

Slovak Foreign and European Policy Agenda in 2015

Safe and democratic world

NATO: Contribute to the concerted efforts of allies to strengthen NATO's defence capabilities especially in the eastern flank

Ukraine: Take steps to address the crisis in the east of the country by political means

Russian Federation: Contribute to the search for appropriate forms of communication with the RF, maintain energy cooperation

USA: Strengthen transatlantic cooperation and ties with the USA, support successful conclusion of negotiations on TTIP

Afghanistan: Contribute to the training and education of the armed forces and to further stabilisation of the country

Middle East: Continue to support the activities of the international coalition in the fight against ISIL

Western Balkans: Actively contribute to the stabilisation of conditions and relations in the region

ODA: Implement projects of the Slovak Official Development Assistance in the programme countries – Afghanistan, Kenya, Moldova

SSR: Further develop the agenda of security sector reform

European policy

EU: Contribute to the enhanced efficiency of EU institutions, actively cooperate with the new EC and EP in the context of Slovakia's main priorities – support for economic growth and employment, energy and climate policy, Digital Agenda, continue with preparations for SK PRES 2016

SK PRES V4: Implement SK – V4 PRES agenda with continued strengthening of internal links among the V4 countries, and support of V4 interests in the EU

CFSP/CSDP: Strengthen the position of the EU and its MS in the global arena. Encourage development of EU crisis management capabilities

Eastern Partnership: Actively contribute to shaping the future priorities of the EU's Eastern Partnership, with the aim of their adoption at the Riga Summit

EU enlargement: Promote the continuation of negotiations on EU enlargement

Climatic objectives: Promote Slovak interests in the preparation of EU positions for the Paris Summit

Economic diplomacy

Energy security: Ensure security of energy supplies and continue to implement the diversification of transit routes and resources

Economic diplomacy: Provide expert information services and create conditions for establishing partnerships between Slovak and foreign business entities. Initiate and promote new approaches – in particular, the networking of Slovak innovative entrepreneurs with foreign partners, strengthening the presence of private sector in the implementation of development cooperation projects

EU and its neighbours: Further develop existing investment and trade relations between EU MS and neighbouring countries

Asia, Pacific, and South America: Complementarily seek to increase Slovak exports and to attract investments particularly from China, India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Brazil

Services to citizens and modern diplomacy

Consular assistance: Provide Slovak citizens with full and reliable consular assistance

Honorary consular officers of the SR: Organise 7th worldwide meeting of honorary consuls of the Slovak Republic

Cultural diplomacy: Actively present Slovak art and culture

Public diplomacy: Develop communication with the domestic and foreign public; continue work on the national branding project

Slovaks abroad: Protect the interests of Slovak communities abroad, taking into account also their new composition

The NGO sector: Continue active dialogue and cooperation with the non-governmental sector

Introduction

Unlike those of the past twenty years, the changes in the security environment brought about by the crisis in Crimea and in south-eastern Ukraine, as well as by developments in the Middle East, require that the Slovak Republic's foreign policy face new challenges. There have been violations, of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our neighbouring country, of the overall geopolitical balance of the European continent, of the principles of international law, as well as of the rightful control of internationally recognised entities over their own national territories. Unlike in previous years, this new situation requires a special highlighting of the **security dimension of Slovak foreign policy in all its vectors**. Looking ahead, Slovakia must be ready to respond to developments that may be described as a shift from relatively stable conditions to a period of low predictability, especially in countries east of our border and in the Middle East. It is possible that the dramatic changes that have occurred in Europe in the context of the crisis in Ukraine, and in the Middle East due to the activities of extremists from the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), will result in a prolonged period of instability.

The Ukrainian crisis has also had an adverse impact on the broad, long-existing **domestic political consensus as to Slovak foreign policy**. Despite differences in opinion among some political actors, Slovakia's foreign policy will continue to call for a respect for the fundamental principles of international law, and to promote a peaceful resolution of the crisis while maintaining Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It will primarily assist in the implementation of democratisation and reform processes in the country, which may pave the way for long-term stabilisation and prosperity. In this respect, the Slovak Republic will seek within the EU to prepare a long-term strategy with concrete steps for implementing the Association Agreement with Ukraine.

Restrictive measures against the Russian Federation – as seen by the SR – are a tool, not a policy objective, of the European Union. They cannot be regarded as a one-way street. Russia's violation of international law is unacceptable to the whole democratic world, including Slovakia. In the event of movement towards a mutually agreed solution, Slovakia will be ready to gradually loosen the sanctions. Slovakia is interested in pursuing a political dialogue with Russia in order to seek a way out of the difficult situation persisting on the continent at the turn of 2014/2015. Resolving the Ukrainian crisis will not be possible without Russia, or by taking action against Russia. In this context, Slovakia will support the further strengthening of the OSCE's role in resolving conflicts through dialogue, in the de-escalation of tensions, and in the direct engagement of missions, including the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

The work of the **new European Commission and the European Parliament** will be in full swing next year. The European Union is expected to actively contribute to revitalising the dynamics of economic growth and reducing unemployment in its Member States. The EC has a stronger legitimacy, and proceeds in a more independent and self-confident manner, having a strong political mandate that generates a wider space for promoting the necessary changes. Slovakia will pay particular attention to the issues of climate and energy framework, compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact with full use of its existing flexibility, and the Digital Agenda as an area with significant potential for contributing to the restoration of economic growth. When it comes to competitiveness, energy policy – to be coordinated at the

European Commission by Slovak Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič as Vice-President for the Energy Union – will be the fundamental issue for Slovakia. Looking ahead, attention will have to be given to the project of completing an economic and monetary union, particularly in terms of fiscal and economic policy. In 2015, Slovakia will focus on the priorities of its European Union Council Presidency in relation to the work programme of the new European Commission.

It will also be necessary to increase the confidence of citizens in the European project and in its added value, particularly through initiatives aimed at the streamlining and clarification of the EU's functioning. The decision-making of the EU must not be a distant, unintelligible or even complicating element. On the contrary, its decisions must result in support and positive changes in people's daily lives. It will be equally important to maintain the EU's unity and to avoid the deepening of dividing lines between North and South, or East and West, or between countries within the euro zone and those outside it. The principle of subsidiarity must not remain in declarative form only. What can be more effectively addressed at the national level should be dealt with at the national level; issues requiring the wider background of the EU should be addressed at European level.

Slovakia's efforts to create a stable, secure and favourable international environment must result in **favourable economic development**, with a positive impact on the quality of life of its citizens. The political conditions of intense and friendly contact with partners, which we have managed to achieve with the overwhelming majority of countries, must be transposed into closer economic relations. In this context, the countries of the Balkan Peninsula, where political developments have brought stability in recent years, still represent an unexploited opportunity. The same can be said of the Eastern Partnership countries.

Against the backdrop of global instability, the Slovak Republic in 2015 will commemorate the **70th anniversary of the end of World War II**, a major milestone in modern Slovak history, as well as the 70th anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Charter, which became the backbone of contemporary international relations. Both anniversaries will be a good opportunity for reflection on the current arrangement of international relations and the European integration project, which was born from the ashes of World War II. Slovakia along with the entire continent is facing the challenge of completing the still current and unfulfilled vision of a Europe whole, free, democratic, and at peace. This vision will continue to be one of the main baselines of Slovakia's international activity.

