

Report on Fulfilling Slovakia's Objectives and Responsibilities in Foreign and European Policy in 2013

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Introduction

In 2013 the **Slovak Republic** celebrated the **twentieth anniversary of its establishment**. In part, the anniversary prompted an assessment of the country's two decades of independence, in a number of areas, including its activities internationally. From the Ministry's perspective, we could say that both Slovakia and Slovak **foreign policy have undergone a triple transformation**, which with hindsight can be viewed as successful.

Twenty years ago we were driven by a vision of becoming a member of the Euro-Atlantic integration groups and we now help others achieve this vision. **Being fully integrated in the European Union**, Slovakia is able to participate in the most important discussions and play its part in shaping the future of the European project. Slovakia is now preparing to assume another important role – its first Presidency of the Council of the EU. Twenty years ago Slovakia sought strategic allies in security and today it has the highest level of security guarantees thanks to **NATO membership** and it is helping expand security and stability. Slovak diplomats, soldiers and civilian experts take part in many international crisis management operations led by the UN, EU and NATO. Slovak diplomacy is active in the important area of security sector reform. Twenty years ago we were the recipients of international assistance and now Slovakia is an **established donor** providing financial and material **development assistance** as well as valuable expertise on transformation and reform.

This Report reflects the international standing Slovakia has achieved after two decades of independence and assesses the **extent and way in which it fulfilled its foreign and European policy objectives and responsibilities last year**.

The Active European Policy section covers **Slovakia's main activities within the EU**. 2013 was a year of financial and currency stabilization, as the measures adopted in previous years began to deliver the anticipated results. There was a positive shift in discussions on deepening and developing the Economic and Monetary Union, particularly in relation to the banking union (*agreement on the Single Supervisory Mechanism*) and strengthening the social dimension. The agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020 is good news for Slovakia in a number of ways since it provides an increase in the national allocation for cohesion policy, simplifies the conditions for using European funds and a possible increase in direct payments for farmers.

The second and third sections of the Report identify **the main factors in bilateral cooperation in the regional, European and broader context**. Particular attention is paid to Slovakia's key foreign policy issues – the **Western Balkans** and the **Eastern Partnership**. The Report reflects on a number of last year's positive events: the progress made in normalizing relations between Belgrade and Pristina, the EU decision to start accession negotiations with Serbia, Croatia's accession to the EU and the initialling of Association Agreements with Moldova and Georgia. However, in 2013 a large question mark hovered over the future of political association and economic integration between the EU and Ukraine.

In terms of **promoting economic interests** last year saw the implementation of a new model of economic diplomacy, whose main goal is to streamline communication and cooperation between the business sector and the Slovak government. The Government Council for Promoting Export and Investment was primarily responsible for this. In order to interact more with the business community the Ministry organized and co-organized a host of events aimed at creating opportunities for doing business abroad. In seeking to extend the potential of economic cooperation (in particular European countries), Slovak economic diplomacy

strengthened the economic diplomat network in key partner countries in Europe and concentrated on promoting the diversification of Slovak exports on non-European markets as well (*Russia, Southeast Asia, Latin America and Gulf Cooperation Council states*).

Section five of the Report deals with Slovakia's work within **international organizations** helping to strengthen global **security, stability, prosperity, democracy and human rights**. In recognition of Slovakia's engagement in the developing world over the last decade, Slovakia was accepted onto the OECD Development Assistance Committee last year. Slovakia's previous experience of providing **official development assistance** was incorporated into the new Medium Term Strategy for 2014–2018. Slovakia's work on **security sector reforms** (SSR) was positively assessed in the UN Secretary General's second comprehensive report on SSR. One of the highlights of the **domestic coordination of human rights policies** was the more inclusive and participative dialogue with civil society last year.

This Report also deals with one of the Ministry's main pillars – **consular services and protecting the interests of the people**. Last year there were a number of positive outcomes in some of the more complicated cases requiring consular assistance. The Ministry continually sought to improve the standard and accessibility of services. 2013 saw the launch of the *Svetobežka* (Globetrotter) mobile application, which provides practical advice on how to proceed in crisis situations abroad and also the roll-out of a free SMS information service triggered when the mobile phone holder crosses the national border, providing the contact details of the Slovak embassy in that country.

The Report on Fulfilling Slovakia's Objectives and Responsibilities in Foreign and European Policy in 2013 does not, of course, aim to cover all Slovakia's foreign policy work, bilateral relations or events occurring in the EU and international organizations to which Slovakia belongs. **The Report captures the main challenges, risks and issues that Slovakia, the EU and the international community as a whole had to face and also looks at the achievements**. It is based on the Direction of Slovak Foreign and European Policy for 2013 approved by the Slovak government on 9 January 2013 (Resolution No. 12/2013) and on the Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic for 2012–2016.

1. Active European Policy

Last year the main starting points for Slovak policy for European issues were active engagement in the EU, pragmatic promotion of national interests and support for extending the integration project in line with the principles of responsibility and solidarity.

Slovakia clearly backed steps to **overcome the economic and financial crisis** both within Europe and in its own economic policy. The European Stability Mechanism, the Fiscal Compact and the activities of the European Central Bank on the financial markets all proved to be effective measures in 2013. Slovakia fully participated in **deepening and developing the Economic and Monetary Union** (EMU) in all four of its pillars. In constructing the banking union, Slovakia helped finalize the Single Supervisory Mechanism and achieve agreement on the Single Resolution Mechanism for the banking sector at Council level. Slovakia succeeded in ensuring that the equality of all Member States in decision-making (one Member State = one vote) was incorporated into the finished agreement on the Single Supervisory Mechanism. In policy terms, the key factors in resolving the banking crisis via the Single Resolution Mechanism are the early launch, beginning in 2016, of the rescue

mechanism using banks own funds (a bail-in) and the adoption of resolution decisions, where home and host Member States have equal weighting. On other EMU issues, Slovakia focused on making the fiscal framework more efficient and strengthening the **social dimension**, with an eye to using existing mechanisms and dividing up competencies. In discussions on the proposed solidarity mechanisms, Slovakia stressed the need to ensure that these should not prevent national budget targets from being achieved. On issues relating to **strengthening democratic legitimacy**, Slovakia supported a community approach where EU institutions were authorised to pursue common goals, and sought to ensure the principle of subsidiarity was respected.

Slovak foreign policy was also concerned with the **future architecture of the EU** and Slovakia backed constructive and realistic proposals, emphasising that given the current conditions in the EU, it is not possible to achieve fundamental change outside the framework of existing legislation. The European integration project has developed dynamically over the past two decades and it is now time to reassess the legislative procedures and principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Slovakia also approached EU and Member-State initiatives with this in mind.

One of Slovakia's most important outcomes when engaging in the EU and promoting its own interests was the outcome of agreements on the **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)** for 2014–2020. Slovakia's national cohesion policy allocation increased by 10% on the previous one and this was despite an overall decrease in cohesion policy by 8.5% in the new MFF in real terms. Slovakia succeed in gaining more favourable conditions for using European structural and investment funds, including maintaining current levels of co-financing for its least developed regions. Slovakia obtained an increase in funding for the decommissioning of two blocks at Jaslovské Bohunice Nuclear Power Plant, from the original €118 million to €225 million, and there is the possibility of higher direct payments to farmers via the increased transfer of funds from rural development. Working closely with the Visegrád countries, Slovakia helped achieve agreement on Common Agricultural Policy reforms, which will lead to the gradual balancing out of differences between Member States concerning direct payments. Last year Slovakia drafted the **2014–2020 Partnership Agreement**, a strategic document outlining the framework for using the structural funds. The Agreement focuses on five priority financing areas: (1.) An innovation-friendly business environment; (2.) A modern and professional administration; (3.) Human capital development and improved labour market participation; (4.) The sustainable and efficient use of natural resources; (5.) Infrastructure for economic growth and jobs. Following up on the Partnership Agreement, the individual Operational Programmes are now being prepared.

