opportunity but requires the more rapid spending of EU funds, Slovakia should reconsider whether the centralization at the ministry of investment is a step in the right direction.
- the Slovak government needs to reflect on the new EU resources and the qualified majority vote in EU foreign policy proposals, and discuss these with its closest EU partners;
- a broader discussion about the new EU resources should precede ratification in the Slovak parliament as these new tools will be crucial for the reimbursement of the European Commission's loans enabling the creation of the NGEU fund.



Pavol Baboš, Marta Králiková, Aneta Világi

Perceptions of the EU: citizens and political actors*

Recently, there has been an increased effort in Slovakia to destabilize the consensus on the country's foreign policy anchoring in Euro-Atlantic structures. This effort is manifested on the one hand in the establishment of "alternative" disinformation media, and on the other hand by the establishment of political parties and politicians who more or less promote Slovakia's withdrawal from NATO and the EU. Since 2016, they have been relevant actors in every election. The distorted foreign policy consensus (despite its *de iure* existence) was partially reflected in actions undertaken by the state's highest representatives¹ in the previous government term (2016–2020).

Besides the pandemic, 2020 was an electoral year that brought about a change in the ruling elite in Slovakia. Therefore, it is useful to examine how the attitudes of political elites towards European integration are changing at the turn of the decade in Slovakia. In addition, it is interesting to study if, and in what way, political discourse ties in with societal attitudes in the country.

Our findings indicate the existence of a double-track perception among the Slovak population – who hold both positive perceptions of the country's EU membership and negative views of several aspects of European integration (including its direction). This paradox reflects the prevailing tendency in the political discourse. While Euroskeptic tendencies may be dormant for the time being, they are constantly being nourished by politicians and the "alternative" media.

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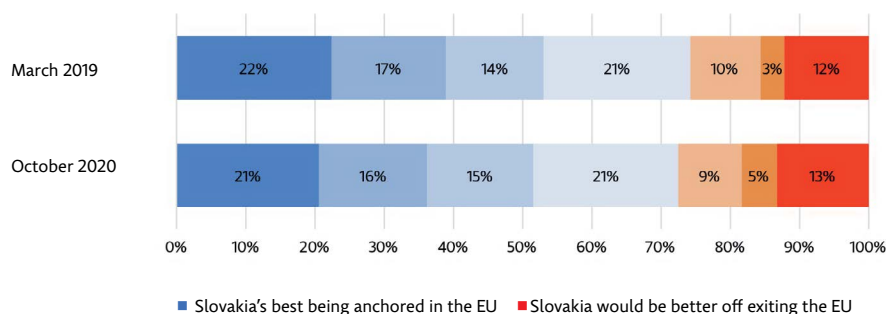
¹ More specifically, the actions of the then Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic which contradicted the EU approach (e.g. his visit to the Russian parliament) and his blocking of the adoption of a new security strategy because his geopolitical view differed from the one presented in the strategy.

■ Popular attitudes towards European integration

The state's foreign policy, like any other, is not formed in a vacuum and popular support plays an important role in policy-making in democratic regimes. Below, we present findings from two waves of a representative survey² on support for European integration in Slovakia and look at the shifts in data from 2019 to 2020.

First, we present popular attitudes towards Slovakia's EU membership measured as agreement/disagreement with the statements indicated in Graph 1. The results show that a majority of the public are in favor of the country's EU membership. Only less than a fifth of people expressed clear disagreement, which corresponds to findings of other surveys (e.g. Eurobarometer³).

Graph 1. Attitudes towards Slovakia's EU membership



Source: Poll carried out by Focus Agency (2019, 2020) for the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava

² The panel survey was conducted by Focus on behalf of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava as part of research project APVV 17-0464. Data were collected from a representative sample of 979 adults in 2019 and 2020.

³ See e.g. "Eurobarometer," No. 91, 2019; or No. 89, 2018. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/index#p=1&instruments=STANDARD> (accessed on January 25, 2021).

Support for the country's EU membership has been stable for a long time and has not fluctuated, not even as a result of the pandemic situation in 2020 and criticism of the EU's inaction during the crisis.⁴

The following graphs (2 and 3) show perceptions of the benefits of EU membership from two perspectives. First, there is the perception EU membership is beneficial or risky for economic reasons. Slightly more than a quarter of people are inclined to believe that EU membership is increasingly risky for the Slovak economy. On the other hand, more than a third of people do not agree with that view, and 36 per cent have no opinion on the issue.

The second perspective on EU membership is also utilitarian and questions the EU's role in ensuring peace and stability. Almost half of the respondents thought EU membership was important for Slovakia for this reason. Less than a fifth of respondents had a negative attitude. We can therefore say that when assessing the benefits of EU membership, Slovaks value security and stability more than economic development. At the same time, in both cases we observed a shift of approximately five percentage points towards a more positive view of Slovakia's EU membership.

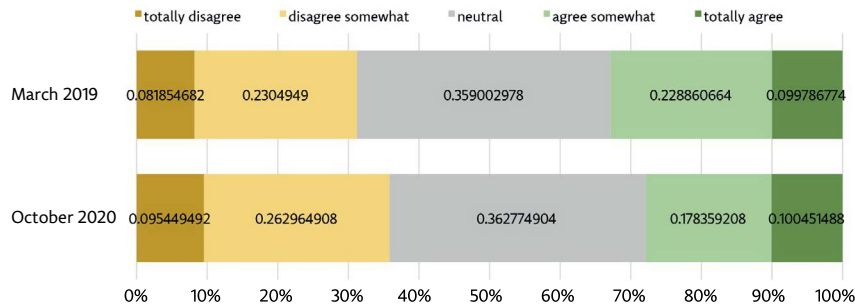
For many years, the economic benefits of Slovakia's EU membership have been communicated mainly in relation to the EU funds. In the early years of membership, they became a symbol of economic support from the EU, to help the country modernize and catch up with "Western Europe." However, owing to increasing experience of the inefficiency and corruption associated with the use of the EU funds at the national level, it is harder to use the EU funds to communicate the economic benefits of membership. As a result, communicating the economic importance of the EU in an accessible way has become a challenge, especially with regards to the single market, which Slovakia benefits from as an open economy. The current absence of relevant positive narratives is reflected in the relatively high proportion of respondents who are not able to assess the economic importance of EU membership or do not think it economically advantageous. Therefore, the pandemic crisis

⁴ See e.g. "Lídri EÚ sa nedokázali dohodnúť," [EU leaders were not able to reach a consensus] RTVS, March 27, 2020. Available online: <https://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/13982/218241> (accessed on March 27, 2020); or "Koronavírus: Euroskupina nedosiahla dohodu o záchrannom balíku," [Corona virus: Eurogroup fails to reach agreement on the rescue package] *Aktuality*, April 8, 2020. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/780776/koronavirus-euroskupina-nedosiahla-dohodu-o-zachrannom-baliku-prerusila-rokovania/> (accessed on April 8, 2020).

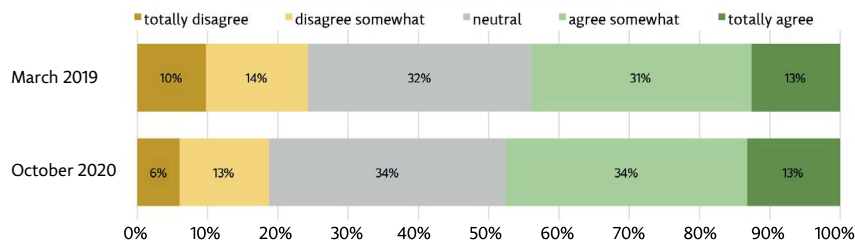
and the EU's response in form of the "Recovery Plan for Europe" might serve as a new impetus for communicating the economic benefits of EU membership.

In addition to the benefits of EU membership, another important identifier of attitudes towards the EU is the way citizens perceive national sovereignty or lack thereof. In Slovakia, more people (Graph 4) are inclined to believe that their country loses too much sovereignty as a result of EU membership. Approximately 40 per cent of respondents agree with this statement. By contrast, less than a quarter (24 per cent) disagree. However, despite the increased public sensitivity to the perceived loss of sovereignty, more people are proud that Slovakia is a member state of the Union. More than 40 per cent of people feel a sense of pride to some degree, while about a quarter do not (Graph 5).

Graph 2. Economic benefits of membership

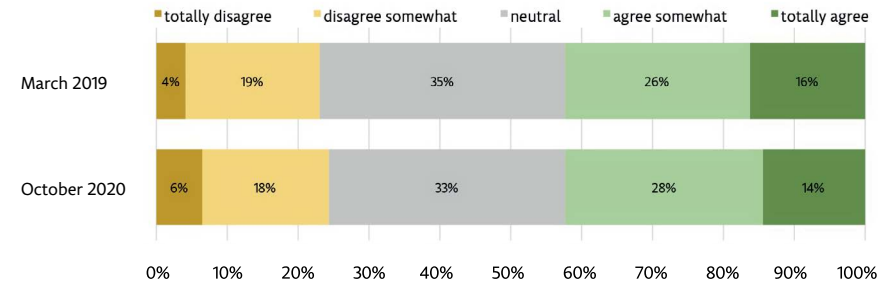


Graph 3. Security benefits of membership

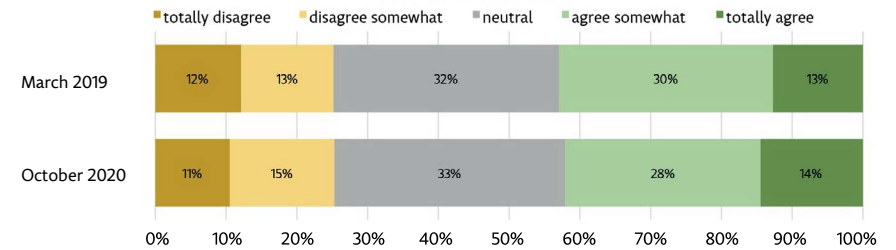


Source (Graph 2&3): Poll carried out by Focus Agency (2019, 2020) for the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava

Graph 4. Perceived loss of sovereignty



Graph 5. Pride in EU membership



Source (Graph 4&5): Poll carried out by Focus Agency (2019, 2020) for the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava

Our qualitative research (based on the focus group method) revealed two main findings. Firstly, perceptions of membership benefits are primarily utilitarian. Secondly, the overall assessment of EU membership does not necessarily fall into rigid attitudes along (non)Euroskeptical lines. Despite some skeptical views, people are aware of the benefits that the Union brings Slovakia. For the elderly, the EU is still a guarantor of stability and peace in Europe (partly because of their experiences of the Cold War, they can imagine conflict in Europe, although not in the purely military sense). Some of the participants in our focus groups welcomed the fact that, thanks to the EU, the Slovak Republic has a bigger say on the international scene, such as in economic negotiations, where the country would otherwise be dwarfed (e.g. steel tariffs in negotiations with China, or car tariffs in negotiations with the USA).

Finally, we also looked at public attitudes using a new typology of Euroskepticism.⁵ Respondents were given four options roughly describing the possible directions of further EU integration and the country's position on the EU. The possibilities cover scenarios from withdrawal from the EU to federalization of the Union (with the Slovak Republic in it). As graph 6 shows, 17.2 per cent of people were in favor of Slovakia's withdrawal from the EU. About 40 per cent would welcome staying in the EU, but with some form of return of competences back to the national level. This attitude is characteristic of so-called soft Euroskepticism. Slightly less, about a third of people, support the current direction of European integration and another 8 per cent support the idea of federation, the creation of a United States of Europe.

Therefore if we now turn to issues relating to the extent and form of European integration, we see a shift away from generally pro-European attitudes to an increase in Euroskeptic tendencies (57.6 per cent of population, see graph 7). This trend has also been captured by other surveys. For example, according to Eurobarometer no. 91⁶ as much as 46 per cent of the Slovak population thought things in the EU were moving in the wrong direction (only 30 per cent of the population held the opposite opinion). The same percentage of the population (46 per cent) tends not to trust the EU (whereas 44 per cent of the Slovak population tends to trust the EU). As many as 47 per cent of the population has a neutral attitude towards the EU's image and for 36 per cent of the Slovak population the EU has a positive image. Looking at the various attitudes of Slovaks towards the European Union, its benefits and risks, some recurring patterns can be observed.

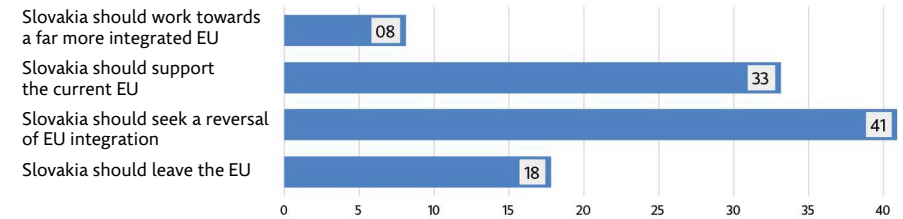
First, most positions (including many that we have measured in the project but are not presented in this paper) show that the public favors the country's EU membership and perceives it positively. Second, people who view most aspects of EU membership positively amount to almost twice those who are negative about it. Third, on any aspect, there is about a third (and often up to 40 per cent) of people who do not have an opinion and cannot make judgements on aspects of Slovakia's EU membership. Fourth, if we turn to more general questions about the functioning of the EU, fewer Slovak

⁵ For more details see: P. Baboš, A. Világi, "Reconceptualisation of party euroscepticism: towards the political Reality," *SEI Working paper* Vol. 27, No. 145, 2019.

⁶ See "Standard Eurobarometer," No. 91, 2019. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2253>, (accessed on January 25, 2021)

citizens have a positive opinion and, in addition to the relatively large group who do not have an opinion, we can observe that the prevailing view is negative. Finally, people are not ideologically committed to consistently rejecting further integration on principle, but consider it on a case-by-case basis.

Graph 6. Attitudes towards EU integration



Source: Poll carried out by Focus Agency (2019, 2020) for the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava

In the following sections, we examine how political parties in Slovakia may serve as the source of Euroskeptic attitudes among the public.

■ Political parties' stances on the EU

Slovak political representatives participate in deciding EU issues on almost a daily basis. They also significantly shape public attitudes on European integration. Our qualitative research (based on the focus group method) captured how ordinary citizens adopt narratives and arguments presented by politicians. This occurred even when the debaters displayed a distrustful, even outright negative attitude towards politicians in general. This section focuses on relevant⁷ political parties and examines the presence, range and

⁷ We consider a political party to be relevant if it holds parliamentary seats or reached the threshold of 5 per cent of popular support three weeks before the 2020 elections.

type of party Euroscepticism in Slovakia.⁸ It is not easy to clearly determine a party's attitude towards the EU. One of the reasons for that is that party performance, especially in the media, often contains mixed or directly contradictory messages on European integration. Another reason is the fact that many political party manifestos are either very general or vague on EU integration. Therefore, in this analysis, the focus is on party inclinations or tendencies towards certain type of attitudes. Based on the definition of party Euroscepticism that considers the EU to be a political system,⁹ parties are Eurosceptic if they are against the current form of the EU political system and/or are against the extent to which the country is integrated into the EU political system.¹⁰ We do not analyze the parties' views on individual EU policies. The following table (1) shows the number of statements in media outputs by political parties on European integration in 2019–2020.

Table 1. Statements by political parties on European integration (2019–2020)

	■ Supportive	■ Skeptical	■ Mixed	■ Neutral	■ Total
Spolu–OD	31.3%	0.0%	0.0%	68.8%	16
PS	28.2%	7.7%	7.7%	56.4%	39
SNS	22.2%	53.3%	6.7%	17.8%	45
OĽaNO	19.1%	28.6%	4.8%	47.6%	21
KDH	15.8%	0.0%	0.0%	84.2%	19
Smer–SD	15.7%	5.9%	2.0%	76.5%	51
Most–Híd	15.4%	0.0%	0.0%	84.6%	13
SaS	10.0%	42.0%	2.0%	46.0%	50
Za ľudí	4.0%	4.0%	0.0%	92.0%	25
K–ĽSNS	0.0%	44.4%	0.0%	55.6%	63
Sme rodina	0.0%	51.9%	0.0%	48.2%	27

Source: Authors

⁸ The analysis focused on three communication platforms through which political parties in Slovakia can communicate their messages: official election manifestos, statements by political leaders/leading electoral candidates in TV debates and Facebook posts by political parties and their leaders.

⁹ For more details see: P. Baboš, A. Világi, “Reconceptualisation of party Euroscepticism,” op. cit.

¹⁰ There are several indicators for measuring Eurosceptic stances based on this definition: challenging the current state of European integration; requests for the dissolution of one of the European institutions; demanding the return of competences from the European to the national level; demanding the current state of integration be returned to the previous one and finally, questioning the authority of the European institutions to issue legally binding decisions.

Slovenská národná strana (SNS) [Slovak National Party], *Sme rodina* [We Are Family], *Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (K–ĽSNS)* [Kotlebas–People’s Party Our Slovakia] and *Sloboda a solidarita (SaS)* [Freedom and Solidarity] were the parties that most frequently expressed Eurosceptic attitudes. However, there is a difference between these parties. While, when commenting on the EU, the *SNS* and *SaS* also made positive assessments of European integration or the country’s EU membership, *Sme rodina* and *K–ĽSNS* did not. If we were to evaluate their overall role in communicating European topics, they use either neutral stances (like factual statements with no evaluation) or Eurosceptic ones. The political parties also differ in their use of negative, critical statements. Political parties that perceive the EU as completely unacceptable insist on the total deconstruction (dissolution) of the EU or the country’s exit from the EU. We refer to such Eurosceptic parties as *hard* Eurosceptic. There are not many relevant political parties on the Slovak political scene that fit into this category, with the exception of *K–ĽSNS* which made statements that not only questioned the current state of European integration but also demanded a return to integration based on economic cooperation between *sovereign* states. However, there was some “moderation” in the case of *K–ĽSNS*. While in 2019 we recorded statements confirming *K–ĽSNS*’s intention to withdraw from the EU, the party later changed its rhetoric and has shifted its focus to changing the EU from within¹¹ (mainly due to the absence of popular support for the withdrawal).

Parties and politicians who demand only a partial deconstruction of the EU are *soft* Eurosceptics. Of the political parties analyzed in this paper, this line on the EU was taken mainly by *Sme rodina*, *SaS* and *SNS*. However, soft Eurosceptic attitudes were not alien to other relevant political parties either. Calls for the partial deconstruction of the EU are manifested in particular in the demand for certain competencies to be returned to the national level; the revision of the basic treaties; or the abolition of some EU institutions.

Political parties with soft Eurosceptic attitudes very often send mixed signals to voters when they emphasize the need for Slovakia to belong to the EU, but at the same time sharply criticize EU integration in its current form.

The double-track perception – the positive perception of the country’s EU membership combined with a negative perception of several aspects of European integration, including its direction – was present not only in the

¹¹ See e.g. Marian Kotleba, chairman of *K–ĽSNS* in the discussion show “V politike,” [In politics] TA3, May 12, 2019 and “O 5 minút 12,” [5 minutes to 12] RTVS, February 23, 2020.

stances of the soft Euroskeptical political parties but also within the population. Whether a societal attitude is a direct reflection of political discourse is not easy to assess. However, given the complexity of the topic, we can assume that political actors play an important role in shaping public opinion on European integration. While the specific policies and actions of the European institutions are easier for ordinary citizens to assess, (e.g. recognition of education qualifications or the non-discriminatory approach to employing foreigners may be part of ordinary citizens' real-life experience of the EU), the views of opinion-makers matter more in discussions on the direction and scope of integration.

We also looked at statements by political parties demonstrating both support for deeper EU integration and for the creation of new EU institutions. *Progresívne Slovensko (PS)* [Progressive Slovakia], *Spolu* [Together] and *Smer-SD* most often expressed support for deeper EU integration (see Table 1) in the monitored media outputs, therefore we can categorize them as Euro-endorsers in the given period¹² of Slovak politics.

The *PS-Spolu* coalition supported deeper EU integration in defense and social policy, as well as the creation of new European institutions such as the European Investigation Agency or the European Prosecutor. In the case of *Smer-SD*, convergence in the social field (European minimum wage) was the main issue.

Despite their Euroskeptical attitudes, the *SNS* and *SaS* were able to openly name areas in which deeper integration would be useful for the Slovak Republic (for the *SNS* this was common European defense; for *SaS* again defense along with security policy, the Energy Union, and the completion of the single market in the digital and service sectors). There were no statements by the *K-LSNS* and *Sme rodina* expressing specific support for further EU integration.

Table 2 gives an overview of the parliamentary political parties according to their attitude towards the EU.

¹² KDH and *Most-Híd* made statements in support of European integration, but given their overall low number of EU-related statements, their chances of influencing public opinion were limited. European integration is simply not an issue that these two parties would use for political mobilization. Similarly, when the party *Za ľudí* discusses EU related topics, 92 per cent of the statements are neutral; hence it neither supports further integration nor criticizes it.

Table 2. Assessment of parliamentary political party attitudes to European integration

■ Attitude to EU integration	■ Political parties 2019	■ Political parties 2020
Tendency for hard Euroskepticism	Kotlebovci-LSNS	
Tendency for soft Euroskepticism	Sme rodina, SaS	Kotlebovci-LSNS, Sme rodina*, SaS
Tendency to support deeper integration	Smer-SD*, Most-Híd	Smer-SD, Za ľudí
Tendency towards Eurofederalization	-	-
Unclassified	OĽaNO, SNS	OĽaNO

*government parties 2019
*government parties 2020

Source: Authors

We decided not to include two political parties – *OĽaNO* and *SNS* – in either of our categories. The reason for this is the significant discrepancy between their statements about European integration in the TV discussions and on Facebook, and their election manifestos. The analysis of the media appearances of the *SNS* shows that most of its statements were soft Euroskeptical and all outputs in television discussions thematically touching on Slovakia's EU integration showed signs of soft Euroskepticism. On the other hand, the *SNS*'s election manifesto did not contain messages indicating the party sought to deconstruct the EU political system, quite the opposite. The *SNS*'s notion of European defense is one of the most specific ones, and it talks about a European army. From an analytical point of view, not only does it support further integration, but it also tends towards EU federalization.

The *OĽaNO* movement is another case. In terms of their media output, we can speak of an inclination towards soft Euroskepticism, as most of their statements are neutral, with about a third of the statements bearing indications of soft Euroskepticism. However, the movement's election manifesto tends to favor further European integration. This means that it communicates messages that support further integration as well as soft Euroskeptical ones.

If we look at the parliamentary political parties through the lens of the coalition-opposition division, there was an increase in the number of Euroskeptical parties in power after the 2020 elections.

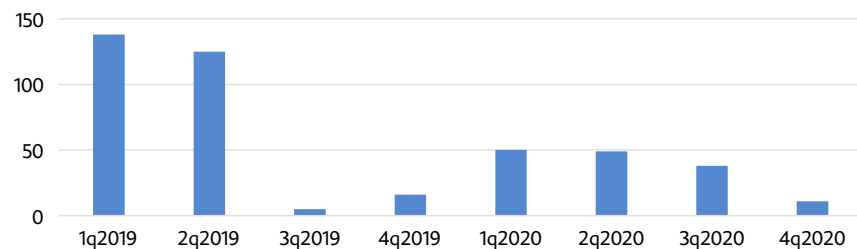
While in the previous period (2016–2020), two of the three coalition parties were more pro-European, the current governing coalition consists of two parties with a tendency towards soft Euroskepticism and the strongest

coalition party, which is not readable in terms of its position on the EU. Only *Za ľudí*, which is the smallest coalition party, can be considered pro-integration in a comprehensive assessment (including the election manifesto). Although the new government consists of more Euroskeptic parties than the previous one, it is too early to assess the political consequences of this change. The pandemic year of 2020 dramatically shifted the focus of politicians onto domestic problems. With the exception of the EU's Next Generation EU initiative, not much attention was paid to the EU. Therefore, the Euroskeptic tendencies have not been triggered yet.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the number of political party media outputs relating to European integration.

The number of media outputs over the two years shows that the intensity of communication on European issues mainly reflects the domestic political cycle and the fact that European issues have become part of the domestic political contest, especially during election campaigns. There was a record number of party media contributions in the first half of 2019 (see Graph 7), in which the presidential and European Parliament elections took place, but after this the number decreased. It did not increase again until the first quarter of 2020, when the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic took place.

Graph 7. Number of political party contributions on the EU



Source: Authors

This fluctuation shows us that important political events such as elections (albeit “only” at the national level) create an opportunity for political parties to communicate more significantly on European issues. This is probably due to the perceived importance of this subject as a potential criterion in voter decision-making. However, issues of European significance, such as

the creation of the new European Commission or negotiations on the new multiannual financial framework, have not prompted political parties to contribute more or start a public discussion; the intensity of party media outputs on EU topics has not reached the same level as it was during the run-up to the elections.

Only when the call came for a common European solution to the coronavirus crisis and the negotiations on the EU Recovery Plan were launched in the second quarter of 2020 did they receive more attention from political parties, as these topics also had a direct impact on Slovakia and its economy. The opportunity to obtain new funding from the EU was heralded by several actors as an unprecedented opportunity, which manifested in a slight increase in positive statements towards the EU in the second and third quarters of 2020.

■ Conclusion & recommendations

This paper aimed to identify how the public perceive European integration and Slovakia’s EU membership. We were also interested in how public attitudes can be shaped by political discourse on this topic.

Most of the indicators we measured in our research provide evidence of positive public perceptions of the country’s EU membership. Support for Slovakia’s EU membership is also evident in political discourse, even among soft Euroskeptic parties. However, when we turn to more general questions about European integration and its direction, positive perceptions fall among Slovak citizens. Aside from a relatively large group who do not have an opinion, negative attitudes prevail.

Our analysis shows that the position of the Euroskeptic parties has slightly strengthened following the 2020 elections, although there has also been a “moderation” (at least on the rhetorical level) in the views of hard Euroskeptics (*Kotlebovci-LSNS*).

It is not possible to assess whether there is a direct link between party duality on EU attitudes and the double tracking of public opinions on this issue. However, we assume that political discourse on this complex topic may contribute, if not directly to negative public attitudes, then at least to uncertainty and to the absence of an opinion among a growing number of people.

- When considering communication practices on EU affairs in Slovakia, there is a need to continue working with both the public and political actors. There is opportunity for positive narratives on the EU to be created. With the weakening potential of the EU funds as a positive example of the economic benefits of the EU, opportunities to approach the economic importance from different angle should be exploited. The single market, which Slovakia benefits from as an open economy and which Slovaks most associate with the importance of the EU¹³ could serve as a possible example in the long-term perspective. In the short term, the new EU Recovery Plan might serve the same purpose;
- perceptions of economic benefits at the individual level lags behind perceptions at the country level. Therefore, when communicating the economic benefits of EU membership, we recommend considering emphasizing the benefits for the average citizen;
- the perception of European politics and integration is predominantly utilitarian, based on the perception of utility (rather than identity or ideology). People are not ideologically consistent in rejecting further integration (on principle), but consider it on a case-by-case basis according to the benefits that an integration impetus would bring to Slovakia, or to them personally. In the short term, it is therefore appropriate when working on public opinion to emphasize the utility aspect;
- in the long run, however, we also consider it necessary to build a relationship with the EU based on identity and values (e.g. solidarity, sense of belonging, a common culture and traditions) to prevent a situation in which disagreement over a public policy, which could be slightly economically disadvantageous, could lead to the collapse of general public support for EU membership.

With regard to the current, rather Euroskeptic political elite, a sensible balancing of the debate on European integration is more important than ever.

¹³ See e.g. "Eurobarometer," No. 90, op. cit.



2020 – an unprecedented year, in the world economy as well

Zsolt Gál

The Covid-19 pandemic had unprecedented economic consequences on growth, trade, employment, commodity prices and government finances and triggered unprecedented policy responses among governments and central banks all over the world including the EU and Slovakia. In 2020 the world economy experienced its worst recession since the Great Depression, the fall in global merchandise trade in the second quarter of the year was the highest on record, with some sectors of the economy like international tourism or air travel recording by far the highest decline ever. The share of people living in extreme poverty was on the rise again, after more than two decades of continuous decline. All of this happened despite massive fiscal and monetary stimulus by governments and central banks, especially in high income countries, which in turn resulted in the explosion of already high public debt levels. On the other hand, these massive money injections prolonged the boom cycles on the global equity markets – looking at most major stock exchanges in early 2021 there was no sign of a crisis. However, there were many signs of what former Fed chairman Alan Greenspan once called irrational exuberance. Such as Tesla’s market value topping the value of the next nine largest automakers combined. The recovery from the worst crisis in decades is strongly dependent on the speed and effectiveness of public health measures against the pandemic, especially the ongoing vaccination programs. But even if the pandemic is defeated, the world will face a tremendous amount of (among other things) public debt and huge asset price bubbles combined with the nightmare of the potential return of inflation. Having decisively entered the era of monetary financing we are now in economic *terra incognita* – nobody knows how these unprecedented economic policies will end.

■ The worst global recession in decades and its far reaching consequences

The newest update of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) World Economic Outlook from January 2021 estimated that the global economy shrunk by 3.5 per cent in 2020, the worst decline since the Great Depression of the 1930s (see Table 1).¹ This downturn, triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, is very different from past recessions where service-oriented sectors tended to suffer smaller growth declines than manufacturing. The IMF argues that this time "the public health response needed to slow transmission, together with behavioral changes, has meant that service sectors reliant on face-to-face interactions – particularly wholesale and retail trade, hospitality, and arts and entertainment – have seen larger contractions than manufacturing."²

Some sectors, like global tourism or civic aviation, witnessed a tremendous fall as a consequence of the "Great Lockdown." The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recorded a 74 per cent fall in international tourist arrivals, in absolute terms a fall from 1.46 billion to 381 million travelers meaning an astonishing \$1.3 trillion loss for global tourism exports.³ (For comparison, the downturn during the 2003 SARS epidemic was a mere 0.4 per cent and during the 2009 global economic crisis just 4 per cent.) At some point, in April 2020 all worldwide destinations introduced some kind of travel restrictions. Since many countries reintroduced them due to the new waves and the spread of new mutations of the virus, unsurprisingly most tourism experts do not expect international tourism to return to pre-Covid levels before 2023–2024.⁴ During 2020 in the European Union as a whole, the European Commission (EC) estimated a 30 per cent decline in nights spent

¹ "World Economic Outlook," International Monetary Fund, January 2021. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/01/26/2021-world-economic-outlook-update> (accessed on January 17, 2021).

² "World Economic Outlook: A long and difficult ascent," International Monetary Fund, October 2020, p. 2. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/09/30/world-economic-outlook-october-2020> (accessed on February 12, 2021).

³ "COVID-19 and tourism. 2020: A year in review," World Tourism Organization, 2021. Available online: <https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-and-tourism-2020> (accessed on February 10, 2021).

⁴ Ibid

in tourist accommodation by domestic residents and by about 70 per cent by nonresident tourists compared to 2019.⁵ Where cross border tourists rely mainly on car travel (e.g. Croatia, Netherlands) the decline was less marked than in countries where air travel predominates (e.g. Spain, Greece, Portugal). This phenomenon is strongly connected to the worldwide collapse of air passenger transport.

Last year was a catastrophe. There is no other way to describe it. What recovery there was over the Northern hemisphere summer season stalled in autumn and the situation turned dramatically worse over the year-end holiday season, as more severe travel restrictions were imposed,⁶

complained Alexandre de Juniac, the director general and CEO of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). According to their data in 2020 global passenger traffic demand (measured in revenue passenger kilometers or RPKs) fell by 65.9 per cent compared to 2019, by far the sharpest traffic decline in aviation history. No wonder airports suffered a similar devastation. For example, Airports Council International Europe reported that Europe's airports lost 1.72 billion passengers in 2020 compared to the previous year, a decrease of 70.4 per cent, which returned Europe's airport passenger traffic back to 1995 levels.⁷ EU airports (-73 per cent and 1.32 billion passengers lost) were significantly more impacted than those in the non-EU bloc (-61.9 per cent and 400 million passengers lost); mainly due to the size and relative resilience of domestic markets primarily in Russia but also Turkey, combined with less stringent lockdowns and travel restrictions compared to the EU market.

In their 2020 October forecast the economists at the World Trade Organization (WTO) estimated global merchandise trade volume to have fallen by 9.2 per cent and underlined that the 14.3 per cent quarter-on-quarter decline

⁵ "European Economic Forecast," *European Economy Institutional Paper 144*, European Commission, Winter 2021, pp. 8–9. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/ip144_en_1.pdf (accessed on February 12, 2021).

⁶ "2020 worst year in history for air travel demand," International Air Transport Association, February 3, 2021. Available online: <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/pr/2021-02-03-02/> (accessed on February 12, 2021).

⁷ "Europe's airport 2020 passenger traffic back to 1995 levels," Airports Council International Europe (ACI EUROPE), February 12, 2021. Available online: <https://www.aci-europe.org/media-room/303-europe-s-airport-2020-passenger-traffic-back-to-1995-levels.html> (accessed on February 12, 2021).

in the second quarter was the largest on record.⁸ Compared to the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 the fall in global trade is forecasted to be similar; however, it is happening in the context of a much stronger global recession. This time the volume of world merchandise trade is only expected to decline around twice as much as world GDP at market exchange rates, rather than six times as much during the 2009 collapse. The decline is unevenly distributed among the continents; trade in Europe and North America was expected to fall over 10 per cent while in Asia only by 4.5 per cent. The same applies for various types of goods. While in the second quarter of 2020 trade in agricultural products declined only mildly, automotive products and fuel and mining products showed drastic falls, on the other hand, trade in computers and pharmaceuticals actually increased and personal protective equipment recorded explosive growth, rising by 92 per cent.

The UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) analysis estimated that 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost in 2020, relative to the fourth quarter of 2019, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs.⁹ More than half resulted from the decline in working hours (within employment) of 4.6 per cent, equivalent to 130 million full-time job losses, while another 114 million was the fall in employment (under which 81 million became inactive and 33 million unemployed). This is approximately four times greater than the number lost during the 2009 global financial crisis and equals US\$3.7 trillion in labor income loss or 4.4 per cent of the 2019 global GDP. Massive income losses disproportionately hitting those with lower incomes in low-income countries may wipe out much of the successes in reducing global poverty. The World Bank estimated that, compared with pre-pandemic projections, the Covid-19 pandemic will increase the global share of people living in extreme poverty (on less than \$1.90 a day) for the first time since 1998 by 1.14 percentage points, which represents almost 90 million people.¹⁰

⁸ "Trade shows signs of rebound from COVID-19, recovery still uncertain," World Trade Organization, October 6, 2020. Available online: https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres20_e/pr862_e.htm (accessed on February 12, 2021).

⁹ "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh edition," International Labour Organization, January 25, 2021. Available online: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf (accessed on February 12, 2021).

¹⁰ "World Economic Outlook: A long and difficult ascent," p. 36, op. cit.

The severity of recession depends on a combination of factors: especially the length of time the containment measures are in place and the extent to which health care systems are overwhelmed, the importance of hard hit sectors like tourism, the size of stimulus packages and dependence on export and external finance including remittances. The recovery from the recession expected across the globe in 2021–2022 will be highly dependent on how the pandemic plays out, especially the success of the vaccination programs. Since this is extremely hard to predict, all forecasts warn of high uncertainty and elevated risks. If – in major economies at least – vaccination campaigns gain momentum easing the pressure on health care systems, then containment measures could be relaxed gradually and there will be a good chance of a relatively strong recovery in 2021 in most countries. The European Commission's last forecast from early 2021 predicted a growth of 3.7 per cent for the EU and almost the same, 3.8 per cent, for the eurozone, after last year's falls of 6.3 and 6.8 per cent respectively.¹¹ Within the EU in 2020 the Mediterranean countries were hardest hit, experiencing a contraction of around 8–9 per cent (Portugal, Italy, Croatia, Malta) to 10–11 per cent (Greece, Spain), while Scandinavia and the Baltic states with Poland had a relatively shallow recession of around 3 per cent with Lithuania estimated to experience the smallest GDP decline (0.9 per cent) and Ireland being the only country expected to grow (+3 per cent).¹² According to the same forecast Slovakia is somewhere in between; Slovak GDP is expected to fall by 5.9 per cent in 2020 and grow by 4 per cent in 2021. The last macroeconomic forecast of the Slovak Ministry of Finance is remarkably similar, expecting a 5.8 per cent fall in 2020 and a 4.3 per cent recovery for this year.¹³ The cautious optimism in the EU is based on the ongoing vaccination programs, the adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework (the common budget for next seven years) plus Next Generation EU (NGEU), a massive recovery fund of €750 billion, at the end of last year, the rising savings of EU citizens (which may boost consumption if containment measures are relaxed) and potential improvement in trade relations.¹⁴ Donald Trump lost the American presidential elections and his successor Joe Biden is not going to open up new fronts in the

¹¹ "European Economic Forecast," p. 42, op. cit.

¹² Ibid

¹³ "Makroekonomická prognóza je lepšia, ako sa očakávalo," [Macroeconomic prognosis is better than expected] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, February 10, 2021. Available online: <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/media/tlacove-spravy/makroekonomicka-prognóza-je-lepsia-ako-ocakavalo.html> (accessed on February 14, 2021).

¹⁴ "European Economic Forecast," p. 2, op. cit.

trade wars started by Trump; on the contrary, he has promised close cooperation with traditional US allies like the UK and the EU – although that is not to say that his administration is going to lift all existing tariffs. Furthermore, at the last minute EU and UK negotiators avoided a no deal Brexit, and the agreement reached on the terms of the future cooperation, reduced the cost of the UK's departure from the EU Single Market and Customs Union.

Table 1. GDP growth, budget balance and public debt estimates and forecasts for 2019–2021

	■ Real GDP change (%)			■ Budget balance (% of GDP)			■ Public debt (% of GDP)		
	Est.	Projections		Est.	Projections		Est.	Projections	
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
World	2.8	-3.5	5.5	-3.8	-11.8	-8.5	83.5	97.6	99.5
Advanced Economies	1.6	-4.9	4.3	-3.3	-13.3	-8.8	104.8	122.7	124.9
United States	2.2	-3.4	5.1	-6.4	-17.5	-11.8	108.2	128.7	132.5
eurozone	1.3	-7.2	4.2	-0.6	-8.4	-5.9	84.0	98.1	99.0
Germany	0.6	-5.4	3.5	1.5	-5.1	-3.4	59.6	70.0	69.9
France	1.5	-9.0	5.5	-3.0	-10.6	-7.7	98.1	115.3	117.6
Italy	0.3	-9.2	3.0	-1.6	-10.9	-7.5	134.6	157.5	159.7
Spain	2.0	-11.1	5.9	-2.9	-11.7	-8.2	95.5	118.2	118.9
Japan	0.3	-5.1	3.1	-3.4	-13.8	-8.6	234.6	258.7	258.7
United Kingdom	1.4	-10.0	4.5	-2.3	-14.5	-10.6	85.2	103.3	110.8
Canada	1.9	-5.5	3.6	0.5	-20.0	-7.8	86.8	115.7	116.4
Emerging Market and Developing Economies*	3.6	-2.4	6.3	-4.8	-10.3	-8.6	54.3	63.3	65.3
China	6.0	2.3	8.1	-6.3	-11.8	-11.0	56.5	65.2	69.4
India	4.2	-8.0	11.5	-7.4	-11.5	-9.7	73.0	85.5	83.1
Russia	1.3	-3.6	3.0	1.9	-4.6	-2.3	13.8	21.0	20.7
Brazil	1.4	-4.5	3.6	-5.9	-14.5	-5.9	87.7	95.6	92.1
Mexico	-0.1	-8.5	4.3	-2.3	-5.2	-3.4	53.3	63.0	63.0
Saudi Arabia	0.3	-3.9	2.6	-4.5	-11.7	-4.2	22.8	32.5	32.9
Nigeria	2.2	-3.2	1.5	-4.8	-5.9	-4.7	29.1	34.4	34.3
South Africa	0.2	-7.5	2.8	-6.3	-14.2	-12.2	62.2	77.7	84.9

Note: Est. – estimate.

*Emerging Market and Middle-Income Economies for data on budget deficits and public debts.

Source: For GDP growth see “World Economic Outlook,” January 2021, op. cit.; for budget balance and public debt see “Fiscal Monitor update, January 2021,” International Monetary Fund, 2021. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/FM/Issues/2021/01/20/fiscal-monitor-update-january-2021> (accessed on February 11, 2021).

The picture for developing countries is diverse. Small emerging economies heavily reliant on tourism were among the hardest hit during the pandemic, suffering double digit declines in GDP (e.g. Fiji, Maldives, many small Caribbean islands like Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados or Mauritius).¹⁵ Some major countries of origin of large migrant worker communities such as Bangladesh, Egypt, Guatemala, Pakistan, and the Philippines were hit by sharply contracting remittances during the lockdowns.¹⁶ In some states that have been facing large internal political and economic problems for years like Libya, Venezuela or Lebanon the Covid-19 crisis further exaggerated the economic decline which was estimated to exceed an astonishing 20 percent in 2020. Overall, East Asian countries like Taiwan, South Korea and especially China were the best performers – this is obviously connected to their successful containment measures. Although the epicenter of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, China quickly reemerged from the crisis and became the only major economy to avoid a recession in 2020 (Table 1).

Naturally, one has to be cautious when interpreting data reported by the Chinese authorities. (International organizations like IMF heavily rely on data sources provided by them.) Official data, especially on GDP growth, has been viewed with skepticism for a long time. As the *Economist* noted, “few serious economists trust its exact growth figures” and especially since 2012 these have been too smoothly in line with government targets hence it “all seems a little too perfect.”¹⁷ The discussion has focused more on how misleading the data are and whether they systematically overestimate economic growth or are a combination of over- and underestimation. For the first half of 2020 the Chinese data seem too rosy taking into account the fact that China's pandemic lockdown in the first quarter was among the world's most restrictive but experts do not question the robust recovery in the rest of the year.

¹⁵ “World Economic Outlook: A long and difficult ascent,” pp. 145–7, op. cit.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁷ “The real deal. Can China's reported growth be trusted?” *The Economist*, October 17, 2020. Available online: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2020/10/15/can-chinas-reported-growth-be-trusted> (accessed on February 11, 2021).

■ The era of monetary financing has definitely started

The Covid-19 pandemic not only resulted in the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression but also provoked the largest fiscal and monetary response on record by governments and central banks. After the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 public debt reached its highest peace-time level, most recently projected to reach all-time highs topping the debt levels reached after the World War II.¹⁸ Worldwide public debt relative to global GDP is set to reach almost 100 per cent in 2021 according to the IMF's Fiscal Monitor Update from January 2021 (Table 1). Obviously, total debt levels, the combination of public and private debt (the latter being the combination of household, nonfinancial corporations and financial sector debt) are much higher. According to the Institute of International Finance's global debt monitor the Covid pandemic has added an astronomic \$24 trillion to the global debt mountain over the last year, leaving it at a record \$281 trillion and the worldwide debt-to-GDP ratio at over 355 per cent – an increase of 35 percentage points.¹⁹ Excess government expenditures accounted for half of the rise, while global firms, banks and households added \$5.4 trillion, \$3.9 trillion and \$2.6 trillion respectively. Naturally, exploding debt to GDP ratios are not only the consequence of rising debt levels but falling GDP as well.

The 2020 global fiscal support was estimated at nearly \$14 trillion by the IMF, comprising \$7.8 trillion in additional spending or forgone revenue (Map 1) and \$6 trillion in equity injections, loans and guarantees.²⁰ Of this, 411.8 trillion was in developed countries: who were spending much more compared to emerging markets not just in absolute terms but also relative to their economies (Map 1). Some low-income countries with limited access to global financial markets and limited ability to borrow simply could not afford to substantially increase their debt levels and the same applies to a number of middle-income countries with already high debt levels or large external

¹⁸ "Fiscal Monitor update, January 2021," International Monetary Fund, 2021, pp. 1–2. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/FM/Issues/2021/01/20/fiscal-monitor-update-january-2021> (accessed on February 11, 2021).

¹⁹ M. Jones, "COVID response drives \$24 trillion surge in global debt: IIF," *Reuters*, February 17, 2021. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-debt-iif-idUSKBN2AH285> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

²⁰ "Fiscal Monitor update, January 2021," op. cit.

imbalances. However, a few states, both developed and emerging ones with relatively successful containment measures against the coronavirus, managed to reduce the adverse impacts on their economies and large-scale fiscal expansion was simply not needed. This is especially true of countries that introduced early, localized and stringent mobility restrictions, together with large-scale testing, tracing and public information campaigns, like South Korea, Taiwan or Vietnam.²¹ Most high-income countries applied a wide range of policies, most of them temporary, to mitigate the impacts of the crisis.²²

Wage subsidies to sustain employment were used in most OECD countries often combined with the extension of unemployment benefits. Cash transfers in the form of stimulus checks or the expansion of existing benefit payments were also popular (e.g. US, UK, India, Turkey) together with food assistance. Various tax measures included deadline extensions and payment deferrals, the acceleration of VAT refunds and lower VAT rates (Germany) or reduced social security contributions (Argentina, China, France, Korea). Further measures included loans and guarantees to provide liquidity to cash-strapped businesses, equity injections to prevent bankruptcies of hard-hit strategic firms such as national airlines, debt and payment moratoriums and delaying bankruptcies and household evictions through the temporary suspension of insolvency rules, for example. Banks and indebted households and businesses were helped through regulatory initiatives to ease classification rules and provisioning requirements for banks' nonperforming loans, together with the release of buffers to help absorb losses.

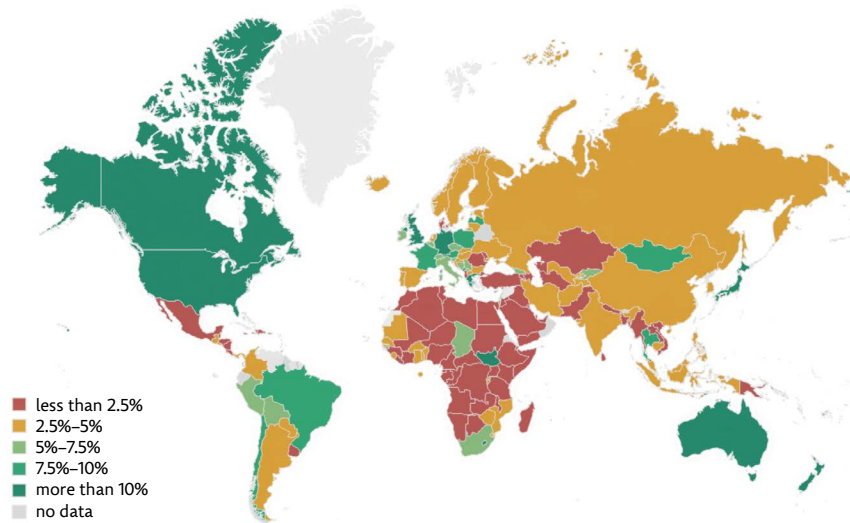
The staggering debt mountains represent a heavy burden on most developed and developing countries, and the sustainability of public finances is likely to remain the central issue for the world economy for some time. The international empirical literature provides robust evidence that high levels of debt are associated with lower growth and the correlation between the two becomes stronger when debt levels cross the threshold of around 85–95 per cent of GDP in the case of advanced economies.²³ In developing countries even lower debt levels usually reduce growth rates.

²¹ "Fiscal Monitor: policies for the recovery, October 2020," International Monetary Fund, 2020, p. 11. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/FM/Issues/2020/09/30/october-2020-fiscal-monitor> (accessed on February 11, 2021).

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 12–20.

²³ P. Baboš, Z. Gál, "Avoiding the high debt – low growth trap lessons for the new member states," *Business systems&Economics* Vol. IV, No. 2, 2014, pp. 154–67.

Map 1. Additional spending and forgone revenue in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (as a percentage of 2020 GDP)



Source: “Fiscal monitor database of country fiscal measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic,” IMF, 2020. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Fiscal-Policies-Database-in-Response-to-Covid-19> (accessed on February 14, 2021).

As emerging market governments have piled up debt like never before, many will face serious difficulties servicing it. In 2020 the world witnessed a large number of sovereign defaults, notably in Argentina, Belize, Ecuador, Lebanon, Suriname and Zambia, and some other countries may follow them, considering their very high debt service to revenue ratios.²⁴ Interest payments as a percentage of government revenues were estimated to be at highest level in 2021, a staggering 62 per cent in Sri Lanka, followed by Zambia (44 per cent), Ghana (44), Egypt (42), Costa Rica (40), Pakistan (39), India (32) and Angola (31). As of January 29, 2021, 85 countries, including most of Africa, were already receiving some kind of assistance and debt service relief from the IMF

²⁴ T. Pham, “EM Sovereigns: Debt sustainability remains a concern but will only become acute for some,” *Think ING*, January 7, 2021. Available online: <https://think.ing.com/articles/em-sovereigns-debt-sustainability-remains-a-concern-but-will-only-become-acute-for-some/> (accessed on February 10, 2021).

to a combined value of \$105.5 billion.²⁵ Some others are likely to join them. Concerns over government finances are particularly well founded this time since emerging market and developing economies had created record high debt levels even before the pandemic: their total debt reached 176 per cent of GDP, led by private debt, which rose to 123 per cent of GDP.²⁶ During the pandemic we witnessed a further sharp rise in both private and public debts. Similar previous waves of debt have ended with widespread financial crises, such as the Latin American debt crisis in the 1980, resulting in a wave of sovereign defaults, and the East Asia financial crisis in the late 1990 s.

The situation is similar in the developed countries: indebtedness has been rising since the 1970 s with only small temporary breaks but without a single major decline and the pandemic has just accelerated this process. However, there is a significant difference: while many developing countries are able to service their debt payments, the developed ones are enjoying historically low interest rates and declining debt servicing payments.²⁷ At a time of record-breaking debt build up, this paradox has been possible only due to massive central bank intervention, namely the various asset purchase programs. Extraordinary times need extraordinary steps. When major central banks reached the limits of conventional monetary policy tools, especially when basic interest rates fell to around zero, or even lower, they turned to unconventional tools. The mass purchase of long-term assets, mostly government bonds, often called “quantitative easing” (QE) is a relatively recent phenomenon with the original aim of stimulating demand, boosting output and raising inflation to hit targets by lowering long-term interest rates. The first major asset purchase program was initiated by the Bank of Japan in 2001, while the US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England started large scale QE during the 2007–2009 global financial crisis, with the European Central Bank (ECB) joining the club in 2015, and finally, last year 18 emerging market central banks announced or implemented asset purchase programs

²⁵ “COVID-19 financial assistance and debt service relief,” International Monetary Fund, 2021. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/COVID-Lending-Tracker> (accessed on February 10, 2021).