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) will evaluate the degree to which the objectives contained in the Mid-term Strategy of Foreign Policy to 2015 were met, and will elaborate materials regarding the adoption of a new strategy up to 2025 with a view to 2030.

The activities related to Slovak foreign and European policy in 2015 will focus on **five main priorities**:

The first, unquestionable priority will be **strengthening the security of the Slovak Republic and the wider Euro-Atlantic area, as well as involvement in global issues**. Membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will remain of paramount importance for the security of Slovakia. The Slovak Republic will fully support the implementation of the decisions taken at the Wales Summit. Particular attention will be paid to strengthening the Allies' security in the Alliance's eastern flank.

In addition to the security situation in Ukraine, Slovakia will pay particular attention to supporting the fight against **terrorism as well as extremist and militant groups** in the Middle East and North Africa. These have become security and humanitarian threats, not only

in that region but also in the broader context, including posing risks to the internal security of European Union Member States. Slovakia is ready to contribute to the efforts of the international coalition in the fight against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and to assume its share of responsibilities. Slovakia plans to make use of the expertise it acquired in past cooperation with Iraq, to assist as well in the security sector reform to be implemented in conflict-affected countries seeking to build the capacity of their security forces. The agenda of security sector reform is an important profile issue of Slovak foreign policy. At the multilateral level, Slovakia will support strengthening the coordination and synergy of the activities of international organisations providing advice and assistance in security sector reform. Slovakia will utilise its position both as Permanent Co-Chair of the United Nations Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, and as President of a similar group at the OSCE.

Particular attention will be paid to the dynamically developing area of cyberspace and its security. In line with the strategic documents of the EU and NATO, Slovakia will strengthen the security of its critical infrastructure, including that of its national information and communication systems.

The second priority area is **European policy**. The MFEA will implement the European agenda and ensure coordination in relation to Slovakia's central state governmental authorities, EU institutions, and EU Member States. 2015 will be the first year for the new European Parliament and the new European Commission, and Slovakia will work together with them especially in key fields such as **economic growth, employment, energy and climate policy, and the Digital Agenda**. For Slovakia, it will be important to seek further opportunities to promote growth, as well as a balance between the policy of consolidation, investments in the economy, structural reforms and reducing unemployment. The Digital Agenda is one of the relatively new areas of the EU, which, if properly set up, can significantly contribute to the growth of employment in Member States. In the area of **energy security**, Slovakia will need to ensure energy supplies, continue to support the diversification of routes and resources, build a cross-border energy infrastructure, and maintain the principle of independent decision-making when choosing power sources. At the 21st Conference of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change at the end of 2015 in Paris, Slovakia will support the global adoption of a generally binding agreement, which will include major emitters.

In 2015 preparation for the **Slovak Presidency of the EU Council** will continue in the areas of human resources, the organisation and logistics of Presidency events in Slovakia, and funding. Work on the preparation of the programme and priorities will intensify. Slovakia, along with the Netherlands and Malta, will define the Trio Presidency programme in which these three countries will successively hold the EU Presidency from 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2017. The preparation of communication on the Presidency will advance in relation to the domestic as well as the international environment.

Slovakia will continue in 2015 to focus on developing the regional dimension of relations within its neighbourhood. Cooperation among the **Visegrad Group (V4)** remains one of the basic premises of Slovak foreign policy even within the EU. In this context, Slovakia will focus on the successful continuation of the V4 Presidency until its end in June 2015. The main emphasis will be placed on energy security, the development of transport infrastructure, defence cooperation – including the creation of a V4 Battlegroup – and

continued dialogue on the harmonisation of priorities in innovation policy and development cooperation.

Slovakia will use the second half of the V4 Presidency to further enhance the V4+ format, which serves as a suitable platform for the development of dialogue with external partners on matters of common interest. We plan to build on the present active SK V4 PRES approach in this area and organise events at a high, expert level with key European partners (Germany, France, UK, Nordic and Baltic States, Eastern Partnership countries), as well as global players (United States).

The third priority area is associated with the Slovak Republic's interest in being active in 2015 as a **strong voice in spreading stability and prosperity in the world** through sharing its experience with reforms, integration and democratic transition. In the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, **Slovakia's key territorial priorities** will remain the **Eastern Partnership countries, especially Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Western Balkans region**. The Eastern Partnership policy will have to be strategically re-assessed and adequately adjusted to the new political reality in Europe. The Riga Summit will create a space which Slovakia will make use of in preparation for the adoption of the necessary corrections.

Slovakia will **support integration efforts in** Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, given that enlargement is a tool for society stabilisation and the deterrence of challengers. Slovakia will continue to support NATO's open door policy. It will continue to disseminate its experience with implementation of accession criteria to Georgia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. Slovakia will support Montenegro, a leader in the region in the European integration process, in their hopes of receiving an invitation to join NATO as early as in 2015.

Slovakia will urge that the new EC engage in the **stabilisation of Ukraine intensively and systematically**. In the Western Balkans, Slovakia in 2015 will promote the continued stabilisation of relations in the region, preserving the dynamics of the negotiation process as contained in the EU's enlargement policy, as well as increasing the overall economic impact of the Slovak Republic in the region.

Using the tool of **Official Development Assistance**, Slovakia will continue to engage in less developed countries. Slovakia's assistance will continue to be directed to the three programme countries – Afghanistan, Kenya and Moldova. Slovakia will respond within its capabilities to the demands of countries affected by humanitarian crises.

The fourth priority area is **promoting Slovak economic interests** through activities in the field of economic diplomacy. The main objective of Slovakia's activities will be to achieve the growth of exports, an inflow of new investments, the strengthening of direct cooperation with businesses, and a focus on building the knowledge economy (innovation, new technologies and investments with high added value). In 2015 the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) will continue to promote **new approaches** to international economic cooperation, which include organising business missions and investment forums, and creating conditions for promoting Slovak start-ups abroad. Slovakia will also monitor developments in Ukraine and operatively adopt measures that minimise the potential negative impacts arising from the deteriorating business relationship between the EU and Russia.

The last but not least important focus of MFEA activities in 2015 will be to ensure **services to citizens via consular assistance and tools for cultural and public diplomacy**.

The MFEA understands that providing consular assistance to all Slovak citizens abroad is one of the main objectives of its activities.

Compared to previous years, our diplomacy will focus on the wider use of social networks and the Internet for the purpose of providing better information for citizens on foreign and EU policy. The MFEA will also develop activities for creating a country brand, in order to ensure the effective presentation of Slovakia abroad.

In 2015 we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ľudovít Štúr, the 135th anniversary of the birth of M. R. Štefánik, and the 80th anniversary of the birth of Albin Brunovský. The Slovak Republic will use these anniversaries to present its cultural heritage abroad.

Bratislava will also host the 7th worldwide conference of Slovak honorary consuls. Slovakia will continue to ensure closer links with expatriates, including a growing group of young Slovak professionals.

In 2015 the MFEA will continue its partnership with the non-governmental sector, which in modern diplomacy participates in formulating and implementing foreign policy. The MFEA is involved in the preparation of the 10th GLOBSEC annual international conference, and will use this platform to enhance political dialogue at the highest levels, and to spread an awareness of the issue of regional and wider European security. In a similar manner, the Ministry will use the annual Tatra Summit forum in relation to the European and economic agenda.