Working with Romania, under the 2007–2013 MFF, Slovakia was able to push for the option of using funding from the structural funds for another year in relation to for commitments accruing in 2011 and 2012 (**a change in the n+2 rule to n+3**), reducing the risk that unused funding will be returned to the EU budget.

The Slovak government devoted particular attention to combating **unemployment**, especially youth unemployment, at the EU level. Slovakia participated in international problem-solving fora, including EU Heads of States and Governments meetings held in Berlin (July) and Paris (November), where Slovakia presented its experiences in implementing EU funded projects to foster youth employment. The Member States endorsed the Council's recommendation that the Youth Guarantee initiative be implemented and €6 billion set was aside in the MFF agreement to resolve these issues, with €144 million being available to the Slovak Republic.

Bearing in mind that efficient infrastructure connecting Europe and the regions is prerequisite to a functioning internal market, to ensuring sustainable economic growth and improving competitiveness, Slovakia helped finalize regulations on guidelines for **Trans-European Networks in transport, energy and telecommunications** (TEN-E, TEN-T and TEN-Tele) last year. These regulations form the framework for Projects of Common Interest. The Visegrád countries worked closely together on this and pushed for a number of energy distribution projects that are extremely important for Slovakia in energy (connecting up the electricity distribution networks in Slovakia and Hungary), the gas industry (connecting Slovakia up to Hungary and Poland) and oil supplies (connecting up Slovakia and Austria, increasing the capacity of the Adria pipeline). Approval of the Connecting Europe Facility with €33 billion is essential to accelerating investment in the Trans-European Networks from 2014 to 2020.

In **EU energy policy**, the coordinated approach of the Visegrád countries led to a number of important proposals being incorporated into the conclusions of the May European Council meeting including, for instance, co-financing of energy efficiency using cohesion policy funds and reference to the importance of the technical safety of transmission network operations, which is essential if renewable energy sources are to be fully integrated. Slovakia also stressed the need to protect vulnerable consumer groups against high energy costs and the importance of nuclear power in the energy mix.

A priority in **EU trade policy** was improved access to the largest and fastest growing economies in the world, in particular through ambitious trade agreements. The focus was on continuing negotiations to conclude bilateral and regional free trade agreements with strategic partners (the USA, Canada, Japan and India), selected ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries.

The Ministry revised the system for coordinating and drawing up opinions on draft EU legislation to improve **coordination in policy areas that are now the responsibility of the Ministry** following the amendment to the Law on Competencies. Accordingly, the legislative process was altered in line with the conditions in the Treaty of Lisbon, including improvements to the mechanism of cooperation between the Slovak government and the Slovak National Council. One of the changes allows NGOs to participate in ministerial coordination group meetings and stipulates that proposed preliminary statements on draft EU legislation must be incorporated into the inter-ministerial consultation process. By making it possible for civic partners to engage in the process of drawing up opinions on draft EU legislation, the Slovak government has fulfilled another of the objectives in its Manifesto. The Ministry took an active approach in working with other ministries to coordinate Slovakia's responses to official European Commission legislation in matters involving breach of agreements.

The Ministry worked with the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia and the European Parliament Information Office in Slovakia to **inform the public about European issues**. Funding from the "Partnership in Management" programme was used to complete a number of projects (cultural and civic events related to Europe Day in Košice, an EU secondary school textbook, etc.) and preparations continued on new projects for 2014, the driving theme of which will be assessing the ten years of Slovakia's EU membership and providing information on European issues, particularly in the context of the European parliamentary elections.

In 2013 the Ministry worked with NGOs to reinstate the **National Convention on the European Union**, whose role is to engage various sections of society in discussion on aspects

of our membership and help formulate consensual national positions. The discussions within the regular meetings of the three working groups focused on perspectives for deepening EU integration, assessing ten years of Slovakia's EU membership and challenges concerning preparation and execution phases of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2016.

2013 saw the conclusion of first initial stage of **preparations for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU**. The Slovak government approved a "National Education Programme" for state administration employees who will be involved in running the Presidency. The Ministry took steps to create a database of experts for human resources. Particular attention was paid to organizational and logistical preparations for the Presidency, including finding adequate space for Slovakia's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels. The government approved the analysis of the expenditure for the Presidency. The Ministry initiated the signing of a political declaration by representatives of the parliamentary political parties attesting to the need for cooperation and consensus to ensure continuity in the preparations for the Presidency following the Slovak parliamentary elections expected to be held in spring 2016.

2. Bilateral Cooperation in a Regional and European Context

One of the key foreign policy events organized in Slovakia in 2013 was the **18th Summit of Presidents of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Countries** (June). Invitations from the host, the President of the Slovak Republic, were accepted by the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Presidents of Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine. The President of the European Commission and the Leader of Kosovo also attended. Those attending the summit discussed current political and economic issues in a regional and European context.

One of Slovakia's natural long-term priorities is developing good relations with neighbours, including those in the wider Central European region. Engaging in work with the **Visegrád Group** (V4) was a focal point of Slovak diplomacy in 2013. The primary areas of cooperation were strengthening internal cohesion, energy security, transport infrastructure and selected aspects of defence policy. A common declaration by Ministers of Foreign Affairs was presented at the GLOBSEC international security conference held in Bratislava (April), attesting to the group's interest in improving the effectiveness, visibility and impact of Common Security and Defence Policy in the EU and strengthening the defensive capabilities of the EU, the European defence industry and its research and development base. At the end of the Polish Presidency (June), the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries approved a roadmap for creating an internal gas market. At their October meeting in Budapest, the V4 leaders stressed the importance of the principle of solidarity in the energy sector and agreed to create a common strategy in defence cooperation.

2013 saw greater contact between the Visegrád countries and external partners in **V4+** format. In March Warsaw hosted the first summit of leaders of the V4, Germany and France (V4+W3 format) on EU Common Security and Defence Policy and a common approach to combating the consequences of economic and financial crisis. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attended the V4 Prime Ministers' meeting in Warsaw (June) at which priority areas of future cooperation were outlined, focusing on science, research and supporting the transformation in

Eastern Partnership countries. The historic first ministerial meeting with the Nordic and Baltic countries in the V4+NB8 format (February) saw the launch of a dialogue on promoting pragmatic regional cooperation (in particular in energy and transport infrastructure) and seeking ways to bolster economic and employment growth.

During **Slovakia's Presidency of the International Visegrád Fund** (January–December 2013), more than 350 NGO projects from countries in the region were approved and more than 100 scholarships were awarded to students from V4, Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries.

Last year Slovakia strengthened bilateral cooperation with European partners. There was frequent dialogue with **EU Member States** on European topics. Visits by Slovak representatives were often combined with a series of presentational activities aimed at seeking out and promoting the flow of direct foreign investment, developing trade and transferring know-how. The 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations was celebrated in 2013. Bilateral agreements on representation for visa issuing were concluded with several countries.

Neighbouring Countries¹

Slovakia's excellent relations with the **Czech Republic** were evident in events celebrating the 20th anniversary of the independent republics – the "Czechs and Slovaks: 20 Years of Cooperation and their interaction in the EU and NATO" conference (held in Prague in January and attended by the Speaker of the Slovak National Council) and "Twenty Years of Independent Czech and Slovak Diplomacies"(Prague, February, attended by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs). Bilateral relations saw frequent contact, including at the highest political level (for instance, Czech President Václav Klaus' farewell visit in February and Czech President Miloš Zeman's inaugural visit in April). There was also frequent contact over the economy, energy and cross-border cooperation. The signing of an agreement on recognizing academic qualifications was a significant step. Consular representation abroad was expanded to include additional countries (visa issues in Lebanon and Cyprus).