²⁶ “Global Economic Prospects,” International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2021, p. 12. Available online: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects> (accessed on February 10, 2021).

²⁷ D. Burns, M. John, “COVID-19 shook, rattled and rolled the global economy in 2020,” *Reuters*, December 31, 2020. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-economy-year-end-graphic-idUSKBN2950GH> (accessed on February 10, 2021).

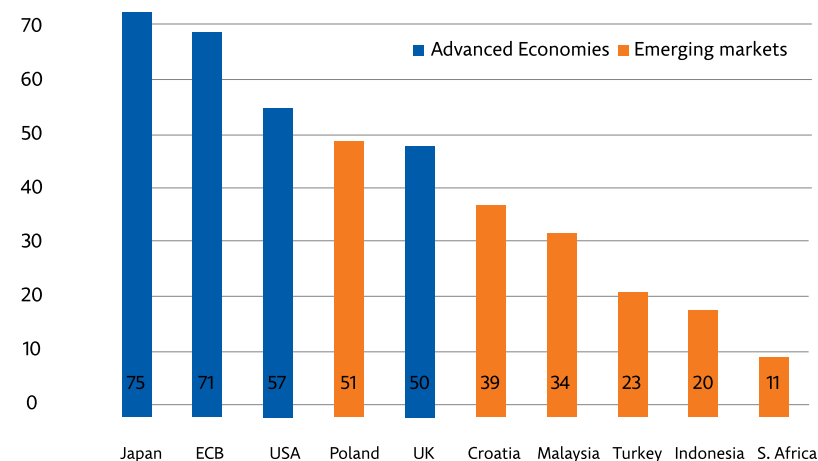
for the first time.²⁸ These included the national banks of Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Ghana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Thailand and Turkey.

During the most recent crisis, asset purchase programs reached new levels, and in advanced economies absorbed most of the newly issued government bonds (Figure 1). Not taking redemptions (repurchases by the issuer leading to the deletion of debt instruments) into account and just looking at net debt issuance (gross issues minus redemptions) the role of central bank purchases is even bigger. In the eurozone, ECB purchase programs basically soaked up all net public debt issuance during the pandemic year of 2020 and the same is expected to happen in 2021.²⁹ This raises serious questions about the independence of national banks. One of the cornerstones of which is the prohibition of monetary financing, i.e., central banks are strictly prohibited from directly lending to governments or buying their bonds. However, while technically not violating this rule, they acquire massive amounts of public debt on the secondary markets. Instead of lending directly, they do it indirectly, and so do not violate the letter of the law but certainly the spirit of it. The risk is that by holding ever increasing amounts of public debt they come under rising pressure from governments to create a bottomless “market” for government bonds and ensure low interest rates and thus low servicing costs. This might come into conflict with their basic role: ensuring price stability.

The concerns regarding monetary financing are especially strong in the case of the ECB which has been testing its legal limits for years or, according to many critics, going beyond them. And that is just part of the taboo breaking steps various EU institutions engaged in during the 2020 economic crisis. The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) was designed and created in the 1980 s and 1990 s with no provision for debt mutualization between member states or the issuing of EU bonds and hence without the possibility of a debt financed common EU budget with mechanisms to prevent, control and sanction excessive budget deficits of members states and it has a central bank

with only one primary goal, price stability, and monetary financing is strictly forbidden. After 2020 it ended up with a de facto mutual responsibility for national debts, with Eurobonds, and suspended fiscal rules which turned out to be ineffective anyway, as not a single fine was ever imposed and the ECB indirectly bought all newly issued government debt and thus de facto engaged in monetary financing.

Figure 1. Central bank purchases of government debt during the pandemic (percentage of central government marketable securities or debt issued between February and September 2020)



Source: “Fiscal Monitor: policies for the recovery,” International Monetary Fund, 2020, p. 2.

The legal framework is still intact as Article 123 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) prohibits “any type of credit facility” from the ECB or national central banks towards EU or national public bodies as well as “the purchase directly from them by the European Central Bank or national central banks of debt instruments” (prohibition of monetary financing); Article 125 states that the Union and member states “shall not be liable for or assume the commitments of central governments, regional, local or other public authorities, other bodies governed by public law, or public undertakings of any member state” (no mutual liability for national debts); and Article 126 requires the member states to “avoid excessive government deficits” and the European Commission to “examine compliance with budgetary

²⁸ “Global Economic Prospects, January 2021,” op. cit., p. 174.

²⁹ C. Cremonesi, F. M. Di Bella, “2021: Another year of heavy issuance but ECB to remain supportive,” UniCredit Strategy Research, Rates Perspectives, No. 85, December 4, 2020. Available online: https://www.research.unicredit.eu/DocsKey/xfifstrategy_docs_2020_178703.ashx?EXT=pdf&KEY=KZGTuQcN4lsvclJnUgseVFcl2-vTFR2nFvdgppPgOyS7_7gSenXs8vw==&T=1 (accessed on February 17, 2021).

discipline.”³⁰ However, in practice the opposite route has been taken and the crisis caused by the 2020 pandemic seems to be a major turning point.

Let’s start with the fiscal rules. In 1995 when the central element of the fiscal framework, the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) was created, German finance minister (of the Kohl government) Theo Waigel proposed automatic sanctions for governments running excessive deficits, but in the final agreement a political vote was required in the European Council, thereby not only excluding automaticity but also implying that technocratic decisions by the Commission could be overruled. The SGP turned out to be vastly ineffective, and mass violation of the rules followed, with half of all member states ending up under the Commission’s so-called excessive deficit procedures at some point, yet no country has ever been issued the fines that notionally apply. “Over the years the rules have sprouted a head-spinning array of exceptions, interpretative possibilities and get-out clauses. No finance minister in Europe fully understands them, says a Brussels insider.”³¹ Facing ballooning deficits because of the pandemic in March 2020 the Commission decided to activate the general escape clause of the SGP suspending the constraints of EU fiscal framework until the end of 2021. More precisely, Articles 5(1) and 9(1) of Regulation (EC) 1466/97 were used:

in periods of severe economic downturn for the eurozone or the Union as a whole, member states may be allowed temporarily to depart from the adjustment path towards the medium-term budgetary objective, provided that this does not endanger fiscal sustainability in the medium term.³²

Whether deficits of 7–10 per cent that push public debt levels up to well over 100 per cent of GDP will not endanger medium-term fiscal sustainability in Italy, Spain or France for example, is a question of... well, interpretation. It is hard to predict whether the fiscal rules will return, and if so in what form but it is highly unlikely that they will place simple, transparent and rigorously implemented spending constraints on national governments.

³⁰ “Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,” *Official Journal of the European Union* C 202/1, Document 12016E/TXT, March 1, 2020. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12016E/TXT> (accessed on February 10, 2021).

³¹ “The fiscal question. What next for the EU’s fiscal rules?” *The Economist*, October 29, 2020. Available online: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2020/10/31/what-next-for-the-eus-fiscal-rules> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

³² A. Delivorias, *Introduction to the fiscal framework of the EU*, Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, 2021, p. 35.

Alongside the diminishing fiscal barriers, the “no bailout” rule has gradually been extinguished. In June 2010, during the eurozone’s sovereign debt crisis, eurozone member states established the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), a temporary limited liability company under Luxembourg law, raising funds of up to €440 billion and providing financial assistance to Ireland, Portugal and Greece. In 2012, to replace the EFSF with a permanent body, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) was established as an intergovernmental financial institution, with a maximum lending capacity of €500 billion to provide financial assistance to eurozone countries facing market stress, which later helped Spain, Cyprus and Greece.³³ Both institutions were based on the principle of mutual liability for debt but considering that they function outside the EU legal framework, EU law was not explicitly violated, just the spirit of it.

But soon the coronavirus crisis resulted in the violation of another taboo. Since the capacity of the ESM was considered insufficient to cope with the huge economic consequences of the pandemic, the European Council adopted an amended proposal of the Commission’s NGEU recovery fund on July 21, 2020 thereby agreeing to set up a one-off instrument which will provide €750 billion (grants of €390 billion and loans of €360 billion) to the 27 EU countries to finance targeted investments and economic reforms funded by common debt issuance.³⁴ In other words, it introduces debt-financed cross-country transfers in the EU for the first time, or debt mutualization with Eurobonds. The Commission is to borrow funding on the capital markets on behalf of the EU, issuing bonds with a maturity of 3 to 30 years and repaying them over a long-time horizon up until 2058.³⁵ To raise the repayment revenues and complement member states’ contributions to the EU budget new own resources will be introduced such as a contribution based on non-recycled plastic packaging waste and others such as the carbon border adjustment mechanism, the digital levy and the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)-based own resource are also being considered. The new recovery fund is likely

³³ *Safeguarding the euro in times of crisis: the inside story of the ESM*. European Stability Mechanism, 2019. Available online: <https://www.esm.europa.eu/publications/safeguarding-euro> (accessed on February 17, 2021)

³⁴ A. Camous, G. Claeys, “The evolution of European economic institutions during the COVID-19 crisis,” *European Policy Analysis* Vol. VI, No. 2, November 19, 2020, pp. 328–41.

³⁵ “The 2021–2027 EU budget – what’s new?” European Commission, 2021. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new_en (accessed on February 17, 2021).

to violate Article 310 TFEU, the so-called “principle of budgetary balance,” which stipulates that all Union items of revenue and expenditure “shall be shown in the budget” and that the “revenue and expenditure shown in the budget shall be in balance.”³⁶ For a long time this was universally seen as prohibiting the EU from borrowing to finance its expenditure. Even the Council website stated that this principle “prevents the European Union from issuing debt to finance itself;” and the Commission website agreed: “EU borrowing is only permitted to finance loans to countries. The EU cannot borrow to finance its budget.”³⁷ Again, it seems that the spirit of the law is being broken but that is not to say that for example the EU Court of Justice would find that EU law had been violated.

Apart from the legal issues there are serious economic concerns regarding the use of this huge new instrument. Despite being related to the pandemic the bulk of the NGEU money is expected to arrive in 2022/2023, which might be too late. Especially in countries – including Slovakia – that are generally slow at absorbing EU funds and where corruption is a problem. One can also question the temporary nature of the program, the possible adverse effects of the new taxes introduced to finance NGEU, the further centralization within the EU with elements of central planning and the possibility of greater bureaucracy or that it might be prove to be another measure that undermines the incentive for the necessary structural reforms in member states.³⁸ Of all the institutions the ECB probably departed most from its original limits by creating the ever expanding QE programs. The breakthrough occurred during the hot summer of 2012 amidst the darkest moments of the Eurozone debt crisis when Mario Draghi, ECB president gave a speech at the Global Investment Conference in London, stating: “Within our mandate, the ECB is ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the euro. And believe me, it will be enough.”³⁹ The announcement of the Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT)

program followed, which gave the ECB the possibility to buy sovereign debt from a particular country with no limits and although OMT has been never activated it was enough to calm the markets and “save the euro” at that moment.⁴⁰ However, the OMT is conditional on participation in an ESM program from the beginning, and thus requires the unanimous political approval of eurozone finance ministers. The next step was the introduction of a large scale QE program in 2015 called the Public Sector Purchase Program (PSPP). The communicated objective has been to bring inflation in line with the ECB target, namely “below but close to 2 per cent,” but indirectly, it also contributes to the maintenance of favorable funding conditions, i.e. low interest rates for member states, especially when we consider that the ECB’s balance sheet more than doubled in size between 2015 and 2019, in large part as a result of this program.⁴¹ To avoid breaching the prohibition of monetary financing, the ECB decided to constrain itself by issuing some key principles: 1. An issuer limit prescribes that the ECB should not buy more than a third of any country’s eligible assets. 2. The distribution of asset purchases across countries follows the ECB’s capital keys, to avoid monetary policy becoming selective. As a reaction to the Covid-19 crisis, on March 18, 2020, following a significant increase in some countries’ funding costs, the ECB led by its new president Christine Lagarde announced a new asset purchase program, the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program (PEPP). Contrary to previous ones, PEPP is not subject to the 33 per cent issuer limit, and asset purchases are guided by, but are not strictly bound by, the capital key distribution in the short term.⁴² While PEPP certainly fulfilled its declared objective of limiting rate spreads between government bonds, it was achieved by purchasing on average 72 per cent of gross public debt issuance by Eurozone members in 2020, i.e. € 830 billion out of the € 1,155 billion of new public debt, the share amounting to 76 per cent for Spanish bonds, 73 per cent for French bonds, 70 per cent for Italian bonds and 66 per cent for German bonds (see Figure 3 for international comparison).⁴³ Unsurprisingly, it also led to further rapid expansion of the ECB balance sheet.

³⁶ P. Leino, “Next Generation EU. Breaking a taboo or breaking the law?” Centre for European Policy Studies, June 24, 2020. Available online: <https://www.ceps.eu/next-generation-eu/> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ M. Vlachynský, “Next Generation EU: Why we should be concerned about the Recovery Plan,” INESS – Institute of Economic and Social Studies, February 12, 2021. Available online: <https://iness.sk/sk/next-generation-eu-why-we-should-be-concerned-about-recovery-plan> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

³⁹ I. Glinavos, “Whatever it takes vs. whatever is legal: The ECB’s problematic relationship with the rule of law,” *Working Paper SSRN*, 2016. Available online: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2798692 (accessed on February 17, 2021).

⁴⁰ A. Camous, G. Claeys, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid, p. 8.

⁴³ C. Blot and P. Hubert, “Public debt: Central banks to the rescue?” *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 February 16, 2021).

In the current situation it is hard to talk about the “markets” accepting low or even negative interest rates on eurozone government bonds, when the markets are basically the ECB and the Eurosystem, which soaks up newly issued government bonds entirely. This is de facto monetary financing, although technically and legally probably not in violation of the rules. (Previously in 2015 and 2018 the Court of Justice of the EU, consulted by the German Constitutional Court on the legality of OMT and PSPP, considered that asset purchases were a legitimate monetary instrument as long as “sufficient safeguards” exist.⁴⁴) This could have widespread consequences, many of them unknown as we enter an economic terra incognita – monetary financing by central banks issuing reserve currencies in advanced economies in times of record-high total debt levels. The next logical step might be to send newly printed ‘helicopter money’ directly to citizens or to cancel the public debt central banks hold. This is no joke: some experts have advocated helicopter money as a way of stimulating consumption, growth and inflation for years; and a serious opinion piece in early 2021 signed by a group of 100 politicians, economists and campaigners including Thomas Piketty, László Andor and Paul Magette requested the ECB cancel a large portion of the public debt it holds (about 25 per cent of eurozone sovereign bonds) allowing us “to ‘take back control’ of our destiny.”⁴⁵

To sum up, the steps taken by EU institutions during the pandemic followed the saying of Winston Churchill: “never waste a good crisis” and in the future another saying from Milton Friedman might materialize: “nothing is so permanent as a temporary government program.” The EU and its member states entered the Covid-19 crisis with no substantial reserves or buffers. The ECB had “no gunpowder” with basic interest rates at zero and a mountain of debt. Many member states were highly indebted and/or continued deficit financing, some even in the good years of economic growth and low unemployment; the status of structural reforms was disappointing. In other words, ECB and many members were running pro-cyclical policies (Table 2).

⁴⁴ A. Camous and G. Claeys, op. cit., p. 8.

⁴⁵ “Cancel the public debt held by the ECB and ‘take back control’ of our destiny,” *Euractiv*, February 8, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/opinion/cancel-the-public-debt-held-by-the-ecb-and-take-back-control-of-our-destiny/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

Table 2. Budget balances in selected EU member states and other advanced countries (as per cent of GDP)

	■ 2009	■ 2010	■ 2011	■ 2012	■ 2015	■ 2016	■ 2017	■ 2018	■ 2019	■ 2020*	■ 2021*
Belgium	-5.4	-4.1	-4.3	-4.3	-2.4	-2.4	-0.7	-0.8	-1.9	-11.2	-7.1
Czechia	-5.4	-4.2	-2.7	-3.9	-0.6	0.7	1.5	0.9	0.3	-6.2	-4.7
Denmark	-2.8	-2.7	-2.1	-3.5	-1.2	0.1	1.8	0.7	3.8	-4.2	-2.5
Germany	-3.2	-4.4	-0.9	0.0	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.8	1.5	-6.0	-4.0
Ireland	-13.9	-32.1	-12.8	-8.1	-2.0	-0.7	-0.3	0.1	0.5	-6.8	-5.8
Greece	-15.1	-11.3	-10.5	-9.0	-5.7	0.5	0.7	1.0	1.5	-6.9	-6.3
Spain	-11.3	-9.5	-9.7	-10.7	-5.2	-4.3	-3.0	-2.5	-2.9	-12.2	-9.6
France	-7.2	-6.9	-5.2	-5.0	-3.6	-3.6	-3.0	-2.3	-3.0	-10.5	-8.3
Italy	-5.1	-4.2	-3.6	-2.9	-2.6	-2.4	-2.4	-2.2	-1.6	-10.8	-7.8
Hungary	-4.8	-4.4	-5.2	-2.3	-2.0	-1.8	-2.4	-2.1	-2.1	-8.4	-5.4
Netherlands	-5.1	-5.2	-4.4	-3.9	-2.0	0.0	1.3	1.4	1.7	-7.2	-5.7
Austria	-5.3	-4.4	-2.6	-2.2	-1.0	-1.5	-0.8	0.2	0.7	-9.6	-6.4
Poland	-7.3	-7.4	-5.0	-3.8	-2.6	-2.4	-1.5	-0.2	-0.7	-8.8	-4.2
Portugal	-9.9	-11.4	-7.7	-6.2	-4.4	-1.9	-3.0	-0.3	0.1	-7.3	-4.5
Romania	-9.1	-6.9	-5.4	-3.7	-0.6	-2.6	-2.6	-2.9	-4.4	-10.3	-11.3
Slovakia	-8.1	-7.5	-4.3	-4.4	-2.7	-2.6	-0.9	-1.0	-1.4	-9.6	-7.9
Sweden	-0.7	0.0	-0.2	-1.0	0.0	1.0	1.4	0.8	0.5	-3.9	-2.5
UK	-10.0	-9.2	-7.5	-8.1	-4.5	-3.3	-2.4	-2.2	-2.3	-13.4	-9.0
US	-13.2	-12.5	-9.7	-8.0	-3.6	-4.4	-4.6	-5.8	-6.3	-15.3	-6.9
Japan	-10.3	-8.9	-9.4	-8.6	-3.8	-3.7	-3.1	-2.5	-3.3	-13.9	-5.6

Note: *Projections.

Source: European Commission for all projections for 2020 and 2021; Eurostat for EU members between 2009–2019 and IMF for US and Japan 2009–2019. “European Economic Forecast, Autumn 2020,” European Commission, 2020, p. 1; “General government deficit/surplus as per cent of GDP,” Eurostat. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00127/default/table?lang=en> (accessed on February 16, 2021) and “Fiscal Monitor: policies for the recovery,” International Monetary Fund, October 2020, op. cit., p. 69.

While some countries, like Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden or Czechia, balanced their budgets and later had surpluses and managed to reduce indebtedness quickly, creating substantial fiscal room to maneuver in bad times, others continued to post deficits until the outbreak of the crisis. This was particularly true of most Southern and East European countries including Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Despite solid economic

growth, record low unemployment and rising public revenues, Slovakia's target of a balanced budget had been postponed several times and never actually achieved. Political interests have always overridden the need for sober fiscal policies. According to the Slovak public sector budget for the 3-year period of 2021–2023 the general budget deficit for 2020 is estimated at a record breaking 9.7 per cent of GDP and is forecasted to decline only slowly, still reaching almost 6 per cent in 2023. This will balloon public debt from the pre-crisis 48.5 per cent of GDP to almost 70 per cent by 2023, which would, needless to say, be an all-time record.⁴⁶ It is clear that the government has no political will to proceed with faster fiscal consolidation, nor a credible plan for bringing down the budget deficit, and just believes in the return of economic growth, especially export demand in the small, export-driven Slovak economy and of course it is waiting for the money from the EU's recovery fund to arrive, hoping that these developments will somehow increase growth and finances and push down deficit and debt to GDP ratios.

After the Covid-19 crisis led to the further explosion of debt and the ECB's balance sheet it is unclear how the EU institutions and most member states will return to sustainable fiscal policies and economic normality in general. With most barriers dismantled, there are strong incentives for governments to continue overspending and political elites are likely to push (the ECB and the Commission) for the temporary measures to be made permanent. The fiscal situation is very similar, i.e. bad and unsustainable in other major developed countries like the UK, US or Japan as well (Table 1 and 2). These countries now face two nightmare scenarios. The first is a debt-deflation cycle: with sluggish growth, low inflation or deflation, ever rising indebtedness, negative basic interest rates and continuous attempts to stimulate the economy and push up inflation by governments and central banks, which creates even higher public debts and further increases the huge balance sheets of national banks. The second is the return of inflation. Assuming successful vaccination programs and the lifting of containment measures a relatively strong economic recovery may follow in many countries. As personal savings rates soared during the pandemic all over the developed world,⁴⁷ consumption might shoot up quickly and considering the vast amounts of money injected to the world economy by very loose fiscal and monetary policies and rising

⁴⁶ "Rozpočet verejnej správy na roky 2021 až 2023," [Public sector budget for 2021–2023] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. Available online: <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/verejne-financie/rozpocet-verejnej-spravy/> (accessed on February 18, 2021).

⁴⁷ D. Burns, M. John, op. cit.

commodity prices this may result in high inflation not seen for a long time. Yes, skeptics might say that they have been listening to prophecies on the dangers of inflation returning for over a decade now, but they have never materialized. But this is not to say that the era of low inflation is here to stay indefinitely. And if inflation returns central banks may face a dilemma: fight inflation and increase interest rates or try to ensure low interest rates for government bonds and let inflation rise. Both steps have the potential to cause major disruptions in the financial systems and economies. Finding the golden middle way out of the crisis and returning to fiscal sustainability and economic normality looks extremely difficult.

■ Crisis, what crisis? An equity market perspective

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the Covid-19 crisis was the behavior of the global stock and property markets. Major economic crises are usually connected to falling stock or property prices. Some of the largest crises started with a stock market or house price crash. In March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, few would have predicted that by the end of the year or in early 2021 most stock indexes would hit record highs and many property markets would show signs of overheating, with house prices continuing to rise across the globe. The incredible growth was mainly caused by the huge monetary and fiscal injections described above. These contributed to the further rise in income and wealth inequalities as well. Equity market behavior was highly volatile and extremely uneven across the different asset classes and companies. The rollercoaster started in late February 2020 with the "Coronavirus crash" when stock markets saw their biggest fall since 2008, but by the end of the year most of them had not only gained back their losses but with considerable growth had reached all-time highs. The winner of the major global stock exchanges was the Kospi index (South Korea, +32 per cent), followed by Nikkei (Japan, +18), Shanghai Composite (China, +13) Dow Jones (USA, +7) and Dax (Germany, +4).⁴⁸ Some stock exchanges like Hong

⁴⁸ K. Buchholz, "How did stock markets perform in 2020?" *Statista*, January 4, 2021. Available online: <https://www.statista.com/chart/23839/annual-gains-of-selected-major-stock-indices-2/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

Kong, Paris and London ended the year in minuses but the optimistic mood continued in early 2021, so they too might go up, reaching previous highs.

In economic sectors the biggest winners were pharmaceutical and technological companies, while the largest losers were the travel industry and the energy sector, most notably oil companies (Figure 2). For example, Zoom – the technological communication company – and Moderna – the vaccine manufacturer – increased their market value by 400 and 433 percent respectively, while Carnival Corporation – the world’s biggest cruise operator – and Air Canada suffered a loss of over 50 per cent, and oil companies were struggling with the annual average 21.5 per cent fall in crude oil price when measured using its West Texas Intermediate (WTI) blend.⁴⁹ Again, the average change hides another huge rollercoaster, as oil prices declined by 60 per cent between February and April 2020 when the pandemic led to a collapse in global oil demand and concerns about storage capacity while OPEC+ countries (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, plus Russia and other non-OPEC oil exporters) could not agree on supply cuts to adjust production.⁵⁰

For the first time in history, the front-month WTI futures price even briefly went into negative territory falling to – \$37 in April; shut-ins, sharply reduced drilling activity and a surge in US shale producer bankruptcy filings followed, resulting in an unprecedented 2 million barrel a day decrease in US crude oil production in May 2020. On the other hand, some other commodities were much more resilient, like gold, which finished the year up 24.6 per cent, but this is still nothing compared to the cryptocurrency Bitcoin which added 303 per cent during the year but after a big fall, so the increase from its lows was more than 650 per cent.⁵¹ Even the rollercoaster comparison seems to be inadequate here. The market capitalization of all cryptocurrencies rose to over \$1 trillion in early January 2021, mostly thanks to the surge of Bitcoin which had a 69 per cent share among cryptocurrencies.⁵² But we are not finished yet, as several relatively large joint stock companies have seen an increase in market value of well over 300 per cent.

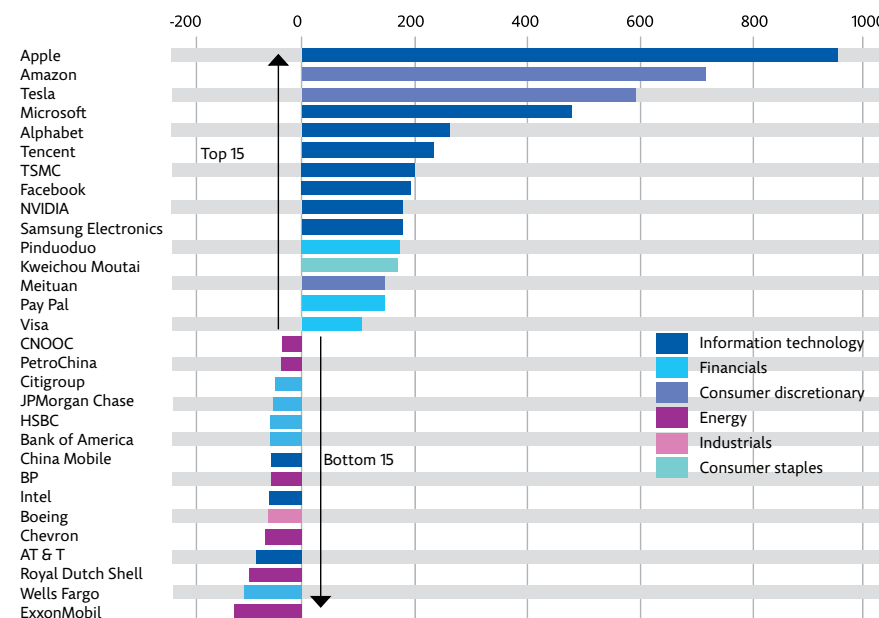
⁴⁹ N. Conte, “How every asset class, currency, and S & P 500 sector performed in 2020,” *Visual Capitalist*, January 1, 2021. Available online: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/how-every-asset-class-currency-and-sp-500-sector-performed-in-2020/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

⁵⁰ “World Economic Outlook: A long and difficult ascent,” op. cit., p. 43.

⁵¹ N. Conte, op. cit.

⁵² “Crypto market cap surges above \$1 trillion for first time,” *Reuters*, January 7, 2021. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/crypto-currency-int-idUSKBN29C264> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

Figure 2. Pandemic winners and losers by market capitalization added/lost in billion USD, 2020



Note: Based on Capital IQ data of 7730 companies.

Source: “Prospering in the pandemic: 2020’s top 100 companies. The final ranking of corporate winners in a devastating year,” *Financial Times*, January 1, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/f8251e5f-10a7-4f7a-9047-b438e4d7f83a> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

The ultimate star of the stock markets was Tesla, the electric car company, which managed to increase its market value by an astonishing 787 per cent, jumping from \$75 to \$669 billion.⁵³ However, in absolute terms Tesla was just third, behind Amazon and Apple (Figure 2), the latter adding almost a trillion dollar to its market capitalization. No wonder concerns were rising over stock market bubbles. Several investors surveys showed that Bitcoin and US tech companies, especially Tesla are considered the greatest bubbles

⁵³ Ibid

on the market.⁵⁴ It is not clear if these surveys influenced Elon Musk, Tesla CEO, in deciding the car company will invest \$1.5 billion buying Bitcoin and creating a kind of double bubble. Joking apart, it is hard to explain Tesla's market valuation using logical arguments. In early 2021 at already well above \$700 billion it was more valuable than Toyota, Volkswagen, Daimler, GM, BMW, Honda, Hyundai, Fiat Chrysler and Ford combined, with its 2020 production just shy of 500,000 cars while Toyota, for example manufactured 828,066 vehicles in the month of November alone and Volkswagen just under 11 million in 2019.⁵⁵

Signs of bubbles appeared on global property markets as well. As another absurd development during the pandemic crisis, there were concerns housing markets were overheating in many countries. UBS analyzed 25 major cities in its Global Real Estate Bubble Index 2020, and over half were found to be at risk of a housing bubble or were overvalued.⁵⁶ Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, reported that for the third quarter of 2020, house prices, as measured by its House Price Index, rose by 4.9 per cent in the eurozone and by 5.2 per cent in the EU compared with the same quarter of the previous year.⁵⁷ Slovakia (8.5 per cent) had the fourth highest annual increase after Luxembourg (13.6), Poland (10.9) and Austria (8.9). According to data from the National Bank of Slovakia the annual growth in housing loans stood at 9.2 per cent in September 2020 or about twice the eurozone average.⁵⁸ Although that rate represented an all-time low, it was only a minor change compared with growth rates in previous years of around 10 per cent. Naturally, the house price and credit boom have long been fueled by very low interest rates (in fact negative real interest rates for most of the time) which were the consequence of the ECB's zero interest rate policy. The average

⁵⁴ E. Howcroft, M. Jones, "Bitcoin, U.S. tech stocks seen as biggest market bubbles – investor surveys," *Reuters* January 19, 2021. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets-survey-bofa-int-idUSKBN2900UE> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

⁵⁵ "Tesla market cap surpasses next five largest automotive companies combined," *Reuters* January 7, 2021. Available online: <https://www.reutersevents.com/supplychain/technology/tesla-market-cap-surpasses-next-five-largest-automotive-companies-combined> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

⁵⁶ "UBS Global Real Estate Bubble Index 2020," UBS, September 30, 2020. Available online: <https://www.ubs.com/global/en/wealth-management/chief-investment-office/life-goals/real-estate/2020/global-real-estate-bubble-index.html> (accessed on February 14, 2021).

⁵⁷ "House prices up by 4.9% in the eurozone," *News release*, Eurostat, January 14, 2021. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/housing-price-statistics/publications> (accessed on February 14, 2021).

⁵⁸ "Financial Stability Report," Bratislava: National Bank of Slovakia, November 2020, p. 34.

interest rate on Slovak housing loans provided during the third quarter of 2020 was just 1.2 per cent.

Unprecedented fiscal and monetary policies flooded the markets with cash and they seemed to blow the bubbles from the global equity and property markets over to the Slovak housing market during 2020. The risk of stock and property market crashes increased. If that did in fact happen it would be incredible hard for highly indebted economies facing serious fiscal problems to cope. The Covid-19 pandemic might be over soon but its economic legacy is here to stay for a long time.

■ Conclusions, or how to get out from this mess

In the return to normality developed countries need to rebuild the credibility of their fiscal and monetary institutions, reduce deficits and debts, phase out extraordinary measures and thus ensure the sustainability of their public finances. The last thing they need is to experiment with "magic sticks" proposed by some proponents of unconventional policies like the cancellation of public debt held by central banks or the introduction of "helicopter money", i.e. the direct monetization of government debts. These steps have the potential to undermine the stability of the financial and monetary systems and currencies including the euro. The ECB must resist proposals to cancel the sovereign debt it holds, as Daniel Lacalle argues:

What we read in Piketty's column are typical fallacious populist arguments. Debt reliefs and defaults exist, of course: They are evidence of an issuer's insolvency. What does not exist is a debt relief to spend more and get even more in debt, which is what they propose, which leads to constant monetization and cancellations that ultimately undermine the solidity of the euro... That is, to copy Argentina.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ D. Lacalle, "Europe's debt cancellation would mean recognition of insolvency," posted on February 7, 2021. Available online: <https://www.dlacalle.com/en/europes-debt-cancellation-would-mean-recognition-of-insolvency/> (accessed on February 17, 2021).

The EU needs to rebuild its fiscal framework, to create transparent and simple rules which are enforceable, while the ECB should ensure that its extraordinary PEPP program is really just a limited one-off instrument. In other words, we need an institutional design that will push EU member states towards sober fiscal policies and the necessary structural reforms. If the temporary measures become permanent, and EU instruments that force national governments to behave responsibly remain deactivated or return in a watered-down version only, it would be illusory to expect substantial improvements.

The Slovak government should have a credible plan demonstrating how it will bring down its huge budget deficit and halt the alarming growth of indebtedness. Also, it should introduce legislation on expenditure limits, which has been a constitutional obligation long neglected by previous governments. These spending limits could ensure that future “good times” are used to proceed more rapidly with fiscal consolidations and create substantial buffers for bad times, instead of wasting existing opportunities as was the case in the last decade. Like all national governments in the eurozone, we should prepare for a situation in which the era of low interest rates and resulting low servicing costs of sovereign debts does not last forever and the ECB does not use its endless capacity to buy government bonds indefinitely. At the same time, the country desperately needs to improve the pace and efficiency with which it spends EU funds and restart structural reforms. Slovakia is expecting an additional approximately €6 billion in grants from the new NGEU funds in addition to the regular billions of the EU budget (Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027). This gives it a unique opportunity to escape the middle-income trap and return to fast convergence toward the EU core and it should not be wasted. However, as usual, Slovakia is still struggling to spend the available resources from the previous (2013–2020) EU budget: by the end of 2020 it had used only 45 per cent of the money which was the second slowest tempo after Spain among the 27 members states,⁶⁰ so the challenge is tremendous. Therefore radical changes are needed in EU fund management.

⁶⁰ “European Structural and Investment Funds,” Data, European Commission. Available online: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/overview#> (accessed on February 17, 2021).



Vladimír Tarasovič

Slovak security and defense policy in 2020

The world of the next ten years will be very different from the world the Alliance inhabited during the decades after the Cold War. It will be a world of competing great powers, in which assertive authoritarian states with revisionist foreign policy agendas seek to expand their power and influence, and in which NATO allies will once again face a systemic challenge cutting across the security and economic domains. Well-known threats like terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, will persist, even as new risks loom from pandemics and climate change, and as emerging and disruptive technologies present both dangers and opportunities for the Alliance.¹

The European Parliament, in its “2020 Annual Report on the implementation of the Common Security and Defense Policy,” confirmed that the European Union was still striving to be a global actor for peace and security. It noted that the continuing deterioration in the Union’s strategic environment is both directly and indirectly affecting the security of its member states and citizens. The European Union declared its ambition to develop European strategic autonomy, based, first of all, on the Union’s ability to independently assess crisis situations and take autonomous decisions, and, secondly, on its capacity to act autonomously where circumstances require. According to the parliament, the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the EU’s vulnerability and dependency on third countries. Therefore, it is even more important to intensify the EU’s efforts towards strategic autonomy.²

¹ “NATO 2030: United for a new era analysis and recommendations of the Reflection group appointed by the NATO Secretary General,” NATO, November 25, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf (accessed on December 12, 2020).

² More see “European Parliament: implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – annual report 2020,” European Parliament, 2020. Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0265_EN.html (accessed on January 20, 2021).

As far as Slovak foreign policy is concerned, the primary aim is to promote the interests of its citizens. Bearing this in mind, it seeks to deepen good neighborly relations, maintain friendly relations with members of the international community, and act as a reliable and responsible partner on both the European and global stages. The defining framework of Slovak foreign policy activities is Slovakia's membership of the European Union and NATO.³

■ NATO in year 2020

"The year 2020 was a difficult year for all of us. But amid the uncertainty, NATO provided stability and security – helping with Covid-19 relief efforts and carrying out our core task of keeping people safe," said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the end of 2020. He pointed out that Covid-19 has changed people lives in ways that nobody could have imagined. No country and no community has been left untouched. Furthermore, throughout the Alliance the military has played a key role in the measures taken against the pandemic to help in the civilian efforts to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴ Ministers at the NATO defense ministers meeting in April 2020 took stock of the steps taken by NATO and allies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. They agreed a set of recommendations to strengthen NATO resilience by updating the existing baseline requirements for civil preparedness, based on the lessons learned from the crisis and by working even closer with NATO and EU international partners.

Throughout 2020, NATO and allied military personnel supported civilian efforts to tackle Covid-19, both in allied and partner countries. NATO developed a new operations plan to help both allies and partners, and established a trust fund for the purchase of urgently needed items and for a stockpile of medical supplies in Italy for Allies in need.⁵

³ Ibid

⁴ "Adapting NATO for 2030 and beyond. Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the 66th Annual Session of the NATO," *NATO – opinions*, November 24, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179665.htm (accessed on December 16, 2020).

⁵ "NATO responds to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020, helping allies and partners," *NATO – news*, December 22, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180548.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed on December 28, 2020).

Speaking at the Riga Conference in November 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said,

NATO Allies and our militaries have been supporting each other and our partners throughout this pandemic. [...] At the same time, we remain vigilant and ready because NATO's main responsibility is to make sure this health crisis does not become a security crisis.⁶

NATO also worked closely with other international organizations, including the European Union. In July 2020, in response to a global request by the United Nations for airlift support in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, UK planes, coordinated by NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre, transported a field hospital from Europe to Accra, Ghana.⁷

After the President of France declared that NATO was suffering from "brain death," the Alliance sought advice on how to stay vibrant in the face of new challenges from Russia and China.⁸ This was the impetus for the NATO member states to present the Secretary General with a task. Articulated in the Declaration of the Heads of State and Government at the North Atlantic Council meeting in London December 3–4, 2019, it stated:

taking into account the evolving strategic environment, we invite the Secretary General to present to foreign ministers a Council-agreed proposal for a forward-looking reflection process under his auspices, drawing on relevant expertise, to further strengthen NATO's political dimension including consultation.⁹

On this basis, the NATO Secretary-General led a forward-looking reflection of the Alliance – NATO 2030 – where the goal is "to make the strong Alliance even stronger" for the next decade and beyond, setting three priorities for

⁶ "Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Riga Conference," *NATO – news*, November 13, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179489.htm?selectedLocale=fr (accessed on December 16, 2020).

⁷ "Adapting NATO for 2030 and beyond," op. cit.

⁸ S. Erlanger, "NATO needs to adapt quickly to stay relevant for 2030, report urges," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2020. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/30/world/europe/nato-2030-russia-china.html> (accessed on December 5, 2020).

⁹ "London declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3–4 December 2019," *NATO – Press Release* 115, December 4, 2019. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm (accessed on December 16, 2020).

NATO 2030: to ensure NATO remains a strong military Alliance, becomes stronger politically, and takes a more global approach.

A year later, experts from across the Alliance issued a new report, NATO 2030, with a series of recommendations.¹⁰ To ensure the first priority, it strongly recommends the Alliance invest more in modernizing its capabilities and ensuring the higher readiness of NATO forces. The Alliance assumes that will continue, but it is dependent on sufficient levels of defense spending and that is no easy task in the middle of a health crisis. Besides, the threats that existed before the pandemic have not diminished, so the commitment to invest more in defense is as relevant as ever.

In October 2020, NATO published the updated figures for defense spending in all NATO Allied countries. They confirmed that all the Allies are increasing their defense spending and investing more in defense. The year 2020 was the sixth consecutive year of budget increases – 4.3 per cent in real terms. More NATO Allies are meeting the guideline spending of 2 per cent of GDP on defense and the majority have plans in place to achieve 2 per cent. Most Allies now invest 20 per cent or more of defense spending in major new capabilities.¹¹

One of the main NATO 2030 recommendations is to update NATO's Strategic Concept. The Alliance's current strategic concept dates back to 2010 and describes a strategic environment that is far removed from reality. The process of updating the Strategic Concept will improve the common understanding of the threats and challenges facing the Alliance. At the leaders meeting at the end of 2021, the leaders agreed the secretary general would be in charge of that process.¹²

¹⁰ More in "NATO 2030: United for a new era analysis and recommendations of the Reflection group appointed by the NATO Secretary General," op. cit.; T. Tardy, "NATO 2030. United for a new era: a digest," NATO Defense College, *NDC Policy Brief 23–20*, December 9, 2020. Available online: <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1509> (accessed on December 27, 2020).

¹¹ "Online press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the second day of the meetings of NATO defense ministers," *NATO – speeches & transcripts*, October 24, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_178947.htm (accessed on December 27, 2020); "NATO agrees 2021 civil and military budgets," *NATO – news*, December, 7, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180185.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed on December 27, 2020).

¹² "Adapting NATO for 2030 and beyond," op. cit.

Besides tackling the pandemic and discussions about the future of the Alliance, NATO approved a large number of measures relating to deterrence and defense in 2020. NATO is determined to maintain its cutting edge in all domains – land, sea, air, cyber, and space. In 2019, it declared that space was one of NATO's operational domains and at the virtual meetings of the NATO defense ministers on October 22–23, 2020, ministers agreed to establish a new NATO Space Centre at Allied Air Command in Ramstein (Germany). It will help to coordinate Allied space activities, support NATO missions and operations from space, including communications and satellite imagery, and protect allied space systems by sharing information about potential threats. According to the NATO Secretary General, the Alliance has to make sure it has safe and reliable systems in space because Russia and China are now developing capabilities that could blind and destroy satellites, which would have a severe impact on both military and civilian activities on the ground.¹³

Russia, with its military capability, and China, as a fast-growing power in recent years, present the biggest challenges for NATO in the near future. Russia continued its aggressive military activities around NATO countries and partners. For instance, NATO Air Forces scrambled more than 400 times in 2020 across Europe to intercept unknown aircraft approaching Alliance airspace. Almost 90 per cent of these missions – around 350 – were in response to flights by Russian military aircraft. Air policing is an important way in which NATO provides security for members.¹⁴ Russia also represents a challenge in the High North. The High North is a very important area for transatlantic allies and their partners because of the undersea communication cables located there. If the ice continues to melt at the current speed, the transatlantic community will face a more aggressive Russia, and China, which has also become more interested in it.¹⁵

China was brought officially to the attention of the Alliance in a structured way in London in December 2019. And since then, the Alliance has been looking at the economical, technological, and military rise of China. This brings both challenges and opportunities to the transatlantic community that are worth considering here. At the beginning of December 2020, NATO foreign

¹³ "Online press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg..." op. cit.

¹⁴ O. Lungescu, "NATO intercepts hundreds of Russian military jets in 2020," *NATO – news*, December 28, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180551.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed on January 11, 2021).

¹⁵ "Online press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg..." op. cit.

ministers sanctioned an important component of the NATO China strategy that was presented to them in this last year of work since London. It is clear that China, which currently has the second biggest defense budget in the world, is aggressively modernizing its military capabilities (including nuclear capabilities, missiles that can reach all NATO countries, maritime capabilities¹⁶). Moreover, China does not share the values of western democracies. All this means that despite being a regional alliance (and it should remain a regional alliance), NATO needs a more global approach.

There are other challenges which NATO will quickly have to find solutions to. One is the NATO missions. Despite the pandemic, NATO is active in Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan. At the end of the year, Allies discussed the training missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, which are to help build long-term security and stability in both countries. All the Allies remain committed to the *Resolute Support* mission and to supporting Afghan security forces in the fight against terrorism. They also remain committed to contributing to the financial sustainment of the Afghan security forces until 2024. NATO will discuss its future presence in Afghanistan at the next defense ministers meeting in February 2021.¹⁷

With regard to Iraq, in early 2020 NATO reduced the number of personnel in the Training Mission, partly because of Covid and partly because of the health situation. Later some of the trainers and personnel returned to Iraq and the mission contained roughly 500 personnel. NATO consulted with the Iraqi government and the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, and it is considering enhancing its presence. The details of this new operation plan will be discussed at the defense ministerial meeting in February 2021.¹⁸

In 2020, NATO also had to deal with internal problems. Examples include the activities of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, which led to tensions between two NATO Allies – Greece and Turkey – engagement in the Azerbaijani–Armenian conflict in the Caucasus on the side of Azerbaijan, despite both countries being NATO partners. And of course, the Turkish decision

¹⁶ T. Tardy, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ "NATO Secretary General: 2021 will be a pivotal year," A press point with Alexander Dobrindt, Chairman of the CSU Parliamentary Group, *NATO – news*, January 7, 2021. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180642.htm (accessed on January 8, 2021).

¹⁸ "Online press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg..." *op. cit.*

to acquire the Russian S-400 system, which is not compatible with NATO systems. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made enormous efforts to ease the tensions between the two member states.

The year 2020 confirmed that NATO–EU cooperation is a basic necessity in the Euro Atlantic area. NATO and EU share the same values and are predestined to stand together in a more unpredictable world. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said when speaking with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen that "NATO–EU cooperation had reached unprecedented levels, including military mobility, cyber defense, countering disinformation, and the support of their partners, from Afghanistan to Ukraine."¹⁹

■ EU security and defense policy in 2020

A good place to start the assessment of EU security and defense in 2020 is to look at the plans and the reality of the two presidencies of the Council of the EU – Croatia and Germany. In the first half of 2020, Croatia held the presidency for the first time under the slogan "A strong Europe in a world of challenges." The slogan very accurately predicted the circumstances of Croatia's presidency.²⁰ The presidency started with a very ambitious program focused chiefly on enlargement, digital transformation, and border security.²¹

In security and defense policy, Croatia wanted to act as a security provider during its presidency. Its main priorities were: a strategic approach to defense and security, conflict prevention and crisis management in cooperation with

¹⁹ "Press statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meeting with the members of the College of Commissioners at the European Commission," *NATO – news*, December 15, 2020. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_180094.htm (accessed on January 8, 2021).

²⁰ G. Bandov, "Croatia's EU Presidency: A strong Europe in a world of challenges," *European view*, Research Article Vol. XIX No. 2, 2020, October 28, 2020, pp. 188–96. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1781685820968303> (accessed on December 27, 2020).

²¹ N. Đorđević, "Croatia's presidency of the EU Council: Success or failure?" *Emerging Europe, News & Analysis*, July 21, 2020. Available online: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/croatias-presidency-of-the-eu-council-success-or-failure/> (accessed on December 11, 2020).

partners, strengthening the EU's defense capabilities and defense industry, and close cooperation and complementarity between the EU and NATO.²²

At the beginning of its presidency, Croatia had to deal with the migrant crisis on the Greek–Turkish border. The situation escalated with a significant number of illegal border crossings in late February 2020. Following an extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on March 6, 2020 the situation on the EU's external borders calmed down.²³ The Covid-19 situation had already become very serious by the time the Director of the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020.²⁴ The EU failed to act as one and the pandemic strategies of the EU member states were not unanimously agreed at the EU level, but were adopted individually by the various countries. However, there was a kind of domino effect in the measures – when one country introduced a measure, others soon followed.²⁵ At the end of May 2020, the defense ministers of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain sent a letter to Joseph Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and to their European colleagues.²⁶ They reaffirmed their commitment to enhanced European cooperation in security and defense. In the letter, which followed the first wave of the Covid-19 crisis that was deeply affecting Europe, the four ministers shared their thoughts on a series of topics, their aims, and their willingness to enhance Europe's unity, resiliency, and sovereignty.²⁷ The letter was not

²² "Priorities: Croatian presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 January – 30 June 2020." Available online: <https://eu2020.hr/Uploads/EUPDev/files/priorities-of-the-croatian-presidency.pdf> (accessed on December 11, 2020).

²³ "Decision 2020/135 on the conclusion of the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community," Council of the European Union, OJ L29. January 31, 2020, p. 1. Available online: <https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vl5rbh1umxym> (accessed on January 31, 2021).

²⁴ "Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19," World Health Organization, March 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19—11-march-2020>, (accessed 23 September 2020).

²⁵ G. Bandov, op. cit.

²⁶ More: "Letter of the defense ministers of France, Germany, Italy and Spain: At the heart of our European Union," May 29, 2020. Available online: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/at-the-heart-of-our-european-union> (accessed September 18, 2020).

²⁷ "France, German, Italian and Spanish defense ministers reaffirm their strong commitment to Europe," *EDR On-Line Editorial Staff*, May 30, 2020. Available online: <https://www.edrmagazine.eu/france-german-italian-and-spanish-defence-ministers-reaffirm-their-strong-commitment-to-europe>, (accessed September 18, 2020).

coordinated with Croatia, which held the presidency at the time, but it outlined some thoughts that were incorporated into the modified program of the German presidency. The German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas dubbed his country's EU Council presidency the "corona-presidency," as the pandemic largely dominated the agenda, while foreign policy plans were pushed into the background.²⁸ And Angela Merkel conceded that she had not accomplished as much as she had wanted. Speaking at a press conference after the EU summit, she said, "There was more that we had planned to do; I will say that openly." The bloc was unable to improve ties with Turkey, which had provoked regional tensions, for instance, by engaging in gas exploration in the Mediterranean.

Despite the progress in deepening the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy over the past few years, the ongoing crisis revealed strong and weak aspects of the system. The first lessons learned illustrate the necessity to focus on two core issues: to start with, the EU needs the capacity to provide support and assist in the direct and immediate management of the crisis. In the long run, the EU has to be able to act so as to position itself in the post-Covid-19 order, especially in the domain of security and defense. Increasing resilience could empower the EU to be a capable and reliable partner in international crisis management, acting out of solidarity and in an effective and cooperative manner. To achieve this, close cooperation and coordination is essential between Europeans as well as their transatlantic partners in NATO. To advocate these necessary improvements, the German presidency took a slightly different course than initially planned.²⁹

Berlin had long been criticized, mainly by France, for steering clear of international military missions and not investing enough in defense. One of the main objectives of Germany's EU presidency goals was the Strategic Compass. It was initiated in June 2020 and will create clarity as to what the EU wants – and does not want – to be able to do as an actor in security and defense. The document builds on the first threat analysis of the EU. It covers security trends in different regions of the world and contains various thematically

²⁸ B. Riegert, "Germany gets mixed scorecard for EU presidency," *Deutsche Welle*, December 30, 2020, Available online: <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-gets-mixed-scorecard-for-eu-presidency/a-56078412> (accessed January 11, 2021).