1. Slovakia in a safe and democratic world

Strengthening the security of the Euro-Atlantic area

The pillar of Slovakia's security is membership in the collective defence system of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**. Membership in the Alliance deters potential adversaries, gives confidence to Slovak citizens, and contributes to maintaining a stable economic environment. Over the past year, the importance of NATO for Slovakia has increased, mainly due to the deteriorating security situation to the east of NATO borders in neighbouring Ukraine, but also in Iraq, Syria and North Africa.

NATO member states, including Slovakia, respond to new challenges by improving NATO's ability to guarantee the security of the Allies. Slovakia will implement the decision adopted at the Wales Summit on measures to strengthen NATO's eastern border. The collective commitment to streamline and gradually increase expenditure on defence and modernisation of the armed forces, will be implemented in accordance with the national commitment to halt the decrease in defence expenditure, to provide for its real increase in line with economic growth, and also to allocate 1.6% of GDP to defence by 2020 and spend 20% of the defence expenditure on modernisation of the armed forces by 2016.

In order to enlarge the area of stability and security, the Slovak Republic will actively utilise the tools of NATO's partnership policy, and continue to **promote the accession of new countries to the Alliance**. Slovakia will support Montenegro in its hopes of obtaining an invitation to join NATO as early as in 2015, and will continue to **share its experience** with implementation of the NATO accession criteria with Georgia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, and to support the aspirations of these countries to be on NATO soil. In 2015, the Slovak Embassy in Belgrade will continue to perform the duties of NATO Contact Point Embassy.

Through material and financial support, training, and sharing its experience, Slovakia will contribute to NATO's efforts to **strengthen the defence capabilities of Ukraine**. Slovakia will strive to resolve the crisis by political means, at the same time continuing to assist in strengthening the capabilities of the Ukrainian armed forces, with an emphasis on the training of Ukrainian demining specialists at the national demining centres in Sered', Nováky and Martin, as well as at the NATO Centre of Excellence in Trenčín.

Slovakia will pay particular attention to responding to global threats and challenges. It will continue to **contribute to the stabilisation and reconstruction of Afghanistan**. After the recent completion of the ISAF operation, Slovakia is now ready to participate in the new NATO Training Mission (Resolute Support). Apart from this, in 2015 it will also contribute the amount of 500,000 USD for the development of the Afghan security forces.

Slovakia will support the activities of the international community in the **fight against terrorism, as well as against extremist and militant groups** that systematically violate fundamental human rights and constitute a threat to stability in Europe. Through military and humanitarian aid, Slovakia will assume its share of responsibilities and engage in the activities of the international coalition in the fight against the so-called **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**. Slovakia will use a wide range of tools in combating terrorist threats, including diplomatic and economic measures. Slovakia will implement specific steps in close coordination with Allies and partners within NATO and the EU.

Slovakia will enhance its abilities in terms of **cyberspace protection**. Cyber-attacks today are more frequent, better organised, and cause more damage to government institutions,

businesses and national economies. The Slovak Republic as a member of NATO, therefore, will contribute to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of cyberspace protection by improving security awareness and education, cooperating at the national and international levels, and coordinating a consistent security policy with an emphasis on critical infrastructure sectors.

Security policy (international crisis management missions and SSR)

Slovakia will contribute to the development of the EU's **Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)**, including the strengthening of capacities and capabilities in international crisis management. Slovakia will participate in EU missions and operations based on its capabilities. The Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic will participate in the EU mission in the Western Balkans (**EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina**), and in the **UN missions in Cyprus (UNFICYP)** and the **Middle East (UNTSO)**. Slovakia is also prepared to continue its engagement in the South Caucasus (**EUMM in Georgia**).

Slovak civilian experts will operate in the EU missions in Kosovo, at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, in Afghanistan, and in the Palestinian territories. Possible contributions of the Slovak Republic to other operations and missions will be assessed individually, in response to specific requirements and operational needs in the context of the priorities of foreign and security policy, commitments and personnel, and material and financial possibilities.

Slovakia will promote the development of a comprehensive EU approach, which allows for the effective use of a wide range of political, security, economic and development instruments when involved in international crisis management. Slovakia will advocate for the closest possible cooperation between the EU and NATO, and encourage the search for the most financially efficient solutions in the building of defence capabilities within the framework of the "Pooling and Sharing" initiative, while at the same time seeking to maximize the potential benefit of regional cooperation, especially within the Visegrad Group (V4) countries. In context of regional defence cooperation, Slovakia will place particular emphasis on the creation of a V4 EU Battlegroup, which will be on standby in the first half of 2016. Both within the EU and NATO Slovakia will promote enhanced cooperation between the two organisations in the field of defence and security.

An important milestone will be the June European Council summit, which will assess the fulfilment of the objectives of European security and defence.

The Slovak Republic will continue to pursue a significant foreign policy priority – the agenda of **security sector reform**. Due to its growing global importance, which was confirmed by the approval of the first UN Security Council resolution on Security Sector Reform in April 2014, Slovakia will take advantage of the planned activities in this area in order to develop bilateral cooperation, particularly with African countries. At the multilateral level, Slovakia will promote the better coordination and synergy of the activities of international organisations providing advice and assistance in security sector reform. For this purpose, Slovakia will utilise its position both as Permanent Co-Chair of the United Nations Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, and as President of a similar group at the OSCE. In practical terms, Slovakia will continue to focus its activities in security sector reform mainly on the transfer of its own reform and integration experience and expertise to interested countries.

Multilateral cooperation and priorities at the United Nations

Adherence to the principles of effective multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core, will also retain its central position in Slovak foreign and European policy in 2015 – a critical year when it comes to finding solutions to global crises, challenges and threats.

An unprecedented number of national and regional conflicts (including in our own neighbourhood) and of refugees and displaced persons in the world, new levels of international terrorism, the spread of contagious diseases such as Ebola having an extraordinary impact on public health in the world, the existential threat of climate change and the need to adopt new ambitious commitments in this area, and last but not least the preparation of a new transformative, sustainable development agenda for 2016-2030, with adequate tools to implement it, will all require solutions involving participation and compromise at the global level. Slovakia will make every effort within its power and status as a member of the European Union in this regard.

Slovakia will actively participate in the adoption of a comprehensive global development agenda beyond 2015, as reflected in the conclusions of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Rio+20), and at the Millennium Summit in September 2010. Slovakia will continue to promote the necessary reforms in key areas such as UN management, and administrative and financial affairs, but also in peacekeeping operations. The MFEA will actively promote the candidacy of the Slovak Republic to UN bodies and organisations.

Protection of human rights

Within international organisations (especially the United Nations, Council of Europe and OSCE), and in the context of bilateral relations, Slovakia will continue to advocate for **stronger and more effective protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law**. This effort will focus on the consistent implementation of existing human rights obligations.

Slovakia will continue to fulfil its obligations arising out of membership in the **Council of Europe**, facilitating the reform process of the organisation in order to streamline its monitoring mechanisms and the European Court of Human Rights.

