

Direction of Slovak Foreign and European Policy in 2014

Introduction

While 2013 saw Slovakia and its foreign service celebrate their twentieth anniversary, 2014 is an opportunity to reflect on the outcomes of our strategic foreign policy decision – integration into European and trans-Atlantic structures.

In 2014 Slovakia will commemorate **the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution**. This historical event put our country back on a democratic track, giving it freedom of choice and direction, in foreign policy as well. The anniversary presents us with a good occasion to assess whether the hopes and expectations we had of the political and social changes of 25 years ago, including those associated with international affairs, have come to fruition.

In 2014 Slovakia will celebrate **the 10th anniversary of its accession to the EU and NATO**. This anniversary testifies to the fact that we have become a fully-fledged and equal member of a prestigious community founded in shared values, democratic principles, the rule of law, a social market economy, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Upholding these values and principles determines our international activities in the long term and 2014 will also see continuity in our foreign policy priorities and objectives.

Another historical event in Slovakia's not-so-recent history – **the Slovak National Uprising, the 70th anniversary** of which is to be commemorated in 2014 – has also had a decisive influence on Slovakia's development. The war-time generation was prepared to defend the values of freedom and ideals of humanism. The fact that we are able to live in a free and democratic environment should not be taken for granted. It is an ongoing and seemingly never-ending challenge to preserve these values for future generations both here in Slovakia and internationally.

Slovakia's foreign and European policy is constructed around four pillars. The first is **bilateral and multilateral diplomacy**, i.e. developing bilateral relations with other countries, being actively involved in international organisations, and enhancing stability and prosperity (particularly, but not exclusively, in neighbouring countries) so as to advance our interests and priorities, particularly in economic terms. In 2014, whilst engaging in negotiations, Slovak diplomacy will again provide practical assistance to partners and share our experiences of transformation, reform and integration. Our civilian and military experts will continue to take part in international crisis management missions in the Balkans, Cyprus, Middle East and Afghanistan. Slovakia will help address challenges in eradicating poverty, encouraging sustainable growth and democratic transformation in various regions of the world via official development aid.

The second pillar is **European policy**. Inter-ministerial and cross-sectional, it is implemented by the joint participation of all ministries and other state administration bodies and is also reflected in other dimensions of Slovakia's foreign policy. Besides pursuing European policy, Slovak diplomacy has coordination competences in a number of related areas. A key event in 2014 will be the European Parliament elections in May. The results will significantly influence EU dynamics overall, change the make-up of the European Commission, and bring new faces to other key posts in EU institutions. These changes will be important as Slovakia prepares for the EU Council Presidency in the second half of 2016, especially in terms of

identifying and specifying programme priorities. The moderate yet fragile recovery of the EU's economy, expected in 2014, may spur a strategic discussion on the future of European integration. In the new EU programming period that starts in 2014, Slovakia will support measures aimed at economic growth and reducing unemployment.

The third area of our country's foreign policy activities is **economic diplomacy and the coordinated presentation of Slovakia abroad**. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic (MFEA) will, in accordance with the Competence Act, coordinate Slovakia's pursuit of its commercial and economic interests abroad, and coordinated presentation of the country. It will also foster greater collaboration with private businesses. Small and medium enterprises are vital to the economy, given the substantial proportion of jobs in this sector. Slovakia needs added-value investment, new technologies, innovations, and collaboration over applied research with universities abroad. All these aspects form the core of Slovakia's new economic diplomacy policy.

The fourth pillar is **consular work and assisting citizens**. The MFEA intends to be as close as possible to Slovak citizens abroad and aims to raise the standard of its services through the use of advanced technologies, and also improve communication and accessibility. In 2014 specific measures will include providing services via consular outreach trips, enhancing accessibility through consular cooperation agreements with other EU Member States, extending the range of services provided by honorary consuls, and continuing to develop e-Government.

1. Active European policy

On 1 May 2014 Slovakia will commemorate the **10th anniversary of its accession to the EU**. The event will be a good opportunity to look back at our experiences so far, and to set out our priorities for the future. The MFEA will produce a report evaluating the first decade of Slovakia's EU membership, including recommendations for the Slovak Government on European policy and the future direction of the EU project. One of the main platforms for engaging various segments of Slovak society in discussions on European issues is the **National Convention on European Union**. Its working groups will continue to hold meetings, and the first phase will be concluded by a plenary session in May 2014 held to mark Slovakia's EU accession.

The upcoming **European Parliament elections** scheduled for May 2014 may help stimulate public discussion on EU affairs and foster dialogue between the people and political parties. By publicising EU topics, we hope to achieve higher voter turnout than in the past. The MFEA will pay particular attention to procedures for selecting and recruiting new staff for key EU institutions, and calibrating relations among them. It is likely that EU institutional reform will be carried out in the distant future, once sufficiently broad consensus has been established among Member States.