²⁹ Ibid

extended segments on European security.³⁰ The confidential document was finalized in November 2020 by the EU Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity within the European External Action Service. It is based on contributions from national intelligence services. It takes a 360 degree look at the world, compiling the threats and challenges of the next five to ten years. This will update the shared understanding of the EU security environment and help bring coherence to EU security initiatives. The Strategic Compass will focus on four "baskets": *Crisis management* – improving the effectiveness of the EU's missions and operations; *Resilience* – examining and strengthening the EU to manage vulnerabilities, particularly against hybrid threats and cyber-attacks; *Partnerships* – enhancing the EU's ability to be an effective partner and also engaging and enabling others through training and equipping; *Capabilities* – enhancing civilian and military capabilities that can be employed in a mutually reinforcing way.³¹ It is not designed to replace or rewrite the EU's Global Strategy. The Strategic Compass should rather be an addition to the system dealing with newly emerged threats that were not fully taken into account at the time.³²

The aim of the Strategic Compass is to make the European Union a better and more capable security provider for its partners around the world. It is not only important for the member states internally as they examine how to prepare themselves for external threats, but it also provides clarity to partners about the implementation of the strategic goals in the EU's 2016 Global Strategy. The process for producing the Strategic Compass is member-state driven, and the Council of the EU plans to adopt the document upon its completion during the French presidency in 2022. The cooperation between the EU and NATO is crucial, and the Strategic Compass will complement the NATO 2030 initiative and a possible new NATO Strategic Concept.³³

³⁰ A. Brzozowski, "EU's threat analysis running out of time as bloc's security problems multiply," *Euractiv*, August 27, 2020. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/eus-threat-analysis-running-out-of-time-as-blocs-security-problems-multiply/> (accessed October 10, 2020).

³¹ J. Lodge, "The German Presidency of the Council of the EU and the future of transatlantic security, strategic compass: guiding EU security and defense into the future," Johns Hopkins University, American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, December 17, 2020, Available online: <https://www.aicgs.org/2020/12/the-german-eu-council-presidency-and-the-future-of-transatlantic-security/> (accessed January 11, 2021).

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

On November 20, 2020, the European Council approved the first PESCO Strategic Review (PSR),³⁴ an assessment of the first initial phase (2018–2020) of the Permanent Structured Cooperation, and guidelines for its second initial phase starting in 2021 and lasting until 2025. PESCO's participating member states have recognized that the binding commitments they mutually agreed upon "have proven to present a solid guideline in ensuring consistent implementation of PESCO and must therefore not be changed in the context of the current PESCO Strategic Review."³⁵ The same day the PSR was approved, the Head of the Agency, High Representative Joseph Borrell presented the first CARD report to the 25 EDA defense ministers.³⁶ It identified 55 collaborative capability development opportunities across six domains, advising member states to concentrate their capability development efforts on them. The report also identified the land domain as one characterized by high fragmentation and a lack of coherence, particularly in the armored vehicles sector. Consequently, the PSR also identified 26 PESCO projects planned to deliver concrete results and full operational capability before the end of the next PESCO phase in 2025. The PSR is the cornerstone for checking the progress of member states' commitment and substantial efforts in the sector of European Defense and Security.³⁷ However, according to experts, there is a lack of progress in many projects.

³⁴ "Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)'s projects – Overview," European Council, November 20, 2020. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46846/pesco-projects-20-nov-2020.pdf> (accessed December 20, 2020).

³⁵ Y. Benchekroun, "The First PESCO Strategic Review," Finabel (European Army Interoperability Centre), November 24, 2020. Available online: https://finabel.org/the-first-pesco-strategic-review/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=the-first-pesco-strategic-review (accessed December 12, 2020).

³⁶ "Results of first coordinated annual review on defense," European Defense Agency, November 20, 2020, Available online: <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/reports/card-2020-executive-summary-report.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2020).

³⁷ Y. Benchekroun, "The First PESCO Strategic Review," Finabel (European Army Interoperability Centre), November 24, 2020, Available online: https://finabel.org/the-first-pesco-strategic-review/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=the-first-pesco-strategic-review (accessed December 12, 2020).

■ Main determinants of the Slovak security and defense policy in 2020

Slovak security and defense policy in 2020 was determined by the parliamentary elections in February on one hand and by the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected life not only in Slovakia but in the rest of the world on the other. In the parliamentary elections on February 29, 2020, *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities] (*OLaNO*) won the largest share of the vote. It formed a coalition with three other political parties – *Sme rodina* [We Are Family], *Sloboda a solidarita* [Freedom and Solidarity] (*SaS*), and *Za ľudí* [For the People].³⁸ The new Slovak government took over from the previous government led by the party *Smer*³⁹ on March 21, 2020. On April 30, 2020, the government manifesto for 2020–2024 was approved by the parliament.⁴⁰ In it the new government agreed that the basic framework for security policy activities was EU and NATO membership.⁴¹ Simultaneous with the drawing up of the manifesto for 2020–2024, the new government had to solve the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The government declared that the pandemic, which it had been tackling since taking office, would not change Slovakia's strategic orientation. This was duly noted in the Joint Declaration by the three highest-ranking officials on May 9, 2020.⁴² President Zuzana Čaputová, Speaker of Parliament Boris Kollár and Prime Minister Igor Matovič pledged that it was their intention and shared responsibility to collaborate on a united and responsible foreign,

³⁸ The coalition controls 95 out of parliament's 150 seats, which means it can make changes to the constitution.

³⁹ *Smer-SD* governed Slovakia for 12 of the past 14 years.

⁴⁰ "Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky na obdobie rokov 2020–2024," [Government Program Manifesto for 2020–2024] Government of the Slovak Republic, May 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/zakon&ZakZborID=13&CisObdobia=8&CPT=68> (accessed on May 13, 2020).

⁴¹ "New Slovak government wins confidence vote," *Europost*, April 30, 2020, Available online: <https://europost.eu/en/a/view/new-slovak-government-wins-confidence-vote-28529> (accessed on May 13, 2020).

⁴² "Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2020: Slovakia in an unstable world," (unofficial translation) Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 28, 2020, Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/30297/4238317/Foreign+and+European+Policy+of+the+Slovak+Republic+in+2020+%28unofficial+translation%29.pdf> (accessed on December 18, 2020).

European and security policy for Slovakia. They stressed that the country is a member of both the European Union and NATO, and that Slovakia's joined of its own free will. They also declared they were prepared to reinforce the foreign policy consensus, increase defense spending, and draw up a new security strategy.⁴³ Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Korčok endorsed the fulfillment of the Joint Declaration.

In the defense sphere, the new Slovak government confirmed its unambiguous Euro-Atlantic orientation. The country regards "responsible membership" as the priority not only in NATO, but also in the EU, which has been increasingly active in common defense in recent years. However, despite the potential of the EU to finance defense projects and to cooperate with member states, the new government manifesto does not address this particular point in the defense section. The opportunities are only mentioned in the section dedicated to foreign policy, stating that the government will "support" capacity building within the Union, as "without it the Union cannot fulfill its ambition to be a respected global player in international relations."⁴⁴

As the new government had pledged in its manifesto, it drew up the first of the strategic documents, the Security Strategy and Defense Strategy. Teams created by ministers Ivan Korčok (MFEA) and Jaroslav Naď (MoD) began drafting them in summer 2020 and they were approved by the government in December 2020.⁴⁵ According to the ministers, the government decided to create new strategies because the proposals from 2017 did not sufficiently reflect the new situation in the world. They stated that Slovakia had been facing new threats since 2017, e.g. the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict in neighboring Ukraine aggressively provoked by the Russian Federation.

Although the Defense Strategy was approved by parliament at the end of January 2021, the Defense Ministry had already started working on its many

⁴³ "EU and NATO membership vital for Slovakia, top officials agreed," *The Slovak Spectator*, May 11, 2020, Available online: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22401738/eu-and-nato-membership-vital-for-slovakia-top-officials-agreed.html> (accessed on September 18, 2020).

⁴⁴ L. Yar, "Správa o stave európskej obrany: Ambície Únie prekračujú možnosti európskych armád," [State of the European defense report: EU's ambitions exceed the capabilities of the European armies] *EuroPolicy* and *Euractiv* November 26, 2020 (updated on December 12, 2020). Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/obrana-a-zahranicie/news/sprava-o-stave-europskej-obrany-ambicie-unie-prekracuju-moznosti-a-schopnosti-europskych-armad/> (accessed on December 28, 2020).

⁴⁵ Parliament approved the defense strategy on January 27, 2021 and the security strategy on January 28, 2021.

tasks set out in the manifesto. Defense had been understaffed and underfunded for a long time. The new management at the defense ministry adopted a new approach to this problem. They declared that they would continue projects that benefitted the armed forces (finalization of the acquisition of the Black Hawk helicopters and F-16 Block 70, continuation of the reconstruction of Malacky military airfield, etc.) but would stop projects that did not contribute to the NATO Force Goals (acquisition of 4x4 armored military vehicles). At the moment, the MoD is considering the acquisition of 8x8 armored vehicles for a heavy brigade. The new Defense Ministry management is prioritizing the purchase of new radars for the air force and the reconstruction of Sliač military airfield (the base for the new F-16) by NATO's NSPA, among other things. Also, the Defense Ministry has agreed to spend €17 million on basic equipment for soldiers as declared in the manifesto. One of the goals mentioned in the strategy is to increase the role of the Slovak defense industry in supplying the forces, but the level of cooperation will depend on product quality, meeting delivery terms, and competitiveness.

In defense spending, Slovakia agreed to the goal to comply with NATO and EU commitments. The ambition remains to achieve baseline spending of 2 per cent of GDP in 2024 and then keep it at that level at least. In addition, 20 per cent of defense spending is to go on the acquisition of the basic weaponry and equipment of the armed forces. Finally, the defense strategy states that 2 per cent of defense spending will be allocated to research and development.

In 2020, Slovakia continued its work in planning, the formation of the rapid reaction force, military exercises, and the creation and operation of NATO structures abroad and at home. A very important part of Slovakia's commitment to NATO was participation in the NATO-led missions and operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Latvia. At home, the Slovak air force fulfilled its tasks regarding the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defense System (NATINAMDS). At the beginning of December, for the first time in history, Slovakia deployed an artillery unit with artillery systems abroad. They will form part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic States, to deliver indirect fire support to the NATO eFP Battle Group Latvia.⁴⁶ Slovakia also contributed to

⁴⁶ More in "Artillerymen along with equipment head out to Baltics, this marks SVK military's first ever deployment of artillery capabilities abroad," Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, December 7, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/48635-en/do-pobaltia-sa-presuvaju-slovenski-delostrelci-s-technikou-pojde-o-historicky-prve-nasadenie-delostreleckej-sposoblosti-os-sr-v-zahranici/> (accessed on January 9, 2021).

other missions under the EU umbrella in Bosnia and Herzegovina and UN umbrella in Cyprus. Under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Slovakia participated in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), where it leads one project and participates in five others. In this area, Slovakia backs the strengthening of capacities and deepening cooperation and efforts to reinforce the EU's capacity to act, its strategic autonomy, and its ability to cooperate with partners, and with NATO as a key pillar of security and collective defense.

Covid-19 was the topic of many (virtual) meetings on all levels from the beginning of the pandemic. After a senior meeting of the Visegrad Group, State Secretary of the Slovak Ministry of Defense Marian Majer said,

The developing pandemic situation clearly demonstrates the importance of civil-military cooperation, and the need to build tools for strengthening the resilience of our society, whereas it is desirable for the said processes to evolve concurrently at the national, regional as well as EU and NATO levels.⁴⁷

In Slovakia, alongside medical personnel, the military were the second decisive element in the fight against Covid-19. Given the dramatic spread of the pandemic and the lack of sufficient capabilities and capacities, the government decided to call on the Armed Forces to support civilian efforts. All units and facilities of the Slovak Armed Forces were put on standby in March 16, 2020,⁴⁸ for deployment within six hours of receiving a request for assistance.

Moreover, in the first phase of the military response to the coronavirus outbreak, it was decided they would support the Police Corps and set up an isolation facility at the Lešť Training Centre. An additional 2,800 soldiers are ready to perform tasks. At the same time, the Armed Forces remain committed to ensuring that all their legal responsibilities, such as protecting Slovak airspace or operating the radar field, continue to be performed.⁴⁹ The Armed

⁴⁷ "V4 Senior Body discusses future cooperation on COVID-19 pandemic," Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, May 28, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/47097-en/statni-tajomnici-rezortov-obrany-v4-rokovali-o-buducej-spolupraci-v-kontexte-pandemie-covid-19/> (accessed on June, 3, 2020).

⁴⁸ On March 16, 2020, a state of emergency came into force and lasted until June 14, 2020.

⁴⁹ "Armed Forces have deployed nearly 340 soldiers to conduct assistance tasks, all military units are on standby," Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and MoD Communication Department, March 18, 2020, Available online: <https://www.mod.gov.sk/46768-en/ozbrojene-sily-nasadili-na-plnenie-asistencnych-uloh-uz-takmer-340-vojakov-v-pohotovosti-su-vsetky-utvary/> (accessed on March, 23, 2020).

Forces stood ready to assist with the delivery of medical supplies by Spartan transport aircraft and UH-60M Black Hawk multi-role helicopters to transport swab samples taken from Roma communities to laboratories. For this purpose, the military also offered pre-paid flying hours under the Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS).

The MoD made available its Horezza-run accommodation facilities for Slovak citizens undergoing the mandatory 14-day self-isolation. So far, service personnel have protected border crossings and provided assistance at hospital entrances in several cities. The support from the Armed Forces also continued via the Defense Medical Service (DMS), which helped by providing civilian hospitals with military doctors and nurses. Additionally, DMS supplied Ružomberok Central Military Hospital with 13 containers from the military field hospital, which were used to triage civilian patients.⁵⁰ On March 27, 2020, Defense Minister Jaroslav Naď met with President of the Slovak Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Slovak Armed Forces Zuzana Čaputová at the MoD. The minister presented the MoD's new prospects and priorities as well as its potential to provide additional support to the government in tackling Covid-19.⁵¹

On October 18th, the government approved a proposal to prepare and conduct nationwide coronavirus testing of the population. That task was assigned to the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The bulk of the antigen testing took place from October 31 to November 1, 2020; the next round was held on the weekend of November 7–8, 2020. The professional soldiers of the Armed Forces, members of the Police Forces, qualified medical personnel and administrative personnel worked at the test centers.⁵² The nationwide testing of the population was probably one of the most important tasks in the history of the Slovak Armed Forces.

⁵⁰ "First two confirmed cases of COVID-19 across defense," Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, March 24, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mod.gov.sk/46790-en/v-rezorte-obrany-boli-zachytene-dva-pripady-ochorenia-covid-19/> (accessed on April 9, 2020).

⁵¹ "Defense Minister Jaroslav Naď presents new MOD prospects and priorities to President Zuzana Čaputová," Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, March 27, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mod.gov.sk/46806-en/minister-obrany-jaroslav-nad-predstavil-prezidentke-zuzane-caputovej-nove-perspektivy-a-priority-rezortu-obrany/>, (accessed April 12, 2020).

⁵² E. Gallová Kriglerová, A. Holka Chudžíková, J. Kadlečíková, M. Pířová, "Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – fundamental rights implications country: Slovakia," European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, November 3, 2020, p. 3. Available online: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/sk_report_on_coronavirus_pandemic_november_2020.pdf (accessed on November 3, 2020).

■ Conclusion

The year 2020 was an unusual one for security and defense. Initially, both NATO and the EU had supposed that they would be discussing future developments that year. The Alliance started working on its analytical NATO 2030 report as the basis of the anticipated new strategic concept. The EU launched its Strategic Compass by analyzing threats to the EU for the first time. Its purpose being to bring clarity on what the EU wants – and does not want – to be able to do as an actor in security and defense. Regarding Slovakia, the parliamentary elections were the top event of 2020. However, in the first half of 2020 many of the newly-elected government's plans were hindered by Covid-19 and the worldwide pandemic. The truth is, every state of the world was unprepared for the type of the threat represented by the virus.

Over the year, Slovak politicians did not publicly comment on the main concerns of NATO (e.g. NATO 2030, NATO Strategic Concept, the continuation of threats from Russia, the growing political and military power of China) or the EU (e.g. Strategic Compass, PESCO, CARD). Nevertheless, in its manifesto the new government declared unambivalent support for Slovakia's Euro-Atlantic orientation. Equally, the new key strategic security policy documents – Security Strategy and Defense Strategy – consider EU and NATO membership to be the basic pillars guaranteeing the security and defense of the Slovak Republic. Last but not least, Slovakia pledged allegiance to Euro-Atlantic cooperation through its actions – the increase in the defense budget and its engagement in international missions and operations.

To conclude, in order to continue building and maintaining its credibility as a valued member of NATO and the EU, it is crucial that Slovakia sticks to implementing the resolutions declared in the government manifesto and strategic documents in 2021 and the following years.



Veronika Oravcová

Climate and energy policy in 2020: are we green yet?

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic it was evident that 2020 would be an important year for pursuing the climate agenda, as by the end of 2019 the new European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen had announced a package of measures against climate change – the European Green Deal. Therefore, in 2020 Slovakia's climate and energy policy was shaped mainly by two things: the decarbonization efforts of the European Union aiming towards climate neutrality in 2050 and the parliamentary elections held on February 29th.

The EU used the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to accelerate the green transition by introducing a new financial tool, Next Generation EU (NGEU), and adopting the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027. This presents all member states, including Slovakia, with an opportunity to speed up the green transition.

■ Green agenda, green parties, but what next?

Slovakia does not have a green party that is capable of being a relevant actor on the political scene, focusing attention on climate issues or starting a public or political debate. For years, green topics have been in the shadow of other problems in the country, such as healthcare, justice, corruption, education or employment issues.¹ But in the 2019–2020 campaign for the national

¹ P. Baboš, A. Világi, V. Oravcová, "Spoločenské problémy, politické (ne)riešenia: Voľby 2016," [Societal problems, political (non)solutions: Elections 2016] *Stimul*, 2016, p. 210.

parliamentary elections the campaigning political parties showed greater interest in climate policy – especially coalition *PS–Spolu* [Progressive Slovakia – Together] The environmental trend had already been set in the 2019 presidential elections won by Zuzana Čaputová – a lawyer, environmental activist in her hometown of Pezinok and Goldman environmental prize winner of 2016.

This trend is positive, as the candidate parties not only addressed the need to tackle climate change, but their election manifestos included several specific solutions on cleaner air, water and forest management and energy efficiency measures. The parties called for greater use of renewable energy sources, and a gradual decline in the use of fossil fuels. Several of them approached climate change cross-sectionally and came up with measures for cleaner transport, organic farming and environmental education.²

The parties that formed the government *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities] (*OLaNO*), *Sme rodina* [We Are Family], *Sloboda a solidarita* [Freedom and Solidarity] (*SaS*), *Za ľudí* [For the People] after the elections considered climate policy as one of their priorities during the campaign (the priorities stemmed from election manifestos and surveys)³ and that is why the public has high expectations that specific measures will be taken to tackle climate change. Two other parties (the *KDH*, and *PS–Spolu*) that proposed complex climate policy measures in their election manifestos did not reach the threshold for entering parliament.

The new government formed during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic presented a government program for the next four years that confirmed its pro-European stance on climate issues and was almost fully in line with the goals of the European Green Deal.⁴ The government committed itself to

² V. Oravcová, J. Hajko, P. Kováč, "Postoje politických strán k energetickým a klimatickým témam," [Attitudes of political parties towards energy and climate issues] Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2020. Available online: <http://www.sfpa.sk/publication/postoje-politicky-stran-k-energetickym-a-klimatickym-temam/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

³ Ibid

⁴ J. Hajko, M. Mišík, V. Oravcová, "Analýza Programového vyhlásenia vlády Slovenskej republiky na obdobie rokov 2020–2024 z pohľadu energetických a klimatických tém," [Analysis of the Government Programme of the Slovak Republic for the period 2020–2024 from the point of view of energy and climate issues] Slovak Climate Initiative, 2020. Available online: https://klimatickainiciativa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Analiza-program-vyhlasenia-vlady-SR_2020.pdf (accessed on February 16, 2021).

"...create conditions for the transition to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050... [and] to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve Slovakia's ability to adapt to the negative effects of climate change."⁵

The government program for 2020–2024 contains several new measures that require intense cooperation between ministries, such as support for low-emission zones or green public procurement. Some government commitments require substantial personal and financial resources, such as energy efficiency audits for state buildings, monitoring emissions from individual heating systems. And some require public support, and hence discussion on a deep geological repository of spent nuclear fuel.

However, the government program emits mixed signals on renewable energy sources (RES). While on the one hand the government officially supports RES, it lacks a specific vision and emphasizes the financial aspects of boosting RES use on the other. Moreover, the government claims to be "ready to support a possible extension of the deadlines for achieving the required share of renewables and other deadlines resulting from the winter energy package and other European Union initiatives,"⁶ which is decidedly ambiguous on the scope of RES use.

Indeed, the economy ministry led by the new minister Richard Sulík stopped the green auctions that had been announced by the previous minister Peter Žiga in February 2020.⁷ Although the criteria for the auctions had been criticized by renewable energy producers, the new minister cancelled the auctions entirely, arguing firstly that the Covid-19 pandemic had complicated things and later that the regulatory policy of previous governments had led to a financial deficit relating to the operating tariff.⁸

⁵ "Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky," [Program Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic] Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24756/1> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

⁶ Ibid

⁷ "MH SR spúšťa historicky prvú aukciu na výrobu zelenej energie," [The Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic is launching the first ever auction for the production of green energy] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/aktuality/mh-sr-spusta-historicky-prvu-aukcii-na-vyrobu-zelenej-energie-1> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

⁸ R. Potočár, "Ministerstvo mení plán, aukcia na nové zelené elektrárne nebude," [The ministry changes its plan, the auction for new green power plants will not take place] *EnergiePortal*, December 16, 2020. Available online: <https://www.energie-portal.sk/Dokument/ministerstvo-meni-plan-aukcii-na-nove-zelene-elektrarne-106696.aspx> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

Progress in RES use in Slovakia is evident in the rapid increase in installed solar capacity following the introduction of Act No. 309/2009 on the promotion of renewable energy sources and high-efficiency co-generation that led to the end of support for other types of construction to avoid electricity grid problems and escalating electricity prices. In 2013 the system operators stopped accepting requests for distribution grid connections (with more than 10 kW of generating capacity) due to concerns over grid stability and security of supply. Moreover amendments to the Act in 2018 introducing the “local source” concept failed to deliver substantial changes. The future expansion of renewables is also dependent on support for existing ones, without further pressure being exerted on electricity prices, and this is a priority for both the economy ministry and Regulatory Office for Network Industries⁹ headed by Andrej Juris since July 2020.

In line with the latest developments in the EU, the new economy minister began to emphasize the role of hydrogen in the decarbonization of transport and industry and support for the Hydrogen Research Center in Košice and announced the creation of a hydrogen strategy for Slovakia involving nuclear-based hydrogen production (purple hydrogen).¹⁰ A hydrogen strategy was drafted at the EU level as well and approved by the European Commission in July 2020. Currently hydrogen accounts for less than 2 per cent of the EU’s energy consumption and is primarily used to produce chemical products.

However, the future of hydrogen use remains questionable, especially green hydrogen (produced from RES), as 96 per cent of it is produced using natural gas. According to the EU hydrogen strategy, green hydrogen is expected to play a key role in achieving a climate neutral economy by 2050 through its crucial role in decarbonizing sectors, where other alternatives would be too expensive or hard to achieve, such as heavy-duty transport and industry.¹¹

⁹ “ÚRSO chce zmeniť podporu obnoviteľných zdrojov v prospech všetkých spotrebiteľov,” [ÚRSO wants to change the renewable sources support to benefit all consumers] Regulatory Office for Network Industries, 2020. Available online: <http://www.urso.gov.sk/?q=node%2F707> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

¹⁰ “Sulík: Chceme využívať lacný prúd z atómových elektrární,” [Sulík: We want to use cheap electricity from nuclear power plants] *Pravda*, January 3, 2021. Available online: <https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/energetika/clanok/573516-podla-sulika-budeme-potrebovat-vodik-a-aj-jadrovu-energiu/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

¹¹ “Hydrogen,” European Commission, 2020. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-system-integration/hydrogen_en (accessed on February 16, 2021).

The strategy also refers to cooperation with international partners, especially Ukraine, in developing renewable electricity and hydrogen,¹² which opens up potential cooperation for Slovakia as well.

Minister Richard Sulík even stated that the prospects for electromobility are limited and that the future lies in hydrogen cars instead.¹³ In fact, the economy ministry stopped the new round of electromobility subsidies in April, but then in May re-opened it with an allocation of €6 million.¹⁴ Customers who bought an electric vehicle were able to apply for an €8,000 subsidy for a battery-run electric car and €5,000 for a plug-in hybrid car and the scheme was targeted at charging stations for municipalities and businesses as well. However, low-emission private transport has been progressing very slowly, the share of electric vehicles in Slovakia remains low and private transport is responsible for the gradual increase in emissions.

■ An ambitious European Union and an unambitious Slovakia?

2020 was the last year in the first period of the climate and energy targets for the EU and its member states. The 2020 climate and energy targets were set by EU leaders in 2007 and enacted in legislation in 2009. The legislation package was aimed at a 20 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels), 20 per cent in RES based EU energy and a 20 per cent improvement in energy efficiency.¹⁵ The focus on the energy sector is key to decarbonization,

¹² “A hydrogen strategy for a climate-neutral Europe,” European Commission, 2020. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0301> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

¹³ I. Jenčová, “Vláda nevidí po kríze budúcnosť dopravy v elektromobilite, stavať chce na vodík,” [The government sees no future in electromobility after the crisis, preferring to bet on hydrogen] *Euractiv*, June 24, 2020. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/energetika/news/vlada-nevidi-po-krize-buducnost-dopravy-v-elektromobilite-stavit-chce-na-vodik/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

¹⁴ “Podpora nákupu elektromobilov pokračuje, prvé dotácie sú už vyplatené,” [Support for purchasing electric cars continues, the first subsidies have already been paid out] Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mhsr.sk/press/podpora-naku-pu-elektromobilov-pokracuje-prve-dotacie-su-uz-vyplatene> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

¹⁵ “2020 climate & energy package,” European Commission, 2021. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020_en (accessed on February 16, 2021).

as this sector is responsible for 75 per cent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), and setting and enacting these three targets has meant that energy policy has become fully merged with climate policy.¹⁶

Since then the EU has been gradually pushing the climate agenda and has committed itself to a fully decarbonized economy and climate neutrality. In December 2019 the European Council endorsed the objective of EU climate neutrality by 2050, in line with the Paris Agreement. The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to a decline in EU emissions, the largest relative fall since the World War II – albeit temporarily induced by the restrictive measures – and for the first time RES generated electricity slightly surpassed fossil fuel generated electricity.¹⁷

In January 2020 the European Parliament endorsed the net-zero GHG emissions objective in its resolution on the European Green Deal. In March the EU submitted its long-term climate strategy to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The EU leaders at the December summit in Brussels agreed on an emissions decrease of at least 55 per cent on 1990 levels by 2030, toughening the existing 40 per cent target. The target needs approval from the European Parliament, which supports a more ambitious 60 per cent cut as part of a wider vote on the proposed European Climate Law¹⁸ introduced by the Commission in March.

In February 2020 the Slovak government adopted a low-carbon strategy, “Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a View to 2050.”¹⁹ The strategy was developed under the environment ministry headed by László Sólymos and analyzes the necessary measures in the energy sector, industry, transport, agriculture and waste management required to

achieve climate neutrality by 2050. However, the strategy points out that further emission reductions will require high investment costs, as the cheaper technologies have already been “exhausted.”

The most controversial agenda for Slovakia is the deployment of RES. The original Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) establishes an overall policy for the production and promotion of RES generated energy. It ensures that each member state contributes to the EU's overall target of a 20 per cent RES share of gross final energy consumption. The starting point for each country varies, with fair allocation, different starting points and potential, including existing energy mix and level of RES based energy, being taken into account.²⁰

Slovakia is committed to achieving an RES share of 14 per cent. While at the beginning of 2020 it seemed that there was no way the country could meet this goal as it had an RES share of around 12 per cent,²¹ the situation changed rapidly once the figures on biomass use were corrected, the 16 per cent threshold was surpassed. The correction was down to a change in the methodology used to calculate biomass use to include households and small companies, which had not previously been part of the official statistics and Eurostat reporting.²²

The fact that Slovakia was able to make this rapid turnaround and surpass the target raises concerns as to whether the country will be willing to take additional measures or even to set more ambitious targets for 2030 (enacted through the Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001/EU) rather than satisfying itself with the current figures. Currently, progress is questionable as on the one hand the economy ministry has already announced that Slovakia will easily meet its 2030 target so the priority should be focusing on paying

¹⁶ J. Vogler, “Changing conceptions of climate and energy security in Europe,” *Environmental Politics* Vol. 22, No. 4, 2013, pp. 627–45.

¹⁷ “Landmark moment as EU renewables overtake fossil fuels,” EMBER, 2021. Available online: <https://ember-climate.org/project/eu-power-sector-2020/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

¹⁸ F. Simon, “EU Parliament votes for 60% carbon emissions cut by 2030,” *Euractiv*, October 7, 2020. Available online: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-parliament-votes-for-60-carbon-emissions-cut-by-2030/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

¹⁹ “Nízkouhlíková stratégia rozvoja Slovenskej republiky do roku 2030 s výhľadom do roku 2050,” [Low-carbon development strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a view to 2050] Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://www.enviroportal.sk/en/eia/detail/nizkoughlikova-strategia-rozvoja-sr-do-roku-2030-s-vyhľadom-do-roku-205> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

²⁰ “Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources,” European Commission, 2009. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009L0028> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

²¹ “Share of renewable energy in the EU up to 18.0%,” Eurostat, 2020. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10335438/8-23012020-AP-EN.pdf/292cf2e5-8870-4525-7ad7-188864ba0c29> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

²² I. Jenčová, “Analytička SHMÚ: Čísla o spotrebe biomasy nesedeli už roky, nikoho to nezaujímalo,” [Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute analyst: Figures on biomass consumption have not been right for years, no one was interested] *Euractiv*, January 29, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/energetika/interview/analyticka-shmu-cisla-o-spotrebe-biomasy-nesedeli-uz-roky-nikoho-to-nezaujímalo/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

existing debts,²³ but on the other hand the ministerial state secretaries Karol Galek and Michal Kiča support higher renewables deployment.²⁴

At the end of 2020 the EU thus entered its new ten-year period of climate and energy goals. Under the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action (EU) 2018/1999, EU countries are required to draft national energy and climate plans (NECPs) for 2021–2030, outlining how they will meet the new 2030 targets for decarbonization, RES and energy efficiency. At the end of 2019 Slovakia submitted its plan drawn up by the economy ministry under then Minister Peter Žiga.

In October 2020 the European Commission critically assessed the plan and considered it insufficiently ambitious, stating that “most of the policies and measures lack details on the exact scope of the measure.”²⁵ The Slovak NECP was further criticized for not being clear on the funding sources for the required investments; for lacking specific national objectives for research and innovation, energy poverty measures and specific measures for the just transition; and for being unambitious in expanding RES use and on energy efficiency measures. Slovakia set its 2030 target to a 19.2 per cent RES share of final energy consumption instead of the 24 per cent recommended by the Commission. Given that Slovakia corrected its reporting of biomass use in 2020, the target is easily reachable and should be increased substantially under the 2023 revision of the NECP that applies to all member states.

Similarly, there is a lack of ambition in energy efficiency measures. Although Slovakia claims that energy efficiency is the priority, there is a lack of information on how the measures will be applied in practice – the national contribution for energy efficiency in 2030 is set at 15.7 Mtoe for primary energy and 10.3 Mtoe for final energy. Moreover, there is no long-term renovation strategy for buildings, which should number among the core measures.

²³ T. Grečko, “Najprv splatíme dlhy, povedal Sulík a stopol dotácie na nové zelené elektrárne,” [First, we will repay the debts, Sulík said, and stop subsidies for new green power plants] *DenníkN*, February 2, 2021. Available online: https://e.dennikn.sk/2256984/najprv-splatime-dlhy-povedal-sulik-a-stopol-dotacie-na-nove-zelene-elektrarne/?utm_source=spravyaktualne.sk&utm_medium=media-like&utm_campaign=prehlad-sprav (accessed on February 16, 2021).

²⁴ “Diskusia Obnoviteľné zdroje: Má Slovensko na viac?” [Discussion on renewable energy resources: Could Slovakia go higher?] *Euractiv*, February 26, 2021. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/energetika/video/diskusie-obnovitelne-zdroje-ma-slovensko-na-viac/> (accessed on March 5, 2021).

²⁵ “Assessment of the final national energy and climate plan of Slovakia,” European Commission, 2020. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/staff_working_document_assessment_necp_slovakia.pdf (accessed on February 16, 2021).

The environment ministry headed by Ján Budaj announced support for energy efficiency measures (home insulations, replacing heating sources, exchanges, windows, etc.) of up to € 25,000 per house.²⁶ This program will replace the old subsidy program for replacing old solid fuel furnaces with natural gas boilers that was announced at the beginning of 2020 by then Minister László Sólymos. The program failed owing to the almost complete absence of applications.

■ Green investments: Recovery and Resilience Plan

The Covid-19 pandemic was perceived as an opportunity for the EU institutions to speed up green investments and the leaders agreed on the Recovery and Resilience Facility – the centerpiece of Next Generation EU, a temporary recovery instrument – that will make €672.5 billion available in loans and grants to support reforms and investments in the member countries. The unprecedented funding reserves of 37 per cent for spending on climate-friendly measures is chiefly aimed at mitigating the economic and social impact of the pandemic. To benefit from the support, member states have to draw up Recovery and Resilience Plans setting out a coherent package of reforms and public investment projects to be implemented by 2026.²⁷ It should be noted, however, that the post-crisis green economic recovery crisis is not a brand new idea for the EU. Already in 2008, the European Commission was able to combine its climate-change agenda with a discourse of economic renewal by proposing “Europe 2020: A Strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth,” acknowledging that climate change and energy are one of

²⁶ “J. Budaj pripravil energetickú obnovu rodinných domov,” [J. Budaj has drawn up energy renovations for houses] Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.enviroportal.sk/clanok/j-budaj-pripravil-energeticku-obnovu-rodinnych-domov> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

²⁷ “The Recovery and Resilience Facility,” European Commission, 2021. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en (accessed on February 16, 2021).

the key priorities of EU policies until 2020 and emphasizing the deployment of clean technologies.²⁸ However, this time the financial package is unprecedented and allows countries to invest in green technologies and policies over a relatively short period and undertake reforms needed to mitigate the pandemic consequences and to “prepare the EU economies for a sustainable, digital future.”²⁹

In Slovakia the plan is being drawn up by the Finance Ministry under Minister Eduard Heger. However, green policies are a cross-sectoral agenda requiring close cooperation between ministries. Slovakia published the main takeaways from the draft plan in December 2020, focusing on five reform priorities: education, research and innovations, healthcare, public administration and digitalization, and the green economy. According to the first draft the €1.9 billion earmarked for green policies is to be allocated to the deployment of renewable energy sources and grids (€100 million), green building renovations (€700 million), modernization of the railways (€700 million), the decarbonization of industry and alternative fuels (€400 million).³⁰ However, the plan was criticized for not containing measures on agriculture, waste management, cycle networks and biodiversity protection.³¹ The finance ministry has been working with other ministries on adjustments so the final version can be sent to the Commission in April 2021.

²⁸ “EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth,” European Commission, 2010. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52010DC2020> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

²⁹ “Covid-19 recovery: how the main EU instrument will work,” European Parliament, 2021. Available online: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20210128STO96608/covid-19-recovery-how-the-main-eu-instrument-will-work> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

³⁰ “Predstavujeme ďalšie detaily Plánu obnovy,” [We present further details of the Recovery Plan] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/media/tlacove-spravy/predstavujeme-dalsie-detaily-planu-obnovy.html> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

³¹ M. Hudec, “V pláne obnovy chýbajú odpady aj agrosektor. Ako chce vláda ozeleniť Slovensko?” [The recovery plan has nothing on waste and the agricultural sector. How does the government want to green Slovakia?] *Euractiv*, December 23, 2020. Available online: <https://euractiv.sk/section/ekonomika-a-euro/news/v-plane-obnovy-chyba-voda-odpady-aj-agrosektor-ako-chce-vlada-ozelenit-slovensko/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

■ Cities, citizens and climate change

Climate policy and the pursuit of climate neutrality have entered public discourse as well. In October a petition signed by more than 120,000 people was delivered to the Slovak parliament. Organized by *The Climate Needs You* the petition called on the parliament to speed up the green transition by declaring a climate emergency, achieve climate neutrality by 2040, draft a low carbon strategy for 2040 outlining the steps to be taken and support stricter climate goals at the EU level aiming for a 65 per cent cut in emissions by 2030.³² It is expected that these demands will be discussed in parliament in March 2021. The initiative is supported by the environment minister Ján Budaj who is in favor of declaring a climate emergency and considers it a “strong political gesture” that would have the potential to mobilize environmental awareness among the public, politicians and businesses.³³

Under public pressure to adopt more ambitious climate measures, the municipalities have been taking steps towards the green transition. In June 2020 the mayors of the Visegrad capital cities – Bratislava (Matúš Vallo), Budapest (Gergely Karácsony), Prague (Zdeněk Hřib) and Warsaw (Rafał Trzaskowski) – sent an open letter to the Council of the EU emphasizing the central role of cities in the ecological transformation. The mayors urged the EU to set a more ambitious emissions reduction target for 2030, and referred to the escalating climate crisis as a greater challenge than the coronavirus pandemic. The mayors called for an EU agreement to reduce emissions by at least 55 per cent of 1990 levels by 2030 and asked for EU measures to support the cities’ climate action.³⁴

³² “Klíma ťa potrebuje,” [The climate needs you] 2020. Available online: <https://www.klimatapotrebuje.sk/> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

³³ “Vyhlásením klimatickej núdze by sa podľa Hrbáňa definovali úlohy pre vládu,” [According to Hrbáň, declaring a climate emergency would determine the government’s tasks] *Sme*, January 22, 2021. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22579229/vyhlasenim-klimatickej-nudze-by-sa-podla-hrbana-definovali-ulohy-pre-vladu.html> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

³⁴ “Mayors of central European capitals call for tougher EU climate goals,” *Reuters*, June 17, 2021. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/eu-climate-v4/mayors-of-central-european-capitals-call-for-tougher-eu-climate-goals-idINL8N2DU3H5> (accessed on February 16, 2021).

As the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed, municipalities are key partners in the implementation of effective solutions and that will apply to climate policies as well. The Slovak NECP suggests the focus should be on developing and implementing green policies and measures at the regional level by establishing a network of regional (sustainable) energy centers and considers these “one of the most important in terms of meeting energy efficiency objectives.”³⁵ These centers would primarily focus on supporting and improving energy efficiency in public administration, but also on building capacities for high quality energy planning at the strategic planning level for regions, towns and municipalities. The European Commission considers regional energy centers an example of best practice; however, the timeframe for opening the centers and the financing have yet to be clarified.

■ Future challenges

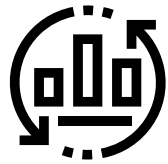
The Covid-19 pandemic has temporarily had a positive effect on emissions, which fell sharply under the strict lockdown measures, but as previous crises have shown there is a risk that countries could return to their business-as-usual mode. To prevent such a risk the EU has decided to use the economic and social crisis caused by the pandemic as an opportunity for the green recovery and has approved an unprecedented amount of funding that will allow member countries to invest in green projects in return for reforms. Slovakia has been supportive of the EU’s climate policies, but whether these are successfully implemented is questionable. For years the country has adopted an ambiguous position on the deployment of renewable energy sources and there is still no clear vision on this. But deployment is key not only in the electricity and heating sectors, but also for the production of hydrogen, which become a talking point in Slovak policy discourse only last year. Hydrogen may be a new (and controversial) theme in decarbonization discussions, but old issues, such as poor air quality, have not disappeared. For Slovakia, it is crucial

- to work more intensively on clean transport measures by focusing on developing integrated regional transport systems with rail transport as

³⁵ “Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021 to 2030,” European Commission, 2020. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/sk_final_necp_main_en.pdf (accessed on February 16, 2021).

- the backbone and on developing a denser network of charging stations to speed up electromobility;
- to apply complex measures to improve energy efficiency in the public building sector and adopt a long-term strategy on building renovations;
- to introduce an operable definition of energy poverty and target specific measures at these group to improve standards of living and reduce emissions from individual heating systems.





Priorities of Slovakia's foreign policy



Tomáš Strážay

The newcomers versus the old guard? Regional cooperation in Central Europe

Central Europe is the most important region in terms of Slovakia's interests. It can also be considered its natural sphere when seeking coalition partners to help promote Slovakia's interests in the EU (and NATO). Slovakia is one of Central Europe's most integrated EU members, alongside Austria and Slovenia, partly because it is a eurozone member. Hence, there is no format of regional cooperation involving Slovakia in which all countries are integrated to the same degree. This is indicative of some of the differences between the countries in the region. Nonetheless, Central Europe, and especially the close neighborhood remain important to Slovakia – and not just geographically.

Structural differences mean Slovakia has to sensitively balance its strategic interest in deepening European integration against cooperation with the countries in the region, including through various regional initiatives. In 2020, new regional initiatives emerged among the existing ones in Central Europe that Slovakia is directly involved in. Although in the current government program manifesto, adopted following the February 2020 elections, Slovakia's continued active involvement in the Visegrad Four is seen as a natural means of enhancing regional cooperation, emphasis is also placed on "developing partnerships with other states and regional groupings."¹ Therefore, the primary focus of this analysis is on the Visegrad Four (V4), the Central European regional format in which Slovakia is most involved; the Slavkov Three (S3), a fast developing initiative; and the Central Five (C5), which is the most recent format. Other formats and instruments of cooperation are also briefly mentioned.

¹ "Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky na obdobie rokov 2020–2024," [Government Program Manifesto for 2020–2024] Government of the Slovak Republic, May 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/zakon&ZakZbo-rID=13&CisObdobia=8&CPT=68> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

■ C5

The Central Five (C5) format, consisting of Slovakia, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia, is the most recently established regional initiative in Central Europe. It is an informal initiative aimed at intensifying dialogue with participating countries on joint areas of interest. In 2020, the main topic of discussion was coordinating the activities of the five countries in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences. The first meeting took place just after the easing of the pandemic restrictions in June 2020 and was initiated by Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg.² The second ministerial meeting, which took place in Budapest in July, was mainly concerned with the opening of the borders in relation to the pandemic. Other issues discussed included financial matters, such as the EU's new Multi-annual financial framework.³ The pandemic and its impact on Central European countries remained the main focus of two other ministerial meetings in the C5 format, which were organized in 2020 in Ljubljana (September) and as an online conference (in November). During an online meeting with his counterparts the Slovak Foreign Minister, Ivan Korčok, spoke highly of the assistance provided by Austria and Hungary during the mass coronavirus testing in Slovakia in the last weekend of October as an example of the good neighborly relations between these countries.⁴ The pandemic and the counter-measures were also the subject of discussions in other regional formats, including the V4 and S3, which raises the question of whether it

² "Ivan Korčok in Vienna with the ministers of foreign affairs of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 16, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset_publisher/oLViwP07vPxv/content/i-korcok-vo-viedni-s-ministrami-zahranicnych-veci-rakuska-ceska-madarska-a-slovenska/10182?p_auth=Xd6h55w5 (accessed on February 25, 2021).

³ "Minister Ivan Korčok holds talks in Budapest with partners from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria and Slovenia," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, July 14, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/ministry/minister/activities/-/asset_publisher/nNnVuDsSsgB1/content/minister-ivan-korcok-v-budapesti-rokoval-s-partnermi-z-madarska-ceska-rakuska-a-slovenska/10182?_101_INSTANCE_nNnVuDsSsgB1_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fminister%2Fminister%2Factivities (accessed on February 25, 2021).

⁴ "Minister Ivan Korčok meets with the ministers of foreign affairs of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia to discuss the current pandemic situation," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, November 6, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-i-korcok-rokoval-s-ministrami-zahranicnych-veci-rakuska-ceska-madarska-a-slovenska-a-aktualnej-pandemickej-situacii/10182 (accessed on February 25, 2021).

was necessary to establish a new format of cooperation. The C5 platform provides few new opportunities for Slovakia, but is probably more important for Austria, as the C5 format could be considered a platform for cooperation with all four Eastern neighbors. Another country for which the C5 may bring real added value is Slovenia, as this is the first regional platform of which it is a full member.

■ S3

In 2020, it became clear that Slovakia aims to be increasingly active as an initiator in the Slavkov Triangle. It is a useful platform for developing ties (in sectoral cooperation as well) with neighboring Austria and the Czech Republic. With the Covid-19 pandemic, this format became even more important for the coordination of the Czech, Austrian and Slovak borders. Indeed, in the first wave, the most intensive coordination occurred in this format.⁵ The S3 deputy foreign ministers met with their French counterpart to discuss the most important challenges at the EU level, such as the pandemic, Brexit, the Conference on the Future of Europe, and the EU budget and rule of law. The "sherpas" also discussed the EU–Western Balkans summit and confirmed their readiness to assist the region in tackling the pandemic and its consequences, and with EU integration.⁶ The focus of the meeting between the deputy foreign ministers in June, where Slovakia handed over its S3 presidency

⁵ Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok underlined the importance of the coordination of steps with Austria and Czech Republic at the meeting with his Czech and Austrian counterpart in May 2020. "Slovakia in favor of intense cooperation with the Czech Republic and Austria within the Slavkov Format," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 19, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/slovensko-je-za-intenzivnu-spolupracu-s-ceskom-a-rakuskom-v-slavkovskom-formate/10182 (accessed on February 24, 2021).

⁶ "Video conference of S3 sherpas and France," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 13, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/videokonferencia-serpov-s3-a-francuzska/10182?p_auth=SjGcvz1E (accessed on February 24, 2021).

to Austria, was on the Western Balkans and the post-pandemic period.⁷ The S3 prime ministers meeting was on border management and, as it took place just before the second wave, the prime ministers made a commitment to leave the borders open as long as possible. Slovak Prime Minister Igor Matovič used the opportunity to officially invite his Austrian counterpart, Sebastian Kurz, to visit Slovakia.⁸ Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok initiated the establishment of a regular platform for exchanging opinions with his Czech and Austrian counterparts on foreign and EU related issues, aimed at finding constructive solutions to joint challenges, especially at the EU level. Korčok also stressed that the S3 format was open to other EU countries.⁹

Given the nature and focus of the S3, Slovak governments had never previously considered it a competitor or even substitute for the Visegrad Group. Compared to the V4, the Slavkov format is even more heterogeneous, partly because the Czech Republic and Slovakia are NATO members, while Austria adopts a position of neutrality. Today, the tendency is to favor the S3 format for discussing EU related issues (at the expense of the V4), since both the Czech Republic and Austria are considered more like-minded countries on this than Hungary and Poland are. The extent to which this tendency strengthens, will, however, depend on the willingness of Austria and Czech Republic to invest in the format, but also on developments in the region generally.

⁷ "Martin Klus symbolically hands over the Presidency of the Slavkov Format to Austria," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 30, 2020. Available online: https://www.foreign.gov.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-symbolicky-odovzdal-predsednictvo-slavkovskeho-formatu-rakusku/10182?p_auth=Kn1nlzft (accessed on February 24, 2021).

⁸ "Hranice medzi SR, Českom a Rakúskom zostávajú otvorené, uistil I. Matovič," [The borders of Slovakia, Czechia and Austria remain open, Matovič assures] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, September 9, 2020. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/hranice-medzi-sr-ceskom-a-rakuskom-zostavaju-otvorene-uistil-i-matovic/> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

⁹ "Minister I. Korčok: Slovensko, Česko a Rakúsko sa dohodli na intenzívnej a pravidelnej spolupráci v rámci Slavkovského formátu," [Slovakia, Czechia and Austria agree on intensive and regular cooperation] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 21, 2021. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/minister-i-korcok-slovensko-cesko-a-rakusko-sa-dohodli-na-intenzivnej-a-pravidelnej-spolupraci-v-ramci-slavkovskeho-formatu?p_auth=0xJlu3b5&_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D0 (accessed on February 24, 2021).

■ V4

V4 is the oldest of the regional initiatives analyzed in this section. Thirty years of cooperation in the V4 format has resulted in the existence of multiple ties and contacts on different levels in both the governmental and non-governmental spheres.¹⁰ Although the V4 countries have been considered traditional coalition partners on many EU-related issues, some are more integrated into the EU than others. This – and differences in policy preferences – limit V4 policy coherence. On the other hand, it allows for cooperation in other regional formats, which can be combined with ad hoc coalitions with non-Central European EU members.

The V4 is the most widely used platform in terms of the number of meetings, including high level meetings. One of the highlights last year was the online summit between the prime ministers of the V4 countries with the German chancellor Angela Merkel, organized under the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group. The summit was held just one day after the launch of the Recovery Fund by Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, a new instrument for tackling the economic consequences of the pandemic.¹¹ The Recovery Fund and the conditions under which the member states will have access to the allocated funding was widely discussed at another V4 prime ministers summit, in Lednice in June. At that time the V4 leaders declared joint support for the EU's efforts to overcome the crisis and welcomed the creation of the Recovery Fund, while stressing that the money should be fairly distributed among the EU member states. Later on, as it became obvious

¹⁰ In relation to this, it is worth mentioning the new online pandemic platform and the platform for the exchange of information and know how. See, for instance, "Martin Klus: new online platform of the V4 countries is already working and will make it easier for us to share know-how in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 9, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/cgkrakow-en/detail/-/asset_publisher/XptbLMYwZmJ6/content/martin-klus-nova-online-platforma-krajin-v4-uz-funguje-ulahci-nam-zdielanie-know-how-v-boji-proti-pandemii-koronavirusu/10182?p_auth=AADSKYa2&_101_INSTANCE_XptbLMYwZmJ6_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fcgkrakow-en%2F (accessed on February 24, 2021).