Slovakia will continue to participate in the activities of the **UN Human Rights Council** and to cooperate with its mechanisms, while taking into account its national capacity and the enforcement of EU priorities. Through a committed approach to human rights policy, the Slovak Republic will fulfil the preconditions for re-election as a member of the Council for 2018–2020.

Slovakia will continue to contribute to the implementation of the **EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy**, including reinforcing its commitment to a “true” partnership with civil society. Slovakia will support the activities of the EU’s Special Representative for Human Rights in promoting the EU human rights policy externally. Slovakia will actively support the work of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), which supports democratic actors in the EU neighbouring countries.

International law

In the area of international law, Slovakia will continue to develop its bilateral and multilateral treaty base. Its improvement will be the priority, particularly in terms of creating the most favourable conditions for economic and trade cooperation. In order to streamline and

improve the process of national approval of international treaties, the MFEA will draft a new consolidated legislation in the form of an act on international treaties.

Slovakia will continue to promote respect for and strengthening of the rule of law and law enforcement in an international environment. Attention will be paid to the ongoing codification of international law and its progressive development within the UN system, particularly in the **UNGA Sixth Committee (Legal)**, as well as in the Council of Europe and other regional organisations. At the 70th UNGA session, Slovakia will focus on issues of the rule of law at the national and international levels, and on the activities of the United Nations International Law Commission.

The Slovak Republic will promote the streamlining of the Commission's operations, primarily by focusing mainly on those topics and issues of international law that are eligible for codification, *inter alia* on the issue of the peremptory norms of international law (*jus cogens*).

Slovakia will support implementation of the decisions of the **International Court of Justice** and monitor its decision-making. It will continue to actively support the effective implementation of the mandate of the **International Criminal Court** in the process of its investigation, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law, and as a Party to the Rome Statute. Slovakia will use all available means to protect the integrity – as well as the independence and impartiality – of the court, against any attempts to politicise its activities.

Slovakia will support the implementation of international humanitarian law, in particular by promoting the creation and strengthening of mechanisms for compliance with its norms.

Disarmament

The Slovak Republic will contribute to the consolidation of the existing system of relevant global norms, and promote the strengthening of the international institutional and contractual infrastructure. At the Review Conference of the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons** in the first half of 2015, Slovakia will advocate a balanced approach to all its pillars, in order to strengthen the integrity, credibility and status of this treaty as a key factor in maintaining global security.

In 2015 Slovakia will continue to chair the **Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency**, one of the Agency's key management bodies. Slovakia will engage in promoting the development of nuclear energy use for peaceful purposes, in strict observance of impartiality and neutrality.

In line with its emphasis on the strict observance of international humanitarian law, Slovakia in 2015 will carry out tasks laid down in Slovakia's Action Plan for accession to the **Convention on Cluster Munitions**. The aim is to deposit the instruments of ratification by 30 June 2015 – the Convention would thus enter into force on 1 January 2016.

Slovakia will actively implement the provisions of the Arms Trade Treaty following its entry into force on 24 December 2014.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

On the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the Slovak Republic will participate in the creation of a commemorative OSCE Document, anchoring the further strategic direction of the organisation, its visibility, and its effectiveness. Following its two-year presidency in the OSCE Economic and Environmental Committee, Slovakia will promote the

implementation of Ministerial decisions strengthening energy security. Slovakia will strive to enforce the OSCE's existing commitments in all three of the organisation's dimensions: political-military, economic-environmental and human rights. Slovakia will continue to lead the OSCE's SSR Group of Friends.

Fight against terrorism

The fight against terrorism is one of the priorities of Slovak foreign policy. In cooperation with the USA, Slovakia will continue to implement its **Action Plan for combating the smuggling of nuclear and radioactive material** in order to prevent its possible misuse for terrorism.

The Slovak Republic will continue its professional collaboration with experts from the United States in the management of the crises arising from the abuse of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials. Slovakia will also seek to enhance its cooperation with partners from neighbouring countries and the wider region.

Development cooperation and humanitarian aid

At the 70th UNGA session in 2015, the international community will evaluate the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and establish a **new global framework and new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Slovakia will actively participate in defining these Sustainable Development Goals, and in creating a new development architecture after 2015.

For the first time in EU history, the "European Year" will be dedicated to the topic of foreign policy and will be designated as the "**European Year for Development**". As part of this initiative, the Slovak Republic will organise events aimed at raising public awareness on the development cooperation between the EU and Slovakia.

In line with the Medium-term Strategy for Development Cooperation for 2014–2018, **Slovakia's Official Development Assistance (ODA)** will be directed primarily to three programme countries – Afghanistan, Kenya and Moldova. ODA will mainly include the **sectors of health care, education, good governance, and building civil society**. The Slovak Republic will focus on the promotion of transformation and integration processes in the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans countries. Effective tools for sharing transformation and integration experience include the Centre for Experience Transfer from Integration and Reforms (CETIR), which is utilised for expert consultations, study tours, training and internships of diplomats from partner countries at the MFEA, and also a joint project of the MFEA, Ministry of Finance, and UN Development Programme (UNDP).

In 2015 Slovakia will seek to strengthen its cooperation and coordination of development activities with other donor countries, particularly the Visegrad Four. It will also more actively make use of international platforms for presenting its activities and building partnerships.

It is Slovakia's ambition to follow up pilot initiatives, such as start-ups, with the aim of achieving the effective and transparent **involvement of Slovak businesses** in its development activities. A new tool for connecting business and development activities in Slovakia will be soft loans, which will also assist Slovak entities in their participation in the tenders and grants of the European Commission and international financial institutions.

In the context of **humanitarian crises** in the world, Slovakia will respond promptly to the requests and needs of the international community.

2. Active European policy

Current European themes and cross-cutting issues

As in previous years, in 2015 the MFEA will implement the European policy within its power, as well as ensure coordination of the European agenda between Slovakia's central state administrative bodies and EU institutions and Member States. The aim is to improve cooperation, not only with the various ministries and the National Council of the Slovak Republic, but also with the non-state sector. At the same time, Slovakia will continue its efforts to improve the process of drafting position papers on draft EU acts. Towards this end, preparation for the establishment of an electronic portal to monitor the EU agenda will continue.

The new European Commission took its mandate for 2014–2019 on 1 November 2014 under the leadership of Jean-Claude Juncker. The most significant organisational change as compared to the previous EC term has been the inclusion of Commissioners in project teams that will be led by European Commission Vice-Presidents. Their role will be to coordinate the work of Commissioners' groups, the composition of which may change as a result of new projects. Under the leadership of Juncker, the EC has a more powerful political mandate, given that his election as EC President took into account the results of the European elections.

The EC has committed itself to promoting reform agenda during its five-year term, in order to achieve its 10 main political priorities.¹ The main topic for the Slovak Republic will be **supporting economic growth and employment**. To maintain the credibility of the Stability and Growth Pact, Slovakia will insist on its consistent compliance without formal modifications, but with full use of its existing flexibility. Making use of the Stability and Growth Pact's flexibility will promote a balance between consolidation policy, investment in the economy, structural reform, and reducing unemployment. Slovakia will endeavour to make the maximum use of existing European resources, especially of cohesion policy. Equally, Slovakia will promote a regional balance in the formation and implementation of the European Commission's investment package in the areas of employment, growth and investment – the so-called Juncker package.