In relations with **Hungary**, the emphasis was on developing a positive agenda of extending cooperation at all levels while maintaining a pragmatic approach to dealing with unresolved issues. The Slovak President visited Hungary for the first time in nine years (February). A major event was the joint governmental meeting in Budapest (July), resulting in agreements to strengthen transport and energy infrastructure up to 2020 as well as an agreement on cooperating over regional development at the Higher Territorial Unit level (the largest administrative regional level). The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the Slovak Republic (March). Work continued apace on joint commissions to help fulfil the conditions of the Basic Treaty and deal with unresolved issues. The expert dialogue on dual citizenship issues also continued.

The strategic partnership with the **Republic of Poland** was affirmed in the conclusions from the first joint government meeting in Poprad (March) and the joint bid for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games (November). Bilateral contact attested to the fact that for both countries completing up-to-date cross-border transport infrastructure remains a priority.

¹ Relations with Ukraine are covered in the Eastern Partnership part of the section on External EU Relations and Bilateral Cooperation with Other Partners / Eastern Partnership" section.

The Slovak Prime Minister's official visit to Austria (January) was an important boost in **relations between Slovakia and Austria** and agreement was reached on the 1st Slovak-Austrian Economic Forum (preliminarily scheduled for spring 2014). Slovakia continues to make use of Austrian expertise in dual education (a combination of apprenticeships and vocational training), support for innovation and the internationalization of small and medium enterprises.

Non-Neighbouring European Countries

Relations between Slovakia and the **Federal Republic of Germany** involved a great deal of political dialogue mostly about fostering economic cooperation. In bilateral relations, an important theme was seeking out common positions on European affairs, especially in relation to the Eastern Partnership. Important visits included the President of the Bundestag's visit to Slovakia (May), several working visits to Germany by the Slovak Prime Minister (April, May and June), the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs (January, February, June and October) and the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (January).

Relations between Slovakia and France reached a post-independence high with the President of France's visit to the Slovak Republic (October). One of the tangible outcomes results of the visit was the signing of the Action Plan of Strategic Partnership in 2013–2018, specifying bilateral cooperation in foreign policy, economics, trade, energy, defence, justice, the domestic issues and administration, education, science, university education and culture. In 2013 the Slovak Prime Minister (April) and the Speaker of the Slovak Parliament (July) visited France and the French Minister of European Affairs visited Slovakia (February).

The fact that Slovakia maintains good relations with the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** was demonstrated during the visit of the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs to London (February). A number of the United Kingdom's initiatives had an impact on European policy and the "Balance of Competencies Review" dominated bilateral meetings as well. Slovak foreign policy was focused on consular work, since a high number of Slovak citizens live in the UK.

Visits by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs to the **Republic of Finland** (May) and the **Kingdom of Sweden** (September) were particularly beneficial to developing bilateral economic cooperation. Not only did he attend bilateral meetings but also side events on collaboration in science and research. The Minister's meeting with counterparts in the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** (March), the **Kingdom of Denmark** (May) and **Ireland** (May) was rounded off with appearances at various international fora, where he spoke about the situation in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries. The dialogue with the **Kingdom of Spain** culminated in a working visit by the Slovak Prime Minister to Madrid (April), where he was received by King Juan Carlos and held meetings with the Spanish Prime Minister. One of the aims of the visit was to encourage the Spanish business community to invest in Slovakia.

Slovak foreign policy was also directed at cooperation with the Baltic States. There was greater bilateral contact as illustrated in the President of the **Republic of Estonia's** visit to Slovakia (April) and the fact that the Presidents of **Lithuania** and **Latvia** attended the Summit of the Heads of State of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries (June), where bilateral meetings were also held. Slovakia's traditionally friendly relations with the **Republic of Bulgaria** continued in all areas, culminating in the Bulgarian President's official visit to Slovakia (November), accompanied by a trade mission. There was greater cooperation

with **Romania** including contact at the highest level. The President of Romania (August) and the Prime Minister of Romania (June) visited Slovakia. The Slovak Prime Minister attended the Summit of Central and Eastern European Countries and China in Bucharest (November).

In the **Republic of Italy**, the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs visited Milan (October) further extending economic cooperation and representing Slovakia academically and culturally. Consultations between the Maltese and Slovak State Secretaries at the Foreign Ministries in the **Republic of Malta** (October) paved the way for successful cooperation over the Council of the EU Trio Presidency. Last year also saw the revitalization of contact with the **Hellenic Republic**. The President of Greece visited Slovakia (September) and after nearly five years of stagnation there were reciprocal visits by the Foreign Ministers (March and October).

There was greater ministerial contact at various levels with the **Republic of Slovenia**. Slovenia expressed an interest in closer cooperation with the V4, including being involved in International Visegrád Fund programmes. In relations with the **Republic of Croatia**, Slovakia focused on providing support and assistance in helping Croatia fulfil the remaining conditions of EU accession. Since joining the EU, Slovakia has offered to share its experience in reforming state institutions and provide expertise on Croatia's integration in the Schengen Area. In addition, the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs visited Croatia (June).

The visit by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the **Swiss Confederation** to Slovakia (August) resulted in plans for subsequent cooperation, including in the V4+ format and as part of the work conducted by the International Visegrád Fund. There was greater cooperation with geographically smaller but economically potent European countries, such as the **Principality of Lichtenstein** (visited by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs in June) and the **Principality of Monaco** (the Monacan Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Slovakia in September). There was also continued bilateral contact at the working level with **Andorra, Belgium, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal** and the **Holy See** in relation to many areas of cooperation. One outcome will be future high level bilateral visits.

3. External EU Relations and Bilateral Cooperation with Other Partners

EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

Slovakia actively engaged in coordinating EU Member States' foreign and security policies to ensure that a consistent, cohesive and effective EU **Common Foreign and Security Policy** (CFSP) is presented externally presenting and implemented. Slovak foreign policy made use of its experience and expertise of the situation in Slovakia's priority regions, in particular the Western Balkans (EU enlargement process) and Eastern Europe (Eastern Partnership policy).

CFSP can be seen as having been particularly successful in terms of the progress made in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and in negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme. Slovakia backed a **comprehensive EU approach to preventing and resolving crises** around the world and mitigating their impact using available EU resources and policies. The EU backed the reinstatement of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and actively engaged in resolving crises in Syria, Mali, the Central African Republic, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and stabilizing the situation in

Lebanon, Egypt, Libya and Myanmar/Burma. Slovakia advocated strengthening **EU cooperation with strategic partners** (the USA, Russia, Japan, China, South Korea, India, South Africa and Brazil). Bilateral EU summits were held with a number of these countries. There was a multilateral EU–CELAC summit with Latin America and the Caribbean (January).

In reviewing the organization and functioning of the **European External Action Service**, Slovakia worked with other Member States to push for greater involvement of EU Delegations in non-EU countries in providing consular protection for EU citizens.

Western Balkans and Turkey

Slovakia maintained its support for the integration and reform efforts of Western Balkan countries. It noted that although Europe faces its own challenges, it cannot forget about events beyond its borders and should take the initiative and play an active role in expanding stability and prosperity. The prospect of joining the EU has become the greatest transformational force in the Western Balkans and from this perspective **enlargement policy is one of the most successful EU policies**. The fact that **Croatia joined the EU** in July 2013 is proof that enlargement is still a dynamic policy. The European vision offered to these countries ten years ago, the vision of becoming a full member of this single, peaceful and prosperous community became a reality with Croatia's EU accession. This also attests to the enduring attraction of the European model, which is based on cooperation and solidarity.

Slovakia actively supported and promoted EU enlargement policy and NATO's open door policy whilst emphasizing that countries aspiring to membership would have to fully meet all the criteria for membership. In addition to political support, Slovakia has assisted by **sharing practical experience in transformation and integration**. Consequently, **Montenegro** has made good progress with reforms and accession. Slovakia backed **opening accession negotiations with Serbia**. The Slovak Foreign Ministry also sought to get **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Macedonia** on track to European integration and transformation. It was stressed that the reform processes and the development of good neighbourly relations should be down to the country in question. In the case of **Kosovo**, whose sovereignty Slovakia does not recognize, the Ministry supported initiatives that correspond to the region's EU ambitions. Slovakia continued to support **Turkey's** accession to the EU, and a new accession chapter was opened at the end of the year.

