



MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



Published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic
Public Diplomacy Department

ISBN 978-80-88726-30-2

Annual Report Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic Foreign Policy in 2008

ministry of foreign affairs of the Slovak Republic

publication activities

Miroslav LAJČÁK

Minister of Foreign Affairs



Oľga ALGAYEROVÁ

State Secretary



Diana ŠTROFOVÁ

State Secretary



Marcel PEŠKO

Secretary General

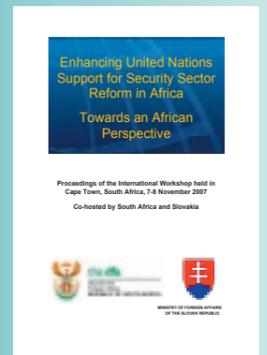


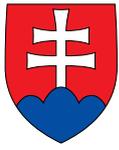
To ensure better awareness and promotion of Slovakia abroad – 122,022 promotion and information materials about Slovakia (books, promotion and information publications, CDs, DVDs and so on) were purchased and distributed to the diplomatic missions of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Institutes.

editorial activities in 2008

In cooperation with the individual departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic the following publications were published:

- *Enhancing United Nations Support for Security Sector Reform in Africa, Towards an African Perspective* (Proceedings of the international workshop held in Cape Town in November 2007, published in cooperation with the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa and the Directorate General for International Organizations and Official Development Assistance).
- *Zmluva o Európskej únii, Zmluva o fungovaní Európskej únie (Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union)* (consolidated versions as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon, published in cooperation with the Department of EU Internal Affairs and Institutions).
- *Information bulletin on the services provided by the Citizens Assistance and Services Centre* (in cooperation with the Consular Department and the Citizens Assistance and Services Centre). ■





MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Annual Report Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Foreign Policy in 2008

2008



Annual Report 2008
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic
Foreign Policy in 2008

© Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava 2009
All rights reserved.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic
Hlboká cesta 2
833 36 Bratislava 37
Slovak Republic

tel.: 00421-2-5978-1111
fax: 00421-2-5978-3638 (3639)
e-mail: info@mzv.sk
web: www.mzv.sk

Photographs:
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic,
The News Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR)

Translation:
Martin Chovančík

Proof-reading:
Catriona Menzies

Number of pages: 78
Circulation: 3,000
Printed and designed by: AEPRESS, s.r.o.

ISBN 978-80-88726-30-2



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| ■ Foreword | 5 |
| ■ Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2008 | 7 |
| ■ The Highest Representatives and Foreign Policy in 2008 | 10 |
| ■ A Safe and Democratic World | 13 |
| Slovakia in NATO..... | 14 |
| Chairing the Council of Europe | 16 |
| The Western Balkans Remains a Priority..... | 18 |
| Slovakia in International Organizations..... | 20 |
| ■ A Successful and Prosperous Slovakia | 25 |
| Slovak Economic Diplomacy..... | 26 |
| Slovakia and the V4..... | 30 |
| Good Neighbourhood Relations | 32 |
| SlovakAid 2008..... | 36 |
| Energy Security | 39 |
| ■ Slovak Interests in an Effective European Union | 41 |
| Ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon | 43 |
| The Coordination of Sectoral Policies | 45 |
| European Neighbourhood Policy..... | 49 |
| Slovaks in EU Institutions | 50 |
| ■ Serving Our Citizens and Slovakia Open to the World | 53 |
| Consular Service | 54 |
| We Serve and Assist | 56 |
| Services for the Public | 57 |
| Honorary Consulates..... | 58 |
| Cooperation with the Third Sector | 59 |
| Cultural Diplomacy | 60 |
| The Seniors of Slovak Diplomacy..... | 63 |
| ■ Modern Slovak Diplomacy | 65 |
| 2008 – The Year of Implementing Changes..... | 66 |
| The Budget and its Use in 2008..... | 75 |
| Organizational Chart of the MFA | 76 |
| Frequently Asked Questions..... | 78 |



“We are a state which actively takes responsibility, not only in the diplomatic, but also in the security field, for the fates of people living in various war-torn regions around the world. The collaborative decision-making of the Slovak

Republic on global issues is both a great moral challenge and a rewarding aspect of our 15 year existence. It is confirmation of our political maturity and the anchoring of our moral values in the community of democratic nations.”

Ivan Gašparovič, President of the Slovak Republic, address at the New Year's meeting with the diplomatic corps accredited in the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, 16 January 2008



“I am convinced that any European solution must be in compliance with the national as well as the general good. Finding a way to join these two is in fact the most important role of European integration. That is precisely why today

the development of the national existence of individual states is so dependent upon the true unity of Europe.”

Robert Fico, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, address before the concert on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Prague Spring, Berlin, 25 June 2008

“I picture Europe as a strong global actor because only a strong Europe can be competitive, active and effective. If Europe wishes its voice to be heard on the global forum it must be as unified as possible. In this regard the interests



of individual Member States are not weakened, but strengthened through the effect of synergy. A strong Europe equals strong Member States!”

Pavol Paška, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, address at the Central European Summit of the Presidents of Parliament, Prague, 26 September 2008

“The euro will help Slovakia to take part in, and benefit from, Europe's collective effort to recover from the current economic crisis. By joining the Euro zone, Slovakia has enhanced its long-term potential to create growth and jobs and keep inflation under control.”



José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, the New Year's speech on the adoption of the Euro by Slovakia, 1 January 2009

Dear readers,



With this Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on the foreign policy of Slovakia, we would like to present our views and assessments of Slovakia's foreign policy in 2008. We are aware that we are bringing our report into an environment which, due to the digital and information technologies, is being overwhelmed daily by a multitude of images, news, and commentaries from the international scene. Their volume, transparency, inaccuracy and selection, however, pose a problem. Thus, the ambition of the Annual Report, written by those who directly contributed to the formulation and implementation of foreign policy in 2008, is to offer an authentic mosaic of Slovak foreign policy over the last year.

I assumed office as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic in January 2009, taking over from my predecessor and colleague Ján Kubiš who achieved a great deal throughout the two years he was in office as Minister. The MFA is innovative in its working methods and is staffed by many distinguished diplomats, people with substantial experience as well as those who are young, dynamic and ambitious.

The year 2008 was a challenging, yet good year for Slovak diplomacy. The MFA directly participated in fulfilling Slovakia's strategic goals. Slovakia joined the Schengen area, which significantly increased the potential for the free movement of our citizens across Europe including the free movement of labour. Parliament ratified the *Treaty of Lisbon* and Slovakia handled the preparations for the adoption of the Euro excellently. The Slovak Republic repeatedly confirmed its alliance commitments by being very active within the European groupings and by participating in international diplomatic and military missions. Slovakia also responded to the challenge of assisting those countries most in need by increasing its official development assistance and successfully carrying out its Chairmanship in the Committee of

Ministers of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the MFA improved its ability to operate in the field of consular services and public assistance.

Building on the above-mentioned accomplishments, I sincerely wish to confirm the continuity of Slovakia's foreign policy – it has evolved on the basis of time-tested values, challenges and alliances.

At the beginning of 2008, the MFA adopted its strategy *A Successful Slovakia in a Safe World*, in which it defined its main mission, strategic priorities, and goals for the foreseeable future. This was both the first year of its implementation and the beginning of a process of modernization in the management and working practices of the MFA. The reorganization and reform of the MFA should increase its effectiveness at a time of new and serious challenges.

The year 2008 brought the first signs of change in the distribution of geopolitical power in the world and marked the beginning of an era of increased vulnerability in global relations. The conflict in the South Caucasus and the onset of the world financial crisis are clearly some of the signs or symptoms of this. Events from the turn of the year, such as the military confrontation in Gaza, the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine that seriously impacted on many European countries including Slovakia, and the deepening global economic crisis, have simply exacerbated the negative trends of the latter half of 2008.

These developments do not change Slovakia's strategic foreign policy priorities but they do force us to re-evaluate their ranking. Mitigating the negative impact of the global economic crisis on Slovakia has become the highest priority for the MFA. It is also the reason why developing the economic dimension of Slovakia's diplomacy is one of the priorities I will be focusing on as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The MFA has been preparing for this since the latter half of 2008. It has established an inde-

pendent Directorate for Economic Cooperation and Official Development Assistance. Since February 2009, we have been focusing on specifying the nature of our contributions to the struggle of the Slovak government regarding the crisis. We have been paying particular attention to the possibility of increasing support for Slovak exports, to communicating with the governments of the countries with the largest investors in Slovakia, as well as to being significantly more active at home, in the European Union, and in other international organizations in order to make best use of the funds available and perhaps even to achieve their augmentation. I am aware that the fulfilment of these objectives will require significantly closer cooperation and coordination with the other ministries, and above all with the Ministry of Economy.

The other foreign policy priorities remain unchanged for the forthcoming period. Relations with EU members and ensuring that the EU develops in the best way possible form the basis of Slovakia's foreign policy. The 'jubilant' North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remains the cornerstone of our security. Slovakia is prepared to cooperate with the new US administration, which we anticipate will provide a stimulus for international and alliance policy. Along with its EU partners Slovakia will strengthen the rational and pragmatic policy of relations with Russia as well as other East European partners, mainly Ukraine. The Slovak Republic will continue to focus on the countries of the Western Balkan region.

Dear readers,

We have entered a period of extraordinary challenges. Most recently we have spoken often and with pleasure about cooperation in international relations, about integration, coordination, and solidarity. Now, the time has come to prove the validity of these values in practice. It is time to prove the trustworthiness of our political principles and the coherence of our communities – political, economic and military – to the citizens of Europe. It is even more important in the light of the fact that any crisis, even an economic one, has the potential to radicalize the internal political life of the affected countries and helps to foster destructive political extremism. I believe that diplomacy, and especially European diplomacy, must prepare itself for this phenomenon and resolutely face it. That is also why we are very concerned to overcome the present problems as soon as possible and we are prepared to discuss them openly in our region as well and look for solutions with our partners.

Solidarity and cohesion should become the key words of domestic and foreign policy in 2009. These words indicate a way out of the crisis as well as a move towards greater improvement in relations. I sincerely hope that for you and all those who participate in the foreign policy making process that this will be a year of renewal in values and greater responsibility in international relations.



Miroslav Lajčák
Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Slovak Republic

Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2008

Activities in NATO

NATO is the main guarantee of Slovakia's security. Slovakia is perceived as a trustworthy partner and an active ally, due to its determination to strengthen the transatlantic bond and participate in military missions. The Slovak Republic participated in international crisis management operations under NATO command and in the build-up of NATO and EU Rapid Response Forces. It also continued its support of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. By transferring its multifunctional engineer unit to the south of Afghanistan and by implementing the decision to double the number of staff in 2008, Slovakia continued to fulfil its long-term commitment to assisting Afghanistan. The number of Slovak soldiers in the Kosovo Force (KFOR) mission was also increased. Slovakia voiced its support of the conclusions of the NATO Bucharest summit including the further enlargement of the Alliance. For a second year the Slovak Embassy in Kiev has been continuing its hard work at the NATO Contact Point Embassy in Ukraine, informing the general public and professional communities about NATO. The Slovak position on the US missile defence contributed to the inclusion of this issue in the internal agenda of the Alliance.

Slovakia in the UN

The Government of the Slovak Republic has been successful in fulfilling its programme within the United Nations (UN) and the specialized agencies of the UN System. In its positions and activities Slovakia followed the topics it promoted during its non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UN SC) in 2006-2007. The country's membership in the UN Human Rights Council, supported by 135 Member States, has contributed to the strengthening of Slovakia's position in the structures of this global organization. Furthermore Slovakia participated in UN peace missions (the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus – UNFICYP, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force – UNDOF, and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization – UNTSO). The prestige of Slovak diplomacy has also been increased by the appointment of two Slovak diplomats to significant posts within the UN: Miroslav Jenča was named the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and at the end of the year Ján Kubiš was appointed Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

The six-month chairmanship of the Slovak Republic of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of

Europe continued up to May 2008, when Slovakia handed the chairmanship over to Sweden. Until then, Slovakia strived to direct the attention of Council of Europe (CoE) Member States and other partners to optimizing the organization's work. Under its chairmanship, Slovakia prepared a rich programme emphasizing the issues of education and the upbringing of Roma children and youth, local and regional self-government, the work of the European Court of Human Rights, and the *European Landscape Convention*. On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* coming into force, Slovakia organized a separate international conference. Expert cooperation was also established with the representatives of the Belarusian executive and civil society.

The Region of the Western Balkans

The history of the Western Balkans is often connected with instability in Europe. By strengthening cooperation between the countries of this region, Slovakia has been striving to change this perception of the Western Balkans. It has done so both through bilateral political and economic dialogue as well as through multilateral diplomatic means. The Slovak Republic has assisted these countries in their efforts to join the EU and NATO and in making the European integration process more attractive. For this purpose, Slovakia used its own experience from the transformation process. Slovakia ratified the NATO accession treaties of Albania and Croatia. The social and economic reform in this region also represented one of the priorities of Slovakia's official development assistance. In Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, Slovakia supported projects to the amount of approximately 2.5 million Euros.

The unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo in February 2008 was not recognized by the Slovak Republic for it has always promoted the idea that the solution to Kosovo's status should be decided by means of an agreement between the parties concerned with the UN SC playing a decisive role. Slovak diplomacy encouraged positive development in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the support of the Office of the High Representative of the International Community which was headed by the Slovak diplomat and current Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák.

Neighbours and the Visegrad Four

Slovakia strived to maintain good relations with its neighbours on a pragmatic level and develop them in as wide as possible range of areas. Mutual rela-

tions also intensified due to the enlargement of the Schengen area. Our strategic partnership with the Czech Republic was strengthened in anticipation of the first Czech presidency in the EU Council. A considerable part of Slovakia's foreign policy was devoted to the agenda concerning relations with the Republic of Hungary. The bilateral Slovak-Hungarian political dialogue lagged behind the positive dynamics of general cooperation in this relation. However, due to pressure from the Slovak side, at the end of 2008 the dialogue became more active and contributed to an improvement in communication. In relations with Ukraine, Slovakia's only non-EU neighbour, emphasis was laid on economic and cross-border cooperation and supporting Ukraine's integration ambitions.

The Visegrad Four (V4) has traditionally occupied an exceptional position in Slovakia's Central European activities. The Summit of V4 Presidents organized by the Slovak President, Ivan Gašparovič, in September 2008 in Piešťany significantly contributed to the dynamics of the V4 activities. Prime Minister Robert Fico initiated the establishment of a regional investment bank which would offer long-term loans and guarantees to local banks and riskier projects in the V4 countries, Slovenia, Croatia, and in Ukraine. It would also support projects in Romania, Bulgaria, the countries of the Western Balkans, and Moldova. The effectiveness of the International Visegrad Fund was increased by the introduction of new types of flexible V4 projects (Visegrad+) in relation to Belarus, focused on, among other things, supporting the Belarus media industry.

European Union

The fifth year of EU membership was very successful for Slovakia. It joined the Schengen area and proved its ability to participate effectively in protecting the common European area. Slovakia concluded the ratification process of the *Treaty of Lisbon* and thus fulfilled its intention to support the efficiency of the EU institutions. The Slovak Republic also concluded the long process of meeting the demanding criteria for the adoption of the Euro on 1 January 2009. Slovakia thus became the sixteenth state of the Euro Zone and the first of the V4 countries to do so. This step created a stable and secure currency environment for the country at a time of international financial and economic crisis. It also led to the elimination of high volatility and uncertainty in terms of its currency, which small states inevitably have to face during a crisis.

Slovakia supported the coordinated approach of the EU in mitigating the impact of the global crisis. It also backed the agreement of the European Council on the EU climate and energy package, the

implementation of which will enable the fulfilment of the EU's ambitious commitments in the field of climate change and energy. Slovakia supported the EU enlargement process. It offered to share its experiences regarding the pre-accession preparations with the candidate countries, Croatia in particular. EU integration negotiations with the Western Balkan countries contributed to the stability in this region. The process of strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy has commenced through the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean and the formulation of the Eastern Partnership Policy, which should create the institutional conditions for deepening EU cooperation with its Eastern European neighbours.

Official Development Assistance

Slovakia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) was distributed in line with the document *Medium Term Strategy for Official Development Assistance: 2003-2008*. The *Act on Official Development Assistance*, confirming the role of the MFA as the national ODA coordinator, came into force in February. In 2008 Slovakia focused on strengthening stability, pursuing good governance in the regions and states of priority interest to Slovakia. It also focused on development as a means of reducing poverty and famine in developing countries. The MFA continues to take an interest in increasing the effectiveness of development assistance which should be supported by the implementation of the innovative document *Medium Term Strategy for the Official Development Assistance: 2009-2013*.

In 2008 the programme countries Serbia, Montenegro and the project countries Albania, Afghanistan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Sudan, Tadjikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan were priority countries for *SlovakAid* assistance. Alongside other multilateral and bilateral development assistance schemes, Slovakia thus supported 34 development projects of Slovak organizations in 14 countries to the amount of 130 million SKK (4.31 million EUR) in 2008. In the course of 2008, Slovakia also provided humanitarian assistance to the citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, Myanmar, Sudan, China, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Haiti, Cuba, and Palestine to a total sum of 59.4 million SKK / 1.97 million EUR.

Consular Services

One of the basic tasks of the MFA, which is perceived very sensitively by the public, is providing a consular service, with particular emphasis on serving its citizens. This task is fulfilled by the MFA headquarters and by the network of Slovak diplo-

matic missions abroad. An increase in the numbers of citizens travelling abroad and the fact that the MFA has limited personal and financial resources together create ever more demanding conditions for the provision of this service. The tragic accident of the Slovak bus in Croatia, the evacuation of Slovak citizens from South Caucasus during the conflict in Georgia in the summer of 2008, and the organization of air transportation for the Slovak student who fell seriously ill in Taiwan were all, despite their tragic nature, examples of well provided consular assistance involving cooperation with other Slovak departments. In an attempt to make services to citizens more effective, the MFA established a Citizens' Assistance and Services Centre in June 2008 before the summer tourist season. In 2008, the impact of Slovakia joining the Schengen area was also fully manifested when the Slovak Republic had to take its share of responsibility for the protection of this area, including the issuing of Schengen visas.

In 2008 the MFA organized the 5th *World Meeting of Honorary Consuls of the Slovak Republic* with the participation of 92 out of a total number of 141 honorary consuls of Slovakia. All of them met with the highest political representatives of Slovakia and had an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the new *Strategy of the MFA SR* which also relies on the role of honorary consuls especially in the development of international economic and cultural cooperation.

Slovakia's PR

The diplomatic effort to present Slovakia as a country with a positive environment for business and investment, with rich cultural potential, and as a country to explore and spend time in was also part of the promotion of Slovakia's interests. Diplomatic missions, their economic departments and cultural institutes organized hundreds of economic and cultural presentations on Slovakia. One of the key topics of these events was the adoption of the common European currency in Slovakia in January 2009. The cultural events included exhibitions of art and photography, a variety of musical concerts, presentations of Slovak literature and music, theatre and film presentations, debates with artists and specialized seminars and conferences. Key projects were the exhibition *The Magic Number '8' in the History of Slovakia*, which portrayed the anniversaries of significant and decisive events in the modern history of Slovakia (1848, 1918, 1938, 1948, and 1968) and events commemorating the unsuccessful reform efforts of 1968. A project entitled *Centenary of Eugen Suchoň* presented the anniversary of the birth of one of the most significant composers from Slovakia in the 20th century. In 2008, it was

also decided that the Eastern Slovak town of Košice should be European Capital of Culture along with Marseille in 2013.

Modernization of the MFA

The MFA responded to the ever more demanding challenges facing the Slovak foreign service with a thorough modernization of the organization and its work procedures. After adopting the strategy *A Successful Slovakia in a Safe World*, the MFA introduced a new system of management through a combination of strategic, project and process management. It developed the strategic priorities and goals of the MFA, producing specific operational steps with allocated responsibilities. Connecting these strategic goals with the economic management of the MFA i.e. the allocation of budget resources in the fulfilment of specific goals is an important element of strategic management.

The new organizational structure of the MFA saw a reduction in the number of management levels to three. A new set of MFA career regulations has been adopted unifying, for the first time, the rules regarding the long-term professional orientation of employees and thereby contributing to the transparency and effectiveness of the foreign service and establishing the rights and obligations of MFA employees.

Continually re-evaluating the network is part of an effective budgeting system and the utilization of human resources. Due to changing priorities, Slovakia closed the Consulate General in Brno and opened a new embassy in Hanoi. At the same time, the MFA is preparing to transform the Nairobi branch office in Addis Ababa into an embassy, open an embassy in the United Arab Emirates – Abu Dhabi, and establish branch offices in Skopje and Tirana. ■

Priorities of the MFA for 2008

The main goals of the MFA for 2008 were set out in the document, Slovakia's Foreign Policy Orientation for 2008 and the Strategy of the MFA SR – A Successful Slovakia in a Safe World adopted in February 2008.

The priority objectives of the MFA in 2008 focused on:

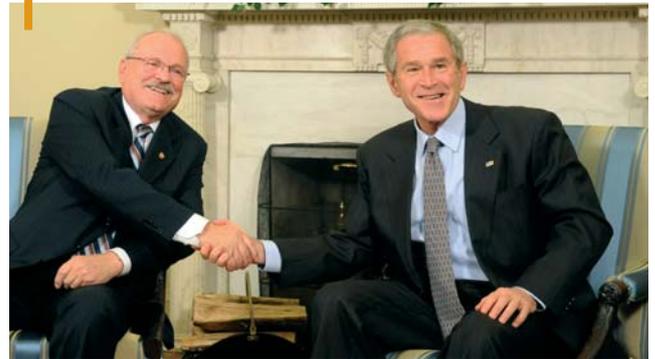
- **effective promotion** of Slovak interests in the EU and the achievement of membership in the Euro Zone;
- **ratification** of the EU reform treaty signed in Lisbon;
- **strengthening** the security of the Euro-Atlantic area;
- **successful** chairmanship of Slovakia in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe;
- **good neighbourhood relations**, cooperation within the V4;
- **support** of security, stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans;
- **development** of the economic dimension of Slovak foreign policy;
- **securing** the external energy security of the Slovak Republic;
- **modernization** of the MFA and foreign service.

The Highest Representatives and Foreign Policy in 2008



A two-day visit by the British Royal couple – Her Majesty the Queen, Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh to Slovakia in October 2008 represented the highpoint of good political relations between the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and is indicative of their promising future

The official visit of the President of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Gašparovič, to the United States of America in October 2008 confirmed the alliance and friendship between Slovakia and the USA. The discussion with the President of the USA, George W. Bush, was primarily focused on issues concerning the internal functioning of NATO, the war on terrorism, and the global financial and economic crisis. During the visit, the President of the USA announced his intention to abolish visa requirements for Slovak citizens travelling to the USA. The visa requirements were abolished on 17 November 2008, the day of a national holiday commemorating the fight for freedom and democracy



The Summit of the V4 Presidents organized by the President of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Gašparovič, on 12-13 September 2008 in Piešťany contributed to the dynamics of the development of good Slovak neighbourhood relations as well as regional cooperation

Several times in 2008, the Prime Ministers of Slovakia and Hungary discussed the issues of mutual neighbourhood relations, the basic framework of which is represented by the *Treaty on Good Neighbourhood and Friendly Cooperation*. Despite some differing positions on part of the political dialogue, cooperation developed positively, for example, through the fulfilment of the programme of the Slovak and Hungarian Prime Ministers *Common Past, Common Future in the Mirror of Common Projects* which included specific tasks. A number of these were fulfilled or were in their implementation phase in 2008. Both sides expressed an interest in broadening this programme



Effective multilateralism and adherence to international law are among the key principles of Slovak foreign policy. The support of the UN is also a cornerstone of this policy. At the meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on 28 January 2008 in Bratislava, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico, confirmed support for the reform effort designed to better prepare the UN for managing the global challenges of the 21st century

Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Pavol Paška used his official visit to the People's Republic of China in November 2008 to confirm Slovakia's interest in strengthening bilateral political dialogue at a parliamentary level. He also attended the Slovak representation at the travel and investment forum in Shanghai, where he presented Slovakia as an attractive country for Chinese businessmen, investors and tourists



Slovakia strives to truly assist Afghanistan in stabilizing its internal security situation and seeks to contribute to the long-term sustainable development of the country. Therefore, Slovakia adopted the decision to increase the level of its previous engagement. Members of the Armed Forces currently deployed in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan were increased to 175 in 2008. There are plans to further raise the total to 246 during the course of 2009 (in the sense of the mandate approved by the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NC SR) in June 2008). At the same time, Afghanistan became one of the priority countries for Slovakia's bilateral development assistance



Strengthening security and development in the Western Balkan region is one of the long-term priorities of Slovak foreign policy and is a crucial point on the agenda of Slovak diplomacy. The appointment of Slovak diplomat Miroslav Lajčák to the position of High Representative of the International Community and EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina serves as an example. During his mandate, Bosnia and Herzegovina was able to gain new momentum in its internal political dialogue, in implementing necessary social reforms and in European integration through signing the *Stabilization and Association Agreement* with the EU



On 12 October 2008, the Slovak Republic represented by Prime Minister Robert Fico participated for the first time in the Euro Zone Summit – a special meeting on the issue of the financial and economic crisis, organized by the French EU Presidency in Paris. At this event, Robert Fico supported the joint approach of all the member countries, aimed at renewing trust in global financial markets and thus help solve the problem of the negative impact of the crisis on the economy and unemployment



Slovakia carried out its chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from November 2007 to May 2008. It focused on operational issues of the Organization, on the education and upbringing of Roma children and youth, on supporting the concept of Europe for Citizens, and cooperation between the CoE, EU and the UN Human Rights Council. Slovakia also promoted dialogue with Belarus in the CoE framework. Minister of Foreign Affairs Ján Kubiš regularly presented positions on the political and legal points of the CoE agenda and participated in several multilateral meetings



A Slovak soldier greeting his son, who travelled with his mother by Presidential plane to visit him, Prishtina, December 2008

A Safe and Democratic World



The Slovak Republic is a responsible and active member of the international community. Through its work it contributes to the development of a safe and democratic world, the spreading of the values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. Internationally, Slovakia is perceived as a trustworthy partner, a member of the European Union, the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In 2008 the Slovak Republic continued in its active participation and cooperation with its European partners in fulfilling the goals of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The focus of Slovak activity within the EU corresponded to our long-term foreign policy priorities, primarily the Western Balkans, and EU policy towards its eastern neighbours and relations with strategic partners.

In the area of European and global security the year 2008 saw remarkable developments which brought several significant changes. The situation in Afghanistan deteriorated due to increasingly frequent Taliban attacks on the units of ISAF and the Afghan National Army. On the other hand the security situation in Iraq improved.

The countries of the Western Balkan region undoubtedly constitute one of Slovakia's foreign policy priorities. The Slovak Republic perceives the integration of these countries into the EU and NATO as a means of ensuring their development and security. In this regard, the unilateral declaration of the independence of Kosovo has not improved the situation in the area.