A fundamental issue in terms of competitiveness will be **energy policy**, for which Slovak Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič will be responsible as EC Vice-President. The implementation of energy connections and the diversification of transport routes and resources will contribute to the completion of the internal energy market and the strengthening of energy security. A key project in energy security will be the completion of the north-south connection utilising available EU resources, including the "Connecting Europe" facility. Slovakia will be fully involved in the building and optimal formation of the Energy Union, which should help to reduce the high energy dependence of Member States.

¹ *These include: strengthening employment, growth and investments, uniform digital market, energy union/policy in climate change, enhancing the internal market, deepening the economic and monetary union, agreement on free trade with the USA, strengthening justice and fundamental rights, new migration policy, the EU as a strong global player, and democratisation of the EU*

The climate and energy framework will be a particularly difficult issue for the Slovak Republic. It will be necessary to ensure conformance with Slovakia's national interests when preparing the common European legislation in this area. Equally important will be to revise the EU's objectives and its progress in achieving them, based on the development of international climate negotiations and the ambitions of other countries.

The **Digital Agenda** will also require much attention as an area with significant potential to contribute to the restoration of economic growth. Given its cross-sectional nature, the Digital Agenda will impact almost every sector of the economy and society, including science and research and educational systems. It will facilitate technology transfer and innovation generation, especially among start-ups but prospectively also among SMEs, and ideally across the economy. The completion of a single digital market within the EU will bring about benefits in the form of harmonised rules and an interconnected online environment. These aspects of the Digital Agenda will bring about benefits not only to businesses but also to consumers. In order to take full advantage of these benefits, it is crucial to systematically eliminate risk aversion and to build an awareness of the need for the internationalisation of economic activities.

It is the ambition of the Slovak Republic to remain at the core of EU integration. It will be necessary, therefore, to give its attention to the project of the **completion of the economic and monetary union**, particularly in its fiscal and economic policy. After considerable progress is made in building a banking union, we will advocate that the EU focus mainly on the consistent implementation of existing mechanisms. In particular, it will be necessary to ensure the smooth operation of the surveillance mechanism, and the timely launch of a single mechanism for addressing bank crises. Slovakia also supports its deeper integration into the budgetary and economic pillar of the Economic and Monetary Union, on the basis of budget neutrality and support of reforms regarding national ownership.

In 2015 Slovakia will focus on the priorities of the **Slovak Presidency of the European Union Council (SK PRES)**, in relation to the agenda of the new European Commission. In defining content priorities, the Slovak Republic will continue to cooperate with its partners in the **Trio Presidency (Netherlands, Malta)**. The result, at the end of 2015, will be the Trio's 18-month programme and an integrated system of communication about the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council at home and abroad. An important aspect of this preparation will be the continuous implementation of tasks defined in the previous period. The training of human resources, development of the budget, and logistical-organisational preparation of about 200 Presidential events in Slovakia will all progress in 2015. The reinforcement of personnel of the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU in Brussels, and of individual ministries in Bratislava, will continue.

In 2015 the **National Convention** on the European Union will continue its work as a proven tool for constructive public debate. The Convention is an arena for the wider involvement of the professional, academic and general public in the debate on current aspects of EU membership, as well as on the challenges of integration and Slovak prospects in it. Slovakia's experience in this regard will be shared with other countries, particularly with Albania in 2015.

What defines a qualified majority of votes, the most common method of decision-making in the EU, was amended by the Lisbon Treaty and the new definition took effect on 1 November 2014. As a result, the Slovak Republic, as a smaller member state of the EU, will have to place an even greater emphasis on **finding partners** who share the same or similar positions within the EU. The new rules introduced a **double-majority voting**, i.e. of both EU Council members and the population. A qualified majority requires at least 55% of EU

Council members (i.e. at least 16 EU Member States) representing at least 65% of the total EU population (e.g. approximately 328.6 million of the total of 505.6 million in 2014). Slovakia's main partners will naturally be the V4 countries, but it will also cooperate with other countries, depending on the agenda and the potential for finding a common position.

Bilateral cooperation in regional and European contexts

Relations within the V4, with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, will remain a natural priority of the Slovak Republic. Close cooperation with the **Czech Republic** will focus, *inter alia*, on the implementation of projects of strategic economic interest, infrastructure projects in the central and northern areas of the common border, and on new impetuses to be outlined at the 3rd joint meeting of the governments of Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 2015. Slovakia will further develop its pragmatic neighbourly relations with **Hungary** – there is a mutual interest in continuing projects with tangible results, including the implementation of the Memorandum on transport infrastructure development between Slovakia and Hungary, signed by the Prime Ministers in Szad on 27 March 2014, which contains an indicative list of projects for transport links between the two countries in the period 2014–2020. In its relations with **Poland**, the priority will be completion of the transport and energy infrastructure, and a deepening of cross-border and business cooperation. In the traditional neighbourly dialogue with **Austria**, Slovakia will focus on the European and economic vector of cooperation, particularly on strengthening investment presence, improving transport infrastructure, and giving a new impetus to cross-border cooperation.

In the field of **regional cooperation**, the Slovak Republic, in the first half of 2015, would like to build on its thus-far successful **V4 Presidency**. Slovakia will not only retain a continuity of the successful coordination of V4 country positions at the European level, but also continue to make progress on the long-term strategic priorities within the V4 region (energy, transport, defence). It will seek to bring new elements into regional cooperation (Digital Agenda, public finances, science, research, innovation) in accordance with the document “Programme of the Slovak Presidency in the Visegrad Group (July 2014 - June 2015) – Dynamic Visegrad for Europe and Beyond”, which was approved by Slovak Government Resolution no. 278 of 4 June 2014.

In order to consolidate the internal cohesion of the Central European region, the working groups of V4 governments will continue their activities in energy security, common gas market, regional transport links, defence cooperation, and EU cohesion policy. As part of the Slovak Presidency, all technical aspects associated with the preparation for putting the joint V4 Battlegroup on standby in the first half of 2016 will also be finalised. In addition to implementation of the established ministerial formats (V4 or V4+) in the various sectors, the Slovak Republic will follow up on many foreign policy activities initiated during the first six months of its V4 Presidency in 2014 (ministerial meetings in the V4+ format: V4+ South Korea, V4+ Western Balkans, V4+ Great Britain, as well as coordination of V4 activities towards Ukraine, V4 Prime Ministers Summit with the President of Switzerland, and others). In March 2015, the Slovak Republic will host the 3rd Meeting of the V4 Foreign Ministers and the Nordic and Baltic countries (NB8), and will also hold the traditional V4 ministerial consultations with six Eastern European partners before the May Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga. Slovakia will conclude the SK V4 PRES (June 2015) by hosting the V4 Prime Ministers Summit.

In its bilateral relations with **EU Member States**, the Slovak Republic will place special emphasis on the further development of economic and investment cooperation and enhanced political dialogue within the framework of European policy and Atlantic ties.

Germany is an important strategic partner for Slovakia in both bilateral and European politics. The current priority in bilateral relations is to strengthen the position of Germany as a country that can bring a strong stimulus for innovation in the Slovak economy, as well as in the scientific community.

As a member of the Visegrad Group, Slovakia will take advantage of the **United Kingdom**'s deepening interest in mutual political cooperation on EU reforms, and also of the growing trend of pragmatic cooperation with British investors in industry, particularly in the energy and financial sectors.

