

Foreign and European Policy in 2018

Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign
and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic



MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Year 2018: Anniversaries in a turbulent period of international relations



"Our struggle for a better life in the 25 years of a democratic Slovakia would not have been so successful had we not been a member of the European Union."

Andrej Kiska, President of the Slovak Republic



"You have decided to become free, to join the European Union and to be at the very core of Europe, now we have to endorse it."

Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic

"Slovaks and Czechs are now weighing up the 100 years of our coexistence, our path has not been easy and together we faced several crises and attacks, we had the extraordinary experience of building a common state, but what I think is most valuable is that we gained each other."



Andrej Danko, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic



"I look forward to working with the Slovak Chairmanship, and pledge OSCE's commitment to assist participating States in implementing your decisions and supporting efforts to strengthen security and stability in our region and beyond."

Thomas Greminger, Secretary General of the OSCE



"I see diplomacy as having a unique role in smoothing the way for the state and helping create a platform for open dialogue at difficult times. I think this is both the prerogative and the duty of a professional diplomat towards society, and I very much hope Slovak diplomacy will continue to see itself in this way."

Peter Pellegrini, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

Successful Slovakia in a turbulent world



In 2018, Slovakia commemorated several historical events that have shaped our statehood. Thus, 2018 was a year of remembrance and taking stock. There was much discussion about the centenary of the birth of Czechoslovakia and the significance of the events that occurred after the First World War for the present status of the two successor states, the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. We also remembered the difficult years of 1938 and 1968, which led to our country being closed to the world for a long time. And, of course, right at the start of the year, we began by celebrating the 25th anniversary of our independent statehood.

I think we can say that at the end of its 25th year Slovakia's foreign policy story is a successful one. We are a member of all the international organizations that bear relevance to our geopolitical space. Our membership of the EU means that we belong to a community of 500 million people based on shared values and the four freedoms. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty provides us with a strong security guarantee. Our regional forms of cooperation, with the V4 in the centre, strengthen our relations with our neighbours. Slovakia is also experiencing a period of significant economic growth.

Slovakia's achievements were, however, put into perspective by many events at home and on the international scene. The year 2018 was yet another tumultuous year ending in the number 8, and will unfortunately go down in history as the year a journalist and his fiancée were murdered. This tragedy shook Slovak society and the political scene.

Meanwhile, in the foreign policy environment there was more turbulence than stability creating fertile ground for hybrid forms of rivalry and the contestation of rules as well as undermining the pillars on which the post-war world order stands and on which we have built our foreign policy.

The world is changing dynamically. Globalization, migration, economic inequality and an unstable foreign policy environ-

ment are feeding many of the prejudices and insecurities that will eventually create a breeding ground for demagoguery, populism, nationalism and other present-day maladies.

Overall, in 2018, the atmosphere in the foreign policy field was more polarizing than uniting. On many key issues, joint solutions fell victim to individual interests, rationality gave way to political campaigns, simplifications prevailed over expertise and individual force over compromise. Thus, the year behind us was in many ways a year of drifting apart rather than of coming together.

At the end of 2017, we noted a shift away from multilateralism and towards looking inwards, unilateralism and wall-building; at the end of 2018, the walls are even higher. At the end of 2018, "alternative facts" continue to flood Slovakia and more and more young Slovaks are listening to the radicals. At the end of 2017, we noted the unpredictability on the international scene; now, we can only add the word "utterly". The constants that we have worked with in foreign policy are now becoming variables.

Life on the European continent is being subjected to these elements of uncertainty in large part because of Brexit. We spent the whole year trying to determine the conditions under which our partner will depart and what the future relationship will be. This has cost us a great deal of time, effort and resources. Brexit is a manifestation of the deeper problem of growing distrust in the EU. The scepticism also stems from the fact that over the last decade the EU has faced several serious crises. They are pressuring us to complete the economic and monetary union, including the banking union, as well as the single market, including the digital market or the Energy Union.

Already this year, there has been a great deal of discussion on the new post-2020 multi-annual financial framework. Opinions vary from one member state to another, and so its political passage is not simple. We need to respond to the

new challenges such as innovation or migration. However, these ambitions cannot come at the expense of traditional policies. The situation has understandably been complicated by the departure of one of the EU's major contributors.

In 2018, the EU and society were divided by the issue of migration. The EU has intensified its work to protect its external borders and the Schengen borders, but has yet to agree on the specific nature of the reforms to the Dublin system. Migration is a global problem that requires coordinated efforts. However, the debate about the approval of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration has again revealed the sensitivity of this issue.

In 2018 we also tried to bring discussions about the EU closer to the citizens. Slovak society is closely following the debate on the future of the EU. The Ministry has therefore been focusing more intensively on communicating the pro-European agenda to citizens, through the #MYSMEEU project. Discussions at Slovak universities have had a positive response. Our goal is to ensure the general public are better informed about Slovakia's EU membership and its benefits, and more engaged with European issues, including participating in the European parliamentary elections.

The challenge continues to be how to respond to the new foreign policy doctrine being shaped in the US. The EU has increasingly been engaged in discussions on the EU taking on greater responsibility in defence and adopting a more balanced working relationship with the US. Though, it must be clearly stated that NATO remains the cornerstone and guarantee of the European security architecture. Activities relating to our CFSP and initiatives such as PESCO will therefore always complement, not replace, NATO activities.

If in the coming decades an individualistic approach comes to prevail in international relations, Slovakia's direct response will be to adapt to the changing circumstances and to highlight the importance of alliances and international cooperation. Our Ministry pays due attention to both. We have adapted our strategic thinking by developing new national strategy papers. We have identified a new spectrum of security issues and believe that answers must urgently be found. In this, Slovakia has no better ally than NATO which does not just provide us with a means of implementing security policy, it represents a set of values that we have chosen to defend and offer as inspiration to others.

However, the value of international commitments is being questioned in the new turbulent environment. Unilateralism is on the increase, and confidence in the established international institutions and multilateralism is fading. For Slovakia, it is vital to cultivate an international environment that is based on international law, cooperation and respect for the rules. In any scenario in which international relations are controlled by the rule of power more than the rule of law, Slovakia gets the shorter end of the stick. If the international order is to maintain its democratic nature, its international institutions must continue to be irreplaceable.

Consequently, Slovakia is very actively involved in the key international organizations. In 2016, Slovakia chaired the Council of the EU, in 2017/2018 we led the UN General Assembly and became a member of the UN Human Rights Council, and in 2019 a trio of responsibilities awaits us: the presidencies of the OSCE, V4 and OECD.

When I presided over the UN General Assembly, I sought to strengthen the organization's work in maintaining the peace and conflict prevention. We worked on a sustainable peace concept that redefines the UN's approach to peace. It is based on the idea that peace is more than just the absence of conflict. It views peace as a continuum of effort and links our understanding of peace with development and the humanitarian situation. The UN remains the main multilateral platform for dialogue and is a strong pillar in our foreign policy.

Slovakia officially took over the OSCE's Presidency on 1 January 2019, but the previous year was spent preparing and planning it. We assume the Presidency in a particularly challenging period. The mood on the multilateral scene is rather glum and the OSCE faces many challenges relating to the way it operates internally. Nonetheless, we are prepared and determined to grasp the opportunity, in pursuit of solutions that will improve the situation of the people affected by conflict.

In the middle of 2018, we assumed the presidency of the Visegrad Four. We have previously held the V4 Presidency, but the current dynamics in our region are greatly affecting perceptions of the V4 brand. Therefore, there will be a lot of work ahead of us in the second half of our presidency as well. We want to promote the V4 as being firmly part of the EU and engaging in the search for joint solutions.

If we succeed in our pursuit of the common elements in the agendas of the Slovak presidencies of the V4, the OSCE and the OECD, it will be a great success for our country and a contribution to strengthening effective multilateralism. For us, this is one of the most important means of implementing foreign policy. And these are not just words. The global challenges are serious and increasingly complex. No country will be able to respond alone to the climate change, migration, radicalization, terrorism, hybrid threats and so on. Solving them requires coordinated effort from the international community. The paradox of this era is that many are moving away from multilateralism precisely when we need it most.

The Ministry will therefore continue to pursue a foreign policy built on Slovakia's membership of the EU and NATO, and to promote multilateralism, international cooperation and dialogue as the basis on which to address the challenges ahead of us this coming year.


Miroslav Lajčák,
Minister of Foreign and European
Affairs of the Slovak Republic

▶ As part of a series of joint events marking the 100th anniversary of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak and Czech presidents, Andrej Kiska and Miloš Zeman, undertook a symbolic train journey from Hodonín to Topolčianky. One of the carriages was the historical Aza 80 made in 1930 for the first Czechoslovak President, T. G. Masaryk, 29 July 2018 (Photo: Office of the President of the SR)



◀ On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Czechoslovakia, an exhibition featuring the original Pittsburgh Agreement was held at Bratislava Castle. It was officially opened by Speaker of the Slovak Parliament Andrej Danko, Speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies Radek Vondráček and US Ambassador Adam Sterling, 14 June 2018 (Photo: National Council of the SR)

▶ The prime ministers of the Slovak and Czech Republics, Peter Pellegrini and Andrej Babiš, launched the official opening of the *Common Century* Exhibition at the European Commission in Brussels on 18 October 2018, which was held under the auspices of Věra Jourová and Maroš Šefčovič, the EU commissioners representing the republics (Photo: Lukasz Kobus)



František Ružička, State Secretary



You have recently completed your year as Chef de Cabinet of the President of the 72nd UN General Assembly. Before that you were a Slovak Ambassador to the UN. How did these experiences shape your perception of the global context of foreign policy?

It was a unique and perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. After five difficult but rewarding years both diplomatically and workwise as Permanent Representative to the UN, I have seen multilateralism from the other side working for a year at the UN Secretariat. I had the opportunity to see and participate in the inner workings of many processes. The president of the UN General Assembly represents the interests of 193 UN member states. The president's chef de cabinet is in charge of running the team, but also manages the preparations on the political, legal and procedural sides of the processes. The international team of 30 diplomats from 24 countries was extremely qualified, worked independently and did not require micro-level management, leaving a lot of time for the truly professional work, policy-making discussions and diplomacy. The different viewpoints held, for example, on climate change by experts from Central Europe, Nauru or Jamaica were not a barrier to formulating positions. On the contrary, they gave us a much more comprehensive grasp of the issue. These kinds of day-to-day experiences also shaped my perception of global contexts. If we want to solve a problem, we have to listen to each other, meet and even argue. But attentively and with respect. The UN gives us the platform and the multilateral means to do so. Anyone who gives up on that is doing themselves a disservice.

Your main portfolio in your current post at the Ministry is the European agenda. Which issues have most affected the EU in the past year and what was Slovakia's position on them?

There are many issues the EU has to deal with that will determine the quality of cooperation and our common fate. First of all, I have to say that Slovakia's place is in the EU's

core, and so I want our voice to be heard in decisions on the Union's vision, in negotiations on the new financial framework, but also on advancing the single market, the banking union and digitalization. In short, on every agenda that has an impact on our everyday life.

Perhaps what was most visible in the media, and had a real impact on citizens, were preparations for Brexit. It was not something we wished for, but we respect the UK's sovereign decision. We want to have a good and mutually beneficial relationship with London, even after Brexit, and that is what we are working towards.

Another area in which we need to step up is the fight against disinformation. It is now clear that this is not just speculation but that various types of hybrid warfare have become reality. And not just a virtual one. The danger is they may affect the functioning of democratic institutions (e.g. elections), and worse, they can often deprive us of the ability to think critically.