In 2008, Slovakia continued to support the transformation process of NATO in the political as well as the defence and military fields. Slovakia's representatives outlined their positions strengthening the transatlantic bond and cooperation with the EU. Our Embassy in Kiev, which serves as the NATO Contact Point Embassy, continued its activities with the goal of increasing the awareness of the Ukrainian public about NATO.

Slovakia presided over the Committee of Ministers of the CoE until May 2008. It focused particularly on the rapprochement of the international community and the citizen, the coordination of CoE activities with other international institutions, and the support of values such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy. As of June 2008, the Slovak Republic became a fully-fledged member of the UN Human Rights Council for a period of three years.

In 2008 Slovakia worked effectively within international organizations, especially the UN as well as the specialized agencies of the UN system and promoted the foreign policy priorities of the Slovak Republic as well as the principles, values and interests of the EU in the field of strengthening the instruments of multilateralism and the effective system of international relations with the key role of the UN. Slovakia actively participated in solving urgent issues and global challenges which are long-term in character and have considerable security, economic and social implications such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, the world food and energy crisis, poverty, sustainable development, and human rights. ■

Slovakia's membership in NATO has qualitatively changed the international position of the Slovak Republic. It has enabled Slovakia to take part in decision-making processes concerning the most important regional and global security issues and, at the same time, it has simultaneously increased our responsibility for developments on the international scene. As we approach the fifth anniversary of our full membership in NATO, it can be stated that Slovakia is increasingly prepared and able to reasonably and adequately formulate and promote its own positions and principles on even the most sensitive aspects of the policies and operations of the Alliance.



Sergeant First Class Miroslav Fejko who was honoured by the NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer for his service in missions at the North Atlantic Council meeting, Bucharest, April 2008

Improving the Alliance's Efficiency

Our objective was and still is to actively contribute to improving NATO's efficiency including its ability to face global security challenges. Thus, Slovakia



Minister of Defence of the Slovak Republic Jaroslav Baška accompanied by Ambassador of Slovakia to Ukraine Urban Rusnák at the opening of the Euro-Atlantic Information Centre in Uzhgorod, May 2008

is also focusing its energies on supporting further NATO (and EU) enlargement in order to strengthen the zone of stability, peace and prosperity within the Euro-Atlantic area. In 2007 and 2008, the Slovak Republic acted as the NATO Contact Point Embassy (CPE) in Ukraine communicating NATO values to the various sections of Ukrainian society and offering its assistance in establishing an institutional framework for deepening cooperation with NATO. The very active approach of the Slovak embassy and the positive evaluation of its work in this field contributed to the fact that Slovakia will continue to carry out the tasks of the NATO CPE in Ukraine over the next two years (2009-2010).

The Slovak Republic will carry on taking an active role in the formulation of NATO policies in the Western Balkan region. From a security standpoint, we will closely monitor the development of the situation, especially in Kosovo, where NATO units operating within the KFOR mission safeguard the stability and security of all citizens.

Increased Participation in Afghanistan

The significance of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan grew during 2008. This is also reflected by the increasing participation of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AF SR) in this region. Compared to 2007, the Slovak Republic increased the number of its contingent members in Afghanistan by more than 200%. The Slovak presence in Afghanistan is evolving, i.e. the Slovak Republic is



Rastislav Káčer, former Ambassador of Slovakia to the USA and the President of the Slovak Atlantic Commission

Europe and the USA are Destined for a Close Alliance

■ Slovakia will shortly celebrate its 5th anniversary of NATO membership. How would you assess Slovakia's performance in the Alliance and in what direction do you think the priorities of our membership should develop in the years to come?

For Slovakia, NATO membership was, along with EU membership, a prerequisite for stability and prosperity. The historically unprecedented economic growth experienced by our country and our membership of the community of the most developed and influential countries of the world simply prove this fact. The Alliance, however, is only an instrument. If we wish to make best use of it we have to be clear, consistent and credible. Credibility is important not only in formulating clear foreign policy positions, but also in building up military capabilities which are real and able to respond to new security challenges. In general I see

these priorities developing in three directions: firstly, having a clear foreign policy and the support of Alliance relations; secondly, building-up national defence capacities which are realistic, capable of reacting to developing security challenges and investing in training and equipment; and finally, having the support of Alliance projects which increase our collective military action capabilities and ensure that NATO remains a relevant institution on a global scale.

■ You were the Ambassador of Slovakia to the United States, the most important NATO country. What is the future, in your opinion, of US involvement in NATO with regard to the economic crisis and enduring differences between the USA and European allies on the issue of defence expenditure?

The USA is a crucial ally. The productivity and potential of its economy, military power, political stability and global involvement place the country in a separate category from other Member States. However, none of these attributes can alone guarantee that the

gradually developing its participation in the ISAF mission, taking on a more demanding role with a higher level of responsibility. According to the new mandate of the AF SR in Afghanistan approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic (11 June 2008) and the National Council of the Slovak Republic (19 June 2008), the focus point of Slovakia's activity is moving to the south of Afghanistan to the provinces of Oruzgan (under Dutch command) and Kandahar (under Canadian command). Slovakia currently deploys 175 soldiers in Afghanistan (and will commit a total of 246 soldiers by the end of the first half of 2009):

- multifunctional engineering unit of 57 (Kandahar);
- military police of 50 (Kandahar);
- military police of 45 (Oruzgan);
- national support element of 11 (Kandahar);
- 4 Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) members (Oruzgan);
- 4 members of ISAF command (1 in Kabul, 3 in Kandahar);
- 4 Personal Rapid Transport (PRT) members (2 in Oruzgan, 2 in Baglan).

In 2009, Afghanistan will become a programme country of Slovakia's official development assistance. Cooperation with programme countries is long-term in character involving a greater volume of resources. In 2008, the Slovak Republic donated 50,000 EUR to the Afghanistan Trust Fund. The Trust Fund is dedicated to the stockpiling of surplus ammunition and maintenance equipment,



Celebrations for the fourth anniversary of Slovakia's membership in NATO took place in Nitra. The army put on a series of displays involving military equipment and hand-to-hand combat, the military police, helicopter flights and dog handling, March 2008



The Secretary General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and the President of Romania, Traian Basescu, welcome the President of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Gašparovič, at the ceremonial opening of the NATO Summit at the Palace of the Parliament in Bucharest, April 2008

training in ammunition management and the joint development of the national action plan on ammunition. ■

problems and challenges of the globalized world will be solved. Europe and the USA are mutually destined to maintain a close alliance and cooperate because it is mutually beneficial and our interests are very similar. The financial and economic crisis only accentuates the scope of today's globalization. The deepening of the crisis on a global scale will not remove existing problems and challenges in the security field. On the contrary, for the USA and the EU to be equal partners it is necessary for the EU to command equal collective military capabilities, have a unified will and a mechanism to utilize these forces at times of need. I am afraid that from a long-term perspective the military capability gap between the USA and the EU will only increase and that the inability of Europe to quickly express its collective political will may well widen the transatlantic divide.

■ **Is success in Afghanistan truly decisive for the future of the Alliance as many representatives of NATO member countries have stated?**

The success of each person and institution is directly dependent on their actions and their ability to fulfil the objectives set. Correctly establishing objectives is especially important in terms of military operations as it allows us to determine what is a success and what is not. I am afraid it will be very hard for NATO to define what the 'success of the operation' is and even harder to define what has to be done to achieve it. Security and defence are expensive matters financed by public funds and they easily become the subject of oversimplified political arguments and debates. Success is important, but the ability to define and subsequently achieve it is even more important. Today, the Alliance is facing a great challenge in terms of its relevancy, and not only in regard to the operation in Afghanistan. NATO only has as much significance and influence as its members bestow upon it. It would be a shame if its members marginalized it without having a better alternative than that which NATO has been for the past 60 years. ■

More at:
www.nato.int (NATO)

The year 2008 was dominated by Slovakia's chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE). The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ján Kubiš, assumed the post of the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE on 12 November 2007 in Strasbourg. The full text of the priorities along with the calendar of the planned events associated with the Slovak chairmanship was announced on this occasion. Our chairmanship of this significant and traditional European organization offered us an opportunity, not only to confirm our interest in a unified and democratic Europe, and to confirm our support of its values and their development, but also served as an opportunity to promote a positive image of Slovakia.

Ján Kubiš participated as the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE in several multilateral meetings. He took part in the plenary meetings of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly (January and April 2008 in Strasbourg), the meetings of the OSCE Permanent Council (February 2008 in Vienna), the UN Human Rights Council (March 2008 in Geneva), and the joint meetings of the CoE with the EU (March 2008 in Brussels).

Slovakia organized several expert events as part of the integral role of the chairmanship. The Minister of Foreign Affairs or the State Secretaries were personally present at these events. The participation of the highest representatives of the CoE at these events in Slovakia was also ensured (the Secretary General, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE, the President of the European Court of Human Rights and others). Apart from the chairmanship events, Slova-

kia also organized working visits of the highest political representatives and representatives of Slovakia's institutions and state administration to Strasbourg as well as visits of other CoE representatives to Slovakia.

During the chairmanship, Slovakia attempted to focus the attention of Member States and other relevant partners on the core values of the organization, while primarily concentrating on areas where it could contribute its own experience. At the same time, Slovakia strived to operate equally on all levels: nationally, internationally and on the level of the institution's management. Assessments have shown that the Slovak Republic chose the right course. As an ordinary member of the organization, Slovakia wishes to continue promoting the priorities it adopted during the period of its chairmanship. Our attention is particularly devoted to dialogue with Belarus.

On 7 May 2008, at the 118th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE, Slovakia handed the chairmanship over to Sweden for the ensuing six-month period. The meeting was held in the new and more effective format initiated by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia and Sweden. Almost twenty Foreign Affairs Ministers and/or State Secretaries of CoE Member States participated in the meeting.

In the UN Human Rights Council

The Slovak Republic has been expressing interest in actively participating in human rights protection on a global scale for some time. In May 2008, Slovakia's candidacy to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), which is the main universal instru-



Emil Kuchár,
Permanent
Representative of the
Slovak Republic to
the Council of Europe,
Ambassador

We Not Only Talked, But Acted As Well

■ How would you evaluate the 6-month period of our Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE)?

Positively. We ourselves know how hard we prepared for those six months and how much effort it took to make it run smoothly, and without revealing the hard work that had gone on behind the scenes. Increasingly, the Member States expressed their support to us during the chairmanship, and the reactions of the delegates at the 118th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE were very positive. This is documented together with the positive attitudes of the Parliamentary Assembly representatives. We were well prepared; we established our priorities and achieved them. The

fact that President Ivan Gašparovič and Prime Minister Robert Fico came to Strasbourg to support the CoE was very well received at the time. Deputy Prime Ministers Dušan Čaplovič and Štefan Harabin actively contributed to the important conferences we initiated and organized. We began the chairmanship as an EU member, and Minister Ján Kubiš was exceptionally active in his position as President. We proved that we have the abilities and resources to prepare a great pan-European project. We have the ability to represent 47 European countries and coordinate their cooperation. We presented our chairmanship as a service to the Member States. At the same time we created sufficient space for the presentation of our opinions on the agenda. We finished our chairmanship strengthened as a country. The CoE is not a bogeyman but an instrument for the strengthening of positive values.

ment for the protection and promotion of human rights, was successful. In the elections of the 62nd UN General Assembly session in New York, Slovakia gained strong support from 135 countries from all the regions of the world. This diplomatic success once again confirmed that the Slovak Republic already had a positive reputation even in dealing with such undoubtedly sensitive issues such as respect for basic human rights and freedoms.

As of June 2008, the Slovak Republic became a full member of the HRC for a period of three years. Member status allows us to participate in the formulation of and voting on all resolutions and decisions made by this institution. It is in Slovakia's interest that the UN HRC works as an effective multilateral mechanism for the protection of human rights and that it actively and operatively solves cases of their violation wherever they may occur. The diplomatic and expert negotiations pursued under the HRC umbrella should lead to the achievement of tangible progress in the respect of human rights on a global scale. For the period of its membership of this institution, the Slovak Republic has made a commitment to promoting the equality of all categories of human rights (civil, political, as well as economic, cultural, and social rights, including the right to development).

The promotion of the EU's common positions and initiatives in the field of human rights is one of the Slovakia's priorities while holding membership of the HRC. In the current cycle of the HRC, the European Union is only represented by seven member countries, which generally coordinate their positions when presenting drafts of resolutions and decisions. ■

Events Organized During our CoE Chairmanship

- international workshop on the *European Social Charter* organized by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (Bratislava, 12 February 2008)
- international conference *Sector Report on the State of Higher Education in the Slovak Republic*, organized by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic (Bratislava, 19 February 2008)
- international seminar on the *Implementation of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes*, organized by the State Veterinary and Food Administration of the Slovak Republic (Bratislava, 13-14 March 2008)
- meeting of the CoE Member States' agents representing their state before the European Court of Human Rights organized by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic (Bratislava, 3-4 April 2008)
- international conference on the *Education and Training of Roma Children and Youth*, organized by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities and the MFA SR (Bratislava, 8-9 April 2008)
- international educational seminar *From Sport to Knowledge*, organized by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic (Bratislava, 17-18 April 2008)
- international conference *Improving Governance at the Local Level: Tools and Strategies* organized by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (Piešťany, 17-18 April 2008)
- international expert seminar, *The Use of International Instruments for Protecting Individual Rights, Freedoms and Legitimate Interest through National Legislation and the Right to Legal Defence in Belarus – Challenges and Outlook* organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with the Venice Commission and the Constitutional Court of Belarus (Minsk, 24-25 April 2008)
- 7th meeting on the workshops of the CoE on the implementation of the *European Landscape Convention: Landscape Concepts and Management: Integrated Space Management* organized by the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic (Piešťany, 24-25 April 2008)
- international seminar on the role of non-governmental organizations and civil society, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with Slovak non-governmental organizations (Bratislava, 25-26 April 2008)

■ What specific results was Slovakia able to achieve as the presiding country?

They are laid out in the two reports Ján Kubiš presented to the Parliamentary Assembly. The communiqué which we discussed until the final hour of the 118th session of the Committee both summarizes the results and sets out new tasks. We were keen to focus on the equality of all the institutions of the council. We devoted attention to the European Court of Human Rights and the implementation of its judgements. It was important to revitalize the positive spirit of the organization. In this sense, we accomplished a lot. We also presented our country. There were several exhibitions aimed not only at promoting a 'positive image'. We also focused on the holocaust and drugs, which convinced people of our openness and sincerity. What was also positive was the fact that we not only talked – but acted as well.

When cooperation with the EU was being discussed, the Commissioner, Ján Figel, and Members of the European Parliament were present. Were relations with the Parliamentary Assembly being discussed? That is when we were in close contact with our delegation. Were there problems with the budget? During our chairmanship, it was adopted in half a day. So it was also a success both in terms of approach and method.

■ What can we expect from the podium of the CoE in the forthcoming period?

A lot of hard work. In 2009, the CoE will celebrate its 60th anniversary. Our objective must be to see that it works in accordance with its mandate and that it remains a significant support to its members. Work must be done on reforming the courts. A new Secretary General must be elected. What is positive for us is the fact that our opinions are relevant to others. ■

The Western Balkans Remains a Priority

Slovak foreign policy considers the Western Balkans, which includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Montenegro (CG), Macedonia, and Serbia (including Kosovo), a priority region. The integration of Western Balkan countries into the EU and NATO is a means of ensuring the stability, security, and general development of the region. The Slovak Republic has been involved in the region and in stabilizing it on a long-term basis through the deployment of its citizens in military and civil missions. In 2008,

field. Given our very recent accession to the European and transatlantic structures, Slovakia was able to share this experience with individual countries in the region. We also quite extensively used the resources of Slovakia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to this end. Slovakia supported, via its ODA mechanism, projects dealing with the integration of Western Balkan countries into international groupings and organizations, encouraged the development of civil society, and assisted in the reconstruction and development of core infrastructure.



Visit of the Slovak Prime Minister and the Defence Minister to the Butmir EUFOR base near Sarajevo, June 2008

Slovakia was represented in the Office of the High Representative of the International Community in BiH (OHR), the European Forces (EUFOR) and the European Union Police Mission (EUPM) in BiH as well as in the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the newly formed European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in Kosovo.

We were equally active in contributing to solving the situation in the region in the diplomatic

In the Interests of European Integration

Slovakia's role in the successful signing of the *Stabilization and Association Agreement* in 2008 between the EU on one hand and Serbia and BiH on the other cannot be omitted. The signing of the agreement (despite the fact that Serbia had yet to fully implement the agreement in 2008) will enable further specification of the European perspective for the countries concerned, particularly given the opportunity to progress towards EU membership.

Slovakia also supported the efforts of the Western Balkan countries in liberalizing their visa regimes with EU Member States. We have been encouraging the countries of this region to fulfil the necessary criteria so that broad reciprocal contact with EU Member States can be simplified as soon as possible. The fact that Slovakia has been able to increase the volume of mutual trade and economic cooperation with most of the countries of the Western Balkans year on year is positive. In 2008, this was also an important aspect of transferring our intensive political dialogue to the economic platform.



Igor Slobodnik, Head of the Political Affairs Directorate General, MFA

We are Bound by Past and Present

■ Why is the Western Balkan region one of the priorities of Slovak foreign policy?

There are significant historical, cultural, political and economic, as well as, personal bonds between this region, its individual countries and Slovakia. We must, however, also be interested in the region due to its considerable influence on the security situation in Central Europe, amongst other things. Slovakia has developed an intensive dialogue with the Western Balkan countries. It has accumulated significant expertise, valued by our allies and partners. Slovakia is

involved, through the participation of its representatives, in maintaining stability and ensuring regional security in practically all its currently functioning forms including the military and civil missions. At the same time, we belong to those countries which systematically – through political and practical steps – support the idea of enlarging the European and Euro-Atlantic structures to include the countries of this region.

■ Kosovo remains the main security challenge of the Western Balkans. Will Slovakia as a member of the 'western' community of countries maintain its position on the issue of Kosovo's independence?

While at the beginning of 2008, NATO declared that it would treat the agenda of Kosovo as 'status-neu-

Bilateral Activities

The year 2008 was also significant in terms of bilateral relations. In this respect, the official visit of the President of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Gašparovič, to the Republic of Croatia on 28-30 October 2008 was one of the most important events. In December, the President visited members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic in the KFOR mission in Kosovo and the EUFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The official visit of the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico, to the Republic of Serbia on 13 October 2008 was of both political and economic benefit. In July, the Slovak Prime Minister also participated in the multilateral meeting of European heads of state and governments at the Croatia Summit in Dubrovnik. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ján Kubiš, paid three visits to the Republic of Serbia (in April, July, and October).

The President of the Republic of Macedonia, Branko Crvenkovski, visited Slovakia in March 2008. The Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Luka Bebić, came to Bratislava on an official visit in July 2008.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Vuk Jeremić, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, Gordan Jandroković, paid a visit to Slovakia in February 2008. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sven Alkalaj, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, Lulzim Basha, visited Slovakia in April 2008.

The Kosovo Issue

In 2008, the overall stability of the Western Balkans region was greatly affected by the situation in Kosovo. Kosovo unilaterally declared independence in February 2008. This decision had



Slovak President, Ivan Gašparovič, and Defence Minister, Jaroslav Baška, watching the ceremonial display of the Slovak KFOR contingent in Kosovo, December 2008



Ceremonial line-up on the occasion of the welcoming of members of the Slovak Armed Forces deployed in the KFOR and ALTHEA missions. In the picture: Chief of the General Staff, Ľubomír Bulík, and former Ambassador of the USA to the SR Vincent Obsitník. Michalovce, August 2008

the potential to destabilize the entire region. At the time, the foreign policy activities of Slovakia including the participation in civil and military missions were all aimed at preventing such a negative development. In this regard, Slovakia stressed the need to respect and adhere to the principles of international law and at the same time followed its national-state interests. ■



The Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vuk Jeremić, at the exhibition of Slovak naïve painting from Serbia, on the premises of Slovakia's Ministry of Culture, February 2008

tral', the EU, within its Common Foreign and Security Policy, left the issue of recognizing or not recognizing Kosovo independence up to the individual Member States. I am compelled to appreciate this internal democracy of both Brussels institutions; something which Slovakia benefits from fully.

We care about the unity of the EU but we cannot recognize the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo and thus join the majority of EU Member States; at the same time I would like to remind you that we have thus joined the vast majority of UN member countries.

Our reasoning on the issue of not recognizing Kosovo has been based on the principal that (in our

opinion) this step is in conflict with international law. As a relatively small country, we must emphasize the integrity of the international system. Our approach included supporting Serbia's right to demand, at the vote of the United Nations General Assembly in autumn 2008, that the International Court rule on the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence. We will determine our next steps by considering developments in Kosovo and the region as well as the overall situation on the status of Kosovo (including the aforementioned ruling of the International Court of Justice), and this will be done with the closest cooperation of other EU countries. ■

Slovakia in International Organizations

In 2008, Slovakia worked effectively within the platform of international organizations, especially the UN and the specialized agencies of the UN system. The Slovak Republic promoted its foreign policy priorities as well as the principles, values and interests of the EU in the areas of strengthening the instruments of multilateralism and the effective system of international relations, with the UN playing a key role. Slovakia actively participated in solving urgent issues and long-term global challenges, which have considerable security, economic and social implications, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, the world food and energy crisis, poverty, sustainable development, and human rights.

Within the UN, Slovakia continued to build on the credit and position it had gained thanks to its successful performance as a UN Security Council member (UN SC) in 2006-2007, i.e. as a respected UN member capable of helping find

session. Minister Ján Kubiš also appeared at the high-level side-events of the UN GA where he, in the presence of heads of states and prime ministers outlined the position of the Slovak Republic on the current global challenges, which the UN and entire international community must face. Events and negotiations dominating the agenda were: the fulfilment of the *Millennium Development Goals*; sustainable development; the world food and energy crisis; global warming; development financing; conflicts and security crises especially in relation to the situations in Georgia, the Balkans and the Middle East; the Iranian nuclear programme; as well as the prevention of conflict, peace-making, the war on terrorism, and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

In 2008, Slovakia was particularly involved in the reform of UN SC working methods, which the Slovak Republic considers integral to the complex reforms the UN is undergoing. The overall goal is

Ceremonial line-up on the occasion of the departure of members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic for service in the UNFICYP Peace Mission in Cyprus, Trebišov, March 2008



solutions to the most complex global and regional problems.

This approach was expressed by the active participation of the Slovak Foreign Minister, Ján Kubiš, who headed the Slovak delegation at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly (UN GA) in New York (21-27 September 2008). At the session, he delivered a speech as part of the general debate and met the UN Secretary General, the Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, the Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, and the President of the 63rd UN GA

to achieve a higher level of efficiency, openness and transparency in its work. As former Chairman of the Informal UN SC Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (2007), Slovakia gained unique knowledge and experience, which it was able to utilize in 2008. In this area, it closely cooperated with the Small Five (S5) countries (Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Singapore, Costa Rica, and Jordan), with Panama and Japan (an informal group of S5 friends), and also with relevant nongovernmental and academic institutions.

Slovakia continued to be involved in the agenda of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) through the coordination of the informal Group of SSR Friends, consisting of the diplomatic representatives of the Member States' permanent missions to the UN, who politically or even directly and financially sponsor diplomatic activities focused on supporting this reform on various continents.

The members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AF SR) and Slovakia's military observers continued to participate in the UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNFICYP, UNDOF, and UNTSO), in accordance with the strategy of Slovakia's participation in international crisis management operations. The largest Slovak military contingent currently operating is that in the UNFICYP mission in Cyprus. The presence of Slovak soldiers on the island in 2008 was also part of the overall political context of the exceptionally active political role our country has played since 1993 in mediating the bi-communal dialogue between the representatives of both halves of the divided island.

The operation of the Slovak military contingent in the UN Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights (UNDOF) was terminated due to regular rotation in June 2008. In accordance with a bilateral agreement, the Slovak contingent was replaced by that of the Croatian Armed Forces. The contingent of AF SR in Afghanistan (NATO ISAF mission), however, was consequently reinforced.

The fact that Slovak diplomat Miroslav Jenča assumed the post of the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Central Asia and Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy (UNRCCA) in this region, based in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan), was another success for Slovak foreign policy (the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed Miroslav Jenča on 1 May 2008 and he assumed the post on 1 June 2008). Since it is the first UN regional centre for preventive diplomacy of its kind, its results will largely determine the future development of UN capacities in the field of conflict prevention as well as the establishment of more similar centres in other regions of the world.

The participation of the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Antonio Maria Costa, in the GLOBSEC Conference 2008 in Bratislava was a significant element in the cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the UNODC in the context of the security agenda and the solution of global threat issues in 2008. Slovak authorities involved in combating crime actively partnered the UNODC in the discussions



Slovak soldiers of the SLOVCON forces at patrol base PB-126 near the bi-communal village of Pyla in Cyprus

on human trafficking. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic and the National Coordinator for the Fight against Human Trafficking, Vladimír Čečot, participated in the Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking (UN GIFT, 12-14 February 2008), where Slovakia presented its experience both as an origin and transit country and proposed the establishment of a database centre for the complex exchange of information on the subject.

Since 2008, Slovakia has been active in implementing UN international commitments in the fight against trans-national organized crime and in realizing projects against human trafficking and organ trafficking. To this end, it has been working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Federal Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Austria and the European Commission within the project *Development of Guidelines for the Collection of Data on Trafficking in Human Beings, including comparable indicators*.

The decision to establish the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia in Bratislava is evidence of the fact that Slovakia is perceived to be a reliable and responsible partner in the field of multilateral diplomacy, and is also a significant success in terms of the diplomatic activities of the MFA. The Regional Office monitors, evaluates and assists in the activities of the region states in the areas of population and development, reproductive health, and gender rights and equality. Opening a regional office in Slovakia is primarily a prestigious matter, which positively reflects on the state

in the context of international cooperation in the given area. It also has a positive impact on the local economy. The inauguration is planned for the second half of 2009.

In accordance with Slovakia's efforts to strengthen cooperation with UNESCO, a Permanent Delegate of the Slovak Republic to UNESCO in Paris was appointed to the rank of ambassador. Slovakia participated in the meetings of intergovernmental committees, councils of international UNESCO programmes, and negotiations of the Executive Board as well as those bodies of which Slovakia is a member: the International Coordination Council of the Programme on Man and the Biosphere, the consultative Bioethics Committee of COMEST, the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBS), and the Intergovernmental Committee of the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) (the Slovak Republic was elected vice-chairman). In cooperation with appropriate departments (the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education), Slovakia strived to ensure the effective implementation of those international legal instruments of which it is a signatory party, especially three UNESCO conventions: the *International Convention against Doping in Sport*, the *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, and the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*.

In July 2008, at the meeting in Canadian Quebec, the World Heritage Committee approved the inscription of the Wooden Churches of the Slovak part of the Carpathian Mountain Area onto the *UNESCO World Heritage List*.

On 11 November 2008 under the auspices of the UNESCO Director General and in cooperation with UNESCO, the Slovak Commission for UNESCO along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic organized an international conference in Bratislava on the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* entitled *New Ethical and Social Challenges*.