Relations with **France** will be dominated by the systematic implementation of the multi-sectoral Action Plan for Cooperation for 2013–2018 in political partnership, economic development, trade, education, science and culture.

In 2014 Slovakia will also focus on developing its ongoing dialogue on innovation and development policy with **Finland**.

Slovakia will pay great attention to its partnerships and to close cooperation with other EU Member States. In **Cyprus**, Slovakia will continue its unique role as an impartial facilitator of bi-communal dialogue, by organising activities in order to build confidence between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities, this being the only channel for dialogue between the two sides in the event of a stagnation of talks.

EU external relations

In accordance with the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Slovak Republic will continue to closely coordinate its activities with other Member States and EU institutions in the field of foreign policy. It is in Slovakia's interest to strengthen the EU's position and weight, and hence the position and weight of its Member States, in the international arena. In this respect, the Slovak Republic will actively support the further development and building of the European External Action Service (EEAS) under the leadership of the **new EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**, particularly in relation to the planned assessment of the organisation and functioning of the EEAS by the end of 2015. The MFEA will support and actively promote candidates for EEAS middle and senior management positions, including the heads of EU delegations.

The key territorial priorities of the Slovak Republic in the EU CFSP will remain Eastern Partnership countries, especially Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and the Western Balkans.

Ukraine, countries of Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus, Russia and Central Asia

Enhancing EU cooperation with the countries of the **Eastern Partnership** will be at the heart of Slovak foreign policy. An essential part of its further development will be the adaptation of the Eastern Partnership policy to the current political reality in Europe. Our goal is to help Eastern partners to advance the process of reform, transformation and transposition of European values, democracy and human rights. Efforts to resolve the **crisis in Ukraine** calmly and peacefully while ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, and support for democratic and reform processes, represent fundamental principles on which Slovak foreign policy is based. Slovakia will develop ambitious neighbourly and friendly relations with Ukraine, while promoting democracy, reform and stabilisation processes

tending toward political association and economic integration with the EU. The main carriers of these processes must be, first and foremost, Ukrainians themselves.

An important factor in relations with **Moldova and Georgia** will be the process of their political association and economic integration with the EU. It is essential from the perspective of the Slovak Republic that this process should continue as dynamically as possible, despite the tense situation in Ukraine. Slovakia is interested in using the positive impact of the integration efforts of these countries in the development of intensive economic and trade relations.

Slovakia will continue to develop pragmatic relations with the other Eastern Partnership countries – **Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus** – and to encourage them towards activities that would lead to improved relations with the EU. Slovakia's priority is the development of political dialogue and the activation of bilateral political and economic relations.

Political dialogue and cooperation in the energy sector have a special significance in relations with the **Russian Federation** (RF). Slovakia is interested in long-term stable energy supplies, while utilising its potential as a transit country to the fullest extent. From the Slovak perspective, restrictive measures against the RF are a tool, not an objective, of EU policy. Although they do not represent a real solution to the situation in Ukraine, they were an essential step taken by the international community in response to violations of international law. In the event of the stabilisation of the situation in Ukraine, involving the Russian Federation's positive contribution, Slovakia is prepared to respond flexibly to sanctions.

Slovakia will continue to support the further development of EU relations with the **countries of Central Asia**. This will remain a key region in terms of energy security (Southern Corridor, uranium deposits), economic and trade cooperation (raw material sources) and cooperation in the field of development aid and security.

Transatlantic cooperation (relations with the USA and Canada)

The Slovak Republic has a sustained interest in **transatlantic cooperation and ties with the USA and Canada**, which are of strategic importance from the Slovak perspective. Their practical expression is Slovakia's commitment to security within NATO and to the same democratic values and principles. It will be an opportunity and a challenge to use and sustain the 'renewed' interest of the United States and Canada in Central and Eastern Europe, which has increased as a result of the situation in Ukraine. We want to maintain active dialogue and cooperation – at the bilateral level, within the V4, at the EU level, and through common membership in NATO, as well as in the areas of primary interest to the Slovak Republic: Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

Slovakia will continue its bilateral high-level dialogue, including as follow up to the meetings of the Slovak Prime Minister and the US President in November 2013, and the Foreign Ministers in March 2014. Slovakia wants to continue negotiations on an ambitious and comprehensive agreement on Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and supports an early conclusion of negotiations before the end of the mandate of the current US administration. Slovakia supports the continuation of the EU–US high-level dialogue, as well as the EU–US Summit and EU–US Energy Council in 2015.

EU enlargement

EU enlargement is regarded as one of the most important and also most successful EU policies. Stability in Europe is unattainable without a secure and prosperous Western

Balkans, fully integrated into European structures. Slovakia will therefore continue to provide support for the European integration ambitions of the countries in the region. It will also give attention to encouraging economic cooperation and opening opportunities for Slovak business through a high level bilateral political dialogue.

Western Balkans and Turkey

In 2015 Slovakia will support the efforts of **Montenegro**, a regional leader in the European integration process, to implement reform and open up further negotiation chapters. We consider it a necessity that the opening of individual chapters with **Serbia** will be accomplished as soon as possible. This step will strengthen Serbia's commitment to advance the integration process and will have a positive impact on public opinion regarding EU accession. Slovakia will continue to emphasise the ongoing dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, to which there is no political alternative for achieving normalisation of relations. Slovakia will assist **Albania** in maintaining its momentum in the accession process, and in meeting the requirements for opening accession negotiations. For **Macedonia**, there remains the crucial need to improve the situation, especially in the areas of political dialogue between the government and opposition, the rule of law, freedom of the media, and good neighbourly relations. Slovakia will continue to advocate for the active involvement of the EU in overcoming the general stagnation of the processes in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

Slovakia will support Turkey's accession to the EU after meeting the criteria for future membership, and will make use of the potential development of economic relations.

Latin America

In 2015 Slovakia will seek to intensify relations with the most influential Latin American countries, especially **Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia and Peru**. Economic interests and the promotion of our foreign policy objectives, particularly within international organisations, remain at the core of the Slovak Republic's activities.

Asia and Pacific

The demographic and economic development of the **Asia-Pacific region** affects global international relations in the 21st century with growing significance. Slovakia will support strengthening the EU's strategic partnerships with **China, India, Japan and Korea, as well as the dialogue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**. We are interested in strengthening economic cooperation, increasing Slovak exports and attracting new investments. Slovakia will continue its regular political dialogue with key countries in the region, while its attention will focus on making increased use of opportunities for cooperation with developed Asian countries in the fields of science, technology, research, innovation and advanced technologies (Japan, South Korea and Singapore). Slovakia will continue to participate in the efforts of the international community to strengthen security, good governance, and democracy in Afghanistan.

Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa

The unstable situation and escalation of conflicts in several countries of the Middle East and North Africa will continue to pose a security and humanitarian threat not only in the region but in the wider spectrum of international relations, including risks to the internal

security of European Union Member States. The main challenge, therefore, is to achieve tangible progress in stabilising the situation, and to increase security, democratisation and economic development. Slovakia considers progress in all these areas important, and will therefore support efforts to achieve an Israeli–Palestinian peace agreement, and the elimination of violence especially in **Libya, Syria and Iraq**. A further important element will be the intensifying of economic cooperation, and the sharing of experience with countries of the Southern Neighbourhood, to whom Slovakia is ready to pass on its transition experience. Slovakia will actively respond to opportunities for cooperation with **Iran**, depending on the outcome of the negotiations on its nuclear program.