¹¹ "Predseda vlády SR I. Matovič na videosummite lídrov V4 s nemeckou kancelárkou," [The Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic Igor Matovič at a V4 video summit with the German Chancellor] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 19, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/varsava-en/detail/-/asset_publisher/XptbLMYwZmJ6/content/predseda-vlady-sr-i-matovic-na-videosummite-lidrov-v4-s-nemeckou-kancelarkou/10182?p_auth=dpy4BL4g (accessed on February 24, 2021).

that upholding the rule of law would become integral to the allocation of the fund's resources, Hungary and Poland decided to veto both the Recovery Package and the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027. Their decision raised further questions about the split within the V4, the meaningfulness of the group, and its added value for Slovakia. Bratislava, did not – and does not – have a problem with the rule of law condition. The priority was to approve the budget and the Recovery Package so that Slovakia could access the allocated funds without delay. The remaining 24 EU members – including the Czech Republic – shared the same position, so Hungary and Poland were alone in blocking the agreement. Minister Ivan Korčok publicly declared his intention to convince his Polish and Hungarian counterparts to push for their countries to change position, while stressing that Slovakia saw the rule of law issue differently from Hungary and Poland.¹² As both countries withdrew their veto, the Prime Minister, Igor Matovič, spoke welcomingly of the consensus on both the budget and Recovery Package. In reference to the Visegrad cooperation, he ensured that Slovakia would not be the “slave of V4,” but where Slovakia agreed with joint positions those would be supported. He also noted the geographical closeness of the V4 countries and social proximity of their populations.¹³ However, after the “veto,” calls for Slovakia to draw a sharper line between it and the V4 brand strengthened. Tomáš Valášek, then chair of the Slovak parliament's European Affairs Committee, openly asked for a “divorce” from the other V4 countries and new coalition partners.¹⁴ This was a personal view though, not an official statement.

¹² “Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Ivan Korčok: ‘The veto by Poland and Hungary complicates the agreement about the budget and the recovery plan in the EU. However, this is not the end of the negotiations,’” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, November 17, 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-veto-polska-a-madarska-komplikuje-dohodu-o-rozpocte-a-plane-obnovy-v-eu-nie-je-to-v/10182 (accessed on February 24, 2021).

¹³ “Premiér: Pri dohode o rozpočte EÚ a fonde obnovy boli na konci všetci víťazmi,” [Prime Minister: The agreement on the EU budget and the recovery fund is a win-win result] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, December 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/premier-pri-dohode-o-rozpocte-eu-a-fonde-obnovy-boli-na-konci-vsetci-vitazmi/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

¹⁴ “Valášek: Vyšehradské manželstvo sa nevydarilo, je čas na odluku a aj nových partnerov (podcast),” [Valášek: The Visegrad marriage is not a success. It is time to separate and seek new partners] *Aktuality.sk*, November 20, 2020. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/841922/valasek-vysehradske-manzelstvo-sa-nevydarilo-je-cas-na-odluku-a-novych-partnerov-podcast/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

The V4 prime ministers also reacted to the developments in Russia and Belarus. At the September summit in Lublin, Poland, they condemned the attempt to poison Russian opposition leader Alexander Navalny and asked for an independent investigation of the case. In relation to Belarus, they highlighted the importance of free and fair elections and supported the right of the people of Belarus to choose their representatives. They also called for a strategic approach and for future steps to be debated within the EU.¹⁵

On the ministerial level, besides the usual V4 meetings and V4+ ministerials with the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries,¹⁶ and the Nordic and Baltic states (NB8),¹⁷ particular attention was paid to the teleconference with the German foreign minister and meeting with the French foreign minister in Bratislava.¹⁸ While the V4 is the only regional format that systematically cooperates with the Western Balkans region and the V4+WB ministerials are regularly attended by the EU's high representatives, the continuous dialogue with Germany is important partly because of the significance of Germany for the V4 economies (and vice versa), but primarily because of Germany's role in shaping the EU and EU policies. In this sense, the V4+France format is complementary. It also shows that despite the

¹⁵ See “Premiéri V4 vyzvali Rusko, aby dôkladne vyšetrilo údajnú otravu Navalného,” [V4 prime ministers call upon Russia to thoroughly investigate the alleged poisoning of Navalny] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, September 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/premieri-v4-vyzvali-rusko-aby-dokladne-vysetrilo-udajnu-otravu-navalneho/> (accessed on February 24, 2021) and “Lidri V4 volajú po strategickom prístupe k Bielorusku,” [V4 leaders call for a strategic approach towards Belarus] Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, September 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/lidri-v4-volaju-po-strategickom-pristupe-k-bielorusku/> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

¹⁶ “Meeting of the foreign ministers of the V4 countries and the Western Balkans,” Visegrad Group, February 28, 2020. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/the-meeting-of-the-200323> (accessed on February 24, 2021); “V4 foreign ministers discussed the future of the Eastern Partnership,” Visegrad Group, April 9, 2020. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/v4-foreign-ministers-200409> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

¹⁷ “Videokonferencia ministrov zahraničných vecí formátu V4+NB8,” [Video conference of the V4+NB8 foreign ministers] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 3, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/vsetky_spravy/-/asset_publisher/Rp-2fPY0svzsu/content/videokonferencia-ministrov-zahranicnych-veci-formatu-v4-nb8?p_auth=ro58xixh&_101_INSTANCE_Rp2fPY0svzsu_redirect=/ (accessed on February 24, 2021).

¹⁸ “Teleconference of foreign ministers of the V4 countries and Germany,” Visegrad Group, March 13, 2020. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/teleconference-of> (accessed on February 24, 2021); “Rokovanie ministrov zahraničných vecí krajín V4 a Francúzska,” [V4 foreign ministers' negotiations with their French counterpart] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 10, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/ministerstvo/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/rokovanie-ministrov-zahranicnych-veci-krajin-v4-a-francuzska?p_auth=B0oJR7Zr (accessed on February 24, 2021).

V4's worsening reputation within the EU, both Germany and France intend to continue dialogue with it, which is important from the Slovak perspective as well.

While the Visegrad Group celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2021, the 20th anniversary of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) was in 2020. The IVF is the V4's only standing institution and plays a crucial, especially in the non-political dimension of Visegrad cooperation. Through its various grants and mobility programs, the IVF has supported people-to-people contacts, expert networks and civil society organizations in the Visegrad region, but also beyond, especially in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. In the last 20 years, the IVF has supported more than 6,000 projects to a total of €100 million. The role the IVF plays in strengthening regional cooperation is of special value to Slovakia, partly because it is the only international organization based in Bratislava.¹⁹

■ Other cooperation formats

As mentioned in the introduction, several new names have appeared “on the list” of existing regional initiatives in the last couple of years – apart from the S3 and C5, there is the Three Seas Initiative (TSI) and the 17+1 format. All four are newcomers and are still crystalizing.

Slovakia is (just) a regular member of these groups and has no obvious intention of changing its status. This applies to more complex formats like the Central European Initiative (CEI), which actually is even older than the V4, as well as more sector-oriented initiatives, such as the Bucharest Nine (B9) or the Central European Defense Cooperation (CEDC). The Salzburg Forum has a more specific position, especially on migration issues. The Three Seas Initiative's biggest promotor is Poland, and although it was originally a presidential initiative, its outreach has increased in the last two years. For Slovakia, TSI's added value lies in sectoral cooperation, especially transport

¹⁹ “Medzinárodný vyšehradský fond – regionálna organizácia s globálnym dosahom,” [International Visegrad Fund – a regional organization with global reach] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 26, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/medzinarodny-vysehradsky-fond-regionalna-organizacia-s-globalnym-dosahom?p_p_auth=bazkryRq (accessed on February 24, 2021).

infrastructure, energy and digitalization.²⁰ The 17+1 format, initiated by China, could be seen more as a forum for the exchange of information between China and the CEE countries than a viable regional cooperation format that can bring tangible results. One of the reasons for that is perhaps its diversity, as it encompasses both EU members and countries from different geographical subregions aspiring to EU membership. Besides, the Slovak government considers the EU–China dialogue to be the most appropriate tool for communication with China.²¹

Some stakeholders in Slovakia would argue that ad-hoc thematic coalitions are the future of policymaking on the EU level, so geographic criteria should not be a decisive factor. There is a certain logic behind this view, but nonetheless Slovakia's performance in the V4 (and in other regional initiatives) would suggest otherwise. Since the V4 format is more a coalition of the willing than a political bloc, the individual countries can make their own choices regarding preferred partners of cooperation in different fields and issues. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the V4 countries have – and will have – joint interests, which can be pursued more efficiently through the existing V4 framework.

²⁰ “Videokonferencia ministrov zahraničných vecí krajín Trojmorja,” [Video conference of the Three Seas Initiative foreign ministers] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, June 30, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/vsetky_spravy/-/asset_publisher/Rp2fPY0svzsu/content/-videokonferencia-ministrov-zahranicnych-veci-krajin-trojmorja?p_p_auth=XdB1Qo68&_101_INSTANCE_Rp2fPY0svzsu_redirect=/ (accessed on February 25, 2021).

²¹ Slovak Prime Minister Igor Matovič, who represented Slovakia at the last (online) 17+1 summit held on February 9th, called this format of cooperation a “supplement” to the EU–China dialogue that continues to be the “main pillar” of Slovak–Chinese cooperation. See “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 with an open mind and cooperation can relations advance] 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 February 25, 2021).

■ Multiplication or inflation of formats?

In principle, it would be beneficial if the joint interests Slovakia shares with its partners in the Central European region are pursued through a number of instruments. In that case, the V4, which is the oldest and most viable group, could co-exist in parallel with other formats of regional cooperation. The S3 seems to have added value for Slovakia's foreign policy and especially European policy, since it can foster cooperation with Austria through it. On the other hand, the TSI format remains an ongoing challenge for Slovakia. As cooperation has intensified in selected sectors and new instruments have been set up, Bratislava is having to pay more attention to this initiative and will need to keep abreast of it.

All the remaining formats are either too narrowly oriented, especially when it comes to specific sectors (B9), stagnating (CEI, especially following Austria's departure) or too new to know what the long-term added value (C5) might be. The 17+1 format is different again, since its short history shows that it is not easy (even for China) to maintain a productive dialogue with such a numerous and diverse group of countries.

The V4 presents several challenges that have not had an appropriate response. Although it was primarily a political initiative, when established on the initiative of the leaders of then Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, it has since gradually spilled over into other dimensions and focused on different areas and sectors. The establishment of the International Visegrad Fund was an important moment, opening up the V4 to the non-governmental sphere. Up until 2015, more or less, the balance between the political and non-political aspects of Visegrad was maintained. The emergence of the migration crisis and related opportunities for self-presentation brought the prime ministers to the forefront and made them the "faces" of Visegrad. This shift led to the V4 being externally perceived as a blocking coalition that undermines EU decision making. This reputation has also had an impact on the coalition potential of V4, which can be considered another problem for V4. The fact that the political level represents only a part of the Visegrad mosaic, albeit monitored most intensively by the media, remains mostly unnoticed by external observers. The bigger part of the Visegrad "iceberg" remains underwater – the contacts and cooperation between civil servants at the middle and lower levels and between experts, academics, artists, students and so forth. Visegrad is built more on informal institutions and ties than on formal structures, which

is also why this group has been able to overcome difficulties. By maintaining an informal form of cooperation, it can focus exclusively (and yes, selectively) on areas of common interest while "ignoring" problematic issues.

Another problem is that the V4 countries have had increasingly different perceptions of Visegrad cooperation and their role in it. Although the differences are not so obvious at the summits of the high representatives of the V4 countries and in the declarations, a more in-depth examination shows that the V4 countries differ in what they want to achieve with the V4 trademark, and what purposes they think it should serve. Hungary is a good example, as it would like to apply the Musketeer "one for all, all for one" approach to the V4, but that is not really favored by the other V4 partners. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán – and other too – often uses the V4 for his own individual and domestic political purposes.

The different perceptions of the V4 and differences in individual country preferences frequently result in the creation of micro-coalitions inside the V4 – be they the Czech–Slovak or the Polish–Hungarian tandem. Such cleavages nevertheless weaken Visegrad cooperation generally. Last but not least, some of the other regional initiatives were only established in the last decade, so it is more difficult to identify the V4's added value, at least at first glance.

Nevertheless, regional cooperation is no beauty contest. All of the formats mentioned above could continue to exist side by side, but it would be wasteful to invest energy in all of them. Some degree of prioritization is necessary. Avoiding creating new formats would seem sensible, otherwise the multiplication might turn into inflation. How and by which means Slovakia should be involved in regional cooperation in the future is, however, a question that requires more space than is available here. Nonetheless, some hints can be found in the lines above or between them.



Alexander Duleba

Slovakia's Eastern policy in 2020: good start with a bad end

On foreign policy the ruling coalition led by Igor Matovič, formed after the parliamentary elections in February 2020, returned to the strategic lines of previous governments led by Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998–2006) and Iveta Radičová (2010–2012). In its program manifesto it “reaffirmed the importance of membership of the EU and NATO as the best alternative for promoting Slovakia’s foreign policy interests.”¹ As President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová adheres to the same foreign policy lines, in 2020 Slovakia presented itself on the international scene, including in relations with Eastern European countries, as a country with clear readable attitudes. Compared to the two-track “pragmatic” eastern policy of the governments led by Robert Fico and Peter Pellegrini (2012–2020), including the servile pro-Russian attitudes of former Speaker of Parliament Andrej Danko (2016–2020), Matovič’s government has offered a reset of Slovakia’s eastern policy, bringing it back to the foundations laid by the anti-Mečiar opposition in the 1990 s and initially implemented by the two consecutive governments led by Mikuláš

¹ “Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky na obdobie rokov 2020–2024,” [Program Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the period of 2020–2024] National Council of the Slovak Republic, April 19, 2020, p. 106. Available online: <https://www.nrsk.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=477513> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

Dzurinda.² However, as it turned out, the restart of eastern policy fell victim to a government crisis that loomed faster than expected.

At first, in 2020, it looked like Matovič's government had shown that it wanted to start a new phase in Slovak eastern policy and distance itself from the ambiguities of the previous governments of Robert Fico and Peter Pellegrini. This was manifested in particular, first, by the elaboration of the new security and defense strategies, including the unambiguous naming of Slovakia's interests vis-à-vis the policies of Putin's Russia; second, by taking a clear political stance toward the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine; third, supporting the opposition in Belarus during the protests following the rigged presidential elections in August 2020; and last but not least, the visit of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky to Bratislava in September 2020, which was exceptional partly because it took place during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, at a time when official visits and meetings of political leaders were a rarity rather than the rule. It should be added that another important event in 2020, which had an impact on the changed constellation of the geopolitical architecture of the European part of the former USSR – the war over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia – was outside the reach of Slovak diplomacy, but also the EU's, as an actor in international relations. And finally, the national elections in Moldova and Georgia remained rather in the shadow of both foreign policy and the domestic debate in Slovakia,

² For a comparative analysis of the eastern policies of the Slovak governments led by Vladimír Mečiar (1992–1998), Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998–2006), Robert Fico (2006–2010) and Iveta Radičová (2010–2012) see A. Duleba, "Slovakia's relations with Russia and Eastern neighbours," in G. Fóti, Z. Ludvig, eds, *EU–Russian relations and the Eastern Partnership. Central-East European member-states interests and positions*, East European Studies No. 1, Budapest: Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2009, pp. 7–60; A. Duleba, B. Shmelev, "Slovak-Russian relations," in A. Zagorski, ed., *Russia and East Central Europe after the Cold War. A fundamentally transformed Partnership*, Prague: Human Rights Publishers, 2015, pp. 135–66. For an analysis of the eastern policies of Fico's and Pellegrini's governments (2012–2020) see A. Duleba, "Tri tváre slovenskej východnej politiky v roku 2015," [Three faces of Slovakia's eastern policy in 2015] in P. Brezáni, ed. *Ročenka zahraničnej politiky Slovenskej republiky 2015*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2016, pp. 85–100; A. Duleba, "The Janus-face of Slovakia's eastern policy in 2017," in P. Brezáni, ed. *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2017*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2018, pp. 71–86; and A. Duleba, "Slovakia's Eastern Policy in 2019: the ruling coalition in cacophony," in P. Brezáni, ed. *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2019*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2020, pp. 81–94.

which was preoccupied with the pandemic crisis. It can be stated that the implementation of the new government's foreign policy during 2020 on issues related to Slovakia's relations with Eastern European countries was in line with the government's program manifesto, including the revised security strategy. One could hardly have expected that the issues concerning Slovakia's eastern policy would become part of the growing tensions between the members of the governing coalition that were primarily caused by disagreements on how to deal with the pandemic crisis. Nevertheless, at the beginning of 2021, Prime Minister of Slovakia Igor Matovič's conduct, the purchase of the unauthorized (in the EU) Russian Sputnik V vaccine against Covid-19 as well as inappropriate jokes about Ukraine, raised questions about the credibility of his government's efforts to reset Slovakia's eastern policy. Moreover, the prime minister's arbitrary decision to buy the Russian vaccine triggered a government crisis. Two of the four coalition parties, *SaS* [Freedom and Solidarity] led by Richard Sulík and *Za ľudí* [For the People] led by Veronika Remišová, made their continued presence in the coalition conditional on Igor Matovič's resignation as prime minister.

At the same time, it should be noted that issues related to Slovakia's relations with Eastern neighbors have not ceased to be a dividing line in domestic politics. The parliamentary opposition, represented by *Smer-SD* [Direction-Social Democracy] led by Robert Fico, the extreme right *ĽSNS* [People's Party Our Slovakia] led by Marián Kotleba and a group of deputies around former Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, which split from *Smer-SD* after the elections to form *Hlas-SD* [Voice-Social Democracy], expressed dissenting views and criticized the foreign policy of the Matovič government throughout the year with perhaps the exception of the purchase of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine.

■ Reading Slovakia's interests in Eastern Europe vis-à-vis Russia

The Matovič government's program manifesto is quite brief on eastern policy. It contains one, sufficiently telling, goal that the new government wishes to pursue: "We will actively support Ukraine's transformation and European perspective and do not accept the violation of its territorial integrity. We will support an ambitious approach to the forthcoming EU cooperation program

with Eastern Partnership countries after 2020.”³ The goals and principles of Slovak foreign policy relating to Eastern Europe under the Matovič government are set out in a more elaborated form in the updated version of the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic.⁴

In response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, which started in 2014 and was accompanied by Russia spreading mass disinformation in an effort to weaken the democratic institutions of European countries, including EU and NATO unity, most of the member states of both organizations updated their security strategies to meet the new security challenges. A draft update of the Slovak security strategy had also been prepared by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) of the Slovak Republic under Minister Miroslav Lajčák in 2017, who, however, was unable to gain political support for its approval from the governments led by Robert Fico and Peter Pellegrini. Its approval was blocked by the leader of the then governing coalition party SNS [Slovak National Party] and the Speaker of Parliament, Andrej Danko.⁵ Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok together with his colleague Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad’ of the Matovič government prepared drafts of the new security strategy and new defense strategy several months after taking up office.⁶ Parliament approved both strategic planning documents at the end of January 2021.⁷

Among the main threats to Slovakia’s national security, the strategy lists the ongoing conflicts in Eastern Europe that require the constant attention of the country’s security and defense authorities.

³ “Programové vyhlásenie...,” op. cit., p. 107.

⁴ “Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky,” [Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic] Government of the Slovak Republic, February 10, 2021. Available online: https://www.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/8048_bezpecnostna-strategia-sr-2021.pdf (accessed on February 23, 2021).

⁵ For an analysis see A. Duleba, “Slovakia’s Eastern Policy in 2019: the ruling coalition in cacophony,” op. cit.

⁶ “Bezpečnostná aj Obranná stratégia SR sú predložené na pripomienkovanie,” [The Slovak security and defense strategies have been released for consultation] *TASR, Teraz.sk*, December 1, 2020. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/bezpecnostna-aj-obranna-strategia-sr/511388-clanok.html> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

⁷ “Parlament schválil po 16 rokoch novú bezpečnostnú stratégiu,” [Parliament approved a new security strategy after 16 years] *Sme*, January 28, 2021. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22583834/parlament-schvalil-po-16-rokoch-novu-bezpecnostnu-strategiu.html> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

We are witnessing the projection of power and territorial ambitions, the illegal use of force and violations of international law, the strengthening of military and non-military capabilities, political and economic stagnation and chronic instability in the region. The conflict in Georgia and eastern Ukraine caused by the aggressive behavior of the Russian Federation, as well as the illegal occupation of Crimea in Ukraine and the city of Sevastopol, violate international law and Russia’s obligations. The region of Eastern Europe is also a source of many potential threats to the Slovak Republic, including the possibility of armed attack, hybrid, cyber and intelligence operations, disinformation campaigns, organized crime, illegal proliferation of small arms and illegal migration.⁸

According to the Security Strategy, Slovakia

has recorded activities by foreign entities on its territory aimed at undermining the credibility of the public administration institutions as well as the democratic constitutional order. The most significant hybrid activity is the targeted dissemination of propaganda and disinformation against the democratic political system and anchoring of the Slovak Republic in NATO and the EU.⁹

The Security Strategy defines the main lines of Slovakia’s approach toward Russia as follows:

The Slovak Republic is interested in developing good relations with the Russian Federation ... because Russia ... is an important partner in addressing international threats and challenges, but at the same time, with its confrontational approach in the military, security and political spheres, it represents a major challenge for the security of our Euro-Atlantic area. Slovakia cannot ignore violations of the basic principles of international law, interference in the democratic processes of other states and efforts to weaken the foundations of the European security architecture, including the unity of NATO and the EU. The policy of the Slovak Republic towards Russia in the given circumstances is to continue seeking the crossover points of our common interests, but also an open critical dialogue on issues where our values and interests diverge, and will therefore support the application of restrictive measures.¹⁰

⁸ “Bezpečnostná stratégia...,” op. cit., pp. 5–6. [translated by the author]

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7. [translated by the author]

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 17. [translated by the author]

The very fact of naming Russia as a major challenge to both Slovakia's national security and the security of "our Euro-Atlantic area" is a new element of Slovak foreign policy which fundamentally distinguishes Matovič's government from the previous governments of Robert Fico and Peter Pellegrini. *ĽSNS* opposition MPs voted against the adoption of the new security and defense strategies. *Smer-SD* MPs led by Robert Fico and the splinter group of MPs around Peter Pellegrini (*Hlas-SD*) abstained from voting.¹¹ This was something of a surprise, especially in the case of the MPs around Peter Pellegrini, as he had, when prime minister (2018–2020), sided with the then Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák in his dispute with Andrej Danko, then leader of the *SNS* in the governing coalition over the adoption of the new security strategy.¹² However, as an opposition politician after the elections, Peter Pellegrini put tactical short-term politics against Matovič's government ahead of the country's long-term strategic interest.

Pellegrini thus confirmed his willingness to engage in foreign policy opportunism, which had also been in evidence three days before the parliamentary elections in February 2020, when he visited Russia as prime minister and at that time the political leader of *Smer-SD*. Despite politicians tending to deny it, official foreign visits during election campaigns are nothing other than a part of the election campaign. There were no urgent issues in bilateral relations with Russia that needed to be addressed at the prime ministerial level or by Pellegrini's meeting with President of Russia Vladimir Putin.¹³ In modern Slovak history, a similar journey was made to Moscow shortly before the parliamentary elections in 1998 by then Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. However, traveling to Moscow helped neither Mečiar in 1998 nor Pellegrini in 2020 to win parliamentary elections in Slovakia. Servile pro-Russian positions did not even help Andrej Danko in the 2020 elections, whose *SNS* party dropped out of the Slovak parliament.

¹¹ "Parlament schválil po 16 rokoch novú bezpečnostnú stratégiu," op. cit.

¹² For more see A. Duleba, "Slovakia's Eastern Policy in 2019: the ruling coalition in cacophony," op. cit.

¹³ M. Tóda, "Pellegriniho prijal v Moskve nový premier, cieľ bola pomoc pred voľbami, hovorí analytik Hirman," [Pellegrini was received by the new prime minister in Moscow, the goal was to get help before the election, says analyst Hirman] *DenníkN*, February 26, 2020. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/1774583/pellegriniho-prijal-v-moskve-novy-premier-ciel-bola-pomoc-pred-volbami-hovori-analytik-hirman/> (accessed on March 5, 2021).

Between the inauguration of the Matovič government and the purchasing of the Russian vaccine Sputnik V, there was a single event in bilateral relations with Russia in 2020 that deserves attention. In August, Slovakia expelled three Russian diplomats from its territory. The MFEA's decision was made on the basis of information from the Slovak intelligence services relating to the activities of the three Russian diplomats in Slovakia generally, which violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. As the ministry spokesperson Juraj Tomaga said, "in addition, visas issued at the Slovak Consulate General in St. Petersburg to a Russian citizen were misused to commit a serious crime on the territory of another NATO and EU member state."¹⁴

Although the MFEA did not provide further information on the relationship between the activities of the three Russian diplomats in Slovakia and the issuing of Slovak Schengen visas to a Russian citizen in St. Petersburg, the media appealed to the Bellingcat investigation portal, including some referencing sources in the Slovak authorities, and found that the expulsion of the Russian diplomats was related to the murder of Georgian citizen Zelimchan Changoshvili in Berlin in 2019, which, according to German prosecutor had been planned and organized by the Russian intelligence services. The shooter was a Russian citizen who was detained by German police after the assassination of Changoshvili. The killer's accomplice was a 39-year-old Russian citizen, Roman Davydov, who had crossed the Schengen border thanks to his Slovak visa. The visa had been issued to him by the Slovak Consulate General in St. Petersburg, despite the person in question having provided false information in the application, including his name and address. Minister Korčok promised to investigate how a Slovak visa came to be wrongfully issued to the accomplice in a murder in Germany and confirmed that the Slovak institutions would provide the German authorities with all the available information concerning the investigation of the case.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Slovensko vyhostilo troch ruských diplomatov," [Slovakia has expelled three Russian diplomats] *TASR*, August 10, 2020. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/559741-slovensko-vyhostilo-troch-ruskych-diplomatov/> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

¹⁵ M. Turček, "Slovensko vyhostilo troch ruských diplomatov. Mali pracovať pre ruské tajné služby," [Slovakia expelled three Russian diplomats. They were supposedly working for the Russian secret services] *Aktuality.sk*, August 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/813207/slovensko-vyhostilo-troch-clenov-ruskych-tajnych-sluzieb-s-diplomatickym-pasom/> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

As already mentioned, in 2020 the implementation of the new government's foreign policy started in line with the government's program manifesto, including the revised security strategy. However, in February 2021, Prime Minister Igor Matovič's stance on the purchase of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine against Covid-19, which had not been authorized by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), raised questions about the credibility of his government's efforts to reset Slovakia's eastern policy.

On February 16, 2021, at a special press conference Igor Matovič declared: "I've worked a little miracle. I've got us two million Sputnik vaccines."¹⁶ At the press conference he said he had negotiated, over the phone with the Russian economy minister, guaranteed monthly deliveries of the Russian vaccine to Slovakia, totaling two million vaccines by June 2020. He said Slovakia should buy and use the Russian vaccine even though it had not been authorized by the EMA. He referred to the examples of Hungary and Serbia, the first European countries to vaccinate their citizens with the Russian vaccine. Let's forget about the geopolitics, the health of the citizens of our country is at stake, he argued.¹⁷

However, the Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the *Za ľudí* governing coalition party, Veronika Remišová, opposed the purchase of the Russian Sputnik vaccine. To block the adoption of the decision by the government, she used the veto that coalition parties have the right to use under the coalition agreement, providing they disagree in principle with the proposed government decision. Explaining her position to the public, Deputy Prime Minister Remišová stated that she would agree to the purchase of the Russian vaccine only on condition it was authorized by the EMA, along with all the other Covid-19 vaccines used in Slovakia, as an EU member state. She argued that the Russian vaccine manufacturer had not yet applied for EMA authorization and Slovak citizens could not be used as "guinea pigs" for testing unauthorized drugs. Consequently, the decision to use an unauthorized Russian vaccine in Slovakia fell under the responsibilities of the Health Minister, Marek Krajčí (an *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent

¹⁶ L. Kišová, "Matovič: Urobil som malý zázrak. Vybavil som dva milióny vakcín Sputnik," [Matovič: I've worked a little miracle. I've got us two million Sputnik vaccines] *Hospodárske noviny*, February 16, 2021. Available online: <https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/2302729-matovic-podaril-sa-mi-maly-zazrak-vybavil-som-dva-miliony-vakcin-sputnik> (accessed on February 25, 2021). The article includes a video recording of the prime minister's press conference.

¹⁷ Ibid

Personalities] (*OLaNO*), nominee, the party led by Matovič), but she ruled out her party bearing responsibility for any such decision.¹⁸ The dispute over the purchase of the Russian vaccine was not the first serious rift between the coalition parties of the Matovič government in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in Slovakia, but it was the first serious rift, which raised questions about relations with Russia that went beyond the declarations in the program manifesto. One way or another, without the agreement of the coalition partners and despite their opposition to the purchase of the unauthorized Russian vaccine, Prime Minister Igor Matovič decided to get the Russian vaccine for Slovakia.¹⁹ The decision triggered a government crisis that could end in either a government reshuffle or early elections.²⁰

On the one hand, the prime minister's impatience could be seen as understandable in light of the ongoing second wave of the coronavirus in Slovakia and the slow delivery of the supply of the authorized vaccines under the agreement negotiated by the European Commission for all EU member states. On the other hand, Prime Minister Igor Matovič's decision meant that Slovakia joined Hungary, as the two EU member states that first agreed on a common approach to purchasing vaccines through the European Commission,²¹ and became the only member states to break the solidarity within the EU on this issue. Naturally, this led to many questions: why did Prime Minister Matovič think it a good idea to follow the Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán, who misses no opportunity to distance himself from the EU institutions that criticize him for his authoritarian style of ruling and who sees alternative allies in Russia and China? In what way is it in Slovakia's interest to question the authority and the rules of the EU institutions, in this particular case the EMA? In what way is it in Slovakia's interest to cooperate with Russia in questioning the European institutions, in this particular

¹⁸ V. Foltentová, L. Osvaldová, M. Barčíková, "Strana Za ľudí na vláde zastavila nákup ruskej vakcíny Sputnik V," [For the People stopped the purchase of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine at the government meeting] *DenníkN*, February 18, 2021. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/2276917/strana-za-ludi-na-vlade-zastavil-nakup-ruskej-vakciny-sputnik-v/?ref=in> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

¹⁹ "Sputnik je na Slovensku. V Košiciach pristálo lietadlo s ruskou vakcínou," [Sputnik is in Slovakia. A plane with a Russian vaccine has landed in Košice] *TA3*, March 1, 2021. Available online: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1204309/sputnik-je-na-slovensku-v-kosiciach-pristalo-lietadlo-s-ruskou-vakcinou.html> (accessed on March 20, 2021).

²⁰ Author's note: this article was completed before the government crisis was resolved.

²¹ "Coronavirus: Commission unveils EU vaccines strategy," European Commission, June 17, 2020. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1103 (accessed on March 20, 2021).

case circumventing the EMA, and thus undermining the solidarity between the EU member states? Wasn't it in fact the security strategy drafted by the ministers of the Matovič government that drew attention to this threat to Slovakia's national security?

Igor Matovič did not offer any satisfactory answers to the above questions; quite the contrary, he questioned the implementation of his own government's foreign policy after the parliamentary elections in February 2020. His only response justifying his decision to buy the Russian vaccine was "it is about the health of the people, it is not about geopolitics"²² proved that he is unable to make systematic decisions and anticipate their long-term consequences. Richard Sulík, the leader of SaS, one of the coalition parties, said his party would only remain in the governing coalition providing Matovič resigned as prime minister. He explained his decision as follows: "He (Matovič) has no managerial skills, not personal ones or communicative... the government is mismanaged, the word chaos is the word to sum it all up... I will not remain in this government with him because I can see the damage he is doing."²³ Alojz Hlina, former chairman of the Christian Democratic Movement and long-time colleague of Igor Matovič in Slovak politics, offered an insightful explanation as to why Matovič, as prime minister, decided to buy the Russian vaccine:

He needs to do big epic things, a huge show because he is fascinated if someone writes about him. I can vividly imagine that when he got the Sputnik V vaccine, someone was made to survey the Russian press for him and then I can imagine him in the evening looking to see his name in Cyrillic. The idea that someone writing about him in Russia would fascinate him. If Putin mentioned him as well, that would literally be too

²² "Chcete ruskú vakcínu Sputnik? Lobuje za ňu Matovič," [Do you want the Russian Sputnik vaccine? Matovič is lobbying for it] *Pravda*, February 17, 2021. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/578297-chcete-rusku-vakcinu-sputnik-v-lobuje-za-nu-matovic/> (accessed on March 20, 2021).

²³ "Sulík je pripravený na demisiu, chce lepšiu vládu: Matovič je problém tejto krajiny," [Sulík is ready to resign, he wants a better government: Matovič is this country's problem] *Plus jeden deň*, March 18, 2021. Available online: <https://www1.pluska.sk/spravy/z-domova/sulik-je-pripraveny-demisiu-chce-lepsiu-vladu-matovic-je-problem-tejto-krajiny> (accessed on March 20, 2021).

much for him. The problem is that his great epic shows have to be paid for by someone and that is why we as citizens are constantly at risk.²⁴

It would seem that the welcome ceremony for the Russian Sputnik V vaccine and the press conference on the landing strip at Košice airport, on March 1, 2021, was the last great epic show Igor Matovič put on for the citizens of Slovakia as prime minister.

■ Ukraine: a re-declared foreign policy priority

All the foreign policy planning documents adopted by the Matovič government declare that Ukraine is a country of priority interest in eastern policy. Slovakia's position towards Ukraine can be summarized in three major points: support for the reforms and Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, rejection of Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine, including support for restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity within its borders as it was before 2014 and support for the implementation of the EU's Eastern Partnership program. The security strategy states that the

Slovak Republic will promote the all-round development of good neighborly relations, their conflict-free nature and support a stable security situation in neighboring countries. The main challenge is to end the military conflict in Ukraine, to restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity, including illegally occupied Crimea. The Slovak Republic will make every effort to support a political solution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and will contribute to the achievement of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic ambitions.²⁵

In 2020 President Volodymyr Zelensky returned Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová's visit to Kyiv in September 2019. With the Covid-19 pandemic, which

²⁴ K. Sudor, "Alojz Hlina: Matovič je zákerný, v karavane som s ním zažil veci, ktoré búrajú obrazy, čo o sebe vytvára," [Matovič is insidious, in the packtrain I experienced things with him that ruin the images that he creates of himself] *DenníkN*, March 19, 2021. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/2318305/alozj-hlina-matovic-je-zakerny-v-karavane-som-s-nim-zazil-veci-ktore-buraju-obrazy-co-o-sebe-vytvara/?ref=tit> (accessed on March 20, 2021).

²⁵ "Bezpečnostná stratégia..." op. cit., p. 16.

affected the whole world in 2020, including Slovakia and Ukraine, visits by national leaders were kept to a minimum. In this context, Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to Slovakia, on September 24, 2020, was the exception that proved the rule. His visit, despite the pandemic, emphasized all the more the importance that the presidents of both countries attach to their bilateral contacts and the relationship between the two countries. In addition to agreeing on key issues in international relations, including an identical assessment of Russia's policy towards Ukraine and repeated confirmation of Slovakia's support for the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, not to mention support for Ukraine on its path to Euro-Atlantic institutions, the two presidents also signed two bilateral intergovernmental agreements in Bratislava.²⁶

A good example of the important shift in bilateral relations is the conclusion of an agreement on conditions for the use of a designated part of Slovak airspace in connection with the provision of air traffic services at Uzhhorod International Airport. Negotiations on this agreement took years until finally the transport ministries of both countries managed to harmonize all the technical details. The agreement is a green light for the development of the regional airport in Uzhhorod, which is located on the border with Slovakia. In order for the airport to be able to operate, landing and departing planes have to use Slovak airspace. Both sides believe that the operation of Uzhhorod airport will improve conditions for regional development not only in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine but also the border areas on the Slovak side of the common border.²⁷

However, 2020 also brought less positive news for bilateral relations. Probably, the least positive news of the year concerns the termination of the planned investment by Slovak company NAFTA, a. s. relating to natural gas extraction in the Yuzivska gas field in eastern Ukraine. NAFTA, a. s. and EPH, a company that controls significant stakes in the Slovak energy sector, including the gas industry, began developing investment of € 200 million in the Yuzivska gas

²⁶ "Prezidentka privítala ukrajinského prezidenta Volodymyra Zelenského," [The President welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky] Office of the President of the Slovak Republic, September 24, 2020. Available online: <https://www.prezident.sk/article/prezidentka-privitala-ukrajinskeho-prezidenta-volodymyra-zelenskeho/> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

²⁷ "Ukrayina ta Slovachchyna pidpysaly uhodu pro vidnovlennia roboty aeroportu Uzhhorod," [Ukraine and Slovakia have signed an agreement to restore the operation of Uzhhorod Airport] *Ukrinform*, September 24, 2020. Available online: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3105530-ukraina-ta-slovaccina-pidpysali-ugodu-pro-vidnovlennia-roboti-aeroportu-uzgorod.html> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

field based on the previous consent of the Ukrainian government and the promise of an extraction license in 2018.²⁸ This would have been the largest foreign investment by a Slovak-based company since 1993. Unfortunately, in December 2020, the Ukrainian government decided to grant the Yuzivska license to a state-owned Ukrainian company, NAFTOGAZ, not to foreign investors from Slovakia.²⁹ This decision by the Ukrainian government caused disappointment in the Slovak gas businesses, as it thwarted the planned investment as well as the opportunity to bring natural gas cooperation between the two countries to a qualitatively new level.³⁰

Another cloud, darkening the bright sky of bilateral relations, appeared when Slovak Prime Minister Igor Matovič, made an unfortunate joke. In a Radio Express talk show, when asked by the moderator what he had promised Russia in return for the supply of the Sputnik V vaccine, Igor Matovič responded: "Transcarpathian Ukraine."³¹ Although he immediately said that he had meant it as a joke, his response outraged Ukrainian politicians. "It is a pity that with his incorrect statements, the Slovak Prime Minister is spoiling the very friendly and sincere relations between Ukraine and Slovakia," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba responded.³² The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry subsequently issued a protest note, summoned the Slovak chargé d'affaires

²⁸ "Miliardár Křetínský má na dosah nálezisko plynu na Ukrajine. Ťažiť môže slovenská firma," [Billionaire Křetínský has a gas field in Ukraine within reach. The Slovak company can extract] *Hospodárske noviny*, August 15, 2018. Available online: <https://finweb.hnonline.sk/zahranicna-ekonomika/1794305-miliardar-kretinsky-ma-na-dosah-nalezisko-plynu-na-ukrajine-tazit-moze-slovenska-firma> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

²⁹ "Kabmin soglasoval pokupku Naftogazom 'Nadra Yuzovskaya,'" [The government approved the sale of Nadra Yuzovskaya to Naftogaz] *Interfaks-Ukraina*, December 16, 2020. Available online: <https://interfax.com.ua/news/economic/710291.html> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

³⁰ Author's interview with representatives of the Slovak Gas and Oil Association, Bratislava, January 15, 2021.

³¹ "Igor Matovič: Zohnať ruskú vakcínu bolo mojou povinnosťou, je mi jedno, že ma budú ľudia nenávidieť," [Igor Matovič: It was my duty to get the Russian vaccine, I don't care if people hate me] *Rádio Expres*, March 2, 2021. Available online: <https://www.expres.sk/243452/igor-matovic-zohnat-rusku-vakcinu-bolo-mojou-povinnostou-je-mi-jedno-ze-ma-budu-ludia-nenavidiet/> (accessed on March 19, 2021).

³² "Kuleba otvetil na slova premiera Slovákiji ob obmene Zakarpattya na vakcínu," [Kuleba responded to the words of the Prime Minister of Slovakia about the exchange of Transcarpathia for a vaccine] *Jevropejskaja Pravda*, March 3, 2021. Available online: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2021/03/3/7120485/> (accessed on March 19, 2021).

in Kyiv and called on Prime Minister Matovič to officially apologize for his inappropriate words that harmed Ukraine's territorial integrity.³³ Despite Igor Matovič having immediately apologized for his inappropriate statement about Transcarpathian Ukraine,³⁴ the bitter taste of his foolishness remained and slightly tainted bilateral relations.

Regardless of the stop on investment by Slovak companies in gas extraction in Ukraine and the Slovak prime minister's silly joke the almost identical approaches of the Slovak president and government towards relations with Ukraine created a "window of opportunity" for developing bilateral relations, including coordination of policies on the international scene, to an extent that never existed under the Fico governments.

■ Belarus in the spotlight, Moldova and Georgia in the shadows

Despite the lack of an explicit mention of Belarus in either the Matovič government's program manifesto or the newly adopted security strategy, Belarus became one of the central topics in foreign policy debate in Slovakia in the second half of 2020. The events in Belarus following the presidential elections in August 2020 overshadowed both the Russian–Ukrainian conflict as a Slovak foreign policy debate for the first time since 2014, and the results and consequences of the national elections in Moldova and Georgia in 2020.

The government, and President Zuzana Čaputová, shared the same reading of the situation in Belarus after the August presidential elections, which can be summarized as: the elections were rigged and are therefore invalid; Alexander Lukashenko cannot be recognized as the duly elected president; the regime

³³ Ibid

³⁴ "Matovič sa ospravedlnil Ukrajine za svoj výrok," [Matovič has apologized to Ukraine for his statement] *Sme*, March 4, 2021. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22610249/matovic-sa-ospravedlnil-ukrajine-za-nevhodny-vyrok.html> (accessed on March 19, 2021).

has to stop the violent repression of the peaceful protests, release the political prisoners, and immediately start a dialogue with the opposition on resolving the political crisis.³⁵

The leader of the Belarusian opposition in exile, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, was received by President Čaputová, Prime Minister Matovič, and Speaker of the Slovak Parliament Juraj Šeliga on her visit to Bratislava when invited to participate in the Globsec conference on October 8, 2020. She was received by Slovakia's most high-ranking state representatives in their official seats as she would be as head of state. On the sidelines of the Globsec conference in Bratislava, she met the Slovak Foreign Minister and the foreign ministers of Austria, Bulgaria and Greece. The 2020 Czech and Slovak Transatlantic Prize, a prize regularly awarded by the Globsec organizers, was awarded to the Czech politician and former Foreign Affairs Minister Karel Schwarzenberg and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.³⁶ The way Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was received in Bratislava on October 8, 2020, spoke volumes about Slovakia's attitude toward the situation in Belarus. Slovakia backed the EU sanctions against the representatives of the Belarusian regime and recalled its ambassador from Minsk, in response to the restrictions imposed by the Belarusian authorities on the embassies of Poland and Lithuania.³⁷

On September 2, 2020, the Slovak government decided to create the Fund in Support of Civil Society in Belarus with an initial allocation of €700,000 with the aim, in particular, of supporting Belarusian citizens who are victims of the

³⁵ "Vyhlásenie MZVAEZ k situácii v Bielorusku," [Statement by the MFEA on the situation in Belarus] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, August 10, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/vsetky_spravy/-/asset_publisher/Rp2fPY0svzsu/content/vyhlasenie-mzvez-k-situacii-v-bielorusku?p_p_auth=oZX6Haqk&_101_INSTANCE_Rp2fPY0svzsu_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fsk (accessed on February 23, 2020); "Čaputová odsúdila násilie v Bielorusku, zo situácie je znepokojená," [Čaputová condemned the violence in Belarus and is concerned by the situation] *Hospodárske noviny*, August 10, 2020. Available online: <https://hnonline.sk/svet/2192601-caputova-odsudila-nasilie-v-bielorusku-zo-situacie-je-znepokojena> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

³⁶ "Prezidentka aj premiér prijali Cichanovskú," [Both the president and prime minister received Tsikhanouskaya] *Pravda*, October 8, 2020. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/565141-matovic-cichanovska-je-vzorom-pre-mnoho-zien-vo-svete-i-europe/> (accessed on February 23, 2021); "Cichanovská na Globsecu: Bielorusko si musí politickú krízu vyriešiť samo," [Tsikhanouskaya at Globsec: Belarus must resolve the political crisis on its own] *Pravda*, October 8, 2020. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/565107-globsec-oceni-schwarzenberga-a-cichanovsku/> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

³⁷ Z. Gabrižová, "Bratislava – Slovakia recalls Ambassador in Minsk," *Euractiv*, October 9, 2020. Available online: https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/bratislava-slovakia-recalls-ambassador-in-minsk/ (accessed on February 23, 2021).

regime's repressions. The fund is also intended to co-finance future EU and other international actors' initiatives in support of Belarusian civil society. On September 16, the Slovak government adopted a special extraordinary scholarship program for Belarusian students expelled from their home universities for participating in the protests. They could apply for a scholarship to complete their education in Slovakia at the start of the 2020/2021 academic year.³⁸ Another dimension illustrating Slovakia's approach towards Belarusian society is the humanitarian aid provided through the Catholic charity, Caritas of the Minsk-Mogilev Archdiocese, which implements projects funded by SlovakAid. The project provided support for medical facilities for elderly patients located in the remote parts of the Belarusian districts of Uzda, Vozhyn, Vileyka, Mogilov and Krichov. Under the project, by the end of October 2020, medical supplies had been delivered to the above facilities, including 3,750 medical masks, 1,200 gowns and overalls, more than 38,000 caps and shoe covers, 4,260 FFP2 respirators, 10 re-circulators, 5 mobile bactericidal irradiators, 250 liters of disinfectant and 10 non-contact thermometers.³⁹

Slovakia's approach toward Belarus, shared by the government coalition formed after the parliamentary elections in February 2020, can be characterized as a combination of two parallel tracks: a restrictive approach towards the regime and support for civil society. It is also driven by the normative belief that citizens of all countries have the right to vote freely, but also by the rational view that the Lukashenko regime has lost its political legitimacy and has zero capacity to ensure stability, reforms and prosperity in Belarus. The regime has so far resisted mass protests, mainly for the following two reasons: firstly, the employees of state-owned enterprises, which make up the majority of workers in Belarus, have not supported the general strike, and secondly, the loyalty of the police and armed forces. The result is a political stalemate, which in combination with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, is exacerbating the socio-economic crisis in the country.

³⁸ "Slovensko vytvorí fond na podporu občanov Bieloruska," [Slovakia sets up a fund to support citizens of Belarus] *TASR, Teraz.sk*, September 2, 2020. Available online: <https://www.teraz.sk/najnovsie/slovensko-vytvori-fond-na-podporu-bielo/490549-clanok.html> (accessed on February 23, 2021); "Governmental scholarships of the SR. Wizard – Belarus." Available online: <https://www.vladnestipendia.sk/en/> (accessed on February 23, 2021).

³⁹ "Slovensko pomáha regionálnym zdravotníckym zariadeniam v Bielorusku v boji s pandemiou," [Slovakia is helping regional health facilities in Belarus fight the pandemic] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 27, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/rss/rss-zoznamy/-/asset_publisher/9BNBrxv9s4iR/content/slovensko-pomaha-regionalnym-zdravotnickym-zariadeniam-v-bielorusku-v-boji-proti-covid-19 (accessed on February 23, 2021).

The parliamentary opposition, and especially *Smer-SD* and *ĽSNS* MPs, presented the exact opposite view of the events in Belarus following the presidential election in August 2020. The most vocal assessors of the situation in Belarus were the chairman of *Smer-SD*, Robert Fico, and his vice-chairman Ľuboš Blaha, and Marián Kotleba, leader of *ĽSNS*. They declared that the protests were organized from abroad (variations were the West, NATO, USA, "gentlemen from Brussels," EU, multinational corporations, Soros, etc.) and that the young people had taken to the streets in Minsk just for the sight of "Swiss shop windows and double wages" (Ľ. Blaha). Their interpretation of the situation in Belarus was that the outcome of the work of the foreign organizers of the regime change will ultimately be that Western experts will seize control of the state and that all state property will be stolen or privatized. In the context of the events in Belarus, Robert Fico repeated the theory he began to articulate after the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová in 2018, when he was pushed into resigning by the mass protests in Slovakia: "In Belarus, I see an attempt to implement the model used in Ukraine, but we also saw elements [of this] in Slovakia, where there was gross political abuse of the murder of a journalist and his girlfriend in an attack against the legitimate government power."⁴⁰ It should be emphasized that the opposition party *Hlas-SD* led by Peter Pellegrini took a position close to that of the government on the issue of Belarus. The party's chief foreign policy expert and former Slovak ambassador to the United States, Peter Kmec, commented: "It is very important to separate facts from lies and half-truths. I agree that there is an information war in which conspiracy theories play an important role in manipulating public opinion and distorting real developments in Belarus."⁴¹

Another key event in 2020 that changed the political map in Eastern European countries was the presidential elections in Moldova. In the second round of the elections on November 15th, the former prime minister and leader of the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity, Maia Sandu, clearly won

⁴⁰ For a good overview and a collection of statements by the leaders of the opposition parties *Smer-SD* and *ĽSNS* regarding the situation in Belarus following the presidential elections in August 2020, see M. Sliz, "Fico a Kotleba opäť na vlne konšpirátorov: klamstvá o Bielorusku," [Fico and Kotleba riding the wave of conspiracists again: lies about Belarus] *Aktuality.sk*, August 20, 2020. Available online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/815678/konspiracni-teoretici-presedli-na-bielorusko-spolu-s-nimi-aj-fico-a-kotleba/> (accessed on March 5, 2021).

⁴¹ "Opozičný poslanec a bývalý veľvyslanec v USA Peter Kmec (*Hlas*) privítal iniciatívu ministra zahraničia Korčoka" [Opposition MP and former ambassador to USA Peter Kmec (*Hlas*) welcomed the initiative by Foreign Minister Korčok] *DenníkN*, August 26, 2020. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2016828/> (accessed on March 5, 2021).

against the acting president, Ivan Dodon, who favored deepening Moldova's relations with Russia over its rapprochement with the EU.⁴² However, unlike in Belarus, the political developments in Moldova did not become a major issue in foreign policy discourse in Slovakia. It is rather astonishing that not even the MFEA issued an official statement on the results of the presidential elections in Moldova, despite it being accustomed to doing so in such cases, all the more so since Moldova is one of the three associated Eastern Partnership countries for which support is a Slovak foreign policy priority.⁴³ It was President Zuzana Čaputová, who, together with the presidents of six other countries, signed a public letter in support of the newly elected president of Moldova.