Slovak experts were actively involved in the technical improvement of the large hadron collider (LHC) and associated devices as well as in the transfer of technology within the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva. This can be seen on one hand as evidence of Slovakia's strong representation both in the management of CERN and the scientific community and on the other as promoting the economic interests of our country. Slovakia was also a member of the CERN Finance and Scientific Policy Committee. The most significant event within CERN was the launch of the LHC and the accompanying inauguration ceremony on 21 October 2008 where Slovakia was represented by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, Ján Mikolaj.

Slovakia in OPCW

On 5 March 2008, Slovakia was unanimously elected Chairman of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Executive Council based in The Hague for the period of 12 May 2008 to 11 May 2009. While holding this position, Slovakia has been fulfilling its ambitions in improving the efficiency of the OPCW decision-making process, especially in relation to the implementation of individual articles of the *Chemical*

95 members of the AF SR who returned from the UNDOF mission in the Golan Heights were awarded medals for their service in peacekeeping and observer missions by the Slovak Defence Minister Jaroslav Baška, Michalovce, June 2008



cal Weapons Convention (CWC) concerning the liquidation of chemical weapons and providing international assistance to countries in efficiently monitoring and utilizing chemical materials. It has also been strengthening the dialogue with the chemical industry with the goal of preventing misuse of chemical materials and broadening universal adoption of the CWC.

Co-Sponsorship of the International Process on Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

In 2008, the Slovak Republic co-sponsored the project of the *International Process on Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation*, aimed at supporting the implementation of the UN *Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* adopted in 2006 and establishing an integrated system of international cooperation under UN management. The Swiss government and the Centre on Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation based in New York were the authors of this project. Besides Slovakia, the project was also co-sponsored by Switzerland, Turkey, Costa Rica and Japan. Four international seminars were organized as part of this process from January to July 2008. Their objective was to enable an exchange of opinion between experts on the implementation of the *UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. The second seminar was held in Bratislava on the premises of the MFA in March 2008. It focused on the issue of UN cooperation with regional, sub-regional and other international institutions including civil society in implementing the *Global Strategy*. The entire process resulted in the drawing up of a final report and recommendations for the first formal evaluation of the *Global Strategy* implementation. The final report and recommendations were presented together by the co-sponsors of the project. The evaluative conference of the UN General Assembly took place in New York in September 2008. The resolution adopted confirmed the key role of the UN and the UN Global Strategy in the fight against international terrorism.

Slovakia in the OSCE

In 2008, Slovakia actively participated in the work of all major OSCE formats and used them to monitor developments in the countries considered territorial priorities for Slovak foreign policy (the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe) as well as in countries where it does not have its own representation (South Caucasus, some Central Asian states).

Slovakia advocated maintaining and strengthening the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK), de-



Ruská Bystrá



Nížny Komárnik

ploying OSCE observers to Georgia and their operations throughout the country, it supported the OSCE programme on Afghanistan and the organization's perspective on solving frozen conflicts.

Slovakia also succeeded in promoting the Slovak candidate – Ambassador Ľubomír Kopaj – to the post of the Head of the OSCE Mission to Ukraine, one of the key posts of the OSCE missions. Slovakia contributed to the strengthening of selected missions and their activities in the field of human rights and promoted the increased participation of qualified Slovak experts in these missions (there are currently 7 Slovak experts in the OSCE missions). The Slovak Republic voiced support for maintaining the strong and autonomous position of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Besides politically supporting the ODIHR, Slovakia primarily contributed to the work of this institution by deploying Slovak observers in various election monitoring missions in the OSCE participating states.

In 2008, the Slovak Republic continued its work as the EU Chef de File for Croatia. Using its position, Slovakia actively supported Croatia within the OSCE and the EU and advocated a reduction in the budget, number of employees and mandate of the OSCE Office in Zagreb. Thus, Slovakia served as a counterbalance to the many EU countries that insist on a continued OSCE presence in Croatia and perceive development in the country too critically. ■

In July 2008, at the meeting in Canadian Quebec, the World Heritage Committee approved the inscription of the Wooden Churches of the Slovak part of the Carpathian Mountain Area onto the UNESCO World Heritage List

More at:
www.un.org,
www.unodc.org,
www.iom.int,
www.unfpa.org,
www.unesco.sk,
www.cern.ch
www.osce.org



As of 13 September 2008, the fountain in front of the Irma Health Spa in Piešťany will be known as the Fountain of Presidents. This name will remind residents and visitors of the two-day Summit of the V4 Presidents

20

A Successful and Prosperous Slovakia



The effort to mitigate the impact of the world economic and financial crisis, which is widely considered to be the most severe since the 1930s, demands an appropriate reaction from all the entities involved, i.e. the realization of fundamental and, in many regards, extraordinary measures in the management of the financial market, international trade rules, and adjustments to the ways in which enterprises operate.

The Slovak economy is very open and export-oriented, with limited raw materials and a small internal market, which means that it is greatly affected by global economic development, economic movements and change, and indeed, crises. Slovakia's situation, when compared to the EU average, is also complicated by the higher energy consumption per unit of GDP and lower levels of productivity. The fact that so far the financial crisis has not had a dramatic effect on the Slovak banking system is a comparative advantage. However, the Slovak economy has not been able to avoid certain aspects of the global recession.

Two years ago, the MFA started a process of fundamental organizational and conceptual change, including an internal audit (TREFA project) which resulted, amongst other things, in the more effective setting of strategic priorities with an emphasis on substantially strengthening the economic dimension of diplomacy. The establishment of the Directorate General for Economic Cooperation and Official Development Assistance (DG) in autumn 2008 was an anticipated and logical progression.

Many of the DG's activities are already familiar to the foreign affairs department. However, their institutionalization gives them greater significance and quality.

Besides the standard activities undertaken by the DG, such as: supporting Slovak exports; attracting investment in areas with a higher return; supporting current investors; utilizing its membership in international organizations to more effectively represent its economic interests, for instance in making maximum use of the development funds available in order to ensure long-term economic growth, the DG is now looking to concentrate on its activities within the domestic sphere. Intensive and regular dialogue with the business sector, its interest groups and the foreign investors already established in Slovakia is an important instrument. The goal is to primarily focus on activities aimed at fulfilling the specific requirements of the business community. During the period under consideration, tangible progress has been achieved in the quality of cooperation between the MFA and the Ministry of Economy. This change is most visible in relation to the constructive coordination of the activities of both ministries in fulfilling joint objectives. Recent examples that could be highlighted are the forwarding of a joint instruction letter to the heads of the Slovak Embassies and the employees of trade and economic sections and the cooperation of both departments during the recent gas crisis, when supplies were disrupted. The DG is also engaged in issues of external energy security. It participates in the promotion of public-private partnership programmes.

At a time of deepening uncertainty, the decision not to delay the adoption of the common European currency proved to be correct. The MFA played a crucial role in this regard as well. It can be stated that, in its own field, the MFA significantly contributed to the economic successes and the prosperity of the country in 2008. ■

Economic diplomacy, brought into the spotlight by the dramatic progress of the global financial and economic crisis, has become a priority of the utmost significance, along with work related to politics and international relations. In this regard, operative procedures were combined with activities directed at formulating a strategy for economic diplomacy and the realization of multiple supplementary tasks.

Assistance to Small and Medium Enterprises

Attention was devoted primarily to Slovakia's performance within the EU structures, especially to the adequate preparation for negotiations within the individual groupings of the European Council and simultaneously to the observation of procedural effectiveness in utilizing the benefits related to membership in this organization. Thus, emphasis was put on the European Globalization Adjustment Fund (EGF) which enables us to provide support for those who lost their jobs as a result of structural changes in the international trade system. In close cooperation with the Slovak Ministry of Economy in particular, the MFA worked on assignments related to the *European Economic Recovery Plan* which could provide an important stimulus in overcoming the consequences of the

economic crisis. Due to the unsatisfactory utilization of EU resources dedicated to supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (a result of the overly demanding criteria in Slovakia and insufficient capital assets), the MFA strived to find a solution by organizing a specialized event concerned with mediating the necessary information to SMEs. An integral part of the work was 'territorial cooperation' or the task of managing the bodies of both operational programmes – South-Eastern Europe and Central Europe (supervised in Slovakia by the Ministry of Environment – MoE) and EU regional programmes – ENPI, CBC, and cross-border cooperation programmes as part of the third objective of the EU cohesion policy 2007-2013, also supervised by the MoE. The Euro-regional activities support programme SPERA has also been purposefully utilized.

Changes in the Organization of Joint Slovak OECD Activities

The opportunities presented by EU membership also provide for the distribution of resources from the EEA Financial Mechanism, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Swiss Financial Mechanism. Besides the participation in the work of the National Monitoring Committee for Implementation, this also concerns the prepara-



Radomír Boháč,
Head of the Directorate
General for Economic
Cooperation and Official
Development Assistance,
MFA

Our Motto is to be as Accommodating as Possible

■ **What were your intentions when you took over as head of the newly established DG for Economic Cooperation and Official Development Assistance (ODA) at the time of the increasing global financial and economic crisis?**

The greatest challenge of my work was to intensify the dialogue between the MFA and the Slovak business community and its interest groups with the goal of incorporating their expectations into real departmental policies. Being as accommodating as possible towards the requirements of our entrepreneurs in supporting their activities abroad, even going beyond the framework of our operations, during the exceptional conditions of the world economic crisis is our motto. I pay the same amount of attention to maximizing synergy in the cooperation between the MFA and the Ministry of Economy in the realization of economic diplomacy and I especially value the progress we have been able to achieve in terms of the level and intensity of communication between both departments. The

concept for the Economic Dimension of Slovak Diplomacy which is currently being prepared will be an important instrument; we anticipate that it will be deliberated by the Government of the SR in the first half of 2009.

The MFA's role is irreplaceable at a time of deepening world economic crisis, which requires solutions based on close international cooperation. In this regard, the MFA has the resources and means so that it can promptly identify the important phenomena linked to the crisis, adequately evaluate, and prepare its response with the goal of eliminating the impact on our economy and society in general. The steps and measures that have been applied in other countries comparable to Slovakia may serve as a source of valuable inspiration. The network of Slovak diplomatic missions is an important gateway to this information. As Head of the DG, I will strive to ensure that the missions see trade and economic issues as a first priority. It is our Embassies and other diplomatic missions which must serve as the first and main contact point for the representatives of the business community, because they possess databases containing information regarding the

tion of legal documents and the implementation and evaluation of the projects within these financial assistance schemes.

Special emphasis was placed on working within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Since the main objective of our membership in the OECD is to support the development of the Slovak economy and improve individual sector policies – producing the *Economic Survey of the Slovak Republic* was the dominant activity of 2008. The positive outcome of the survey followed the OECD's very important contribution to the positive decision made by the European Commission in assessing Slovakia's readiness to enter the Euro Zone (June 2008), which merely confirmed the overall positive perception of the Slovak Republic on the part of this organization.

Changes are being gradually implemented into the way that work is carried out, which is generally having a great impact on the efficiency of government policy in the spheres of economic production, social affairs, education, and other areas. As part of this, changes were also made to, among other things, the system of organization in joint Slovak and OECD activities in the form of targeted projects as well as in the implementation of a clearly defined mechanism, which will

ensure support for the most important activities and that efficiency requirements are considered. Thus, during the past year, various conferences, seminars and other activities were organized supporting sector policies in the field of tax administration risk management, the implementation of fruit and vegetable quality standards, all with the aim of strengthening the representation of Slovak experts in the OECD, etc.

From Recipient to ODA Donor

The most important undertaking of Slovak foreign policy in 2008 relating to the international financial institutions was the World Bank graduation process. Graduation is the transfer of a country from status as a recipient of World Bank assistance to the status of donor of development assistance. The successful completion of this task at the end of 2008, along with the *Economic Survey of the Slovak Republic*, confirmed the dramatic change in the perception of Slovakia in the international environment, something that was also achieved thanks to the successful transformation of the economy.

In 2008, the long-term priority of Slovak foreign trade policy – supporting the establishment of a stable and transparent multilateral trade system, adequately supplemented by the devel-

possibility of launching Slovak products on the local markets, and details on imports. Increasing our activity in economy-oriented international organizations will be an important element in utilizing our membership to the best effect, including drawing on the development funds available to support the economic growth of Slovakia.

▪ What are the priorities of your activities for 2009; a year which is expected to bring the severest downturn in economic activity across the globe?

Mobilizing the capacity of the foreign affairs department to mitigate the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis will be of the highest priority. Our job will be to promptly predict and effectively identify economic movements, trends, crises, and phenomena relevant to the Slovak economy, respond adequately to them, and initiate corresponding reactions from Slovak economic entities. The existing infrastructure of the MFA, its know-how and contact database must be maximally employed in promoting Slovakia's sustainable development through the acquisition of foreign direct investments, export support, science and technology cooperation, as well as providing a better service for our current

foreign investors, in cooperating with other countries on third markets, in utilizing international development funds, and so on. Drafting a joint paper on the strategy of economic diplomacy with the Ministry of Economy will represent a significant step forward. I also consider it necessary to continue deepening the dialogue with the relevant central bodies of the state administration with the goal of achieving maximum synergy in the fulfilment of the foreign economic interests of the Slovak Republic. Due to the deepening instability in the energy supply markets, it is necessary to broaden the energy dialogue with dominant partners, such as source countries, transit countries including neighbouring states, and countries similarly affected.

It is also imperative that greater emphasis is placed on developing contacts with alternative source countries. Due to Slovakia's political and moral commitments to the international community, it is necessary to continue increasing Slovak ODA to third-world countries in accordance with the foreign policy priorities of Slovakia. At the same time the ODA should have a higher profile and be used as another instrument of economic diplomacy. ■

opment of bilateral and regional relations with important Slovak partners – was realized primarily within the framework of the multilateral negotiations of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on the Doha development agenda. Both in formulating future directions and realizing the EU common trade policy, we actively promoted our interests and priorities according to the requirements of the business sector and the intentions of the *Pro-Export Policy of the Slovak Republic for 2007-2011*.

The multilateral trade negotiations of the WTO once again reached a very high level of intensity. The July meetings of Ministers in Geneva which were to conclude a final agreement, however, came to a successful end. Thus, it will be necessary to work even more intensively to overcome the long accumulated problems in trade relations between developed and developing economies, to reverse the spreading economic recession, and to prevent the deterioration of the results already achieved in trade negotiations.

In terms of the supplementary activities conducted in cooperation with the international community, special mention should be given to the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) programmes. ECE activity continued in the

areas of environmental issues, agriculture, transport, energy, and trade statistics. A wide range of Slovak experts were included within the ECE programmes. The corresponding government departments or their experts actively participated in the project, the Environment for Europe (for example the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute was the seat of the International Water Assessment Centre IWAC for 2008).

Economic Activities of Diplomatic Missions

Among the specific activities of the foreign service directed at supporting the economic interests of the SR, we must mention the active approach to encouraging potential investors into the Slovak economy (for instance, presentations on the government's intentions to acquire partners for Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in motorway construction, or the activities of the Embassies in Washington, Berlin, Stockholm, and other capital cities). Support activities focused on broadening trade exchange, expanding tourism and particular cooperation projects overseas (the Slovak Embassies in Astana, Beijing, Helsinki), and the support of export with the cooperation of Eximbank, and many others.



Peter Mihók,
President of the Slovak
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

We Offer Cooperation

▪ **What is the most vulnerable part of the Slovak economy and, vice-versa, where do you see the greatest opportunities for Slovakia in the context of the global economic and financial crisis?**

The nature of Slovakia's position in the current economic crisis can be seen in both positive and negative terms. The positives include: a stabilized banking and financial sector that has not been directly damaged during the credit crisis, however the situation in some of the parent banks has had an indirect influence; the successful adoption of the Euro on 1 January 2009, which makes for higher currency stability and a decrease in transaction costs; public investments which not only maintain internal demand but also encourage development; and finally, a modern industrial base equipped with the newest technologies. Among the negatives are: the narrow production portfolio of the Slovak economy with the significant dominance of two industries – the automotive industry and the electro-technical industry, and a strong orientation, almost monolithic, towards EU markets, which represent more than 85% of Slovakia's exports. These are mostly countries

that are clearly in the midst of recession. Further negatives would be energy instability – we are not self-sufficient in any energy resource (not even electricity, anymore) and our sources are not territorially diversified; a potential increase in unemployment, caused not only by the decrease in production, but also by the return of people working abroad, which could produce tension within the labour market. On the other hand, the return of highly-qualified people to professions that are currently experiencing underemployment may prove to be positive. The final issue is the limited internal market. These and other factors will influence Slovakia's society and economy throughout 2009 for certain and most likely beyond. There are factors over which we have no control, but there are smaller areas where we can make a difference by adapting our business and economic behaviour. The crisis can be used by society as a whole to invest in those areas of the economy (bio-technologies, optical electronics, and so on) which will decrease the monolithic nature of our production.

▪ **In which areas does the Slovak business community see the greatest deficiency in the performance of state institutions towards the support of their trade and economic activities abroad?**



Evaluative meeting of members of the Slovak Government with social partners on the implementation of the conclusions of the European Council negotiations in Brussels on 11-12 December 2008, and on overcoming the impacts of the global financial and economic crisis

Through our representation at the UN Office in Geneva, Slovakia also actively participated in operations of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, where it has been

successfully promoting Slovak companies as the suppliers of various goods and services for this organization for some time now. ■

First of all, there is a lack of a truly effective pro-export policy and support of the trade and economic interests of the Slovak business community operating on foreign markets, especially outside the EU internal market. In this area, the state administration owes a real debt to Slovak economic operators who are thus disadvantaged when facing competitors that can access proper schemes of export support. Also, progress could be made in participation in international fairs and expos abroad and especially in improving the efficiency of the financial mechanisms within Eximbank, which although fully owned by the state is in my opinion still short of capital, which decreases its possible involvement for the benefit of Slovak exporters.

■ **Where do you see the role of the MFA in the context of fulfilling the economic interests of Slovakia abroad with regard to mitigating the impact of the world economic crisis on the country?**

The MFA headquarters in Bratislava, as well as its offices and missions abroad, represent an important worldwide network suitable for the promotion of Slovakia's economic interests. So, on one hand there is natural potential; on the other hand, it is not always adequately utilized and capitalized. Informa-

tion of an economic or trade character which the MFA obtains abroad is not getting through to the business sector. If it is, then it is on a personal basis rather than systematically. The Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry is prepared to actively cooperate with the MFA on the flow of information and evaluate it in terms of the decision-making needs of economic and business entities. We would also welcome better economic training for the heads of diplomatic missions prior to their departure abroad or a systemic solution of the issues of effective cooperation between the political and trade sections of diplomatic missions and offices abroad. We have noticed the first positive signs of improved communication between the MFA and the Ministry of Economy. I believe they will not be limited to the period of the crisis, but rather that they will forge a new quality of the foreign service, which will reflect the needs of Slovak society and the economy better than ever before. On the other hand, on our part we offer the cooperation of our representatives who hold significant positions in European as well as global business institutions, but have not been made use of in practice by the state administration or the MFA itself. ■

Slovakia and the V4

In the course of 2008, the Visegrad Four (V4) developed its cooperation not only within its very region (e.g. in the development of infrastructure, environmental issues, cross-border cooperation, support of education and cultural activities via the International Visegrad Fund), but it also began to focus beyond the region's borders, especially in the discussion on the climate and energy package, the strengthening of the eastern vector of the European Neighbourhood Policy, or even in coordinating the provision of development assistance to third countries. The V4 displayed a growing attractiveness for other regional groupings and countries (for example the B3 – the Baltic countries; Ukraine, Belarus,

Romania, Japan and Israel) and its ability to act in participating in European policies. This confirmed not only the ability of the V4 countries to formulate their positions and shape European policies, but also emphasized the cooperativeness and proximity of the positions and the consonance of the interests of V4 countries.

The joint approach of the V4 + B3 + Bulgaria + Romania in the negotiations on the climate and energy package represents a very positive signal. These countries decided that they will advocate a common solution for protecting the climate, but which does not endanger their economies. They agreed on the exchange of information from the bilateral drafts which were proposed during the negotiations on the climate and energy package in the run up to the EU summit in December 2008. They jointly promoted maintaining the reference date for greenhouse gas emissions to 1990.

As of yet, the V4 has not been able to achieve more significant progress in coordinating the process of promoting candidacies for the seat of the institutions as well as for individual positions within these institutions. The Polish V4 Presidency (1 July 2008 – 30 June 2009) declared its interest in making progress in this field. In 2008, three of the four Visegrad countries aspired for the seat of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, and Poland) which was finally granted to Hungary. On the other hand, the support of the nomination of former Polish President Lech Walesa as a joint V4 candidate to the EU Reflection Group represents a positive example of candidacy coordination within the V4.

Meeting of the V4 Prime Ministers, Warsaw, November 2008



From left to right the Prime Minister of Slovakia Robert Fico, the Prime Minister of Hungary Ferenc Gyurcsány, the Prime Minister of Latvia Ivars Godmanis, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria Sergei Stanishev, the President of France Nicolas Sarkozy, the Prime Minister of Poland Donald Tusk, the Prime Minister of Estonia Andrus Ansip, the Prime Minister of Lithuania Gediminas Kirkilas, the Prime Minister of Romania Calin Popescu-Tariceanu and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Alexander Vondra at the press conference of the V4 Prime Ministers, the Baltic states, Romania, and Bulgaria with the participation of the President of France Nicolas Sarkozy in Gdansk (Poland), December 2008



Summary of V4 Activities and Events in 2008

- April: meeting of the V4 Justice Ministers (Tatranská Lomnica)
- April: meeting of the V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs + Ukraine + Sweden (Prague)
- May: meeting of the V4 Speakers of Parliament (Prague)
- May: meeting of the Prime Ministers of the V4 + B3 at the meeting of the European Nuclear Forum (Prague)
- June: summit of the V4 Prime Ministers + President of France (Prague)
- June: meeting of the Prime Ministers of the V4 + B3 at the meeting of the European Council (Brussels)
- June: meeting of the V4 Ministers Responsible for Regional Development + Bulgaria + Romania (Prague)
- June: meeting of the V4 Ministers of Culture (Olomouc)
- September: summit of the V4 Presidents (Piešťany)
- September: meeting of the V4 Environment Ministers (Budapest)
- October: meeting of the Prime Ministers of the V4 + B3 + Bulgaria + Romania at the meeting of the European Council (Brussels)
- November: summit of the V4 and B3 Prime Ministers (Warsaw)
- November: meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 + B3 + Sweden + Bulgaria + Romania + Slovenia (Warsaw)
- December: meeting of the Prime Ministers of the V4 + B3 + Bulgaria + Romania + the President of France (Gdansk)

The International Visegrad Fund

In 2008, the total budget of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) amounted to 5 million EUR i.e. each country contributed the sum of 1.25 million EUR. In 2008, the IVF supported 151 small projects, 240 standard projects, and 7 strategic projects and approved grants for 24 artists from the V4 countries within the Visegrad Artist Residency Programme.

In the academic year 2008/2009, the IVF provided 176 scholarships (58 intra-Visegrad, 42 in-coming, 13 out-going and 73 scholarships for Ukrainian students and researchers) to the sum total of 1,295,500 EUR.

The Visegrad scholarship sub-programme for Ukraine met with exceptional interest on the part of the Ukrainian public and government. With 63 allocated scholarships, the IVF has become one of the largest providers of scholarships in Ukraine. The establishment of an individual Visegrad scholarship programme for Belarus as part of the 'in-coming' scholarships was also approved in 2008, with financial resources allocated for the provision of 80 semesters of education for Belarus students at universities in V4 countries beginning from the academic year 2009/2010. Within the Visegrad University Studies Grant, the IVF supported a total of 33 facilities in 2008.

The IVF also started to implement a new type of so-called flexible V4 project for Belarus (there are plans to further expand these projects to include Serbia and Georgia) with the goal of maintaining the pro-European orientation in these countries.

The realization of projects financed from the flexible IVF fund gives the IVF a completely new dimension. Based on the political demand of V4 countries, and approved by the V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the IVF will ensure the realization of a specific project in the target country. At the end of August and the beginning of September 2008, before the parliamentary elections in Belarus on 28 September 2008, the IVF realized a flexible project for the support of 16 independent Belarus newspapers. ■

Ceremonial welcoming act on the occasion of the meeting of the V4 Presidents, Piešťany, September 2008



Czech Republic

In 2008, friendly and forthcoming cooperation on all levels was also of continuing value in Slovak-Czech relations. Important representatives met regularly. Joint events celebrating significant anniversaries in the common history of our two nations were attended by the highest representatives of both countries, indicating that relations between the two countries were extremely good. The Presidents of both countries commemorated the anniversary of August 1968 in Bratislava, while the Prime Ministers met in Prague. The Presidents commemorated the 90th anniversary of the establishment of a common state in Prague and the Speakers of the Parliaments observed the event in Martin.

The joint European project – the European Nuclear Forum continued successfully with both Prime Ministers attending the second session in Prague in May 2008 and the third in Bratislava in November 2008. A protocol of understanding was signed in Prague on the linking of the energy markets of both countries.

The visit of the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic to the Czech Republic on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Kramářova vila, Prague, 21 August 2008



Slovak-Czech cross-border cooperation concentrated on accelerating the construction of the road and rail infrastructure which is to connect the Púchov and Zlín regions and the Žilina and Ostrava regions. Implementation of the *Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic for 2007-2013* began amidst great interest.

Cooperation between the defence departments, especially in establishing a joint EU Battle Group, also retained a high standard.

Poland

The intensive and pragmatic dialogue with the Republic of Poland was strengthened in 2008 by official visits of all the highest representatives. The Slovak President visited Poland, while the Speaker of the Sejm, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland visited Slovakia.

Slovak support for the Polish-Swedish Eastern partnership proposal, the signing of the *Memorandum on the Construction of a Commemorative Monument to the Victims of the Holocaust in Sobibor*, and the signing of ministerial agreements on the cooperation of security branches in the fight against organized crime all contributed to the strengthening of Slovak-Polish relations and the deepening of regional cooperation.

The intergovernmental conference on cross-border cooperation which exceptionally met twice in 2008 is an effective instrument of bilateral cooperation. The *Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Poland for 2007-2013* was put



Boris Zala,
Chairman of the Foreign
Affairs Committee of the
National Council of the
Slovak Republic

Our Policy is One of Good Neighbourhood Relations

▪ What position do relations with our neighbours occupy in the foreign policy of Slovakia?

Our Parliament and the Government implement a policy which represents continuity and the full international integration of Slovakia. We did not adopt a non-engagement policy concept; on the contrary our policy is one of full international responsibility involving the participation of Slovakia in solving European and global problems and events. The statehood of Slovakia was formed in close interaction with neighbouring countries and nations; therefore the policy of good neighbourhood relations represents a pivotal line in foreign policy on the regional level. With Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO, these relations have lost

none of their significance, they have just become more complex. It is 2009 and Slovakia must solve the urgent problems caused by the world financial and economic crisis along with its neighbours. I do not believe it is necessary to abandon some of our past premises, value and interest frameworks, nor the goals and approaches our foreign policy has pursued thus far, whether it be in the regional, European, transatlantic, or global dimensions. Changing the emphasis on the way in which foreign policy instruments are used is however very urgent in the new conditions facing us. It is highly probable that if the crisis deepens it will become necessary within the EU to face the egoistic approaches of some countries at the expense of more vulnerable countries, which can weaken solidarity, cohesion, and the ability to adopt joint decisions. Recent negotiations at the highest EU level with the active participation of

in motion in 2008 with interest. The construction projects laying down road and rail infrastructure in the border regions, which lag behind the needs of the dynamically growing economic and trade cooperation, remained a focus point.