In terms of bilateral relations, Slovakia sought to translate positive political relations into better economic cooperation. There were official visits to Slovakia by the President of Serbia (January), the Prime Minister of Montenegro (April), and working visits by the Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (December) and the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (September). The Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs visited Serbia (June) and the Slovak Minister of Economy visited Montenegro (October). Many heads of states from the region attended the 18th Summit of the Presidents of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Countries in Bratislava (June). The GLOBSEC international security conference (April) saw high participation from political representatives from the Western Balkan countries. Bilateral meetings at the highest political level also took place on the sidelines of international fora.

There was active bilateral dialogue with Turkey as well, with an emphasis on further developing economic cooperation. The Slovak President also made an official visit (August). The Slovak Minister of Economy was a member of the accompanying delegation and had

meetings with the Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources. The outcome was the signing of a Memorandum on Cooperation in the energy sector between the Slovak and Turkish Governments. There were reciprocal prime ministerial visits (February and June) and a working visit to Slovakia by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs (October).

Eastern Partnership

Slovakia continued to display interest in being one of the leaders of discussions on the subsequent direction of this key area of EU foreign policy. A major milestone in the Eastern Partnership was the **Vilnius Summit** (November). Despite not achieving our goal of signing an Association Agreement with Ukraine, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), the summit itself was an important step towards clarifying the conditions and prospects for cooperation. Association Agreements were initialled with Moldova and Georgia and a joint declaration was agreed, which will constitute the Eastern Partnership's political programme in the next few years.

In 2013 Slovak relations with its largest neighbour, **Ukraine**, focused primarily on promoting the latter's pro-European ambitions. There were repeated meetings between the Slovak and Ukrainian presidents in the V4 plus Ukraine format, in the trilateral Slovak Republic–Poland–Ukraine format and in the "Central European format" on the sidelines of the 68th United Nations General Assembly. The Ukrainian President attended the Summit of the Presidents of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Countries in Bratislava (June). The Speaker of the Slovak parliament visited Ukraine (October) and the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Slovakia (September). The Ministry organized two working meetings between the foreign ministers of EU Member States and Ukraine (January and October). Meetings were also held with all three bilateral intergovernmental commissions. The National Convention on the EU project was completed in Ukraine in 2013. In addition, Slovakia continued to adopt practical measures to simplify the visa regime with Ukraine.

Moldova is one of Slovakia's Eastern Partnership foreign policy priorities. The Slovak Embassy in Chisinau was opened in June, whose responsibilities include garnering greater support for the reforms and improving the reforms. There were reciprocal visits between the foreign ministers (July and October). The importance Slovakia attributes to Moldova is also demonstrated by the fact that Moldova will become one of the three programme countries for Slovak official development assistance beginning in 2014. Prior to this, an intergovernmental agreement on development cooperation was signed when the Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration visited the Slovak Republic (October). The President of Moldova attended the Summit of the Presidents of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Countries in Bratislava (June).

Slovakia followed the EU's lead on foreign policy in relations with **Belarus**. Domestic political developments in Belarus meant limited opportunity to develop relations. In order to keep communication channels open and to be able to influence the Belarusian partners, a bilateral foreign ministers' meeting was held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly (September) and the Slovak Foreign Ministry State Secretary visited Minsk (October).

In the Southern Caucuses, Slovakia has traditionally maintained closer bilateral relations with **Georgia**. Reciprocal visits by the foreign ministers (April and October) and the decision to establish a Slovak Embassy in Tbilisi in 2014 are evidence of this. Slovakia was amongst those who actively backed Georgia's Euro-Atlantic ambitions last year. One of the aims of the visit by Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs to

Armenia and **Azerbaijan** (April) was to developing cooperation, particularly in trade and commerce and in energy.

Transatlantic Relations

Slovakia pushed for a continued strong trans-Atlantic alliance, for greater cooperation with the **USA** and for strengthening the EU's standing as one of the USA's closest international partners. In the EU and NATO, Slovakia continued to work closely with the USA on key international foreign policy and security matters, especially in relation to the ongoing situation in Syria, Iran's nuclear programme, the Middle East peace process and NATO's activities in Afghanistan. Bilaterally, there was wide-ranging practical cooperation and frequent dialogue. The main focus of cooperation related to the Slovak Armed Forces involvement in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, which is highly regarded by the Americans. Slovakia pushed for greater cooperation between the V4 and the USA, for an early EU–USA summit, for continued NATO enlargement and for support for the reforms in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. Last year Slovakia built on previous cooperation with the USA dating back to 2010 in relation to the integration and resettlement programme for individuals detained at Guantanamo Bay detention centre. On the economy, Slovakia supported EU negotiations with the USA on the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Given strong public interest, the European Commission decided to launch a public consultation on TTIP and halt negotiations on investor-state dispute settlements (ISDS) from March 2014. There was greater cooperation in innovation, science, research and building a knowledge economy. A meeting between the Slovak Prime Minister, President Barack Obama and Vice President Joseph Biden in Washington (November), a working visit by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs (November) and a working visit by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior (May/June) to the USA all point to the very good relations between the two countries.

Building on relations with **Canada** was another important element in trans-Atlantic links. With the formal conclusion of negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada, there is high expectation that the agreement will enter into force in 2015. There were continued negotiations over protecting investors and settling investor-state disputes.

Relations with the Russian Federation

Slovakia concentrated on further developing and extending economic cooperation with the **Russian Federation** using the framework conditions created between the EU and Russia and pushed for unresolved issues to be dealt with (i.e. removing restrictions on goods imported from the EU and problems applying the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods Under Cover of TIR carnets in the Russian Federation). The Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation visited Slovakia to commemorate the anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising (August). Economic cooperation had a positive impact on the 16th Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation in Moscow (March) and its outcomes. It was attended by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs. Progress was made in ongoing long-term strategic projects (including the Proton Therapy Centre in Ružomberok). New job-creation investment activities were also identified and supported (particularly in engineering). The foreign ministers held meetings on the sidelines of the intergovernmental commission. The Ministry of Finance received the final instalment of debt incurred by the former USSR and the Russian Federation (May), thus settling the debt owed to the Slovak Republic.

Asia and the Pacific

Slovakia sought opportunities to strengthen economic, scientific and technological cooperation on the dynamically developing Asian continent. Slovakia backed EU security steps to decrease tension in some parts of Asia and to work closely with countries holding similar values. There was political dialogue with strategic partners including **China, Japan, India** and the **Republic of Korea** as well as **key countries in Southeast Asia** on backing economic projects to improve export potential.

Meetings were held with the Japanese (June) and Chinese (November) Prime Ministers. The Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs visited **Mongolia** (April), India (June), the Republic of Korea (November) and had a series of bilateral meetings with Asian counterparts on the sidelines of multilateral fora. The Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance visited Japan (May), Hong Kong, **Singapore, Malaysia** and the Republic of Korea (November). The Slovak Foreign Ministry State Secretary visited **Cambodia** (April), Hong Kong and Macao (December) to discuss economic cooperation. He also visited **Vietnam** (April) and **Mongolia** (September) along with State Secretaries from the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Agriculture. The Slovak Republic welcomed the President of Singapore (November), the Governor-General of **Australia** (June) and the Prince and Princess of Japan (June).

In 2013 the Minister of Finance organised and attended joint commission meetings to **foster economic cooperation** with China, India and **Indonesia**. In all three cases significant progress was made in terms of format (e.g. the meetings shifted up a status level to that of State Secretaries in the case of India), content and the types of cooperation. An agreement on scientific and technological cooperation was signed with the Republic of Korea. A seminar on new materials was held with Japan in Bratislava. Slovakia supported EU efforts to improve conditions for trade and investment cooperation through the systematic development of a network of ambitious free-trade and investment agreements. The European Commission was mandated to negotiate an investment agreement with China in October and it also extended its existing mandate to negotiate investment agreements for ASEAN countries.