Maia Sandu has received a strong mandate from the people of the Republic of Moldova, who expect change, a more ambitious reform agenda, democracy and closer ties with the EU. In this context, we express our full support for Maia Sandu and her efforts to consolidate the implementation of reforms based on democratic values, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law,⁴⁴

the letter from the seven presidents states.

Nor did the events in Georgia in connection with the parliamentary elections, which were held in two rounds in October and November 2020, become the subject of foreign policy debate in Slovakia or public reflection on the part of governmental institutions or political leaders. The Georgian opposition boycotted the second round of the elections and called on voters to abstain from voting because of election fraud. Moreover, the opposition parties refused to take up their mandates in the parliament, triggering a parliamentary crisis and calling into question the winning party's political mandate

⁴² G. Mesežnikov, "Moldavské voľby boli optikou Moskvy súbojom proruského "dobrá" a "zla" zo Západu," [The Moldovan elections were, from the perspective of Moscow, a duel of pro-Russian 'good' and Western 'evil'] *DenníkN*, December 4, 2020. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/2172985/moldavske-volby-boli-optikou-moskvy-subojom-proruskeho-dobra-a-zla-zo-zapadu/> (accessed on March 17, 2021).

⁴³ See the MFEA news line on Moldova for November and December 2020 on the ministry's website: https://www.mzv.sk/cestovanie_a_konzularne_info/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/moldavska-republika?displayMode=1 (accessed on March 16, 2021).

⁴⁴ "Zuzana Čaputová podporila moldavskú prezidentku," [Zuzana Čaputová supported the president of Moldova] *Trend*, December 25, 2020. Available online: <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/europski-prezidenti-vratane-caputovej-podporili-novu-moldavsku-prezidentku> (accessed on March 17, 2021).

to form a new government, including its ability to pursue reforms and implement the Association Agreement with the EU.⁴⁵ Before the election, in August, the MFEA had issued an official statement on the occasion of the 12th anniversary of the Russian-Georgian war of 2008. It says that "Slovakia fully supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders" and notes that "the continued presence of the Russian Federation's armed forces in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, including obstruction to the entry of the EU Monitoring Mission into these Georgian areas is a breach of the EU-mediated ceasefire of August 12, 2008."⁴⁶ However, the political developments at the end of 2020, which plunged Georgia into a severe political crisis, slowed down the reform process, including its rapprochement with the EU, went largely unnoticed by officials in Slovakia.

At the same time, it should be noted that in 2020 Slovakia continued to provide development assistance to Moldova and Georgia, which are program countries (i.e. main beneficiaries) of the Slovak Official and Development Assistance Program (Moldova since 2014 and Georgia since 2019). In addition, in 2020 both countries received humanitarian aid from Slovakia in connection with the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "Polícia v Gruzínsku zasiahla proti demonštrantom žiadajúcim nové voľby," [Police in Georgia have cracked down on protesters calling for new elections] *Sme*, November 8, 2020. Available online: <https://svet.sme.sk/c/22530499/policia-v-gruzinsku-zasiahla-proti-demonstrantom-ziadajucim-nove-volby.html> (accessed on March 17, 2021).

⁴⁶ "Vyhlásenie MZVEZ SR k 12. výročiu rusko-gruzínskeho konfliktu," [Statement by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic on the 12th Anniversary of the Russia-Georgia Conflict] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, August 7, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/cestovanie_a_konzularne_info/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/vyhlasenie-mzvez-sr-k-12-vyrociu-rusko-gruzinskeho-konfliktu?_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Fcestovanie_a_konzularne_info%2Fdetail%2F%2Fasset_publisher%2F%2Flw1ppvnScIPx%2Fcontent%2Fgruzinsko%3FdisplayMode%3D1 (accessed on March 19, 2021).

⁴⁷ See "Programové krajiny," [Program countries] SlovakAid. Available online: <https://slovakaid.sk/zaradenie-krajiny/programove-krajiny/> (accessed on March 19, 2021).

■ Nagorno-Karabakh out of reach

In addition to the events in Belarus, Moldova and Georgia, the war on Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia was important in terms of developments in the Eastern European region in 2020. The war ended with a ceasefire that de facto and de jure confirmed Azerbaijan's military victory and the defeat of Armenia.⁴⁸ The results of the war have yet again redistributed the geopolitical cards in the Caucasus region: first of all, the pre-war 2020 status quo guaranteed by Russia ended; second, Azerbaijan returned to Armenia its military defeat of the early 1990s and gained control of the territories that it had lost then; and third, Turkey proved it was a geopolitical player in the region to be reckoned with, as together with Russia, it is co-guarantor of the new post-war 2020 status quo. The EU and its member states, including Slovakia, remained out of the game and found themselves in the role of statistician. Slovakia, together with the EU, condemned the military violence during the war and declared, through Minister Korčok, that there can only be a political solution to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁹ In addition, Slovakia sent humanitarian aid to the population, which found itself in the conflict zone on both sides.⁵⁰

However, Baku and Ankara do not accept the opinion of the Slovak ministry, shared by most of the EU member states. This also applies to Yerevan and Moscow, which lost more from the war than they gained. For all the actors involved it was a zero-sum game: some gained, others lost. It is true that the

⁴⁸ "Eto voyennaya kapitulyatsiya Armeniyi – obrashcheniye prezidenta Aliyeva k natsiyi," [This is the military capitulation of Armenia – President Aliyev's speech to the nation] *Sputnik Azerbaijani*, November 11, 2020. Available online: <https://az.sputniknews.ru/azerbaijan/20201110/425428253/Segodnya-istoricheskij-den-dlya-Azerbaydzhana---prezident-Aliyev.html> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

⁴⁹ "Minister I. Korčok: V Náhornom Karabachu neexistuje iné ako politické riešenie," [Minister I. Korčok: There can be no solution other than a political solution in Nagorno-Karabakh] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 16, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/minister-i-korcok-v-nahornom-karabachu-neexistuje-ine-ako-politicke-riesenie?p_p_auth=skHQE5WzG_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2F (accessed on February 24, 2021).

⁵⁰ "Ministerstvo poskytne humanitárnu pomoc na oboch stranách konfliktu v Náhornom Karabachu," [The ministry will provide humanitarian aid on both sides of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict] *Sme*, October 12, 2020. Available online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22508326/ministerstvo-poskytne-humanitarnu-pomoc-na-oboch-stranach-konfliktu-v-nahornom-karabachu.html> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

EU is among those who gained nothing. The EU's potential to play a greater role in resolving the conflicts in the North Caucasus is now less than it was before the Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020.⁵¹ Also due to the weakening of the EU's role in the region, Slovak diplomacy had no way of intervening in the conflict and like other EU member states has to live with the fact that its potential to influence developments in the Caucasus region are now more limited than they were before the war.

■ Instead of a conclusion: two main lessons learned

This year of Slovakia's eastern policy, performed by the government under the leadership of Igor Matovič (March 2020–March 2021), offers a very mixed picture. On the one hand, the government started with a clear vision and an excellent goal-based move in line with the foreign policy foundations laid by the governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda and Iveta Radičová. Together and in harmony with the foreign policy activities of President Zuzana Čaputová, in the course of 2020, Slovakia became a transparent actor in international relations, a readable ally of partners in the EU and NATO, and finally got rid of the ambiguities in foreign policy introduced by Fico's governments. On the other hand, it took only a few days at the turn of February/March 2021 for all the efforts made throughout the year to be questioned, and not by just anyone, but by the prime minister himself. This startling outcome deserves special attention because it is a rather exceptional phenomenon in the history of modern Slovak politics and diplomacy.

There are many questions relating to Prime Minister Matovič's attitude to the purchase of the Russian Sputnik vaccine in February 2021. However, what deserves special attention was his readiness to believe in the "miracles that come from Russia and save Slovakia," which is similar to the faith of his predecessors Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s and Robert Fico in the 2000s and 2010s, who also expected miracles from Russia. Even though the

⁵¹ For an analysis see N. Tocci, N. Miklelidze, "Winners, losers and absentees in Nagorno-Karabakh," *IAI Commentaries 20/84*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, November 2020. Available online: <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaicom2084.pdf> (accessed on February 24, 2021).

miracles from Russia never came, they still believed they were coming. Matovič seemed to practice the same religion. Two main lessons emerge from the one-year story of the Matovič government, which point to systemic and long-lasting problems regarding Slovakia's eastern policy.

The first lesson concerns the finding that the main cause of the instability and fragility of Slovakia's eastern policy is the populism of political leaders. Populist politicians regularly pull "Russian miracles" from their sleeves in domestic political struggles and will do so as long as there is a significant number of voters in Slovakia who want to believe in these miracles. Why a significant number of Slovak voters believe in "Russian miracles" is a topic for special analysis that goes beyond the scope of this article. Typically the prime ministers who believe in "miracles from Russia" are insensitive to or rather ignore Ukraine and its interests, with Mečiar, Fico and Matovič all being similar on this. Whenever they faced a problem in domestic politics, they pulled out the "Russian card" and exhibited a demonstrative blindness towards Ukraine and a questioning of EU and NATO policies. Their short-term domestic political interests were staying in power, and almost every time they found themselves in a critical situation in domestic politics, these prevailed over the long-term foreign policy interests of the country.

In such situations, they prefer to ignore the fact that the Slovak economy has more than quadrupled since 1993 thanks to its access to the EU single market, and that the basic guarantees of prosperity and security that Slovakia has come from EU and NATO membership. Or, as Prime Minister Matovič demonstrated, they believe that Slovakia will be saved by the Russian vaccine, although vaccinations were ongoing in Slovakia at the time of his decision to import the Russian vaccine, thanks to the vaccines arranged by the European Commission. In such situations, they make public statements as if they are blind to what Slovakia gains from the EU; however, when it comes to Russia they see something where there is nothing. At a time when they are losing ground in domestic politics, instead of leading their voters, they become their followers, and do not hesitate to play with Russia as a country that "certainly may" provide us with alternative solutions, moreover, they tend to present Russia as Slovakia's savior, although in reality they are merely trying to save themselves in Slovak politics. Of course, Russian diplomacy does not hesitate to exploit these weakness of Slovak prime ministers, and this has been repeated regularly over the last 30 years, in its efforts to achieve its own goals in relations with both the EU and NATO. As long as there are voters in Slovakia who believe in "Russian miracles" and as long as Slovak governments are presided over by populist politicians, this phenomenon will inevitably be repeated again.

The second lesson follows on from the first and concerns the institutional arrangement of Slovakia's foreign policy, respectively the position of the foreign minister in the government and his relationship with the prime minister, which has always had a crucial impact on the country's foreign policy. The conflict between Prime Minister Igor Matovič and Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok (and not just in the case of the Russian vaccine) was not the first conflict of its kind in the modern history of Slovak diplomacy. It is interesting that regardless of whether it is a coalition government or formed by one political party, conflicts between the prime minister and foreign minister on priority foreign policy issues occur quite often and at regular intervals. Of course, in disputes with prime ministers, the foreign ministers always pull on the shorter end of the rope, and in the end, in such cases, worse decisions are always made insofar as the long-term foreign policy interests of the Slovak Republic are concerned.

At the same time, it is noticeable that these prime ministers (Mečiar, Fico and Matovič), who for domestic political reasons have brought "Russian miracles" into the light of day, had a problem with their foreign ministers in particular. In the nine years he ruled the country (1990–1998), Prime Minister Mečiar got through ten foreign ministers. The lifetime of a Foreign Minister under Mečiar was less than one year. Robert Fico's first Foreign Minister, Ján Kubiš, resigned after two years in service. Minister Miroslav Lajčák served the longest in Fico's governments (almost ten years in total), but even then, especially after the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council in 2016, he got into an ever-increasing conflict with Prime Minister Fico. During the preparations for and the performance of the Slovak EU Presidency in 2016, Fico tolerated the autonomous decision-making by Minister Lajčák; but not afterwards, and like Mečiar before him, he was led into conflict with his foreign minister for domestic political reasons. Under Mečiar, foreign policy changed frequently, because the interest groups behind his party and governments had a stronger say in foreign policy than the foreign ministers. The double face of Fico's eastern policy was also largely shaped by the interest groups behind his government. Mečiar and Fico had an additional reason to pursue a populist eastern policy. Matovič is a slightly different case. He had no additional reason other than populism. However, he achieved the same outcomes.

A clear exception, however, which only confirms the rule, was the relationship and collaboration between Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda and Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan, which lasted without major tensions for eight years (1998–2006). With the exception of the above-mentioned Dzurinda-Kukan tandem, there is no other good example of cooperation between the prime

minister and the foreign minister in the modern history of Slovak diplomacy. The belief of populist prime ministers that they understand foreign policy better than their foreign ministers is a systemic institutional problem for Slovak diplomacy, which has the most negative impact on Slovakia's eastern policy. The government of Igor Matovič was to be a "government that will enter the textbooks as the best government in the history of Slovakia."⁵² Unfortunately, partly because Igor Matovič believed that he understood foreign policy better than "his" foreign minister, the government, which took power under his leadership in March 2020, entered the Slovak politics textbooks after one year, but in a completely different way to the one Igor Matovič originally expected.

⁵² "Matovič chce vládu, ktorá sa dostane do učebníc ako najlepšia," [Matovič wants a government that goes down in the textbooks as the best]. *TA3*, March 4, 2020. Available online: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1177714/matovic-chce-vladu-ktora-sa-dostane-do-ucebnic-ako-najlepsia.html> (accessed on March 23, 2021).



Július Lőrincz

Western Balkans – the meaning and the pitfalls of enlargement

The Western Balkans have long been a priority region of Slovak foreign policy. The parliamentary elections that took place in February 2020 and the formation of the new government have not changed this. This is evident from the strategies drawn up by government officials and adopted by parliament.

The Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2020 emphasizes that

... it is in Slovakia's interest that the Western Balkans region is stable and prosperous and that EU values and standards are applied. Support for the transformation of the countries of the Western Balkans as a basic prerequisite for meeting their Euro-Atlantic ambitions remains one of the main priorities of Slovak foreign policy.¹

The Western Balkans region is similarly discussed in a more detailed internal foreign ministry document assessing the application and focus of foreign and European policy in 2020.² The important position of the Western Balkans in Slovak foreign policy is clearly underlined in the Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2020–2024 in the section entitled “Basic

¹ “Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2020. Slovakia in an unstable world,” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 18, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/30297/4238317/Foreign+and+European+Policy+of+the+Slovak+Republic+in+2020+%28unofficial+translation%29.pdf> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

² “Hodnotenie priorít zahraničnej a európskej politiky Slovenskej republiky v roku 2019 a ich zameranie na rok 2020,” [Assessment of the priorities of the foreign and European policy of the Slovak Republic in 2019 and foresight for 2020] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 2020. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/2686701/2020+Hodnotenie+prior%C3%ADt+zahrani%C4%8Dnej+a+eur%C3%B3pskej+politiky+Slovenskej+republiky+v+roku+2019+a+ich+zameranie+na+rok+2020> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

priorities of foreign and security policy.”³ This long-term approach to the Western Balkans therefore remains in place even with the change of government, following the parliamentary elections on February 29th and the appointment of Ivan Korčok as the new Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. The previous Foreign Minister, Miroslav Lajčák, became the EU Special Representative for Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan Regional Issues on April 1, 2020.

The main principles are therefore clearly and comprehensively situated within both the domestic and international context, and the key players are named. The reality, of course, is more complex. All these issues were discussed in November 2020 in an online discussion organized by *Euractiv* and the Representative Office of the European Parliament in Slovakia by Slovak experts on the Western Balkans involved in some way in the Western Balkans accession process and on policy making on these countries. One of the participants in the discussion, Vladimír Bilčík, a member of the European Parliament, said that the year 2020 had started well, but few of the commitments and ideas came to fruition. Specifically, in March the EU said that the door should be opened to accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, but then could not agree on a date for the start of the negotiations, and that remains the case today. And while the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina resumed eighteen months later, under the eye of Miroslav Lajčák, after a relatively good start, the outlines of possible agreement remained more a hope than a reality. The same applies to other problems and unresolved issues relating to the Western Balkans – the year began well and progress was made and then things gradually became more and more complicated. This could be seen in relation to the elections in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, developments in Kosovo and relations between Bulgaria

³ The government manifesto states, “Cooperation with the Western Balkan countries will remain an important priority of our foreign policy. Slovakia will support the efforts of the Western Balkan countries to meet the criteria for EU membership, as EU enlargement is an important means of achieving stability and promoting our interests in the region.” (translated by author). See “Program Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic,” Government of the Slovak Republic, May 11, 2020. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/12485/Program-ov%C3%A9+vyhl%C3%A1senie+vl%C3%A1dy.pdf> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

and North Macedonia. And of course the Covid-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life, including international relations.⁴

The pandemic’s impact on mobility and communication above all has had destabilizing effects in the political, economic, information, cultural and social spheres, with negative consequences.

Naturally, as in other European countries and elsewhere in the world, the fight against the pandemic has taken place against a backdrop of dramatic conflicts stemming from the scale of the tragedy, inexperience in dealing with similar events and attempts to extract political capital out of the need to solve the problems created by the pandemic.

■ The struggle over the form of enlargement

Obviously, not everything can be blamed solely on the pandemic. In essence the whole of 2019 was marked by a political struggle over the fate of further EU enlargement – Denmark, the Netherlands and especially France slowed down the process of opening the door to Albania’s and North Macedonia’s accession negotiations with the Union. Denmark and the Netherlands had what can be described as predominantly technical reservations about the applicant countries and whether they were able to cope with the various tasks the association path entailed. However, France’s reservations were more fundamental and conceptual – it called for the Union to be reformed first, before enlargement could take place. Although this idea remains on the table, some of it was picked up on at the beginning of 2020, and an agreement was reached with the European Commission on a new methodology for the accession negotiations.

⁴ The discussion focused on the Western Balkans as part of Europe and among the discussants were two MEPs Vladimír Bilčík (*Spolu* [Together], EPP group) and Michal Šimečka (*Progresívne Slovensko* [Progressive Slovakia] in the Renew Europe Group); Katarína Mathernová, Deputy Director General, European Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations; and Peter Kadvan, Department for South-Eastern Europe and Turkey of the Foreign Ministry. See “Diskusia | Západný Balkán ako súčasť Európy,” [Debate: Western Balkans as part of Europe] *Euractiv*, November 19, 2020. Available online as a podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/euractivpodcasty/diskusie-zapadny-balkan-ako-sucast-euroopy> (accessed on February 28, 2020).

Slovakia is still an active participant in the struggle over the shape and especially the efficiency of the EU enlargement process, particularly in the Western Balkans. Therefore, it was only natural that the foreign ministry should welcome the Commission's proposal to adjust the accession process procedures. According to the ministry's statement, Slovakia will continue to promote three key elements in the negotiations: confirmation of the countries' European prospects and full EU membership for the Western Balkans as the ultimate goal of the integration process (proposals to replace the word membership with "privileged partner" or "strategic partnership" did not attract wider support); the clarity of the criteria and their evaluation; and restoring the credibility of the process – both in the eyes of the people in the region and the EU.⁵

The new EC draft does in fact contain the core parts of the French proposal for a new methodology of the accession process; such as the suggestion that the articles of the Accession Agreement should be grouped into the main thematic areas and discussed gradually and as a whole, rather than individually as has been the case so far. That way, the intergovernmental conferences between the Union and the candidate states should be more relevant and interactive. And the accession process should become more dynamic and quicker.

⁵ The statement reads, "The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic welcomes the proposal of the European Commission to revise the procedures concerning the accession process, which was worked out based on the request made by member states in autumn 2019. We perceive this to be a good basis for the discussion and appreciate the efforts to increase the trustworthiness, dynamics and foreseeability of the enlargement policy. We especially support the intention to increase even more the emphasis on the implementation of reforms in reinforcing the rule of law." See "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic on the proposal of the European Commission to revise the EU accession process," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 5, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/vyhlasenie-mzvez-sr-k-navrhu-europskej-komisie-na-upravy-pristupoveho-procesu-do-eu/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D1%26strana%3D2 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

■ The new methodology for the accession process

The new methodology for the accession process contains an important element, the principle of reversibility, which means that the already concluded chapters of the Accession Agreement can be revisited. This is to ensure that the whole process is both credible and stimulating. In other words, it should be used if a candidate country does not partially or completely meet certain membership criteria or ceases to fulfil its obligations. In such a situation, the Union's response should be proportionate to the seriousness and magnitude of the candidate's error or shortcoming, ranging from the suspension of assistance to the total suspension of the accession negotiations in the event of a breach of the EU's fundamental values. This could also apply to closed chapters, which could be reopened if necessary. The most sensitive chapters are those dealing with the value criteria for the functioning of the Union, such as Chapters 23 and 24, which deal with the rule of law and the judiciary. Following internal negotiations in the EC, Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Olivér Várhelyi confirmed in early February 2020 that the application of the rule of law is a key condition for progressing with the integration process. He stated that under the new methodology Chapters 23 and 24 of the proposed agreement would be opened at the beginning of the accession negotiations and not closed until the end. According to experts, this is the *sine qua non* condition for progressing with EU integration and the implementation of these chapters on the rule of law will be assessed throughout the accession negotiations.⁶

The new methodology is to be applied to the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Serbia and Montenegro, who have already started accession negotiations, will be able to decide whether to continue with their accession negotiations as before – chapter by chapter – or to switch to the new methodology. Both of these candidate countries have expressed an interest in transferring to the new methodology. Serbia has 17 out of a total of 35 chapters open, 2 of which have already been provisionally closed. The accession process ground to a halt in 2020 – the EU did not open a single

⁶ "Nova metodologija najpre za Severnu Makedoniju i Albaniju," [New methodology first for North Macedonia and Albania] *Radio Free Europe, Balkan*, February 5, 2020. Available online: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/nova-metodologija-severna-makedonija-albanija/30418442.html> (accessed on February 28, 2020).

new chapter with Serbia, largely because of the coronavirus pandemic, but also because of the inability of both stakeholders to navigate the crisis.

The agreed principles of the new accession process methodology also provide for additional financial and investment assistance for membership applicants during the negotiations, which will mean the more rigorous use of pre-accession instruments and the opportunity to use the structural funds, currently only available to the EU member states. Over the next ten years, the EU will provide the Western Balkan countries with €20 billion, €9 billion will come before the end of the current European Commission's mandate in 2024.

March 2020 saw the first practical test of the implementation of the newly agreed principles of the EU enlargement, primarily in the Western Balkans. The new Foreign Ministry State Secretary Martin Klus represented Slovakia at a videoconference of the respective ministers and state secretaries of the EU member states that replaced the regular General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting on March 24. The most important outcome of this negotiation was the consensual decision to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. It was a particular success for Slovakia and its long-term support of the EU prospects of the Western Balkans and active commitment to opening accession negotiations with both partners. Nonetheless, all the member states representatives approved the European Commission's proposal to adjust the accession negotiation procedures, that is, the new methodology, and engaged in the political discussion on EU enlargement. Klus underlined that Slovakia thought the new solutions should "offer a more dynamic, more credible and more foreseeable accession process, which will be beneficial for both the EU and the candidate countries."⁷

⁷ State Secretary Martin Klus stated, "The opening of accession negotiations will allow both countries to make the effort at reforms even more intense. This decision sends a signal of engagement and solidarity to the whole region of the Western Balkans in the currently difficult situation. Slovakia supports the proposal of the European Commission which should offer a more dynamic, more credible and more foreseeable accession process, which will be beneficial for both the EU and the candidate countries. The speed of the EU membership for the candidate countries depends primarily on the readiness of their leaders to implement the necessary reforms, specifically with the emphasis on the rule of law," See "EU member states, with the presence of State Secretary Martin Klus, confirmed their capacity for action by an important decision on the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, March 24, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/clenske-staty-eu-za-ucasti-statneho-tajomnika-m-klu-sa-potvr dili-akcieschopnost-unie-dolezitym-rozhodnutim-o-otvoreni-pristupovych-rokovani-s-albanskou/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D2 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

■ Continuity in Slovak positions

In 2020 the debates on EU enlargement, the discussions on the new methodology, and its shape and purpose were undoubtedly an opportunity for Slovak foreign policy and diplomacy to prove itself. They also exhibited continuity, which was evident in the actions of Slovakia's foreign policy representatives and diplomats, at the ambassador level at least. For example, former Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, where he co-chaired the Global Future Council on Europe in January 2020, stressed in the debate on the Western Balkans that the "correct way forward is to continue with the EU enlargement process, and the sooner, the better for all parties concerned."⁸

He pointed out that this is why a new consensus should be sought on the application of the new methodology when opening accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia. At a conference in Berlin (January 2020) on the new challenges and risks of enlargement policy, he said "lately I often get the sense as if enlargement were regarded as a problem," adding that the Western Balkans was a region where the EU had to demonstrate its clout: "If not in the Western Balkans, then where?"⁹

In the process of opening the accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania, the Foreign Minister, Ivan Korčok, had to deal with misunderstandings and a conflict situation requiring drastic methods to preserve the principle of EU enlargement. Specifically, in the second half of 2020, relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia became more complicated in the run up to the Council of the EU conclusions on the planned opening of accession negotiations (December 10, 2020) with the two Western Balkan countries.

⁸ "M. Lajčák discussed the future of Europe in Davos," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 21, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/m-lajcak-diskutoval-v-davose-o-buducnosti-europy/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D0 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

⁹ "Miroslav Lajčák in Berlin on the importance of EU enlargement," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 16, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/m-lajcak-v-berline-o-dolezitosti-rozsirovania-eu/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D0%26strana%3D2 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

The Bulgarian side had included sensitive historical issues in the wording of the final document provisions on the negotiations with the Macedonia partner as part of the accession process. Yet, it had previously been agreed that these issues would be the subject of bilateral expert talks, not the accession integration negotiations.

The Slovak and Czech representatives therefore decided to block the adoption of the Council of the EU Conclusions on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in December 2020, on the grounds that the EU member states had failed to take an important step in the accession process. In talks with the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Oliver Várhelyi, Ivan Korčok emphasized that the accession process must not be disrupted by unresolved bilateral issues between member states, the EU and accession candidates. It cannot become hostage to unresolved bilateral issues: "Such an approach is damaging and potentially 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) – to ensure a more dynamic and credible accession process."¹⁰

The cases of North Macedonia and Albania are part of attempts to move to a new stage in the potential EU enlargement in the Western Balkans and are a gauge of that process. Besides revitalizing the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, it is a demonstration of its ability to advance the EU integration process with the Balkans against the backdrop of Russia's and China's efforts to disrupt the hegemony of the region. In this context, Slovakia, with its knowledge of the region and its continued involvement in the Western Balkans, plays a significant role.

This was also expressed by a very active Slovak MEP, Vladimír Bilčík (European Parliament's rapporteur for Serbia and the head of the EP delegation for relations with Montenegro), who, when on a trip to the Western Balkans, welcomed the announcement that a North Macedonian embassy would be opening in Bratislava as an important step in bilateral political and trade relations and security ties with NATO's newest ally in the Balkans. He also said that vetoing the conclusions of the EU Enlargement Council had sent a clear signal to our partners in the Union: bilateral disputes, and especially

¹⁰ "Minister Ivan Korčok v rozhovore s eurokomisárom Olivérom," [Minister Ivan Korčok in an interview with European Commissioner Oliver Várhelyi] *TASR*, January 11, 2021. Available online: <https://www.tasr.sk/tasr-clanok/TASR:20210111TB00189> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

those based on controversial historical events or different definitions of nationality, cannot dictate the pace of the enlargement process. This would set a dangerous precedent in which the EU would be assessing the history and historical context instead of the country's political and economic criteria and reform efforts.¹¹

The problems around the EU enlargement in the region were the subject of a videoconference between the State Secretary Martin Klus on January 20, 2021, and his partners in Albania and North Macedonia. He explained to Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia Nikola Dimitrov that the Slovak Republic was especially keen to see that the talks with the EU accession candidate countries were progressing. And that it applied particularly to the Western Balkans as it would affect not only the reforms but also the resolution of various bilateral disputes and wrongs of the past. Martin Klus was clearly criticizing Bulgaria's stance in the accession negotiations with neighboring North Macedonia.¹²

In a dialogue with Albania's Chief Negotiator for the EU Accession Talks, Zef Mazi, Klus praised Albania for its recent progress in the integration process, and the great public support for Albania's EU membership and Euro-Atlantic direction. Both partners agreed that Albania needed to continue its efforts and produce results, especially in important areas such as the rule of law and the fight against corruption and organized crime.¹³

¹¹ "Slovensko sa zastalo Skopje v konflikte s Bulharmi, Macedónci u nás otvoria ambasádu," [Slovakia defended Skopje in its conflict with the Bulgarians, the Macedonians will open an embassy here] *DenníkN*, January 12, 2021. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/2222383/slovensko-sa-zastalo-skopje-v-konflikte-s-bulharmi-macedonci-u-nas-otvoria-ambasadu/> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

¹² "Martin Klus: 'Reforms and an end to the conflicts among neighbors in the Western Balkans are in the best interest of Slovakia, and therefore we support the efforts of these countries to join the EU,'" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, January 21, 2021. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/martin-klus-reformy-aj-koniec-susedskym-sporom-na-zapadnom-balkane-su-v-najlepsom-zaujme-slovenska-preto-podporujeme-ich-usilie-o-vstup-do-eu/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D0 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

¹³ *Ibid*

■ An important trip to the Western Balkans

Given the complications surrounding the opening of North Macedonia's accession negotiations, which were repeatedly postponed, Ivan Korčok's most important trip to the Western Balkans naturally began in *North Macedonia*. Starting there on February 8, 2021, he spent the next two days visiting Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania. At his first stop in Skopje, he agreed with his partners that North Macedonia had made extraordinary progress since 2017, both in establishing and developing good relations with its neighbors and in the reforms needed to start EU accession talks. Korčok also highlighted North Macedonia's NATO accession in March 2020.

The partners agreed that it was crucial for the EU to draft and adopt the negotiating framework as soon as possible and to decide on the date of the first intergovernmental conference between the EU and North Macedonia. It is extremely important for maintaining the EU's credibility.

The North Macedonia representative, led by the President Stevo Pendarovski, particularly welcomed the activities of the Slovak Minister in support of Skopje's EU integration ambitions, including for the project of the National Convention on the EU.¹⁴

Humanitarian aid was distributed, consisting of four lung ventilators manufactured by the Slovak companies Chirana Medical a.s and IPM Chirana worth €100,000. The aid was provided through the NATO Pandemic Response Trust Fund and SlovakAid. Back in October 2020, Slovakia had sent humanitarian materiel to North Macedonia in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. It consisted of medical equipment, tents, blankets, electric generators and so on worth €204,000.

Development cooperation and humanitarian aid were an important aspect of the minister's talks in *Albania*. In 2020 Slovakia donated €250,000 to Albania for reconstruction following the earthquake in the northwest of the country in November 2019, along with a microgrant of €40,000, and it is helping to implement several projects through Slovak Aid. Development

¹⁴ This project has been organized for several years in the Western Balkans by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA). For more information see the convention platform website: <https://nkeu.mk/> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

cooperation with Albania will continue in 2021. Minister Korčok also symbolically presented Albania with a donation of €30,000 towards the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

The main objective of his visit was to enhance bilateral relations, especially in the economic sphere, and to express support for Albania's transformation and reform processes bringing it closer to European Union accession. Korčok spoke highly of Albania's recent progress in meeting the criteria for opening its EU accession negotiations, which demonstrates the country's strong political will and determination to achieve its key foreign policy goals.¹⁵

Although Minister Ivan Korčok held important talks with each of the five countries on his "Western Balkans tour" in the first half of February 2021, the talks in *Serbia* were of particular significance. Meeting with President Aleksandar Vučić, the minister reminded him that Slovakia expected "Serbia, as the largest country in the region, to be an important and reliable source of stability." President Vučić stated that Serbia was interested in finding a solution that would be acceptable to both Belgrade and Pristina. The talks with the Serbian Foreign Minister, Nikola Selaković, focused not only on an assessment of bilateral cooperation but also on current political issues related to the EU accession process. However, it is worrying that Serbia failed to conclude any chapters of the EU Accession Agreement in 2020.¹⁶

Cooperation between the Serbian and European parliaments was part of the agenda of the Serbian-Slovak talks so the internal political dialogue could continue between the coalition and opposition parties in Serbia. Here the Slovak MEP Vladimír Bilčík, the EP rapporteur for Serbia, along with other colleagues from the European Parliament, is playing an important mediating

¹⁵ "Minister Ivan Korčok: 'Albania has made progress in the EU accession process; it is necessary to continue with the reforms,'" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 10, 2021. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-i-korcok-albansko-urobilo-pokrok-v-pristupovom-procese-do-eu-v-reformach-je-potrebne-pokracovat/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D1%26strana%3D2 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

¹⁶ "Bez napretka Srbije u Poglavljima 23 i 24," [Without the progress of Serbia in chapters 23 and 24] *Slobodna Evropa*, November 17, 2020. Available on: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30954739.html> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

role. At the beginning of March 2021, another Slovak diplomatic veteran with a wealth of experience of the Western Balkans, Eduard Kukan, joined the EP group.¹⁷

Minister Ivan Korčok's talks in *Montenegro* were of particular importance as it has made the most progress among the Western Balkan EU candidates. In addition, the opposition won the parliamentary elections on August 30, 2020, for the first time in 30 years and since the restoration of the independent state in 2006. The long-standing dominance of the Democratic Party of Socialists led by President Milo Djukanović gave way to a three-party coalition of conservative pro-Serbian parties: *For the Future of Montenegro, Peace is Our Nation* and the *United Reform Action*. The leaders stated that Montenegro's Euro-Atlantic orientation had not changed.

The change of government was civilized but there was a fierce pre-election struggle between the multifaceted opposition and the ruling group around the president. It was therefore important, during his talks with his Montenegrin partners, that the foreign minister, who enjoys undeniable prestige in Montenegro, should call for constructive cooperation between the new government and the president, as conflict could undermine the country's chances of joining the EU anytime soon.

Development cooperation was another aspect of the visit. In 2020 Slovakia provided microgrants and assistance to four Montenegrin hospitals worth €50,000.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is probably the least prepared Western Balkan country in terms of its possible accession process. Recently, diplomats from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bosnia and Herzegovina discussed the present state of affairs and it is clear that there is no comprehensive, unifying idea of how the state should be organized and what the future of the state might look like. Currently it is both disintegrated and dysfunctional. This issue is even more complex than the situation between Serbia and Kosovo.

¹⁷ "Minister Ivan Korčok in Belgrade: "We expect from Serbia, as the largest country in the region, to be an important and reliable factor of stability," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 8, 2021. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-i-korcok-v-belehrade-od-srb-ska-ako-najvacsej-krajiny-regionu-ocakavame-ze-bude-dolezitim-a-spolahlivym-faktorom-stability/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D1%26strana%3D3 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

However, the Slovak Republic has not given up on its support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's declared intention to become part of Euro-Atlantic structures. The difficult domestic political situation and the resulting controversial or sluggish attitudes slow down the accession process and this is something Slovakia is aware of. During his talks in Sarajevo in February 2021, Minister Korčok stressed that

Slovakia continues to be ready to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina by offering its experience from the transition period and providing political support in the country's integration efforts... the pace of coming closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures is proportionate to the outcome of the reforms.¹⁸

The presence of Slovak troops in the EU operation EUFOR Althea is a long-term Slovak commitment (since 2005) to the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Recently, the Slovak parliament approved an increase in the Slovak contribution to this international military operation – currently, there are 41 Slovak soldiers and the newly approved mandate provides for a maximum of 60 soldiers.

The ministry issued special statements in commemoration of the anniversaries of two important events concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina and the broader international community: the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre and the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which formally ended the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the end of World War II. The Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and Slovak diplomacy

¹⁸ "Ivan Korčok on a working visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina: "The pace of coming closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures is proportionate to the outcomes of the reforms," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 9, 2021. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/ivan-korcok-na-pracovnej-navsteve-v-bosne-a-hercegovine-rychlost-priblizovania-sa-k-euroatlantickym-strukturam-je-umerna-vysledkom-reforier/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2021%26mesiac%3D1%26strana%3D3 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

have from the outset been actively engaged in maintaining peace, and in the stabilization and transformation efforts that are an attempt to resolve the crisis and conflicts in the Western Balkans.¹⁹

■ Slovakia is not ignoring the position of Kosovo

Unlike in previous years, the foreign minister of the new Slovak government has yet to visit Kosovo, but that does not mean that Kosovo's position in the context of Euro-Atlantic policy and integration processes does not form part of the Slovak Republic's foreign policy. Thanks to Ivan Korčok, as well as his European counterparts, the agenda of the EU General Affairs Council in October 2020 included a discussion on the state of the Belgrade–Pristina dialogue in which Miroslav Lajčák participated. Korčok noted that the EU has to be active in the Western Balkans. He also welcomed the fact that the Belgrade–Pristina dialogue had been resumed after eighteen months. The discussion at the ministerial meeting in Brussels resulted in strong political support for the EU-led process of the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina and sent a clear message to both parties that dialogue is one of its priorities. Ministers of the 27 EU member states agreed that Southeast Europe

¹⁹ Minister I. Korčok stated, "We see the Dayton Peace Agreement as a chance for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to build their own future... The issue of the country's future constitutional order must be addressed in the context of moving closer to the EU and in a civilized way by local politicians who have received their mandate from their constituents... The international community can offer a helping hand but not ready-made solutions. This would contradict the logic of the country's future integration, which is a path that every society must take on its own." See "Minister I. Korčok: 'We see the Dayton Peace Agreement as a chance for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to build their own future,'" Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, December 14, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-i-korcok-daytonsku-mierovu-zmluvu-vnimame-ako-sancu-pre-obyvatelov-bosny-a-hercegoviny-pre-budovanie-vlastnej-buducnosti/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D11 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

will not be able to achieve its European prospects without reaching a comprehensive and legally binding agreement between Belgrade and Pristina on the normalization of relations.²⁰

The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has been resumed after a long interruption and, despite many obstacles on both sides and more broadly, the first results can be seen. The obstacles include the pandemic, the parliamentary elections in Serbia and Kosovo and Hashim Thaci's resignation as president of Kosovo following his summons to the Specialized Court in The Hague for crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in 1998–2000. The attempt by former US President Donald Trump's pre-election campaign to gain points by proposing an alternative means of reaching a solution on the Belgrade–Pristina line without consulting the EU is also problematic. In this difficult situation, Lajčák managed to get the leaders – President of Serbia Alexander Vučić and Prime Minister of Kosovo Avdullah Hoti – around the negotiation table three times along with six experts from both sides. Miroslav Lajčák announced:

We have agreed which elements will form the future agreement on the normalization of relations. Both sides agreed with them. We already have the first agreed texts. They concern missing persons, internally displaced people or economic cooperation. Now there are very complex topics on the table. These are mutual financial and property settlement or the position of districts with the majority Serbian population.²¹

²⁰ "Minister Ivan Korčok holds talks with his counterparts of the EU member states," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 12, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-ivan-korcok-rokov-al-s-rezortnymi-partnermi-clenskych-krajin-eu/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Ffen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D9%26strana%3D2 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

²¹ "Lajčák: Pokrok v otázke Kosova môže prísť v priebehu mesiacov," [Lajčák: Progress on Kosovo could come in months] *Pravda*, October 13, 2021. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/565501-lajcak-pokrok-v-otazke-kosova-moze-prist-v-priebehu-mesiacov/> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

■ What are the prospects for standardization?

As the Slovak Republic is one of five EU member states (Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Spain and Romania) that have not yet recognized Kosovo's independence, the EU Special Representative's opinion on whether this issue could be resolved during the Belgrade–Pristina raised questions too. In an interview for the Slovak newspapers, he said:

Of course, I cannot speak for individual EU member states, it is their sovereign decision. However, I can say that the signals I receive from some of these countries say that if Serbia normalizes its relations with Kosovo, there is no reason for them not to do so.²²

So what are the prospects for normalizing these relationships? And would that mean mutual recognition of both countries? Serbia claims that it is not about Kosovo being recognized, because it is already an internationally recognized country. But he admits that a compromise could lead to a solution. And what is the compromise in this case? That has yet to be clearly defined. Serbian President Vučić says that recognition will be achieved without an ultimatum, without seeking to get everything and without being completely satisfied. The EU is not talking about recognition though, but about standardization, and Lajčák often repeats that. When he talks about standardization, he says he is not dictating to his partners what that means – the solution will come at the end of the negotiations. When will that be? Lajčák is not able to answer this with certainty. The two negotiating parties have to want to agree and to understand that EU integration is in their interests, for the benefit of their citizens. But, of course, it also depends on the EU itself. The Union is not interested in slowing down the process, but it cannot artificially accelerate it either. It is important that the EU members fully realize that the agreement between Belgrade and Pristina is not just a bilateral matter, but a step towards stabilizing the situation in the region, as well as its rapprochement with the EU and subsequent integration with the Union, and in that sense is an end in itself.

²² "Miroslav Lajčák: Belehrad, Priština aj ja máme predstavy, ako dosiahnuť normalizáciu vzťahov," [Lajčák: Belgrade, Pristina and I have ideas on how to achieve normalization of relations] *DenníkN*, September 21, 2020. Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/565501-lajcak-pokrok-v-otazke-kosova-moze-prist-v-priebehu-mesiacov/> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

■ Humanitarian aid

Through the SlovakAid Program, the Slovak Republic responds efficiently, directly and quickly to requests from other states for assistance in coping with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Western Balkan countries request assistance bilaterally or through the European Union and NATO crisis coordination centers.

SlovakAid is currently assisting the Western Balkans through a number of instruments, the most effective of which is direct financial contributions. These are designed specifically for local partners who know the situation in detail and the current needs of the country. On that basis, for example, the foreign ministry decided to provide a humanitarian financial contribution to Serbia of €50,000 and a humanitarian financial contribution to Montenegro of €30,000. The contributions were used to purchase protective equipment and medical equipment for hospitals, specifically the hospital in Novi Sad, Serbia, the Montenegro clinical center of in Podgorica, and the general hospital in Beran, also in Montenegro.

In addition to these contributions, the Foreign Ministry responds to the needs of the people of the Western Balkans through small financial contributions of up to €10,000 for development projects based on specific requests from local partners. Compatriots living in the region are not forgotten either in SlovakAid contributions. Medical facilities at the hospital in Novi Sad will also serve the large Slovak minority living in the Vojvodina in Serbia.²³

²³ "Ivan Korčok: pomáhame západnému Balkánu v boji proti pandémiei, pričom nezabúdame na svojich krajanov," [Ivan Korčok: We are helping the countries of the Western Balkans to fight the pandemic] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, May 15, 2021. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/lw1ppvnScIPx/content/-ivan-korcok-pomahame-zapadnemu-balkanu-v-boji-proti-pandemii-pricom-nezabudame-na-svojich-krajanov?p_p_auth=7zzZSgnB&_101_INSTANCE_lw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvsetky_spravy%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D4%26strana%3D2 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

It is noteworthy that the above applies to Kosovo as well. In 2020 Rastislav Kostilník, Head of the Liaison Office of the Slovak Republic in Pristina, made several working visits to the regions of Kosovo, where he handed over face masks and other medical equipment for the local population. The Health Minister, Armend Zemaj, commended the SlovakAid project for its long-term humanitarian commitment in distributing protective masks to the Kosovo Association for the Blind.²⁴

■ Conclusions and recommendations

To conclude, there is a need to look again at the prospects for EU enlargement in the Western Balkans in the light of developments in 2020 and at the turn of 2020/2021. In the introductory part of this analysis, I quoted a statement by the Slovak MEP and expert on the Western Balkans, Vladimír Bilčík, who said that the year 2020 started well, but very few of the commitments and ideas became reality. I have attempted to establish why this is the case. The main reasons are the slowing down, interruptions and delayed start to the EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, compared to the agreed plan. Another Slovak MEP, Michal Šimečka, pointed out that questions around further enlargement tend to be focused on Western European countries' views of the rule of law (and the position of newer member states, including Slovakia), in other words on value issues. According to Šimečka's experience the shortcomings in this sphere are compounded by skeptical assessments of the potential for further EU enlargement in the Western Balkans.

Katarína Mathernová, Deputy Director-General for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, points out that the skepticism seems to lead some Western European countries to close their doors to potential new members,

²⁴ "Another part of project funded by SlovakAid and implemented by Forum for Leadership and Diplomacy done," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 5, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/kosovo-dalsia-cast-projektu-financovana-z-prostriedkov-slovakaid-uspesne-zrealizovana/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues%3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D9%26strana%3D3 (accessed on February 28, 2021).

even when the applicant country has largely or fully met the criteria. The Slovak Foreign Ministry considers it important that greater emphasis should be placed on the principles of the rule of law in the dialogue with the candidate countries – reforms in this area cannot simply be left on the paper.

These and other views on developments in the Western Balkans were mentioned in the discussion noted above. Undoubtedly, many are an incentive for further "Slovak" action in the EU enlargement process in this region. Within this framework, it would be good to focus on activities in the following directions:

- Slovak foreign policy evaluations and assessments of this issue should form part of a permanent system of political, diplomatic and social dialogue between the Slovak Republic and other EU member states, and with partners applying for EU membership. It is important that all of us in the EU realize that enlargement is not just a topical issue for those joining but a strategic solution for everyone in the EU;
- the idea that the EU should focus on reforms first and only then on enlargement is false. The reforms are an ongoing process, and the applicants have to be part of it; the reforms and the enlargement are parallel processes;
- non-enlargement in the Western Balkans would come at a very high security, geopolitical, political and economic cost. Maybe not right away, but at some point. The vacuum caused by the EU's inaction will be filled by other players – Russia, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, etc;
- if normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo is not on the table, it will cause difficulties for the countries themselves and the EU as a whole. Further enlargement in the Western Balkans only makes sense if it includes Serbia, the region's largest country;
- there is a consensus that the conditions for visa liberalization with Kosovo have been met. However, it is not enough simply to state this, action should follow. It affects the practical sphere of everyday life;
- continual attention is focused on the rule of law, including the state of the judiciary, human and media rights and freedoms. In this context, boycotting institutions (e.g. the elections in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo) is a short-sighted policy that merely deepens crisis situations;
- the activities of civil society, think-tanks and other non-governmental organizations, play a very important role in the transition to a modern integrated European society, as evidenced by the experiences of the 1990s (e.g. in Serbia in the 1990s, but also later with the National Convention on the EU project);

- in economic cooperation, Slovakia must urgently raise its currently low level and participate in the effective use of the EU's investment aid to the Western Balkans. Over the next ten years the latter is set to reach €20 billion, and €9 billion by the end of the current European Commission's mandate in 2024.

Slovakia undoubtedly has the potential to play an important role in finding good and productive solutions to this issue. This can be seen in government policy and the work of Slovak civil society in the past, in partnerships with citizens and political, social and economic actors in the Western Balkans.



Matej Šimalčík

Slovakia in East Asia: no longer naive, still not committed

In 2020, Slovakia's relations with East Asia changed significantly as a consequence of domestic and international disruptions.

First, a new government was formed following the February 2020 general elections. The elections brought to an end the almost 15-year-long domination of *Smer–Sociálna demokracia* [Smer–Social Democracy] in Slovak politics.¹ After the elections, a broad coalition of four right-of-center parties was formed, headed by Prime Minister Igor Matovič, from *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities] (*OLaNO*), a political movement. The domestic political change caused a profound shift in the ideological basis of Slovakia's approach to international affairs, including relations with countries in East Asia.

The second highly disruptive event, which rocked Slovak relations with East Asia, is the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which spread from the Chinese city of Wuhan to the rest of the world in early 2020. The disruptive effects have not only complicated diplomacy, but also highlighted the systemic fragility of relations with some countries (especially China), and opened up new areas for potential cooperation.

¹ Prime ministers from the *Smer–SD* led governments in 2006–2010, 2012–2016, and 2016–2020. During the 2010–2012 intermezzo, the Slovak government was led by Prime Minister Iveta Radičová from a right-of-center party, the *SDKÚ–DS* [the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union–Democratic Party]

■ Perceptions of East Asian countries in Slovakia

Domestically, perceptions of East Asian countries among both the general public and politicians acts as an important driver of Slovakia's engagement with these countries, and are a source of legitimacy for specific policies.

A recent public opinion survey conducted by the Central European Institute of Asian Studies and Sinophone Borderlands at Palacký University Olomouc found, that among a sample of seven East Asian countries, only Japan attracts predominantly positive views among Slovak respondents – 47.3 per cent of Slovaks see it positively or very positively, while 24.0 per cent see it negatively (the remainder are neutral). In the case of the remaining six countries/territories, negative opinions prevail over positive ones, most notably in the case of North Korea, China, and India.²

The survey also shows that the Slovak public distinguishes between the various Chinese-speaking communities, as public perceptions of Hong Kong and Taiwan are less negative compared to mainland China. As much as 42.3 per cent of Slovak respondents perceived China either negatively or very negatively. Whereas perceptions of both Taiwan and Hong Kong, were less negative by approximately 10 percentage points.³

Past research on the perceptions of East Asian countries among Slovak politicians has focused exclusively on China. Yet, based on the politicians' opinions on China we can obtain some insights into their views on other East Asian countries.

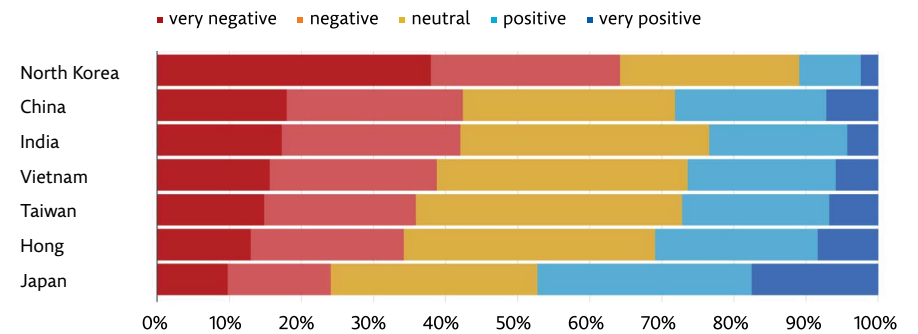
Slovak political parties can be grouped into three clusters according to their perceptions of China: pragmatic supporters (*Smer-SD*, *Hlas-SD* [Voice-Social Democracy], *SNS* [Slovak National Party]); ideological supporters (selected *Smer-SD* politicians, *ĽSNS* [People's Party Our Slovakia]); and ideological opponents (*SaS* [Freedom and Solidarity], *OĽANO*, *Progresívne Slovensko* (*PS*))

² M. Šimalčík et al., "Slovak public opinion on China in the age of Covid-19: caught between values and conspiracies," Central European Institute of Asian Studies 2020. Available online: https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SK-poll-report_FINAL.pdf (accessed on February 25, 2021).