In relation to **Sub-Saharan Africa**, Slovakia will continue its bilateral activities and economic cooperation, particularly with the **Republic of South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria**, and will participate in drafting and implementing the EU CFSP.

3. A thriving Slovakia and support for economic interests

Economic diplomacy

Development of the Slovak economy is linked to foreign policy and our participation in the global market. **Economic diplomacy** actively promotes the economic interests of the state abroad. Its main instrument is support for the trade and investment activities of enterprises in their entry into foreign markets, and promotion of their interests in particular territories, as well as strengthening the interest of foreign investors in doing business in Slovakia.

Based on an analysis of Slovakia's standing in the world, the MFEA will identify **priority activities for individual countries and regions** in the context of their current and expected developments. It will also seek to promote the interests of Slovak exporters and export diversification plans in traditional export sectors (*automotive, consumer electronics, steel and metallurgy*), and also in other sectors with growing export potential (*energy, services, transport, information technology, agriculture, food*).

Slovakia will further develop **trade and investment relations mainly within the European Union and with the countries in its neighbourhood**. Furthermore, it will strengthen cooperation with traditional markets such as **Japan, South Korea, India and China**. Finally, Slovakia will seek to strengthen the territorial diversification of exports via greater involvement in the areas of the **Arabian Peninsula, Latin America and Africa**.

The MFEA will cooperate with the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance and other relevant departments in creating a single information portal for Slovak exporters. Through the Ministry's web portal "Podnikajme v zahraničí" (Doing Business Abroad) we will continue to effectively transfer current economic information from abroad to the business community in Slovakia. In 2015 we will expand the information provided to exporters to include other information blocks related to the potential for involving Slovak entrepreneurs in research and innovation transfer, as well as a block for selected instruments of Slovak development assistance.

The MFEA will promote the wider participation of the Slovak Republic in projects related to **EU financial instruments within the jurisdiction of the MFEA** – the IPA II Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), an implementation instrument for building institutions of state and public administration (TWINNING), and the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX) of the EC Directorate-General for Enlargement.

In 2015 the MFEA will promote both proven **and pilot approaches to international economic cooperation**. This will include organising business missions, investment dialogues, and bilateral innovative forums, as well as **initiatives to promote networking** among entrepreneurs at home and abroad (on transatlantic, European and regional scales), the promotion of Slovak entrepreneurs, consultants and experts **in international organisations and financial institutions** (mainly in consortia with key partners, through technical cooperation funds, and tenders declared separately by developing countries on the basis of medium-term strategies in international organisations and financial institutions), and engaging the **diaspora of Slovak professionals abroad** in business activities within Slovakia, for example as investors or mentors. The MFEA will work closely with the relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy.

New approaches will be piloted particularly in area of **innovation**. The MFEA supports the **development of the knowledge economy and the internationalisation of Slovak research and innovation** in line with the goals of the strategy for the smart

specialisation of the Slovak Republic. In 2015, the MFEA – within its portfolio and in tandem with the relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Education – will strive to intensify the efforts of selected Embassies **to link** Slovak innovative businesses (start-ups) with foreign partners, mentors and investors. Slovakia will ensure the participation of innovative entrepreneurs in relevant **training, competitions, investment and business forums, stays in incubators and world-class accelerators, as well as in building and promoting the V4 “start-up” brand.**

An innovative approach will be used to promote a greater role for the private sector in **development cooperation.** The MFEA and MoF will follow up on their successful cooperation in 2014 on the development of stimulating financial instruments (soft loans for consumers of Slovak goods and services in developing countries), as well as continuing with their Private Sector Liaison Officer (PSLO), who will inform and advise businesses and consultants competing for contracts in international organisations and financial institutions (MO/MFIs).

Via the **Slovak Government’s Council for Export and Investment Promotion,** the MFEA will also ensure a sustained and intensive dialogue between government representatives and the business sector, and the coordination of activities in the field of international economic cooperation and presentation of Slovakia abroad. Being a member of the **Council for the Strategic Management, Coordination and Control of Activities of the Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO),** the MFEA will contribute to streamlining the agency and to the close coordination of pro-investment and export-oriented activities.

Energy Security of the Slovak Republic

The MFEA will respond to the major global changes in the energy sector, as reflected in the volatility of energy demand and prices, a drop in long-term investments, by increasing Slovakia’s share of renewable energy sources and supporting new approaches in the extraction of unconventional oil and gas reserves. The main goal in this area will be to **ensure the security and stability of energy supplies and their economic sustainability. This must be based on the strategic platform that is represented in Slovakia by the Druzhiba Pipeline and the Brotherhood gas transit pipeline, such transit comprising a considerable source of income for the state budget.** It should also be borne in mind that there is not currently a great demand for gas in Europe, and so some of the alternative projects being considered do not appear to be sustainable from an economic point of view. At the same time, we should be considering both alternative routes and alternative resources. Slovakia will support the Southern Corridor, which would link existing EU transportation networks to new resources of natural gas from the Caspian region and the Middle East. Russia has announced its withdrawal from the South Stream project.

The MFEA will actively pursue the foreign policy and economic interests of the Slovak Republic in the changing international environment of energy security. In bilateral and multilateral contexts it will seek to **promote the diversification of transit lines and resources, and the building of a cross-border energy infrastructure.** It will promote informed discussion on nuclear energy and contribute to the formulation of the EU common energy policy.

In connection with the issue of energy security, the “Project of External Energy Security” was created under MFEA auspices. In order to improve energy security by sharing information and seeking common solutions, a joint Interdepartmental Analytical–Coordination Commission for Energy Security was founded on the platform of the Slovak

Ministry of Economy and the MFEA. These tools having proved useful, the Slovak Republic will continue to use them in its energy policy.

International economic organisations

In 2015 Slovakia will focus on overcoming the impact of the current global crisis in **international economic organisations**, and multilateral economic and financial groupings. Slovakia will support creating preferential conditions for Slovak industries and sectors of the national economy, as well as using the infrastructure and outcomes of such organisations and groups in favour of Slovak economic interests, including the interests of businesses.

Within the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, Slovakia will seek effective solutions to overcome the impact of the crisis, particularly in the areas of unemployment (long-term and young people), education, and public administration reform. It will also strengthen the link between OECD membership and operational and strategic priorities. A new tool will be a short-term internship for government experts at the OECD, based on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Slovak Republic and the OECD. In 2015, 70,000 € will be allocated for the implementation of joint Slovak-OECD projects.

Within the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**, Slovakia will continue to support the continuation of multilateral negotiations based on the Doha Development Agenda. The outcomes of the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali will provide the basis for further work. Based on these outcomes, Slovakia will continue to prepare multilateral trade agreements along with other EU Member States. A key outcome of this conference has been the adoption of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, which will contribute to a significant reduction in the administrative burden on domestic producers.