Another complicated issue is migration. We have managed to significantly reduce illegal migration from Africa and the Middle East, but we do not as yet have a systemic approach to migration, and mandatory quotas are not the solution. Our view is that we must first secure the external border and ensure citizen safety while keeping the Schengen system. Migration is an objective phenomenon, and the solution is not to build walls but to find a systemic approach and regulation, and this also applies to meeting the needs of the labour market.

The EU has the potential, tools and responsibility for what happens in its immediate neighbourhood and globally. It is leading the fight against climate change. It is leading in the introduction of new technologies and in providing development aid. However, this potential has to be enhanced by updating our common foreign policy tools. All these issues are shaping the debate on the future of the EU that will culminate in Sibiu, Romania, in May 2019. We want to be an active

player in this debate and most of all we want to discuss this with the Slovak public.

The security–stability–prosperity triad is closely linked to the ability of a state, or a transnational integration group such as the EU, to defend itself against threats. So what is your view of the persistent question regarding a common European defence?

Defence and security are high on the list of European policy priorities. It is a natural response to the key changes in the security environment in the European neighbourhood and in the world. Violations of international law, attacks on territorial integrity, and even territorial annexation, terrorism, illegal migration, hybrid threats, cyber-attacks and the use of chemical weapons pose serious security risks that have had a major impact on both Europe's and Slovakia's security. We need to, and have to, do more together about defence at the European level. By creating PESCO, we have begun cooperating more closely, are developing better military capabilities and we are also reviving the European defence industry. The goal we are aiming at is a European defence model that will be more effective, more powerful and will complement NATO.

Last year, the topic of migration also shaped the domestic political debate in Slovakia. How did the migration crisis and attempt to maintain the functionality of the Schengen system affect Slovakia and the EU?

In 2018, Slovakia clearly emphasized its positions on migration. We set our "red line", which is mandatory quotas, but at the same time we were a constructive partner in the discussions and in adopting other measures. We want citizens to feel safe in the EU. That is why we focus on strengthening the external border and the relevant institutions. Migration flows have returned to pre-crisis levels. The measures taken by the EU and its member states – with Slovakia's active involvement – helped considerably. For example, experts were sent to EU agencies, FRONTEX and the European Asylum Support Office, and support was provided to the African Peace Fund. Slovakia is among the largest contributors (per capita). Steps to address regulated migration should not interfere with any of the freedoms the EU is based upon – here I am thinking specifically of freedom of movement. Slovakia has supported most of the elements of effective solidarity. The problem of migration must be addressed by helping the countries in which it originates and working with transit countries. A constant challenge is the fight against smugglers and traffickers.

Issues of vertical integration have become important in the EU, especially the completion of the economic and monetary union, the digital agenda and energy cooperation. How far have we got with them as a country and where do you still see significant room for improvement?

Each of these agendas is important for the future of the EU. In the monetary sphere, our goal has been, and remains, building a stable euro area that is resistant to crises and to external and internal economic shocks. We therefore backed

the creation of fiscal capacity or a special budget for the euro area, the banking union and the capital markets union to eliminate the problems that have arisen. Establishing the rules of the digital area will be important for future development. The Union should become the dominant player in artificial intelligence, automated production and in building the supercomputing infrastructure. At the same time, we need to develop our cyber security capabilities in such a way that the data economy and modern technologies are not a threat but become an integral and safe part of our lives.

The idea of a common Europe cannot be restricted to the common market or the reforms required to achieve it. The EU should not forget about life beyond its borders. What is the current status of EU enlargement?

The opportunity to become an EU member is the best transformational motivator we have. The energy we expend in working with the countries in the Western Balkans or the Eastern Partnership is aimed at their eventual entry into the EU and is a political, economic and security investment for the future. This process must be credible and vigorous, and should open the door to the meeting rooms in Brussels for anyone fulfilling the conditions. The dilemma of whether to "widen or deepen" has resonated in the corridors and meeting rooms for decades. I think our ambition should be to implement these processes in parallel, because when properly grasped they will strengthen stability, development and cooperation in Europe. In February 2018, the European Commission published its strategy which not only described the state of preparedness of the Western Balkan countries for EU accession and confirmed the principles of enlargement, but also created a more positive atmosphere around the topic. In May 2018, the EU–Western Balkans summit was held in Sofia. At it, Slovakia reaffirmed its long-standing interest in the Western Balkan region and advocated sending out political signals of belonging and a shared future with the region. And we will continue in this policy.

In Slovakia, the differences between domestic and foreign policy issues are becoming blurred. How did the Ministry respond to this last year, and how did the added value of the strategic communication tools and #MYSMEEU as well as #MYSMENATO campaigns shine through?

The Ministry is well aware of the need to engage more intensively in the information sphere and in active dialogue with the public. To do so, we began developing a concept of strategic communication, or systematic communication, aimed at building public support for Slovakia's strategic direction in accordance with its basic foreign policy documents and the Ministry's mission and vision. The aim of the #MYSMEEU project is to achieve open and critical discussion between the public and representatives of state institutions, non-governmental organizations, businesses and the academic and media sectors about supporting Slovakia's participation in EU cooperation and deepening and widening integration. As part of the #MYSMENATO initiative – Slovakia is one of five pilot countries – we launched a public debate on the mission of the Alliance.

Lukáš Parížek, State Secretary

The year 2018 brought with it the centenary of the birth of Czechoslovakia and the 25th anniversary of the independent Slovak Republic. Our assessment of all that we achieved this year was performed in light of these two anniversaries. The dynamic development in the non-European regions is driving the world economy forward and creating an opportunity for us to establish ourselves. Slovak diplomacy now has the opportunity to capitalize on its traditional ties and reputation, and the rapidly changing world also gives us a chance to use the latest means of communication. In 2018, a great deal of work went into preparing for the next year in a responsible and professional fashion.

THE PRESIDENTIAL TRIO OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

Preparing for the presidency of the largest regional security organization with 57 states in Europe, Central Asia and North America requires intensive work and agenda-setting. In close cooperation with Austria and Italy, and as members of the Presidential Trio, we introduced new themes into the international debate, while continuing to work on long-term tasks.

In January 2018, Slovakia became the presidency country of the Forum for Security Co-operation for the first trimester of the year. This discussion platform was established in Helsinki in 1992 to strengthen the focus on political and military security through meetings and consultations on military security and stability. The topics of discussion are expanding to include the fight against extremism and radicalization, cyber security, tolerance and non-discrimination, education, the safety of journalists and dialogue with the third sector. During our presidency, security sector reform, which is now something of a Slovak hallmark, and the V4 format were highlighted as successful examples of regional military cooperation.



Throughout the year, we led the Mediterranean Contact Group, which consists of OSCE states and six Mediterranean partners. The first, March, plenary session focused on energy security and the protection of critical energy infrastructure. Within this line of cooperation and security, we continued to focus on water management on both sides of the Mediterranean, particularly in relation to the economic, social and environmental challenges. The Slovak themes were warmly received at the Annual Conference of the OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group in October, where the importance of energy and its impact on economic growth and cooperation in the Mediterranean was highlighted. The other themes were cyber security and a new one – education as a means of combatting radicalization.

Our work in the Presidential Trio was also associated with the appointment of Slovak diplomats to high positions in challenging areas where there are frozen conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria. I am proud of and enormously appreciative of the confidence displayed in Slovak diplomacy. I believe we are well prepared for the 2019 Presidency.

NEW STAGE IN ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

A hard pragmatism is starting to prevail in geopolitical developments. Economic diplomacy is becoming an increasingly established part of the foreign service. It is a strategic instrument for making decisions on how the country will develop in the context of our increasingly close political and trade relations. We have 89 diplomatic missions across the world, and these represent at least 89 exceptional opportunities. We are a pro-export country, and achieved growth in 2018. Can we do more or do better?

Slovakia's small and medium-sized enterprises account for more than half of GDP, employing two thirds of the working

population, but their share of the exports is less than one third. If we want Slovakia to advance, we have to leave our comfort zone and gain a better understanding of this segment. That is why we and our colleagues decided to take the initiative and travel to the regions to talk directly with businesses and ask them what they expect from the state in terms of cooperation. This led to the creation of a new unique format, “Together for Slovakia – From the regions to the world”, bringing together ministry efforts and business expectations. The aim is to introduce forms of state aid and discuss what can be done by the Ministry and institutions such as the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Eximbanka, SARIO and the Slovak Business Agency. This year, we met business people in Žilina, Košice, Trenčín and Trnava. Working with the economic ministry, we have taken the first step, and company representatives agree there is still a great deal of work ahead of us, particularly in continuing close communication.

BUSINESS MISSIONS

Over the year, interest in participating in our business missions picked up considerably, be that in relation to our business trips westwards or eastwards, as part of development aid to Africa or in terms of the innovative workshops in Israel. I have been meeting with representatives from the traditional engineering and energy fields as well as those from waste management, high-tech companies and cyber security. The areas with the greatest potential for further development in bilateral economic cooperation are science, development, innovation and start-ups. I also saw successful examples and opportunities for Slovakia in Brazil, Colombia, Moldova, Serbia and Central Asia. Emerging countries and economic growth in Central Asia are an exceptional opportunity to build traditional business relationships and to set trends. At the same time, they are a bridge to trade with the extensive Asian markets. Good trade relations between countries also make for good political relations, but we still have some way to go before we truly understand that good political relations create opportunities for economic and trade relations.

SLOVAKS LIVING ABROAD

The roles and issues in this area have changed significantly over the past decades. The priorities of the Government Council for Expatriate Issues include capturing generational trends and, in coordination with the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, systematically creating new relationships and ties with Slovaks living abroad. Slovakia’s approach should be to provide help and support so we can best assess the potential of working-age Slovaks living abroad.

In the last two years, we have been gradually increasing the volume of funding to support activities for Slovaks living abroad, and in 2018 the sum of €871,123 was allocated to

support 540 such projects. The number of applications for a Slovak Living Abroad Certificate also increased, especially in Serbia and Ukraine. In the first half of the decade there were hundreds, now there are more than two thousand a year.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Development cooperation is one of the most effective ways in which Slovakia can make a real contribution to addressing the migration crisis. We welcome the establishment of the African–Europe Alliance and a new roadmap on Africa’s economic potential and the mobilization of the private sector, focusing on raising youth employment. By creating employment opportunities and educational opportunities, we will effectively prevent the devastating migratory flows whilst supporting the economic growth of both continents through European investment. At a V4 coordination meeting, on the occasion of the meeting of the European Commission’s Foreign Affairs Council on development issues, Slovakia proposed a joint project in Ethiopia, where SlovakAid is interested in expanding its development activities from 2019 onwards. The project should provide comprehensive support to the region’s economic development by creating jobs and improving professional skills. A similar project has been implemented in Kenya.

In 2018, we worked hard to meet our international commitment to spend 0.33 per cent of GDP on development aid. We have the opportunity to finance our commitments through the External Investment Plan, which could foster stronger engagement by the Slovak business sector. We are working on making Slovakia’s development cooperation more effective. The system needs to ensure greater flexibility towards the applicant and so the available resources are used as effectively as possible.

GIVING THANKS

I would like to end this assessment of 2018 by thanking all our embassies around the world who, through official events and personal engagement, have supported Slovakia’s important anniversaries across the world. Rarely can we link such celebrations with the high standards we uphold when performing our diplomatic mission, and so I wish to express my thanks for the excellent way in which the working trips were organized, especially to Latin America and the United States of America. Knowing where we belong and where we are heading gives us the courage of decision in these fast-moving and challenging times. Only countries underpinned by strong values, dynamic relationships and a capacity to respond flexibly to change will have the ability to survive and develop in the third millennium. A successful 2018 now lies behind us. Let’s not be afraid to go beyond familiarity and routine. Success always lies in the detail.