Hungary

The *Treaty on Good Neighbourhood and Friendly Cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary* signed on 19 March 1995 in Paris continued to represent the fundamental framework for the development of bilateral relations in 2008. The implementation of its provisions is ensured by 12 joint committees. The activities of the joint committee on minority issues and the joint committee on cross-border cooperation must once again be commended.

The implementation of the joint programme of the Prime Ministers of Slovakia and Hungary entitled *Common Past, Common Future in the Mirror of Common Projects* served as the basis for the realization of bilateral projects in 2008. The majority of the 14 specific tasks included in this programme were fulfilled in the course of 2008. For example, the Ministers of Health signed a memorandum on cooperation between their ministries on fighting cancer. Slovakia's Deputy Prime Minister, Dušan Čaplovič, along with the Minister heading the Office of the Prime Minister of Hungary, Péter Kiss, organized a conference on the conditions for utilizing European funds for cross-border programmes. The Foreign Affairs Ministers signed an agreement on the status of the joint award of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs for contributing to the development of Slovak-Hungarian relations.



Negotiations in Budapest, December 2008

As part of the *Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme* the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region successfully submitted an application to the European Regional Development Fund for the funding of the construction of two bridges over the Ipeľ River on the common state border.

Mutual relations in minority issues were influenced by the situation in the village of Mlynky (Pilisszentkereszt) in the spring of 2008, when the local self-government decided to evict the local Slovak organizations from the Slovak House and only after the interventions of the Hungarian and Slovak governments were preparations started for the construction of a new Slovak House.

The meetings of the Deputy Prime Minister, Dušan Čaplovič, with the Minister heading the Office of the Prime Minister of Hungary, Péter Kiss, were particularly significant in terms of contact between the Slovak and Hungarian representatives in 2008. Both politicians met four times and

the Slovak representation have shown that EU membership has a strategic and positive impact on Slovakia. Cooperation within the V4 has proven its worth even though the practical results are not remarkable and we are not always capable of reaching agreement on a joint strategy. Speaker of the Parliament Pavol Paška actively participated in the meeting of the V4 Speakers of Parliaments on the issue of the *Treaty of Lisbon* in May in Prague. The Foreign Affairs Committee also devotes continual attention to V4 partners.

▪ **Relations with the Czech Republic are currently undoubtedly of a very high quality. What has to be done in order to reach similar levels in relations with other neighbours, for example Hungary?**

With the exception of Ukraine all our neighbours are EU members and, with the exception of Austria, they are also NATO Member States. All our neighbours

are members of the CoE and the OSCE. With certain legitimacy, we can therefore state that we share a common continuity of values and common goals with these countries. At the same time, however, we share a developmental or historical discontinuity with our neighbours, which projects itself in various forms and intensity into our current relations.

The current state of Slovak-Czech relations is very good and conflict-free at a political level, despite the fact that the governing political representations do not share an identical political orientation. Disagreements and disputes over the distribution of common property, over who was subsidising who in the common state, or who has the right to use the symbols are currently only of interest to historians.

The Czech community in Slovakia (approximately 50,000 citizens) and the Slovak community in the

their meetings contributed to the improvement in the nature of Slovak-Hungarian relations.

Relations escalated to a certain degree in the autumn when a number of conflicts appeared over a relatively short time –for instance, the use of geographical names in minority textbooks in Slovakia or the distribution of EU funds to minority schools in the Slovak Republic.

Relations between the legislative bodies of both countries were influenced by the transformation of the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin to a permanent institution of the Hungarian Parliament. On 4 November 2008, the Slovak Parliament adopted a resolution on the information on the relations and possible negative effects of the institutionalisation of the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin in the Hungarian Parliament on the political and social life in Central Europe.

After the events of November 2008, the context of relations was altered with the issue of extremism which has recently started to negatively affect mutual relations. Valid concerns have

emerged concerning the export of extremism to Slovakia (the participation of extremist Hungarian fans at the football match of the Slovak League in Dunajská Streda; the apprehension of members of the National Guard in Kráľovský Chlmec, who were placing wreathes to commemorate the anniversary of the Vienna Arbitration; three demonstrations of Hungarian extremists in front of our Embassy in Budapest at the beginning of November).

After these events which negatively influenced mutual relations, both sides expressed their interest in political dialogue with the goal of reducing the tension in mutual bilateral relations. A meeting between Prime Ministers Robert Fico and Ferenc Gyurcsány took place on 15 November 2008 in Komárno. It resulted in a joint statement which condemns extremism in all its forms, advocates the development of minorities in both countries, expresses the intention to develop universal bilateral relations, and places particular emphasis on cross-border cooperation.

The Speakers of the Parliament met in Komárno on 3 December 2008 and the Presidents negotiated in Nové Zámky on 6 December 2008. Among the main issues of bilateral relations were minority status issues, the fight against extremism, and the development of bilateral relations.

Political negotiations at the highest level culminated with the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ján Kubiš and Kinga Göncz, on 15 December 2008 in Budapest. They assessed whether the basic agreement had been fulfilled and agreed upon the issuing of joint annual awards to individuals and institutions that had

The President of Hungary, László Sólyom, at the memorial ceremony near the village of Hejce, where 24 Slovak soldiers from the KFOR mission died in a tragic plane crash on 19 January 2006, April 2008



Czech Republic (approximately 350,000 citizens) are fully integrated into the majority society. Neither in the Czech Republic nor in Slovakia did or do these minority groups have ambitions to form political parties and movements distinguished from the others on a purely national basis. Cooperation between institutions, parties, and organizations is so abundant it cannot be described in detail. We fully feel that Slovakia and its foreign policy interests are fully accepted by the Czech side. As Head of the Slovak Delegation, I also explicitly sense this in the work carried out at the CoE.

In the case of Slovak-Hungarian relations, we need to distinguish between practical cooperation and historically sensitive issues. The fourteen-point plan of cooperation adopted by Prime Ministers Fico and Gyurcsány is a good basis for the rapprochement of both nations and the economic development of the region. Disputes

arise mainly in the area of minority policy: however, we are convinced that minority rights in Slovakia are ensured to a high level, which corresponds with the high European standards. The creation of further 'higher' rights raises concerns in Slovakia that this is no longer simply a question of the development of minorities, but rather the introduction of political goals aimed at destabilizing the country. Of course these steps cannot be supported by Slovak foreign policy. Speaker of the Parliament Pavol Paška undertook many steps and personal initiatives designed to improve mutual relations with Hungary. His last initiative led to a broad dialogue among all the committees of the parliament. The truth is that even on this platform we were unable to avoid provocations from Budapest parliamentarians. Despite this fact, we will patiently continue in the search for a gradual rapprochement of our positions.

made the greatest contribution to the development of bilateral relations.

Austria

In 2008, major state representatives continued to meet with great frequency, discussing questions of further multilateral cooperation. Austria made a significant gesture in lending a number of Euro banknotes as part of Slovakia's preparations for the adoption of the Euro. Both countries intensively consulted on a variety of issues of common interest: energy security, the EU climate and energy package, the further enlargement of the EU, and so on. Austria and Slovakia mutually supported a number of each others' candidacies in the UN system and in other international organizations.

Mutual economic cooperation maintained a traditionally high level. Austria is one of Slovakia's most important trade partners. It holds the position of the third largest investor in Slovakia (after the Netherlands and Germany) with the highest share of investments in banking. The mutual cooperation of the Chambers of Commerce of both countries also developed well.

With the utilization of structural EU funds through the *Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Austria for 2007-2013* both countries strived to contribute to the complex development of a socially, economically and environmentally integrated border region which would be attractive to investors while at the same time also solving the problem of mutual transport connections across the River Morava.

Ukraine

Ukraine is one of our foreign policy priorities. During bilateral negotiations, emphasis was laid on economic cooperation, the development of cross-border cooperation, and the support of Ukrainian integration ambitions. Positive development of trade and economic cooperation continued throughout 2008. Slovakia maintained a positive foreign trade balance. The key events in cross-border cooperation were the signing of the *Agreement on Local Border Traffic*, the implementation of the Schengen visa regime, and the modernisation of border crossings.

Carrying out the tasks associated with the NATO Contact Point Embassy in Ukraine was one of the greatest challenges for Slovak diplomacy. The work of our diplomatic mission in this regard is very highly regarded by both the Ukrainian side and representatives of the Alliance. The realization of the annual target plan of Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation in achieving EU standards was also one of the important activities of individual Slovak departments.

Due to Slovakia's accession to the Schengen area, fundamental changes were made in the visa issuing process especially with regard to the implementation of Schengen criteria in light of the agreement between Ukraine and the EU on the liberalization of the visa regime. Despite the positive development of mutual relations in culture, education, and compatriot issues, the problem of ensuring that there is an institutional basis to this agenda still remains. Ukraine is the only neighbour country of the SR without an established Slovak Institute. ■



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Volodymyr Ohryzko



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria, Ursula Plassnik



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Karel Schwarzenberg



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Radosław Sikorski

■ What has the Slovak Parliament done for the development of good neighbourhood relations and how do you view its role in the future in this regard?

The National Council of the Slovak Republic (NC SR) makes full use of its representation in the permanent delegations of the NC SR in the Parliamentary Assemblies of the CoE, NATO, WEU, and the OSCE to achieve its set goals. Our solid institutional integration in the common political and economic area has created a new dimension in the further cultivation of neighbourhood relations. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is becoming another very significant forum for the presentation of our positions and proposals and consultation on various issues. The foreign policy activities of the NC SR committees have also gained a considerable position, especially in the V4. The meetings of partner committees which are not bound by protocol limita-

tions are proving to be ideal forums for the formulation of joint positions. But I would also like to mention the activities focused on EU enlargement. Enlargement is directly connected to neighbourhood relations. We are putting a great deal of effort into helping Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Turkey in their integration into the EU. They are all countries with links to our history and especially now with our tourism and trade. Their accession will significantly increase the stability and security of Slovakia. This is the message I took with me when I visited Bosnia and Herzegovina as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Of course relations with neighbours are not and in fact cannot exist without the occasional surge of turbulence. It is only natural, precisely because we are so dependent upon each other and we react sensitively even to internal political movements. ■

Achievements

The year 2008, which represented the half-way mark in fulfilling the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), was an important breakthrough for international as well as Slovak development assistance.

The Act No. 617/2007 Coll. on *Official Development Assistance* (ODA), or the competence act amendment, which entered into force on 1 February 2008, states that the MFA is the national ODA coordinator.

Over the past five years, ODA has become an integral part and an effective tool of Slovak foreign policy. Slovakia has joined the developed countries of the world that participate in the elimination of the direst social, medical, economic, and environmental problems in less developed countries. The bilateral assistance coordinated by the MFA carries the flag of the Slovak Republic and contributes most to strengthening its good image and improving bilateral relations with the countries accepting aid. *SlovakAid* has become an important label in relation to the Slovak public.

Slovakia's main priorities in development assistance in 2008 were – consolidating stability and good governance in the regions and states of priority interest to Slovakia, from an economic perspective as well, and contributing to development and thus reducing poverty and famine in developing countries through concentrated and more effective provision of development and humanitarian assistance.

The programme countries Serbia and Montenegro and the project countries Albania, Afghanistan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kaza-

khstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Sudan, Tadjikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan were the key countries earmarked for the provision of *SlovakAid* assistance in 2008. Slovakia supported 34 development projects of Slovak organizations in 14 priority countries to the sum of 130 million SKK (4.3 million EUR).

In 2008, via the embassies in Belgrade and Sarajevo, the MFA provided financial resources within the framework of micro-grants for 24 minor development projects. *SlovakAid* is a flexible instrument which strengthens Slovakia's image as well as the position of the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic in the country of his accreditation.



Ivan Surkoš,
Slovak Agency
for International
Development
Cooperation Director

Yesterday We Received Help, Today We Are Helping

■ From being a country that received assistance, Slovakia has now become a country that provides assistance. How is this reflected in the activities of the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAMRS)?

The shift in Slovakia's position from being a recipient of development assistance to becoming a donor was gradual in nature. In the sense of the competences bestowed by the new competency act, SAMRS prepares and implements activities linked to the provision of official development assistance (ODA) and the agency primarily focuses on bilateral ODA. In terms of financial volume, bilateral assistance currently only represents part of the total assistance provided by

the Slovak Republic. SAMRS is a budgetary organization founded by the MFA.

■ What will the agency focus on in the nearest future?

The fulfilment of the objectives and intentions of the government approved programme documents on ODA is the alpha and omega of our work. This is primarily the *Medium Term Strategy for Official Development Assistance* and the *National Programme* for the corresponding calendar year. Our activities are realized in very close cooperation with individual MFA departments and sections. We will continue to issue calls for applications for development assistance projects according to the geographical and sector priorities. We would however like to move forward and execute larger and more complex projects. We have more than 80 'running' projects which are

In 2008, the MFA formulated a new innovative *Medium Term Strategy for Official Development Assistance in 2009-2013* with a revised list of priority countries for *SlovakAid*.

Cooperation with Other Donors within the EU

According to the provisions of the *Paris Declaration*, the *Accra Agenda for Action*, and the *Code of Conduct of the EU Donors*, the coordination of donor activities and cooperation with other donors is an important prerequisite for conducting successful operations in a developing country.

Cooperation with more experienced traditional donors is an opportunity for the development assistance of Slovakia and Slovak organizations actively participating in development assistance to build their own capacities and draw upon the experience of these donors.

The main partners of the Slovak Republic in trilateral ODA are primarily EU member countries.

The Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) prepared a mutual memorandum with the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) which was signed on 21 January 2009. The new memorandum for 2009-2011 will ensure the joint implementation of Slovak and Austrian development assistance projects as well as the building up and improvement of SAIDC capacities through the provision of training and internships for its employees.

In April 2008, a new cooperation agreement was signed and a new project prepared between the MFA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – *The Slovak Trust Fund* –



2008-2010: Promotion of the Slovak Transitional Experience and Human Capital in ODA. Based on this agreement, the second phase of the Slovak-UNDP Trust Fund began on 1 July 2008. This phase will focus on strengthening Slovakia's cooperation with selected developing countries, consolidating the position of the Slovak Republic and Slovak ODA in the international context, deploying Slovak experts to international projects in cooperation with UNDP regional centres in priority countries, and handling volunteer deployment in bilateral development assistance.

Slovakia also actively participated in the negotiations of four high-level international confer-

in different phases. We would like to focus more on field monitoring and the evaluation of their overall benefit for the country of their implementation. We want to extend the micro-grant programme to other countries. So far it has only been implemented through our embassies in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We will surely make full use of the assistance of more experienced donors. Contacts with the Austrian agency, ADA, are promising and we have signed a cooperation agreement with them. We would like to implement joint projects with Austria in Serbia and Ethiopia. The effective fulfilment of tasks is to a large extent dependent on the professionalism and expert background of the people involved. We will invest in the professional development of SAMRS personnel.

■ **At a time of increasing global financial and economic crisis, the public in Slovakia is fairly reserved and negative towards the provision of Slovak assistance to development projects across the world. What can be done to change this?**

I do not think that the position of the Slovak public on the provision of ODA using tax payers' money is explicitly negative. There has been no recent public opinion survey, but charity events and public fundraisers are getting fairly decent responses. People are willing to help, but they must know how exactly their help will be used. For SAMRS, this means it must maintain maximum transparency in all its activities, intensively communicate with the public, explain the sense of providing development assistance, and inform the public of specific projects. Our main allies in this regard are NGOs. ■



ences – *Aid Effectiveness* (Accra, 2-4 September), *UN General Assembly on Africa* (New York, 22 September) and *Millennium Development Goals* (New York, 25 September), as well as the *World Conference on Financing for Development* (Doha, 29 November-2 December).

During the negotiations on the final document of the *Aid Effectiveness* conference, Slovakia actively supported the EU effort to promote ambitious commitments for donors as well as recipients. The Slovak Republic also emphasized the necessity of effective complex development, not just aid itself, and the need for a reform agenda for partner countries as well as donors (for example on good governance, the fight against corruption, the development of the private sector, and the coherence of donor policies to the benefit of development).

The third edition of the European Development Days (EDD) took place in Strasbourg on 15-17 November 2008. The main goal of this event was to increase awareness on EU development assistance as well as on the development assistance provided by its individual member countries. The programme included many exhibitions, round tables, and accompanying events. The local dimension of development and especially the role of local institutions were the main themes of the EDD. The EDD focused on the evaluation of the current state of the *Millennium Development Goals*, the fulfilment of commitments by donor countries, the issue of increasing food prices, the energy crisis, climate change, and the impact of these phenomena on the development assistance provided.

Thanks to Slovakia's membership in the EU, Slovak organizations can apply for resources from EC grant rounds in the field of external relations. In 2008, *SlovakAid* specifically allocated resources to the sum of 5 million SKK for the co-financing of development projects of Slovak organizations approved within the EC grant rounds.

Humanitarian Aid

The number, scope, and growing frequency of natural disasters and armed conflicts confirm that the humanitarian aid provided by the Slovak Republic is a necessary part of our operations in the international field.

An individual fund for the provision of urgent humanitarian aid was first formed in 2007 within the MFA budget for development assistance to the sum of 10 million SKK. This instrument proved to be effective and therefore the same sum of 10 million SKK was again allocated to urgent humanitarian aid from the MFA budget in 2008.

In 2008, Slovakia provided humanitarian aid to the citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, Myanmar, Sudan, China, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Haiti, Cuba, and Palestine to a total sum of 59.4 million SKK. Of this sum, 49.4 million SKK worth of direct material aid was provided from the reserves of the Ministry of Interior. Direct financial aid from the *SlovakAid* programme to the sum of 10 million SKK was provided through international humanitarian organizations or through the Slovak Embassy in Nairobi (the purchase and distribution of food). ■

More at:
www.slovakaid.sk (ODA SR)

The need to ensure adequate and reliable energy supplies directly influences the development of the country as well as its national and international security. The development of the energy security agenda has in the past undoubtedly confirmed the importance of its external, foreign policy dimension. Slovakia responded to changes in the external aspects of internal energy security by evaluating energy security risks and eliminating individual threats. In accordance with its national interests, Slovakia continuously and actively promoted a more effective EU external energy policy stemming from respect for the security of energy resource supplies, the security of their transit, and consumers.

Efforts to Diversify Sources and Routes

During the negotiations on the climate and energy package and the Third Energy Package, which will create the future regulation and infrastructure framework for the realization of Slovakia's energy policy, we along with a group of similarly minded EU countries were able to push for the effective unbundling of vertically integrated energy companies, which is in the interests of the Slovak Republic.

Within the EU, but also in bilateral relations, Slovakia is continually striving to ensure secure supplies from the energy carriers from the region of the post-Soviet republics. In pursuing this aim, we have utilized all the different forms of negotiation with our partners. In the interest of ensuring stable energy supplies, in 2008 Slovakia focused on developing bilateral dialogues with Russia and Ukraine on both political and professional levels.

In its long-term strategy Slovakia, like the EU, strives to diversify its sources and transit routes. Besides actively participating in the dialogue between the EU and Russia – Slovakia's main partner in the energy sphere – the Slovak Republic was also involved in forming EU energy initiatives with those potential partners who have the capacity to develop the diversification of energy sources and transit routes both bilaterally and multilaterally. Strategic EU materials on the agenda of energy security and communication with EU partners – Russia, Ukraine, and Central Asian countries – fully reflected the positions and interests of Slovakia.

The Slovak Republic was involved in formulating the EU Strategy towards Central Asia and actively participated in the fulfilment of the priorities set out in this document, which included, among other things, the energy dialogue with the countries of Central Asia. In the future, the

Central Asian region will play an important role in ensuring the supply and diversification of natural gas and oil sources to the EU area. Slovakia also joined discussions on the possibility of Caspian oil transit through Slovakia. The technical and geopolitical aspects of the issue, including the specific new context relating to the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, were all continually evaluated.

Energy Dialogue

The Slovak Republic succeeded in including the subject of energy security in the programme of all bilateral political negotiations including those of the V4 and EU. In 2008, Slovakia initiated an 'energy' dialogue with its regional partners (the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Austria, and Ukraine) on the issues of the energy sufficiency of Slovakia and the region, on alternative sources, and energy transit routes.



The Third Plenary Session of the European Nuclear Energy Forum, Bratislava, November 2008

The Slovak Republic continued to promote the development of the safe utilization of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, which has the potential to enable the fulfilment of EU energy policy goals and has a role to play in the transition to a low-carbon economy. In 2008, the Slovak and Czech Republics hosted the European Nuclear Forum, a platform for an open discussion on nuclear energy in the light of the current challenges such as climate change and energy security.

An international conference, The Common EU Energy Policy and the Energy Security of Slovakia II, was organized in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association and the Representation of the European Commission in the Slovak Republic on the premises of the MFA. ■



Governor of the National Bank of the Slovak Republic Ivan Šramko, and Member of the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth Ján Figel' at the unveiling of the bronze sculpture Biatic in front of the building of the National Bank of the Slovak Republic, December 2008

Slovak Interests in an Effective European Union

From the point of view of Slovakia's performance in the EU, 2008 was marked by the continuing effort to achieve further integration into European structures. With the abolishment of checks on internal EU borders and airports at the beginning of 2008, Slovakia finalized its full-fledged accession to the Schengen area and thus fulfilled one of its strategic goals. In 2008, Slovakia was also able to fulfil the criteria for the accession to the Euro Zone, which was one of the priorities of the Slovak government. This was completed on 1 January 2009, when Slovakia became the sixteenth member of the Euro Zone and simultaneously the first country of the Visegrad Four and the second country of Central and Eastern Europe to join the Euro Zone.

Energy and Climate Changes

Discussion on the implementation of the common EU energy policy continued throughout 2008. Agreement was reached on the third liberalization package, which will influence the internal energy market. The unbundling of vertically integrated energy companies was a problem in negotiations.

The formulation of the climate and energy package was not only one of the priorities of the Slovenian presidency in the EU Council but also the most visible activity during the French presidency in the latter half of 2008. At the negotiations on the measures package, the Slovak Republic pursued positions according to its energy and climate policy. The main goal was to create instruments and adopt solutions which would not have a negative effect on the Slovak econo-

my. In close cooperation with the countries which had dramatically decreased emissions in the period 1990-2005, we prepared a compromise proposal, which would take into account the reduction accomplished within this timeframe (more than 25%). An agreement taking into consideration the reduction of greenhouse gases emissions achieved between 1990 and 2005 was only reached at the EU Summit in December 2008.

Ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon

Reform of the bodies and institutions of the EU remained a priority of the Slovak Republic in 2008. Almost all member countries ratified the *Treaty of Lisbon*, which is to amend the EU founding Treaties. Once the document was approved by the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Slovakia ratified it in June 2008. However due to the negative outcome of the Irish referendum and constitutional objections of the Czech Republic and Germany, the *Treaty* has yet to be ratified by all member countries. The removal of the last obstacles on the path to bringing the *Treaty of Lisbon* to life is expected by the end of 2009.

Eastern Partnership

The European Neighbourhood Policy is one of the fundamental priorities of EU foreign policy. Its goal is to create a stable, secure, and prosperous environment around the EU. The conflict in the South Caucasus in August 2008 gave a new dynamic to the transformation process of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which resulted in the proposal of the Eastern Partnership concept.



Governor of the National Bank of the Slovak Republic Ivan Šramko and President of the European Central Bank Jean-Claude Trichet, Bratislava, September 2008

Along with Poland, Sweden, the Czech Republic and the Baltic countries, the Slovak Republic is one of the countries most involved in the Eastern Partnership project.

It is a shift from neighbourhood to partnership and involves a greater readiness to consider each individual Eastern neighbour country of the EU in terms of their specifics and progress achieved. Slovakia also sees the Eastern Partnership as an opportunity for the creation of a common economic and value area as well as for the overall modernisation of society in the partner countries based on the EU model.

Slovak Citizens in EU Institutions

Since the accession of Slovakia to the EU, our citizens have the right to apply for jobs in EU institutions. In the interest of ensuring public awareness, in 2008 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a bulletin addressed to those applying for work in EU institutions. The organization of an international conference on the issue of Slovaks in EU institutions was another step in the complex activities of the MFA in the field of strengthening personnel policy in European institutions. The goal of these activities was to acquaint potential applicants with the criteria for the successful completion of the selection procedures and to familiarize them with the working conditions in

EU institutions. In 2008, the number of Slovak citizens working in EU institutions exceeded 600 (of whom half were working in the European Commission). If the current trend is maintained, Slovakia should reach its quota of 279 permanent employees by 2010. At present, there are few problems filling positions in general, however, filling middle and higher management positions is more difficult.

Fulfilling Slovakia's Priorities in the EU

As a supranational grouping of states, the EU forms a complex system of formal and informal relations. In 2004, on entry to the EU, the Slovak Republic found itself at the centre of these relations; relations which will be profoundly influenced by the adoption of the *Treaty of Lisbon*. Thanks to the demanding preparations and the gradual integration of Slovakia into the Union, the enormous efforts of the Slovak government led to it achieving the final abolishment of Slovakia's borders with other EU countries as well as the adoption of the common Euro currency. So far our progress has not been as fast as we would have liked in filling the personal and institutional positions within the European Union, and filling the primarily higher management positions within the EU will remain a priority for Slovakia. ■

Ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon

In the Interests of Slovakia and Europe

After the *Treaty of Lisbon* was signed in December 2007, the ratification of the treaty by all Member States was planned for 2008. The *Treaty of Lisbon*, an instrument for increasing the effectiveness of the EU's operation through institutional reforms, was approved by the National Council of the Slovak Republic on 10 April 2008. Subsequently the ratification documents were signed by President Ivan Gašparovič on 12 May 2008 and delivered to the Italian government. It was a clear political signal to other partners within the EU of Slovakia's dedication to contributing to the adaptation of EU institutions to new conditions. Slovakia considers the treaty to be a suitable response to the challenges the EU will have to face in the future.

The negative outcome of the ratification referendum held in Ireland on 12 June 2008, when 53.4% of the Irish citizens who voted rejected the treaty, was the gravest event in the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2008. The loss of national sovereignty, the future of traditional military neutrality, the militarization of the Union, the harmonization of taxes, ethical questions concerning family law, and other main themes resonated through the referendum. Despite this primary setback, a solution was found

at an EU summit in December 2008, in the form of a political agreement in relation to Ireland on those areas and commitments which had influenced the outcome of the referendum. This paves the way for another ratification attempt in autumn 2009.

Three other European Union Member States besides Ireland have yet to complete the ratification process – the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland, which are all dealing with constitutional objections or waiting for a solution on the means of ratification in Ireland. Their ratification can be expected before the autumn referendum in Ireland. The objective is for the *Treaty of Lisbon* to come into force before the end of 2009 and the appointment of the new European Commission to office.