Within the **EU common trade policy**, Slovakia will mainly promote gaining better access to the largest and fastest growing economies in the world through **ambitious free trade agreements with the EU's strategic partners – the United States and Canada**. Slovakia will pay close attention to the course and outcome of negotiations on free trade agreements with Japan, India, and the ASEAN countries, to the provisional application of free trade agreements with the Eastern Partnership countries Georgia and Moldova, as well as to the application of a special trade regime with Ukraine.

Slovakia will support cooperation with the **World Bank Group (WBG)**. Under the new constituency, it will focus on the promotion of Slovak interests in the defining of common priorities. Its newly elected representative will also map out the status quo relationships, and highlight the opportunities that exist for Slovakia in the WBG. Through cooperation with the newly created contact point for the business sector – the Private Sector Liaison Officer (PSLO) – Slovakia (via its representative) will continue its efforts to involve the private sector in development cooperation through international organisations and financial institutions. During the first phase, Slovakia will contribute to defining the possibilities for the systematic and effective sharing of information regarding opportunities in the WBG for Slovak companies and individual experts. The Slovak Republic will also focus on the use of paid professional technical assistance (RAS) and WB counselling in selected areas of Slovak interest (e.g. climate change and transition to a low carbon economy, efficiency of public spending, good governance, innovation agenda). Within the World Bank Group, Slovakia will also focus on capacity building, *inter alia* in development cooperation and innovation agenda, and on disseminating its know-how of political and economic transformation through the World Bank Institute.

Slovakia will coordinate its position with that of other EU Member States in order to implement the reform of the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**.

4. Open Ministry and citizen services

Consular assistance

Due to the high mobility of Slovak citizens, it is an increasingly important challenge for consular services to ensure quality service and assistance to citizens abroad in resolving problem situations. In pursuing this goal, the consular service, within the framework of the MFEA Electronic Services project, will begin in 2015 to automate certain consular services, which we expect will dramatically shorten the time needed for the application processing of our citizens abroad. A higher standard of consular emergency assistance will be achieved via adjustments in financial aid to Slovak citizens abroad, and by amending the law on the Foreign Service in order to strengthen the scope of consular authorities in the performance of notary activity, certification and translation. External consular days, which have proven valuable, will be used to a larger extent in areas with larger populations of our citizens. Consular departments will give special attention to those citizens who went to live abroad in the past two decades.

Slovak honorary consular officers play an important role in assisting Slovak citizens abroad, and their powers will be further extended. The MFEA will adopt systematic measures to improve the network of offices operated by honorary consuls, and to further streamline their operations. During this year, the 7th global conference of honorary consuls of the Slovak Republic is being prepared.

A priority of Slovakia's visa policy will be to further reduce the scope of visa requirements for Slovak citizens, and balance reciprocal visa relations with third countries. In cooperation with Schengen States, Slovakia will focus on visa procedure standardisation. Negotiations with Italy and Germany will be concluded on representation agreements with regard to the visa procedure; such an agreement will also be proposed to France. This will simplify the procedure for obtaining Slovak visas for foreigners who come to Slovakia mainly for tourism and trade.

In 2015 the consular service will gain its first practical experience from the pilot project for outsourcing the visa application process, at the Slovak Embassies in Moscow and Kiev and at the Consulates General in St. Petersburg and Uzhgorod. The knowledge gained will be important when deciding on the further use of this service, aimed at people requiring a Schengen visa.

Cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy as an integral part of foreign policy will continue to play an important role in 2015. Slovakia will continue presenting its art and culture abroad through diplomatic missions and Slovak institutes, with a particular emphasis on important anniversaries: the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ľudovít Štúr, the 135th anniversary of the birth of Milan Rastislav Štefánik, the 80th anniversary of the birth of Albín Brunovský, and the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Depending on available budget resources, a comprehensive presentation of Slovak culture in selected countries will be initiated.

Activities within the field of cultural diplomacy will be carried out in close cooperation between the MFEA and the Ministry of Culture, under the Agreement on Cooperation in Cultural Diplomacy and International Presentation of Slovak Art and Culture Abroad. This framework will also include the creation and preparation of a cultural and social presentation programme during the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2016.

Slovaks living abroad

The preservation and development of the linguistic, cultural and national identity of Slovak minorities and communities abroad falls under the auspices of the **Office for Slovaks Living Abroad**, which will exploit the potential of representative expatriate organisations and personalities in Europe and overseas in fulfilling this task in 2015.

Priority will be given to addressing the complex needs and projected plans of expatriates, in order to ensure the aim of the subsidy system and public policy objectives in relation to Slovaks living abroad – i.e. to preserve and enhance their national consciousness, mutual solidarity, and good relations with Slovakia. Awarding the Certificate for Slovaks Living Abroad and increasing its prestige, as well as continuing and developing its cooperation with churches and mission centres in providing for the spiritual and socio-cultural needs of expatriates, will continue to be important roles performed by this Office.

In cooperation with the organisations and personalities of expatriate life, Slovakia will support cultural, educational, artistic and publishing activities, and the development and protection of the cultural heritage of Slovaks living abroad as an integral part of the values of the Slovak national cultural heritage.

Cooperation with non-governmental sector

The fundamental objectives of the MFEA include also the raising of public awareness of international relations, security, and the foreign and EU policy of the Slovak Republic, through intensive dialogue at the levels of Minister, state secretaries, and the MFEA's various departments, along with NGOs and the academic sector. Meetings are focused on current issues of Slovak foreign policy and the use of external expertise in preparation of the Ministry's conceptual materials.

In 2015 the MFEA will work in **partnership with the non-governmental sector**, which in modern diplomacy participates in the formulation of foreign policy. The NGO sector will be involved in joint projects with the MFEA, funded by the MFEA's subsidy mechanism, through the organisation of professional events, the development of studies, and publishing.

Coordinated presentation of Slovakia abroad

When presenting Slovakia abroad, the MFEA will emphasise its continuation of the process of creating the country brand (i.e. branding). The MFEA's objective is to complete the current process of Slovakia brand preparation and move it to the implementation stage, in active cooperation with the relevant ministries and agencies, such as SARIO (Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency) and SACR (Slovak Tourist Board). The MFEA has prepared proposals for specific communication messages, and – based on the results of the discussions with professionals and the wider public – will propose an inter-ministerial

agreement to finance the creation of a comprehensive country brand. The MFEA will actively enforce the principles of coordination, synergy, transparency and effective use of budget appropriations in order to avoid duplication.

Professional Foreign Service

In 2015 the MFEA will modernise the information and communication infrastructure between Slovak embassies abroad and headquarters at home.

The Foreign Service will continue its preparations in 2015 for the Slovak EU Council Presidency in 2016. A number of projects (such as *“Improving the performance of government employees on the EU agenda – preparing for the Slovak EU Council Presidency”*, financed by the European Social Fund) will aim to increase the language and professional proficiency of government employees working in European affairs.

The diplomatic sector will strive to achieve a minimum burden on public finances and work with real cost rates. Our vision for Slovakia is to be always perceived as a successful leader, good organiser and attentive host.

In line with its strategic objectives, the Ministry will also focus on improving the best forms of employee education. In cooperation with universities and academia, the MFEA will hold training courses in the field of economic diplomacy and international development cooperation and humanitarian aid. The Ministry will also provide internships for about two hundred young people studying at Slovak and foreign universities. It will also continue its *“National Plan for Education in French”*, for employees across the Slovak state administration.