³ Ibid

[Progressive Slovakia], etc.).⁴ Before the 2020 general elections, Slovak policy towards China (and East Asia) was determined by a group of pragmatic and ideological supporters.

Figure 1. Slovak public perceptions of selected East Asian countries



Source: M. Šimalčík et al., "Slovak public opinion on China in the age of Covid-19: caught between values and conspiracies," op. cit

Following the elections, the new government consisted of "ideological opponents" to China. Their views of China are mainly informed by their support for democracy and human rights. As China is neither democratic nor keen on human rights, they tend to view China in a negative light.⁵ This dynamic can also be observed among the voters of these parties, as voters of parties with negative views of China tend to have a more negative view of China. Even though no political party has a majority of voters with a positive attitude towards China, the two pro-China parties, *Smer-SD* and *Hlas-SD*, have the highest share of supporters with a positive perception of China. On the other hand, *PS* has the lowest share of supporters that are positive about China.

This is inversely mirrored in voters' attitudes towards Taiwan and Hong Kong. Supporters of *Smer-SD* are among those with the least favorable views of

⁴ M. Šimalčík, "Image of China in Slovakia: ambivalence, adoration, and fake news," *Asia Europe Journal*, March 3, 2021. Available online: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10308-021-00597-4> (accessed on March 3, 2021).

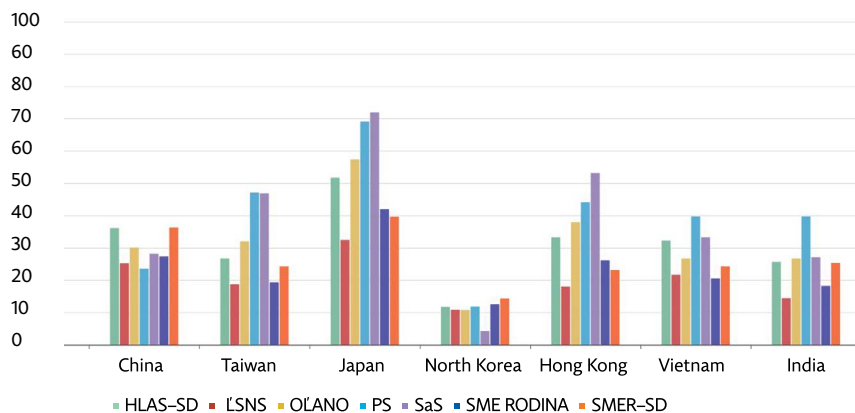
⁵ Ibid

both Taiwan and Hong Kong, while *SaS* and *PS* supporters have the highest share of supporters with favorable views of both.

Even though Japan is the most positively perceived country across all parties, this support is lowest among supporters of *ĽSNS*, *Sme rodina* [We are family], and *Smer-SD*.

A notable case is the neo-Nazi *ĽSNS* party, which has a low share of supporters with a positive perception of any of the countries included in the poll. It is also interesting to note the difference between voters of *Hlas-SD* and *Smer-SD*. While supporters of these two parties have similar views of China and India, supporters of *Hlas-SD* have more positive views on the remaining countries/territories (except for North Korea). This suggests that after the split of the *Smer-SD* party in 2020, *Hlas-SD* attracted the more internationalist portion of *Smer-SD*'s electorate.⁶

Figure 2. Perceptions of East Asian countries among voters of political parties polling over 5 per cent (share of respondents with positive and very positive perceptions)



⁶ R. Q. Turcsányi et al., "Sinophone Borderlands Europe Survey," [dataset] Palacký University Olomouc, 2020.

■ Economic relations

When it comes to economic relations with East Asia, the most important players for Slovakia are South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China, as well as several ASEAN countries.

In bilateral trade, Slovakia maintained a negative trade balance with all major East Asian economies in 2020. The largest trade deficit was recorded with Vietnam, followed by South Korea, and China.

Despite the high trade imbalance, China remained Slovakia's largest trading partner from among the East Asian economies, both in terms of imports and exports. In 2020, imports from China accounted for 6.7 per cent of overall imports (€4.9 bn). Exports accounted for 2.7 per cent of Slovakia's overall exports (€2.1 bn). South Korea accounted for 4.9 per cent of Slovak imports (€3.5 bn) and 0.5 per cent of Slovak exports (€334 m). Imports from Vietnam were also high, accounting for 5 per cent of overall imports (€3.6 bn), but Slovak exports to Vietnam remained marginal (€36.7 m).⁷

It should be noted, though, that the actual exposure of Slovakia towards East Asian economies is likely to be higher than the bilateral trade data suggest if the re-export of goods is accounted for. Slovakia is firmly integrated within global value chains. This means that a proportion of the products imported by or produced in Slovakia is exported elsewhere (mainly EU markets) and from there they are again exported to their final destination. Previous research on economic exposure to China has shown that when these re-exports are accounted for, the real economic exposure to China is approximately

⁷ "Total import and Total export by continents and economic groupings," Statistical Office of Slovakia, March 11, 2021. Available online: [http://statdat.statistics.sk/cognosex/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi?b_action=cognosViewer&ui.action=run&ui.object=storeId\(%22i10B2CB52FFF44B-319DA31F65A3FFE155%22\)&ui.name=Celkov%20dovoz%20a%20celkov%20v%20v%20pod%20pod%20c4%bea%20kontinentov%20a%20ekonomick%20zozoskupen%20kraj%20v%20roku%202014%20%5bzo0002ms%5d&run.outputFormat=&run.prompt=true&cv.header=false&ui.backURL=%2fcognosex%2fcps4%2fport-lets%2fcommon%2fclose.html&run.outputLocale=en](http://statdat.statistics.sk/cognosex/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi?b_action=cognosViewer&ui.action=run&ui.object=storeId(%22i10B2CB52FFF44B-319DA31F65A3FFE155%22)&ui.name=Celkov%20dovoz%20a%20celkov%20v%20v%20pod%20pod%20c4%bea%20kontinentov%20a%20ekonomick%20zozoskupen%20kraj%20v%20roku%202014%20%5bzo0002ms%5d&run.outputFormat=&run.prompt=true&cv.header=false&ui.backURL=%2fcognosex%2fcps4%2fport-lets%2fcommon%2fclose.html&run.outputLocale=en) (accessed on February 28, 2021).

3.5 times higher.⁸ A similar trend is most likely to apply to other East Asian countries as well.

Naturally, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted bilateral trade with East Asian countries as well. Among the seven countries for which the Statistical Office records data, all but one saw their exports shrink in 2020 compared to the previous year. The largest decrease was in Japanese exports to Slovakia, which in 2020 reached only 75 per cent of their 2019 value. On the other hand, Slovak exports to East Asia were not impacted by the pandemic. Slovak exports to five out of the seven monitored countries have increased. The rise was most significant in the case of China, Japan, Taiwan, and Malaysia.

The pandemic has also opened up new avenues of trade cooperation. Throughout 2020, trade in personal protective equipment (PPE) and other pandemic-related articles (e.g. testing kits) became a regular part of Slovakia–East Asia trade. Antigen testing kits were largely supplied from South Korea, which were used to identify people infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, as part of efforts to suppress the spread of Covid-19 in Slovakia.⁹ Face masks and other protective equipment were supplied from China in the main, but also from other East Asian countries. The adverse side of this is that dependency on a single supplying country can pose a security risk in a time of crisis.

However, trade is only one part of the whole picture of economic relations between Slovakia and East Asia. Equally important, if not more so, are investments. As the available data on foreign direct investment stocks by East Asian countries differ significantly according to the methodology used, the official statistics may not provide a full picture of how Slovakia is benefiting from the presence of various East Asian investors. This is mostly due to the fact that some methodologies take into account reverse flows of capital, while others do not take indirect investments into account.

⁸ “German-Central European supply chain-cluster report,” *Country Report* No. 13/263, International Monetary Fund, 2013. Available online: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2016/12/31/German-Central-European-Supply-Chain-Cluster-Report-Staff-Report-First-Background-Note-40881> (accessed on February 25, 2021). M. Šebeňa. “Chinese trade and investment in the Visegrad countries: mapping increased exposure and volatility,” *China-CEE Institute Working Paper*, No. 11, 2018. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/chinese-trade-and-investment-in-the-visegrad-countries-2/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

⁹ M. Šimalčík et al., “Slovakia and the democracies of Northeast Asia: Partnerships rooted in values,” *Central European Institute of Asian Studies*, 2020. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/slovakia-and-the-democracies-of-northeast-asia/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

Table 1. Trade relations with selected East Asian economies

	■ imports (€m)	■ share of overall imports (%)	■ imports index 2020/2019	■ exports (€m)	■ share of overall exports (%)	■ exports index 2020/2019	■ trade balance (€m)
China	4853.4	6.7	96.2	2054.1	2.7	121.1	-2799.3
India	271.4	0.4	97.9	85.2	0.1	85.2	-186.2
Japan	414.2	0.6	74.5	199.2	0.3	114.8	-215.0
Malaysia	587.1	0.8	120.0	15.7	0.0	113.4	-571.4
South Korea	3535.9	4.9	82.6	334.2	0.4	94.0	-3201.7
Taiwan	349.0	0.5	85.6	33.4	0.0	113.6	-315.5
Vietnam	3638.1	5.0	89.5	36.7	0.0	107.2	-3601.3

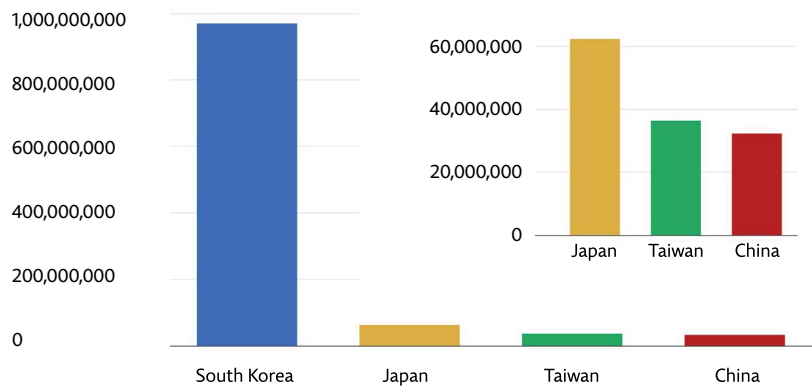
Source: “Total import and Total export by continents and economic groupings,” op. cit.

To overcome these methodological conundrums, income tax payments are used in this paper as a proxy measure.

Comparing investors from four Northeast Asian countries – South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and China – we can observe that over the past ten years, Slovakia has reaped the most benefits from the presence of South Korean investors. Between 2010 and 2019, South Korean companies paid almost €1 billion in income taxes. The remaining three countries pale in comparison. Japanese companies generated approximately €62 million in income taxes, followed by Taiwan (€36 m), and China (€32 m).¹⁰ Over the past ten years, income tax payments by Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese companies operating in Slovakia have risen. However, the trend is stagnant for Japan. Overall, the amount of taxes paid by Northeast investors tripled between 2010 (€51.5 m) and 2019 (€144.3 m).

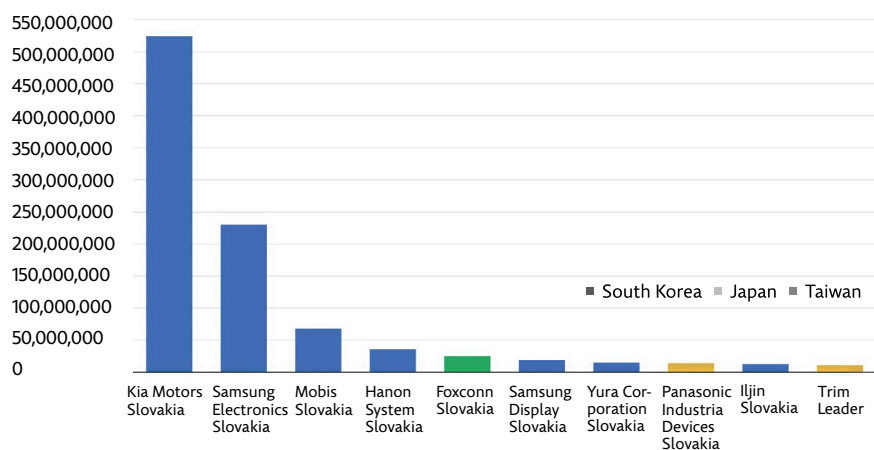
¹⁰ Data available online: www.finstat.sk. The lists of companies/investors from South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan were obtained from the respective embassies in Slovakia. As the Chinese embassy did not provide such a list, one was compiled by the author from open sources.

Figure 3. Income tax payments by Northeast Asian investors in Slovakia (2010–2019; in €)



As far as individual investors go, the largest taxpayers are the Korean companies Kia Motors Slovakia and Samsung Electronics Slovakia. Kia Motors Slovakia accounts for 47.6 per cent of all income taxes paid by East Asian companies in the past ten years, while Samsung Electronics Slovakia accounts for 20.9 per cent. The list of the top 10 taxpayers in the past ten years includes seven companies from South Korea, one Taiwanese company, and two Japanese companies. No Chinese companies feature in the top 10 list.

Figure 4. Investors from Northeast Asia in Slovakia – top 10 income taxpayers (2010–2019, in €).



Another useful proxy measure for calculating the economic benefits of the presence of Northeast Asian investors in Slovakia is employment data.¹¹

Rather unsurprisingly, in 2020, South Korean companies employed the most people (between 11.5–19.7 thousand workers), closely followed by Japanese companies (between 7 and 13.5 thousand workers). Next are Chinese companies (between 4 and 7.8 thousand workers). Then companies from Taiwan with the lowest number of employees (between 2.1 and 4.2 thousand workers).¹²

Among the companies that employ at least 1,000 workers, four are from South Korea, three from Japan, one from China, and one from Taiwan.

It is worth noting the different contributions by Japanese companies in terms of taxes and in terms of employment. While tax contributions by Japanese companies were equivalent to only 6 per cent of the South Korean contributions, in terms of employment, Japanese companies are close behind the Korean ones.

This is partially due to the fact that many Japanese companies operating in Slovakia are embedded into the Kia Motors value chain, producing and supplying parts that are installed into Kia-produced cars. While these products can be similarly labor-intensive, the added value of these intermediate products is much lower.

A specific issue in 2020, relating to the crossover point in economic and political relations, was the negotiation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the EU and China. After several years of negotiations, the finalization of the talks was rushed through the EU Council in the final weeks of December by the German presidency.¹³ The compromise negotiated by the EU Commission has already been criticized by several MEPs

¹¹ As the Statistical Office records categories of employers according to size only (e.g. a company with 1,000–1,999 workers), and does not provide precise figures, the following data are an estimation only.

¹² Data available online: www.finstat.sk. The lists of companies/investors from South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, were obtained from the respective embassies in Slovakia. As the Chinese embassy did not provide such a list, one was compiled by the author from open sources.

¹³ J. Carafano, A. Gupta, J. Smith. "The pitfalls of the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment," *The Diplomat*, January 22, 2021. Available online: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/the-pitfalls-of-the-china-eu-comprehensive-agreement-on-investment/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

(including Slovak ones) and think-tank experts,¹⁴ on the grounds that it does not sufficiently deal with forced labor in China, and does not provide for equal market access to crucial sectors, for example, the media industry.¹⁵

If the treaty is ratified, it will impact on all aspects of relations with China. Despite this, there has been no public debate in Slovakia, suggesting that relations with China are not a priority for Slovak representatives in the EU institutions.

■ Political relations and security policy

Political change and the Covid-19 pandemic caused significant disruption in political relations with East Asian countries as well.

As was already outlined, following the 2020 general elections, a government coalition with a more value-based approach to foreign policy took power. Naturally, this has impacted on the government's approach to East Asia, especially China.

In the past, human rights issues in China were treated as merely a foreign policy addendum at best and a useless distraction from economic cooperation at worst. Any form of dissent on the part of domestic political actors was met with stern criticism. But after years of ignoring human rights in its foreign policy toward China, Slovakia became a vocal critic of China in 2020.

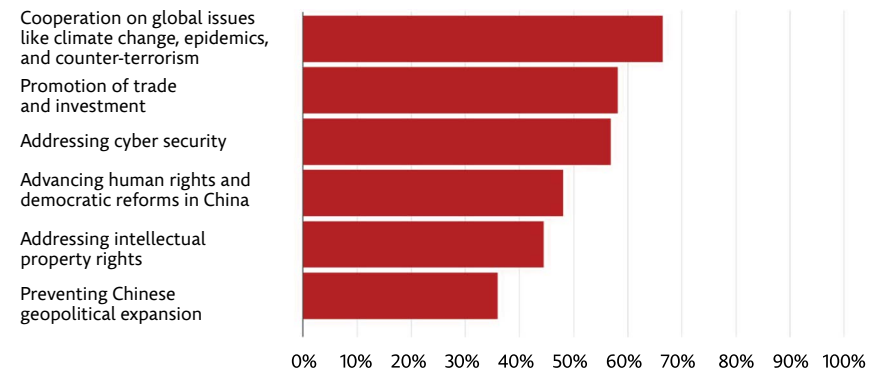
Notable actions on human rights in China included a call for the release of Panchen Lama and other political prisoners, decrying the unilateral imposition of security legislation on Hong Kong and the dismantling of its electoral system, and atrocities committed against the Uyghur population of Xinjiang.

¹⁴ E.g. F. Godement et al., "EU should not rush investment deal with China," *EU Observer*, December 18, 2020. Available online: <https://euobserver.com/opinion/150432> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

¹⁵ S. Lau, J. Hanke Vela, "EU deal cements China's advantage in media war," *Politico*, March 13, 2021. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-trade-deal-china-media-war-industry-soft-power/> (accessed on March 14, 2021).

Concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, Slovak representatives have objected to Chinese misinformation and mask diplomacy, and voiced support for Taiwan's accession to the World Health Organization (WHO).¹⁶

Figure 5. Slovak public's foreign policy preferences on China



Source: M. Šimalčík et al., "Slovak public opinion on China in the age of Covid-19: Caught between values and conspiracies," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2020. Available online: https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SK-poll-report_FINAL.pdf (accessed on February 25, 2021).

However, it should be noted that most of these activities were carried out by legislators within the Slovak parliament and/or the European Parliament rather than the executive branch. Executive action was notable in October 2020, when Slovakia co-signed a joint statement alongside 39 other countries on the mistreatment of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities and objecting to the adoption of the National Security Law for Hong Kong. Slovakia was the only V4 country to sign the statement.¹⁷ When a similar statement was presented

¹⁶ M. Šimalčík, "Slovakia: a new challenger of China's human rights record?," *The Diplomat*, August 17, 2020. Available online: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/slovakia-a-new-challenger-of-chinas-human-rights-record/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

¹⁷ "Joint statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang and the recent developments in Hong Kong, delivered by Germany on behalf of 39 countries," October 6, 2020. Available online: <https://usun.usmission.gov/joint-statement-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-xinjiang-and-the-recent-developments-in-hong-kong-delivered-by-germany-on-behalf-of-39-countries/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

a year earlier, Slovakia was among the absentees, which confirms that the domestic political change has impacted on Slovakia's official position on Xinjiang.¹⁸

A public opinion survey has shown that almost 50 per cent of the Slovak population believes that addressing human rights and democratic reforms in China should be one of the priorities of Slovak foreign policy on China. Voters of *SaS*, *PS*, and *OLaNO* are most strongly in favor of this, from among the relevant political parties. On the other hand, voters of *ĽSNS* and *Smer-SD* consider this policy option least desirable.

Other policy options are deemed even more desirable, even among those who recognize the necessity for a human-rights dimension in foreign policy. Almost 70 per cent of the Slovak population favor cooperation on global issues like climate change, epidemics, and counter-terrorism, followed by the promotion of trade and investment (almost 60 per cent of respondents). This suggests a preference for a pragmatic engagement alongside a strong human-rights foreign policy dimension.¹⁹

Human rights are not the only dimension of political relations with East Asia that changed during 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the steadily developing interaction with many East Asian democracies. To illustrate, Slovakia and Japan were supposed to celebrate the centennial of their mutual relations in 2020. This was to be accompanied by cultural and other events which, however, were largely put on hold due to the pandemic.²⁰

Security policy was also impacted by the pandemic. Besides recognizing the interplay between public health and national security, we came to realize that dependence on a single source of strategic inputs is a security risk. During the pandemic, dependence on supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) from China illustrated this problem. Before the pandemic, China

had been responsible for half the global production of PPE. While this was enough to satisfy demand under normal circumstances, during the period of heightened demand in the first half of 2020, the lack of production facilities outside of China, especially in Europe, proved highly problematic.²¹

A similar problem caused by the pandemic became visible in March 2021, when a global shortage of semiconductors (imported – directly or indirectly – from Taiwan, China, and other East Asian countries) caused disruptions in Slovak automotive production.²² Since vehicle exports account for almost 27 per cent of Slovakia's overall exports,²³ prolonged disruption in the supply of semiconductors from East Asia could prove devastating for this crucial sector of the economy.

Slovak political representation and the expert community began to recognize that China and its behavior posed other security risks, beyond those related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Several official documents point to this, especially the newly adopted Security Strategy. Reflecting the positions of the European Union, it describes China as a partner to cooperate with on global challenges, an economic and technological competitor, and a systemic rival. The key passage in the Security Strategy reads:

China is significantly increasing its power potential and political influence, based on rapidly growing military capabilities, which, combined with economic strength and strategic investment, are assertively used to

¹⁸ Z. Basu. "More countries join condemnation of China over Xinjiang abuses," *AXIOS*, October 8, 2020. Available online: <https://www.axios.com/un-statement-china-uighurs-xinjiang-6b29dbf5-b93c-4c70-bd4c-333e1c23471f.html> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ M. Šimalčík et al., "Slovakia and the democracies of Northeast Asia: Partnerships rooted in values," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2020. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/slovakia-and-the-democracies-of-northeast-asia/> (accessed on February 25, 2021).

²¹ M. Šimalčík. "Ako pandémie odhalila rozsah celosvetovej závislosti zdravotníctva od Číny," [How the pandemic revealed the extent of global healthcare dependence on China] *DenníkN*, March 27, 2020. Available online: <https://dennikn.sk/1824806/ako-pandemia-odhalila-rozsah-celosvetovej-zavislosti-zdravotnictva-od-ciny/?ref=list> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

²² R. Tomek, "Problém s čipmi dorazil zatiaľ len do Trnavy, výroba v ďalších automobilkách je bez problémov," [The problem with chips has so far only reached Trnava, production at other car manufacturers is problem free] *DenníkE*, March 15, 2021. Available online: <https://e.dennikn.sk/2311843/problem-s-cipmi-dorazil-zatial-len-do-trnavy-vyroba-v-dalsich-automobilkach-je-bez-problemov/?ref=mwat> (accessed on March 15, 2021); "Nedostatok polovodičov vo výrobe pocítil aj bratislavský Volkswagen," [The lack of semiconductors also affected Volkswagen in Bratislava] *Živé*, March 18, 2021. Available online: <https://zive.aktuality.sk/clanok/151672/nedostatok-polovodicov-vo-vyrobe-pocital-aj-bratislavsky-volkswagen/> (accessed on March 18, 2021).

²³ Data as of 2018, see Atlas of Economic Complexity. Available online: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/explore?country=206&product=undefined&year=2018&productClass=HS&target=Product&partner=undefined&startYear=1995> (accessed on February 28, 2021).

advance Chinese interests. China promotes its own style of governance and a different understanding of human rights and freedoms; the Slovak Republic will take this into account in mutual relations, as well as its positions within international organizations.²⁴

Besides this discussion on China, the new Security Strategy also deals with some of the security risks which apply to China. These include the threat of authoritarian states represent to democracy, the spread of disinformation and propaganda, and the impact of corrosive capital on security.

■ Way forward

Despite the developments outlined above, Slovakia still lacks a clear strategy on how to deal with the East Asian region in its entirety, and the individual countries. Previous attempts to develop policy guidelines for relations with China were inherently flawed, as they focused only on economic relations, while altogether ignoring the political, security, and human rights dimensions. Compared to the past, we can say that Slovakia is no longer naive about its dealings with East Asia, especially with China, but it is still not fully committed to developing relations with the countries in the region.

There are indications that this may change soon, as the 2021 annual foreign policy plan lists starting work on Slovakia's Asia-Pacific Strategy as one of the tasks for the year.²⁵

For effective and beneficial relations with East Asian countries, this new policy should as a minimum focus on the following aspects:

- Slovak economic relations with South Korea and Japan are already on a high level, while interaction on a political level has been neglected in the past. Catching up in this realm should be a top priority, which grows ever more urgent as the global geopolitical and geo-economic centers of gravity move steadily towards the Indo-Pacific region. Improving political relations could also provide a new boost for economic relations;
- future engagements with China should be based on a rigorous cost-benefit analysis which takes into account not only the potential economic benefits but also the impact on national security, as well as possible reputational costs;
- to deal with the new security challenges posed by China, Slovakia does not need to “re-invent the wheel.” Many Slovak allies and partners among the East Asian democracies have long-term experience of countering hybrid threats posed by China. Slovakia should therefore exchange lessons learned and best practices with these countries. NGO sectors could act as an intermediary in this dialogue;
- Slovakia is not an active player in South East Asia when it comes to official development aid. Slovakia's experience of economic and political transition, as well as the adoption of good governance reforms, could be one of the signature aspects of Slovak ODA in South East Asia;
- as Slovakia does not recognize Taiwan, but nevertheless maintains beneficial relations with it, the new Asia-Pacific Strategy should be used to set out Slovakia's own view of the “One China Policy” and suitable levels of engagement with the island. This will make Slovak engagement with Taiwan more predictable, and provide bureaucrats across governmental agencies with guidelines on how to deal with Taiwan in the future.

The lack of personnel to deal with East Asia remains a challenge for Slovakia.²⁶ As the pandemic has chipped away at disposable financial resources, the prospects of successfully dealing with this challenge remain bleak.

²⁴ “Bezpečnosť stratégie Slovenskej republiky,” [Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic] Government of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: https://www.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/8048_bezpecnostna-strategia-sr-2021.pdf (accessed on February 28, 2021).

²⁵ “Zahraničná a európska politika Slovenskej republiky v roku 2021: Slovensko a svet v čase pandémie,” [Foreign and European policy of the Slovak Republic in 2021: Slovakia and the world in the pandemic era] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia, February 2021. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/4238286/2021-Zahrani%C4%8Dna-a-europ-ska-politika-SR-v-roku-2021.pdf> (accessed on March 3, 2021).

²⁶ M. Šimalčík, “Slovak relations with East Asia: A lost decade?” in P. Brezáni (ed.), *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2019*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2020. Available online: http://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Rocenka_2019_web.pdf (accessed on March 3, 2021).

This makes anchoring Slovakia's approach to East Asia within the common EU approach all the more important. Nonetheless the 2021 foreign policy plans rightly note that Slovak policy towards the region needs to be embedded in the common EU position. However, it is necessary to recognize the Slovakia must act as co-creator and co-owner of the common EU approach, and not put itself in the role of a mere follower. Successful engagement with East Asia can only be achieved if Slovakia manages to actively shape EU policy with the aim of ensuring that it reflects Slovak interests as much as possible. Cooperation on this with other smaller member states with similar interests will be crucial.





Slovakia's foreign policy tools



Daniel Kaba

Slovak development cooperation in 2020

■ Prologue: you can't change the direction of the wind, but you can adjust the sails

The crisis is one thing and our response to it is another. Yet, the two things have been and will continue to be treated as interchangeable, whether intentionally or not. The global pandemic has also revealed the extent of inclusiveness and solidarity, both in relation to society and the individual.¹

There's no doubt that in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has been the main game changer in development cooperation worldwide and in Slovakia. The two main questions haunting and puzzling the minds of foreign ministry officials, non-governmental organizations and others were:

- How should we respond and provide development and humanitarian assistance in this global crisis?
- How can we protect or adapt, perhaps even transform, the Slovak system of development cooperation when faced with the coronavirus.

The two are interconnected and of course the potential solutions are to be found at the crossover point, which is unknown territory. They also highlight

¹ "Covid-19 has been likened to an x-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built. It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere: The lie that free markets can deliver health care for all, the fiction that unpaid care work is not work, the delusion that we live in a post-racist world; the myth that we are all in the same boat. While we are all floating on the same sea, it's clear that some are in super yachts, while others are clinging to the drifting debris," said the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in "Opening remarks at Nelson Mandela Lecture: 'Tackling the inequality pandemic: a new social contract for a new era,'" United Nations Secretary-General, July 18, 2020. Available online: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-07-18/remarks-nelson-mandela-lecture-tackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era> (accessed on February 20, 2021).

another fundamental issue: did the decision makers adopt a systemic approach and adjust development cooperation to reflect the pandemic situation, or has it deepened and accelerated previously existing trends and exacerbated fundamental problems that were already in evidence? In other words what was improved (including system changes), what damage control was enacted and what deteriorated?

■ Three key factors

In order to better understand Slovak development cooperation in 2020 we need to think about three factors:

- the global coronavirus pandemic;
- the state of ODA before 2020; and
- the new government manifesto.

Paradoxically, the global pandemic, perhaps even more than previous crises such as the financial crisis of 2008 and the so called migration crisis of 2015, highlights the importance of development cooperation. Slovakia may well be faced with another pandemic in the future, and today we know that simply closing borders does not necessarily help.

The coronavirus has significantly affected the health, economic security and way of life of the entire population of Slovakia. However, it has also been an opportunity to show greater solidarity and to change mindsets, which will ultimately lead to more rapid and substantial change in the system of development cooperation.

The pandemic will probably significantly deepen inequality in the world, slow down the achievement of the sustainable development goals and place millions of people in a very difficult situation.

In a report entitled *The inequality virus*,² Oxfam stated that the 1,000 richest people on the planet had recouped their losses caused by the coronavirus pandemic within nine months, but that it could take more than a decade for

² "The inequality virus bringing together a world torn apart by coronavirus through a fair, just and sustainable economy," Oxfam, January 25, 2021. Available online: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-virus> (accessed on January 26, 2021).

the world's poorest to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic. According to the report the Covid-19 pandemic is the first time in history that inequality is rising in almost every country at once. This does not just affect wealth; gender and racial inequality are expected to increase as well.

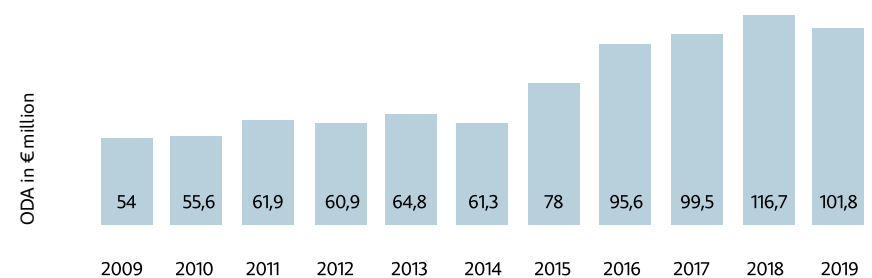
The report also says that 112 million fewer women would be at high risk of losing their incomes or jobs if women and men were equally represented in the sectors negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis.

The pandemic does not just present a challenge to development cooperation and the search for solutions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, whether in resource mobilization, speed of response, transparency or international cooperation, but could also significantly change the whole development cooperation system, and have impacts that are not yet visible or still have to be evaluated.

Second, in order to better understand development in 2020 it is worth reminding ourselves what it looked like on the eve of 2020. Even before 2020, EU official development assistance (ODA) was in decline. In 2019, despite a slight increase of €3 billion, ODA had fallen for the third year in a row relative to the EU's gross national income (GNI) (accounting for 0.46 per cent of GNI).

The Slovak development cooperation budget had fallen to 0.11 per cent of GNI (€101 million) before the Covid-19 pandemic, and that was despite GDP growth. Unfortunately, this is a long-term trend. Without going into the motivations, it is the case that the Slovak Republic had decided to contribute even less of its total wealth to help less developed countries than in the previous year.

Figure 1. Total Slovak ODA 2009–2019 (in € m)

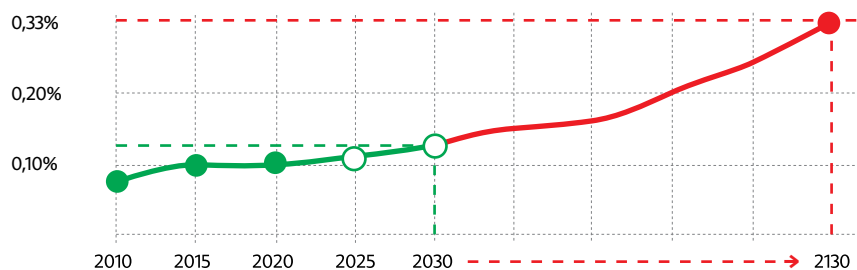


Source: "Aidwatch 2020," Ambrela – Platform for development organisations, 2021. Available online: https://ambrela.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Ambrela_Aidwatch_2020_WEB.pdf (accessed on January 25, 2021).

One can therefore legitimately ask how important it is for the Slovak Republic to help solve problems that, being global in nature, are increasingly affecting Slovakia's interests and the lives of its inhabitants.

If the development cooperation budget continues to increase at the same rate, we will not achieve our international commitment of 0.33 per cent of GNI by 2030, but by 2130.

Figure 2. Timeline of Slovakia's ODA commitment of 0.33% of GNI



Source: "Aidwatch 2020," op. cit.

But there were bold and realistic plans for 2020 and improvements were incorporated into strategic documents and budgets. The significant increase in funding and the advancement of activities in January and February 2020 were grounds for enthusiasm.

It is important to note that the increase in funding was down to unique circumstances that will not apply in the next few years, namely:

- accumulation of unspent funds from previous years and willingness to use them wisely (financial contributions for 2020 were prepaid and hence the almost €1 million increase for SAIDC grants);
- the overall SAIDC budget was funded purely out of microgrants;
- the Covid-19 pandemic had not begun.

Nevertheless, the development community rightly expected 2020 to be the best year out of the last 10 years at least. The optimism was backed by activities that had been planned and properly budgeted. To name a few: the Foreign Ministry planned to deploy three new development diplomats to Lebanon, Ethiopia and Serbia; the budget for grants of SAIDC was increased by

€1.5 million (more than 20 per cent); and a new tool framework partnership agreement renamed a strategic partnership was to be piloted in Kenya. The most important tasks included the drafting of the country strategy papers for Kenya, Moldova and Georgia, and also the "Strategy on humanitarian aid" and the systematic implementation of project and program evaluations.³

Third, following the February elections a new government was formed on March 21st, and Ivan Korčok became the new Foreign Minister (April 8th). Development cooperation became the responsibility of the new state secretary, Ingrid Brocková.

The Government's Program Manifesto⁴ raised further expectations, especially when compared to the 2016. It included a short chapter on development cooperation with rather bold commitments such as

- to promote the targeted setting of development cooperation and humanitarian aid instruments;
- to accelerate the increase in financial resources for bilateral development cooperation activities in line with our commitments to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
- to continue a close dialogue with the non-governmental sector as a key partner;
- to seek to mobilize private sector resources through engagement with major donors and international organizations, in particular the EU.

Besides this the manifesto also included commitments on strategic communication, awareness raising and tackling the threat of disinformation and fake news (among other things) in development cooperation, humanitarian aid and support to human rights worldwide.

³ "Zameranie bilaterálnej rozvojovej spolupráce SR na rok 2020," [Bilateral development cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2020] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: https://slovakaid.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/zameranie_bilaterálnej_rozvojovej_spoluprace_sr_na_rok_2020.pdf (accessed on January 26, 2021).

⁴ "Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky," [Program Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic] Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 2020. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24756/1> (accessed on February 21, 2021).

One of the strongest commitments states that “the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the promotion of the rule of law will be a key criterion in the promotion of the foreign policy interests of the Slovak Republic.”

■ SlovakAid in 2020 or seven lean cows

Total ODA for 2020 amounted to €122 million and increased from 0.11 per cent to 0.14 per cent of GNI. Bilateral aid was €32 million and multilateral €90 million. These figures may look promising but 50 per cent of the bilateral aid consists of €16 million of debt relief for Serbia. In multilateral aid the contributions to the European Commission increased by €7 million.

Table 1. Development cooperation spending: plans vs. reality (€m)

	■ national program for 2020	■ real spending in grants	
Grants	Development cooperation projects	€ 3,000,000	2,464,190
	Strategic partnerships	600,000 ⁵	0
	Humanitarian aid projects	1,300,000	1,737,509
	GCE projects	100,000	89,593
	Capacity building	150,000	150,000
	Volunteers	351,860	185,760
	EU Co-financing projects	80,000	15,792
	Grants total	5,581,000	4,642,844
Financial contributions	Microgrants	600,000	633,849
	Sharing Slovak Expertise	110,000	11,733
	Unplanned	0	875,160
Other	SAIDC admin	575,183	664,695
	Evaluations	50,000	0
	Audit	50,000	58,860
	Capacity building	10,000	6,302
	Public awareness	70,000	69,150
	Development diplomats	0	234,129

⁵ The plan was for a five-year strategic partnership project to consist of a first three-year tranche of €600,000 and a second tranche of €400,000 in years four and five.

The year started positively and the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) successfully completed its year-long EU pillar assessment⁶ to become the third EU13 national agency to administer EU funds. This will not only improve the quality but also bring additional funding back to the national level, in a situation where 80 per cent of the total Slovak ODA is multilateral with the biggest recipient being the EU. In January the Slovak National Program⁷ including the budget for 2020 was approved by the government and it seems there were no major obstacles to starting implementation of the promising plan mentioned above.

Main developments in SAIDC funding:

- *systemic elements* and changes planned to improve the quality of Slovak ODA, such as strategic partnerships and evaluations, were canceled;
- the *predictability* of SlovakAid donor deteriorated because the two program countries Kenya and Georgia had funds approved of only 48 per cent of what had been allocated under calls for proposals;
- funding – financial contributions – that are *not accessible to Slovak implementers* and not under the direct effective control of the Foreign Ministry were increased by more than 100 per cent;
- moreover 17 per cent of the grant funding, i.e. €900,000 was *redirected* to financial contributions;
- grant funding returned to its *€4–4.5 million, ten-year average*;
- at the same time the *success rate dramatically declined and demand almost doubled*, In 2020 a total of 16 calls were announced, 37 out of the 109 applications were successful (27 projects submitted by NGOs and ten entrepreneurs and other entities), representing a success rate of 34 per cent (excluding volunteer projects), In 2018, out of the 59 applications submitted, 30 were successful, which is a success rate of 50 per cent (excluding volunteer projects);
- in response to the pandemic SAIDC quickly prepared *methodological guidelines for the ongoing projects* (shifting and changing implementation of activities, eligibility of unexpected items/higher amounts etc.) but it was not able to tackle the political motives behind the main changes stated above.

All the above did much to erase the high expectations not only of 2020 but beyond.

⁶ “Zameranie bilaterálnej rozvojovej spolupráce SR na rok 2020,” op. cit.

⁷ Ibid

■ Development projects

In the call for Kenya with an allocation of €500,000, only €170,000 was used on a single approved project, while the other five projects submitted by Slovak NGOs with a long-term presence in Kenya were not recommended by the evaluation committee for approval despite having achieved the minimum threshold, or more than 75 points. The real reason for not recommending and not approving five projects was not the quality, but the ministry's need to redirect most of the allocation to Covid-19 related activities.⁸ In the future a more transparent manner should be adopted and decisions to redirect resources and the justification for that must be communicated publicly and in a timely manner so applicants do not waste money on unnecessary work and project preparation costs.

NGOs need to plan longer ahead strategically. To what extent should they take into account the diminishing interest of the ministry in relation to CSO projects in Kenya? The fact that the call for strategic partnerships, advocated for by the CSOs in the past eight years, was canceled just a day before the submission deadline meant economic and reputation losses for the NGOs and their local partners working on the project proposals.

The regional approach in Subsaharan Africa was kept and two projects were approved in Tanzania and Ethiopia and one joint proposal for Uganda and Rwanda. The Eastern Partnership call was changed, applying to individual countries. Despite the fact that Georgia is a program country, only €300,000 of the €500,000 allocated and only three of the ten projects were approved. For Ukraine the call issued was for humanitarian projects, not development projects. As regards the Western Balkans only €176,624 was redistributed and two projects were approved. In 2019, four applications were approved totaling €343,371.05. In 2018, five projects were approved overall to a total of €430,287.40.

⁸ Presented at the meeting between the foreign ministry and civil society organizations on June 24, 2020.

■ Humanitarian aid

On the positive side it has to be said that the humanitarian call was processed and evaluated in ten days (in the past the process has taken 60–90 days), Although it was ad-hoc, it was tested and the foreign ministry should build upon this experience when designing rapid response humanitarian calls. However, two things shaped the Slovak humanitarian calls: low predictability and geopolitics.

All in all four humanitarian calls were published totaling €1.7 million. The problem was that with the limited funding they targeted four regions, the Middle East, South Sudan and Ethiopia, Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic the focus of Slovak ODA was on South Sudan and the Middle East.

The two Covid-19 calls included socio-economic assistance and were open to the business sector as well. The Covid-19 humanitarian calls were not primarily targeted at countries where SlovakAid provides humanitarian aid on a long-term basis and none of the applications were approved for these countries. This represents a departure from the Medium-Term Strategy and diluted the scarce resources among a larger number of countries and sectors.

As one CSO senior program manager bluntly stated in relation to the predictability, planning and sustainability of the Slovak humanitarian interventions:

Everything – expertise, project impact, quality networking, good reputation, trained local experts who have been in the project for years and worked with beneficiaries, their know-how – has been lost, and hence the ability to react promptly to an alarming situation is reduced. Organizations generally build a strong base, are members of the Cluster system, get to know other organizations, and deepen relationships – thereby gaining potential new donors. Short-term projects also reduce such networking at the local level, as well as the overall visibility of SlovakAid in the eyes of other donors.⁹

This statement illustrates the need to have and to stick to a humanitarian aid strategy.

⁹ Feedback given as part of the assessment of SAIDC grant calls by Ambrela and its members.

■ Volunteer program

Needless to say due to the very nature of this program it was one of the most affected and only 18 of 58 volunteer projects were approved, that is 50 per cent, or €185,760, of the total allocation used. Despite the fact that Kenya is a program country, only two of the 15 applications for Kenya were approved (even taking into account the fact that the volunteer program does not just serve project and program countries, it is disproportionate). The other two program countries were so interested that no volunteer project was submitted for Georgia and only two projects for Moldova. It is not entirely clear whether and what the synergetic effect of volunteering projects should be in relation to program countries. SAIDC does not disclose how many points the applicant has achieved. In some cases, the letter does not mention the evaluation criteria at all, despite the fact that they are part of the call. It is not clear from the evaluation what the role and position the embassy has in the evaluation commission.¹⁰

The NGOs represented by Ambrela suggested introducing block grants for volunteer projects, NGOs know best which volunteer projects are a priority for them, which volunteers they have selected, and what will enable the selection of countries, etc. Block grants could streamline and speed up processes while relieving the SAIDC administration. It should be stated that the Foreign Ministry and SAIDC successfully repatriated all volunteers and planned volunteer deployments were canceled.

¹⁰ The two recurring reasons are not sufficient nor logical: A. "The request did not get sufficient points.." is a circular argument. It does not answer the basic question of why the project did not obtain enough points. In addition, the applicant does not even know how many points they get; B. "The embassy did not recommend the application to the evaluation committee for approval." The embassy has only one vote on the whole commission, and no right of veto, and if the project is not recommended, it does not mean that the other members of the commission have to follow it. In addition, there is no justification given as to why the project was not recommended.

■ Global education

SAIDC approved projects focused on public information rather than on education. The demand for grants exceeded the allocation 3.5 times over. The pandemic has also shown the very practical implications of a nexus between global education and infodemia.

Ambrela raised the possibility of increasing the budget with the help of DEVCO/DEAR in the context of SAIDC as a pillar assessed national agency. SAIDC responded fairly positively and it may well become a key goal in the systemic funding of global education.

■ Microgrants

In 2020 a total of 76 microgrants were implemented totaling €633,849.68 in the following countries: Kenya (13), Bosnia and Herzegovina (10), North Macedonia (5), Georgia (9), Serbia/Kosovo (5), Ukraine (8), Iraq (1), Montenegro (2), Bhutan (1), Belarus (1), Moldova (9), Lebanon (3), Ethiopia (3), Albania (4), Greece (1) and Indonesia (1).

It is not clear what the proportion of microgrants is in relation to program countries, humanitarian aid priority countries and support for human rights, democracy and civil society. More than one third was approved for the Western Balkans and in Kenya the vast majority of recipients were state authorities.

The author of this article suggests the current microgrant guidelines for program countries should be revised so the microgrants contribute to Slovakia's strategic and sectoral goals. They could have a complementarity function and contribute to large interventions or could be used as seed money or to support humanitarian responses.

Table 2. SlovakAid calls in 2020

■ call specification	■ allocation according to national program	■ allocations per call	■ spending	■ underspent
SAMRS/2020/ZB/1	400,000.00	400,000.00	176,624.00	223,376.00
SAMRS/2020/HUM/1	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00	1,049,459.45	-49,459.45
SAMRS/2020/KE/1	500,000.00	500,000.00	172,172.00	327,828.00
SAMRS/2020/GE/1	500,000.00	500,000.00	311,314.00	188,686.00
SAMRS/2020/MD/1	500,000.00	500,000.00	598,897.00	-98,897.00
SAMRS/2020/ST/KE/1	600,000.00	0.00 ¹¹	0.00	0.00
SAMRS/2020/D/1	351,860.00	351,860.00	185,760.00	166,100.00
SAMRS/2020/SSA/1	500,000.00	500,000.00	649,725.00	-149,725.00
SAMRS/2020/AFG/1	100,000.00	100,000.00	99,960.00	40.00
SAMRS/2020/PPP/1	500,000.00	500,000.00	455,498.00	44,502.00
SAMRS/2020/UJA/1	300,000.00	300,000.00	190,000.00	110,000.00
SAMRS/2020/RV/1	100,000.00	100,000.00	89,593.00	10,407.00
SAMRS/2020/EK/1	80,000.00	80,000.00	15,792.16	64,207.84
SAMRS/2020/HUM/2		300,000.00	298,050.14	1,949.86
SAMRS/2020/HUM/3		300,000.00	200,000	100,000.00
SAMRS/2020/BK/1	150,000.00	150,000.00	150,000	0.00
■ total	5,581,860.00	5,581,860.00	4,642,844.75	939,015.25

■ Multilateral aid and other development

The first news about Covid-19 on the Foreign Ministry website appeared on February 3, 2020. It briefly noted the spread of the coronavirus in China. On February 5th the Slovak government approved a financial humanitarian contribution of €200,000 to the WHO for the fight against the coronavirus.¹²

¹¹ This call was canceled the day before the submission deadline and the funding was redirected to other calls.

¹² "Slovakia's contribution to the World Health Organisation's fight against the coronavirus," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 18, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/prispevok-slovenska-na-boj-s-koronavirusom-svetovej-zdravotnickej-organizacii/10182?p_p_auth=rwJ4zbnJ (accessed on January 30, 2021).

Slovakia was leader of the Slavkov Format (cooperation with the Czech Republic and Austria) at the time and announced at the Slavkov meeting in Bratislava on February 12th the launch of the joint development project in Aragvi, Georgia. At the conference on Foreign and European policy of the Slovak Republic 2016–2020 on February 13th, Miroslav Lajčák gave his farewell speech after almost ten years as the minister, stating the following:

We are on the threshold of processes that can be described as the gradual transformation of the world order, in which rivalry between the great powers is being renewed and the existing rules are increasingly being ignored or violated. However, what has happened in recent years is merely the manifestation of something deeper.

These processes caused shocks that were felt in all corners of the world – and the result is something that can unquestionably be called the transformation of the global order. We are in the midst of an ongoing story so it is difficult to define its parameters. We don't know how nor when it will end... We don't know what human and material values it will require, but we know it's happening, that we are in the midst of tectonic shifts in geopolitics and geoeconomics, and we sense that it will be extremely difficult to navigate these movements. [translated by author]

With a little exaggeration, we can now say it was a prophetic speech.

His brief comments on development cooperation were partly based on an optimistic vision of the future rather than on the great results of the past. "We have succeeded in professionalizing development cooperation, which today has not only a clear strategy, but also recognition by the OECD and, most recently, a quality management system certificate. It will allow us to participate in joint EU projects."¹³

¹³ "Miroslav Lajčák: do not break the strategic compass of Slovakia," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 13, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/detail/-/asset_publisher/oLViwP07vPxx/content/m-lajcak-nerozbite-strategicky-kompas-slovenska/10182?p_p_auth=2ltRP9TJ&_101_INSTANCE_oLViwP07vPxx_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fhome (accessed on January 30, 2021).

At the EU Foreign Affairs Council on February 17th, Minister Lajčák signed an MoU between the foreign ministry and the European Endowment for Democracy (EED).¹⁴ As the ministry put it, the aim of the document was to lay the foundations for cooperation in exchanging information and sharing experience on development aid with the EED, which focuses on supporting civil society in the EU's neighborhood.

On April 21, 2020, at the meeting with CSO representatives, State Secretary Ingrid Brocková declared that development cooperation is or at least should be one of the core businesses of the Foreign Ministry. The two parties at the meeting discussed the economic impact on the sector, the recently announced humanitarian call, as well as the possibility of announcing further calls. For Ambrela it was a good opportunity to provide additional information on the adaptability of projects submitted as part of the SAIDC calls in light of the pandemic. This was the first time CSO representatives had asked for the matching requirement to be temporarily lifted.

On May 12, 2020, the state secretary participated in an online discussion on European solidarity (among other things) during the pandemic, where she stated:

It is essential to show solidarity within and outside the EU, towards our partners in Africa, the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries. The whole EU is built on the principle of solidarity and the Slovak Republic wants to be part of the system of help and solidarity.

Later, on May 13th, she confirmed Slovakia's position at the first meeting with Jutta Urpilainen, the EU Commissioner for International Partnerships.