In 2014, Slovakia will continue to take an active part in discussions on the **appropriate pace of EU fiscal consolidation** so as to balance the need to reduce unemployment by encouraging investment in economic growth areas and to safeguard the sustainability of public finances. Slovakia's standpoint will continue to be formed by the principles of responsibility and solidarity, supporting its ambition to remain part of the "core" of the EU integration project.

In 2014 special attention will be devoted to continuing the discussion on the **four pillars of a strengthened economic and monetary union** – banking union, fiscal union, economic union, and the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Key elements in the banking union will be the launch of a single supervisory mechanism and drafting legislation for a single resolution mechanism. Both mechanisms are crucial for an efficient banking union and so Slovakia will push for the prompt implementation of the single supervisory mechanism and for negotiations on the single resolution mechanism to have been concluded by the end of the current term of office of the European Parliament. Slovakia considers the recovery of the EU's banking sector and restoration of trust in the banking environment to be essential for renewed sound economic growth. Slovakia will be focusing on the other two pillars of the strengthened economic and monetary union by emphasising the thorough implementation of existing fiscal and economic policy mechanisms, supporting better coordination of economic policies in the EU, and encouraging efforts aimed at achieving the Europe 2020 strategy objectives. The fourth pillar, strengthening democratic legitimacy, is of no less interest to Slovakia. Slovakia advocates a communitarian approach in the areas where the EU has been entrusted to fulfil common goals while strictly observing subsidiarity principles. Thus decisions need to be taken at levels which will help produce the most effective and practical solutions. It is therefore important to further strengthen the role of national parliaments.

2014 will be the first year in which the new **Multiannual Financial Framework 2014 - 2020** will be implemented, including all related programmes and European structural and investment funds. Slovakia will channel its EU funding into areas that generate higher added value for the people of Slovakia targeting especially renewed economic growth, greater national economic competitiveness, infrastructure projects, and reducing unemployment, particularly among young people.

A viable industrial base is essential for a strong Europe. The EU's **Industrial Policy**, aimed at boosting the competitiveness of European businesses on a global scale, will be one of the issues heading the EU's agenda (the subject of a single-issue European Council meeting in February 2014). Slovakia will work to create better conditions for closer links between industry, research and development, and for more innovation in practice. The EU Industrial Policy must respect the principles of sustainability, energy and resource efficiency, as well as national traditions and potential.

Slovakia believes that finalising the **EU's internal energy market** and developing energy links are essential to fostering economic growth and competitiveness, where the priority is implementing common interest projects in order to build the north-south gas and electricity interconnections in the broader Central European region. The EU discussion on the **2030 framework for climate and energy policies** will be of great importance. Slovakia believes that the different situations in the individual EU Member States and the impact on their competitiveness should be considered, as should their right to opt for their own energy mix.

In 2014, Slovakia will enter the second phase of **EU Council Presidency preparations**. The MFEA will focus on implementing tasks planned in the previous period (e.g. selecting and training presidency staff, drawing up the presidency budget, drafting a comprehensive media and culture communication strategy for the presidency, putting into practice new aspects of the amended status of the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU in Brussels and resolving the capacity problems of the Permanent Representation to the EU in relation to the upcoming presidency). The MFEA will also formally consult on the EU Trio Presidency programme with its presidency partners – the Netherlands and Malta – and will launch preparations for outlining the framework for political priorities of the presidency.

The MFEA will ensure **coordination and implementation of EU agenda** in relation to the Slovak government bodies, EU institutions, and EU Member States, while following the newly updated rules and procedures on formulating national positions on draft EU legislation. This will allow the MFEA to step up cooperation with the Slovak ministries, the National Council of the Slovak Republic as well as non-governmental and private sector representatives, thus increasing quality and effectiveness in preparing national positions.

Bilateral cooperation in the regional and European context

Cooperation with neighbouring countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Ukraine) will be a natural priority in bilateral relations. Slovakia will concentrate on fostering wide-ranging cross-border cooperation and implementing strategic objectives to strengthen energy security and build transport infrastructure. Preparing and implementing EU Strategy for the Danube Region projects will make for effective cooperation within the broader Central European region. In relations with its largest neighbour, Ukraine, Slovakia's main strategic objectives will be to support the transformation and reform processes and help bring the country closer to the EU by pursuing the association agenda. The MFEA will further encourage joint cabinet meetings with neighbouring countries, an initiative begun by the current Slovak Government. The bilateral format will be used to produce tangible results, particularly in relation to the economy.