Slovakia used a number of multilateral platforms to pursue its own interests, the "Asia-Europe Meeting" (meetings between Foreign Affairs Ministers in New Delhi, November), the Summit of the Heads of State and the Prime Ministers of China and sixteen Central and Eastern European countries in Bucharest (November) and the Japanese Prime Minister's attendance at the Summit of V4 Prime Ministers in Warsaw (June).

That the Slovak Republic is seen as a responsible and reliable partner was demonstrated by its continued involvement in stabilizing **Afghanistan**. Slovakia continued constructive dialogue through its embassies in Astana (Kazakhstan) and Tashkent (Uzbekistan) with **Central Asia**. The main focus was on strengthening trade and economic relations. A key meeting was an official visit by the Speaker of the Slovak National Council to Kazakhstan (June), where the economic dimension was important.

Middle East and Africa

Geopolitical challenges and economic interests continued to be decisive in Slovak relations with the Middle East and Africa. Slovakia continued to help form CFSP in relation to the "**Arab Spring**" countries. Slovakia also continued working with the Netherlands to coordinate the sharing of transformation experiences with Tunisia as part of the Community

of Democracies initiative. Slovakia used official development assistance to fund three new projects on building civil society and reforming the security sector in Tunisia.

Slovakia carefully monitored developments in **Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Iran** and backed peaceful diplomatic solutions to crisis situations. Slovakia used a number of mechanisms to materially and financially **help Syrian refugees** who found themselves in difficult humanitarian situations. Slovakia also helped the international community's efforts **to dispose of Syria's chemical weapons**, a major destabilizing element in the country and a serious danger to the civilian population.

The political dimension of relations with **Israel** and **Palestine** were the subject of a visit by the Foreign Ministry State Secretary (November). Visits by the Slovak Minister of Education (October) and the Minister of Economy (November) helped extend cooperation with Israel on the economy, science and research, education and culture. The Ministry also completed a micro-grant project to develop the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Palestine.

The positive trend in cooperation with countries on the Arabian Peninsula continued in 2013. An embassy was opened in the **United Arab Emirates**. The Ministry initiated specific steps to strengthen the economic dimension and agreements (proposals to conclude agreements to protect investments). There were visits to **Qatar, Kuwait** and the United Arab Emirates (March) by the State Secretaries of the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy, accompanied by trade missions

In **Sub-Saharan Africa** the Ministry concentrated on developing economic cooperation, particularly in energy (Nigeria) and development assistance (**Kenya** and **South Sudan** – both are programme countries for Slovak official development assistance). The Kenyan Foreign Minister's visit to Slovakia (October) helped strengthen bilateral cooperation. The Foreign Ministry was also involved in seeking solutions to the crisis situations in the region at EU level as part of CFSP.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Slovakia continued to identify opportunities to develop bilateral cooperation, in economic areas in particular, and helped shape EU policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean. There was greater bilateral contact, primarily in relation to **Brazil** (visit by the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs (June), reciprocal visits by the Defence Ministers (April and October) and a delegation of Brazilian senators visited Slovakia (September)). The Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs attended the 1st EU–CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Summit in Santiago de Chile (January). The Slovak Foreign Ministry State Secretary visited other countries in the region (**Cuba, Columbia and Ecuador**) expanding and extending bilateral relations.

4. Promoting Economic Interests

The Ministry coordinates economic diplomacy in accordance with the Manifesto of the Slovak Government, the amended Law on Competencies and the memorandum of cooperation between the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Economy.

An institutional platform was set up to promote export, investment and direct interaction between state representatives and the business community – the **Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Export and Investment Support (RVPEI)**, which is a government advisory and coordinating body set up to provide state support for international economic cooperation and to promote Slovakia abroad. The RVPEI debated a number of strategically important documents at its six meetings, including "The Strategy for External Economic Relations of the Slovak Republic for the 2014–2020", "The Strategy of Export-Import bank of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2020", and measures to improve the system of intergovernmental and interdepartmental joint commissions for economic cooperation and the system for official participation in exhibitions and trade fairs abroad. Following up on the RVPEI conclusions, the ensuing bodies were created to coordinate the aims of the state and business community within Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO) and Coordination of Slovak Tourism Board (SACR): the Council for Strategic Management, Coordination and Control of the Work of SARIO, and the Council of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development for the Work of SACR.

Last year the **network of economic diplomats was strengthened** in countries where developing and increasing economic cooperation is important, that is, EU Member States (Budapest, London, Paris, Prague, Warsaw and Vienna) and the USA (New York and Washington). Forty-nine systematised positions for economic diplomats were created at diplomatic missions in accordance with recommendations from the business community. Executive responsibility for economic diplomacy was transferred to the ambassadors. 2013 saw a shift towards a project-based focus in economic diplomacy. A pipeline has been created consisting of trade, investment, research and collaborative manufacturing projects initiated by diplomatic missions or involving diplomatic missions.

One of the priorities of economic diplomacy was encouraging the **diversification of Slovak exports to non-EEA markets**, in particular the Russian Federation, Southeast Asia, the GCC states (Gulf Cooperation Council) and Latin America. A new mechanism for exploiting the synergies of joint visits of senior representatives of state institutions to countries and areas where there is a palpable need to promote Slovak exports has proved to be a success. Examples include the outcome of working visits by State Secretaries from the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finance, accompanied by a trade mission to the GCC states (March) and State Secretaries from the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture to Vietnam (April) and Mongolia (September). One of the successes in economic diplomacy was the substantial progress Slovak companies made in penetrating the Russian regions (7th annual Cooperation Exchange involving companies from eight Russian regions).

The Foreign and Economy Ministries used **the mechanism of joint intergovernmental and inter-departmental commissions for economic cooperation**. These included trade missions, presentations and meetings between the business community and foreign partners. The Ministry led an intergovernmental commission meeting with the Russian Federation. Along with the Slovak diplomatic missions, the Ministry of Economy organized and ran joint commission meetings with Ukraine, Belarus, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, India and Kazakhstan. These joint commissions and accompanying trade missions were prepared with the help of the Foreign Ministry and other departments. The focus was on developing cooperation in the format of sixteen Central and Eastern European countries plus China, and new opportunities were created in trade, investment and tourism, where joint projects were funded via a preferential loan.

The diplomatic missions worked with the Ministry of Economy on organizing Slovakia's official attendance at **exhibitions and trade fairs abroad**. Other successes included Slovakia's attendance at the 2013 LAAD Defence and Security Trade Fair in Rio de Janeiro (April) and the international FIHAV trade fair in Havana (November), where preliminary contracts were drawn up.

The European Parliament and Council regulation establishing transitional arrangements for bilateral investment agreements between Member States and third countries came into force last year and was important in terms of promoting investment. The Member States were once again authorized to draw up bilateral investment agreements under the conditions defined in the regulation. Slovakia plans to commence negotiations on a number of bilateral investment agreements in strategically important areas in 2014.

Last year the Ministry (co-)organized thirteen **specialized seminars** (e.g. on pre-accession aid and EU financial instruments, trade with the Russian Federation and countries in the EU Customs Union, the forthcoming agreement on Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, opportunities for cooperation with French and Taiwanese investors and the internationalization of SMEs), four **international conferences** (a symposium on nuclear safety with Japan, a seminar on Slovak innovation policy with the USA, a Danube Axis and Port Development conference, a conference on funding research and development in the non-profit sector) and eight **economy-related working trips abroad by senior Foreign Ministry representatives including trade missions** to the Russian Federation and the South Caucasus, Southeast Asia, GCC states and Latin America.

The Ministry was the **National Contact Point** for Twinning and TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument) instruments. As the **coordination centre for EU External Action Financing Instruments**, the Ministry encouraged Slovak businesses to participate in projects funded by instruments such as IPA (pre-accession assistance), ENPI (neighbourhood policy) and SIGMA (joint instrument of the EU and OECD). This led to improved public access to information from diplomatic missions through changes to the Ministry website, expansion of its **Doing Business abroad portal** to include a new information section (e.g. international public procurement) and the launch of a **weekly magazine, *Economic News from Abroad***, which is electronically distributed to interested members of the business community.