A New and More Effective EU

The *Treaty of Lisbon* was formulated as a result of the negotiations between EU Member States in 2007. The founding treaties (the *Treaty on the European Union* and the *Treaty establishing the European Community*) will remain valid but in an amended version. The *Treaty establishing the European Community* will also be renamed the *Treaty on the Functioning of the EU*. The *Treaty of Lisbon* changes the institutional organization of the EU. The current three-pillar EU structure



The ratification of the *Treaty of Lisbon*, National Council of the Slovak Republic, 10 April 2008

Status of the Treaty of Lisbon Ratification as of 31 December 2008

| | Country | Date of Deposit of Instruments of Ratification |
|-----|---------------|--|
| 1. | Malta | 6 February 2008 |
| 2. | Hungary | 6 February 2008 |
| 3. | France | 14 February 2008 |
| 4. | Romania | 11 March 2008 |
| 5. | Slovenia | 24 April 2008 |
| 6. | Bulgaria | 28 April 2008 |
| 7. | Austria | 13 May 2008 |
| 8. | Denmark | 29 May 2008 |
| 9. | Latvia | 16 June 2008 |
| 10. | Portugal | 17 June 2008 |
| 11. | Slovakia | 24 June 2008 |
| 12. | Great Britain | 16 July 2008 |
| 13. | Luxembourg | 21 July 2008 |
| 14. | Italia | 8 August 2008 |
| 15. | Greece | 12 August 2008 |
| 16. | Cyprus | 26 August 2008 |
| 17. | Lithuania | 26 August 2008 |
| 18. | Netherlands | 11 September 2008 |
| 19. | Estonia | 23 September 2008 |
| 20. | Finland | 30 September 2008 |
| 21. | Spain | 8 October 2008 |
| 22. | Belgium | 15 October 2008 |
| 23. | Sweden | 10 December 2008 |

is to be removed, but the Common Foreign and Security Policy will retain a special position in the decision-making processes. For the first time, the EU will thus gain one legal personality and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights will become legally binding.

Multiple changes are planned in the institutional area. Once the *Treaty of Lisbon* has been implemented, the European Council will become an independent institution with a permanent President, who will be elected for a period of two and a half years. The treaty replaces the rotating presidency in the Council of the EU with a joint team presidency of three states for a period of 18 months. The President of the European Commission will be elected by the European Parliament for a period of five years. The treaty provides for a new position: the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who will also be Vice-President of the Commission and preside over the

More at:
www.mzv.sk
(Rada EÚ)

regular negotiations of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. In fulfilling his tasks, the High Representative will be supported by the newly-established European External Action Service.

According to the plans, the co-decision procedure is to become the standard legislative procedure, which will strengthen the position of the European Parliament and broaden its reach to include a wider range of legislative issues. The number of Members of the European Parliament is to be capped at 754 including its President. The voting method employed within the Council of the EU will change as a result of the adoption of the *Treaty of Lisbon*. The treaty replaces the principle of weighting the votes of individual countries in the Council of the EU with double-majority voting (65% of citizens and 55% of Member States). At the same time, national parliaments will gain the opportunity to directly check the conformity of European Commission legislative proposals using the principle of subsidiarity. The distribution of competences between the EU and Member States will be more transparent. The draft of the treaty introduces the option of withdrawing from the EU, which has yet to be legally determined. The original draft of the *Treaty of Lisbon* would also have reduced the number of European Commission members, but in the interest of gaining Ireland's support for the treaty, this modification was abandoned and each Member State can thus continue to nominate their own commissioner.

Slovakia's Endeavours and its Contribution

Slovakia ratified the *Treaty of Lisbon* and supported the continued ratification in other countries even at a time when circumstances were not in favour of the treaty's adoption. In our opinion, the *Treaty of Lisbon* introduces reforms which will enable the EU to respond to changes on the international scene more effectively and flexibly, even in the case of EU enlargement, which is also a priority of our foreign policy. As a smaller EU country, Slovakia requires an international environment with clear rules and international partner cooperation for its development. The *Treaty of Lisbon* would contribute to the establishment of such an environment within the EU. The correct implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon – to maintain the balance between the distribution of competences and the application of the principle of subsidiarity – will be crucial for Slovakia. ■

The Coordination of Sectoral Policies

Slovakia's Accession to the Euro Zone

On 1 January 2009, the Slovak Republic became the sixteenth Member State of the Euro Zone. The adoption of a new currency in Slovakia was preceded by the required reform measures, difficult negotiations, and an extensive information campaign.

The positive evaluation of Slovakia's readiness to enter the Euro Zone was outlined by the European Commission in its *Convergence Report on the Slovak Republic* on 7 May 2008. The Report confirmed that Slovakia had met the criteria for the adoption of the Euro and simultaneously recommended that the Council accept Slovakia into the Euro Zone. On 19 June 2008, the European Council discussed the *Convergence Report* compiled by the Commission and European Central Bank and approved the entry of the Slovak Republic into the Euro Zone.

At its meeting on 8 July 2008 in Brussels, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) adopted a resolution on the introduction of the Euro in Slovakia and set the conversion rate to 1€ = 30,1260 SKK.

A long-term, intensive information campaign, with the aim of informing the citizens about the appearance and security features of Euro notes and coins and detailing the process of their introduction formed part of the preparations for adopting the new currency in Slovakia.

What to Expect from the Entry into the Euro Zone?

The common currency will have many positive impacts on the Slovak economy – the Euro will

support a stable economic environment in Slovakia, it will render financial transactions simpler and cheaper, improve the accessibility of loans, simplify the payments system, enable better price comparison, and eliminate currency risk. Adherence to the Maastricht Criteria will positively influence the long-term sustainability of Slovakia's public finances. The common currency will also provide significantly better protection against speculation on the financial markets.

In adopting the common currency, Slovakia expects an increase in foreign direct investment as well as an increase in the intensity of trade exchange with the countries of the Euro Zone. The stability of the common currency, which is not so dependent upon the surrounding currencies is a great advantage. The Euro will thus support the macroeconomic stability of the Slovak Republic. At present, the Euro is the national currency in sixteen countries of the Euro Zone, and with the approval of the European Community, the Euro is also valid in some countries which are not EU members.

Confidence in the Euro is a growing trend in international trade. A stable currency is very important for countries like the Slovak Republic, which has one of the most open economies. The common currency protects the countries of the Euro Zone much more effectively against the consequences of economic shock – for example oil shocks, financial crises on world markets, and so on. The common currency will be especially appreciated by Slovak citizens who can thus compare prices in Slovakia with prices in other countries within the Euro Zone. Travelling and staying



The celebration of the coming of the New Year, and the adoption of the Euro in Slovakia on 1 January 2009 in the Main Square of Bratislava

Member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Milan Urbáni, Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia Ivan Šramko, Minister of Finance of the Slovak Republic Ján Počiatek, Vice-President of the European Central Bank Lucas Papademos, the French Minister for the Economy, Industry and Employment Christine Lagarde, the Commissioner responsible for Economic and Monetary Affairs Joaquín Almunia, and the European Commissioner responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth Ján Figel' during the 'Euro-celebrations' on 8 July 2008, in Brussels



abroad will also be easier for Slovaks with the new currency.

With the adoption of the Euro, Slovakia fulfilled one of the requirements of the Treaty of Accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU, and thus confirmed that it is a trustworthy EU member and a reliable partner that fulfils its commitments.

The Climate and Energy Package

The issue of climate change and related energy issues dominated the international political debates in 2008. The political agreement on the climate and energy package achieved in December 2008 will ensure the fulfilment of the EU's ambitious commitments in this field. The adopted measures will significantly influence the development of not only the European, but also the Slovak economy. The fact that the European Council accepted the structure and philosophy of the Slovak proposal on the additional redistribution of emission allowances and created a supplementary category of 2% for nine Member States was a

key moment in the negotiations on the adopted conclusions in the field of climate and energy, especially in regard to the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020.

The adoption of the climate and energy package will enable the EU to play a leading role in the fight against climate change on an international level and help prepare a credible common position of the EU-27 in the negotiations of the signatory parties of the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*. The goal of the negotiations, which will take place in December 2009 in Copenhagen, is to achieve a global agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gas emission once the *Kyoto Protocol* expires in 2012.

Energy Policy

In the course of 2008, the implementation of a Common EU Energy Policy was discussed more in declarative terms than in practical ones. Due to complicated relations with the main suppliers of energy resources, and especially suppliers from



Oľga Algayerová,
State Secretary of the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Slovak Republic

The Adoption of the Euro in Slovakia

■ How can the Slovak entry into the Euro Zone inspire neighbouring countries?

At a time of global financial crisis, the adoption of the Euro acts as a stabilizing factor and the currency risks which the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary currently face are practically eliminated. Slovak trade partners will have a much more predictable financial

environment than that associated with the independent Slovak currency. Confidence in the Euro is a growing trend in international trade, and a stable currency is very important for Slovakia, which has a very open economy. The Slovak Republic can assist other countries by transferring its experience with the adoption of the Euro much like the way in which Slovakia consulted its steps with a number of members of the Euro Zone, especially Slovenia, which adopted the Euro on 1 January 2007.

the Russian Federation, the need for energy security as the third pillar of energy policy is being discussed more and more often. Ensuring energy security within the EU should thus be directed at the diversification of sources and transit routes in accordance with the principles of solidarity and EU unity.

Following the EU policy on the energy agenda, the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted the *Energy Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic* on 15 October 2008 which sets out several priorities in this area.

The continued use of nuclear energy in the energy mix with the goal of ensuring Slovakia's self-sufficiency in the production of electricity is one of them. The Slovak Republic successfully fulfilled this goal, when it continuously advocated and promoted the utilization of nuclear energy as a means of achieving its objectives. In 2008, we received the approval of the European Commission for the finalization of the third and fourth blocks of the Mochovce Nuclear Power Plant. At the same time, Slovakia advocated the creation of adequate conditions for the further development of nuclear energy in Slovakia.

On the agenda of the internal market for energy, the Slovak Republic supported the promotion of changes in the draft of the third liberalization package. The unbundling of vertically integrated energy companies proved to be a major problem in the negotiations. In accordance with Slovakia's energy policy, the provisions on the independent transit network operator were included as a new chapter in the draft of the natural gas directive and the electricity directive.

The Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs 2008-2010

The financial crisis and the decrease in economic growth highlighted the significance of the Lisbon strategy as a set of instruments for the strengthening of economic growth and improving the resistance of economies towards external and



Commissioner Ján Figel' at the inauguration of the exhibition, *From the Slovak Crown to the Euro*, on the occasion of the setting of the conversion rate of the Slovak crown in Brussels, July 2008

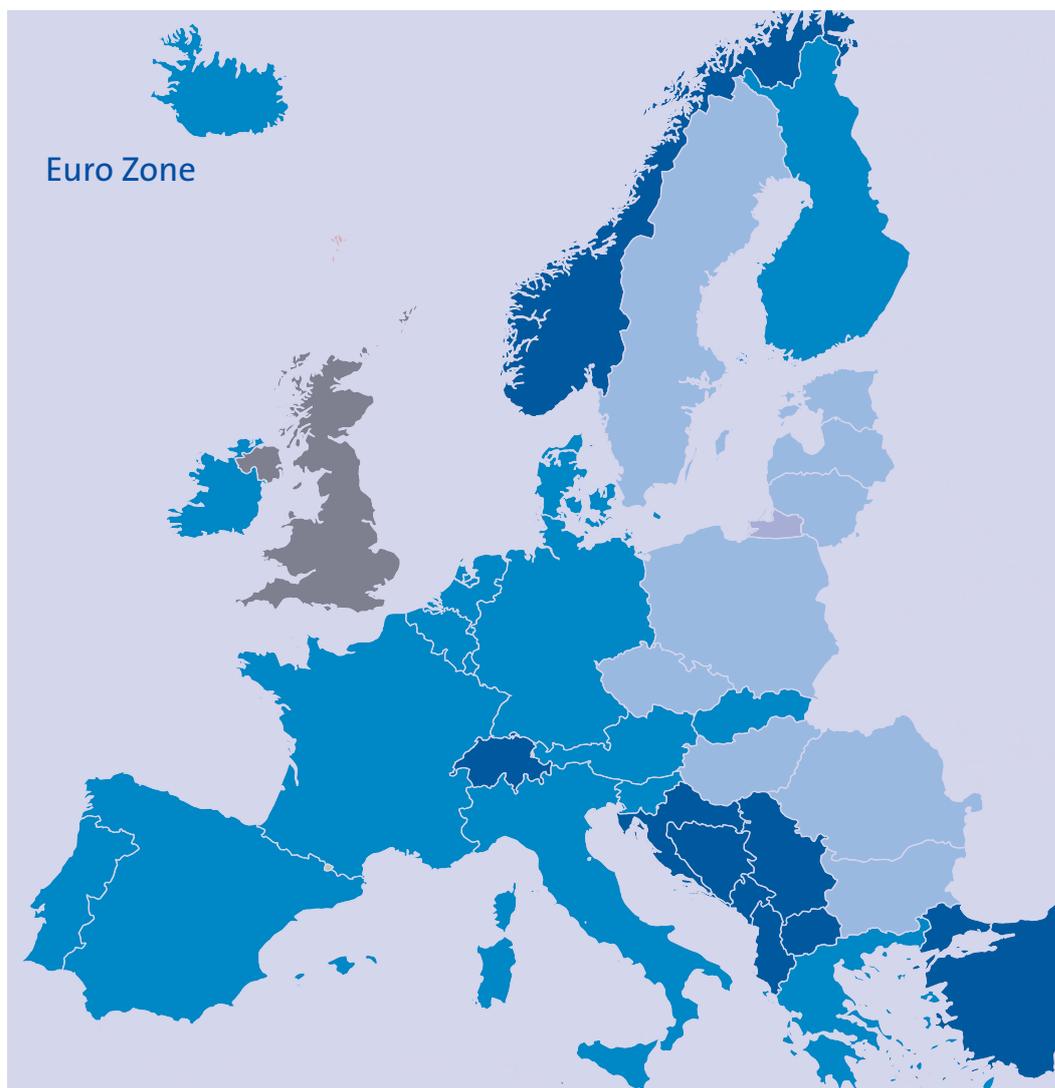
internal turbulence. In 2008, we entered a new three-year cycle of the *Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs 2008-2010*. In October 2008, Slovakia presented its *National Reform Programme until the Year 2010* to the European Commission. The programme is based on the modernisation programme *Slovakia 21* approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic in June 2008, and the four current priority areas: research, development and innovation, education, and employment and the business environment, to which another priority was added after the spring meeting of the European Council in 2007 – energy and climate change.

The EU is an important global actor thanks to its economy, while the main source of its stabilizing role is its prosperity and economic strength. In the complicated economic situation of 2008 emphasis needed to be laid on the development of human resources, the support of education, research, development, and the release of all internal market reserves. The abolition of the barriers

■ How did you perceive the interest of the partners in Slovakia's adoption of the Euro during negotiations on Slovakia's accession to the Euro Zone?

EU institutions approach the evaluation of each country striving to adopt the common currency very strictly and require the maximum fulfilment of all Maastricht criteria. The country preparing for the adoption of the Euro must convince them that it is capable not only of fulfilling the Maastricht criteria,

but also continuing to do so in a sustainable manner. The Government of the Slovak Republic made maximum efforts in this direction at all negotiations with foreign partners on the issue of our entry into the Euro Zone. During the negotiations, the partners positively perceived the efforts of the SR to fulfil the required criteria and therefore they approved the readiness of the SR to enter the Euro Zone on the set date of 1 January 2009. ■



which impeded the full use of the four freedoms, especially the free movement of labour was a priority. That is why, in the year 2008, Slovak diplomacy continued to promote the removal of the remaining transition periods. France removed its transition period measures. At the end of 2008, Denmark declared it would abolish the transition period measures on the free movement of labour by 1 May 2009. Along with Denmark, transition measures still apply to Slovak citizens in Belgium, Germany, and Austria.

Migration

The MFA devoted its attention to the agenda while fully respecting that it is only one of three central state administration institutions which participate in the management of migration, due to the cross-section character of migration policy (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, and the MFA). Migration and its

growing significance, from the viewpoint of Slovakia, were also taken into consideration during the formulation of the strategy of the department of foreign affairs. One of the long-term strategic objectives is to *Regulate Migration According to the Interests of Slovakia*. The MFA continued coordination activities with the goal of fulfilling the aforementioned objective, especially in relation to the EU, but also in the strengthening of migration aspects in the provision of development assistance and the directing of legal migration flows according to the requirements of the labour market. These activities were the dynamic element of migration management in Slovakia. In 2008, the MFA actively participated in the preparation of multiple key events in the migration agenda including the *Global Forum on Migration and Development* (27-30 October 2008, Manila) and the *2nd Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development* (25 November 2008, Paris). ■

More at:
www.euromena.sk,str
[www.euro.gov.sk \(Euro\)](http://www.euro.gov.sk (Euro))

In 2008, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) continued to represent one of the key areas of interest for the Slovak Republic within the EU's foreign and security policy. In the first half of the year, the EU's attention was focused on the beginning of a new stage in relations with its Southern neighbours.

Union for the Mediterranean

At a summit held with Mediterranean countries in the latter half of 2008, France inaugurated the new EU policy: The Union for the Mediterranean. Slovakia most of all welcomes the participation of the entire EU in the initiative, its orientation, and particular projects, which should bring tangible results for the EU countries as well as their Mediterranean partners. The Union for the Mediterranean is an initiative supported by the Slovak Republic because, among other things, in a broader context it also contributes to the Middle East peace process. Slovakia will look for opportunities to actively participate in the Union for the Mediterranean.

Developing the ENP's Eastern Dimension

In 2008, however, the attention of the Slovak Republic continued to focus primarily on developing the ENP's Eastern Dimension. Together with its partners, and working within the V4 as well, Slovakia was able to put many ideas on the table on how to further motivate Eastern neighbours and the EU into an even closer and ambitious partnership. The agreement upon the political orientation of the new *EU-Ukraine Agreement* represents an important milestone in the context of bilateral relations. Slovakia considers the fact that agreement was reached on its basic parameters to be important as well. The name itself – *Association Agreement* – indicates a higher level of ambition in mutual relations. Slovak diplomacy actively promoted the idea of the possible development of relations towards the potential future membership of Ukraine in the EU to be included in the future *Association Agreement*. Similarly, Slovakia also supported the initiation of negotiations on strengthening a new partnership agreement with Moldova.

The presentation of the Polish-Swedish initiative of the Eastern Partnership – which followed V4 discussions with its partners, especially Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia – represented an important step in the ENP's Eastern Dimension as well. Thus, in June 2008 at the European Council's negotiations, Slovakia was one of the countries explicitly supporting the initiative which

puts higher emphasis on the bilateral character of the ENP's Eastern Dimension and is supported by its regional dimension.

The events of August in the Southern Caucasus confirmed the necessity of deepening and intensifying the ENP's Eastern Dimension based on the concept of the outlined Eastern Partnership. Slovakia advocated both accelerating formalization of the Eastern Partnership as well as ensuring that the European Commission would produce the first draft version before the end of the year. In October and November 2008, Slovak diplomacy communicated intensively in this regard with its partners – Eastern European partners as well as the European Commission – with the goal of supporting this ambitious document on Eastern Partnership. Slovakia particularly pushed for the economic and sectoral integration of partner countries with the EU through a new generation of association agreements and action plans oriented towards a free trade zone, mobility, and the possibility of a visa-free regime between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. The overall modernisation, reform support, the deepening of democratization and solving of frozen conflicts, openness to third countries, the support of re-



Group picture on the occasion of the Conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union Member States and the Mediterranean countries, Marseille, November 2008

gional cohesion, and the realization of projects in key interest areas (energy, infrastructure, small and medium enterprises) were the basic parameters which we promoted with our partners. The document presented by the European Commission on 3 December 2008 fulfilled Slovakia's expectations. The Czech Presidency, in the first half of 2009, included the Eastern Partnership among its priorities, which represents a great chance for a promising and successful start to the strengthened Eastern neighbourhood policy of the EU. ■

In 2008, Slovakia continued in the positive trend of increasing its citizens' representation within EU institutions. Thus in 2008, besides many other things, Slovakia increased its direct influence on the activities of EU institutions by ensuring higher awareness, closer work ties, and subsequent opportunities to use these contacts at home. The national interests of the Slovak Republic can therefore continue to be directly communicated within the specific institutions of European structures.

Several actors within the state administration play an important role in the strengthen-

work in European institutions, as well as informing the applicants about job opportunities.

Slovaks in Brussels

In 2008, the increase in the representation of Slovak citizens in EU institutions showed that this successful trend that has developed over the past few years continues. The overall number of Slovak citizens working in EU institutions in various positions continues to grow unabated. At the end of 2008, 306 Slovaks were working in the European Commission in permanent or temporary positions. Slovakia has thus been successfully fulfilling the quota set by the European Commission, i.e. 279 permanent positions, which it should reach by 2010. After 2010, the preferential quota system for new Member States will be abolished.

From Slovakia's perspective, the level of the position held is regarded as a more significant indicator of success than the overall number of positions occupied in the EU structures. It is clear that administrative staff and their assistants visibly improve the image of their home country. The representation of Slovaks in the highest positions in Directorate Generals, however, is not yet as high as that found at lower levels. Therefore, Slovakia will continue to focus its efforts in this field for the foreseeable future.

Our long-term interest in achieving higher representation of our citizens in EU institutions is being hampered by the insufficient interest of suitable candidates in gaining middle and higher ranking management positions in the EC and other EU institution.

Slovak citizens are undoubtedly able to compete against candidates from other countries, but they have doubts about applying for publicly announced tenders, and sometimes apply for positions which do not reflect their actual expertise and work experience. However, this paradox will easily be resolved when candidates are able to realistically evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses.



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, David Miliband, and guests at the debate with students of the Faculty of International Relations of the University of Economics on the *Challenges for Foreign Policy in Europe*, Bratislava, October 2008

ing of the personnel representation of Slovaks in EU institutions. The Government Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU in Brussels, mutually coordinate the links between the individual national bodies within the EU institutions while implementing the steps required to ensure a higher quality of training for Slovak citizens for

Overall Representation of Slovak Citizens in the EC

| Year | Total Number | of that | | | |
|------|--------------|---------|-------|-----|-------|
| | | Women | % | Men | % |
| 2004 | 64 | 45 | 70.31 | 19 | 29.69 |
| 2005 | 128 | 89 | 69.53 | 39 | 30.47 |
| 2006 | 177 | 124 | 70.06 | 53 | 29.94 |
| 2007 | 264 | 174 | 65.91 | 90 | 34.09 |
| 2008 | 306 | 202 | 66.01 | 104 | 33.99 |



The Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ján Kubiš, and the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the EU, Maroš Šefčovič during the EU Summit in Brussels, 19 June 2008

The number of national experts working overall within the EC in 2008 totalled 1108 people. Of these, 161 were from the ten new Member States. While 17 Slovaks were sent to these posts directly by their employers (the bodies and institutions of the state administration of the Slovak Republic). Among the ten new Member States only Hungary (44), Poland (37) and Lithuania (18) achieved better results in placing their national experts.

An Investment in the Future

Activities directed at the continual training of candidates for work within EU institutions are an important instrument in strengthening the personnel representation of Slovakia in EU institutions on a long-term basis. Thus, in 2008, the realization of the *National Training Project of Candidates for Work in Public Administration* was implemented. The project was financed from the resources of the European Social Fund and attended by several hundred participants. In addition, further training is being provided in cooperation with other Slovak institutions from the state administration, academic circles and non-governmental organizations.

In November 2008, a working visit of the heads of the Slovak central bodies of the state adminis-

tration personnel offices to EU institutions took place. Its aim was to explain the work of the Brussels administration to experts responsible for personnel policy at the level of the state administration's central bodies.

In 2008, the MFA published a guidebook for candidates seeking work in EU institutions entitled: *Slovaks in EU Institutions – Practice and Experience*. The objective of the publication is to outline the conditions required for successful completion of the selection process, and provide details on the working conditions potential applicants can expect in the EU institutions.

The organization of an international conference, *Slovaks in the Institutions of the European Union*, with the participation of David Bearfield, Director of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), was another step in a series of complex activities undertaken by the MFA in strengthening personnel policy within European institutions. The goal of the conference was to inform the general public and experts on the opportunities of working in EU institutions, on the conditions of the selection procedures, and the method of candidate hiring, which is being prepared and gradually implemented by the EPSO. ■



Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Pavol Paška opens the Ladislav Bielik photography exhibition *August 1968* at Helsinki University with the presence of the Vice-Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Finland, April 2008

Serving Our Citizens and Slovakia Open to the World

A fundamental and long-term goal of Slovak foreign policy is to secure and provide assistance to Slovak citizens abroad when needed and deal with personal matters in relation to the Slovak institutions. Thus, in both cases foreign policy directly addresses the citizens of Slovakia.

In 2008, several priorities were set in this field, including Slovakia's smooth involvement in Schengen cooperation and the fulfilment of tasks related to our joining the Schengen area. Slovakia also focused on the following issues: achieving the abolition of visa regimes or their liberalization in regard to Slovak citizens; improving communication with the public; raising public awareness about consular services; as well as ensuring the employment of highly qualified and trained personnel in our diplomatic missions.

The Citizens Assistance and Services Centre, which began its work in June 2008, plays an important role in increasing the quality of services provided to our citizens.

The year 2008 was very significant in terms of commemorating important historical and cultural anniversaries. The 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968); the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Czech-

oslovak Republic; and the centenary of the birth of a key figure in modern Slovak music culture, Eugen Suchoň, were all celebrated. In this regard, our cultural diplomacy was exceptionally active. The Slovak Institutes prepared a number of events and our diplomatic missions held exhibitions and concerts on their premises.

Strengthening relations with traditional Slovak communities around the world is an integral part of the work of the MFA and our cooperation with these numerous bodies continued to develop rapidly throughout 2008. Honorary Consuls have played a significant role in this regard. The holding of the 5th *World Meeting of Honorary Consuls of the Slovak Republic* in 2008 and the establishment of a separate department at the MFA are steps towards improving cooperation with honorary consuls.

The first exhibition at the *Diplomatic Museum* took place in October 2008 indicating that the final phase of this project has been reached.

Cooperation between the MFA and the non-governmental sector continued successfully and key steps primarily concerned the financial support of specific projects and cooperation in the organization of expert meetings, seminars, and conferences. ■

Following Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO, its joining the Schengen area, and the gradual opening up of the EU labour market, Slovak citizens continued to travel abroad and migrate for the purposes of work in ever increasing numbers. Thus, the volume of services provided by the MFA to our citizens abroad via our Embassies, Consulates General and Honorary Consulates increased. As they are the first point of contact for citizens who require consular information, have requests or need to resolve unusual situations, they are growing in significance.