In relations with the Visegrad countries, bolstering unity and cooperation within **the Visegrad Group** (V4) will be the main priority. During its V4 presidency (July 2014 - June 2015), Slovakia will continue to re-energise and strengthen the V4 brand as the most efficient regional grouping in Central Europe. The Slovak presidency will strive to step up coordination among V4 members in regional priority areas, as well as in external policy, and promote shared standpoints on current foreign and European policy issues. Slovakia will build on the positive experience of prior presidencies and their priorities (addressing the impact of the crisis and emphasising high youth unemployment, energy and transport infrastructure, external energy security, effective use of EU budgetary resources, strategic cooperation in defence, and sharing transformation and integration experience with Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries). Slovakia will use the well-proven "V4 plus" format, both in relation to European partners and regional groupings (Austria, Croatia, Benelux, or the Baltic and Nordic countries teamed up in the B3 or NB8 formats, and the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries) as well as in relation to overseas countries (the US, Japan and China).

In bilateral relations with **EU Member States**, Slovakia will focus primarily on kick-starting economic recovery and creating new jobs, reinforcing the EU's unified voice in international matters, and on discussion about the direction the integration project will take. Particular emphasis will be put on developing political dialogue with the Federal Republic of Germany (Slovakia's key European partner), France (with which Slovakia has been building a strategic partnership since 2008), and with the United Kingdom (given the significant influence this country has on discussions on current European issues). Slovakia will, however, devote its attention to partnerships and close cooperation with other EU Member States as well. Besides using the existing formats of cooperation in European and global structures, Slovakia will also capitalise on the increasingly more significant bilateral consultations that lead to ad hoc coalitions in a variety of European policy areas. The significance of European partners is also based on the size of mutual international trade, direct foreign investment, and the potential for

sharing experiences of supporting innovations, and building a knowledge economy. In its relationships with European partners, Slovakia will therefore continue to regard economic diplomacy as an instrument of special significance.

External EU relations

Slovakia will coordinate its foreign policy primarily with other EU Member States within the framework of the **EU Common Foreign and Security Policy**. Slovakia would like to see an EU whose external actions are unified, coordinated and comprehensive, who can proactively respond to crises worldwide making effective use of its instruments and policies, and who holds consultations on global issues with strategic partners in particular. In its work in the EU, Slovakia will encourage a comprehensive approach to addressing international crises. In the ongoing review of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Slovakia will support proposals for strengthening and improving overall efficiencies in organisational aspects and in the work it performs. The MFEA will also help make sure that Slovakia is adequately represented in the EEAS, including at senior levels.

One of the main priorities of Slovakia's foreign policy is supporting the transformation of **the Western Balkan** countries, bringing them closer to the EU. In discussions in Brussels, Slovakia will endorse the **EU enlargement** process, providing all the criteria are fulfilled, whilst making sure that no other additional conditions are imposed on candidates on the integration path. Slovakia will support continued dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, and is ready to provide political support and expert assistance to Montenegro, which is making good progress in the accession negotiations, and to Serbia, which will join the accession talks in 2014. Slovakia will also back continuation of accession negotiations with Turkey and the beginning of accession talks with Macedonia. In regard to the latter, Slovakia will encourage the prompt solution of unresolved issues, including the dispute over the official name of the country. The lengthy stagnation of the stabilisation and reform processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a challenge for the EU and Slovakia. Slovakia will support positive movement in Albania's European integration process. Slovakia will strive to take advantage of good bilateral relations with the countries in the region to spur economic cooperation and create new opportunities for Slovak entrepreneurs.

Encouraging cooperation between the EU and the **Eastern Partnership** countries remains a priority in Slovak foreign policy. Besides endorsing the outcomes of the Vilnius Summit, Slovakia will also focus on preparations for signing, ratifying, and subsequently implementing the Association Agreements and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreements (DCFTA). In relations with eastern neighbours it will be crucial to maintain the positive dynamics in the mobility of people. Progress in visa liberalisation will boost the involvement of young people from the Eastern Partnership countries in Erasmus +, an EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. By sharing its own experiences, Slovakia will encourage the ongoing transformation and reform processes in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia. Following the opening of the Slovak embassy in Chisinau, Moldova, the MFEA will also continue its efforts to establish a direct diplomatic mission in the South Caucasus region. Slovakia will support discussions on European prospects with the Eastern Partnership countries that have been most successful in making reform progress. Improvements in the EU's relations with Belarus, which makes limited use of the potential of the Eastern Partnership project, are subject to a change in the country's attitude to human rights. Enhancing EU involvement in solving frozen conflicts in the region will be a significant aspect of Slovak foreign policy.

Deepening **the transatlantic partnership between the EU and the USA** is a pivotal interest in Slovak foreign policy. Slovakia will participate in the dialogue with the US on a broad range of common issues (Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, developments in the wider Middle East, coordination of the process of winding up the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, and transforming NATO's follow-on presence in the country after 2014, and so forth). In the economic field, preparing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement (TTIP) will be of key importance in the forthcoming period. On the bilateral level, Slovakia will focus on cultivating relations with existing US investors and attracting new ones, with IT and cyber security being promising areas of cooperation.

