Slovakia

5 years after the accession
to the EU and NATO
Slovakia has pursued EU and NATO membership since its establishment as an independent state in 1993. It achieved full membership in NATO, the strongest political-military alliance in the world, in March 2004. One month later, in May 2004, Slovakia entered the European Union, a unique political and economic community of democratic countries, unseen in the history of the European continent.

**Slovakia – part of integrating Europe**

The membership in both organizations was preceded by thorny negotiations and an intense diplomatic effort by the young state. With the accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the artificial dividing line of Europe, known as the Iron Curtain, was erased.

The success of its crucial ambition to integrate has anchored Slovakia in a natural, geopolitically and economically secure environment of shared values. Not only has Slovakia benefited from this accomplishment, it has also observed the commitments towards its partners and Allies in the EU and NATO. What benefits has the membership in these organizations brought for Slovakia?

**Euro-Atlantic integration of Slovakia – Milestones**

- **October 1993**
  The Association Agreement between the EU and Slovakia is signed

- **February 1994**
  Slovakia joins the “Partnership for Peace” programme of NATO

- **June 1995**
  Slovakia tables its membership application to the EU

- **EU summit in Helsinki 1999**
  The EU decides to start accession negotiations with Slovakia

- **NATO Washington summit 1999**
  NATO approves the Membership Action Plan as a form of assistance and support for candidate countries, including Slovakia

- **EU summit in Copenhagen 2002**
  Slovakia concludes accession negotiations with the EU

- **NATO summit in Prague 2002**
  Slovakia receives the invitation to start talks on NATO membership

- **26 March 2003**
  The Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of Slovakia is signed in Brussels

- **9 April 2003**
  The accession of 10 new member states, including Slovakia, into the EU is approved by the European Parliament

- **14 April 2003**
  The accession of 10 new member states, including Slovakia, to the EU is approved by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs

- **16 April 2003**
  The Treaty of Accession between the EU and Slovakia is signed in Athens

- **16-17 May 2003**
  The referendum on the accession to the EU is held in Slovakia with 92.5 % of participating citizens voting in favour of the accession

- **29 March 2004**
  Slovakia becomes a member of NATO

- **1 May 2004**
  Slovakia becomes a member of the EU

- **21 December 2007**
  Slovakia joins the Schengen Area

- **1 January 2009**
  Slovakia introduces the single European currency, the Euro
With the accession to the EU and NATO, Slovakia has become part of internationally recognized communities. The accession to the EU was approved by the citizens in the only successful referendum so far. After five years of membership, the proportion of the citizens who beside the Slovak identity also feel the European identity has increased from 46 percent to 58 percent. In addition, Slovakia’s accession to NATO is considered to be one of the most significant historical events in the history of Slovakia by 67 percent of its citizens.

**Prestige and influence**

Joint action with its partners from the EU and NATO has also increased the influence of Slovakia on the international stage. This cooperation has helped to solve problems which Slovakia would not be able to effectively handle alone – national security, financial and economic crisis, the problems of energy security, climate change, the fight against terrorism and other issues as well.

Along with membership in the EU came new rights for Slovak citizens. Among them is the right to diplomatic and consular assistance from an Embassy of any other EU member state in third countries, the right to petition, the right to non-discrimination and in particular the right to vote for the European Parliament.
Being a member of NATO, Slovakia can rely on the security guarantees from its Allies. At the same time, Slovakia observes its commitments and responsibilities stemming from membership. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty guarantees, in case of an armed attack, assistance from Allies who have the most advanced Armed Forces in the world.

On the other hand, along with NATO membership comes the commitment to contribute to the security of all its Allies. To meet the needs of NATO and the evolving European defence policy of the EU, the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic have been increasing their capabilities since before 2004. According to the schedule, Slovak Armed Forces maintain a given force at standby for the purposes of NATO Response Forces and EU Battlegroups, which may be deployed on short notice into a crisis area.

Security – precondition for development

One of the current highest operational priorities of NATO is the stabilization of Afghanistan. Slovakia has adequately responded to the requirements of the ISAF operation (NATO) by strengthening its military presence in Afghanistan.

In 2006 compulsory military service was abolished in Slovakia. Thanks to the membership in an effective system of collective defence, Slovakia can afford to maintain a lower number of Armed Forces.

The accession of Slovakia to NATO and the EU has been preceded by indispensable reforms in the field of economy. Since being a member of both organizations, Slovakia has sent a clear signal of being a safe area for investments and business. It has started to attract big international companies, which contribute to the economic growth and creation of new jobs.
There are four basic freedoms that create the substance of a single European market - the freedom of movement of persons, goods, capital and services. They are considered to be the pillars of European integration.

The idea behind free movement of persons is that every citizen has the right to move across the EU without limitations. Tens of thousands of Slovak citizens obtained the chance to find employment on the large EU labour market without administrative obstacles.

The single European market also means high level of consumer protection, which saw the introduction of real air fare price transparency, compensation for cancelled or delayed flights, a two-year warranty period for products and a price ceiling on roaming calls within the EU.