#MYSMEEU

▲
#MYSMEEU [#WEAREEU] is an initiative run by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic aimed at renewing the national debate in Slovakia on topical EU issues, particularly the future of the EU and Slovakia's place within it

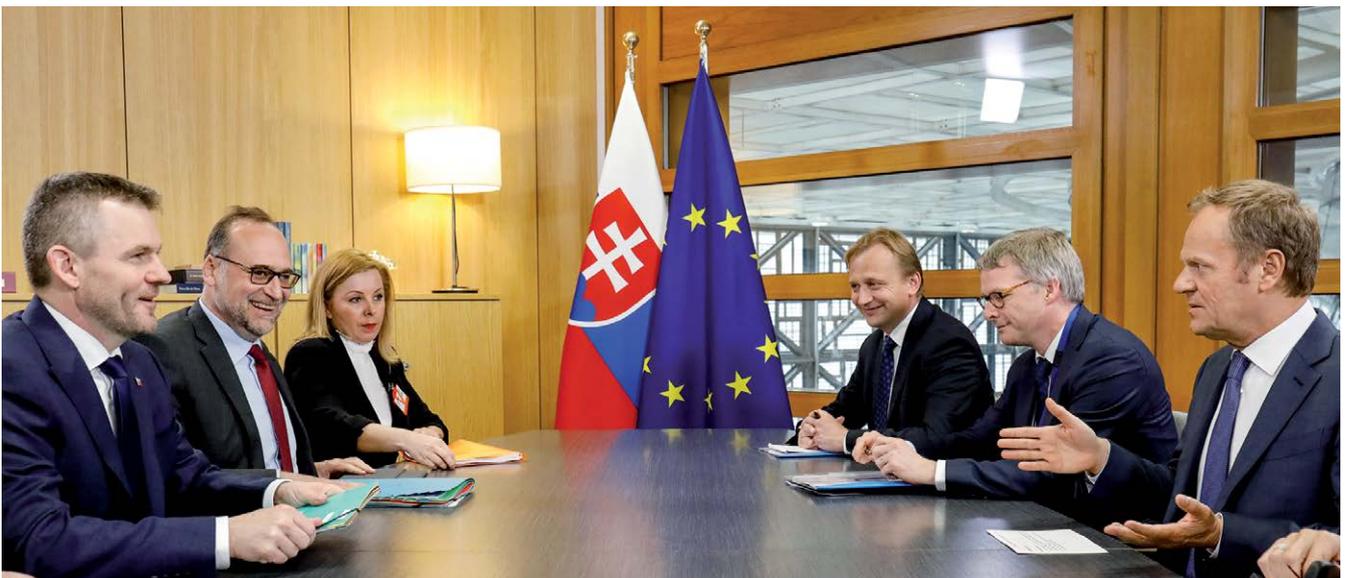
EUROPEAN PILLAR

The EU is Slovakia's basic living space and where its values are anchored. The economic strength, security, functioning rules, quality of life and political cohesion the EU brings has a very positive impact on life in Slovakia. At the same time, by being involved in the EU's decision-making processes, the Slovak Republic was able to influence global developments and shape the rules of the international system. We also recognized that the most palpable results of European integration – the internal market, the Schengen system and our common currency – have faced major challenges. That is why we backed the completion of the internal market, and sought to ensure that the migration crisis does not undermine the benefits of free movement to EU citizens. We were also actively engaged in the debate on completing the economic and monetary union, which is crucial to the EU's economic stability and therefore Slovakia's.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

The EU leaders' debate on the future of the European Union, launched in September 2016 at the Bratislava summit, will culminate in May 2019 in Sibiu, Romania, where the key pri-

orities of the European Union until 2024 will be established. In the ongoing discussions, Slovakia has emphasized that the new Strategic Agenda should reflect the usual sectoral priorities, respond to new challenges and strengthen the EU's global standing. We advocate the social and economic convergence of EU member states and actions to strengthen the internal and external security of the EU and its citizens. We also support efforts to improve the rules of free and fair international trade and to strengthen the role of the euro. Greater attention also needs to be paid to managing migration, creating the prerequisites for building a strategic culture and consensus within the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, strengthening the EU's capacity for action and its decision-making system. We want the EU's new strategic agenda to pay greater attention to the issues of defence, cyber threats, misinformation and the spread of anti-European narratives in society. Supporting science, research, technological modernization and the competitiveness of European industry are another important area. Regarding institutional reforms, we support preserving the EU's communitarian character and the balance between the institutions and the member states, and among the institutions themselves.



Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini during talks with European Council President Donald Tusk in Brussels on 12 April 2018 (Photo: Dario Pignatelli)



EU heads of state and prime ministers gathered at an informal Salzburg meeting on 19–20 September 2018. The discussions concerned internal security, migration and Brexit (Photo: Dario Pignatelli)

PROGRESS ON THE FOUR FREEDOMS

Removing barriers, exploiting the potential of digitalization and innovation as well as enhancing the EU's global competitiveness were among Slovakia's European policy priorities concerning the functioning of the EU single market last year. Slovakia backed legislation bringing the EU in line with dynamic changes in the digital environment. Key European initiatives have led to the creation of a further dimension of the single market – the free movement of data with the potential to stimulate technological innovation and create a European data area.



Minister Miroslav Lajčák and European Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič discussed the future of the EU at a Slovak Foreign Policy Association event in Bratislava, 11 October 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ASPECTS

The EU's 2030 Climate and Energy Framework was completed with the adoption of legislation on energy efficiency and renewable energy. On the climate, our aim was to ensure that our ambitious goals could be achieved in a socially and economically sustainable way. In negotiations on reducing emissions from new passenger and light and heavy-duty commercial vehicles – clean mobility – the Slovak Republic sought to balance environmental ambition with the competitiveness of the automotive industry, a key segment of our national economy. In 2018, the politically sensitive revised Posted Workers Directive was also approved, with Slovakia playing a constructive role in reaching a final compromise. Similarly, it proved possible to ensure an appropriate balance was achieved between social conditions and competitiveness in the rules on the posting of workers in international road transport – known as Mobility Package 1. Under Slovakia's initiative, the issue of dual product quality gained new dynamism, evident in the subsequent legislative and non-legislative developments. Consequently, the expectation is that the harmonized testing and comparison of food products in the EU member states will be conducted using a common methodology developed in 2018.

EU BUDGET

Economic expectations played an important role in EU-level discussions last year. We engaged in negotiation on the Multiannual Financial Framework from the principle that



▲ Europe Day on Bratislava's Main Square, 9 May 2018
(Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

the financial aspect must not restrict our visions of the EU's future and that achieving a good balanced agreement is more important than completing it quickly. We welcomed the fact that Slovakia will remain a net beneficiary of the EU budget for the next seven years. At the same time, we advocated an ambitious approach to finding sufficient resources in the new budget of the European Union for the usual policies such as cohesion policy and the Common Agricultural Policy as well as for the new challenges of security, defence, migration and climate change. We also indicated our willingness to contribute more to the EU budget than has been the case in the past. Furthermore, Slovakia aided discussions on the future shape of the EU multi-annual budget by organizing a Friends of Cohesion High Level Meeting in Bratislava on 29 November 2018, at which a joint declaration on the next financial framework was adopted.

CONSTRUCTIVE SOLUTIONS TO MIGRATION

In 2018, cooperation with countries of origin and transit was crucial in dealing with migration issues, with the Trust Fund for Africa playing an important role. Slovakia was among the countries keen to focus on solving the causes of migration in the countries of origin. We therefore donated €8.75 million out of the €35 million Visegrad Four contribution to the Integrated Border Management Programme for Libya. Overall we contributed €10.35 million to the Trust Fund. On a per capita basis, this amount places Slovakia into the top 6 of this Fund's donors. In 2018, we also continued to support the European Coast Guard and Border Guard (Frontex) and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) by sending national experts. In further discussions of the European Commission's proposals to strengthen Frontex and EASO in September 2018, Slovakia favoured strengthening Frontex's mandate to operate in third countries and the agency's role in returning migrants. Slovakia has always clearly indicated that we are prepared to participate in all forms of solidarity, except mandatory quotas, and on this our national position remains unchanged.



▲ The National Convention on the EU held an opening event on 22 February 2018 in Bratislava (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

BREXIT TALKS

Last year, events in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as London's relations with the EU institutions and member states were largely determined by the complicated nature of the Brexit negotiations. Key issues were protecting the rights of EU citizens, the financial settlement and securing an open border regime on the island of Ireland. The draft withdrawal agreement was endorsed in November 2018. From Slovakia's point of view, the agreement was a good one. It was balanced and reflected our interests and priorities, including the status of Slovak and European citizens on the British Isles and the financial settlement, but also set out the right level on which to begin the future mutual relationship. It should be based on a close partnership, balanced rights and obligations and equal conditions for developing economic activities. It is equally important to us that smooth cooperation is maintained in other non-trade areas, particularly in internal and external security, and foreign and defence policy.



▲ At a National Convention event in Banská Bystrica on 15 October 2018, State Secretary František Ružička spoke about Slovakia role in shaping European policies (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

#WEARENATO

▲
The #WeAreNATO information campaign makes use of short videos and discussion events to explain NATO membership and its importance to peace. Slovakia was one of five countries launching this pilot campaign in 2017

SECURITY PILLAR

In 2018, the security of the Slovak Republic continued to be grounded in our NATO membership, the cornerstone of our security and defence, to which there is no alternative. New security challenges and the increasingly assertive behaviour of global actors had to be addressed. At the national level we increased our investments in the security sector and continued with our NATO adaptation. Differences in views on resolving some of the challenges in the global environment facing the international community in 2018 also left their imprint on transatlantic relations. Slovakia thought it essential for the transatlantic dialogue to continue on issues where the EU considered more could be achieved together than through unilateral acts. Slovakia does not see the EU and NATO as

competing organizations but as complementary ones that work alongside one another, and it is in this vein that we wish to continue. We believe that a stronger and safer Europe that takes greater responsibility for European and transatlantic security also makes for a stronger transatlantic alliance.

A RELIABLE ALLY

The NATO Summit in Brussels in July 2018 strengthened transatlantic unity and solidarity between the Allies, who indicated their readiness to share their responsibilities as NATO members, including investing in defence and fulfilling their



▲ President Andrej Kiska travelled to the NATO summit to convey the Slovak government's firm promise to raise defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP by 2024, Brussels, 11–12 July 2018 (Photo: NATO)



▲ At the North Atlantic Council meeting Slovakia was represented by State Secretary Ivan Korčok. The discussions concerned Russia, the Alliance's presence in the southern periphery, its engagement in Afghanistan and the open door policy, Brussels, 27 April 2018 (Photo: NATO)

commitments arising from the summits in Wales and Warsaw. Reflecting the conclusions of the NATO summit, Slovakia continued to increase its defence investments in 2018. Thanks to the healthy economic outlook and the stability of public finances, we were also able to create conditions to achieve our defence spending target of 2 per cent of GDP more rapidly. In the public administration budget adopted for 2019–2021 spending is targeted to reach 1.73 per cent of GDP in 2019.

This is partly down to the extensive modernization projects relating to the Slovak Armed Forces. For Slovakia, the year 2018 was also one in which we continued our presence in international crisis management operations and missions. We sent 152 members of the Slovak Armed Forces to participate in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States (EFP), demonstrating our willingness and operational support for the Allies' joint efforts to ensure NATO is more effective and has greater credibility. Slovakia also participated in NATO's training and advisory activities in Iraq. We received recognition from Allies for the scope and quality of training in de-mining and repairing Soviet military equipment. Slovakia also continued to contribute militarily and financially to Afghanistan and to run NATO's contact embassy in Sarajevo. Within NATO's open-door policy, we supported the decision to invite Macedonia to NATO membership talks and backed the defence reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine.