Slovakia will help build a strategic partnership **between the EU and the Russian Federation**. The focus will be on Slovakia's participation in the Partnership for Modernisation and on continuing the dialogue on gradual visa liberalisation, fulfilling WTO membership commitments, and encouraging a constructive dialogue between NATO and Russia. Bilateral relations will concentrate on energy issues, such as stable supplies of energy resources and exploiting fully Slovakia's potential as a transit country as well as developing economic relations.

Development in **North Africa and the Middle East** will be a challenge for Slovakia, the EU, and the entire international community. To safeguard the credibility of the existing system of international relations, it will be necessary, especially in relation to the crisis in Syria, to encourage decisions that involve the thorough application of the principles and standards of international law. In terms of EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Slovakia will seek opportunities for joint action. If positive development is made in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Slovakia will push for the EU to adopt a strengthened and comprehensive role in creating an environment that will lead to the peace treaty being implemented. In relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Slovakia will strive for bilateral contacts and economic ties to be extended more dynamically.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, Slovakia will promote coordination and collaboration in the CFSP activities, emphasising economic cooperation, especially with Ethiopia, the Republic of South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria.

Developments in the **Asia and Pacific region** are substantially shaping global international relations in the 21st century. Foreign policy towards particular countries or groups of countries in the region will be determined by Slovakia's economic and security interests. Slovakia pays particular attention to creating favourable conditions for developing the economic dimension of bilateral relations as part of the EU's strategic partnerships with China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and in dialogue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). There will also be a focus on greater exploitation of economic cooperation opportunities with China, and Japan's scientific and technical cooperation potential as well as on seeking a more effective cooperation mechanism at a de-centralised level. Slovakia's involvement in the Asia - Europe Meeting (ASEM) will be geared towards cooperation between small and medium enterprises. Slovakia will also continue to assist the international community in strengthening security, good governance and democracy in Afghanistan.

In relations with **Latin America and the Caribbean**, Slovakia will focus on activating political dialogue and economic cooperation, through work involving government-level contact, which is currently being organised. To pursue its foreign policy and economic

interests, Slovakia will use existing formats of EU cooperation with other countries and integration alliances in the region, as well as multilateral platforms.

2. Supporting economic interests

Economic diplomacy

In economic diplomacy, the MFEA will continue its dialogue and tangible cooperation with private businesses. In relations with foreign partners, the MFEA intends to foster pragmatic partnerships aimed at enhancing direct foreign investment, new export opportunities, and extend scientific and technical cooperation. With regard to the capacity of the Slovak internal market and the EU's economic growth prospects, the MFEA will support the **diversification of Slovak exports to markets outside the EU**, especially to Ukraine, the Russian Federation, other BRICS countries, and the Southeast Asia region, whilst simultaneously encouraging links between economic diplomacy and Slovakia's development policy, with an emphasis on involving entrepreneurs in development cooperation.

The MFEA will take part in various forms of **regional cooperation**, especially the Strategy for the Danube Region, Euro-regions, and programmes involving cross-border bilateral commissions with neighbouring countries, as well as major investment projects of a broader regional scope.

Under **EU Common Commercial Policy**, Slovakia will primarily promote efforts to improve access to the largest and fastest growing economies of the world by concluding and implementing free trade agreements with the United States, Japan, Canada, India, ASEAN members, and Eastern Partnership countries. Slovakia's key goal is to make sure the new comprehensive agreements on free trade and economic partnership will help increase exports from the national economy, not only in traditional industries (automotive industry, consumer electronics, and metallurgy), but also in other sectors (power engineering, services, and transport).

The MFEA will exploit the mechanism of the **Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Export and Investment Support** in order to improve coordination of activities with economy-related ministries and business associations in implementing the Strategy of External Economic Relations for 2014 - 2020, as well as defining Slovakia's key annual foreign activities.

Being a member of the **Council for Strategic Management, Coordination and Control of Activities of the Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO)** the MFEA will help build a database of information and investment activities in Slovakia and abroad in order to increase the involvement of Slovak entrepreneurs in the supply network of international companies in Slovakia, the EU, and in other selected parts of the world.

In conjunction with the Ministry of Economy, the MFEA will use the mechanism of **intergovernmental and interministerial commissions for economic cooperation** to support joint commercial and investment projects.

The **MFEA Business Centre** will relay current economic information from abroad to businesses in Slovakia, identifying business and investment opportunities, and providing information about international public procurement projects.

The MFEA will help Slovak entities (including entrepreneurs) become involved in projects implemented through the **EU's funding instruments for external action** for which the MFEA has responsibility (the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance – IPA II, the European Neighbourhood Instrument – ENI, the Development Cooperation Instrument – DCI, the European Development Fund – EDF, etc).