¹⁴ "Minister Lajčák at the meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, February 17, 2020, Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/ministry/minister/activities/-/asset_publisher/nNnVuDsSsgB1/content/minister-m-lajcak-na-zasadnuti-rady-pre-zahranicne-veci-eu/10182 (accessed on January 30, 2021).

■ Slovak contribution to Team Europe

The ministry redirected €10 million for developing countries to fight the coronavirus. The bulk of it, €5 million, is to be transferred from the Integrated Border and Migration Management Phase II project to a new project to help Libya fight Covid-19. Around €3.5 million was to go on SlovakAid projects adjusted for Covid-19. This is not new money and, needless to say, it will be missed elsewhere.

■ Humanitarian aid to Beirut as a wake-up call?

Apart from being hit by the Covid-19 pandemic Lebanon is not only hosting one of the largest refugee populations per capita but has also recently been struggling with a massive economic crisis that has pushed many Lebanese people into poverty and society into turbulent political unrest.

The explosion in Beirut port on August 4, 2020

has left at least 220 dead, 6,500 injured and 300,000 displaced from their homes. The explosion was one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded, registering as a 3.5 magnitude earthquake in Beirut and felt as far away as Cyprus – more than 100 miles away. According to the World Bank, the blast caused between \$3.8 billion and \$4.5 billion in damages. The health sector was amongst the most damaged, with 292 facilities damaged – 36 per cent of health facilities in the region.¹⁵

The Slovak Foreign Ministry was quick to offer solidarity, both out of sympathy and for strategic reasons given the fact that Lebanon is a SlovakAid partner country. Nevertheless the practical side of the Slovak humanitarian system proved outdated and demonstrated a lack of speed in action, a weak inter-ministerial coordination mechanism and the non-existence of certifi-

¹⁵ "Beirut explosion situation report #9," UN OCHA, February 10, 2021. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/beirut-explosion-situation-report-9-february-10-2021> (accessed February 28, 2021).

cated rescue modules, among other major deficiencies. Slovakia contributed €100,000 to the UNOCHA and delivered four tons of food and medical materiel in cooperation with the three Slovak NGOs active in Lebanon.¹⁶ The systemic difficulties have prompted a discussion on the need to revise the Slovak mechanism of humanitarian aid and the need for a humanitarian aid strategy as well.

As a coordinator of humanitarian aid the Foreign Ministry rightly initiated the inter-ministerial dialogue on how to improve the Slovak system and in November the first stakeholder meeting involving civil society representatives took place. Around the same time Ambrela delivered its participatory review of the Slovak system of humanitarian aid. The process is to continue in 2021.

■ Reflections on the implementation of the Government Program Manifesto

On September 24, 2020, Minister Korčok unveiled the Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2020 in his speech in parliament.¹⁷

It should be noted at the outset that from the start the new leadership of the ministry has placed a clear emphasis on democracy and human rights, including expressing support for civil society in Belarus and elsewhere, and this is to be welcomed.

¹⁶ "In reaction to tragic events in Beirut, Slovakia provides humanitarian aid to Lebanon," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, August 11, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/slovensko-poskytuje-v-reakcii-na-tragicke-udalosti-v-bejrute-libanonu-humanitar-nu-pomoc/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2F3Frok%3D2020%26mesiac%3D7 (accessed on February 27, 2021).

¹⁷ "Minister Korčok: the more we are united at home, the more successful we will be abroad," Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, September 24, 2020. Available online: https://www.mzv.sk/web/en/news/current_issues/-/asset_publisher/lrJ2tDuQdEKp/content/minister-i-korcok-cim-sme-jednotnejši-doma-tym-uspesnejši-budeme-v-zahranici/10182?_101_INSTANCE_lrJ2tDuQdEKp_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fen%2Fnews%2Fcurrent_issues (accessed January 30, 2021).

The new foreign and European policy contains a clear reference to Slovakia's pro-Western orientation: "We are part of the Western democratic community and let me emphasize again: the way we want to manage our society." What worries me, though, is that the section on development cooperation was not consulted with civil society, despite the Government Program Manifesto saying that the Slovak government will continue a close dialogue with the CSO sector as a key partner:

The Government of the Slovak Republic will support active citizenship and simplify the procedures for public participation in the administration of public affairs, including participation in the creation, implementation and control of public policies, including legislation. In this context, the government will adopt regulations and public policies concerning the non-governmental sector in close dialogue with it. [translated by author]

The foreign and European policy document does not mention civil society, with the exception of

...the ongoing task is to raise public awareness of the importance of development cooperation and the visibility of SlovakAid activities at home and abroad. In this effort, the Ministry will be assisted by a long-term partnership with the civic sector,

which I consider to be insufficient.

On the other hand, it contains the clearly unrealistic goal of "fulfilling the international commitment to achieve a 0.33 per cent share of official development assistance in gross national income by 2030," while the ministry has no concrete realistic plan of how to achieve at least 0.22 per cent. In the past 10 years it was about 0.11 per cent annually (0.11 per cent in 2019). The absence of the above makes planning difficult and increases the frustration of all, including state actors in development cooperation.

The document goes on to say that "...in this context, in addition to the annual increase in budgetary resources allocated to development cooperation and humanitarian aid, we will also emphasize the mobilization of private resources and greater involvement of the private sector in development cooperation." There is no strategy for involving the private sector in development cooperation, nor is there a basic prediction or modelling of how much private funding could flow into development cooperation from the state budget thanks to the support of the private sector. Development cooperation does not equal foreign trade. Unlike in other areas, this document does not make reference to any specific tasks directly related to development cooperation.

■ In a few words or never waste a good crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic and decisions taken by the government and the foreign ministry led to the cancellation or postponement of most of the planned systemic issues (processes, strategic documents, capacities and funding). That represents a backwards step. In some instances damage control was put in place (SAIDC flexibility, Covid-19 changes to calls etc). There were a few things that were improved such as humanitarian calls being processed in ten days (something previously declared impossible by the ministry) and the effort to include Slovak innovative and technological solutions in ODA aimed at fighting the coronavirus. However, these cannot outweigh the many areas where the situation had deteriorated. More could have been done especially in the first half of the year when the pandemic was well managed in Slovakia.

Table 3. Effects of policy decisions and Covid-19 on the Slovak ODA system

■ deterioration	■ damage control	■ improvement
country strategy papers on Kenya, Moldova and Georgia postponed by a year	SAIDC flexibility in project administration including project duration and the volunteer program.	pillar assessment of SAIDC
draft humanitarian aid strategy put on hold	one pager Covid-19 adaptability in SAIDC calls for proposals	one humanitarian Covid-19 call processed within 10 days
call for strategic partnerships canceled		focus on human rights and democracy in public discourse and PR by the MFEA
Slovak commitment to 0.33 per cent GNI under further threaten		timeline of SAIDC calls for proposals published beforehand
bilateral aid to and through Slovak NGOs to be decreased		pre-deployment consultations between diplomats and CSOs
cuts in SAIDC grants taking it back to the 10 year average		
no "new" money for Team Europe, merely redirection that will be missed elsewhere		
obligation to co-finance not removed or reduced in spite of the economic impacts of Covid-19 on NGOs		

■ deterioration	■ damage control	■ improvement
deviation from the mid-term strategy in terms of reduced attention on program countries, strategic tools and processes		
ORPO capacities used for non-ODA assignments (humanitarian aid for Italy etc)		
increased support to business sector in ODA		
increase in instrumentalization of ODA in geopolitical interests and neighborhood (e.g. calls for humanitarian aid)		
In some cases less transparency and predictability (e.g. grants for Kenya)		
continuation of large financial contribution to EU programs (e.g. project in Morocco) that are hard to access for Slovak implementers		
contribution to LDCs expected to further decrease		
no monitoring or evaluations pursued, except the evaluation of the global education program		
trips by high representatives of the MFEA and others canceled due to Covid-19 ¹⁸		
cancellation of 3 planned development diplomat postings ¹⁹		
development forums in program countries canceled		

■ What's next for us in 2021?

In 2021 the development cooperation budget line has an allocation of €8.9 million (increase due to the project in Morocco – €1.88 million). This means approximately €4–4.3 million will go on the budget for SAIDC grants. This can be viewed in two ways, despite Covid-19, the amount of grant funding will probably not decrease significantly. However, it will also depend on further advocacy in relation to the 2021 budget, or vice versa, even a pandemic Covid-19 on such a scale, which represents an urgent need to solve global and systemic problems,

¹⁸ Together with the canceled development forums, this was directly caused by the pandemic, whereas the other cases of deterioration were more deliberate in nature and controlled by the decision makers.

¹⁹ Although they do not work fully on development agenda, the three existing development diplomats are paid from the SAIDC budget at the expense of grants.

did not help to increase the amount of SAIDC grants. The same applies to the total ODA budget. The non-funding part is equally worrying and further delays in systemic improvements and aid effectiveness might be expected.

Table 4. Development cooperation in the state budget (€m)

	■ 2018	■ 2019	■ 2020	■ 2020	■ 2021	■ 2022	■ 2023
foreign relations and assistance	160,247	197,804	155,853	157,714	154,710	151,002	152,252
foreign policy	120,442	164,884	118,880	123,778	120,624	118,791	120,041
Slovaks living abroad	1,962	2,142	7,492	7,492	3,529	3,529	3,529
development cooperation	6,174	7,826	7,047	10,535	8,913	7,038	7,038
contributions to international organizations	31,669	22,952	22,434	15,909	21,644	21,644	21,644

Source: "Vládny návrh rozpočtu verejnej správy na roky 2021 až 2023," [Government proposal for the public administration budget for 2021–2023] Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2020, p. 162. Available online: <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=485267> (accessed on January 26, 2021).

In Genesis 41 of the Bible, the prophetic seven fat cows devoured by the lean cows represents seven years of abundance followed by another seven years of famine. In hindsight, it is hard to find any fat cows in Slovak development cooperation. In this period of sickly, ugly, thin cows what can we do to get out of it or make it last less than seven years?

■ Recommendations

The recommendations below are based on key recommendations by CSOs. Some of them can be found in "Aidwatch 2020." They need to be adapted for the Covid-19 crisis and post pandemic world. In my opinion they should be much more focused and integrated.

ODA quantity:

- to fulfill the international commitment of 0.33 per cent of GNI by 2030 and increase the overall budget to 0.21 per cent of GNI by 2024.

Develop a realistic plan to increase ODA with the involvement of other ministries and civil society and increase the budget of the bilateral part to support global education and public information as well, as an important tool of Slovak foreign policy

Focus on people and reduce inequalities:

- to focus on the least developed countries, the excluded and most vulnerable communities, including the rights and status of women, in order to meet the commitment to contribute 0.15 per cent of GNI to the least developed countries by 2030, The focus must be on people and social areas like health, education, food security

Strategic approach:

- to prepare a realistic and ambitious strategic focus, identify Slovakia's comparative advantage and develop a humanitarian aid strategy, a strategy for partnership with the private sector, a multilateral development cooperation strategy, a national strategy for global education and conceptualize a government scholarship program

Effectiveness:

- to improve the predictability and flexibility of funding, strengthen partnerships with the non-governmental sector and introduce framework contracts/strategic partnerships
- to promote a systematic and long-term focus on a smaller number of countries and sectors in order to increase the effectiveness of development cooperation, sustainability and recognizability of the SlovakAid brand

Transparency:

- to publish the point average of the members of the project committee (Foreign Ministry), the names of the members of the committee and external evaluators, the protocol for committee meetings and a more detailed description of the reasons for approval/disapproval (according to the individual point criteria)
- to make clear that consultations with an embassy as part of project preparations are welcome and not considered an attempt to influence the evaluation process

Partnership with CSOs:

- should have a more systemic, well planned, prioritized agenda and a structured dialogue with the CSOs rather than ad hoc or scattered initiatives and buzzwords





Annexes

4

A chronology of important events in Slovak foreign policy in 2020

as of January 2021

January 8 President of European Council Charles Michel pays an official visit to Slovakia. Michel meets Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini. They discuss the role of the EU in relation to the situation in Iraq and the importance of developing partnerships in NATO. They also talk about achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and the EU budget for the next seven years.

January 10 ▪ State Secretary František Ružička attends working consultations with the Danish State Secretary for European Affairs and the Arctic Area. The main objective of his visit to Denmark is to discuss current European issues and the EU's external relations. The talks touch on enlargement policy, the EU's new institutional framework, the rule of law, Brexit and climate change.

January 15 ▪ Minister Miroslav Lajčák is presented with Sweden's Royal Order of the Polar Star by Ambassador of Sweden Mikaela Kumlin Granit. This award was bestowed on the minister by King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden.

January 16 ▪ Prime Minister Pellegrini meets V4 prime ministers and Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. The main topic of the meeting is EU energy policy and climate change. The leaders also discuss the social agenda, the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework and the importance of cooperation on migration.

January 18 ▪ European Chief Prosecutor Laura Codruța Kövesi is received by President Zuzana Čaputová at the presidential palace. The chief prosecutor presents her plans and requests political support for increasing the number of European Delegated Prosecutors.

January 21 ▪ Minister Lajčák attends the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos as one of the speakers on *The State of the World: Quo Vadis?* discussion panel. Later he takes on the role of chair and leads the discussion panel on *A Diplomatic Dialogue in the Western Balkans*.

Prepared by Juraj Sýkora 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 Defence of the Slovak Republic.

January 27 ▪ President Čaputová attends a commemoration ceremony in Poland on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

January 28 ▪ State Secretary František Ružička attends the meeting of the first 2020 session of the General Affairs Council in Brussels. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the priorities of the incoming Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Multiannual Financial Framework.

February 1 ▪ Prime Minister Pellegrini attends the Friends of Cohesion meeting in Portugal. The aim is to agree on a common approach to the Multiannual Financial Framework negotiations.

February 3 ▪ Minister Miroslav Lajčák gives a series of talks at the UN in New York with President of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo.

February 4 ▪ Prime Minister Pellegrini meets President of European Council Charles Michel. They discuss the Multiannual Financial Framework.

February 12 ▪ Defense Minister Peter Gajdoš attends the NATO defense ministers meeting on the Alliance's progress and the further course of action on the fight against terrorism and intensifying NATO-EU cooperation on hybrid threats.

February 13 ▪ Prime Minister Pellegrini meets Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the Hungarian-Serbian border for a border inspection. The prime minister, together with Minister of Interior of Slovak Republic Denisa Saková, declare their willingness to help defend the border between Hungary and Serbia.

February 20 ▪ Minister Miroslav Lajčák pays a visit to Finland to meet his counterpart Pekka Haavisto. He is later received by President of Finland Sauli Niinistö to discuss cooperation in international organizations. The Finnish president acknowledges Slovakia's chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2019 and Slovakia's contribution to resolving the conflict in Ukraine.

February 24 ▪ Minister Miroslav Lajčák opens the Embassy in Yerevan on the occasion of his official visit to Armenia. He meets his counterpart Zohrab Mnatsakanyan and Prime Minister Nikola Pashinyan. They discuss Slovak-Armenian relations and EU-Armenian relations in the context of the anticipated Eastern Partnership summit in June.

February 26 ▪ Prime Minister Pellegrini pays an official visit to the Russian Federation where he is received by newly elected Prime Minister Michail Misustin. They discuss bilateral relationships between Slovakia and Russia and relations between the EU and Russia.

March 4 ▪ Prime Minister Pellegrini attends a meeting of the V4 leaders in the Czech Republic. The meeting is primarily concerned with the coronavirus situation in Europe.

March 6 ▪ Minister Lajčák attends the extraordinary EU Foreign Affairs Council in Zagreb to discuss the situation in Idlib, Syria, and on the EU-Turkey border.

March 23 ▪ Newly appointed State Secretary Martin Klus represents Slovakia at the EU foreign ministers video conference. The topics of the meeting are cooperation in consular services and strengthening coordination in the repatriation of citizens.

March 25 ▪ State Secretary Martin Klus negotiates the repatriation of Slovak citizens with his counterparts Aleš Chmelař in the Czech Republic and Ferenc Kumin in Hungary.

March 26 ▪ Newly elected Prime Minister Igor Matovič attends the EU leaders video conference on countering the novel coronavirus pandemic. Matovič gives his assurances that the new Slovak government will tackle the coronavirus at both the national and European levels.

April 8 ▪ President Čaputová appoints Ivan Korčok as new Minister of Foreign and European Affairs.

April 14 ▪ Minister of Defense Jaroslav Naď speaks to NATO Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoană. They discuss the pandemic, the measures in place to mitigate the spread of the virus and its impact on NATO's activities. Naď provides an update on the planned rotations of Slovak troops over the coming period.

April 17 ▪ Minister Korčok makes his first telephone call with High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell. They discuss cooperation in the fight against the novel coronavirus pandemic and mitigation of the social consequences.

April 20 ▪ Minister Korčok offers Slovak assistance to Italy, the EU country most affected by the coronavirus and with the highest number of victims to date, in an act of European solidarity and sympathy. The assistance worth €316,000 consists of 300,000 surgical face masks and 500 liters of disinfectant concentrate (5,000 liters in dilution).

April 21 ▪ Minister of Defense Naď has a phone call with his Czech counterpart Lubomír Metnar in which he updates him on the goals and priorities of the new leadership. The two ministers discuss the steps they have taken in response to COVID-19.

April 30 ▪ Minister Korčok speaks to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. They discuss the new Slovak government's priorities in fulfilling its mandate in security and defense.

May 6 ▪ Prime Minister Matovič takes part in the EU video summit on the integration of the Western Balkans and their reform efforts. He also re-emphasizes Slovakia's support for the integration ambitions of partners.

May 13 ▪ President Čaputová calls with the President of Georgia Salome Zurbíšviliová. They discuss the coronavirus crisis and agree the pandemic is a situation in which countries should show solidarity with one another.

May 15 ■ Minister Korčok has a phone call with his Moldovan counterpart Oleg Țulea. The discussion concentrates on tackling the coronavirus, mutual relations, Slovakia's development cooperation and Moldova's reforms, and the EU association process.

May 19 ■ Prime Minister Matovič attends the video summit of the Visegrad 4 prime ministers with the German chancellor. They discuss the next Council presidency and the Croatian handover to Germany on July 1. The presidency will be affected by the current challenges facing the EU such as the reopening of the Schengen borders and the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027.

May 25 ■ Minister Korčok pays his first foreign visit to the Czech Republic, meeting his Czech counterpart Tomáš Petříček. Minister Korčok expresses his pleasure at the fact that, despite the difficult situation, his first working visit has brought him to the Czech Republic. The discussion focuses on the border regime, the successful repatriation of 341 Slovak citizens and EU steps relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

May 29 ■ Minister Korčok has discussions with the EU foreign ministers on relations with China, the situation in Hong Kong and the impact of the pandemic on relations with Asia and the Pacific. The talks concentrate on the impact of the global pandemic on Asia and Pacific and how the EU's approach to the region can be adapted to reflect the changed circumstances.

June 1 ■ State Secretary Ingrid Brocková receives President of the National Economic Council of the Czech Republic Vladimír Dlouhý. The visit is related to his candidacy for the OECD Secretary-General.

June 2 ■ Ivan Korčok pays a second visit to Budapest. At the meeting with his counterpart Péter Szijjártó, the discussions focus primarily on coordinating the further relaxation of cross-border movement at the bilateral, regional and European levels. They also assess the V4 projects and the use of the V4's contribution of €3 million to the Coronavirus Global Response initiative.

June 3 ■ Igor Matovič meets his Czech counterpart Andrej Babiš. The two discuss the pandemic, mutual bilateral relationships and the Recovery Plan worth €750 billion euros. Matovič is also received by President Miloš Zeman, President of the Senate Miloš Vystrčil and Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Radek Vondráček.

June 5 ■ Ivan Korčok meets his Polish counterpart Jacek Czaputowicz. The talks focus on the bilateral agenda, regional cooperation and international politics, and the effects of the coronavirus crisis. They also discuss the importance of common infrastructure and interconnections, and the key role of the construction of the gas connection and road network.

June 9 ■ State Secretary Ingrid Brocková speaks with Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe Olga Algayerová. The state secretary welcomes the active approach adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe to support the environment and the circular economy, and the introduction of measures enhancing transport, trade and mobility.

June 10 ■ Defense Minister Naď pays an official visit to Prague. He meets Czech Foreign Affairs Minister Tomáš Petříček. The ministers speak of the valued cooperation between the two countries during the coronavirus crisis, highlighting the repatriation of several hundreds of citizens.

June 11 ■ Prime Minister Matovič attends a meeting with his V4 counterparts at Lednice Castle, Czech Republic. The prime ministers discuss the EU's multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027 and the Recovery Fund, aimed at supporting EU economies affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

June 15 ■ Ivan Korčok and his EU counterparts have a video meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The ministers discuss the most important foreign policy issues in transatlantic relations, including the international implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, relations with China, the Middle East peace process and the situation in the EU's neighborhood, with an emphasis on Ukraine.

June 17 ■ State Secretary Ingrid Brocková has a video meeting with UN Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and America Miroslav Jenča. They discuss digital transformation and security, conflict prevention, multilateralism and promoting preventive diplomacy.

June 25 ■ Defense Minister Jaroslav Naď participates in the Czech Republic's 7th National Conference, "Our Security Cannot Be Taken for Granted," at Prague Castle. Partners emphasize the importance of NATO and collective defense from the perspective of the Central European countries. Jaroslav Naď delivers a speech at the conference.

June 29 ■ Igor Matovič attends a working breakfast with the ambassadors of the EU member states. State Secretary Martin Klus and Head of the Representation of the European Commission in the Slovak Republic Ladislav Miko also participate in the meeting.

June 30 ■ Minister Korčok, the new Chairman of the Slovak Commission for UNESCO, holds the first session. The minister presents his vision of the functioning of the commission and its core priorities.

July 2 ■ Ivan Korčok receives his Maltese counterpart, Evarist Bartol. The partners speak appreciatively of their mutual bilateral relations, which have been closer than usual owing to the joint activities of the Presidency Trio. They emphasize the importance of closer cooperation with the countries of origin and transit.

July 3 ■ Prime Minister Matovič attends the V4 prime ministers meeting in Warsaw. The prime ministers discuss the situation in each country, the EU multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027 and the Recovery Fund.

July 7 ■ Ivan Korčok pays his first visit to Poland, to Wadowice, on the occasion of the launch of the Polish V4 Presidency. The V4 foreign ministers discuss the program priorities and current foreign policy issues as well as EU enlargement, developments in the Western Balkans, the priorities of the German EU Presidency, the Multiannual Financial Framework, Brexit and the Conference on the Future of the EU.

July 9 ■ Defense Minister Jaroslav Naď signs the Agreement on Cooperation in Military Aviation with Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Poland Mariusz Błaszczak.

July 13 ■ Ivan Korčok takes part in the EU foreign ministers meeting. The talks focus on EU relations with Turkey and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Latin America and the Caribbean.

July 17 ■ Defense Minister Jaroslav Naď meets with German counterpart Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer on the occasion of her first official visit to Slovakia. They discuss current issues in security and defense, and opportunities for further strengthening bilateral ties.

July 20 ■ Igor Matovič attends the EU leaders summit in Brussels. This important summit is devoted to the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027 and the Recovery Plan.

July 22 ■ Zuzana Čaputová receives her Slovenian counterpart, Borut Pahor, on his official visit to the Slovak Republic. They discuss the current situation regarding the coronavirus pandemic, its impact and the transformation of countries via the EU Recovery Plan. President Pahor is received by Prime Minister Matovič as well.

July 29 ■ State Secretary Martin Klus visits Austria to meet his Austrian partners: Austrian Federal Minister for the EU and Constitution Karoline Edtstadler, Head of the European Section of the Office of the Federal Chancellor Barbara Kaudel-Jensen and Chairman of the European Committee of the Austrian Parliament Reinhold Lopatka. Talks focus on opportunities to further develop regional cooperation within the Slavkov format (S3), and above all the European agenda and the economic challenges brought about by the coronavirus crisis.

August 11 ■ State Secretary Ingrid Brocková observes the dispatch of almost two tons of health care materials and medicines to Beirut. The Ministry provided the aid to help in the aftermath of the catastrophic explosions in Beirut.

August 21 ■ Ivan Korčok meets his German counterpart, Heiko Maas. Korčok states that Germany is an important strategic and political partner as well as European leader and ally. The partners talk about bilateral, European and international issues, as well as current developments in Belarus. The German foreign minister is later received by President Zuzana Čaputová.

August 24 ■ Defense Minister Naď pays his first official visit to Montenegro and meets with President Milo Đukanović and Prime Minister Duško Marković, as well as with his Montenegrin counterpart Predrag Bošković. The partners discuss the continuation of bilateral engagements, and exchange experience of tackling the coronavirus pandemic.

August 28 ■ Ivan Korčok attends the informal EU foreign ministers meeting known as Gymnich in Berlin. Ministers show solidarity with Greece and Cyprus and discuss the urgent need for de-escalation, dialogue and compliance with international law, and relations with Russia, which have been exacerbated by the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Minister Korčok also meets his Israeli counterpart Gabriel Ashkenazi to talk about growing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean.

September 2 ■ Minister Korčok speaks to his counterpart in the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The ministers discussed preparations for Slovakia's participation in the EXPO World Fair in Dubai planned for 2022.

September 3 ■ Defense Minister Naď meets with US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Boyse. They discuss opportunities to use US funding to replace the Warsaw Pact-era equipment used by the Slovak Armed Forces and the ongoing negotiations to reschedule Slovakia's payments under the F-16 fighter jet contract. Boyse welcomes Slovakia's position, including on the situation in Belarus.

September 5 ■ State Secretary Brocková attends the virtual meeting of the UN Security Council Arria-formula about events in Belarus. UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Belarus Anaïs Marin, UN Resident Coordinator in Belarus Joanna Kazana-Wisniowiecki, opposition candidate to President Alexander Lukashenko in the last presidential election Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, and representatives from Belarus media and civil society, share information about the alarming situation and human rights violations. The state secretary calls for an immediate end to the violence, expresses solidarity with the citizens of Belarus and talks about the introduction of targeted individual sanctions.

September 9 ■ Igor Matovič attends the meeting with his counterparts in the Slavkov Format, Andrej Babiš and Sebastian Kurz. The prime ministers discuss the current state of the coronavirus pandemic, mutual assistance and cooperation, and the arrangements for the EU Summit. Matovič confirms that the border with the Czech Republic and Austria remains open.

September 11 ■ Igor Matovič meets his V4 counterparts, Mateusz Morawiecki, Viktor Orbán and Andrej Babiš in Lublin, Poland. All four support free elections in Belarus and condemn the suppression of human and civil liberties. The leaders also discuss the attack on the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and encourage Russia to investigate. They discuss the situation in China, the death of the Slovak citizen Jozef Chovanec in Belgium and Nord Stream 2.

September 15 ■ Minister Korčok and his Czech (Tomáš Petříček) and Austrian (Alexander Schallenberg) counterparts attend a meeting in Slovenia hosted by their counterpart Anž Logar. The talks focus on cooperation and finding common approaches to tackling the coronavirus pandemic. They also discuss the pandemic situation and EU sanctions against the Belarus regime.

September 17 ■ President Čaputová attends the Austrian World Summit in Vienna. The summit is devoted to the climate crisis and, this year, the coronavirus crisis as well. In her speech the president talks about the approaches Slovakia is prepared to adopt to achieve carbon neutrality in electricity generation by 2030 under the EU Recovery Plan.

September 17 ■ Igor Matovič attends the opening of the new 600 meter-long cross-border bridge between Komárno in Slovakia and Komárom in Hungary. He also meets his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orbán and both emphasize the importance of cooperation and future cooperation within the V4.

September 18 ▪ Minister Korčok attends the virtual 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on the Belarus dialogue that will hopefully lead to new, free, democratic and fair presidential elections in the country. Minister Korčok stresses that measures are needed to prevent the Belarus regime from continuing to perpetrate violence and the mass violation of human rights, especially freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of speech.

September 21 ▪ Ivan Korčok meets Belarusian presidential candidate Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, before the start of the European Union Foreign Affairs Council. The minister gives his assurance that Slovakia is prepared to support the generation of young Belarussians who have become victims of the regime by offering them scholarships to Slovak universities.

September 24 ▪ President Čaputová receives her Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky. She expresses her support for the country's pro-reform efforts. Both sides talk warmly of the mutually constructive relationship between the two countries and discuss the coronavirus pandemic, cultural and sports cooperation, and smuggling. They also sign an agreement permitting Ukraine to use Slovak air space for flights to Uzhhorod airport. President Zelensky is later received by Prime Minister Matovič.

September 28 ▪ The Slovak Foreign Policy Association holds its annual Central European Energy Conference to discuss the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic focused on energy and climate policy and environmental protection. The conference is attended by Finance Minister Eduard Heger, Investment Minister Veronika Remišová, Environment Minister Ján Budaj, Transport Minister Andrej Doležal and State Secretary of the Economy Ministry Karol Galek.

September 29 ▪ President Čaputová receives President of the Council of States in Switzerland Hans Stöckli. They speak positively of the mutual relationship between the two countries and the potential for developing the economy, innovation and environmental protection.

October 2 ▪ Igor Matovič attends the extraordinary EU Leaders Meeting. The leaders discuss the pandemic, the importance of the common market, the situation in Belarus and Turkish aggression against Cyprus and Greece. The EU's relationship with China was another important issue.

October 6 ▪ The Slovak Republic joins numerous other countries in signing the joint statement on the human rights situation in China. The countries call on China to fulfil its national and international obligations and respect human rights, including the rights of members of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet, and to allow meaningful access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

October 8 ▪ President Čaputová receives former presidential candidate and representative of the Belarusian opposition Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. The two speak about current developments in Belarus and the possibilities for a political solution to the situation in Belarus. Tsikhanouskaya is then received by the Prime Minister.

October 8 ▪ President Čaputová meets with President of North Macedonia Stevo Pendarovski. The presidents discuss the effect of the pandemic on their countries, the transformation process of North Macedonia and the situation in the Western Balkans. The partners agree on the need for further development in cooperation between Slovakia and North Macedonia.

October 7 ▪ Bratislava hosts the international two-day conference of the GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum. The conference is followed by the two-day Tatrsummit, held in the High Tatras. The events are attended by Zuzana Čaputová, Eduard Heger, Ivan Korčok, Jaroslav Naď, Veronika Remišová, Andrej Doležal, Richard Sulík, Peter Kažimír and Martin Klus. Foreign guests attend the Globsec Bratislava Forum and Tatrsummit as well, including Director-General of World Health Organization Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hellenic Republic Nikolaos Dendias, Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki, President of Republic of North Macedonia Stevo Pendarovski and main opposition candidate in the Belarus presidential election Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

October 12 ▪ Ivan Korčok attends an EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting where the situation in Belarus and relations with Russia, Latin America and the Caribbean are discussed. The minister welcomes the EU's position on Belarus, where reprisals continue against the civilian population and the regime is refusing to engage in an honest dialogue with the pro-democratic part of Belarusian society.

October 16 ▪ Igor Matovič attends the Climate Summit of the EU Leaders. He states that the Slovak Republic supports climate change mitigation and the EU Carbon Tax, that greater clarity is required on the impact on the EU member-state economies and sophisticated solutions are needed. The leaders discuss the coronavirus pandemic, Brexit and the importance of cooperation with African countries.

October 20 ▪ Ivan Korčok has exerted maximum diplomatic efforts in cooperation with the relevant Slovak bodies to ensure the investigation into the death of Jozef Chovanec, a Slovak citizen, is concluded as soon as possible and justice obtained. These efforts have led to the talks held today in the plenary session of the European Parliament.

October 22 ▪ Minister Korčok visits his US counterpart Mike Pompeo in Washington. They stress the strategic importance of transatlantic cooperation and discuss relations between Slovakia and the US in the context of the current foreign policy and security challenges. The minister launches a Slovak-US strategic dialogue in an effort to intensify bilateral relations and cooperation. The foreign ministers sign a joint declaration on the security of 5G networks.

October 26 ▪ Ivan Korčok participates in a video conference with his Polish counterpart, Zbigniew Rau. The talks focus on the bilateral agenda, the V4, dealing with the impacts of the pandemic, and EU relations with its eastern neighbors.

November 3 ▪ Igor Matovič expresses his condolences concerning the latest terrorist attack in Vienna.

November 6 ■ Minister Korčok attends a virtual meeting with his counterparts in the C5 regional format. The meeting focuses on the current situation – the pandemic, tackling the consequences, and experiences of the various measures taken in the different countries.

November 12 ■ State Secretary Klus attends a virtual meeting of the representatives of the European Court of Auditors. He is the first member of the executive in an EU member state to be selected by the representatives of one of the colleges of the Court of Auditors to engage in a discussion in this format. The talks mainly concern Slovakia's experiences of combating the spread of Covid-19.

November 16 ■ Ivan Korčok attends the Ministerial Conference for the Promotion of Religious Freedom in the World organized by the Polish foreign ministry. Korčok states that, as a member of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, Slovakia is fully aware of the growing seriousness of the problem of violations of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion in the world and actively supports religious freedom and tolerance.

November 18 ■ Minister Korčok takes part in the Prague European Summit today as a speaker on a panel with his Czech, Austrian and Slovenian counterparts. The panelists discuss current international issues including the situation in Belarus and Nagorno-Karabakh, transatlantic relations after the US presidential elections and European topics including EU enlargement.

November 20 ■ Defense Minister Naď attends the EU's Foreign Affairs Council video conference. He and his counterparts discuss the current issues of EU security and defense policy, the latest security developments, and ways to deepen and strengthen existing initiatives.

November 23 ■ Ivan Korčok and Defense Minister Naď meet Foreign Minister of Cyprus Nicos Christodoulides, as well as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Cyprus Elizabeth Spehar during their visit to Cyprus. The partners discuss current developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the long-term engagement of Slovak diplomacy and the activities of Slovak soldiers in the UNFICYP peacekeeping mission under the flag of the United Nations.

November 26 ■ State Secretary Klus attends the video conference with Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister of the Czech Republic Aleš Chmelař and Secretary-General of the Ministry for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal. The partners discuss the pandemic measures in both a domestic and cross-border context. The core topic of the video conference is the fight against terrorism, partly in the context of the attack in Vienna on November 2nd.

November 27 ■ Defense Minister Naď participates in a video conference with representatives of the countries contributing to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Latvia. The minister and his counterparts discuss the state, goals and tasks of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia, under which 152 Slovak personnel are deployed in the Canadian-led NATO eFP Battle Group Latvia.

December 1 Minister Korčok attends the NATO foreign ministers meeting. The talks begin with the reporting of the main recommendations of the expert group for the Reflection Process, known as NATO 2030, which was launched at the London NATO summit in December 2019. The partners also discuss Afghanistan in relation to the US president's decision to reduce the number of US soldiers serving there.

December 3 ■ Ivan Korčok attends the 27th session of the Ministerial Council of the OSCE. In his speech, he emphasizes the current challenges in the OSCE area, including the situation in Belarus and Ukraine. In the context of the situation in Ukraine, Minister Korčok acknowledges the key role played by the OSCE's monitoring and negotiation formats in stabilizing the situation in the conflict zone. He further calls for the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, including Crimea.

December 4 ■ Ivan Korčok speaks at the extraordinary session of the UN General Assembly devoted to the Covid-19 pandemic. Minister talks about the need for closer international cooperation and equal access to information, testing, vaccines and medicines for everyone and the importance of solidarity in the international community. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Slovakia has provided more than €10 million in humanitarian aid.

December 7 ■ Minister Korčok attends the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting. The main topic is the election of democrat candidate Joe Biden as US president. The ministers outline the priority areas of future cooperation, particularly in foreign and security policy, but also on climate change and defending the rules-based international order.

December 11 ■ Prime Minister Matovič participates in the European Council summit on the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027, the Recovery Fund and climate change. The summit reaches agreement on the MFF and the Recovery Fund, which means that financial assistance can be distributed to the EU countries. The partners also agree to reduce carbon emissions by 55 per cent by 2030.

December 14 ■ President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová pays an official visit to Pope Francis. They discuss the pandemic as well as other global problems such as deep divisions in society. President Čaputová presents the Pope with large Our Lady of Sorrows beeswax candles made by vulnerable groups of people.

December 15 ■ Ivan Korčok commemorates the 20th anniversary of Slovakia's membership of the OECD.

December 17 ■ State Secretary Brocková participates in the Global Economic Summit, where she presents Slovakia's innovative digital solution for schools as part of the Covid-19 measures.

December 30 ■ Slovakia sends humanitarian aid for the inhabitants of the most affected municipalities of Sisak and Petrinja, where further earthquake tremors were recorded this morning. Croatia reports seven earthquake victims so far and extensive material damage.



Treaties, agreements, conventions published in 2020

1. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the settlement of the debt of the Republic of Serbia towards the Slovak Republic
(Belgrade, March 30, 2019, published under No. 18/2020 Z. z.)
2. Amendments to Agreement between the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Government of the Republic of Cyprus on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income
(published under No. 81/2020 Z. z.)
3. Amendments to Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Portugal on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and on capital
(published under No. 98/2020 Z. z.)
4. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on remunerated activities of dependents of members of diplomatic missions and consular posts
(Bratislava, September 9, 2019, published under No. 97/2020 Z. z.)
5. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Russian Federation on mutual recognition of education, qualifications and academic degrees
(Moscow, November 19, 2019, published under No. 153/2020 Z. z.)
6. Amendments to Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and on capital
(published under No. 230/2020 Z. z.)
7. Amendments to Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Korea on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income
(published under No. 231/2020 Z. z.)
8. Amendments to Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Russian Federation on avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and on capital
(published under No. 238/2020 Z. z.)

9. Amendments to Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Kazakhstan on avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and on capital
(published under No. 239/2020 Z. z.)
10. Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Peoples Republic of China on mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and academic titles
(Beijing, November 27, 2019, published under No. 249/2020 Z. z.)
11. Agreement between the Government of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic and the Kingdom of Sweden on promotion and mutual protection of investments and the Protocol
(Prague, November 13, 1990, published under No. 479/1991 Zb.)
(expired on August 1, 2020, published under No. 256/2020 Z. z.)
12. Amendments to Agreement between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and on capital in mutual relations between the Slovak Republic and Bosnia and Herzegovina
(published under No. 327/2020 Z.z.)
13. Convention between the Slovak Republic and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the respect of Aruba concerning the automatic exchange of information regarding savings income in the form of interest payments
(concluded in the form of an exchange of letters, June 1, 2004 and November 9, 2004, published under No. 317/2005 Z. z. and 5/2007)
expired on January 1, 2019, published under No 23/2020 Z. z.
14. Amendment No. 2 to the Agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia on mutual visa representation
(concluded in the form of exchange of verbal notes, Bratislava, December 5, 2019, Riga, January 20, 2020, published under No. 23/2020 Z. z.)
15. Reimbursable Advisory Services Agreement between the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
(Bratislava, December 20, 2019, published under No. 31/2020 Z. z.)
16. Amendment to the Article 1 of the Agreement on activities of the Slovak–French bilingual sections between the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of France
(concluded in the form of exchange of verbal notes, March 12, 2020 and May 11, 2020, published under No. 169/2020 Z. z.)
17. Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic on updating the border documentary records
(Prague, November 20, 2018, published under No. 452/2020 Z. z.)

■ Multilateral treaties and agreements

1. Amendments to Rules relating to fees of the European Patent Convention
(Munich, December 12, 2018, published under No. 12/2020 Z. z.)
2. Amendments to Common Regulations under the Madrid Agreement concerning the International Registration of Marks and the Protocol relating to that Agreement
(Geneva, September 27, 2018, published under No. 13/2020 Z. z.)
3. Amendments to Regulations under the Protocol relating to the Madrid Agreement concerning the International Registration of Marks
(Geneva, October 3, 2019, published under No. 14/2020 Z. z.)
4. Convention on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition, enforcement and co-operation in respect of parental responsibility and measures for the protection of children of October 19, 1996
(published under No. 15/2020 Z. z.) – Guayana – convention party as of December 1, 2019
5. Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Kazakhstan, of the other part
(Brussels, November 16, 2015, published under No. 40/2020 Z. z.)
6. Second Additional Protocol to the Universal Postal Convention
(Geneva, September 26, 2019, published under No. 53/2020 Z. z.)
7. Amendments to Rules relating to Fees of the European Patent Convention
(Munich, December 12, 2019, published under No. 58/2020 Z. z.)
8. Amendments to Rules relating to Fees of the European Patent Convention
(Munich, December 12, 2019, published under No. 59/2020 Z. z.)
9. Amendments to Implementing Regulations to the European Patent Convention
(Munich, December 12, 2019, published under No. 60/2020 Z. z.)
10. Amendments to the Regulations under the Patent Cooperation Treaty
(Geneva, October 9, 2019, published under No. 61/2020 Z. z.)
11. Convention setting up a European University Institute
(Florence, April 19, 1972, published under No. 86/2020 Z. z.)
12. Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of the Republic of North Macedonia
(Brussels, February 6, 2019, published under No. 99/2020 Z. z.)
13. Protocol No. 16 to the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
(Strasbourg, October 2, 2013, published under No. 113/2020 Z. z.)

14. Amendment to article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
 1. Weapons which use microbial or other biological agents, or toxins
 2. Weapons the primary effect of which is to injure by fragments undetectable by x-rays in the human body
 3. blinding laser weapons(New York, December 14, 2017, published under No. 121, 122, 123/2020 Z. z.)
15. Convention on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition, enforcement and co-operation in respect of parental responsibility and measures for the protection of children from October 19, 1996
(published under No. 141/2020 Z. z.) – Barbados – convention party as of May 1, 2020)
16. Agreement for the termination of bilateral investment treaties between the member states of the European Union
(Brussels, May 5, 2020, published under No. 190/2020 Z. z.)
17. Amendments to the Article II of the Agreement establishing International Finance Corporation
(April 16, 2020, published under No. 191/2020 Z. z.)
18. Beijing Treaty on Audiovisual Performances
(Beijing, June 24, 2012, published under No. 192/2020 Z. z.)
19. Amendments to the Agreement on International Goods Transport by Rail (SMGS)
(Warsaw, November 4, 2020 published under No. 197/2020 Z. z.)
20. Air Transport Agreement between the European Community and its member states, of one part, and the United States of America of the other part
(Brussels, April 25, 2007, published under No. 206/2020 Z. z. and No. 216/2020 Z. z.)
21. Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement between the European Union and its member states of the one part, and the government of the State of Israel, of the other part (preliminary in force, note No. 187/2015 Z. z.)
(Luxembourg, June 10, 2013, published under No. 202/2020 Z. z.)
22. Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement between the European Union and its member states, of the one part and Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, of the other part
(Brussels, December 15, 2010, published under No. 203/2020 Z. z.)
23. Common Aviation Area Agreement between the European Union and its member states and the Republic of Moldova (preliminary in force, note No. 204/2017 Z. z.)
(Brussels, June 26, 2012, published under No. 204/2020 Z. z.)
24. Common Aviation Area Agreement between the European Union and its member states, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part
(Brussels, December 2, 2010, published under No. 205/2020 Z. z.)
25. Temporary suspension of the application of Rule 51(2) of the European Patent Convention (note No. 47/2008 Z. z.) with respect to the additional fee for belated

payment of a renewal fee for a European patent application (Article 2(1), item 5, of the Rules relating to Fees)
(Munich, May 28, 2020, published under No. 251/2020 Z. z.)

26. Amendments to Implementing Regulations and Rules relating to Fees of the European Patent Convention
(Munich, March 27, 2020, published under No. 252/2020 Z. z.)