HYBRID AND CYBER THREATS

We responded to the growing hybrid threats by adopting the Slovak Republic's Strategy for Combating Hybrid Threats in

July 2018. Its implementation will improve Slovakia's ability to respond to hybrid threats, give us a better overview of the situation and strengthen the resilience of the state and society to such threats. In 2018, Slovakia also supported international efforts to build confidence in cyberspace and develop tools for cyber diplomacy. Slovakia was engaged in developing international cooperation in information exchange, both bilaterally and within the EU and NATO. In 2018, we backed the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace and helped to create and implement the Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox. Our efforts are directed at achieving a unified EU policy and standards for cyberspace protection. The importance of this approach was underlined by the detection of a cyber-attack on the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. Special attention must also be paid to ensuring the resilience of electoral processes.



▲ State Secretary František Ružička gave the opening speech at the Slovak Security Forum, Bratislava, 1 October 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini visited Slovak soldiers on the Resolute Support Mission on 21 December 2018 with Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš (Photo: Office of the Government of the SR)



▲ In Latvia, President Andrej Kiska met with members of the Slovak Armed Forces deployed to strengthen NATO's military presence in the east, 18 December 2018 (Photo: Office of the President of the SR)

THE EU AS SECURITY AND DEFENCE ACTOR

In 2018, there was considerable progress in strengthening the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), notably through the implementation of permanent structured cooperation in the area of defence and military capabilities (PESCO). Slovakia was the lead country for EuroArtillery. In addition, we also participated in other projects where we contributed to pan-European solutions for providing health and logistical

support during operations and to the construction of a light armoured vehicle, the cross-border transportation of military equipment and personnel and the construction of test and evaluation centres. The Civilian CSDP Compact was adopted at the end of 2018. It sets out specific targets and commitments for collectively strengthening and developing civilian CSDP capabilities. Together with our partners, we committed to continuing to improve the CSDP, which in practical terms involves increasing the national contribution to civilian missions.

Participation of the Slovak Republic in military operations and observation missions outside the Slovak Republic

Current Slovak Armed Forces contributions to operations and missions:

Operation/mission	Under the command of	Area of deployment	Number of Slovak personnel deployed
Resolute Support	NATO	Afghanistan	36
NMI (NATO Mission in Iraq)	NATO	Iraq	7
EUFOR Althea (European Union Force Althea)	EU	Bosnia and Herzegovina	42
UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)	UN	Cyprus	242
UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization)	UN	Middle East	2
EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia)	EU	Georgia	1
eFP (Enhanced Forward Presence)	NATO	Latvia	152

NB: EU Naval Force Mediterranean Operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED Sophia) – Mediterranean Sea – members of the Slovak Armed Forces completed their operational tasks on 12 May 2018. Following agreement with Germany, Slovakia plans to again contribute to the operation beginning in January 2020, when the mandate for the operation will be extended.

Current Police Force contributions to operations and missions:

Operation/mission	Under the command of	Area	Number of Slovak personnel deployed
EUAM (European Union Advisory Mission)	EU	Ukraine	2
EUBAM (European Union Border Assistance Mission)	EU	Ukraine/Moldova	1
EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission)	EU	Georgia	5
EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo)	EU	Kosovo	3
UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)	UN	Cyprus	4
MINUJUSTH (United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti)	UN	Haiti	2
OSCE Ukraine (Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine)	OSCE	Ukraine	1
EEAS liaison officer (European External Action Service)	EU	Belgium	1



▲ Minister Miroslav Lajčák served as Chairman of the 72nd UN General Assembly until 17 September 2018. This was yet another indication of the important role Slovakia plays in the international community (Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe)

MULTILATERAL PILLAR

3

LEADING THE UNITED NATIONS

Last year, Slovakia viewed the United Nations (UN) as the central plank of effective multilateralism and a global rules-based order. An important historical moment for Slovakia was that minister Miroslav Lajčák served as President of the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York until 17 September 2018. Politically and in terms of protocol, this is the highest post in the UN. This was the first time the Slovak Republic and Slovak diplomacy had this honour. Holding the presidency, under the banner of “Focusing on People: Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet” gave Slovakia the opportunity to reflect our commitment to strong multilateralism in a proactive multilateral agenda for the United Nations, especially around peacebuilding, peacekeeping and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. We succeeded in expanding the constructive international dialogue, creating partnerships, highlighting the role of preventive diplomacy and mediation in conflict prevention, and raising awareness of the need to finance sustainable development goals and to protect human rights in the world. Under the guidance of the Slovak presidency, the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly approved three reformist divisions proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General in the areas of peace, development and UN governance. The presidency was also a unique opportunity to raise global awareness of Slovakia’s potential in multilateral diplomacy.

FUTURE OF EUROPEAN SECURITY

In 2018, Slovakia embarked on a journey that culminated in the year-long presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2019. In this respect, assuming the presidency of the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) and the Mediterranean Contact Group (MCG) was one of the most significant moments in 2018. From the position of its presidency of the FSC, Slovak diplomacy actively promoted the development of a structured dialogue on existing and future security threats. Slovakia led the negotiations on strengthening and building trust between the OSCE participating states and on the resumption of negotiations on the conventional arms control regime in Europe. We also stimulated debate in areas on which the participating countries hold different positions, such as information transparency and credibility, implementing and updating the Vienna Document or regional cooperation. The situation in the east of Ukraine also resonated in the FSC debates, during which Slovakia strove to be an objective mediator of the talks about the conflict. On 1 September 2018 the Italian Presidency of the OSCE agreed with the nomination of a Slovak diplomat for the post of Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus. The work of the MCG concerned energy security, sustainable water management and connectivity with the OSCE’s Mediterranean partners – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Activities within this format culminated in the organization of the annual MCG conference in Malaga in cooperation with Spain.

Presidency in numbers

During the 12 months Miroslav Lajčák was President of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly

- he led more than 70 General Assembly meetings and delivered nearly 300 speeches;
- he participated in more than 440 meetings with UN member states – including with 26 presidents, 16 prime ministers, 8 deputy prime ministers and more than 90 ministers and state secretaries – and had over 80 meetings with UN partners, including representatives of other international and regional organizations and institutions and civil society;
- he organized 10 high-level UN events;
- he gave more than 60 media interviews;
- he made 20 working trips to 36 cities in 28 countries.

These figures are testimony of a high level of commitment and serve as future inspiration for the entire Slovak foreign service.



▲ State Secretary Lukáš Parížek officially launched the Slovak Chairmanship of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation, Vienna, 17 January 2018 (Photo: OSCE / Micky Amon-Kröll)

Data on the organizational, logistic and personnel preparations for Slovakia's Presidency of the OSCE

Slovakia is preparing to organize or co-organize around **50 events** at different levels, roughly half of which will be held in Bratislava and the surrounding area.

The most visible events in Slovakia – the Informal Meeting of Foreign Ministers and the OSCE Ministerial Council – are expected to be attended by around **1,200 delegates**.

Anti-Semitism, violent extremism and radicalism, cyber security, SSG/R, religious freedom and other issues will be the subject of **12 profile conferences** held in Bratislava.

Two teams – the Bratislava Task Force comprising 24 members and Slovakia's permanent mission team at the OSCE in Vienna comprising 14 employees – are working on preparations for Slovakia's Presidency of the OSCE.

15 Slovaks are working at the OSCE field missions in Ukraine, Serbia, Macedonia and Albania.

12 Slovaks are part of the OSCE Special Observer Mission in Ukraine.

During the Slovak Presidency of the Forum for Security Cooperation, **six round tables** were organized under the leadership of the Slovak Republic at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna.

During the Presidency of the Mediterranean Contact Group, **five meetings** were held in Vienna.

SECURITY AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

In 2018, we continued to work intensively on activities to support the Security Sector Reform (SSR) agenda in co-chairmanship with the Republic of South Africa within the SSR Friends Group at the UN. Thanks to Slovakia's diplomatic activities, the SSR agenda is anchored in the UN concept on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace or conflict prevention,

especially on the African continent. Slovakia also received credit for its work on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. At the 62nd General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in September 2018, Slovakia was elected to the presidency. Slovakia made an important contribution to international crisis management by taking responsibility for Sector 4 of the UN's peacekeeping mission in Cyprus on 1 September 2018. Thus receiving recognition of its hard work. The number of Slovak peacekeepers increased from 160 to 242, and the dialogue between Cypriot politicians held under Slovakia's leadership was the only regular bi-communal activity to take place on the divided island during 2018.

HUMAN RIGHTS

On 1 January 2018, the Slovak Republic became a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), the UN's most important human rights body, for a period of three years. Among the main priorities of our membership are the promotion of children's rights, the fight against all forms of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance and the promotion of religious freedom. At the HRC meetings, Slovakia worked hard in preparing a joint declaration on the fight against anti-Semitism and on a joint statement on the empowerment of children with disabilities through education.

DISARMAMENT AND DENUCLEARIZATION

In 2018, we witnessed a number of negative trends that led to the weakening of international instruments and regimes relating to disarmament, arms control and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In May 2018, Slovakia completed its two-year membership of the OPCW Executive Council, where it also held the position of Vice-President of



▲ After 15 years, Slovakia was visited by the Secretary-General of the oldest pan-European organization, Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, Bratislava, 16 October 2018. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



Minister and President of the 72nd UN General Assembly Miroslav Lajčák spoke about the need for a multilateral renaissance at the security conference GLOBSEC 2018 Bratislava Forum, Bratislava, 9–8 June 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

the Eastern European Regional Group. We supported the holding of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and pressed for the final decision to be adopted, which allows for the creation of OPCW attribution mechanisms to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons. Slovakia considers the INF Treaty to be a key pillar of European security.

We were concerned to learn it had been violated. By contrast, the dialogue with North Korea on the dismantlement of its military nuclear programme was positive news. Slovakia supported the EU's policy of critical engagement based on the rigorous application of the sanction regime as laid out in the UN Security Council resolutions until such time as we have achieved the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization and removal of weapons of mass destruction.



State Secretary Lukáš Parížek visited Donbas to obtain an accurate picture of the security situation as part of preparations for Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship, 13 April 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Selected activities within the OPCW

Training experts from OPCW member states on chemical warfare agents at the Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Training and Testing Centre (VTC RCHBO) in Zemianske Kostolány on **5–15 June 2018**.

Training TS OPCW Inspectors on chemical warfare agents at VTC RCHBO in Zemianske Kostolány on **8–12 October 2018**.

Laboratory skills course for advanced students at the Reference Chemical Laboratory in Zemianske Kostolány on **12–23 November 2018**.

Voluntary EU financial contribution of €30,000 for OPCW to support the construction of the new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology at the Hague in **December 2018**. Slovakia was a member of the OPCW Executive Board for two years – serving as VERS vice-chair from **12 May 2016 to 11 May 2018**, and **12 May 2017 to 11 May 2018** respectively.

DYNAMIC VISEGRAD FOR EUROPE

SLOVAK PRESIDENCY 2018/2019 OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

▲
In July 2018, the Slovak Republic began its fifth Visegrad Four presidency. The aim is to deliver tangible results in three areas – a strong Europe, a safe environment and smart solutions

REGIONAL AND BILATERAL COOPERATION

4

In addition to Slovakia's multilateral diplomatic activities last year, we interacted with neighbouring states and within the regional initiatives and bilateral relations that form the basis of the work of any foreign service. As ever, relations with neighbours which form the key geopolitical micro-region for Slovakia were most important to us. Slovakia was equally active in the Western Balkans, supporting progress on the Eastern Partnership agenda and cultivating bilateral ties with countries that have had and still have major political, security or economic significance for us.