The MFEA will continue to organise innovation forums in Slovakia and abroad, for instance in Israel and Turkey. The achievements and potential of Slovak science will be promoted, and support will be given to projects that are Slovak and EU priorities in research, development and innovation (energy, green technologies, transport-related materials and systems, biomedicine, biotechnologies, IT, and mechanical and electrical engineering). The MFEA will help outcomes to be applied in **building a knowledge society, innovations, and technological development** as defined by the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation and the Strategy for External Economic Relations of the Slovak Republic for 2014 - 2020. The MFEA will join efforts to seek international cooperation opportunities within Horizon 2020 – the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. It will also support the creation of an effective national innovation system for building knowledge and technology transfer centres by developing science and technology parks. The international side of building a knowledge-based society and supporting innovation will be the main role of the newly-created post of MFEA Ambassador-at-large, with special responsibility for science and innovation.

The MFEA will systematically review and upgrade the **network of economic diplomats** at Slovak diplomatic missions, according to the needs of the business sector and insofar as the budget allows. It will also cooperate with the Ministry of Economy in setting up a complementary network of SARIO representatives abroad.

External energy security policy

External energy security is one of the pillars of international relations and is a Slovak foreign policy priority. MFEA foreign policy will concentrate on fulfilling the strategic objectives of Slovakia's energy policy, with the primary aim of strengthening energy security via **diversification of resources and transit lines, and boosting the economic and/or environmental sustainability of the energy mix**. In order to exploit the available bilateral and multilateral formats in actively pursuing Slovakia's energy and energy security interests, the MFEA will highlight the importance and multi-dimensionality of the issue through its own activities as well as through inter-ministerial cooperation.

The MFEA will work with the Ministry of Economy to monitor energy security at home and abroad, analysing possible impacts national, and safeguard steady supplies of strategic energy resources. The MFEA will also participate in examining possible diversified routing of energy supplies, especially Slovak gas infrastructure interconnections with nearby countries and reinforcing cross-border electricity links with Poland, Hungary, and Austria.

International economic organisations

Through its work in international economic organisations and at multilateral forums, Slovakia will concentrate on seeking solutions to tackle the global crisis and to create preferential conditions for Slovak businesses.

Work within the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** will primarily involve boosting employment, identifying measures and structural reforms to ensure sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and improve the competitiveness of the Slovak economy. This will take account of recommendations on innovations policy, stabilising the financial environment, greater Slovak energy security and efficiency, encouraging a green growth strategy in sectoral policies, and implementing joint Slovak-OECD projects.

Within the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, Slovakia will participate in creating a new multilateral trade system in line with the Doha Development Agenda. The outcomes of the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali will provide the basis for continuing the joint efforts of Slovakia, EU and WTO Member States related to the preparation of multilateral trade agreements, especially the reviewed Information Technology Agreement (ITA II) and the new Trade in Services Agreement (TISA).

As a member of **international banking and financial institutions**, Slovakia will support stable global economic development, youth employment support programmes, and the funding of small and medium enterprises. Besides pursuing its own requirements, Slovakia will use its voting rights in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) for the broader benefit of Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe regions, namely for developing an international financial policy to support stable and balanced global economic development. Our activities in the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development** will encourage efficient implementation of the EBRD's strategy for Slovakia and the Post-Graduation Operational Approach approved by the EBRD Board of Directors on 4 September 2013, and will also push for the bilateral Slovak-EBRD Technical Cooperation Fund to be extended beyond 2015. Concerning its participation in the anticipated increase in the subscribed capital of the **European Investment Bank**, Slovakia will back the growth of the loan portfolio in various areas, for instance in youth employment support or funding small and medium enterprises. In the **Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)**, Slovakia will be actively engaged in reviewing the CEB Development Plan for 2010 - 2014, and will promote the extension of CEB activities in Slovakia. In addition, Slovakia will back extending the work of the International Investment Bank (IIB) and the International Bank for Economic Cooperation (IBEC), particularly in Slovakia. In this respect, Slovakia will seek to play an active role in the process, already underway, of transforming the IIB and IBEC into modern international financial institutions. Through its membership mandate in the **World Bank Group**, Slovakia will support the Bank's development initiatives and fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, whilst seeking opportunities to involve Slovak businesses in the activities of the World Bank Group institutions. Following approval by the **International Development Association (IDA)**, Slovakia will take part in the 17th IDA Replenishment and will also make joint efforts with V4 countries to scale up the V4 expert representation in the World Bank Group. Slovakia will use its **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** mandate to advance its interests and coordinate its positions with EU Member States on the IMF reform implementation and on increasing the IMF funds available to support international financial stability.

3. A safe and democratic world

Security policy

The main pillars of national security will be to continue being a member of the collective defence system of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization** (NATO) and systematically strengthen alliance bonds, transatlantic ties and defence cooperation. Slovakia would like to see a functional, effective and credible NATO. As a member of NATO, Slovakia will focus on the following priorities in 2014: (1) controlled wind-up of the ISAF operation in Afghanistan and preparation of a significantly smaller training, advisory, and assistance NATO-led mission; (2) systematic building of defence capacities with efficient use of resources and international cooperation opportunities, particularly within the Visegrad Group; (3) strengthening NATO's role in cooperative security with a continued Open-Door Policy and developing a partnership policy on Eastern Europe and Western Balkan countries, where the Slovak Embassy in Belgrade will also act as the NATO Contact Point Embassy in 2014.