An important aspect was the focus in economic diplomacy on **cross-sectional and global themes with an economic impact**, such as energy, the safety of raw materials and food, climate change, international cooperation in the defence industry, promoting a knowledge economy and international collaboration in science, research and innovation. The Ministry established an **Ambassador for Science and Innovation**, responsible for working with diplomatic missions, public institutions and the non-profit sector to coordinate preparations for innovation fora and international conferences both in Slovakia and abroad. A new project called the Hangout Innovators Connection brought together politicians, investors, businesses and start-ups from Slovakia and other countries using modern technology.

In energy security, Slovakia concentrated on completing and implementing the **north-south gas corridor and electricity and oil network connections**. A number of meetings were held on using existing infrastructure in reverse flow operations. By constructing energy infrastructure connections with neighbouring countries and expanding the capacity of the Adria oil pipeline, Slovakia will be able to diversify energy supplies, make use of non-conventional resources and strengthen the stability of the European energy market. In Europe

one of the most important tasks was defending the principle of **technological neutrality in achieving environmental targets**.

International Economic Organizations and Financial Institutions

In its work in international economic organizations and financial institutions, Slovakia concentrated on seeking ways to resolve the economic and financial crisis and lay the foundations for stronger economic growth, higher employment and improve Slovakia's competitiveness. In the **OECD** Slovakia sought to identify anti-crisis measures to consolidate public finances and increase employment and improve the quality of education. Previous cooperation had led to the Slovak Prime Minister's first official visit to the OECD Headquarters in Paris (April). Another positive event was Slovakia being accepted onto the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which enables us to make the system of providing development assistance more effective. A number of joint projects were completed by Slovakia and the OECD to improve public administration, to counter the impact of an ageing population on public finances, to create analytical capacities in state administration and combat tax evasion.

Slovakia helped create the new multilateral trading system as part of on-going negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) to improve Slovak exports to non-EU markets. The successful outcomes of the 9th **WTO** Ministerial Conference (December) are very important for continued negotiations on the DDA. A new multilateral agreement to ease trading restrictions is crucial to Slovakia's interests. Unrelated to the DDA, Slovakia and other EU Member States prepared new plurilateral trade agreements, in particular the revised agreement on trade in information technologies (ITA II) and the new agreement on trade in services (TISA).

At the **World Bank**, Slovakia concentrated on meetings on its future representation in the Belgian constituency from 2014 to 2024, aiming to improve on its current position. As part of World Bank groups, Slovakia was involved in the 17th round of International Development Association Replenishment meetings for 2015–2017, where it sought to help resolve development problems in the most impoverished countries in the world.

In 2013 the Slovak government approved a Credit Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the **International Monetary Fund** in force from September for a maximum of four years. Signing the agreement helped Slovakia boost available funding sources to foster global financial and economic stability.

To ensure the financial stability of the eurozone, Slovakia and the other eurozone countries took measures to mitigate the consequences of the debt crisis. Slovakia contributed to the temporary European Financial Stability Facility from 2010 until it ceased providing financial assistance in 2013 when it was superseded by a permanent facility, the **European Stability Mechanism**. The member-state capital contribution was divided into five instalments, where the Slovak Republic had paid its first four instalments by the end of 2013, while the final instalment is scheduled for the first half of 2014.

In an effort to more actively involve Slovak businesses in EBRD projects, a seminar was held on public procurement of goods and services for activities co-financed by the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development** (EBRD). In order to identify the main problems and potential solutions in financing export and encouraging the development of foreign investment, a workshop was held in collaboration with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Export-Import bank of the Slovak Republic.

Efforts continued to increase the loan portfolio to support youth employment and fund small and medium enterprises as part of Slovakia's role in increasing the capital of the **European Investment Bank** (EIB). The EIB organized a number of missions to Slovakia in 2013 to identify additional opportunities for collaboration.

Slovakia was involved in revising the **Council of Europe Development Bank** (CEB) Development Plan 2014-2020. It was one of the countries that actively sought to expand the bank's activities and to make wider use of financial instruments (for instance capital investments and public-private partnership projects). The CEB governor visited Slovakia in September and a workshop was held to inform Slovak businesses about loans and finance opportunities as part of efforts to extend cooperation.

Last year Slovakia continued to help transform the **International Investment Bank** (IIB) and the **International Bank for Economic Co-Operation** (IBEC) into modern, international financial institutions. It concentrated on making better use of Slovakia's membership of these institutions when pursuing its economic goals. Meetings of the IIB and IBEC bank councils were held in Bratislava in June and an important decision was taken on capitalizing the banks and paying dividends to IBEC member countries. The Slovak government decided to increase Slovakia's share of paid-in capital at the IIB in December. New loans were drawn up and approved for Slovak businesses.

5. Safe and Democratic World

NATO

Slovakia's membership of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization** (NATO) is the deciding factor in its external security environment and determines the level of external stability required to achieve the country's priorities in social and economic development. On issues relating to the future direction of NATO, Slovakia backed new initiatives, such as assistance in building defence capacities to stabilize the security situation in partner countries and in other countries in crisis regions. Slovakia continued to actively promote **NATO's open door policy**. As part of preparations for the NATO Summit (September 2014), Slovakia was one of the initiators behind the system for assessing the progress of membership candidates used by NATO Member States to decide what further steps to take in relation to enlargement.

Slovakia pushed for the NATO forces in Kosovo (**KFOR**) to continue fulfilling their mission as mandated by the UN Security Council Resolution to guarantee the security and freedom of movement of all residents in Kosovo and sought to ensure that any changes in the scope of deployment be based on the security situation. The Slovak Embassy in Belgrade operated as the **NATO Contact Embassy in Serbia** in 2013. Its work mainly concentrated on providing more information on NATO to the Serb public. Members of the Slovak Armed Forces were involved in the work of the **NATO Command in Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

Slovakia continued to engage in **ISAF operations in Afghanistan**. Slovakia's determination to play an active role in training and educating the Afghan security forces so they are capable of independently provide security in their country as quickly as possible was not weakened by the attacks against the Allied forces that took the lives of three members of the Slovak Armed Forces.

EU Common Security and Defence Policy

In 2013 Slovakia actively engaged in discussions on developing Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and concepts of crisis management capability. Experts from Slovakia were active in **EU missions and operations** in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR ALTHEA), Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo), on the Ukraine–Moldova border (EUBAM), Georgia (EUMM), Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) and in the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS). Slovakia pushed for a comprehensive approach to be developed within the EU so as to ensure more effective use of its broad spectrum of political, security, economic and development instruments as part of its **international crisis management** work. Slovakia encouraged close cooperation between the EU and NATO on a complementarity basis. It supported efforts to find cost-effective solutions for building defence capacities within the EU's "pooling and sharing" and NATO's "smart defence" initiatives whilst emphasizing that best use should be made of the potential offered by regional cooperation, in particular in the Visegrád Group format.

Work continued in 2013 on creating the **V4 Battlegroup** which should be operational and on standby in the first half of 2016. The Visegrád countries coordinated their approaches during preparations for the European Council meeting (December), which for the first time since the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) engaged in strategic discussion of the main defence challenges facing the EU. The challenges include creating effective capabilities and a strong industrial base through greater cooperation within the EU and the strategic EU–NATO partnership.

Effective Multilateralism: Responding to Global Challenges and Threats

Slovakia used its membership of international organizations to push for decisions and solutions based on **respect for the principles and standards of international law**. It backed strengthening multilateral mechanisms in international relations. It advocated consolidation of the existing system of global institutions so that they are better able to respond flexibly to the growing number of challenges while making efficiencies in the use of financial resources.