REGIONAL PLATFORMS

Visegrad cooperation was a priority regional format for Slovakia in 2018 as well, enabling to engage in systematic coordination and more effectively pursue common positions within the EU. After assuming the V4 Presidency from Hungary on 1 July 2018, Slovakia began emphasizing the need to strengthen the internal dynamics, competitiveness, security and cohesion of the Visegrad region as an integral part of the EU. We focused on three main priorities: a strong Europe, a safe environment and intelligent solutions. The philosophy



▲ The V4 presidents discussed the situation in Europe, migration, Brexit and Russia at the two-day summit, Štrbské pleso, 11–12 October 2018 (Photo: Office of the President of the SR)



▲ Discussions at a joint meeting of Slovak and Czech government officials concerned bilateral relations as well as joint events marking important anniversaries in 2018, Košice, 17 September 2018 (Photo: Office of the Government of the SR)

of our presidency is to shape the V4 as a constructive pro-European group with a healthy critical outlook, that helps to address the challenges and issues facing the European community. This approach is being successfully applied through initiatives and projects undertaken by Visegrad and other European partners, as well as through pragmatic and dynamic cooperation in the V4 + format.

In 2018, regional cooperation continued in the complementary Slavkov format comprising the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and Austria, following a work plan drawn up by Slovakia and adopted under Austria's informal leadership of the Slavkov format. It related to transport infrastructure, dual education, industry 4.0, energy security and consultation on European affairs. In 2018, the Slavkov format was bolstered by a parliamentary dimension, with the holding of the first tripartite meeting of the heads of parliaments.



▲ With Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó discussion topics included cross-border cooperation, transport infrastructure and energy projects, Bratislava, 17 October 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR)

OUR NEIGHBOURS

In 2018, amid the focus on the joint celebrations and important anniversaries of the Slovak Republic and **Czech Republic**, it was declared that the founding of the first Czechoslovak Republic was of indisputable historical and political significance, underlining the uniquely peaceful separation of a common state and the 25 years of exceptionally close relations between our republics. These anniversaries held special value for the Slovak foreign service. It was the diplomats who, at the critical moment, worked hard to preserve the legal continuity of Czechoslovakia and gained international support for the restoration of the republic after the Second World War. Despite the traumas of the twentieth century, close civil, cultural and human ties have developed between the Slovak and Czech nations. The great dynamism with which meetings are held at the highest political level stems directly from these ties. The 6th joint governmental meeting in Košice brought political, economic and cultural projects to improve quality of life and the security of our citizens. Last year, for example, saw the expansion of the legal framework for bilateral cooperation through the implementation of the agreement on the mutual protection of airspace and the memorandum of cooperation on joint support for the intelligent cities strategy.

In 2018, constructive relations were maintained with **Hungary**. Our interests remained unchanged. We worked on further cultivating Slovak–Hungarian cooperation, and a range of activities at the high political level contributed to this. Cooperation focused on a positive agenda and the implementation of projects bringing benefits to citizens of both countries. Further progress was made in expanding and improving the cross-border transport infrastructure through the building of the Komárno–Komárom bridge and the completion of the M15–D2 motorway. Improving energy security was seen as



▲ On his first official visit to Poland, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini held talks with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Warsaw, 25 April 2018 (Photo: Office of the Government of the SR)



▲ Austria's new Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl chose Slovakia as the destination of her first trip abroad, Bratislava, 9 January 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

an equally important component of cooperation, in terms of building network connections that are in the interest of both countries and the Visegrad region as a whole.

Where **Poland** is concerned, 2018 was a year in which cooperation based on good neighbourly relations and partnership dialogue continued, reflected in the frequent and very productive mutual visits, which are becoming an increasingly important part of structured inter-parliamentary cooperation, and in the joint meetings of the Slovak and Polish governments. A positive shift occurred in the area of transport and energy infrastructure development, including strategic north–south connections: the launch of construction on the



▲ At a meeting with President Peter Poroshenko, the Minister stressed Slovakia's unconditional support regarding Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, Kyiv, 4 October 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR)

gas interconnector, the signing of intergovernmental agreements on connecting road transport infrastructure, in particular road projects under Via Carpathia.

Relations with **Austria** were very good last year. Differences in opinion on the indexation of family allowances and the long-term view on nuclear energy in no way restricted mutual cooperation. Bilateral contacts and high level visits increased, including multi-party meetings between the three most senior officials in Slovakia and Austria. The fact that Austria's new foreign minister chose Bratislava as her first destination points to the quality of mutual relations between the two countries.



▲ Minister Miroslav Lajčák and his German counterpart Heiko Maas signed the bilateral Action Plan for a Deep Dialogue, which sets out the framework for regular expert dialogue, Berlin, 27 November 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ During his visit, French President Emmanuel Macron thanked Slovakia for her constructive attitudes and support in resolving European issues, Bratislava, 26 October 2018 (Photo: Office of the President of the SR)

We have long had good relations with **Ukraine**, who as our biggest neighbour continued to be a very important partner last year. Slovakia recognizes and supports Ukraine in her Euro-Atlantic aspirations and integration prospects. It was good to see the volume of mutual trade increasing last year, returning to the level it was at before the military conflict began in Ukraine. However, the most pressing challenge is still the ongoing conflict in the east of Ukraine and the potential impact it could have on Slovak interests. Slovakia supports the restoration of full sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, condemns the annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Donbas, and insists on the full implementation of the Minsk Protocols. During our OSCE presidency, the priority will be on resolving the conflict. Ukraine is our

neighbour, and we must therefore take advantage of this unique opportunity. Our continuing objective is to develop and deepen political contact that will lead to the expansion of trade and economic cooperation and to closer relations in energy, transport and education.

STRATEGIC EUROPEAN PARTNERS

Slovakia viewed the EU as an overall framework for interacting with all the member states. Traditionally, Bratislava's most important partners have been mainly Berlin and Paris.

Germany's position as a strategic partner in the political and economic spheres was attested by the foreign ministers signing the Action Plan for a deeper dialogue in 2019–2021 on 27 November 2018 in Berlin. This allowed us to further structure and regularise cooperation between our ministries and other actors in priority areas. It thus strengthens institutional relations between the two countries' ministries without incurring further administrative burdens. Germany is our key partner and ally in the fields of foreign policy, security and the economy, as testified by the importance of German economic investments in Slovakia. Similarly, Germany sees Slovakia as a reliable pro-European actor in the Central European region. We are extremely keen to maintain the annual bilateral meetings between senior officials and the extensive mutual communication between the two countries.

Where **France** is concerned, 2018 was a year in which we succeeded in maintaining the dynamism in intercultural relations and cooperation on deepening EU integration. During his visit to France in June 2018, Slovak Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini signed the 2018–2022 Strategic Partner-



▲ President Andrej Kiska and his entourage being received by Pope Francis. After spending time with Pope Francis, he met with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin and Secretary for Relations with States Mons. Paul Richard Gallagher, the Vatican, 14 December 2018 (Photo: Office of the President of the SR)

ship Action Plan, allowing for the deepening of cooperation in several areas. Another important event was the visit by President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron to Bratislava on 26 October 2018, which had a strong pro-European dimension. The exceptional level of parliamentary contacts was confirmed by a visit by the friendship group of the National Assembly of the French Republic to Slovakia in March 2018, by a meeting between Speaker of the Slovak National Council Andrej Danko and President of the Senate of the French Republic Gérard Larcher in Paris on 14–15 November 2018 and the meeting between the speakers of parliament in the V4 + France and Germany format in Bratislava at the end of 2018.

TRANSATLANTIC ALLIES

In relations with the **United States**, we drew attention to the importance of continuing the transatlantic dialogue. We support a strong partnership between Brussels and Washington, which is based on shared values, goals and strongly established ties. It is our view that Europe has a natural interest in overcoming existing differences. We must continue to listen to each other and align our attitudes on issues that are

important to both sides of the Atlantic, and where more can be achieved together than through unilateral moves. Slovakia's pursuit of functional and mutually beneficial transatlantic cooperation with the United States can be seen in the joint cooperation with the Slovak Armed Forces in NATO missions and the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry and the USAID Development Agency in November 2018. The main areas of practical cooperation on military issues were the modernization of the Slovak Air Force, joint military exercises and the close contact with the Indiana National Guard and the US Armed Forces in Europe. The political dialogue on the stabilization of Ukraine, the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan countries and the fight against hybrid threats and strategic communication also grew in importance.

We also see transatlantic cooperation in terms of our bilateral ties with **Canada**. Slovakia's participation in the Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic Region under Canada's lead contributed significantly to the cultivation of Slovak–Canadian relations in the field of security and defence. Cooperation between Ottawa and Brussels also enhances cooperation on key issues of transatlantic dialogue, including security and trade.



▲ In Washington D.C. Minister Miroslav Lajčák and his US counterpart Michael R. Pompeo discussed bilateral relations, meeting the Wales NATO Summit commitments and the situation in Ukraine in the context of Slovakia's upcoming OSCE Presidency. The Minister also emphasized the importance of continuing the transatlantic dialogue, 14 November 2018 (Photo: US State Department)



▲ During talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov, Minister Miroslav Lajčák discussed the OSCE Chairmanship, trade cooperation, and energy. The Minister also raised the case of imprisoned Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov, Moscow, 9 October 2018 (Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation)

EASTERN POLICY

The most important event in 2018 in relation to the six **Eastern Partnership** countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) was the official launch in March 2018 in Brussels of the new multilateral architecture of the Eastern Partnership. This provides an arena for the more rapid implementation of the 20 targets for 2020 agreed at the Riga summit in 2017. The EU member states and partner countries succeeded in making good progress

on all the key cooperation platforms – strengthening institutions and good governance; economic development and the market; connectivity, energy efficiency and climate change; mobility and people-to-people contacts – before the EU–Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting in Luxembourg in October 2018. The Slovak Republic implemented projects in the priority countries of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, where it managed to successfully engage civil society, small and medium-sized enterprises and others in the process.



▲ State Secretary František Ružička handed over €125,000 in aid to fund rehabilitation stays for 200 people affected by the conflict in Ukraine, 23 November 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Minister Miroslav Lajčák’s October working visit to **Russia** led to an open exchange of views and pointed to mutual interest in maintaining the dynamism in relations, focusing on commerce and trade and the development of interpersonal contacts. Projects were reviewed at the 19th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission for Trade, Economic and Scientific Cooperation in Tatranská Lomnica. Interparliamentary dialogue also continued at the highest level. Slovakia’s foreign policy on Russia will continue to be centred on the EU’s five guiding principles. It is on this basis that we support the development of bilateral relations with a focus on results. The lack of progress on compliance with the Minsk Agreements is a hindrance and led to the imposition of EU sanctions against Russia. Another disruptive factor that led to a deterioration in relations between the Russian Federation and the EU and NATO countries was the use of a chemical warfare agent in the United Kingdom. The Slovak Republic responded by temporarily withdrawing the Slovak Ambassador in Russia and by summoning the Ambassador



▲ State Secretary Ivan Korčok visited the Western Balkans Fund headquarters in Tirana during his official visit to Albania, Tirana, 7 March 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR)



▲ Ivan Korčok and President of Montenegro Filip Vujanović discussed EU integration of Montenegro which is the leader of this process in the Western Balkans, Podgorica, 20 February 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR)

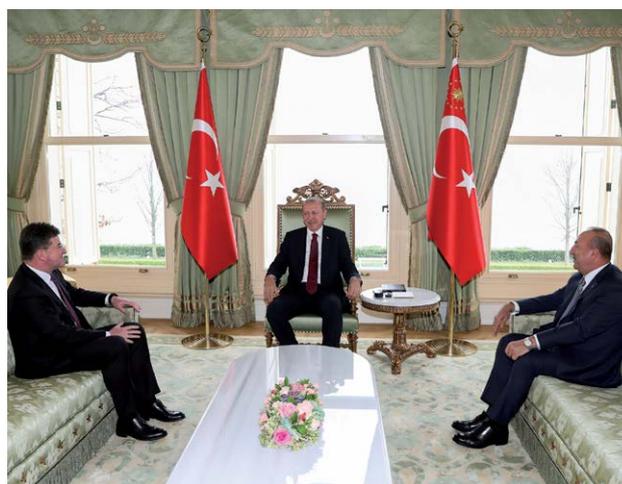
of the Russian Federation to the Ministry. Slovakia continues to share the concern of EU and NATO partners at the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in relation to restrictions on the freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov. Slovakia seeks to calm the situation and encourage both parties to pursue a negotiated solution in compliance with international law and bilateral agreements. At the end of 2018, bilateral relations with Russia were marked by the expulsion of a Russian diplomat from the Slovak Republic, to which Russia responded reciprocally.

SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Slovakia believes that the **Western Balkan** countries are an integral part of the European area and share a future with us. We are also of the opinion that each of the Western Balkan countries aspiring to membership in the elite European club need to fulfil their commitments. Without that, membership is unthinkable. However, until the Western Balkan countries become EU members, the enlargement process cannot be seen to have been successfully completed. That is why Slovakia welcomed the publication in February 2018 of the European Commission's strategy, "A credible enlargement perspective for an enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans". The strategy gives 2025 as the indicative date for further EU enlargement. In May 2018, an EU–Western Balkans Summit took place in Bulgaria. We continued to share our transformation and integration expertise in areas relevant to the modernization of partner countries. We sought to deepen cooperation on digital technologies and innovation, especially with our partners in Serbia. In October 2018, a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of innovation, innovative digitalization and technology transfer was concluded between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for Investments and Informatization and the Government of the Republic of Serbia—Cabinet of the Minister for Innovation and

Technological Development. Economic contacts with Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia have also been improved. In an effort to better help countries facing the challenges posed by migratory pressures, Slovakia sent 60 police officers to Macedonia and 40 to Serbia. In Macedonia work continued on the National Convention on the EU in Macedonia project.

In our relations with **Turkey**, Slovakia maintained open communication. No progress was made on Turkey's EU accession process to the EU; that is, no new negotiation chapters were opened. However, the March 2016 migration agreement continued successfully, making a major contribution to reducing the influx of refugees and economic migrants across Turkey and into the EU. Slovakia would like to see a functional dialogue between the EU and Turkey, based on European values and common interests.



▲ The Minister outlined the intentions and priorities of Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ankara, 26 November 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

INVEST IN SLOVAKIA

GOOD IDEA

▲ Slovakia is one of the most dynamic economies in the world and offers investors a unique combination of reasons to invest in the country

FOREIGN SERVICE'S ECONOMIC TOOLSET

5

Economic diplomacy is one of Slovakia's foreign policy priorities. It is an important means of fostering economic development and an inherent part of the work of all Slovakia's embassies and consulates, and it is a natural complement to the European, security, bilateral and regional aspects of Slovakia's foreign and European policy, and this applied in 2018 as well.

SLOVAKIA AND THE ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In May 2018, the Council of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) approved Slovakia's Presidency of the OECD Council in 2019. Our work with the OECD was aided by the participation of José Ángel Gurría, OECD Secretary General in the Tatra Summit in October

2018 in the High Tatras. He also met with Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini and participated in the meetings between the finance ministers of the Visegrad Four countries, Austria, Germany and France on the digital economy. In 2018, the OECD worked with Slovakia in preparing its Economic Outlook of the Slovak Republic, which provides, among other things, the OECD view of Slovakia's macroeconomic development, focusing on two sectoral themes: improvements to Slovakia's position in global value chains and the inclusion of marginalized Roma communities. In 2018, Slovakia chaired a round table on the competitiveness of Eurasia. A number of significant events were organized in Bratislava in 2018, including a conference on Risk Assessment and Management Tools in the Agro-Food Sector and the 25th Annual Meeting of the OECD Green Action Task Force, to which the V4 countries, Romania, Bulgaria and the European Commission and European Investment Bank were invited.



▲ Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini and Finance Minister Peter Kažimír at a meeting with OECD Secretary-General José Ángel Gurría during the GLOBSEC Tatra Summit 2018, Bratislava, 5 October 2018 (Photo: Tomáš Halasz)



▲ On 19 June 2018, the Ministry became a member of the Digital Coalition of Slovakia platform, Bratislava (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ The ceremonious opening of a branch of ESET in collaboration with the Japanese company Canon IT Solutions took place in Tokyo, on 13 September 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR)

BILATERAL DIMENSION OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

The numerous business missions accompanying the official visits were an important economic diplomacy tool. Within Europe, the missions of significance were those organized around President Andrej Kiska's visits to Norway and Slovenia, focusing on modern technologies and innovations. The outcome of his working visit to the US was the deepening of cooperation between Slovak IT and US automotive industry companies, as well as with companies working in information technology, science and research, artificial intelligence and innovative resources. As part of the celebrations for the centenary of Czechoslovakia, the 60th International Engineering Fair was held in Brno in October 2018, and was attended by the prime ministers of Slovakia and Czechia. Exhibits included the Slovak National Stand and Export House, and there was a Made in Czechoslovakia conference on the export of Czech-Slovak goods to third countries.

THE ASIAN ECONOMIC SPACE AND ITS GROWING IMPORTANCE

Non-EU countries are also important to developing economic cooperation. Asia is growing in importance as a fi-



▲ A meeting of the Slovak Government Council for Export and Investment Promotion was held at the Ministry, Bratislava, 21 November 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

ancial and economic centre. It is also increasingly important geopolitically and in international relations. The region not only represents an alternative market but is also a potential source of labour and foreign investment. Slovakia's priority is to maintain existing investments whilst attracting high value investments in science, research and innovation, as well as electromobility. We are particularly keen to develop cooperation with Asian countries with strong investment potential, such as the Republic of Korea, Japan and India. Deepening science and technology cooperation and the knowledge economy are other focal points. Labour mobility is also important and something we are planning to focus on as part of Slovak government strategy. We are also interested in exploiting the potential of the Belt and Road initiative, particularly by strengthening the link between Europe and China, including the use of Slovak transport capacities (railways, intermodal terminals), and in achieving a better trade balance by creating suitable conditions for the export of Slovak products, such as food and agricultural products, to the Asian market. We continued to develop cooperation between Slovakia and China via the 16+1 format and, as part of innovation, we are responsible for the 16+1 Virtual Centre for Transfer of Technology and Secretariat in Bratislava. In June 2018, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini attended the 7th prime ministerial meeting in this format which was held in Sofia, where two agreements were signed on cooperation with the 16+1 Inter-bank Association. These were signed by Eximbanka on behalf of Slovakia. Slovakia's long-term focus within the 16+1 format is on science, technology and innovation. Other prospective areas of cooperation include rail transport, food and establishing an efficient and secure electronic system for exchanging information on e-customs goods.

DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

Slovakia's key partners were the EU member states accounting for more than 76 per cent of our trade. Cooperation



▲ Slovak Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini opened a joint business forum with Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Bakytjan Sagintayev, Astana, 15 November 2018 (Photo: Office of the Government of the SR)



▲ President Andrej Kiska speaking at the Building Smarter Cities seminar during the first ever official visit to the Kingdom of Norway, Oslo, 4 April 2018 (Photo: Office of the President of the SR)

between the V4 countries was centred around the need to ensure that economic cooperation addresses the EU's current issues and needs in the context of global competition. Specific actions were taken to make industrial policy more effective, strengthen innovation capacities and ensure new technologies are more rapidly introduced into manufacturing and general use. The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) was another regional platform on which Slovakia was represented. A Slovak delegation led by President Andrej Kiska participated in the 3rd 3SI summit in September 2018 in Bucharest, where we indicated to our partners that we considered 3SI a potential vehicle for pragmatic cooperation on some projects, particularly in the area of infrastructure development.

WORK MOBILITY, ENERGY SECURITY AND INNOVATIVE DIPLOMACY

The Ministry was involved in developing the Strategy for Labour Mobility of Foreigners in Slovakia which was approved by the Slovak government in October 2018. It proposes a new approach to tackling labour shortages in

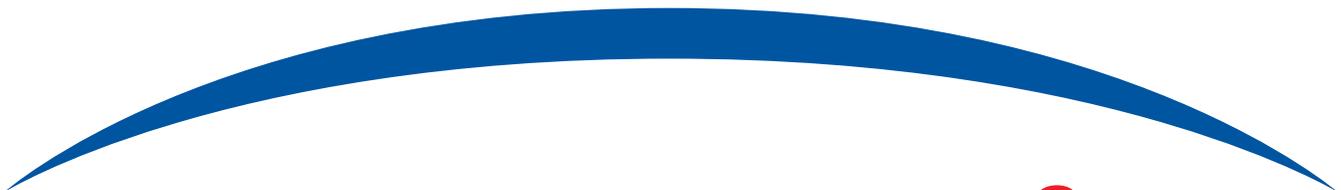
Slovakia through controlled migration, and represents a completely new cross-cutting workstream in economic diplomacy. The idea is that job sectors the Slovak labour market is unable to fill are promoted abroad. Energy security was another important sectoral issue in 2018. A key issue was the planned construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, over which question marks remain. Slovak diplomats repeatedly emphasized the necessity of retaining the Ukrainian transit corridor and of using the transit infrastructure that that traverses Slovakia Slovakia. On 28 November 2018, the Slovak government approved a pilot project to secure the institutional basis of Slovak innovation diplomacy to enable Slovakia to work more closely with countries with a high level of science, research and innovation. Good of effective cooperation takes place with scientific centres abroad such as the Slovak Innovation Liaison Office in Otaniemi, Finland and the Slovak American Business and Innovation Council in the US. Recently the Slovak-Israeli Scientific and Innovation Society launched its activities. Cooperation with Israel – a technology centre of global importance – was undertaken within the V4 format as part of InnovatorsV4, a pilot programme for providing support to innovative companies and start-ups.



▲ The first regular Georgian Airways flight was greeted at the airport by State Secretary Lukáš Parížek, Bratislava, 26 March 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ At the 12th Central European Energy Conference, Maroš Šefčovič discussed the Energy Union with the energy ministers of the V4 countries, Bratislava, 19 November 2018 (Photo: SFPA)



SlovakAid

GOOD IDEA SLOVAKIA

▲ Slovakia has been helping developing countries around the world for 15 years under the SlovakAid brand. The SlovakAid brand increases Slovakia's visibility as a successful country that cares about development in partner countries. Slovakia is a small donor country that concentrates on areas where it can make a difference in partner countries that have limited financial resources

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND HUMANITARIAN AID

6

The Slovak Republic's work in development cooperation and humanitarian aid represents a long-term commitment to supporting sustainable development in partner countries and to making better use of traditional models of development cooperation. The Slovak Republic's priority is to support projects that have tangible outcomes and a multiplying effect that positively impacts people's lives in third countries. It is partly through these bilateral instruments that we wish to play a role in meeting the 17 sustainable development goals of the UN Agenda 2030, which constitute part of multilateral solutions to global challenges. The Slovak Republic is also interested in promoting local economic development, including through the creation of self-sustaining economic models where appropriate.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Slovakia's main focus was on addressing the causes of migration, eradicating poverty and promoting respect for human rights as well as helping establish the principles of democracy and rule of law in partner countries as part of our efforts to fulfil the goals of sustainable development.