Slovakia will back the development of the **EU Common Security and Defence Policy** (CSDP) and the strengthening of the EU's role in international crisis management. Slovakia will help create conditions for a comprehensive EU approach to crisis management and will promote greater cooperation between the EU and international organisations, especially NATO and the UN. Slovakia will endorse the further build-up of CSDP capabilities and will advocate greater convergence between EU Member States defensive planning. There will be support for closer cooperation between EU Member States in the defence industry, and competitiveness measures reflecting the interests of countries whose military industries consist mainly of small and medium enterprises. A major milestone in CSDP development will be the December 2013 European Council on Security and Defence – the outcomes of which may call for updates and more detailed Slovak policy objectives.

Slovakia will continue to engage in **international crisis management** operations and missions in order to help stabilise and strengthen security in the broader Euro-Atlantic area. Slovakia will continue to participate substantially in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan until it is terminated by the end of 2014, and will create conditions to contribute to the new NATO-led mission after 2014. The Slovak Armed Forces will continue in the EU missions in the Western Balkans (EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and in the South Caucasus (EUMM in Georgia). Slovakia will also ensure it is adequately represented in UN missions, particularly the UN mission in Cyprus (UNFICYP), and the UN observer mission in the Middle East (UNTSO). Opportunities for Slovakia to become involved in other operations and missions will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with regard to the particular requirements and operational needs, and in relation to Slovak foreign and security policy priorities, Slovakia's commitments, and available personnel, materials and funding. Slovakia will strive to involve civilian experts in international crisis management.

One of the defining themes in Slovak foreign policy in 2014 will be **Security Sector Reform** (SSR), the strategic importance of which was also highlighted by the UN Secretary-General's September 2013 report on comprehensive UN support for SSR. Building on the efforts made and results achieved to date, Slovakia will enhance its role as leader on this. As Co-Chair of the UN Group of Friends of SSR, Slovakia will further promote the subject at international events not only within the UN, but also other international organisations (especially NATO) and the EU. In 2014 new scope emerged within the OSCE for Slovakia to work alongside the Swiss chairmanship, which has selected SSR as one of its priorities. In practical terms,

Slovakia will continue to share its own reform and integration experience and expertise with interested partners.

Effective multilateralism

Slovakia will work to ensure that the rules and principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations and other key international law documents are adhered to, and will support the **United Nations** stance on international relations. The MFEA will support Slovakia's 2018 - 2020 candidacy for the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and will seek to appoint experienced Slovak experts and diplomats to leading positions in the UN system or other international organisations.

As a member of the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe** (OSCE), Slovakia will maintain its balanced contribution to strengthening the security policy dialogue between the countries involved in all three dimensions of the Organisation, and will support the OSCE's unique instruments for enhancing mutual trust, security and conflict prevention. Slovakia will join efforts with the Swiss chair of the OSCE in 2014 and engage in discussions on the reform of the OSCE to create a comprehensive security community in the OSCE region. In cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Slovakia will focus on issues related to democracy building and respect for human rights in the OSCE region, especially democratic elections and the situation of Roma communities.

Response to global challenges and threats

Through its UN activities, membership of other international organisations and development cooperation initiatives, Slovakia will help address **global challenges**, especially those related to mitigating climate change and improving adaptation to climate change, safeguarding food, security and access to water, enhancing the status of women, and improving public governance.

As 2014 will be a key year for drafting a new international **climate change** agreement, Slovakia will engage in environmental diplomacy to encourage adoption of an ambitious agreement signed by as many countries as possible.

Slovakia will be involved in encouraging universal and multiple participation in existing mechanisms and the thorough implementation of commitments on **arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation**. It will also support initiatives for creating new international instruments for building trust and transparency in disarmament. To help lessen the global threat of nuclear arms proliferation, Slovakia will use its membership of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as well as its position on the IAEA Board of Governors (September 2013 - September 2015) to improve capacities, verification instruments and measures against the non-peaceful use of nuclear material. Slovakia will be involved in evaluating the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) drawn up by the 2015 NPT Review Conference in New York. Both politically and in practice, Slovakia will back a global nuclear testing ban based on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and endorse its ratification.

Combating terrorism is one of the priorities of Slovak foreign policy. Slovakia will continue implementing the Joint Action Plan between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Slovak Republic on Combating Illicit Trafficking of Nuclear and Radioactive Materials and Related Technology, drawn up to prevent terrorist use. Slovak experts will continue to work alongside specialists from the United States in dealing with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear emergencies. Slovakia will also back continued cooperation with neighbouring countries and the broader region, as well as internationally to prevent the smuggling and illicit trafficking of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons and materials, as well as arms.