Letter of thanks to our consulate in the Netherlands for the prompt issuing of a temporary travel document

EU Members Assist Each Other

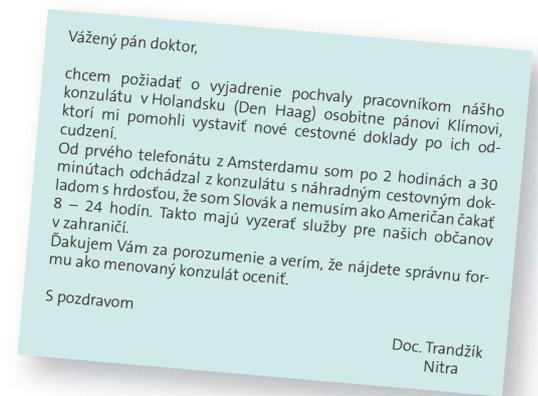
The European Union institutions are also concerned with the protection of citizens. The framework for consular cooperation in cases where the security of EU citizens is endangered was laid out in a document entitled *Guidelines on Consular Protection of EU Citizens in Third Countries* and adopted in 2006. Although the document is not in fact binding, the Member States do in fact abide by it. The document determines specific procedures and rules for cooperation between diplomatic missions in third countries to assist EU citizens and prevent damage or possible failures in the case of a consular crisis.

One of the thank you letters to the Slovak Embassy in Kiev for its flexible approach in issuing a visa to a young Ukrainian artist from Krivoj Rog

The *Lead State* concept adopted by the EU in 2007 is another important document. It determines the guidelines for selecting the state and its diplomatic mission to ensure the protection of all EU citizens in a country where there is limited representation of EU Member States or indeed

no EU Member State representation at all. At the same time, it defines the competences of the selected diplomatic mission and the rules for cooperation with other states should there be a need to provide consular protection.

Any EU citizen who finds him/herself on the territory of a third country where there is no representation of his/her home state is entitled to the same level of protection by the diplomatic or consular authorities of any Member State. This rule is



defined in Article 20 of the *Treaty establishing the European Community*.

250,000 Slovak Citizens Abroad

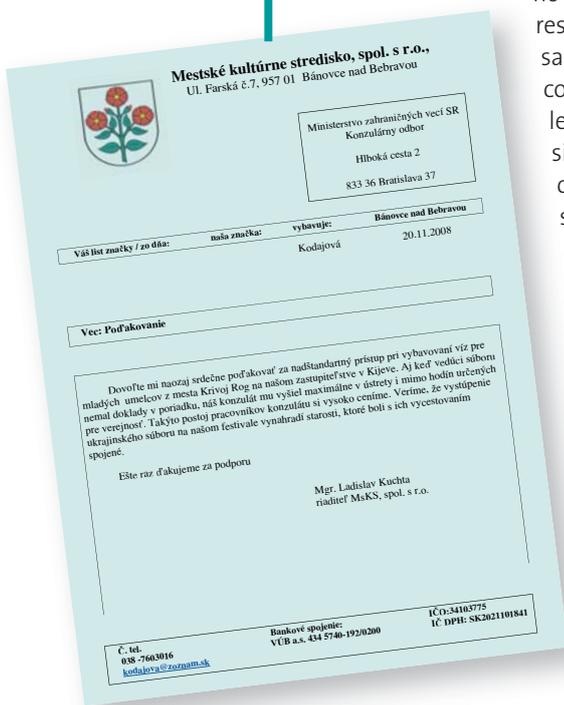
According to estimates, approximately 250,000 Slovak citizens live and work abroad, primarily in EU Member States. Slovakia's diplomatic mis-sions solve many cases related to issues concern-ing their employment and provide necessary as-sistance in solving problems related to their stay or their return home.

The goal of the MFA is to continuously improve the consular service so that a high standard of care can be provided to citizens when necessary and so that their rights and interests can be ad-dressed in time. The Diplomatic Missions, Con-sulates General, Honorary Consulates and the Consular Department of the MFA continue to be the competent bodies for the provision of such assistance.

The establishment of the Citizens Assistance and Services Centre (MFA SR Hotline, tel. +421 2 5978 5978) on 1 June 2008 was an important step towards improving assistance to and serv-ices for Slovak citizens. In the case of consular-related matters the Centre can also be contacted from abroad.

The Abolishment of Barriers

The process of abolishing visa barriers was con-cluded in 2008 when Canada (on 1 March 2008), Australia (on 27 October 2008), and the USA (on 17 November 2008) removed their visa require-ments for Slovak citizens. In the cases of Australia and the USA, this process does not allow for the complete removal of preliminary authorization to access the country (Australia requires 'elec-tronic visas' and the USA needs the approval of the ESTA), but the issuing of preliminary authori-zation is free and can be obtained electronically. Slovak citizens are subjected to the same proce-dures as citizens of other EU Member States. The visa-free regime agreement with the Republic of



South Africa for diplomatic and service passport holders came into force on 29 March 2008. From 3 October 2008, Slovak citizens can travel to Macedonia using their identity cards as travel documents and as of 1 October 2008 Taiwan abolished the visa requirement for Slovak citizens travelling to the country for less than 30 days.

As of 1 July 2008, however, Kyrgyzstan introduced visa requirements for our citizens.

Coordination within the EU

The year 2008 saw the implementation of the Schengen rules into the consular service for the first time. The full cooperation among Schengen countries and the unification of visa procedures also took place in this year. Full coordination was achieved in the issuing of visas based on the agreements between the EU and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine. These agreements allow the citizens of EU Member States to enter the territory of the aforementioned states (with the exception of Russia) without visas and facilitates the procedure for obtaining visas for the citizens of the second signatory side. Some Schengen visas are issued free of charge (to children, sportsmen, pensioners, students, government delegations, entrepreneurs, and so on) and others can be obtained at the lower fee of 35 € (as opposed to the standard general fee of 60 €).

After several months of negotiations, the *Agreement on Local Border Traffic between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine* entered into force in September 2008. Based on this agreement, citizens living within the 50 km border zone can apply for permission to travel as local border traffic without requiring a standard visa. This costs 20 € and is valid for a period of 5 years. However, free movement is restricted to the 50 km zone of the other signatory party. This is undoubtedly considered a facilitation of the visa regime focusing primarily on the development of relations within the region and the facilitation of traffic for families living on the territories of both signatory sides.

Due to the EU request to allow citizens of third countries to apply for a Schengen visa at the diplomatic mission of another Schengen country in the territory where the given Member State is not represented, the Slovak Republic initiated negotiations with some Schengen countries on the possibility of concluding bilateral agreements. Based on these agreements, the diplomatic mission of the given country would issue visas to Slovakia. Preliminary talks on this issue were held in the first half of 2008. If the second contracting par-

In 2008 We Dealt Abroad with:

- 424 deaths;
- 528 serious injuries involving Slovak citizens;
- 2,095 Slovak citizens who committed crimes;
- we had to assist 182 times in the protection of the rights of minors;
- we legalized 34,372 signatures, copies and translations;
- we accepted 3,352 requests for the issuing of birth, marriage and death certificates;
- 4,873 citizens applied for the issuing of a new passport;
- we issued 82,565 visas for visits to the Slovak Republic.

ty agrees, France would issue visas on behalf of Slovakia in Algiers (Algeria), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Rabat (Morocco), Kathmandu (Nepal), Tunis (Tunisia), and Colombo (Sri Lanka), Germany in Baku (Azerbaijan) and Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Hungary in Tirana (Albania), Kishinev (Moldova), and Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), Poland in Luanda (Angola), Islamabad (Pakistan), and Kaliningrad (Russia), Latvia in Tbilisi (Georgia), and Austria in Manila (the Philippines), Amman (Jordan), and Beirut (Lebanon). The agreement proposal with Austria was submitted to the government for approval. Despite its previous interest, Poland has not concluded the agreement because Slovakia cannot currently offer reciprocity. France has not yet officially responded to the proposal and other countries are still considering it.

The Consular department is preparing a project for the electronic submission of visa applications. A test version has already been created and will be tested first and put into practice in the first half of 2009. An 'appointment calendar' through which applicants can electronically set a suitable date for the submission of their application at an appropriate diplomatic mission will also be part of this programme.

The project of issuing biometric passports with 2 biometric elements (face image and fingerprints), which EU Member States must start issuing by 28 June 2009, is also being prepared. ■

Letter of thanks to our consulate in Shanghai for providing extraordinary assistance in need

Vážený pán generálny konzul,

dovoľte mi cestou tohto mailu vyjadriť moju uprimnú vďaku pracovníkom slovenskeho konzulátu v Shanghaji pod Vasim vedením, ktorí mi ochotne poskytli potrebnú konzulárnu pomoc v nudzovej situácii.

Pocas mojho kratkeho pobytu v Shanghaji v dnoch 29. 11. – 3. 12. mi boli odcudzene cestovne dokumenty a ine cennosti značnej hodnoty. V tejto situácii som kontaktoval slovensky konzulat telefonicky v nedelu vecer 30. 11. so žiadosťou o vydanie nahradneho cestovneho pasu. Cez mobilny telefon som dostal vsetky potrebne informacie od p. vicekonzulky Moravkovej, ktorá ma obsluzila mimo pracovnych hodin, cim som bol prijemne prekvapeny. V pondelok rano mi bol na konzulate vystaveny nahradny cestovny pas bez vacsich problemov.

Nasledovne vďaka neocenitelnej pomoci vasho pracovníka Zora, ktorý ma sprevadzal na miesto kradeže kde mi poskytol tlmocnicku pomoc, a nasledovne na cinskom pasovom urade, kde som na dalsi den obdržal vystupne vizum, vďaka comu som sa mohol vratit domov len s dvojdnovym oneskorenim.

Moje zvladne podakovanie za profesionalny a ludsky pristup patri p. Moravkovej a Zorovi, ktorí mi nevhali pomoc v nelahkej situácii, za ich pracu ktorá prekracuje beznu profesionalnu povinnost.

Dovoľte mi vyjadriť Vam pochvalenie za Vasu pracu vo vedeni slovenskeho konzulatu v Shanghaji, a zelim Vam vela uspechovo vasej práci.

S prianim veselych sviatkov a stastneho Noveho roka, zostava s pozdravom

Adam Rihak
Madrid

Minister Ján Kubiš talking to the media after his arrival at Zadar airport. The Slovak government deployed an aeroplane with a medical team to assist our citizens who survived the tragic bus accident in Croatia



The Citizens Assistance and Services Centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic began its work in the middle of June 2008. Its main task is to provide Slovak citizens and institutions with basic information as well as information on conditions relating to travel. By the end of 2008, the employees of the Centre had answered more than 4,000 telephone requests dealing mainly with current travel restrictions, Slovak diplomatic missions, the verification of public documents for their use abroad, or inheritance issues in foreign countries.

One of the basic roles of the Centre is to provide assistance to citizens who find themselves in need abroad. In cooperation with other bodies of the MFA and especially with the Consular Department, the employees of the Centre provided assistance in cases of traffic accidents, loss of travel documents as well as in the search for missing persons or the deaths of Slovak citizens abroad. In addition, the Centre also provided assistance in two very serious and exceptional events – the provision of assistance to Slovak citizens on their return to Slovakia during the military conflict in Georgia and assistance to Slovak citizens in the traffic accident involving the Slovak bus in Croatia. The Centre also helped Slovak citizens in Bombay at the time of the terrorist attacks and in Thailand during the armed conflict. All these cases proved that the existence of the Centre significantly contributed to the fact that the MFA was able to handle the crisis situations well.

The Centre also processes citizen requests for information as provided for in *Act No. 211/2000 Coll. on Free Access to Information*. In 2008, 2,144 information requests were received and processed. ■

State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic Olga Algayerová welcomes Slovak citizens at Bratislava airport. They were transported by a special plane from Yerevan where they took refuge during the military conflict between Russia and Georgia, August 2008



The Citizens Assistance Centre in action.

In 2008, the activities and work of the Archive and Library Department contributed to improving MFA communication with the public and the external environment. Throughout 2008, its services were fully used by the MFA and employees of other bodies of the state administration as well as by the general public in all workplaces of the Department – the Diplomatic Archive, the Library, and the Diplomatic Museum.

The MFA Diplomatic Archive

The Diplomatic archive continued processing, enlarging, and declassifying the document base in existing archive funds and collections. New archive documents were added from Slovak diplomatic missions abroad for the years 2000 and 1997, updating chronologically the archive funds of individual diplomatic missions. The following archive collections were updated and enlarged:

- bilateral international treaties of the Slovak Republic 1992-2008;
- multilateral international treaties of the Slovak Republic 1992-2008;
- credentials and resignation letters of Slovak titulars accredited abroad 1993-2008;
- credentials and resignation letters of foreign titulars accredited in the SR 1993-2008;
- letters of recognition of the SR and the establishment of diplomatic contacts with individual states 1992-2008.

An archive, complete with inventory, on the activities and operations of Vladimír Clementis in exile and at the MFA was compiled from copies of documents from the former Federal Ministry of Affairs in Prague. In 2008, the information and document database of the Diplomatic Archive on the history of foreign policy, diplomacy, and international relations of the Slovak Republic was used by a number of interested persons, mainly students, political scientists, and historians, not only from Slovakia but also from abroad. Increasing interest in studying the archive is documented by forty-three research visits, which represents a significant increase in comparison with previous years.

As part of the international cooperation, the employees of the Diplomatic Archive prepared a joint exhibition of archive documents with their colleagues from Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives in the Czech Republic and France entitled *France and the Birth of Czechoslovakia: Common Path to a Democratic Europe 1914-1925*. Various documents from Slovakia were presented along with documents of Czech and French origin. This provided a representative snapshot of the events and key figures from the period in question. The exhibition was inaugurated on the occasion of the

90th anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic on 27 October 2008 in the Tuscany Palace in Prague, and in 2009, it will move first to Paris and then to Bratislava in the autumn.

Library

The MFA Library is a specialized body focused on the gathering and registering of literature from the fields of history, diplomacy, political science, law, international relations, and economy. In 2008, it acquired and provided access to periodical and non-periodical publications in a variety of formats. The day-to-day services of the library, such as the collection of daily and periodical domestic and foreign press, information databases, and an extensive book fund were primarily used by the MFA employees. The consultations and research possibilities, however, were mostly used by students and interns at the MFA. In 2008 the book fund was enlarged by 564 new titles.



Diplomatic Museum

The concept of the MFA Diplomatic Museum was drafted in 2008. The museum's goal is to publicize diplomatic activities and display related documents from the foundation of the first state formations on the territory of Slovakia up to the present Slovak Republic. The museum was able to acquire an extensive collection of texts and images from Slovak, Austrian, British, Czech, French, Hungarian and Italian archives, museums, and other institutions that serve as the basis for the future permanent exhibition. In the interest of acquiring exhibits from former diplomats, cooperation was established with the Seniors of Slovak Diplomacy Association. A significant quantity of the museum's materials has been processed in electronic form since a considerable part of the exhibition will be presented virtually. Proposed locations for the museum and exhibition have been

The exhibition on the life and work of Štefan Osuský at the University Library in Bratislava was the first event organized by the Museum of Slovak Diplomacy, October 2008



researched and are currently under consideration. The museum should primarily serve as a base for information and educational activities for the general public, students, diplomats, and other experts. For this reason, individuals seeking work experience were involved in helping establish the museum – they may well be future diplomats.

More at:
www.ceit.sk/webisnt/mzvsk.htm (Knižničný fond MZV SR)

The first public presentation of the museum activities was held in October 2008 on the premises

of the University Library in Bratislava. On this occasion, there was a presentation on the personality and work of the Slovak diplomat Štefan Osuský. Similar events on other prominent Slovak diplomats are planned, as well. The museum also co-organized, in cooperation with the Embassy of the United States, the exhibition on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the *Pittsburgh Agreement* on the premises of the National Council. ■

Honorary Consulates

The year 2008 brought significant organizational changes in the agenda of the Honorary Consulates. As of 1 September 2008, the agenda of Honorary Consulates was delimited from the competences of the Consular Department and transferred to the newly formed independent Slovak Honorary Consulates Unit. The agenda of the Honorary Consulates of other countries in the Slovak Republic was moved to the portfolio of the Diplomatic Protocol Department.

At the end of 2008, a total of 144 Honorary Consulates of the Slovak Republic were working abroad and approximately 20 new Honorary Consulates are currently undergoing approval. More than 70 Honorary Consulates are located in Europe. The Concept of Development of the Network of Slovak Honorary Consulates for 2008-2012 anticipates the priority establishment of Honorary Consulates in developing countries, particularly in states where Slovakia has no professional diplomatic or consular representation, or in important regions of those countries where the intensity of relations with the Slovak Republic requires and justifies this form of representation.

In the interest of commencing work with the Slovak Honorary Consulates, the 5th World Meeting of Honorary Consuls of the Slovak Republic was held in Bratislava on 9-11 September 2008.

The meeting was attended by 92 Honorary Consuls from all five continents. The goals of this forum were to inform participants about the developments Slovakia has undergone in fulfilling its fundamental foreign policy goal – the successful completion of the integration processes into NATO and the EU, as well as to present the current internal political situation in Slovakia and the priorities of Slovak foreign policy. The meeting also focused on more clearly identifying the key tasks of Honorary Consulates in terms of Slovakia's current position on the international political scene and on the activities and needs of the Honorary Consulates. It also searched for mechanisms designed to make improvements to their work, and in the coordination and cooperation of corresponding diplomatic missions and Consulates General of Slovakia as well as the MFA Headquarters in Bratislava. The meeting of the Honorary Consuls was a useful forum for the presentation of Slovak foreign policy and an important opportunity for the exchange of information with Consuls with the aim of improving their activities. Proposals and ideas on upgrading the work of Honorary Consulates were shared as were critical remarks on the previous modalities of their operation.

The Consuls' meeting fully achieved its intended purpose and was highly appreciated both for its content and organization. One of the conclusions was the decision to put up a webpage for Honorary Consulates of the Slovak Republic on the MFA website. This would significantly contribute to their awareness of the current developments in Slovakia and allow for more interactive communication among the Honorary Consulates. Experience from the work of Honorary Consulates suggests that this is an important and useful instrument of Slovak foreign policy in countries and regions where Slovakia does not have direct diplomatic or consular representation. The MFA will continue to devote attention to the expansion of their functional network. ■

The 5th World Meeting of Honorary Consuls of the Slovak Republic, Congress Hall of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava



The MFA has been attempting to utilize the potential of the non-governmental sector in achieving the foreign policy goals of the Slovak Republic. Steps were taken primarily to develop, among other things, the financial support of cooperation with the third sector. In 2008, the MFA grant system was supplemented by financing some regular activities in the conference, consultation, and publication fields in the form of provider-customer relations. The MFA, through a public tender, selected the providers of several projects in the given areas. The providers fulfilled their commitments (two conferences, the publishing of an MFA Annual Report and the Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy, as well as analyses on current issues in international relations). Overall the MFA supported cooperation with the third sector to the amount of 6 million SKK.

Two out of the four planned discussion round tables were organized. Based on an agreement with the MFA, the House of Europe organized two international conferences in cooperation with the MFA. The first one was a discussion forum on multilingualism in the EU, which took place in October 2008. The second one was the international conference on the subject of *New Ethical and Social Challenges on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* on 10 December 2008.

This area of cooperation with the third sector was successful. Its aim was fulfilled in the continual dialogue of political and expert representatives of the MFA with the members of non-governmental organizations at frequent expert meetings, seminars, and conferences organized either by the MFA or the NGOs. The planning and realization of Slovak development assistance projects abroad is a specific area of cooperation. The MFA consulted on the Medium-Term Strategy for Official Development Assistance (ODA) as well as the National Programme for 2008 and 2009 with the Slovak Non-Governmental Development Organizations Platform. The Platform had several opportunities to directly communicate with the Foreign Affairs Minister, State Secretary Oľga Algayerová, and MFA experts in addition to the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation on extending the possibility for cooperation between the state bodies and the tertiary sector.

As mentioned before, the MFA grant system for co-financing the NGO sector, which focuses on re-

search on international relations and the foreign policy of Slovakia, was supplemented by a system that ensures regular activities in the conference, consultation, and publication fields, through the form of contract relations. In February 2008, the MFA issued tenders on the provision of the aforementioned services. The winners were two non-governmental organizations. Based on the contract, publication and consultation services are thus provided by the Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (RC SFPA) and the House of Europe, and conference services by the House of Europe. Two specialized periodicals are published within this framework – the journal *Zahraničná politika* and quarterly *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*. The RC SFPA also provided, as requested by the MFA, expert analyses on the current issues concerning international events: the conflict in Georgia, relations between Slovakia and Hungary, and the perspectives of Slovak foreign policy in 2009.

Financial support for the cooperation with the NGOs in 2008 to the amount of 6 million SKK was divided equally between the provision of projects and payments for provided services. This also means that the financing itself took place in two different ways: through the grant system of the MFA and through provider-customer relations.

Altogether, 19 NGOs applied for financial grants (16 legal and 3 personal entities). They presented 66 proposals for projects in the fields of international relations and Slovak foreign policy. Based on the recommendations of an expert commission, the Minister of Foreign Affairs approved the full (8 projects) or partial (11) financial support of 19 projects from 11 applicants to a total sum of 3 million SKK. One of the projects was not implemented due to the applicant's inability to raise sufficient resources to co-finance the project. The projects are realized in accordance with the agreed grant conditions including the timeframe.

In order to ensure the high-quality of the projects implemented within the grant system of the ministry, a specific system of continual project evaluation was introduced. The expert bodies which oversee the projects produce a brief evaluation after the termination of a project and their comments can be taken into account by the commission when considering the project proposals in the following year. ■

The cultural dimension of diplomacy has a universal character. It is a tool which connects, in some cases, completely different cultural, political, or social environments. At the same time, it is an important diplomatic tool, which contributes to the creation of a positive image of Slovakia abroad, in the fields of political, trade and economic relations. The network of Slovak Institutes (SI) throughout the world plays a significant role in increasing awareness about the history and current events in the culture and art of Slovakia, as well as in promoting Slovakia as a tourist destination. Moreover, the Institutes provide targeted audiences and the general public with information on and images of Slovak culture, art, and science from past and present.

Cooperation is significant especially in holding exhibitions with the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. Institute events are often linked with the presentation of Slovak regions and towns, which creates a space for developing trade and economic contacts between individual countries. Joint projects with the Slovak Tourist Board (SACR) and the Ministry of Economy focused on the presentation of travel agencies, participation in tourism fairs, and on promoting self-governing regions, towns, and spas.

Slovak Institutes currently operate in Berlin, Budapest, Moscow, Paris, Prague, Rome, Vienna, and Warsaw.

'Number 8' Anniversaries

The year 2008 was characterized by the 'number 8' anniversaries which dominated the cultural presentation of Slovakia abroad. The exhibition *The Magic Number '8' in the History of Slovakia* presenting the anniversaries of significant and decisive events in the modern history of Slovakia (1848, 1918, 1938, 1948, 1968) was considered a key project undertaken in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. The exhibition was displayed in five languages in more than twenty European and American cities. A travelling photographic exhibition of the tragically deceased Ladislav Bielik *August 1968– Bratislava* was also a successful project, which captured the historical events in an authentic documentary and artistic style.

The project entitled *Centenary of Eugen Suchoň* dealt with the anniversary of the birth of one of the most significant composers of Slovak music in the 20th century. More than 30 different Slovak cultural events were held in Paris and other French towns during the European Cultural Season within the programme of the French Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2008. Czechoslovakia 90 was one of the significant projects which successfully and comprehensively presented Slovak culture in the Czech Republic.

Besides the aforementioned events, Slovak Institutes and diplomatic missions organized a

The exhibition of modern Slovak art *Slovak Picture (Anti-Picture)* in the Hippodrome of the Prague Castle on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, which was based on the programme initiative of the Slovak Institute in Prague, was one of the most significant cultural events in 2008. It was the largest exhibition of independent Slovak visual art in the Czech Republic since 1937. In the picture: the Director General of the Slovak National Gallery, Katarína Bajcurová, accompanying the President of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, and the Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic, Václav Jehlička, at the preview of the exhibition



number of other projects from various cultural and art fields with distinct genres and foci. It is hard to choose the most important ones because they were all significant, each in their own way. The following summary, therefore, is not comprehensive. It is more of an expression of the attempt to show the diversity and wide range of activities used in presenting our culture.

Literature and Slovak Language

- ▣ SI Paris – participation in the *Expolangues* fair with a Slovak language lecture by a Slovak lecturer at INALCO and a lecture on *Building Slovak History* (E. Boisserie, French historian);
- ▣ SI Prague – 30 projections with lectures as a part of the *Slovak Literature and Film* cycle;
- ▣ SI Berlin – literary evenings with Michal Hvorecký, as part of the Landvermesser.tv project within the European Salon, are enjoying increasing popularity. A literary and musical evening with the popular German actors A. Swan and J. Schwartz on the anniversary of the birth of the poet Milan Rúfus was a high point;
- ▣ SI Warsaw – annually holds a translation competition for the students of Slavonic studies;
- ▣ SI Vienna – a presentation of the book *Slovakische Kostbarkeiten* written by *Wiener Zeitung* correspondent, Karin Bachmann. The book includes analyses of the political, economic, and social development of Slovakia from its foundation as an independent state;
- ▣ SI Budapest – *Milan Rúfus Evening* – a recital of his poems in Hungarian translation; a presentation of the book *Slovenské rozprávky*.

Music

- All of the Slovak Institutes organized many concerts by Slovak and foreign soloists or ensembles in various styles, as well as events dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the birth of Eugen Suchoň.
- ▣ SI Paris – as part of the *European Cultural Season* (ECS), it organized a number of concerts with the participation of top Slovak opera soloists (A. Kučerová, O. Šaling, P. Bršlík, E. Šusková, M. Mikuš) and ensembles (the Musica Aeterna chamber orchestra, the Solamente Naturali chamber orchestra, and the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra);
 - ▣ SI Prague – Slovak Jazz Club;
 - ▣ SI Warsaw – Concert of the State Philharmonic Košice;
 - ▣ SI Moscow – the Bratislava Boys Choir attended the Festival of Slavic music at the *Days of Slavic Script and Culture*, where it won the Grand Prix of the Festival and performed in five separate/



On 13 April 2008, President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gašparovič and President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Luís Maria De Puig open the exhibition *The Magic Number '8' in the History of Slovakia* prepared as part of the Slovak Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

joint concerts in the largest Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

Film

- ▣ SI Paris in cooperation with the institutes of the V4 countries organized a film festival *Film and Politics*; the preview screening of the Juraj Lehotský's film *Blind Loves*, which won an award at the International Film Festival in Cannes;
- ▣ SI Rome promoted young film-makers at the *Milano Film Festival* where the I. Šebestová's film *Four* won the top award;
- ▣ SI Berlin organized film evenings of Dušan Hanák and Dušan Trančík prepared in cooperation with Slovak Television (STV);
- ▣ SI Vienna screened the film *Lighthouse*, based on the screenplay by writer Ladislav Mňačko; the film was screened on the premises of the Institute with an introduction on the writer's life and work and about the film, which was created in Austria as an ORF;
- ▣ SI Budapest organized the *XVI. Annual Festival of Slovak Films* and an expert seminar, prepared in cooperation with the Slovak Film Institute, the Slovak National Self-Government in Hungary, and Vertigo theatre.

Visual Art

- ▣ SI Paris organized an exhibition of current Slovak photography *Allons Enfants* with wide media coverage on the premises of the diplo-

In 2008 the Slovak Institutes in Berlin, Moscow, Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, Vienna, Rome, and Paris organized 1087 events on their own premises, at diplomatic missions, or other appropriate locations.