In 2013 the Slovak Foreign Ministry helped develop the **UN's** normative and operational peacebuilding capacities, and contributed to the Peacebuilding Fund. It was engaged in discussions on how to deal with current political, security, socio-economic and other challenges. Slovakia maintained adequate representation in the UN missions, specifically in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and in the observer missions on the border between Lebanon, Syria and Israel (UNTSO).

In the world generally, Slovakia continued its work in relation to **security sector reform** (SSR). Slovakia was involved in organizing a High Level Seminar on the future role of the UN in SSR at the UN Office in Geneva (March). As permanent Co-Chair of the UN Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, Slovakia organized a High Level Group meeting (November) to discuss the UN Second Secretary General Report on SSR, which also recognized Slovakia's prior work in this area. As Chair of the Governing Board of the International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT), an organizational unit of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Slovakia helped achieve greater cohesion and effectiveness in implementing SSR projects in the field. The re-election of an experienced Slovak diplomat as Chair of the Governing Board of ISSAT for 2014–2016 was recognition of Slovakia's engagement in SSR.

As chair of the Economic and Environmental Committee at the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe** (OSCE), Slovakia concentrated on the economic and

environmental dimensions and stimulated discussion where the emphasis was on protecting energy infrastructure. The OSCE Ministerial Council adopted a decision at Slovakia's initiative on the protection of energy networks from natural and man-made disasters. Slovakia's contribution to the OSCE's work on international crisis management in Kyrgyzstan was important in terms of strengthening Slovakia's standing in Central Asia.

Slovakia continued to concentrate on the need to effectively counter new security threats and challenges, including **terrorism** and **cyber threats**. It helped consolidate the global standards system for **arms control, disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction** (WMD). It also backed convening an early conference on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon and WMD free zone in the Middle East and advocated the responsible and safe use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Slovakia was involved in the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which received a Nobel Peace Prize in 2013, providing training and instruction for inspectors. It also contributed financially to a special fund established by the OPCW to **liquidate Syria's chemical weapons**.

The Slovak Republic signed the **Arms Trade Treaty** in June which laid the groundwork for a high universal standard for the conventional arms trade.

Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

In development policy, Slovakia continued to promote principles, rules and values that will strengthen the inclusive development of partner countries, help achieve sustainable growth and create democratic and functional institutions.

A total of nine rounds of Slovak official development assistance grants (ODA) were announced in 2013 and the Ministry approved a total of thirty three projects. Slovakia's priority was three **programme countries** – **Afghanistan, South Sudan and Kenya**, focusing on healthcare, education, agriculture and rural development sectors. Slovakia continued to extend its contractual and legal basis with priority countries. Consequently an agreement on intergovernmental development cooperation was signed with Moldova, a new ODA programme country for 2014. An intergovernmental agreement on development cooperation with Kenya also came into force. Slovakia's role as co-chair of **Task Force Tunisia**, which coordinates requests from the Tunisian side with offers from the donor community came to an end at the close of the year.

The Ministry's **CETIR** programme on **sharing transformation and integration experience** with partner countries, especially in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe was also greatly used. Nearly thirty projects were completed where one hundred and twenty foreign partners received training and the number of Slovak experts sent abroad reached seventeen. Active cooperation with Moldova continued throughout 2013 as part of the "**Public Finances for Development**" programme implemented by the Slovak Ministry of Finance in cooperation with the UNDP Regional Centre in Bratislava. Thus Slovakia helped Moldova introduce programme budgeting at a central level. Slovak experts were involved in **technical assistance** projects which opened up the way for long-term cooperation with Slovak organizations, including businesses, in partnering countries.

In September 2013 Slovakia became a member of the **Development Assistance Committee** (DAC) at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the highlight of Slovakia's ten years of integration in the international donor community. An international conference entitled "Ten Years of SlovakAid: A Vision of Development

Cooperation for a Changing World" was held in Bratislava (October) to commemorate the 10th anniversary of ODA and generated valuable ideas on the future of ODA. In collaboration with others, the Ministry completed the "**Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2018**", which sets out the vision, goals and principles of ODA, the basic programmes and the instruments to be used within these programmes.

Slovakia responded flexibly to international challenges including the **humanitarian crises** in the Philippines, Syria and Mali.

Protection of Human Rights

Protection of human rights is an integral component of Slovak foreign policy. Multilateral human rights fora provide a suitable format for tabling questions requiring Slovakia's attention. At **UN Human Rights Council** meetings, the supreme human rights body in the **United Nations** and Third Committee of the UN General Assembly meetings, Slovakia highlights the need to respect and reinforce international human rights standards. Slovakia also ratified the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure** to further strengthen safeguards for the protection of children's rights. The Optional Protocol is the first international treaty on human rights where Slovakia led the preparations.

At the Council of Europe, Slovakia backed the adoption of measures to improve the effectiveness of the **European Court of Human Rights**. It was one of the first countries to sign the protocols for this purpose (numbers 15 and 16). Slovakia also continued to work closely with the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, including the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and implemented their recommendations. As an OSCE participating state, Slovakia consistently fulfilled its obligations within the human dimension. The work of the Slovak Republic was also recognized at **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meetings**. Slovakia led an active, substantive and constructive dialogue with key OSCE representatives, including the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. In the EU, Slovakia helped implement the tasks and objectives of the **EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy** and supported the work of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights.

A key human rights advisory body to the Slovak government is the **Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality**, which is headed by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs. In 2013, at its five meetings, the council discussed, approved and recommended the government approve materials related to domestic policies and fulfilling international obligations in protecting and promoting human rights. The main points on the agenda included the "Report on Progress and Results of the Third Round of Monitoring the Level of Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in the Slovak Republic" and "Situation Report on the Protection of Human Rights in the Slovak Republic for the Purposes of the 2nd Round of Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council". The council also concentrated on preparing the "National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights" at multiple meetings.

To support the work of civil society, particularly in making substantial contributions to implementing human rights, a **round of grants** was announced, entitled "Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms". A total of fifty eight projects received funding or part funding to support vulnerable groups in society and provide the public with information

on preventing all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other expressions of intolerance.

6. Open Ministry and Services for the People

Consular Assistance

Last year the Ministry's work in protecting citizens of the Slovak Republic abroad was driven by a desire to improve the quality and accessibility of consular assistance. Throughout the year, but especially during the summer tourist season, the Ministry concentrated particularly on informing the public by publishing **travel information and recommendations** on its information portal. A new feature was a **free SMS service** triggered when the state border is crossed and containing basic contact details for the nearest Slovak embassy or consulate. A new mobile application was also launched called **Svetobežka** (Globetrotter), containing practical advice on how to proceed in crisis situations abroad and other relevant information. Satisfactory results were also achieved in the use of an **electronic registration form** for travel to regions with adverse security conditions. The Ministry used its proven method of providing **mobile consular days in areas not near an embassy or consulate**. Most of these were held in different regions in the United Kingdom and the USA. A seasonal consular office was also opened in Split, Croatia, during the summer tourist season. The Ministry worked closely with the Centre for International Legal Protection of Children and Youth and other institutions to deal with the increasing number of special consular issues (e.g. parental child abductions or foreign court orders authorizing the removal of children from Slovak citizens).

The Ministry continued to build and adapt its **network of consular offices led by honorary consular officers** (HCOs). The total number of HCOs was 181 (80 in Europe, 37 in Asia, 18 in Africa, 15 in North America, 21 in Latin America and the Caribbean and 4 in Australia). The work of HCOs is integral to protecting the rights and interests of Slovak citizens and legal entities abroad.

A **visa policy** priority was to reduce compulsory visas for Slovak citizens and make it easier for visas to be obtained at border crossings. Slovak citizens no longer require visas for travel to Turkey, the Philippines extended the maximum stay without visa from 21 to 30 days, Kuwait now allows Slovak citizens to obtain visas at border crossings, and China introduced a 72-hour-visa-free transit through the cities of Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenyang providing travellers produce a valid airline ticket and visa to the destination country.