Slovakia will work with international partners and organisations to increase the competence and capacities to deal with other emerging threats and challenges as well. The onus will be on seeking ways in which Slovakia and Slovak businesses and R&D institutions can become involved in international efforts to provide **protection against cyber attacks**. One such example is Slovakia's participation in the "Cyber Coalition" international NATO exercise.

Development cooperation and humanitarian aid

Slovak **development policy** will concentrate on promoting principles, rules and values leading to the inclusive development of partner countries, sustainable growth and building functional democratic institutions and capacities. Attention will be paid to setting out the principles for reshaping the global partnership for development beyond the 2015 Millennium Development Goals target date. Slovakia will participate in designing a pro-active and effective EU development policy and, as a new member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, will make every effort to implement its membership commitments and accession process recommendations.

Slovak **official development assistance** (ODA) priorities will focus on three programme countries – Afghanistan, Kenya and Moldova, particularly on healthcare, education, regional development, and building civil society. Slovakia will continue to employ effective ODA instruments and methods, such as sending volunteers, micro-grants, and trilateral cooperation (especially with traditional donors). Slovakia will support comprehensive bilateral cooperation programmes for sharing transformation experiences. In cooperation with other ministries, the MFEA uses the **Centre for Experience Transfer in Integration and Reforms**, a unique and well-established instrument, to provide technical assistance. The new **Medium Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2014 - 2018** sets out objectives beyond 2014. The aim is to ensure that Slovak entities, including those in the private sector, are effectively and transparently involved in development programmes and projects organised by the EU and international financial institutions. Working alongside the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Slovakia will focus on engaging Slovak businesses in EBRD Technical Cooperation Fund projects.

Slovakia will push for a prompt and speedy response to the needs of the international community should there be a humanitarian crisis.

Human rights protection

The **core values of Slovak foreign policy** are respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Slovakia will consistently strive to ensure that these principles are respected in its work within the EU and other international organisations (the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE), as well as in bilateral relations with its partners. Slovakia will focus on thoroughly implementing existing human rights commitments, and will support further strengthening of the human rights protection system and improving its effectiveness, especially in countries where grave human rights violations occur.

Slovakia will continue helping fulfil the individual actions and objectives of the **EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy**, including the commitment to further strengthen the partnership with civil society. In terms of the EU's external policy on human rights, Slovakia will support the work of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and will address specific human rights questions in dialogue and consultation with other countries.

Slovakia will continue to take part in regular and special sessions of the **UN Human Rights Council**, and its individual mechanisms, both in a national capacity and in order to advance the EU's priorities, paving the way for Slovakia's re-election to the UN Human Rights Council for 2018 - 2020. Slovakia will be active in concluding agreements on mutual support in this regard.

Slovakia will help strengthen the three pillars of **Council of Europe** – human rights, democracy, and the rule of law by diligently fulfilling its international commitments stemming from its membership and promoting the organisation's values abroad. Slovakia will continue to engage in discussions and support appropriate measures to increase the effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights.

To complete the task assigned by the Government of the Slovak Republic in 2011, the MFEA will continue drafting the **National Strategy to Protect and Support Human Rights**.

In order to promote and raise awareness of human rights issues, the MFEA will further support stakeholders active in this area via a **funding mechanism** designed to: (1) promote and protect human rights, and (2) prevent all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism and other manifestations of intolerance. To step up the efficiency and transparency of the decision-making process, the MFEA will continue with its practice of inviting external experts to Funding Committee meetings. Calls for funding applications will be accompanied by specialised workshops in Slovak towns to improve awareness among applicants.

4. Open Ministry and citizen services

One of the priorities of the MFEA is to provide high-quality, prompt, accessible, and efficient **consular services** to help **protect the lives and property of Slovak nationals abroad**. Its cornerstone will be increased ease of accessibility and a professional, non-bureaucratic approach to those seeking consular services. The MFEA will continue its e-service projects, including the use of the voluntary registration system prior to travel abroad, which provides users abroad with a free SMS service giving access to important information in case of an emergency. Other long-term priorities of the Slovak consular service include processing and

publishing timely up-to-date travel recommendations, improving the information available on the MFEA website, and boosting the efficiency of the Assistance and Services Information Centre. The experiences of some Slovak diplomatic missions in providing a consular service in the form of outreach trips indicate that it will be necessary to continue and extend this form of assistance. During the summer holiday season, the MFEA will continue its well-proven practice of operating a seasonal consular office in Split, Croatia, a traditional hotspot destination for Slovak tourists. In handling specific consular situations, the MFEA will continue to cooperate closely with the Centre for the International Legal Protection of Children and Youth, and other relevant institutions. The MFEA will also continue to extend the network of offices run by honorary consuls of Slovakia abroad and, where appropriate, make frequent use of their services as well as the services of honorary consuls of other countries active in Slovakia.