Structure of the state administration authorities acting in international and European affairs in 2020

as of February 2021

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Prepared by Juraj Sýkora, Slovak Foreign Policy Association

Source: websites of the bodies and agencies of the Government of the Slovak Republic

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Head of the Department: Katarína Hanzalová, tel.: 02/5978 2050,
katarina.hanzalova@mzv.sk

Department of Security, Classified Materials, Archive, and Registry

Head of the Department: Vladimír Kopecký, tel.: 02/5978 2080, vladimir.kopecky@mzv.sk

Department of Services and Processes Electronization

Head of the Department: Vladimír Ježek, tel.: 02/5978 2090, vladimir.jezek@mzv.sk

MINISTRY OF ECONOMY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Mlynské nivy 44, 827 15 Bratislava 212

tel.: 02/4854 1111

www.economy.gov.sk, www.mhsr.sk

▪ Minister

Peter Žiga (until March 21, 2020)

Richard Sulík (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Vojtech Ferencz (until March 21, 2020)

Rastislav Chovanec (until March 21, 2020)

Ján Oravec (since March 21, 2020)

Karol Galek (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Kutuzovova 8, 832 47 Bratislava

tel.: 0960 11 22 33

www.mosr.sk, mod.gov.sk

▪ Minister

Peter Gajdoš (until March 21, 2020)

Jaroslav Naď (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Marián Saloň (until March 21, 2020)

Róbert Ondrejcsák (until March 21, 2020)

Marian Majer (since March 21, 2020)

Peter Kozák (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Pribinova 2, 812 72 Bratislava
tel.: 02/5094 1111, 02/5094 4397
www.minv.sk

▪ Minister

Denisa Saková (until March 21, 2020)
Roman Mikulec (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Michal Bagačka (until March 21, 2020)
Rudolf Urbanovič (until March 21, 2020)
Ján Lazar (since March 21, 2020)
Vendelín Leitner (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF FINANCE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Štefanovičova 5, 817 82 Bratislava
tel.: 02/5958 1111
www.mfsr.sk, www.finance.gov.sk

▪ Minister

Ladislav Kamenický (until March 21, 2020)
Eduard Heger (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Radko Kuruc (until March 21, 2020)
Dana Meager (until March 21, 2020)
Marcel Klimek (since March 21, 2020)
Luboš Jančík (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Námestie SNP 33, 813 31 Bratislava
tel.: 02/2048 2111
www.culture.gov.sk, www.mksr.sk, mksr@culture.gov.sk

▪ Minister

Ľubica Laššáková (until March 21, 2020)
Natália Milanová (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Ivan Sečík (until March 21, 2020)
Konrád Rigó (until March 21, 2020)
Radoslav Kutaš (since March 21, 2020)
Zuzana Kumanová (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Limbová 2, 837 52 Bratislava 37
tel.: 02/5937 3111
www.health.gov.sk, office@health.gov.sk

▪ Minister

Andrea Kalavská (until March 21, 2020)
Marek Krajčí (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Jaroslav Ridoško (until March 21, 2020)
Stanislav Špánik (until March 21, 2020)
Jana Ježíková (since March 21, 2020)
Peter Stachura (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND FAMILY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Špitálska 4, 6, 8, 816 43 Bratislava
tel.: 02/2046 0000
www.employment.gov.sk

▪ Minister

Ján Richter (until March 21, 2020)
Milan Krajniak (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Branislav Ondruš (until March 21, 2020)
Ivan Švejna (until March 21, 2020)
Boris Ažaltovič (since March 21, 2020)
Soňa Gaborčáková (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND SPORT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Stromová 1, 813 30 Bratislava
tel.: 02/5937 4111
www.minedu.sk

▪ Minister

Martina Lubyová (until March 21, 2020)
Branislav Gröhling (since March 21, 2020)

▪ State Secretaries

Peter Krajiňák (until March 21, 2020)
Oľga Nachtmannová (until March 21, 2020)
Monika Filipová (since March 21, 2020)
Ludovít Paulis (since March 21, 2020)

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Župné námestie 13, 813 11 Bratislava
tel.: 02/8889 1111
www.justice.gov.sk

▪ **Minister**

Gábor Gál (until March 21, 2020)
Mária Kolíková (since March 21, 2020)

▪ **State Secretary**

Edita Pfundtner (until March 21, 2020)
Michal Luciak (since March 21, 2020)

▪ **Directorate of International Law**

Director General: Michal Kotlárík, tel.: 02/88891349, ms.smep.sek@justice.sk

Department of Private International Law

Head of the Department: Tatiana Hačková, tel.: 02/88891258

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Nám. L. Štúra 1, 812 35 Bratislava
tel.: 02/59561111
www.enviro.gov.sk, www.minzp.sk

▪ **Minister**

László Solymos (until March 21, 2020)
Ján Budaj (since March 21, 2020)

▪ **State Secretaries**

Norbert Kurilla (until March 21, 2020)
Boris Susko (until March 21, 2020)
Juraj Smatana (since March 21, 2020)
Michal Kiča (since March 21, 2020)

**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Dobrovičova 12, 812 66 Bratislava
tel.: 02/59266111
www.mpsr.sk

▪ **Minister**

Gabriela Matečná (until March 21, 2020)
Ján Mičovský (since March 21, 2020)

▪ **State Secretaries**

Gabriel Csicsai (until March 21, 2020)
Anton Stredák (until March 21, 2020)
Martin Fecko (since March 21, 2020)
Andrej Gajdoš (since March 21, 2020)

**MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND CONSTRUCTION
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Námestie slobody 6, 810 05 Bratislava
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www.telecom.gov.sk

▪ **Minister**

Arpád Érsek (until March 21, 2020)
Andrej Doležal (since March 21, 2020)

▪ **State Secretaries**

Peter Ďurček (until March 21, 2020)
Ladislava Cengelová (until March 21, 2020)
Katarína Bruncková (since March 21, 2020)
Jaroslav Kmeť (since March 21, 2020)

**MINISTRY OF INVESTMENTS, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND INFORMATIZATION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Štefánikova 15, 811 05 Bratislava
tel.: 02/20928149
www.mirri.gov.sk

▪ **Minister**

Veronika Remišová

▪ **State Secretaries**

Vladimír Ledecký
Marek Antal

ANTIMONOPOLY OFFICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Drieňová 24, 826 03 Bratislava
tel.: 02/22122110
www.antimon.gov.sk

▪ **Chairman**

Tibor Menyhart, tel.: 02/48297230, predseda@antimon.gov.sk

STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Miletičova 3, 824 67 Bratislava
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www.statistics.sk

▪ **President**

Alexander Ballek, tel.: 02/55425802, alexander.ballek@statistics.sk



List of the embassies in the Slovak Republic

as of January 2021

▪ 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	Enkeleda Mërkuri Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
People's Democratic Republic of Algeria	1. 1. 1993	Rudolfingerasse 18 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Fauzia Mebarki Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Principality of Andorra	3. 6. 1996	Kärtnering 2 A/13 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Enric Tarrado Vives Ambassador-Designate
The Republic of Angola	30. 9. 1993	Seilerstätte 15/1/10 1010 Vienna Austria	Mariano João Baptista chargé d'affaires
The Argentine Republic	1. 1. 1993	Lugeck 1-2/7/44 A A-1010 Vienna Austria	Maite Fernandez Garcia chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Armenia	14. 11. 1993	Hadikgasse 28 1140 Vienna Austria	Armen Papikyan Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Commonwealth of Australia	1. 1. 1993	Mattiellistrasse 2 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Richard Traves Sadleir Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Cooperative Republic of Guyana	–	Guyana High Commission 3 Palace Court Bayswater Road W2 4LP London United Kingdom	Frederick Hamley Case Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Azerbaijan	27. 11. 1993	Hügelgasse 2 A-1130 Vienna Austria	Galib Israfilov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Prepared by Juraj Sýkora, Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Kingdom of Bahrain		Klingelhöfstrasse 7 10785 Berlin Germany	Abdulla Abdullatif Abdulla Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The People's Republic of Bangladesh	3. 3. 1993	Kaiserin-Augusta-Allee 111 D-10553 Berlin Germany	Muhammad Abdul Muhith Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Belgium	1. 1. 1993	Schönburgstrasse 10 1040 Vienna Austria	Ghislain D'Hoop Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Benin	19. 1. 1993	Englerallee 23 D-14159 Berlin Germany	Josseline Marie Louise da Silva Gbony Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Belarus	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 5 811 02 Bratislava 1	Denis Sidorov Chargé d'affaires
The Plurinational State of Bolivia	5. 3. 1993	Prinz-Eugen-Strasse 18 A-1040 Vienna Austria	María Lourdes Espinoza Patino Chargé d'affaires
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1. 1. 1993	Opletalova 27 110 00 Praha Czech Republic	Martina Mlinarević Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Botswana	–	6 Stratford Place W1C 1AY London United Kingdom	Roy Warren Blackbeard Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federative Republic of Brazil	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 47 811 06 Bratislava	Eduardo Ricardo Gradilone Neto Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Bulgaria	1. 1. 1993	Kuzmányho 1 811 06 Bratislava 1	Yordanka Chobanova Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Burkina Faso	1. 8. 1997	Strohgasse 14c A-1030 Vienna Austria	Dieudonné Kere Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Burundi	29. 6. 1999	Berliner Strasse 36 D-10715 Berlin Germany	Else Nizigama Ntamagiro Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	–	Neulinggasse 29/6/20 A-1030 Vienna Austria	A. Georgette M'Brah chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Cyprus	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 01 Bratislava	Nicos P. Nicolaou Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Chad		Lepsiusstrasse 114 D-12165 Berlin Germany	Mariam Ali Moussa Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Czech Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 8 P. O. Box 208 810 00 Bratislava	Tomáš Tuhý Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Montenegro	1. 1. 1993	Lothringerstrasse 14-16 1030 Vienna Austria	Željko Perović Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

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	Jorge Carvajal Chargé d'Affaires
The People's Republic of China	1. 1. 1993	Jančova 8 b 811 02 Bratislava 1	Sun Lijie Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Denmark	1. 1. 1993	Führichgasse 6 A-1010 Vienna Austria	René Rosager Dinesen Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Representation of European Commission in the SR	–	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	Ladislav Miko chargé d'affaires
European Parliament Information Office	–	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	Robert Sermek Director
The Arab Republic of Egypt	1. 1. 1993	Panská 14 811 01 Bratislava	Bassem Mohamed Abdel-Alim Khalil Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Ecuador	1. 1. 1993	Andrássy út 20.1/2. 1061 Budapest Hungary	Francisco Javier Serrano Salgado Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Estonia	1. 1. 1993	Wohlebengasse 9/12 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Toomas Kukk Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	–	Boothstrasse 20a D-12207 Berlin Germany	Mulu Solomon Bezuneh Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Philippines	1. 1. 1993	Donau City Strasse 11 A-1220 Vienna Austria	Deena Joy D. Amatong Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Finland	1. 1. 1993	Hellichova 1 118 00 Prague Czech Republic	Jukka Uolevi Pesola Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The French Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 7 812 83 Bratislava 1	Christophe Léonzi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of the Gambia	18. 8. 1995	Avenue F. D. Roosevelt 126 1050 Brussels Belgium	Teneng Mba Jaitoh Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Ghana	–	Na Zatorce 89/6 160 00 Praha 6 – Bubeneč Czech Republic	Peter Manu Owusu Chargé d'affaires
Georgia	25. 11. 1993	Michalská 9 811 01 Bratislava	Revaz Beshidze Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Guatemala	15. 4. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/ A-1040 Vienna Austria	Manuel Estuardo Roldán Barillas Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Guinea	16. 3. 1993	Jägerstrasse 67-69 DE-10117 Berlin Germany	Mamadou Bouliwel Sow chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Guinea-Bissau	–	Kronenstrasse 72 DE-10117 Berlin Germany	Malam Djassi Ambassador Designated

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Hellenic Republic	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné námestie 4 811 01 Bratislava 1	Georgios Dimitriadis Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of the Netherlands	1. 1. 1993	Fraňa Kráľa 5 811 05 Bratislava 1	Hendrik-Cornelis van der Kwast Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Honduras		Cuxhavener Strasse 14 DE-10555 Berlin Germany	Christa Castro Varela Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Croatia	1. 1. 1993	Mišikova 21 811 06 Bratislava 1	Aleksandar Heina Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of India	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 4 811 08 Bratislava	Vanlalhuman Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Indonesia	1. 1. 1993	Brnianska 31 811 04 Bratislava 1	Adiyatwidi Adiwoyo Asmady Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Iraq	1. 1. 1993	Johannesgasse 26 1010 Vienna Austria	Baker Fattah Hussien Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of Iran	1. 1. 1993	Jauresgasse 9 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Abbas Bagherpour Ardekani Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	Hildegard Ó Riain Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Iceland	1. 1. 1993	Naglergasse 2/3/8 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Thórir Ibsen Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Israel	1. 1. 1993	Slávičie údolie 106 811 02 Bratislava	Boaz Modai Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Jamaica	1. 1. 1993	Schmargendorfer Str. 32 D-12159 Berlin Germany	Margaret Ann Louise Jobson Ambassador Designated
Japan	1. 1. 1993	Hlavné nám. 2 813 27 Bratislava	Makoto Nakagawa Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Yemen	1. 1. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 18 – 20 1030 Vienna Austria	Haytham Abdulmomen Shoja 'Aadin Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	3. 3. 1993	Rennweg 17/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Leena Al-Hadid Ambassador Designated
The Republic of South Africa	1. 1. 1993	Sandgasse 33 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Rapulane Sydney Molekane Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Cambodia	–	Benjamin-Vogelsdorf Str. 2 D-13187 Berlin Germany	Sopheak Phan Second Secretary

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	Heidi Alberta Hulan Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
		Carlton Savoy Building Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	John von Kaufmann chargé d'affaires, Bratislava
The State of Qatar	–	Schottenring 10 1010 Vienna Austria	Sultan Salmeen S. B. Almansouri Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Kazakhstan	1. 1. 1993	Kancelária v Bratislave Gunduličova 6 811 05 Bratislava	Roman Vassilenko Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Kenya	1. 1. 1993	Andromeda Tower Donau-City Str. 6 1220 Vienna Austria	Stella Mokaya Orina chargé d'affaires
The Kyrgyz Republic	1. 1. 1993	Invalidenstrasse 3/8 1030 Vienna Austria	Bakyt Alievich Džusupov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Colombia	1. 1. 1993	Stadiongasse 6-8/15 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Miguel Camilo Ruiz Blanco Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of the Congo	30. 6. 1998	Wallstrasse 69 D – 10179 Berlin Germany	Jacques Yvon Ndovhu Ambassador Designated
The Democratic Republic of the Congo	18. 2. 1993	Soukenická 34/1765 110 00 Prague Czech Republic	Mibanga Ngala-Mulumr Wa Badidike Benoit-Labre chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Štúrova 16 811 02 Bratislava	Byung Hwa Chung Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1. 1. 1993	Na Větru 395/18 162 00 Prague Czech Republic	Ju Won Chol Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Costa Rica	6. 10. 1993	Flussgasse 7 A-1020 Vienna Austria	Herbert Daniel Espinoza Solano Consul General, chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Cuba	1. 1. 1993	Somolického 1/A 811 05 Bratislava	Yamila Sonia Pita Montes Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The State of Kuwait	1. 1. 1993	Lodná 2 811 02 Bratislava	Essa Y. K. E. Alshamali Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	–	Sommerhaidenweg 43 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Sithong Chitnothin Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Lesotho	8. 5. 1995	Via Serchio 8 001 98 Rome Italy	Malikopo Patricia Rakootje First Secretary

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Address of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Lebanese Republic	1. 1. 1993	Oppolzergasse 6/3 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Ibrahim Assaf Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Libya	1. 1. 1993	Révova 45 811 02 Bratislava	Nasr A. M. Hasan chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Lithuania	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/4 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Donatas Kušlys Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Latvia	1. 1. 1993	Stefan Esders Platz 4 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Veronika Erte Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	1. 1. 1993	Sternwartestrasse 81 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Marc Ungeheuer Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of North Macedonia	1. 1. 1993	Kinderspitalgasse 5/2 A-1090 Vienna Austria	Nenad Kolev chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Madagascar	16. 2. 1996	Koursovoy Per. 5 119 034 Moscow Russian Federation	Florence Isabelle Rafaramalala Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Hungary	1. 1. 1993	Štefánikova 1 811 05 Bratislava	Tibor Pető Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Malaysia	1. 1. 1993	Floridsdorfer Hauptstrasse 1-7 A-1210 Vienna Austria	Dato' Ganeson A/L Sivagurunathan Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Malawi	–	Westfälische Strasse 86 D-10709 Berlin Germany	Michael Barth Kamphambe Nkhoma Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Mali	–	Ambasciata del Mali Via Antonio Bosio 2 00161 Roma Italia	Aly Coulibaly Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Opernring 5 11010 Vienna Austria	Anthony Licari Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Morocco	1. 1. 1993	Hasenauerstrasse 57 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Azzeddin Farhane Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Islamic Republic of Mauritania	–	Kommandantenstrasse 80 D-10117 Berlin Germany	Mohamed Mahomud Ould Brahim Khilil Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Republic of the Union of Myanmar	–	Kneza Miloša 72 11000 Belgrade Serbia	Thurain Thant Zin Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Moldova	1. 1. 1993	Löwengasse 47/10 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Corina Caraus First Secretary
Mongolia	1. 1. 1993	Na Marně 5 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	Davaasambu Uuganbayar chargé 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	Nada Kruger Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Republic of Germany	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo nám. 10 813 03 Bratislava	Barbara Wolf Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nepal	4. 3. 1994	Guerickestrasse 27 D-10587 Berlin Germany	Ramesh Prasad Khanal Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Federal Republic of Nigeria	1. 1. 1993	Rennweg 25 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Vivian Nwunaku Rose Okeke Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Republic of the Niger	–	Machnowerstraße 24 D-14165 Berlin Germany	
The Republic of Nicaragua	5. 1. 1993	Joachi-Karnatz-Alle 45 10557 Berlin German	Tatiana Daniela García Silva Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Norway	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 29 811 06 Bratislava	Terje Theodor Nervik Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
New Zealand	1. 1. 1993	Mattiellistrasse 2-4/3 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Nicole Jocelyn Roberton Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Sultanate of Oman	3. 1. 1993	Wahringer Strasse 2-4/24-25 A-1090 Vienna Austria	Yousuf Ahmed Hamed Aljabri Ambassador Designated
The Islamic Republic of Pakistan	1. 1. 1993	Hofzeile 13 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Jawad Ali First Secretary
The State of Palestine	1. 1. 1993	Gorkého 3 811 01 Bratislava	Attalla S. A. Qubia Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Panama	–	Goldschmiedgasse 10/403 1010 Vienna Austria	Milton Cohen Henriquez Pagés Attaché
The Republic of Paraguay	8. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 18/1/7 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Juan Francisco Facetti Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Peru	1. 1. 1993	Mahlerstrasse 7/22 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Eric Anderson Machado Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Poland	1. 1. 1993	Paulínyho 7 814 91 Bratislava	Krzysztof Strzałka Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Portugal	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 16 811 01 Bratislava	Fernando Manuel de Jesus Teles Fazendeiro Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Austria	1. 1. 1993	Astoria Palace Hodžovo námestie 1/A 811 06 Bratislava	Margit Bruck-Friedrich Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
Romania	1. 1. 1993	Fraňa Kráľa 11 811 05 Bratislava	Steluta Arhire Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Russian Federation	1. 1. 1993	Godrova 4 811 06 Bratislava 1	Igor Borisovič Bratčikov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Rwandese Republic	–	Jägerstrasse 67-69 D-10117 Berlin Germany	Igor Cesar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of El Salvador	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/2/1 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Ramiro Recinos Trejo chargé d'affaires
The Republic of San Marino	1. 1. 1993	Palazzo Begni Contrada Omerelli 31 47890 San Marino Italy	Dario Galassi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	16. 6. 1995	Formanekgasse 38 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Abdullah bin Khalid bin Sultan bin Abdulazziz Al Saud chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Senegal	–	Klingelhöferstrasse 5 D-10785 Berlin Germany	
The Republic of Seychelles	–	51, Avenue Mozart 75016 Paris France	
The Republic of Sierra Leone	–	Rublevskoe šosse 26/1 121615 Moscov Russian Federation	John Bobor Laggah Consul
The Republic of Singapore	12. 2. 1993	MFA, Tanglin 2 48163 Singapore	Chay Wai Chuen Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Slovenia	1. 1. 1993	Ventúrska 5 813 15 Bratislava 1	Gregor Kozovinc Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Federal Republic of Somalia	–	Simferopolsky Bulvar 7a-145 117 556 Moscov Russian Federation	Mohamed Mahmoud Handule Ambassador Designated
The United Arab Emirates	3. 1. 1993	Chimanistrasse 36 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Ibrahim Salim Mohamed Al Musharrakh Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1. 1. 1993	Panská 16 811 01 Bratislava 1	Nigel Marcus Baker Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United States of America	1. 1. 1993	Hviezdoslavovo námestie 4 811 02 Bratislava 1	Bridget Ann Brink Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United Mexican States	1. 10. 1993	Rennngasse 5 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Luis Javier Campuzano Piña Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Country	Start of diplomatic relations	Adress of embassy	In charge of embassy (LoC)
The Republic of Serbia	1. 1. 1993	Búdkova 38 811 04 Bratislava 1	Momčilo Babić Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Democratic Socialist republic of Sri Lanka	15. 2. 1993	Weyringergasse 33-35 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Charitha Weerasinghe Chargé d' affaires
The Republic of the Sudan	27. 7. 1993	Reisnerstrasse 29/5 A-1030 Vienna Austria	Elsadig Mohamed A.E.M. Ahmed Chargé d'affaires
The Holy See	1. 1. 1993	Nekrasovova 17 811 04 Bratislava 1	Mons. Giacomo Guido Ottonello 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	Bassam Ahmad Nazim Al Sabbagh Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Spain	1. 1. 1993	Prepoštská 10 811 01 Bratislava 1	Luis Belzuz De Los Ríos Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Switzerland	1. 1. 1993	Michalská 12 811 06 Bratislava 1	Alexander Hoffet Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Kingdom of Sweden	1. 1. 1993	Liechtensteinstrasse 51 A-1090 Vienna Austria	Mikaela Kumlin Granit Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Tajikistan	–	Hutweidengasse 47 1190 Vienna Austria	Idibek Kalandar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Italy	1. 1. 1993	Palisády 49 811 06 Bratislava	Gabriele Meucci Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The United Republic of Tanzania	1. 1. 1993	Eschenallee 11 D-14050 Berlin Germany	Abdallah Saleh Possi Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Togo	–	Grabbeallee 43 13156 Berlin Germany	Komi Bayedze Dagoh Ambassador Designated
The Kingdom of Thailand	1. 1. 1993	Cottagegasse 48 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Thitiporn Chirasawadi Chargé d'affaires
The Republic of Tunisia	1. 1. 1993	Nárcisz Utca 36 Budapest Hungary	Samia Ilhem Ammar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Turkey	1. 1. 1993	Holubyho 11 811 03 Bratislava 1	Hatice Aslıgül Üğdül Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Turkmenistan	1. 1. 1993	Argentinerstrasse 22/II/EG A-1040 Vienna Austria	Silapberdi Ashirgeldiveich Nurberdiyev Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

■ Country	■ Start of diplomatic relations	■ Adress of embassy	■ In charge of embassy (LoC)
Ukraine	1. 1. 1993	Radvanská 35 811 01 Bratislava 1	Jurij Muška Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Uganda	–	Axel-Springer Str. 54° C-10117 Berlin Germany	Mercel Robert Tibaleka Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	–	Mahlerstrasse 11/2/2 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Juan Carlos Ojeda Viglione Ambassador Designated
The Republic of Uzbekistan	20. 1. 1993	Pötzleinsdorfer Strasse 49 A-1180 Vienna Austria	Rustamdjan Khakimov chargé d'affaires
The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela	1. 1. 1993	Prinz Eugen Strasse 72/1/1.1 A-1040 Vienna Austria	Dulfa Dalila Hernández Medina chargé d'affaires
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	1. 1. 1993	Dunajská 15 811 08 Bratislava	Nguyen Thi Thu Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Zambia	5. 1. 1993	Axel-Springer Str. 54 A D-10117 Berlin Germany	Anthony L. Mukwita Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Republic of Zimbabwe	3. 3. 1993	Chemin William Barbery 271292 Chambésy Geneva Switzerland	Taonga Mushayavanhu Ambassador Designated
Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta	1. 1. 1993	Kapitulská 9 811 01 Bratislava	Alfred Prinz von Schönburg-Hartenstein Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary



List of consulates in the Slovak Republic

as of January 2021

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The Republic of Azerbaijan	Klobučnícka 4 811 01 Bratislava	Džalal Gasymov Honorary Consul
The Republic of Albania	Mostná 56 949 01 Nitra	Valér Husarovič Honorary Consul
The Republic of Armenia	Ventúrska 1 811 01 Bratislava	Bagrat Hakobyan Honorary Consul
The Commonwealth of the Bahamas	Ventúrska 10 811 01 Bratislava	Michal Lazar Honorary Consul
The People's Republic of Bangladesh	Pod záhradami 41 841 01 Bratislava	Štefan Petkanič Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Belgium	Moskovská cesta 10/B 040 11 Košice	Dany R. E. Rottiers Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Belgium	Moskovská 13 811 08 Bratislava	Bart Waterloos Honorary Consul
Belize	Krajná ulica 56C 821 04 Bratislava	Miroslav Strečanský Honorary Consul
The Republic of Belarus	Osadská 679/15 028 01 Trstená	Marián Murín Honorary Consul
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tureň 385 903 01 Tureň	Munir Pašagić Honorary Consul
Montenegro	Zelená 2 811 01 Bratislava	Rudolf Autner Honorary Consul
The Republic of Chile	Kĺzavá 31/C 831 01 Bratislava	Jaroslav Šoltys Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Denmark	Bajkalská 5/A 831 03 Bratislava	Michal Lőrincz Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Estonia	Drieňová 3 821 01 Bratislava	Peter Pochaba Honorary Consul
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	Bojnická 3 831 04 Bratislava	Štefan Rosina Honorary Consul
The Republic of Philippines	Cesta na Senec 15725/24 830 06 Bratislava	Pavol Konštiak Honorary General Consul
French Republic	Hlavná 104, 040 01 Košice	David Mortreux Honorary Consul

Prepared by Juraj Sýkora, Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The Republic of Finland	Moyzesova 5 811 05 Bratislava	Karol Kállay Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Finland	Žriedlová 12-14, 040 01 Košice	Rastislav Puchala Honorary Consul
Georgia	Palisády 31 811 06 Bratislava	James Arthur Honorary Consul
Georgia	Orlové 116 017 01 Považská Bystrica	Nodari Giorgadze Honorary Consul
The Republic of Ghana	Palisády 31 811 06 Bratislava	James Arthur Honorary Consul
The Republic of Guatemala		
Hellenic Republic	Hlavná 20 040 01 Košice	Liberios Vokorokos Honorary Consul
Hungary	Hlavná 67 040 01 Košice	Jozef Gál Honorary Consule
The Kingdom of The Netherlands	Košická 44 P. O. Box 21080 01 Prešov	Matúš Murajda Honorary Consul
The Republic of Iceland	Palisády 39 811 06 Bratislava	Otto Halás Honorary Consul
The State of Israel	Garbiarska 5 040 01 Košice	Peter Frajt Honorary Consul
The State of Israel	M. R. Štefánika 66036 01 Martin	Erika Halašová Honorary Consul
Jamaica	Porubského 2 811 06 Bratislava	Marián Valko Honorary Consul
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	Račianska 96 831 02 Bratislava	Jaroslav Rebej Honorary Consul
The Republic of Cabo Verde	Dvořákovo nábrežie 8/A 81102 Bratislava	Štefan Czucz Honorary Consul
The Republic of South Africa	Fraňa Kráľa 1 851 02 Bratislava	Milan Lopašovský Honorary Consul
The Republic of Korea	Dolný val 5 010 01 Žilina	Oldřich Kovář Honorary Consul
The Kyrgyz Republic	Miletičova 1 821 08 Bratislava	Tibor Podoba Honorary Consul
The Republic of Colombia	AC Diplomat Palisády 29/ A 811 06 Bratislava	Anton Siekel Honorary Consul
The Republic of Costa Rica	Palisády 56 811 06 Bratislava	Tomáš Chrenek Honorary Consul
The Lao People's Democratic Republic	Panská ulica 27 811 01 Bratislava	Bounthong Bounthong Honorary Consul
The Republic of Lithuania	Za záhradami 16 900 28 Zálesie	Marián Meško Honorary Consul
The Republic of Latvia	Krmanova 1 040 01 Košice	Miroslav Repka Honorary Consul
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Prievozská 4/A 821 09 Bratislava	Peter Kriško Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Jašíkova 2 821 03 Bratislava	Igor Junas Honorary Consul
The Republic of Madagascar	V záhradách 4 811 02 Bratislava	Peter Brudňák Honorary Consul

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The Republic of Maldives	Lazaretská 29 811 09 Bratislava	Andrej Maťko Honorary Consul
The Republic of Mali	Mikulášska 3 – 5 811 02 Bratislava	Eugen Horváth Honorary Consul
The Republic of Malta	Palisády 33 811 06 Bratislava	Martin Hantabál Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Morocco	Krajná 86 821 04 Bratislava	Ľubomír Šidala Honorary Consul
The Republic of Moldova	Zámocká 16 811 01 Bratislava	Antonio Parziale Honorary Consul
The Republic of Moldova	Hlavná 81 040 11 Košice	Ján Varga Honorary Consul
The Principality of Monaco	Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	Miroslav Výboh Honorary Consul
Mongolia	Národná trieda 56 040 01 Košice	Peter Slávik Honorary Consul
The Republic of Namibia	Zadunajská cesta 8 851 01 Bratislava	Karol Biermann Honorary Consul
The Federal Republic of Germany	Timonova 27 040 01 Košice	Juraj Banský Honorary Consul
The Federal Republic of Germany	Priemyselná 14 010 01 Žilina	Peter Lazar Honorary Consu
New Zealand	Dvořákovo nábrežie 10 811 02 Bratislava	Peter Korbačka Honorary Consul
The Sultanate of Oman	Sasinkova 12 811 08 Bratislava	Oszkár Világi Honorary Consul
The Republic of Paraguay	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	Martin Šamaj Honorary Consul
The Republic of Peru	Tuhovská 5 831 07 Bratislava	Andrej Glatz Honorary Consul
The Republic of Poland	Nám. osloboditeľov 1 031 01 Liptovský Mikuláš	Tadeusz Frackowiak Honorary Consul
Romania	Kapitulská 1 974 01 Banská Bystrica	Ladislav Rehák Honorary Consul
Romania	Nám.sv. Mikuláša 2 064 01 Stará Ľubovňa	Marián Gurega Honorary Consul
Russian federation	Komenského 3 974 01 Banská Bystrica	Juraj Koval Honorary Consul
Russian federation	Bytčická 16 010 01 Žilina	Ján Majerský Honorary Consul
The Republic of El Salvador	Záhradnícka 62 82108 Bratislava	Igor Moravčík Honorary Consul
The Republic of Senegal	Kálov 655/10 010 01 Žilina	Souleymane Seck Honorary Consul
The Republic of Seychelles	Beblavého 4 811 01 Bratislava	Andrej Hryc Honorary Consul
The Republic of Seychelles	Pod Strelnicou 161/1 040 18 Nižná Hutka	Wanda Adamík Hrycová Honorary Consul
The Republic of Sierra Leone	Partizánska 16 811 03 Bratislava	Branislav Hronec Honorary General Consul

State	Address of the consulate in the SR	Consul
The United Mexican States	Rigeleho 1 811 02 Bratislava	Václav Mika Honorary Consul
The Republic of Serbia	Jesenského 12 040 01 Košice	Eva Dekanovská Honorary Consul
The Republic of Serbia	Pavla Mudroňa 12 036 01 Martin	Mojmír Vrlík Honorary Consul
The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	Mostová 2 811 02 Bratislava	Peter Gabalec Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Spain	Hutnícka 1 040 01 Košice	Daniel Lučkanič Honorary Consul
Switzerland	Vajanského 10 080 01 Prešov	Helena Virčíková Honorary Consul
The Kingdom of Sweden	Tomášikova 30 821 01 Bratislava	Vladimír Kestler Honorary General Consul
The Kingdom of Thailand	Viedenská cesta 3-7 851 01 Bratislava	Alexander Rozin Honorary General Consul
The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago	Nobelova 34 831 02 Bratislava	Roman Danda Honorary Consul
The Republic of Turkey	Kuzmányho 16 974 01 Banská Bystrica	Vladimír Soták Honorary Consul
The Republic of Turkey	Mlynská ulica 2 040 01 Košice	Štefan Melník Honorary Consul
The Republic of Tunisia	P. Mudroňa 5 010 01 Žilina	Patrik Rapšík Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uganda	Ružová dolina 25 821 09 Bratislava	Andrej Brna Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Budovateľská 29 093 01 Vranov nad Topľou	Stanislav Obický Honorary Consul
The Eastern Republic of Uruguay	Trnkova 46 851 10 Bratislava	Milan Beniak Honorary Consul
The Republic of Uzbekistan	Hotel Park Inn by Radisson Danube Rybné námestie 1 811 02 Bratislava	Ludovít Černák Honorary Consul
The Socialist Republic of Vietnam	Hlavná 70 040 01 Košice	Rastislav Sedmák Honorary Consul



List of the embassies of the Slovak Republic, permanent missions, consulates general, Slovak institutes abroad

as of January 2021

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Abuja	Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon, Gabon, Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Mali, Liberia, Togo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Côte d'Ivoire	21st Crescent Off Constitution Avenue Abuja Nigeria	Tomáš Felix Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Abu Dhabi	The United Arab Emirates	Capital Plaza, Office Tower Khalifa Bin Zayed Street Office 14-01, Abu Dhabi The United Arab Emirates	Michal Kováč Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
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	Drahomír Štos Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ankara	Turkey	Atatürk Bulvarı 245 06692 Ankara Turkey	Anna Tureničová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Athens	The Hellenic Republic (Greece)	Georgiou Saferi 4 Palaio Psychiko 154 52 Athens Greece	Iveta Hricová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Baku	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan 90 A Nizami Landmark III 1010 Baku Azerbaijan	Lubomír Rehák 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	Stanislav Opiela Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Beijing	China, Mongolia	Ritan Lu, Jianguomen Wai 100 600 Beijing People's Republic of China	Dušan Bella chargé d'affaires
Beirut	Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria	Weavers Center, 14th fl. Clemenseau Street Beirut Lebanon	Marek Varga Head of the Mission
Belgrade	Serbia	Bulevar umetnosti 18 110 70 Novi Beograd Serbia	Fedor Rosocha Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Berlin	Germany	Hildebrandstraße 25 10785 Berlin Germany	Maroš Jakubócy Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

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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	Alexander Micovčín Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Brasilia	Brazil, Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Surinam, Guyana	SES, Avenida das Nacões, Qd. 805, Lote 21 B CEP 70 200-902 Brasilia, Brazil	Milan Zachar Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Brussels	Belgium, Luxemburg	Avenue Moliere 195 1050 Brusel Belgium	Peter Kormúth Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Budapest	Hungary	Stefánia út 22 – 24. 1143 Budapest XIV Hungary	Pavol Hamžík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Buenos Aires	Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay	Figuerola Alcorta 3240 Buenos Aires Argentina	Rastislav Hindický Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Bucharest	Romania	Strada Otetari 020 977 Bucharest Romania	Karol Mistrík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Cairo	Egypt, Chad, Yemen, Lybia, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Tunisia	3 Adel Hosein Rostom Cairo Egyp	Valér Franko Ambassador
Canberra	Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua-New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	47 Culgoa Circuit, 2606 Canberra Australia	Tomáš Ferko Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Chisinau	Moldova	A. Sciusseva 101 Chisinau Moldova	Dušan Dacho Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Copenhagen	Denmark	Vesterled 26 – 28 2100 Copenhagen Denmark	Miroslav Wlachovský Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Delhi	India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan	50-M, Niti Marg, Chanakyapuri 110021 New Delhi India	Ivan Lančarič Ambassador
Dublin	Ireland	80 Merrion Square South Dublin 2 Ireland	Igor Pokojný Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
The Hague	Netherlands	Parkweg 1 2585 Den Haag Netherlands	Juraj Macháč Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Hanoi	Vietnam	12 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan Ba Dinh District Hanoi Vietnam	Pavol Svetík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Havana	Antigua a Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Saint Lucia, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago	Calle 66, No. 521 Entre 5 B y 7, Miramar, Playa Havana Cuba	Roman Hošťák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Helsinki	Finland, Estonia	Vähäniityntie 5 00570 Helsinki Finland	Slavomíra Mašurová 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	Jaroslav Chlebo Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Kuwait	Kuwait, Bahrein, Qatar	Block No. 2, Street No. 16 Villa No. 22 131 23 Area Surra Kuwait	Igor Hajdušek Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Kyiv	Ukraine	Jaroslavov val 34 019 01 Kyiv Ukraine	Marek Šafin Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Lisbon	Portugal	Avenida da Liberdade 200 1250-147 Lisbon Portugal	Oldřich Hlaváček Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
London	The United Kingdom	25, Kensington Palace Gardens W8 4QY London The United Kingdom	Róbert Ondrejcsák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ljubljana	Slovenia	Bleiweisova 4 1000 Ljubljana Slovenia	Peter Zelenák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Madrid	Spain, Andorra, Morocco	C/Pinar, 20 28006 Madrid Spain	Jaroslav Blaško Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Mexico City	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize	Julio Verne 35 11560 Mexico City Mexico	Terézia Šajgalíková Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Minsk	Belarus	Volodarskogo 6 220 030 Minsk Belarus	Henrich Sasai Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Moscow	Russian Federation	J. Fučíka 17/19 115127 Moscow Russian Federation	Ľubomír Rehák Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nairobi	Kenya, Comoros, Burundi, Congo, Seychelles, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda, Tansania, Eritrea, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo	Jakaya Kikwete Rd., 00 100 Nairobi Kenya	František Dlhopolček Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nicosia	Cyprus	Kalamatas Street No. 4 2002 Nicosia Cyprus	Ján Škoda Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Nur-Sultan	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	Samal 12, Z10F1M5, Nur-Sultan Kazakhstan	Milan Kollár Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Oslo	Norway, Iceland	Thomas Heftyes gate 24 N-0244 Oslo Norway	Denisa Frelíchová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ottawa	Canada	50 Rideau Terrace K1M 2A1 Ottawa, Ontario Canada	Vít Koziak Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Paris	France, Monaco, Algeria	125 rue du Ranelagh 75016 Paris France	Igor Slobodník Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Podgorica	Montenegro	Crnogorskih Serdara 5 81000 Podgorica Montenegro	Boris Gandel Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Prague	Czech Republic	Pelléova 12 160 00 Prague Czech Republic	Rastislav Káčer 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	Monika Tomašovičová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Pristina	Serbia (Kosovo)	Selim Berisha 11, Dragodan, 10000 Pristina Kosovo Serbia	Ľubomír Batáry Head of the branch office
Riga	Latvia, Lithuania	Smilšu iela 8 1050 Riga Latvia	Ladislav Babčan Head of the Mission
Rome	Italy, Malta, San Marino	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144VI/A00194 Rome Italy	Ján Šoth Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Trnovska 6 710 00 Sarajevo Bosnia and Herzegovina	Martin Kačo Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Skopje	FYROM (Macedonia)	Budimpeštanska 39 1000 Skopje North Macedonia	Henrik Markuš Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Sofia	Bulgaria	Blv. Janko Sakazov 9 1504 Sofia Bulgaria	Manuel Korček Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Seoul	South Korea, North Korea	28, 10gil Hannamdae-ro Yongsan-gu Seoul South Korea	Ján Kuderjavý Head of the Mission
Stockholm	Sweden	Arsenalsgatan 2/3 TR 10 388 Stockholm Sweden	Martina Balunová Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Taipei (Slovak economic and cultural office)	Republic of China (Taiwan)	333 Keelung Road 110 Taipei Taiwan	Martin Podstavek Head of the Mission
Tashkent	Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Kichik Beshjogoch 38 100070 Tashkent Uzbekistan	Ján Bóry Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tehran	Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan	72 Moghadassi St., Niavaran St., 1971836199 Tehran Iran	Ľubomír Golian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tel Aviv	Israel, Palestine	Jabotinsky 37 6459 Tel Aviv Israel	Igor Maukš Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tirana	Albania	Rruga Skenderbej 8 Tirana Albania	Peter Spišiak Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Tbilisi	Georgia	13 Mtskheta Str., Apt. 23, 0179 Tbilisi Georgia	Pavel Vízdal Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Embassy	Accredited	Address	Head of the Embassy
Tokyo	Japan, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau	2-11-33, Moto-Azabu Minato-ku 106-0046 Tokyo Japan	Marián Tomášik 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	Marek Lisánsky Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Vienna	Austria	Armbrustergasse 24 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Peter Mišík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Warsaw	Poland	Litewska 6 00-581 Warsaw Poland	Andrej Droba Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Washington	USA	3523 International Court NW 20008 Washington D. C. USA	Radovan Javorčík Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Zagreb	Croatia	Prilaz Gjure Deželica 10 10000 Zagreb Croatia	Peter Susko Ambassador
Yerevan	Armenia		Miroslav Hacek Charge d'Affaires a. p Head of the Mission

■ Permanent Missions

■ Permanent mission	■ Address	■ Head of the Mission
PM International Organizations Vienna	Blaastraße 34 A-1190 Vienna Austria	Radomír Boháč
PM EU Brussels	Avenue de Cortenbergh 107 1000 Brussels Belgium	Petra Vargová
PM NATO Brussels	Boulevard Leopold III NATO HQ 1110 Brussels Belgium	Peter Bátor
PM OECD Paris	28, Avenue d'Eylau 750 16 Paris France	František Ružička
PM UN New York	801 Second Avenue 10017 New York USA	Michal Mlynár
PM UN Geneva	9, Chemin de l'Ancienne Route 1218 Grand Saconnex Switzerland	Juraj Podhorský
PM Council of Europe Strasbourg	1 Rue Ehrmann 67000 Strasbourg France	Marek Eštok
PM UNESCO Paris	1, rue Miollis 757 32, Paris France	Igor Slobodník

■ Consulates General

■ State	■ Address	■ Consul Genral
The People's Republic of China	1375 Huaihai Central Road 2 00031 Shanghai	Ivana Vala Magátová
Hungary	Derkovits sor 7 5600 Békéscsaba	Emil Kuchár
Poland	Św. Tomasza 34 31027 Cracow	Tomáš Kašaj
Russian Federation	Orbeli č. 21/2 194 223 Saint Petersburg	Igor Derco
USA	801 Second Avenue, 12th Floor New York, N.Y. 10017	Ladislava Begeç
Germany	Vollmannstrasse 25d 819 25 Munich	František Zemanovič
Turkey	3. Levent Bambu Sokak No: 6343 30 Istanbul	Veronika Lombardini
Ukraine	Lokoty 4 880 00 Uzhhorod	Pavol Pánis

■ Slovak Institutes

■ Name	■ Address	■ Head
Slovak Institute Berlin	Hildebrandstr. 25 10785 Berlin Germany	Ivo Hanuš
Slovak Institute Budapest	Rákóczi út. 15 H-1088 Budapest Hungary	Ildiko Síposová
Slovak Institute Moscow	Ul. 2 Brestská 27 125-056 Moscow Russia	Peter Feranec
Slovak Institute Paris	125 Rue de Ranelagh F-75016 Paris France	Jakub Urik
Slovak Institute Prague	Nám. Republiky 1037/3 110 00 Praha 1 Czech Republic	Vladimír Valovič
Slovak Institute Rome	Via dei Colli della Farnesina 144 00135 Rome Italy	Ľubica Mikušová
Slovak Institute Warsaw	Krzywe Kolo 12/14a PL-00 270 Warsaw Poland	Adrián Kromka
Slovak Institute Vienna	Wipplingerstrasse 24 --26 A-1010 Vienna Austria	Igor Skoček



List of consulates of the Slovak Republic headed by the honorary consuls

as of January 2021

▪ State	▪ Consulate	▪ Consul
Albania	Tirana	Faik Dizdarii Honorary Consul
Argentina	La Plata	Eduardo Kabát Honorary General Consul
Armenia	Yerevan	Gagik Vladimirovič Martirosian Honorary Consul
Australia	Brisbane	Michal Horvath Honorary Consul
Australia	Melbourne	Eugénia Mocnay Honorary Consul
Australia	Perth	Pavol Faix Honorary Consul
Austria	St. Pölten	Veit Schmid-Schmidfelden Honorary Consul
Austria	Innsbruck	Jurgen Bodenser Honorary Consul
Austria	Linz	Harald Papesch Honorary Consul
Austria	Salzburg	Gerald Hubner Honorary Consul
Austria	Eisenstadt	Alfred Tombor Honorary Consul
Austria	Graz	Friedrich Wolfgang Sperl Honorary Consul
Bangladesh	Dhaka	Miran Ali Honorary Consul
Belgium	Antwerp	Gunnar Riebs Honorary Consul General
Belgium	Gent	Arnold Vanhaecke Honorary Consul
Belgium	Mons	Peter De Nil Honorary Consul
Belarus	Brest	Ivan Michailovič Kozič Honorary Consul

Prepared by Juraj Sýkora, Slovak Foreign Policy Association
Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Medjugorje	Rajko Zelenika Honorary Consul
Brazil	Belo Horizonte	Renato Werner Victor de Queiroz Honorary Consul
Brazil	Joinville	Ernesto Heinzelmann Honorary Consul
Brazil	Recife	João Alixandre Neto Honorary Consul
Brazil	Rio de Janeiro	Mohamad Faiçal Mohamad Said Hammoud Honorary Consul
Bulgaria	Varna	Edita Blagoevova Honorary Consul
Comoros	Moroni	Mohamed Zamine Sondarjee Honorary Consul
Czech Republic	Brno	Jaroslav Weigl Honorary Consul
Croatia	Osijek	Ivan Komak Honorary Consul
Croatia	Split	Goran Morović Honorary Consul
Chile	Santiago	Paul Nador Honorary Consul
China	Hong Kong	Willy Lin Honorary Consul
Cyprus	Limassol	Angelos Gregoriades Honorary Consul
Denmark	Aarhus	Claus Jørgen Søgaard Poulsen Honorary Consul
Egypt	Alexandria	Mohamed Moustafa el Naggar Honorary Consul
Estonia	Tallinn	Even Tudeberg Honorary Consul
Ethiopia	Addis Abeba	Feleke Bekele Safo Honorary Consul
Philippines	Cebu City	Antonio N. Chiu Honorary Consul
Finland	Teerijärvi	Mikael Ahlbäck Honorary Consul
France	Grenoble	Menyhért Kocsis Honorary Consul
France	Lille	Alain Bar Honorary Consul
France	Marseille	Marc-André Distanti Honorary Consul
Greece	Chania	Stavros Paterakis Honorary Consul
Greece	Thessaloniki	Konstatinos Mavridis Honorary Consul
Greece	Patras	Phaedon Couniniotis Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Greece	Pireus	Michael Bodouroglou Honorary Consul
Georgia	Tbilisi	Besarion Kvaratskhava Honorary Consul
Germany	Leipzig	Albrecht Heinz Tintelnot Honorary Consul
Germany	Bad Homburg	Imrich Donath Honorary Consul
Germany	Hamburg	Michael Stein Honorary Consul
Germany	Hildesheim	Dirk Bettels Honorary Consul
Germany	Stuttgart	Cristoph Goeser Honorary Consul
Guatemala	Guatemala	Mario Fernando Montúfara Rodrigues Honorary Consul
Guinea	Conakry	Boubakar Lombonna Diallo Honorary Consul
Haiti	Port-au-Prince	Claude Martin jr. Honorary Consul
Netherlands	Eindhoven	Gerardus Hendrik Meulesteen Honorary Consul
Netherlands	Groningen	Denisa Kasová Honorary Consul
India	Kolkata	Patra Sadhan Bosé Honorary Consul
India	Bangalore	Chiriankandath Joseph Roy Honorary Consul
India	Mumbai	Amit Choksey Honorary Consul
Indonesia	Denpasar	Jürgen Schreiber Honorary Consul
Ireland	Galway	Lorraine Higgins Honorary Consul
Iceland	Reykjavík	Runólfur Oddsson Honorary Consul
Israel	Haifa	Josef Pickel Honorary Consul
Israel	Ha Sharon	Karol Nathan Steiner Honorary Consul General
Israel	Jerusalem	Martin Rodan Honorary Consul
Italy	Forli	Alvaro Ravaglioli Honorary Consul
Italy	Milan	Luigi Cuzzolin Honorary Consul
Italy	Florence	Massimo Sani Honorary Consul
Italy	Torino	Giuseppe Pellegrino Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Jamaica	Kingston	Christopher Richard Issa Honorary Consul
Japan	Osaka	Shiro Murai Honorary Consul
Japan	Kirishima	Masahiro Yamamoto Honorary Consul
Japan	Utsunomiya	Eichii Ishikawa Honorary Consul
Yemen	Sana'a	Adel Mohamed Al Huraibi Honorary Consul
Jordan	Amman	Khaldun A. Abuhassan Honorary General Consul
South Africa	Cape Town	Geoffrey Leighton Ashmead Honorary Consul
South Africa	Johannesburg	Juraj Michlo Honorary Consul
Cameroon	Yaoundé	Mohamadou Salihou Honorary Consul
Canada	Calgary	Eva Hadzima Honorary Consul
Canada	Montreal	Dezider Michaletz Honorary Consul
Canada	Vancouver	Pavol Hollosy Honorary Consul
Canada	Toronto	Michael Martinček Honorary Consul
Kazakhstan	Karaganda	Alexej Petrovič Nefjodov Honorary Consul
Kenya	Mombasa	Christoph Modigell Honorary Consul
Kyrgyzstan	Bishkek	Igor Konstantinovič Gusarov Honorary Consul
South Korea	Busan	Myung- Hwan Oh Honorary Consul
South Korea	Soul	Nan Se Gum Honorary Consul
Laos	Vientiane	Vongnam Vongvilay Honorary Consul
Lebanon	Beirut	Samir Doumet Honorary Consul
North Macedonia	Skopje	Vlade Stojanovski Honorary Consul
Madagaskar	Antananarivo	Ismael Danilhoussen Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Kota Kinabalu	Khen Thau Wong Honorary Consul
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	Tan Sri Tee Keat Ong Honorary Consul
Malta	Valletta	Godwin Edvard Bencini Honorary Consul General

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Monaco	Monaco	Tatiana Paracková Honorary Consul
Morocco	Casablanca	Kamil Ouzzani Touhamy Honorary Consul
Mauritius	Port Louis	Yatemani Gujadhur Honorary Consul
Mexico	Cancún	Francisco Edmundo Lechón Rosas Honorary Consul
Mexico	Monterrey	Jorge García Segovia Honorary Consul
Moldova	Chisinau	Iurie Grigore Popovici Honorary Consul
Nepal	Kathmandu	Pasang Dawa Sherpa Honorary Consul
Nigeria	Port Harcourt	Eze Clifford Amadi Honorary Consul
Nigeria	Lagos	Ramesh Hathiramani Honorary Consul
Nicaragua	Managua	Bergman Castillo Honorary Consul
Norway	Drammen	Zuzana Opavská Wahl Honorary Consul
Norway	Bergen	Torbjørn Haaland Honorary Consul
New Zealand	Auckland	Peter T. Kiely Honorary Consul
Oman	Muscat	Mohammed S. Al-Harthy Honorary Consul
Pakistan	Lahore	Muhammad Malik Asif Honorary Consul
Palestine	Bethlehem	George Suliman Malki Jabra Honorary Consul
Panama	Panama	Julio César Benedetti Honorary Consul
Paraguay	Cuidad del Este	Charif Hammoud Honorary Consul
Paraguay	Asunción	Alex Hammoud Honorary Consul
Peru	Lima	Víctor Andrés Belaunde Gutiérrez Honorary Consul
Poland	Bydhost	Wiesław Cezary Olszewski Honorary Consul
Poland	Gliwice	Marian Czerny Honorary Consul
Poland	Poznań	Piotr Stanisław Styczynski Honorary Consul
Poland	Rzeszow	Adam Góral Honorary Consul
Poland	Sopot	Jerzy Leśniak Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Poland	Wrocław	Maciej Kaczmarski Honorary Consul
Poland	Zakopané	Wiesław Tadeusz Wojas Honorary Consul
Portugal	Faro	Rui Marques Dias Gomes Honorary Consul
Portugal	Funchal	Roberto Rodrigo Vieira Henriques Honorary Consul
Romania	Salonta	Miroslav Iablonsik Honorary Consul General
Russian Federation	Astrachan	Vladimir Stepanovič Sinčenko Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Chanty-Mansijsk	Eduard Vasiljevič Lebedev Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Omsk	Jurij Viktorovič Šapovalov Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Krasnojarsk	Valerij Alexandrovič Gračev Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Ekaterinburg	Alexander Petrovič Petrov Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Vladivostok	Apres Gvidonovič Voskanian Honorary Consul
Russian Federation	Perm	Boris Abramovič Švajcer Honorary Consul
Saudi Arabia	Jeddah	Saeed Omar H. Balubaid Honorary Consul
Seychelles	Victoria	Joseph France Albert Honorary Consul
Serbia	Niš	Stela Jovanović Honorary Consul
Sri Lanka	Colombo	Mahen Roshan Andrew Kariyawasan Honorary Consul
Sudan	Khartoum	Nasreldin Ibrahim Shulgami Honorary Consul General
Syria	Latakia	Anas Dib Joud Honorary Consul
Spain	Barcelona	Joan Ignacio Torredemer Galles Honorary Consul General
Spain	Santa Cruz de Tenerife	Francisco José Perera Molinero Honorary Consul
Spain	Malaga	Jesús García Urbano Honorary Consul
Spain	Zaragoza	José Javier Parra Campos Honorary Consul
Sweden	Göteborg	Carl Magnus Richard Kindal Honorary Consul
Sweden	Lulea°	Jonas Lundström Honorary Consul
Tanzania	Dar es Salaam	Moustafa Hassanali Khataw Honorary Consul

■ State	■ Consulate	■ Consul
Togo	Lomé	Vivoto James Victor Sossou Honorary Consul
Turkey	Bursa	Hüseyin Özdilek Honorary Consul
Turkey	Edirne	Coskun Molla Honorary Consul
Turkey	Izmir	Selçuk Borovali Honorary Consul
Turkey	Trabzon	Suat Gürkök Honorary Consul
Turkey	Kayseri	Osman Güldüoğlu Honorary Consul
Turkey	Antalya/Manavgat	Dr. Şükrü Vural Honorary Consul
Turkey	Mersin	Emir Bozkaya Honorary Consul
Turkey	Tekirdağ	Levent Erdoğan Honorary Consul
Turkey	Kusadasi	Tevfik Bağcı Honorary Consul
Turkey	Izmit	Onur Sümer Honorary Consul
Uganda	Kampale	Abel M. S. Katahoire Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Kharkov	Viktor Vasiljevič Popov Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Mariupol	Tamara Timofejevna Lysenko Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Odesa	Mykhaylo Viktorovič Muzalev Honorary Consul
Ukraine	Velikij Bereznyj	Oleg Ivanovič Adamčuk Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Glasgow	Craig Murray Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Belfast	Thomas Sullivan Honorary Consul
United Kingdom	Cardiff	Nigel Bruce Harold Payne Honorary Consul
Uruguay	Montevideo	Matias Balparda Honorary Consul
USA	Detroit	Edward Zelenak Honorary Consul
USA	Indianapolis	Steve Zlatos Honorary Consul
USA	Kansas City	Ross P. Marine Honorary Consul
USA	Dallas	Martin Valko Honorary Consul
USA	North Miami	Cecilia F. Rokusek Honorary Consul

▪ State	▪ Consulate	▪ Consul
USA	Pittsburgh	Joseph T. Senko Honorary Consul
USA	San Francisco	Barbara M. Pivnicka Honorary Consul
USA	Naperville	Rosemary Macko Wisnosky Honorary Consul
USA	Boston	Peter Mužila Honorary Consul
USA	Denver	Gregor James Fasing Honorary Consul
USA	Lafayette	Zoltán Gombos Honorary Consul
Venezuela	Caracas	Manuel Antonio Polanco Fernández Honorary Consul
Vietnam	Ho Chi Minh City	Huy Ho Honorary Consul General



Slovakia's participation in foreign military operations and observer missions in 2020

as of January 2021

■ Mission	■ Country	■ Armed forces members	■ Police force members	■ Civilian experts
UN				
UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)	Cyprus	240	6	
UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization)	Syria, Israel	2		
■ NATO				
RS (Resolute Support)	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	18		
NMI (NATO Mission Iraq)	Iraq	8		
eFP (Enhanced Forward Presence)	Latvia	131		
■ EU				
EUFOR Althea (European Union Force Althea)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	41		
EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia)	Georgia		4	
EUAM (European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine)	Ukraine		2	1
EUBAM (EU Border Assistance Mission in Moldova)	Ukraine/Moldova		1	
EUNAVFOR MED Irini	Central Mediterranean	2		
EUCAP	Somalia		1	
■ OSCE				
SMM (Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine)	Ukraine		2	12
OSCE Mission in Serbia	Serbia			1
OSCE Mission in North Macedonia	North Macedonia			1
OSCE Mission in Kosovo	Kosovo			1

Source: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic





About authors

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