The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel; the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Mirek Topolánek; and the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico, at a meeting in Berlin. Along with the Czech Prime Minister and the President of the German Bundestag, Norbert Lammert, Prime Minister Robert Fico opens a photographic exhibition on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Prague Spring, June 2008

matic mission as part of the Paris International Month of Photography;

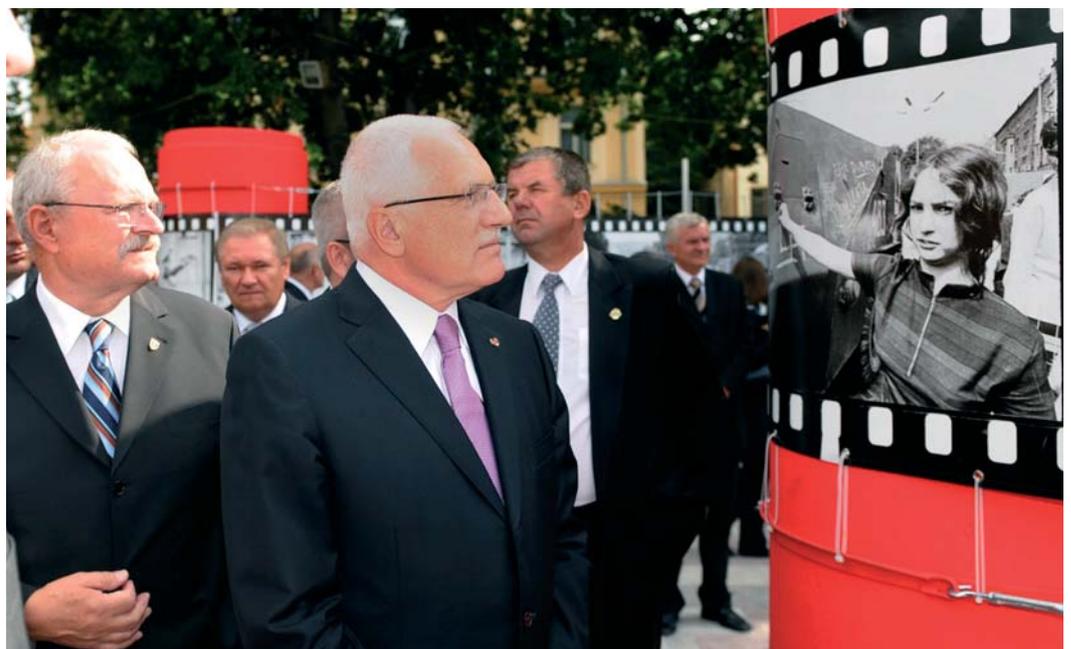
- SI Rome organized the exhibition *Slovak Typography* in cooperation with the Slovak Design Centre, and the exhibition *Visual Soc-Culture 1968-1989* in cooperation with the Slovak National Gallery;
- SI Prague organized an extensive exhibition *Slovak Picture (Anti-Picture)* in the Hippodrome of the Prague Castle on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia;
- SI Warsaw organized an exhibition of Slovak film posters;

- SI Vienna exhibited the work of Miroslav Cipár with the personal participation of the author at the preview; the attractiveness of the preview was enhanced by the performance of the chanson singer Katka Feldeková;
- SI Vienna organized an exhibition of the winning works from the Bratislava Biennial of Illustration; furthermore, a unique collection of violins enriched by the paintings of a hundred prominent Slovak painters was displayed at the exhibition *Na husličkách maľované*;
- SI Moscow organized a photography exhibition by Tibor Huszár *Children of God – Jews and Gypsies*.

Traditional and Other Art

- SI Paris – a variety of performances by the folk ensembles Čičinka and Nádej especially during the Slovak Republic week of the *European Cultural Season* project, on *Europe Day* at the Town Hall square, and other cultural and social events during the French EU Presidency;
- SI Rome – the *Fujara* exhibition and the craftsmanship of traditional musical instruments prepared in cooperation with the Slovak National Museum and the Music Centre;
- SI Warsaw – the presentation of Slovak blacksmith and wire artists was a great success during *Slovak Days* at the Archaeological Museum;
- SI Vienna – an exhibition of Bethlehems from neighbouring countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, and Slovakia – took place at the Lilienfeld Abbey. ■

On 21 August 2008, President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gašparovič welcomed President of the Czech Republic Václav Klaus who paid a working visit to Slovakia on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the occupation by the Warsaw Pact armies. In the picture they are viewing a photography exhibition by Ladislav Bielik, August 1968 in Bratislava





Many of those who have worked in diplomacy state that “when a diplomat completes his active service or career, the door closes behind him and no one is interested in him any longer.” The question is: “How can we change that or how can we use their experience?” These were the thoughts of the seniors of Slovak diplomacy, Rudolf Zábajník and Silvester Minarovič, amongst others and so they put together the first list of former Slovak diplomats.

The first general assembly of the previously registered civic association, Seniors of Slovak Diplomacy (SSD), took place on 1 October 2008 and was attended by fifty-two diplomats. Foreign Minister Ján Kubiš also appeared and expressed a wish to see their knowledge and experience used for the benefit of the MFA’s work, especially in the Academy of Education and the citizen’s assistance service of the MFA. The Ambassador in Sarajevo, Miroslav Mojžita, informed the participants about the development of Slovak diplomacy from its inception to the present day.

The participants of the general assembly elected JUDr. Silvester Minarovič as Chairman of the civic association and Ing. Rudolf Zábajník, CSc. as Vice-chairman. Individual interest groups – sections – were formed based on the interest association members showed in working in particular areas. MUDr. Branislav Lichardus, DrSc., MUDr. Eva Mitrová, DrSc., PhDr. Ján Dömök, and Prof. PhDr. Ábel Král, DrSc. all work in the political section. Ing. Ladislav Lysák, DrSc., Ing. Rudolf Zábajník, CSc., and Ing. Vladimír Lichvár work in the economic section. JUDr. Cecília Kandráčová, CSc. and JUDr. Ing. Juraj Králik, CSc. work in the legal

section. The consular interest group is formed by JUDr. Silvester Minarovič and Marta Markusková. The cultural section by PhDr. Jana Hudcovičová, PhDr. Miroslav Musil, CSc., and Prof. PhDr. Ábel Král, DrSc. And finally, the information science section consists of RNDr. Augustín Nižňanský and Ing. Vladimír Pročka.

In December, the legal interest group organized a lecture by JUDr. Ing. Martin Winkler on the agenda of representation in international trade relations. Following that, the economic interest group organized a series of lectures on the adoption of the Euro, on the impact of the financial crisis on the Slovak Republic, on investing in the Slovak market, and on a systematic solution for family savings with a focus on mutual savings.

The seniors will also participate in the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, for example in the collection of documents and other historical items for the exhibition fund of the Diplomatic Museum. The members of the associations are also to participate in the services of the MFA Citizens Assistance Centre, the educational process within the education system prepared for diplomats, as well as attend selected presentations, social and information events organized for the wider circle of MFA employees.

The management of the civic association Seniors of Slovak Diplomacy also wishes to examine the possibilities and modes of cooperation between the individual interest groups of the association and the individual sections and departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, as well as make its activities more visible. ■



The building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava

Modern Slovak Diplomacy

5.

The globalization processes of the 21st century and the fulfilment of strategic foreign policy goals by achieving membership in the EU and NATO, in addition to the government emphasis on strengthening firstly, the economic dimension of diplomacy, secondly, the economic interests of the state, and thirdly, increasing the quality of services for citizens have all forced the MFA to face new tasks and challenges. The changes to the system, which the MFA management initiated more than two years ago, were a necessary reaction to increased requirements and anticipations, as well as to the government's interest in improving the effectiveness of public spending. The year 2008 was the year in which these changes in the management and work of the MFA were implemented. These changes were realized based on intensive internal discussion and thorough process analysis. A number of partial projects, which already have a positive impact on our current work, were successfully completed within the TREFA project. Other projects are either just about to be completed or will be implemented in the nearest future.

The changes are primarily focused on strengthening the abilities of the foreign service to respond flexibly to alterations in the external environment and cope with new tasks while more effectively utilizing limited resources. The objective is to improve the quality of the MFA's management system, reduce its administration and thus allocate resources for active diplomacy. In addition, they are aimed at establishing a better link between financial and human resources and strategic priorities, at improving the efficiency of economic and financial flow management, increasing the quality and motivation of employees, and last but not

least, mobilizing the entire department in the pursuit of long-term improvement. The strategic goal of the TREFA project is to strengthen the MFA's ability to influence foreign policy developments in favour of Slovak interests through its professionalism, flexibility, rapid analysis and reaction abilities, through having the necessary strength in crucial issues, fostering creativity, as well as targeting the use of resources for strategic tasks.

The individual projects were oriented towards the following areas:

- introduction of strategic planning;
- introduction of process management and a long-term management quality improvement system;
- strategic management and the development of human resources;
- the inter-linking of financial planning with strategic priorities and strategic goals;
- system modernization and the development of information and communication technologies.

One of the first significant steps undertaken was the decision to change the organizational structure of the MFA as of 1 September 2008 and introduce three management levels as opposed to the previous four. Units within the political departments were abolished, which dramatically reduced the number of management personnel and allowed the department directors to utilize human resources more flexibly in accordance with current priorities. The new organizational structure fully reflects the strategic priorities of foreign policy, clearly separates the main bodies from the support bodies, emphasizes economic and public diplomacy, and creates systemic conditions for the introduction of project and process management. ■

Strategic Management in the MFA Conditions – New Quality

The test launch of the new strategic planning system with the Balanced Scorecard method (BSC) enabling the involvement of multiple management levels in the formulation of the medium-term strategy and specific measures for its fulfilment was the main change of 2008. It is also designed to assist in assigning and effectively monitoring the implementation of individual stages within the overall activity, in the fulfilment of strategic priorities and goals according to previously set measurable criteria. The successful undertaking of the initial phase of the project, which was realized by almost all the bodies in the headquarters and 23 diplomatic missions, created the conditions for the full-fledged implementation of strategic planning according to the conditions of the MFA in 2009.

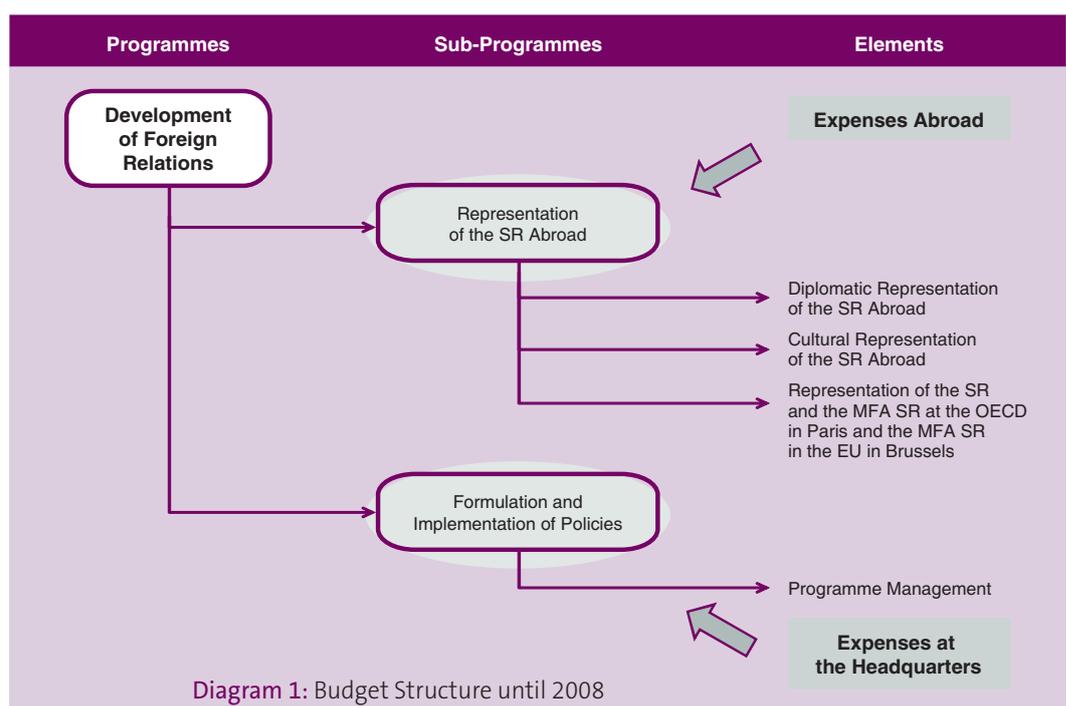
The adoption of the MFA strategy under the name *A Successful Slovakia in a Safe World* (Strategy hereinafter), which defines the role of the MFA and outlines five strategic priorities and 21 strategic goals based on the Government Manifesto, was the basis for the introduction of the strategic planning system. Strategic priorities were subsequently converted into action steps for individual bodies and diplomatic missions along with measurable criteria, the necessary resources, and addressed responsibility. Links are also gradually being created between the strategic priorities and goals and the budget – for financial and human resources planning.

The first evaluation of whether the strategic goals have been fulfilled will take place in January 2009. A modified MFA strategy with goals, action steps and the necessary resources to be realized in 2009 and 2010 will be adopted based on the outcome. Through this process, the department will establish a full strategic cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The Optimization of Economic Management – The Year 2008, Pilot Preparation of the New MFA Budget Structure

Close links had to be established between financial planning and management for the effective implementation of the *Strategy* and strategic goals. A new budget programme structure was created with this intention for 2009. Its sub-programmes copy the strategic priorities of the MFA and the elements/projects of individual sub-programmes correspond with the strategic goals. From 2009, the MFA budget will be planned directly according to strategic priorities. The programme budgeting system, which is one of the most sophisticated systems in the public administration of the Slovak Republic, allows for flexible responses to potential changes in strategic priorities and the dynamic transfer of resources to where they are needed most according to current priorities.

The changes applied to the programme budgeting system of the MFA transforming it from for-



mal to the current version are also demonstrated in Diagrams 1 and 2.

But That Is Not All

In 2008, preparations for the introduction of more detailed levels of MFA financial controlling in 2009 were successfully undertaken.

Changes to the budget structure in 2008 were of a multi-dimensional character. A new management information system (MIS) was introduced in a pilot phase.

The implementation of MIS and its gradual enlargement in 2008 offer different perspectives on the budget, assets, and employees based on the structure data from the MFA and the diplomatic missions of the SR, which display the indicators and budget use by diplomatic missions and by the bodies at the headquarters. The MFA accounting and personnel system is the primary source of data. Unlike in the past, it is now possible to obtain economic and personnel data without administratively burdening the employees responsible or the diplomatic missions. Furthermore, increased pressure on the effective use of resources and more moderate resource planning is expected as a result of the free and transparent access to this information.

At the same time, the implementation of MIS established a new quality in the conditions for introducing more effective financial management through the monitoring of cost centres. In the year 2009, internal accounting will register the

expenses of individual accounting centres, which will be used for internal benchmarking. By establishing more detailed cost centres for different departmental activities (e.g. rent...), and detailed monitoring of its own analytical accounts, as well as through the addressed assignment of sub-programmes in the budget structure – the MFA will obtain a very precise and up-to-date summary of the distribution of the Ministry’s expenses – and all of this in real time. This will allow for more effective budget resources use and when necessary the unused resources can be transferred to priority activities.

Demonstration of the New MIS Report – Summary of Expenses Structured According to Analytical Accounts and Cost Centres.

The data processing itself was already recorded by the management information system in 2008; however, its live operation will only be launched on 1 January 2009. In 2009, the MFA will provide

| Reality | 610 wages, salaries, business incomes and other personal settlements | 611 tariff salary, personal salary, basic salary | 612 bonuses | 620 insurance and insurance contributions | 630 goods and services | 632 energies, water, and communications | 633 material | 634 travel costs | 635 routine and standard maintenance | 636 rent | 637 services | 640 ordinary transfers | 700 capital expenses | Total |
|----------------|--|--|-------------|---|------------------------|---|--------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| GC Békéscsaba | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GC Brno | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GC Krakow | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GK Los Angeles | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Diagram 3: Demonstration of the MFA Management Information System

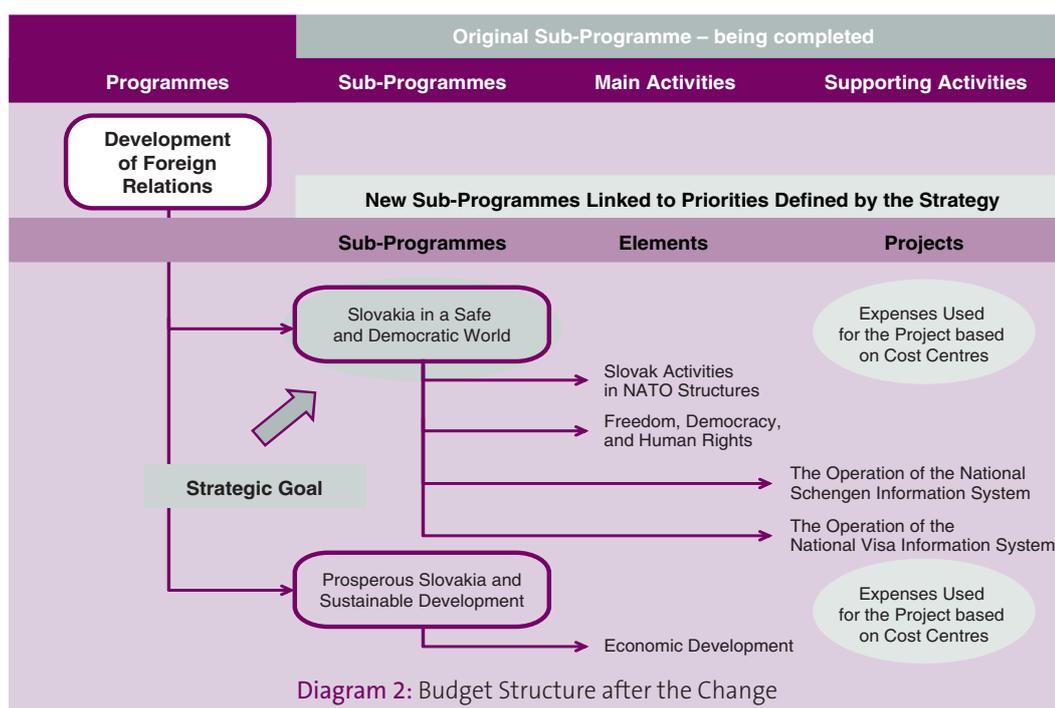


Diagram 2: Budget Structure after the Change

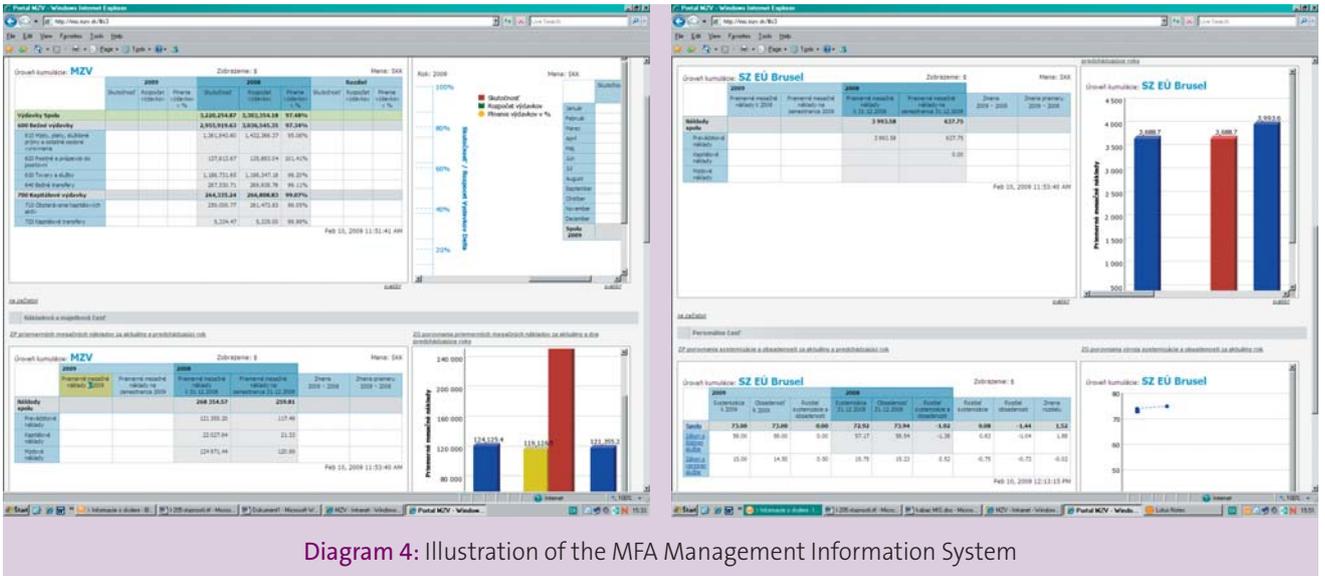


Diagram 4: Illustration of the MFA Management Information System

intensive training for management personnel as well as the employees of the newly established controlling department on the MIS reports.

Linking Foreign Policy Priorities with the Financial Management of the Department in Practice

The new cycle of strategic planning according to conditions at the MFA in 2008 is graphically represented in Diagram 5.

The fact that the top management has access to very well structured and permanently accessible information on the fulfilment of individual strategic goals is also a significant contribution of the new strategic planning system. The new software *QPR Scorecard* purchased at the end of 2008, allows for real time communication on strategic goals not only between the individual depart-

ments of the MFA, but also throughout the extensive network of diplomatic missions over the world. A small Operational Planning and Project Support Department was established within the new MFA organizational structure. Its role is to monitor the fulfilment of strategic goals, to propose their revision, or formulate new goals according to the overall objectives of Slovak foreign policy.

Project Management – In the New Version

The analysis prepared in 2007 proved that the MFA needs to cope with cross-section tasks within a limited timeframe, using a new approach. A project management system was introduced to supplement traditional line management in undertaking work according to the management methods of the modernization process.

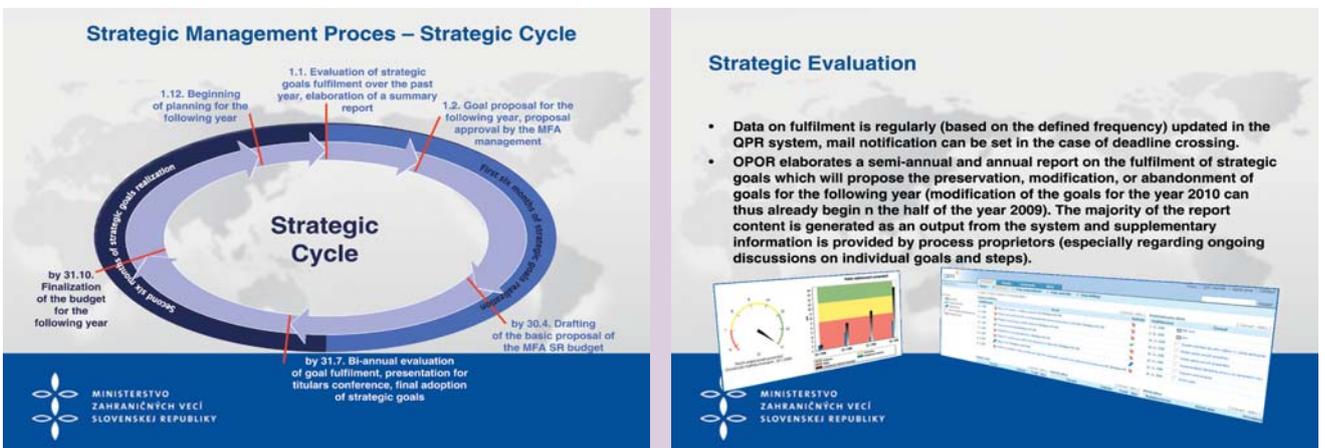


Diagram 5: Illustration of the Applied Software Solution QPR Scorecard at the MFA

The basic rules, extent, control mechanisms, and competences of the project management participants are defined in the *MFA SR Directive on Project Management*, approved in December 2008. This created systemic conditions for the realization of tasks which require the coordination of different MFA bodies due to the specific character of the task. These tasks generally do not come under the management competences of one section or they may require cooperation with external entities. The new rules introduced a more transparent – and for the MFA employees a more motivating – system of task fulfilment. In the past, this was carried out by the MFA without the use of project instruments.

More than 60 different proposals on the realization of project activities in the years 2009 and 2010 were submitted following the adoption of the Directive at the end of 2008. They were evaluated and considered according to the fulfilment of the *MFA SR Strategy*.

We are Already Systematically Improving the MFA Internal Processes

In 2008, the implementation of process management continued at the MFA, aimed at achieving a work organization system which primarily follows the requirements of citizens and MFA partners as well as reflecting the interests of the employees. Process management allows the boundaries and connections between individual bodies to be distinguished more clearly; it also enables improvement to be made to their efficiency and allows for a detailed description of the activities of the organizational units created with regard to the internal regulations of the MFA. Process performance benchmarking through set performance

indicators is also part of this approach. Through regular process monitoring, it is possible to identify potential risks and optimize work efficiency as well as the necessary human resources.

However, for the MFA to be able to measure the processes they must first be mapped. An employee survey and time function mapping conducted in 2007 showed that the MFA has been devoting an excessive amount of time and energy in duplicatingly solving problems and undertaking administrative activities, and that the department often has a problem in clearly identifying the main, support, and managing processes. In May 2008, for the first time, the MFA was able to adopt the first MFA Process Map thanks to the delimitation of processes and the boundaries between them.

A new organizational unit – the Process and Quality Management Unit – was established in autumn 2008 for putting process management into practice at the MFA. From autumn to the end of 2008, this unit organized training on processes for all management representatives of the MFA, as well as for the employees of the individual units which are responsible for the implementation of the management system (overall more than 100 employees). It also determined the process proprietors, ensured the application of the user-accessible software QPR, and the transfer of the process model to this instrument with its subsequent publication on the internal portal.