Slovakia's **visa policy** prioritises reducing visa requirements for Slovak citizens and balancing reciprocal visa relations with non-EU countries. Recent experience clearly justifies efforts to seek new visa representation agreements to expand visa availability to incoming foreign nationals. In 2014 Slovakia will continue to seek out EU Member States who would be interested in entering into an agreement to receive and process visa applications on behalf of Slovakia. Additional staff will be taken on at visa-issuing Slovak diplomatic offices abroad to improve visa availability for incoming travellers during the summer and winter seasons, as well as during peak visa application periods. In addition, preparations are underway to outsource the process of receiving visa applications.

To **coordinate the presentation of Slovakia abroad**, the MFEA will work with experts and the general public to prepare a series of attractive and credible communication messages and graphic designs to be used to promote the country. The MFEA will support the development of an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism covering the three key dimensions of Slovakia's presentation abroad: political (promoting the good name of Slovakia internationally), economic (support for investment, export, and tourism), and cultural and social (presenting Slovakia's top artwork, performances, and achievements at major international sporting events). The main aims are to prevent duplicity and overlapping, to achieve greater synergy, and to ensure effective use of funds. The Working Group for the Coordinated Presentation of Slovakia Abroad will be the main body for overseeing cooperation between governmental bodies and agencies (SARIO and SACR) involved in presenting the country as well as external experts.

In **cultural diplomacy**, Slovakia will focus on presenting Slovak art and culture abroad. The aim is to enrich the cultural programme offered by diplomatic missions and Slovak cultural institutes abroad, with an emphasis on major anniversaries, such as the 10th anniversary of Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO, the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, the 70th anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising, and the centenary of the outbreak of World War I. Slovakia will focus on negotiating and concluding new international contracts for cultural cooperation. Slovak culture will be presented in selected countries as the budget allows. The planning, preparation, and realization of cultural diplomacy activities will be conducted in close cooperation with and on the basis of the Agreement between the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs on Cooperation in Cultural Diplomacy and the International Presentation of Slovak Art and Culture Abroad.

State policy on **Slovaks living abroad** will be conducted according to a framework drawn up by the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad to maintain and develop the linguistic, cultural and

national identity of ethnic Slovaks. The policy will partly engage organisations representing Slovak national minorities. The priority will be to ensure that the needs and project concepts are considered as a whole so that subsidies can be provided, and that state policy on Slovaks abroad will be carried out effectively so as to maintain and strengthen fraternity and the national identity of Slovaks living abroad. A major task will be ensuring that the Certificate for Slovaks Living Abroad issued by the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad becomes more attractive and prestigious, while conveying greater authority.

The MFEA will continue to work hard with the **non-governmental sector and higher education institutions** in relation to international relations, security, foreign, development, and European policies, as well as through the relevant grants. It will cover, in particular, the organisation of events for experts and for the general public, the processing of analytical studies, editing publications, and using external expertise to draft policy materials for the Ministry. The MFEA will work alongside partner universities to provide lecturers exchanges and student internships.

5. Professional and efficient foreign service

In human resources management, the MFEA will continue to further improve the Foreign Service through proven forms of employee training and by building staffing capacities to extend the Slovak diplomatic mission network. In 2014, and for the first time, Slovakia will be the main coordinator of specialist training of civil servants for the Slovak EU Council Presidency. The focus will be on working with the International Organisation of La Francophonie in providing French lessons to state administration employees. One of the main training priorities in economic diplomacy will be “Preparation for Economic Diplomacy Work Abroad”, emphasising the practical side and case studies.

Depending on the budget available, the MFEA will continue to upgrade and rationalise existing ICT infrastructure between the Slovak diplomatic missions abroad and the Foreign Service headquarters, including the system of secure information transfer.

The outcomes of the MFEA e-services project funded by the Operational Programme for the Informatisation of Society will facilitate greater efficiencies, and optimise the provision of services to people and businesses.

In 2014 the MFEA will implement a new EU-funded project called Improving the Efficiency of Ministry Activities in Addressing EU Agendas, in order to simplify, accelerate and update the work of the MFEA and other government agencies. The benefits of the project will be doubled given the upcoming Slovak EU Council Presidency in the second half of 2016.

To ensure consolidation of public expenditure, the MFEA will continue to adopt cost-efficiency measures in relation to the budget. It will also restructure Slovak assets abroad, and improve transparency in the public procurement of goods, services and construction. In cooperation with the EU Member States and the European External Action Service, the MFEA will continue to seek ways to share use of premises at national diplomatic missions and EU missions in non-EU countries, as well as consider other ways of rationalising expenditure. These measures will have no negative influence on the Foreign Service, which will continue to pursue Slovakia’s foreign and EU policy priorities and protect the interests and rights of Slovak citizens in an efficient and professional manner.