In order to make it easier for Russian and Ukrainian citizens to travel, Slovakia made available a 1–5 year multi-entry Schengen visa for the purposes of tourism, family visits and business and trade (Russian citizens may also obtain study visas). Slovakia also introduced similar measures for business visitors from Turkey. Beginning in November 2013, citizens from Belarus and China can now obtain 1–5 year multi-entry visas. The Ministry continued its efforts to make it easier for citizens of countries where the Slovak Republic does not have a diplomatic mission to obtain visas. Agreements on Slovakia's representation abroad were amended so that two other states, Belgium and Spain, can now represent Slovakia in issuing visas, bringing the number of EU Member States with which Slovakia has visa-issuing agreements with to nine. Two new agreements are being drawn up (with Portugal and Switzerland), which should be concluded in early 2014. Existing agreements mean that citizens of the twenty four countries where Slovakia has no representation can obtain Slovak

visas in these countries and Slovakia now represents other EU countries in issuing visas in nine countries.

Public and Cultural Diplomacy

Promoting Slovakia, its culture, art and tourism through the diplomatic missions abroad was an organic part of the Ministry's work. In addition to implementing programmes and projects, work continued on creating the optimal structures, forms and organizational aspects² of public and cultural diplomacy.

Slovakia celebrated two major anniversaries in 2013: the **20th anniversary of the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic** and the **1150th anniversary of the arrival of Sts Cyril and Methodius in Great Moravia**. These anniversaries were an opportunity to familiarize the international community with Slovakia, which is deeply embedded in the history of Europe and to present Slovakia as a young, dynamic and successful country. The Ministry arranged representational exhibitions that the diplomatic missions mounted in more than fifty countries around the world. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic, the Ministry celebrated **two decades of a successful Slovak foreign policy** by holding a conference, "Modern Diplomacy: 20 years Serving Slovakia" (January). There were appearances by leading Slovak diplomats who had been widely recognized and had held important positions in international organizations during their careers.

The Ministry was actively involved in implementing the communication strategy and promoting the *Travelling city* initiative abroad for **Košice – European Capital of Culture 2013**. The Ministry organized an exhibition of artwork by the disabled, entitled **National Presentation of the Art of Disabled Slovak Artists** to be shown abroad in 2014.

The year 2013 saw positive outcomes in public and cultural diplomacy in its work with the **Visegrád countries**. It was the first year of the Visegrád Cycle Race, there was a gala concert in celebration of the anniversary of the signing of the Visegrád Treaty and many joint performances, conferences and workshops. The projects completed by the V4 countries, Austria and Slovenia under the **Central European Cultural Platform** aimed to stimulate cooperation in Central Europe and strengthen a common cultural identity among the participating countries. Cooperation also continued successfully at the EU Member State level, particularly involving the EU National Institutes for Culture, **EUNIC**, (European Literature Nights were held in a number of European countries).

The Programme of Cooperation between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the State of Israel for 2013–2016 was signed in 2013 and covers education, science, culture, youth and sport. There was also a 4th meeting of the Joint Slovak–Austrian Commission for Culture, Education and Science and a 12th meeting of the Intergovernmental Slovak-Ukrainian Commission for National Minorities, Education and Culture. The Ministry traditionally works with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, the Slovak Academy of Sciences and others in the areas of culture, education, science and sport.

² The fact that the Ministry considers this to be of increasing importance is evident in the organizational changes that divided the Public and Cultural Diplomacy Department into two separate units, the Public Diplomacy Department and the Cultural Diplomacy Department.

Coordinating the Presentation of Slovakia Abroad

The Ministry continued to develop a consistent presentation of Slovakia abroad, which is seen as a guided process making greatest use of the potential offered by Slovakia's work in officially presenting the country.

In this respect, the Ministry focused on preparing the "Slovakia brand" and on striving to improve collaboration between those involved in promoting Slovakia abroad (Ministry of Transport, Construction and Rural Development, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, SACR (Slovak Tourist Board) and SARIO (Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency)). The **Working Group for Coordinating the Presentation of the Slovak Republic Abroad**, which operates as part of the Council of the Slovak Government for Export and Investment Support is the platform that coordinates the work. The Ministry completed an overview of the promotional activities of the individual departments and agencies and organized an inter-departmental information platform so that information on previously prepared activities can be shared amongst those involved to achieve synergies and prevent duplicity.

In establishing the **Slovakia brand** the Ministry built upon the success of its previous activities and set up a study to suggest marketing messages to promote Slovakia abroad. External specialists, representatives of the Ministry and other state institutions as well as representatives of the business, academic and creative sectors were all involved. The Ministry arranged two related studies which will translate the marketing messages into visuals.

Working with NGOs

In many areas the NGOs proved to be an invaluable partner to the Ministry. NGOs were involved in **preparing policy documents and strategic materials** (Medium-Term Strategy for Slovak Development Cooperation for 2014–2018, Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs Declaration on Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations in Fulfilling the Ministry's Tasks, Direction of Slovak Foreign and European Policy in 2014, brainstorming on Slovakia's engagement in the work of the Eastern Partnership, etc.).

A number of **important events** took place at the initiative of or in cooperation with NGOs to encourage public discussion of current issues in foreign, security and European policy (Annual Review Conference on Slovak Foreign and European policy, the GLOBSEC, National Convention on the European Union, and the Slovak Security Forum).

The Ministry used **funding mechanisms** and other official development assistance instruments to pursue its own aims and support NGO activities. Thirty six international relations and foreign policy projects were (co-)financed. Support was mainly provided for studies, analyses and publications and for organizing public educational events, academic conferences and seminars.

Slovaks Living Abroad

The Ministry took on responsibility for implementing national policy for Slovaks Living Abroad following the amendment to the Law on Competencies. Diplomatic missions carried out more activities related to Slovaks living abroad. The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad began drafting the "**Strategy for Slovak National Policy for Slovaks Living Abroad 2016–2020**".

7. Professional Foreign Service

At the end of 2013, the Slovak Republic had a total of **83 diplomatic missions** (64 embassies, 7 missions within international organizations, 9 general consulates, 2 branch offices of diplomatic missions and one Slovak economic and cultural office) and 8 Slovak (cultural) institutes. Last year the Slovak Embassy in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) was closed and Slovak Embassies were opened in Chisinau (Moldova) and in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). These changes were adopted in keeping with Slovak foreign policy objectives and reflect the financial resources available to the Ministry. The Ministry re-assessed setting up a Slovak Embassy in Tunis (Tunisia). The embassy in Tripoli (Libya) was not reopened owing to the current security situation. This is also why the embassy in Damascus (Syria) continued to operate temporarily from Beirut (Lebanon).

In staff policies and human resources management the priorities were to improve existing human potential within the Foreign Service, consolidation, and improving motivation and development. In relation to improving the qualifications of staff members, the Ministry and other state institutions continued to prepare training for the upcoming Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Slovak government approved the **National Programme for Training State Administration Employees for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2016**. On this basis, the Ministry designed a project to ensure centralized training, entitled "Improving the Performance of State Administration Employees in relation to the EU: Preparing for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU". The plan is to use EU structural funds to finance these activities. The Ministry collaborated with the University of Economics in Bratislava to run an accredited course on "**Preparation for Work as an Economic Diplomat Abroad**". The open lectures were also attended by staff of other central state administration bodies.

Work continued in 2013 on modernizing and rationalizing the Ministry's information and communication infrastructure. Measures were taken at diplomatic missions abroad to improve internal and external security in order to fulfil Schengen criteria on protecting confidential information and personal information. As part of the Information Society Operational Programme, preparations began at the Ministry on the "Electronization of Services at the Department for the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Citizens and Businesses of the Slovak Republic within the remit of the Foreign Ministry". As a consequence of public expenditure consolidation, the Ministry continued to implement **savings measures** in financial flows, restructuring the Slovak Republic's assets abroad and achieving transparency in public procurement. Despite the limited budget, the Ministry fulfilled all priorities as required.