The area of freedom and opportunities

The free movement of goods is the key to the prosperity of the European economy. A market of half a billion consumers has been opened for Slovak businessmen. In the course of five years, Slovakia has managed to significantly increase its economic potential. Most of Slovak export heads to the internal market of the EU.

Slovakia met the criteria for introducing a common currency - the Euro - being only the second new EU member country to do so. The decision on Slovakia joining the eurozone was taken just before first news on the global financial and economic crisis and secured for Slovakia a comparative advantage in dealing with its consequences.

Besides the freedoms of the single market, Europe is also an area without borders between states for signatories of the Schengen Agreement. For Slovakia and the freedom of movement of its citizens, the enlargement of the Schengen area was the most important event since the fall of the Iron Curtain.
More than € 2,100 per citizen was assigned for Slovakia during 2007-2013 period from the structural funds of the EU. The primary goal of this financial assistance is to strengthen the cohesion of the European Community as a single social and economic entity.

**Euro(Atlantic) solidarity**

The form of this assistance is diverse. Most of the funds are intended for the construction of roads and rails, environmental protection, support of tourism or innovative businessmen, as well as for research and programs for raising the employability of persons.

Slovakia is not only a beneficiary of the solidarity principle in the EU. It simultaneously renders official development aid – Slovak Aid – which is distributed in line with the international commitments and foreign policy priorities of Slovakia. Since 2003, the biggest recipients of Slovak Aid are Serbia and Montenegro. With its accession to the EU, Slovakia has taken over the tools and policies in the field of development aid which are aimed at fighting poverty in the world and promoting sustainable development. The EU is the biggest global collective donor in the world. Its member states provide more than a half of all resources for the development of poorer countries.

The solidarity principle is also pushed forward by Slovakia when it comes to sharing the costs of deployment of crisis management missions within NATO and the EU. The budget of military operations and civilian missions would thus be split among member states regardless of their participation in any particular mission.

**From 2004 to 2006 Slovakia made use of € 1.16 billion for financing more than 6,600 projects that helped to modernize the country in many different ways. During 2008, 405 elementary schools and kindergartens were reconstructed with the use of European funds. Five health institutes for the treatment of cardiac, respiratory, and oncology diseases were complexly modernized. Until 2013, € 113 million will be allocated to improve the high-speed internet accessibility in Slovakia.**
Slovakia supports activities designed to boost Euro-Atlantic ambitions of the countries of the Western Balkans. Projects of Slovak non-governmental organizations have transferred the real experience of Slovakia from the accession process to the EU and NATO and helped to eradicate the myths and prejudices about European and Euro-Atlantic integration in these countries.

Since January 2007 the Slovak Embassy in Kiev has been appointed to be the NATO Contact Point Embassy in Ukraine. This is the second two-year period in which the Embassy has been charged with such mission. In this capacity, Slovakia is securing an ongoing dialogue and facilitates the development of the cooperation between NATO and Ukraine and works to raise public awareness about activities of NATO.

The Western Balkans and Eastern neighbours of the EU are long-standing territorial foreign policy priorities of Slovakia. Cultural and geographical proximity as well as similar historical experience motivates Slovakia to support with concrete steps the effort to successfully accomplish the integration ambitions of these countries towards EU and NATO membership. Slovakia actively pursues its goal, which is to enable these countries to enjoy the same benefits from Euro-Atlantic integration.

Sharing Slovakia’s success story

Slovakia welcomed the third wave of eastward NATO enlargement since the end of the Cold War by Albania and Croatia. Slovakia also supports the accession of other candidate countries from the Balkans and the Black Sea region and participates in securing continued stability and prosperity in Europe by sharing its own success story and providing official development assistance.

While its approach to the enlargement of Euro-Atlantic integration structures is positive, Slovakia insists on the unconditional fulfilment of set conditions by all candidate countries.
Further information on the internet:

European Union

http://europa.eu  |  European Union Portal
http://ec.europa.eu  |  European Commission
www.europarl.europa.eu  |  European Parliament
www.consilium.europa.eu  |  Council of the European Union
http://ec.europa.eu/slovensko  |  European Commission Representation in the SR
www.europyskyparlament.sk  |  European Commission Representation in the SR
www.eurodesk.sk  |  Eurodesk - European Information Network for Youth

NATO

http://www.nato.int  |  North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Government of the Slovak Republic

www.mzv.sk  |  Ministry of Foreign Affairs
www.mosr.sk  |  Ministry of Defence
www.vlada.gov.sk  |  Government of the Slovak Republic
www.europoinfo.gov.sk  |  EurolInfo Centrum (Government office)

Non-governmental organizations

www.cpep.sk  |  Centrum for European politics
www.ata-sac.org  |  Slovak Atlantic Commission

Specialized media

www.euractiv.sk  |  EurActiv.sk
www.eaq.sk  |  Euro-atlantic Quarterly
www.europskaunia.sk  |  Encyclopaedia on EU
www.eu4journalists.eu  |  EU for journalists
www.zahranicnopolitika.sk  |  Foreign Policy magazine online