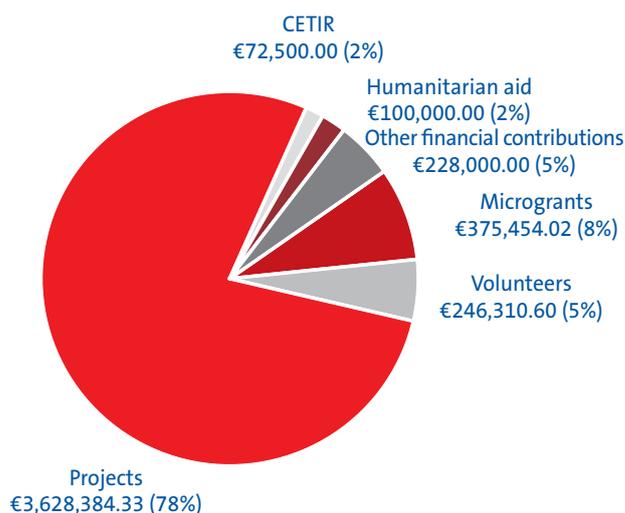
A key moment was our first ever review of Slovak ODA by the OECD Development Assistance Committee, where the aim was to obtain recommendations for further streamlining. The OECD experts concluded that the SlovakAid brand has satisfactory visibility, a good reputation and is associated with a high degree of professionalism, despite the limited administrative and budgetary capabilities. Thanks to Slovakia's energetic ac-



Volunteer project supported by SlovakAid in Kenya – computer class in Malindi (Photo: MFEA SR)



▲ Slovakia is the first former US aid recipient country in the region to have concluded a Memorandum of Understanding on International Development Cooperation with the US administration, Washington, D.C. 14 November 2018 (Photo: USAID)



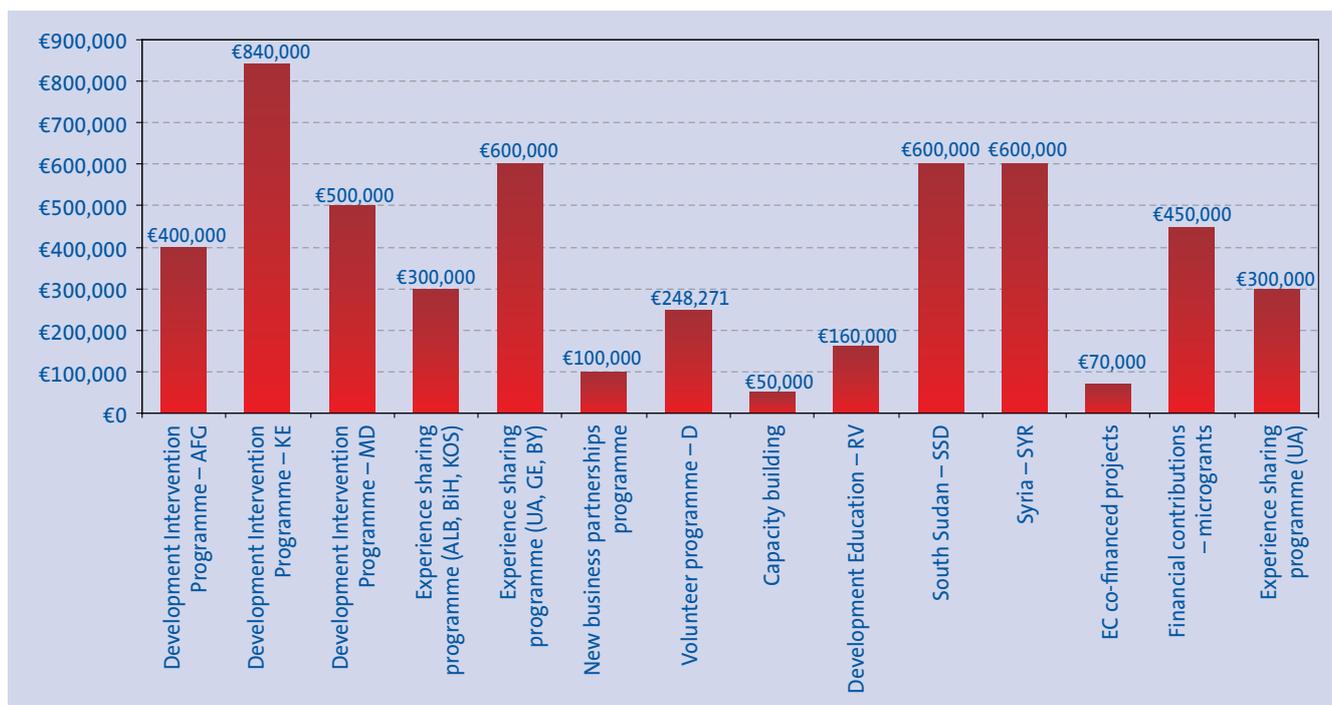
▲ Subsidies and contributions in 2018 – €4,775,648.95 in total

tivity on the international political scene, we rank among the reliable donors.

The OECD conclusions and recommendations formed the basis of the new Medium-term Strategy of Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019–2023. The OECD called on Slovakia to commit to allocating 0.33 per cent of GNI to ODA by 2030, to strengthen the staffing capacities of Slovak development cooperation actors, to gradually extend the allocation of subsidies to foreign development aid actors, to increase the range of actors in development cooperation, especially in the private sector, and to seek innovative forms of cooperation.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Implementing Agenda 2030 was one of the main priorities of Minister Miroslav Lajčák in his role as President of the 72nd UN General Assembly, and also reflected Slovakia's national commitment to voluntarily present a national progress report on fulfilling the sustainable development goals to the UN in July 2018. Out of the 190 countries that have adopted Agenda 2030, 67 countries have presented reports. Slovakia also benefited from OECD assistance in implementing the Agenda 2030 SDGs particularly in drafting the national sustainable development strategy and national investment plan. Slovakia



▲ Allocated through tenders in 2018 – €5,218,271

continued working with the OECD to help implement large-scale bilateral projects on improving the integrity of public administration and fighting against corruption in the use of EU funds. At the end of 2018, joint consultations were held with the OECD on a comprehensive project to improve the national skills training system, known as the National Skills Strategy.

PARTNERSHIPS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Equally important in 2018 was the development of partnerships with foreign donors and international organizations actively engaged in development cooperation. The first ever international development cooperation partnership was concluded between the Ministry and the American development agency USAID in November 2018. Partnership agreements were also concluded with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These partnerships significantly enhanced the reach and visibility of the SlovakAid programme, improved its status among the world's donors and strengthened its capacity.

STREAMLINING THE DELIVERY SYSTEM

In 2018 an opportunity arose to further streamline the development assistance system through amending Act



▲ Integra Foundation used SlovakAid support to provide health care services in the Iraqi governorates of Kirkuk and Nineveh for 40,000 returnees (Photo: Integra Foundation)

No. 392/2015 Coll. on development cooperation as well as through the preparations for adopting a new strategic framework for development cooperation and humanitarian aid. This was aimed at achieving results whilst meeting sustainable goals. The decision to focus on projects targeting the causes of migration, improving social conditions, educating young people in collaboration with local non-governmental or international partners in African countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Libya as well as in the Middle East facing the consequences of military conflict proved to be right one.



▲ The seventh humanitarian shipment was dispatched to the war-afflicted Afghan population. The aid is intended for children from the Afghan city of Mazār-e Sharīf following the construction of a primary school financed from SlovakAid resources (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ Minister Miroslav Lajčák in Palugyay Palace receiving compatriots attending the 13th Standing Conference – Slovakia and Slovaks Living Abroad on 26-27 October 2018. The conference was organized by the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad and under the auspices of the Minister, Bratislava, 26 October 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

CONSULAR SERVICES AND COMPATRIOTS

In 2018, the priorities in looking after citizens and compatriots continued to be the provision of effective consular assistance, protecting our citizens abroad, especially in emergency and crisis situations, including through the timely provision of travel information and recommendations. One of the outcomes of our continued support for Slovak communities abroad in 2018 was a whole range of innovative activities for Slovaks living and doing business abroad.

PRIORITIES OF CONSULAR SERVICES

In 2018, one of the most important tasks of our consular service was again to ensure the provision of high quality consular services for citizens abroad, both through the embas-

sies and consulates and from headquarters. In addition to the usual consular activities, we concentrated on providing consular protection to citizens in need. In 2018, cooperation between EU member states was greatly strengthened by the entry into force of the EU regulation on the consular protection of unrepresented EU member states in third countries. For the network of Slovak embassies and consulates abroad, this was an important means of providing help to Slovak citizens in third countries where Slovakia has no embassy or consulate. In 2018, the use of electronic consular services was expanded through the embassies, with electronic modules being launched in 63 of the 72 embassies authorized to perform consular services, and to a more limited extent in the remaining nine. We continued to provide consular services through our mobile consular days in countries with large widespread Slovak communities.



Secretary-General of the Ministry's Service Office Pavol Sýkorčin signed a Cooperation Agreement on Data Collection and Visa Applications with Christopher J. Dix, on behalf of VFS Global, Bratislava, 5 November 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ A press conference on the summer tourist season was aimed at providing Slovaks with information and practical advice before travelling abroad, Bratislava, 12 June 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

EASIER VISA PROCESSING

As our long-term goal is to make life easier for visa applicants in areas far from an embassy, in 2018 we again provided external assistance for collecting data and applications for Schengen visas. The service was expanded from the original

two destinations to a total of ten destinations in Asia and Africa. The Ministry's contractual partner VFS Global began providing visa services at 38 visa centres in December 2018. Last year, an agreement with the Netherlands on providing visas on behalf of the Slovak Republic in Mali, Qatar, Senegal and Suriname came into force. The agreement whereby Hungary represents the Slovak Republic in Vietnam and Ecuador was also extended.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

In 2018, crisis management underwent an implementation phase of fundamental reform. The aim was to create, adapt and connect the existing processes of internal crisis management and consular assistance, beyond routine work, to produce a coordinated and consolidated centralized approach to consular crisis management and to handling its main target group, which is Slovak citizens. In an effort to respond adequately to current trends in crisis management, the Ministry is paying particular attention to the preventable consequences of risks stemming from exceptional events and to improving early warning systems for predictable threats. In order to improve the fulfilment of crisis management aims, there is greater emphasis on the increasing demand for targeted and permanent monitoring of the security situation and continual comprehensive assessment.



▲ On 24 April 2018, the fourth meeting of the Government Council for Expat Affairs took place at the Ministry (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

COOPERATION WITH SLOVAKS ABROAD

In 2018, Slovakia continued to take an active approach to fulfilling its tasks in policies relating to Slovaks abroad. The work of the Government Council for Expatriate Issues, which is the relevant governmental consultative advisory body, was of great benefit. The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad organized its 13th Standing Conference – Slovakia and Slovaks Living Abroad, which was attended by around 90 participants from 18 different countries. It also continued to issue Slovak Living Abroad Certificates, which are still very popular. From 1 January to 31 December 2018, it issued 2,371 certificates.

A positive example of cooperation in this area in 2018 was relations with the Slovak community in the United States, particularly in the context of the centenaries of the signing of the Pittsburgh Agreement and the birth of Czechoslovakia and the 25th anniversary of Slovak independence. Another popular aspect of our work in 2018 was our support for members of the Slovak national minority in Serbia seeking to pursue their language rights in relation to education, culture, communicating with the authorities, and the receipt of information. The aim was to help the community develop their linguistic, cultural and national identity, to



▲ President Andrej Kiska received the 100 honorary consuls who represent Slovakia abroad at the Presidential Palace, Bratislava, 23 October 2018 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

share the values of the cultural heritage of the Slovak community with people in Slovakia and to create conditions to develop relations between Slovaks living abroad and Slovaks living in Slovakia, the land of their ancestors.

Comparison of consular activities in 2014–2018

TYPE OF CONSULAR SERVICE/ACTIVITY	Year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Consular assistance for Slovak citizens in need	3,460	4,079	4,073	3,885	5,490
Certifications performed at embassies abroad (including translations)	38,033	43,669	47,875	51,209	44,029
Certifications performed by the Ministry's legalization department	4,319 (of which 726 apostilles)	4,359 (of which 745 apostilles)	4,118 (of which 885 apostilles)	5,247 (of which 1,047 apostilles)	4,680 (of which 1,070 apostilles)
Passport applications	13,556	14,430	14,695	15,384	13,856
Diplomatic and service passports	642 + 396	558 + 270	685 + 478	691 + 604	604 + 457
Identity cards	978	1,332	1,081	3,691	3,245
Driving licences	545	615	618	685	579
Registry records and applications	8,122	8,087	8,324	8,253	7,779
Slovak citizenship certificates/confirmations	2,226	2,387	2,368	2,418	2,427
Slovak citizenship applications	23	71	76	159	136
Renunciation of Slovak citizenship	194	65	140	231	264
Criminal record extracts	1,005	950	848	1,327	1,533
Accompanying letters for the transport of physical remains	84	49	67	63	75
Varying types of assistance relating to the death of a Slovak citizen abroad	755	770	803	826	917
Replacement travel documents for Slovak citizens	4,326	5,324	5,039	4,447	4,354
Marriages performed at embassies	40	32	28	38	34
Replies to email requests for information	58,935	77,653	86,232	78,625	88,610
Total number of selected consular actions	137,639	164,700	177,548	177,783	179,069
Visa applications	106,417	77,921	64,958	44,540	29,788
Visa applications on behalf of other states	1,259	1,706	1,175	1,406	1,262
Income from visa fees	2,652,801	1,994,227.50	1,576,163.00	1,271,710.66	1,096,867.59
Income from consular fees	1,291,187	1,507,859.50	1,722,614.50	2,142,302.95	1,921,744.17
Total income	3,943,989	3,502,087.00	3,298,777.50	3,414,013.61	3,018,611.76



▲ In 2018, the Minister continued the tradition of presenting the Goodwill Envoy award, given to individuals who have promoted the Slovak Republic abroad, through their work, professional achievements, sport or cultural and social achievements. It is awarded to Slovak citizens who have lived abroad for many years and made their name through their own work and success (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

8

The goal of public diplomacy last year was to communicate more energetically with the public both at home and abroad. The dialogue on the priorities and values of Slovakia's foreign and European policy was aimed at raising public awareness and strengthening links with both the expert and non-expert public. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs communicates its key messages using a wide variety of tried-and-tested tools and more recent innovative ones. The

fact that 2018 was a successful year for public diplomacy is demonstrated in the fact that active engagement with the general public reinforced a positive view of Slovakia as an authentic, modern dynamic country full of good ideas that is an integral part of the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

It was also a year of many important historical anniversaries – the centenary of the birth of Czechoslovakia, the



▲ Ceremonial opening of the *A. Dubček – A Slovak who gave hope to freedom* exhibition in Nicosia, Beijing and Ankara to mark the 50th anniversary of the Czechoslovak revival process (Photo: MFEA SR)



▲ *A story of an image: bare-chested man in front of the tank*, an exhibition held in Warsaw, Prague and Sofia (Photo: MFEA SR)



▲ Book presentation of *People First – Reflections on the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly* (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

50th anniversary of the Czechoslovak revival process and the 25th anniversary of the Slovak Republic's independence – and so it was a unique public diplomacy opportunity to stress the important messages for today's generations. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic aimed its activities at foreign audiences through its network of Slovak embassies and consulates around the world and their various PR activities. Thus it was possible to take full advantage of the anniversaries. Thanks to the cooperation with our Czech partners, the Ministry was able to organize more than 80 expert events involving historians, specialists, non-governmental organizations and the public at large. This was accompanied by over 200 cultural events promoting the Slovak Republic abroad. To achieve our aims, the Ministry created a whole series of materials with a strong focus, such as a *Slovaks through the century* pamphlet, a photographic exhibition on *M. R. Štefánik – Great Slovak and European diplomat*, an exhibition called *A story of an image: bare-chested man in front of the tank*, a book titled *A. Dubček: A Slovak who gave hope to freedom* and many others. Thus the Ministry was able to raise public awareness of key historical events using social networks and through the Ministry and embassy websites.

In 2018, we continued our constructive dialogue with non-governmental non-profit organizations, focusing especially on organizations whose work is within the scope of public diplomacy funded by the grant mechanism of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Foreign Policy is a webzine that the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs uses to keep the public up-to-date about the latest issues in foreign and European policy, international relations and obtain feedback. The Ministry works with non-governmental organizations including on *MemoGym*, an educational project aimed at strengthening historical memory within the context of European values. It is designed to appeal especially to young audiences and was funded by the Ministry's grant scheme and run under the auspices of the public diplomacy section. *MemoGym: Strengthening the European Memory* project was targeted at the younger generation and was part of a whole series of #MYSMEEU discussions held in several university cities in Slovakia. The discussions between officials from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and secondary school and university students provide for lively discussion and the exchange of views on topical issues the Ministry is involved in that also appeal to young people.

All the public diplomacy activities carried out in 2018 adhered to the brand concept of the Slovak Republic. Public diplomacy continued to sub-licence the use of the Slovak brand by other relevant bodies as part of brand promotion. Information exchanged in an attempt to harmonize the activities of the organizations involved in promoting Slovakia abroad was done under the Inter-ministerial Working Group for the Coordinated Presentation of the



▲ Nominated by Minister Miroslav Lajčák, Olympian Daniela Barteková will represent Slovakia on the European Young Leaders Programme 2019 (Photo: MFEA SR)



▲ Discussion at the Ministry with students from the Dutch University of Twent (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ Screening of the film “From Slovakia With Love” for primary and secondary school students, including an interactive competition, supported by the Department of Diplomacy (Photo: MFEA SR/Kristína Spišáková)

Slovak Republic. As part of the promotional activities aimed at increasing Slovakia’s visibility, international sporting events remained a part of sport diplomacy. The Ministry worked closely with the Slovak Olympic Committee and the Slovak Ice Hockey Association. Successful collaboration helped Slovak Olympian Danka Barteková win a place representing the Slovak Republic next year on the Young European Leader programme for young professionals. She was officially nominated by Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák.

Building Slovak Republic's image abroad is something that cannot be done without the help of the Slovak people. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs keenly watches, and indeed recognizes, the achievements of Slovaks living abroad. Therefore, last year, the Ministry again organized the Goodwill Envoy Award but this time the backdrop was the 25th anniversary of Slovak independence. The concept was promoted by *Party in the Twenty-first Century* art projects, showcasing Slovak culture, art and traditions around the world under the Good Idea Slovakia brand.

An interactive way of promoting Slovakia was through the use of special Oculus 3D glasses to provide a virtual 3D tour of the most interesting places in the Slovak Republic. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs not only hired out the glasses, but supplied the embassies with 95,000 copies of various print materials promoting the Slovak Republic.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

In 2018, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic created a basic platform for strategic communication activities relating to Slovakia’s foreign policy priorities around its #MYSMEEU and #WeAreNATO communication programmes. A series of national conventions on the future of the EU under #MYSMEEU followed on from the 2017 project, *Slovakia discusses the EU* and created an opportunity for a nationwide discussion and the formation of national positions on the EU’s priorities, challenges and future. The crowning event of #MYSMEEU was the public consultations on the EU’s future with French President Emmanuel Macron held on 26 October 2018 in Slovakia, the only Central European country involved.

Slovakia was one of five pilot countries to take part in the #WeAreNATO project aimed at increasing public awareness of the values, role and working of NATO. Slovak media representatives and civil society took part in consultations at NATO headquarters. We also lent significant support to the GLOBSEC and Slovak Security Forum conferences. The Slovak Republic participated in scientific collaboration with NATO, including the International Scientific Evaluation Group. In 2018, Slovakia submitted its first evaluation reports on cyber defence and resistance.

The Ministry stepped up its systematic online communication with the public through social networks, especially its



The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs stepped up its system of online public communication through social networks. Its “Foreign Policy Concerns Us” departmental profile on Facebook enabled young people to engage in direct discussions about the values and directions of Slovak foreign policy

separate Facebook profile “Foreign policy concerns us” where, young people in particular discussed the values and direction of Slovak foreign policy. In December 2018, we began coordinating the interministerial implementation of the EU Action Plan against Disinformation along with the agreed means of

ensuring free and fair European elections. As Slovakia will hold the OSCE Chairmanship in 2019, we also face the challenge of expanding our strategic communication to include the new #WeAreOSCE global policy pillar promoting Slovakia’s active membership of the Council of Europe and the United Nations.



Recipients of the Goodwill Envoy 2018 award were Nina Poláková, first soloist with the Vienna State Ballet, Peter Paulička, engineer and scientist working in Germany, and Ľudovít Kant, solo cellist with Japanese orchestra Kanazawa, Bratislava, 18 December 2018 (Photo:MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



MINISTERSTVO
ZAHRANIČNÝCH VECÍ
A EUROPŔSKÝCH ZÁLEŽITOSTÍ
SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY

MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE OFFICE



The professional foreign service has to continually adapt to change, and this demands greater flexibility and staff expertise. Therefore, last year we looked at how the diplomacy department has evolved and our efforts to ensure it reflects current trends in its 25th year of operation.

THE REFORM PROCESS

The main objective in reforming the Ministry was to make efficiencies in the internal processes of the foreign service both at headquarters and at the embassies. Looking back, we can conclude that this process is a long-term one. In the initial reform phase, the main foundations were to improve flexibility and make more efficient use of the Ministry's human resources, including creating tools to facilitate administrative processes and seeking ways of improving work conditions for foreign service staff. The Ministry reforms were seen primarily as an internal process that would enable us to hold up an imaginary mirror to our work and help us to continually improve the performance of the foreign service. They represented an opportunity for all employees to express themselves and to help find solutions to the issues raised.

Our internal advantage was that the Ministry knew how our partner ministries abroad functioned, and this provided us with a great deal of inspiration.

Part of the process was to identify our priorities and create a timetable for each step. We also analysed embassy staffing, tasks and costs. The results will be used by the Ministry to assess the network of embassies and consulates, categorize them objectively and analyse the potential for cooperation within the countries they operate in. In 2018 the Slovak Republic had 89 diplomatic missions abroad: 64 embassies, 7 permanent representations at international organizations, 8 consulates general, 1 liaison office, 1 Slovak economic and cultural office and 8 Slovak institutes. One of the challenges we identified was how to connect up planning relating to policy, staff and finances, and this is also linked to our ambition to improve the department's analytical capacities. Our long-term goal is to make the diplomacy department fit for the twenty-first century. An important part of this effort is improving our work with the network of Slovakia's honorary consulates abroad. The 8th meeting of honorary consuls that took place in Bratislava and Žilina in October 2018 is evidence of this.

Ministry expenditure in 2018

(simplified overview of programme structure – actual spending in euros)

Ministry programmes:	127,444,133
Foreign relations	125,482,450
of which	
Programme management	44,582,560
Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros legal dispute	458
Cooperation with third sector.....	171,068
Staff training	99,883
Reimbursement of expenditure from Technical Assistance Operational Programme.....	346,608
Economic diplomacy	68,945
OSCE presidency	1,731,308
Diplomatic representation of Slovakia abroad.....	73,917,233
Cultural representation of Slovakia abroad	1,187,210
Staff employed locally abroad	3,377,177
State policy on Slovaks living abroad	1,961,683
Inter-ministerial programmes:	37,877,395
Development cooperation – Ministry	6,208,133
Slovakia's contributions to international organizations – Ministry	31,669,262
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	165,321,528



Minister Miroslav Lajčák with the Slovak Ambassadors, who met in Bratislava for the regular heads of embassies meeting. It is organized by the Ministry to discuss the main issues in Slovak foreign policy, but is also an opportunity to analyse results and departmental priorities (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

Organizational Chart