The MFA still faces a lot of work in this field including updating and completing the process model, adjusting the efficiency indicators for individual processes and linking them to internal regulations, goals, and BSC indicators. In spite of this, we can now state that the extent to which the process management has been implemented will ensure the continuity of the progress of the

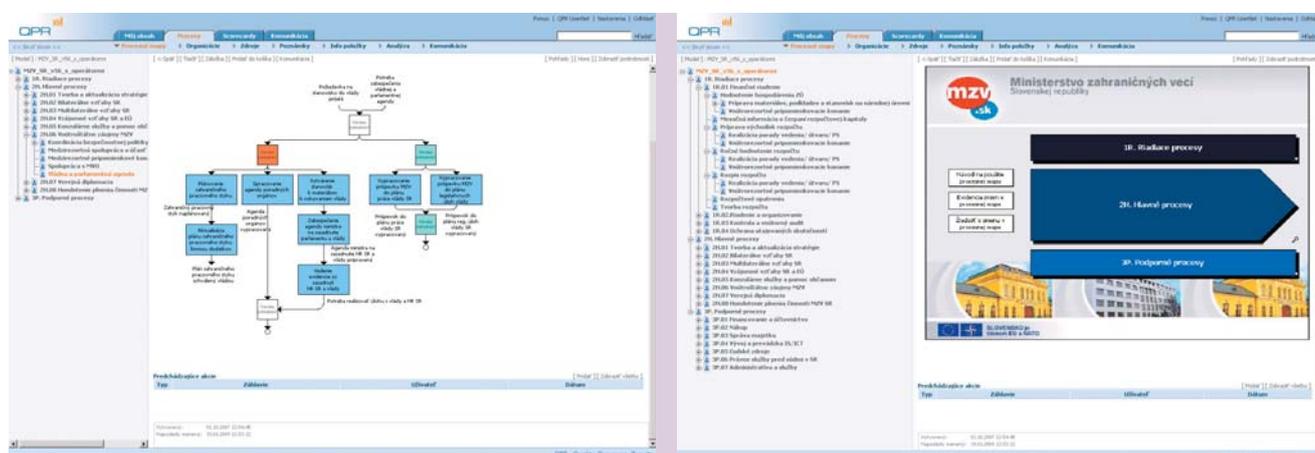


Diagram 6: Illustration of the MFA Process Model on the QPR Portal <https://qpr.mzv.sk>

MFA towards a fully process managed organization and create conditions for the long-term improvement of processes. In 2008, the department selected QPR software as an appropriate instrument to work on the process model with.

The target level of strategic management that the MFA wishes to achieve is gained through a process based on the premise of connecting strategic, process, and financial planning with regard to independent quality control through an internationally recognized quality system. In order to ensure the sustainability and continuation of the changes in the future, the MFA management has decided to confirm its intention and in 2008, it approved the MFA application for membership in the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in Brussels. Through membership of this organization, we expect that connecting *EFQM as a concept of quality* with strategic management expressed by selected indicators will offer through regular evaluation an image of the extent to which the *MFA SR Strategy* has been fulfilled.

In 2008, the department started to implement system measures for the implementation of the EFQM excellence model under MFA conditions. This model offers a mirror image of its operation based on nine set criteria. The criteria evaluate not only the goals and output of the organization, its cooperation with anyone who is a direct or indirect consumer of its output, but also the satisfaction of its employees and the public.

The TREFA project is a simulation of the excellence model in its initial phase. Through its complex approach, extent, and content, it covers almost all nine EFQM criteria. The closed cycle PDCA

– Plan, Do, Check, Act – was achieved through the adoption of 21 projects or action plans as they are referred to by the EFQM. These were realized in the course of 2008 and simultaneously evaluated by the TREFA project.

In 2008, the MFA continued collecting background material and data for the formulation of its own self-evaluation according to the EFQM model. This approach revealed that the department needs to improve the definition and application of processes because they are the core of the EFQM model. Only then can a high-quality self-evaluation report of the MFA be compiled. Thanks to adequately defined processes, the MFA as an organization will be able to precisely determine its partners – ‘customers’ and their influence on its own performance. A new EFQM team was established at the MFA in 2008 and all the bodies of the MFA are represented in it. In 2008, this team focused on determining what should be measured in the model; which results are important to us and why; and whether the MFA can even compare itself with the best foreign services of similar size according to these results.

Quality thus became a real goal in all MFA activities. Furthermore, the department will be able to subject it to objective evaluation by the standards of a renowned and internationally recognized quality management system.

Why Is the MFA Striving to Connect EFQM, BSC, and Processes into One Corpus?

BSC and process management as such support the optimization of the MFA operation as a whole,

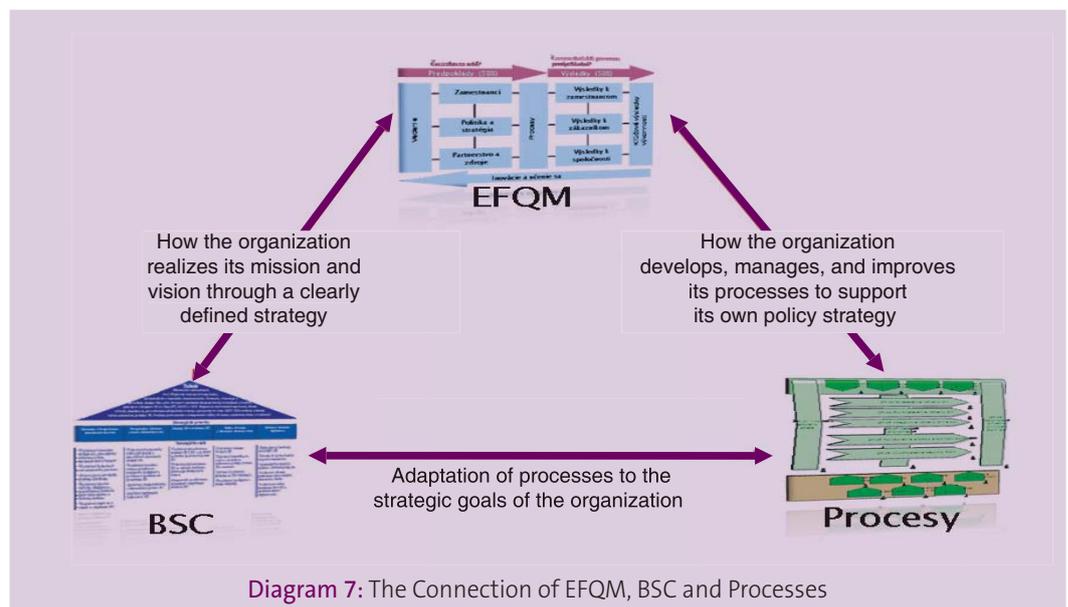


Diagram 7: The Connection of EFQM, BSC and Processes

but this must guarantee a certain level of quality for the future, which we wish not only to sustain but also to improve.

Diagram 7 is a virtual demonstration of what the entire system of strategic and process management with the support of quality evaluation looks like in practice at the MFA.

A New Approach to Developing Human Resources

We realize that the employees, the level of their motivation, the training system, and the assignment of employees to jobs which correspond with their professional experience and competences are without doubt one of the key prerequisites for the successful development of the MFA.

With an awareness of the increasing qualification demands on the employees of the foreign service, the MFA has devoted special attention to the system and methods of the continual and systematic improvement of the personal, professional, and linguistic qualities of the employees during the course of the department's process modernization. In 2008, many specialized internal and external courses were organized to this end. They also adapted the education of employees preparing to fulfil diplomatic, consular, and technical tasks abroad. These services were of a more complex character and reflected the real needs of the department and the employees.

The new trends in the fields of education and the development of human resources were initiated by two impulses in the latter half of 2008. The Career Regulations of the MFA were drafted and adopted. For the first time since the foundation of the MFA, they comprehensively capture all the main processes involved in the implementation of state and public services by the foreign department. The Career Regulations are a system of personal rules and procedures. They are designed to unify and harmonize the entire span of careers at the MFA, to fill and modify individual institutes in the light of new challenges, and render the operation of the foreign service more transparent. Among other things, the regulations introduce a unified system of systemized placements and diplomatic ranks; they define the educational processes necessary in the transfer between individual diplomatic ranks (attestation education), pre-deployment training, initial adaptation training for new employees, language education, as well as thematic education in individual professional fields and distance education. An adaptation system is being introduced for new employees and employees returning after deployment from the headquarters. A repeat deployment to

a diplomatic mission is allowed without requiring a return to the headquarters. The length of operations abroad and at the headquarters has been extended, while the time required to gain a diplomatic rank has been shortened. The restriction on the deployment of spouses or close friends/family to the same diplomatic mission has been abolished. The categories of contract and local capacities have been clearly defined and the terms primary and secondary expertise introduced. A connection has been established between evaluation and the financial motivation of employees, and behaviour which is detrimental or damaging to the service or work discipline (to varying degrees) has been determined. Last but not least, a framework has been established for the operation of the attestation committee as the main consultative body of the Minister and the Secretary General in the implementation of personnel policy along with a series of other changes which should stabilize the rights and obligations of the employees.

Innovation of the New Competence and Performance Evaluation System and its Connection to Education at the MFA

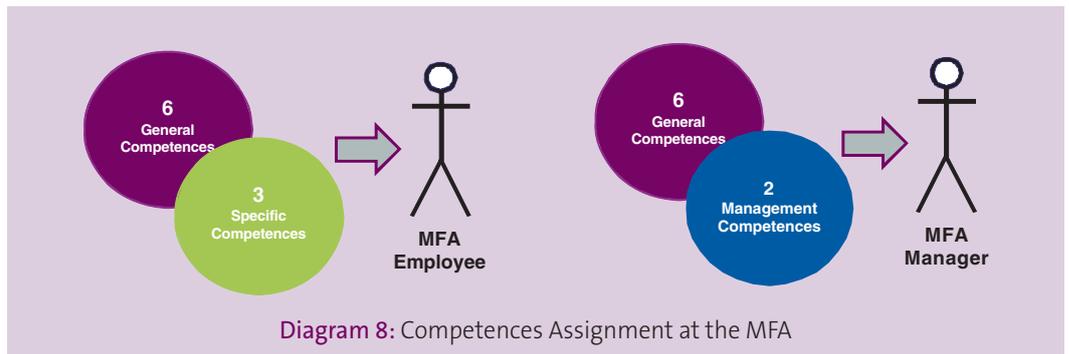
A new system of performance and competence evaluation of MFA employees was also finalized and tested at the end of 2008. Its goal is to evaluate more objectively and transparently both the results an individual achieves and the interest they show in improving their personal professionalism and expertise. The findings directly influence the training programme which the employee either must attend (if their evaluation is below average) or can choose to attend (long-term professional orientation).

The Creation of a New Competence Model at the MFA

The model created has been repeatedly examined through personal interviews with employees who participate in the evaluation of their subordinates. Two electronic forms are filled out as part of the evaluation – competence determination and employee-performance determination.

A new model of work competences at the headquarters was formulated in 2008 consisting of general, management, and expert competences (Diagram 8). The number of competences assigned to a work position is as follows:

- 6 general competences;
- 3 specific competences reflecting the specific requirements of individual bodies (de facto representing expertise requirements);



■ 2 management competences (in positions involving the management of subordinates).

For the first time, the electronic evaluation of MFA employees has a direct influence on the catalogue of mandatory and optional training courses, which are systematically arranged into larger unified corpuses – so called modules. The MFA will offer these modules to the employees as a part of their life-long education.

From 2008 the MFA has divided the courses into these modules:

- management skills module;
- diploma module;
- legal module;
- consular agenda;
- security and crisis management;
- financial and economic module;
- management of human resources;
- information technologies;
- administration;
- language module.

For illustration, Diagram 10 demonstrates what the composition of the training module focused

on the development of employees' general competences, or so-called management skills, looks like in the new system.

Modernization of Information and Communication Technologies

The 2007 analysis showed that the cornerstone of an effective foreign policy is information; its acquisition, storage, and distribution to the right place at the right time. Information is needed quickly in order to provide a solution and respond flexibly to developments within the external environment. This information must be up-to-date and accurate and must be delivered to the correct person. The flow of information must therefore be secured by putting continual pressure on the need to implement the newest technologies.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) represent an important tool in foreign policy and ensure that it is carried out in time and is of a high quality. A new perspective on solving strategic priorities in ICT was also enforced by the auditors in this area in 2007. The rapidly changing environ-

Diagram 9: Competences Assignment at the MFA

ment, the need to integrate the existing information systems of the MFA, and the Act on Information Systems in Public Administration, and the Concept of eGovernment all pointed to the need for new ICT. The Concept defines the basic starting points and principles in this area. It identifies projects for the accelerating process of computerizing public administration, and lays emphasis on the security of the information systems.

Following its analyses of 2008, the MFA was able to conceptually approach the implementation of five priority projects, which have already been realized in this area (with the exception of the *No-Paper Office* project) or are currently in the more advanced stages of realization (Diagram 11).

A strategy of cooperation management involving a consultant in information and communication technologies has been chosen due to the fact that there is a high number of information systems operating within the internal MFA environment, however, they are not all connected. The role of the consultant will be to assist the expert bodies of the MFA in the process of gradually integrating all the ICT systems in accordance with the approved information systems concept of the department. Respect for the principles of cost efficiency and platform independence are a fundamental condition of the gradual system integration. In 2008, as planned, work was begun in organizing the selection process for hiring a new consultant. This will be realized in the course of 2009. The department management chose not to opt for the expensive approach of replacing current ICT systems with one integrated system. Instead, it opted for a gradual integration of the existing systems into one through the process model and with the assistance of the external consultant.

In 2008, the MFA was able to draft a departmental concept on the information system which defined the main directions and strategic tasks the MFA information systems will take until 2013, in full accordance with the National Concept of Public Administration.

The quality of the MFA Helpdesk was improved in 2008. It ensures that solutions are actively sought to the requests of internal employees with feedback following. This project is currently in test phase and there are plans to involve an external supplier in 2009.

The so-called *No-Paper Office* is one of the larger priority projects which have not yet been implemented due to the lack of resources and capacity limitations. The *No-Paper Office* is one of the basic elements involved in creating a digital MFA. At the moment much of the work carried out by

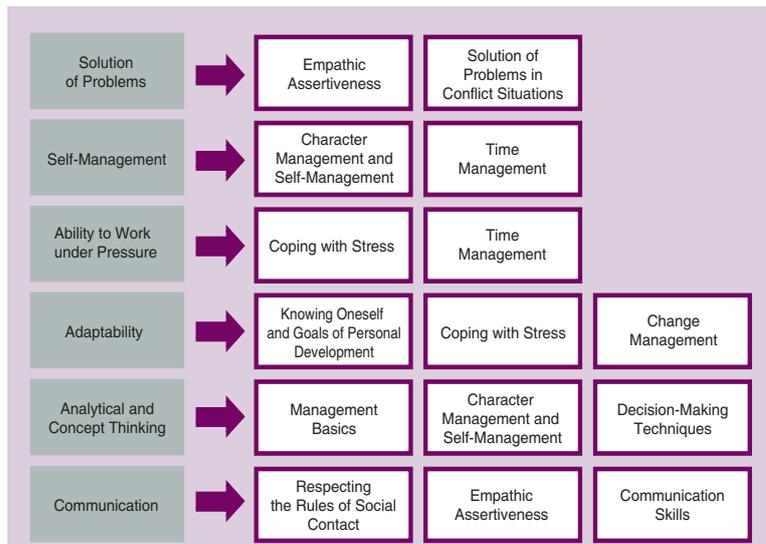


Diagram 10: Composition of the Education Module in the New System

the MFA is in the form of handwritten documents and materials. The physical processing required, the extensive paper agenda, the inconsistency of the end results, the time-consuming nature of the monitoring of documents, and the opaque way in which individual tasks or requests are carried out are some of the issues relating to the use of written documentation at the MFA. The ICT project was planned for 2009 but its implementation had to be temporarily postponed due to significant reductions in financial resources.

Technologies Make Our Access to the Citizens and Colleagues More Effective

In addition to the internal improvements to the MFA technological environment, in 2008 these

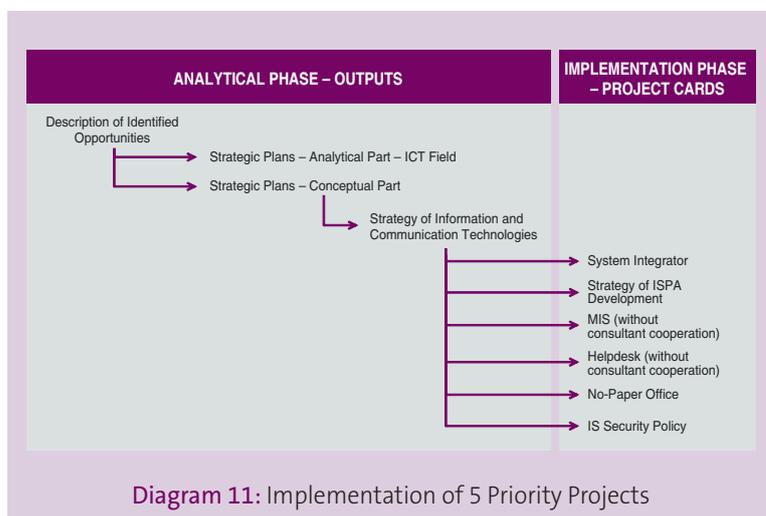


Diagram 11: Implementation of 5 Priority Projects

projects also had a direct impact on our main customer – the citizen. These are primarily:

- the expansion of the Citizens Assistance and Services Centre project;
- the re-design of the MFA webpage enabling citizens with physical disabilities to access it;
- the finalization of the connection of the N-VIS passport system with the central part of the system under the administration of the European Commission;
- the securing of the on-line transfer of classified information (national as and delegated under international cooperation).

New modern digital technologies which enable citizens' requests for information or assistance to be recorded, accepted, and evaluated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week have been used in the establishment of the Citizens Assistance and Services Centre. All diplomatic missions should be connected to the system through landline data networks in 2009.

In 2008, the quality of the work environment was also improved by the fitting of an internal videoconferencing system. The MFA already regularly uses the system in teleconferences on current issues with the Permanent Mission to the EU in Brussels. This has improved the quality and operability of the planning, executive, and controlling procedures of the Ministry. The launching of webmail for all MFA employees, which allows remote email access was also one of the facilities provided by modern internal communication.

An on-line system for the accountants of the diplomatic missions was internally implemented in 2008. This accelerated the recording of account operations of the financial day-book, the registration of assets, and storage control at the diplomatic missions.

New electronic recordings of attendance as well as an electronic telephone directory of employees of a new higher quality which includes a description of the employee's agenda and photograph were also introduced in 2008.

The Improvements will Continue

Many changes and measures focused on improving the quality and organization of work were implemented in 2008. In the following years the MFA wishes to continue in this direction. The

mentioned projects constitute only a selected outline of the number of changes which were launched in 2008. The implementation and improvement of these innovations will continue throughout 2009. A significant number of the short-term goals were achieved in 2008, however the full potential of others will only be visible in the following years. Due to the fact that most of the work has already been done in the form of a thorough analysis and the implementation of projects abroad in the years 2007-2008, management objectives will be to stabilize the new processes and partially modify them according to current developments.

In the future, we wish to achieve our goals with a quality that can be measured objectively. Therefore in 2009, we wish to use the progress achieved and the experience acquired to obtain a higher evaluation of the quality of our organization using the renowned quality system of EFQM at the level of 'recognized for excellence'.

The management of the MFA is convinced that the changes which were implemented during 2007 and 2008 will allow the foreign service to cope more effectively with the new, complicated and changing challenges and opportunities. The modernization project TREFA did not aim to solve all the systemic shortcomings of the MFA in a short time. Its goal was to consistently name them and start the process of the gradual and systematic removal of the deficiencies of the diplomatic department. At the same time, its objective was to introduce a mechanism supporting the culture of change which must be adopted by all employees of the foreign department in today's dynamic world. The goal of the MFA is to be one of the most modern organizations in Slovak public administration and also to join the best of the foreign services in the European context.

The successes which we have achieved in this area in 2008 are proof of the fact that we are on the right track. At the same time, they urge us not to relax our efforts, we must finish the current projects, and start realizing those which are planned. This will lay down the foundations for the sustainability of the MFA modernization processes and the creation of systemic conditions for the achievement of our goals and the fulfilment of our tasks. ■

The Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 608/2007 Coll. on the State Budget for 2008 approved the obligatory indicator of income for the MFA to the amount of 312,500 thousand SKK.

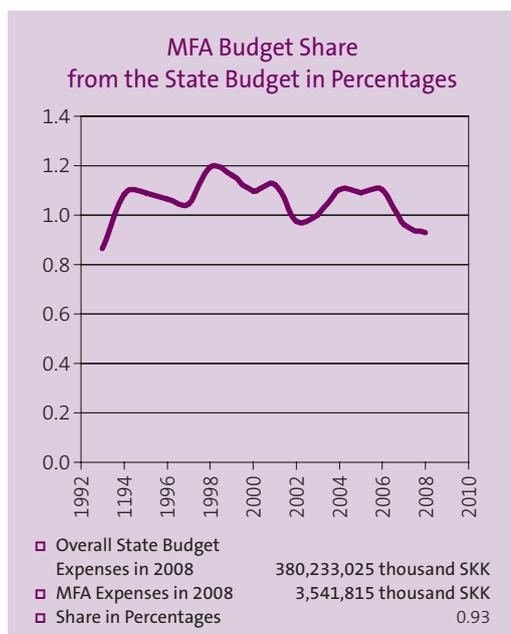
In 2008, the total expenditure of the MFA was 3,541,815 thousand SKK. Salaries, business incomes, and other personal settlements were capped at 1,408,387 thousand SKK and capital expenses at 300,750 thousand SKK.

Over the year, the expense budget was reduced by budget measures to 3,447,602 thousand SKK. The actual amount spent was 3,364,721 thousand SKK (98%).

The income of the MFA was set to the amount of 312,500 thousand SKK. Actual income amounted to 230,120 thousand SKK (74%). However, the MFA complied with legal duty and its expenditure was bound by the difference in predicted income and actual income. This amount was 82,381 thousand SKK, which means that the resources spent from its budget were reduced by this amount.

MFA Expenses in 2008

In 2008, the MFA proposed a new comprehensive structure for 2009 as a part of the TREFA project and the running process, economic, organizational, functional, personnel, and information audit.



MFA Expenses in 2008*

(simplified summary of the overall structure – actual expenses in thousands of SKK)

| | |
|--|-----------|
| □ Diplomatic Representation Abroad (mainly the activities and maintenance of diplomatic missions, salaries and social payments for employees abroad) | 2,144,016 |
| □ Cultural Representation Abroad | 71,900 |
| □ Programme Management (mainly activities and maintenance expenses at MFA headquarters, employee education, transfers to science and research and the allowance organization SÚZA) | 665,829 |
| □ Legal Dispute on Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros | 192 |
| □ Development and Operation of the National Schengen Information System (NSIS) | 127,999 |
| □ Protection of Citizens from Chemical Weapons | 2,368 |
| □ Representation of the SR in International Organizations (Slovak contributions to international organizations) | 209,206 |
| □ Official Development Assistance (SAMRS) | 143,211 |

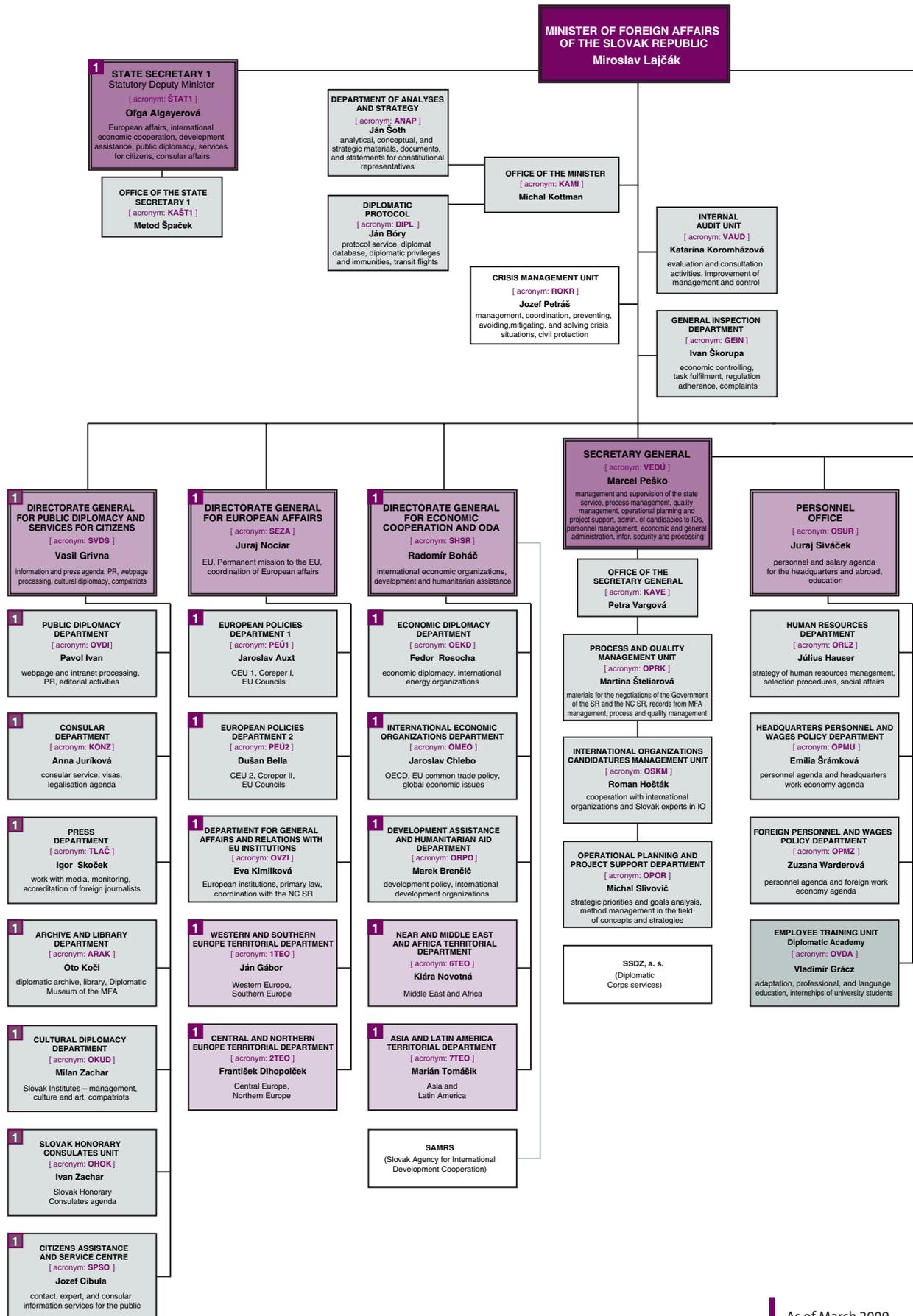
The Capacities of Our Foreign Policy in 2008

- The Slovak Republic was represented by 59 Embassies, 7 Permanent Missions, 10 Consulates General, 3 Diplomatic Mission Branches, 1 Consular Mission, 8 Slovak Institutes and 1 Slovak Economic and Cultural Office
- The MFA had a total of 1033 employees, of whom 419 worked at the MFA headquarters and 614 at the diplomatic missions
- 108 MFA employees were rotated or delegated – 68 diplomats and 30 administrative employees of the MFA along with 10 employees of other Ministries

MFA strategic priorities and strategic goals were defined in the analytical part of the project. The new structure reflects the need to transfer individual strategic priorities and goals into economic management through the establishment of new sub-programmes which copy the strategic priorities and their individual elements which copy the strategic goals. The new structure is expected to increase transparency and improve allocation in planning budget resources and in the subsequent financing of individual types of expenses according to the target of their use. ■

* The data shown is not binding. It only bears an informative character based on the account records of the MFA. The closing account of the MFA for 2009 will be compiled in accordance with the Act No. 523/2004 Coll. on Budgetary Regulation of the Public Administration and the Measure of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic on the Elaboration of Closing Accounts of State Budget Chapters and subsequently submitted to the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, and the Foreign Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic in April 2009.

Organizational Chart of the MFA



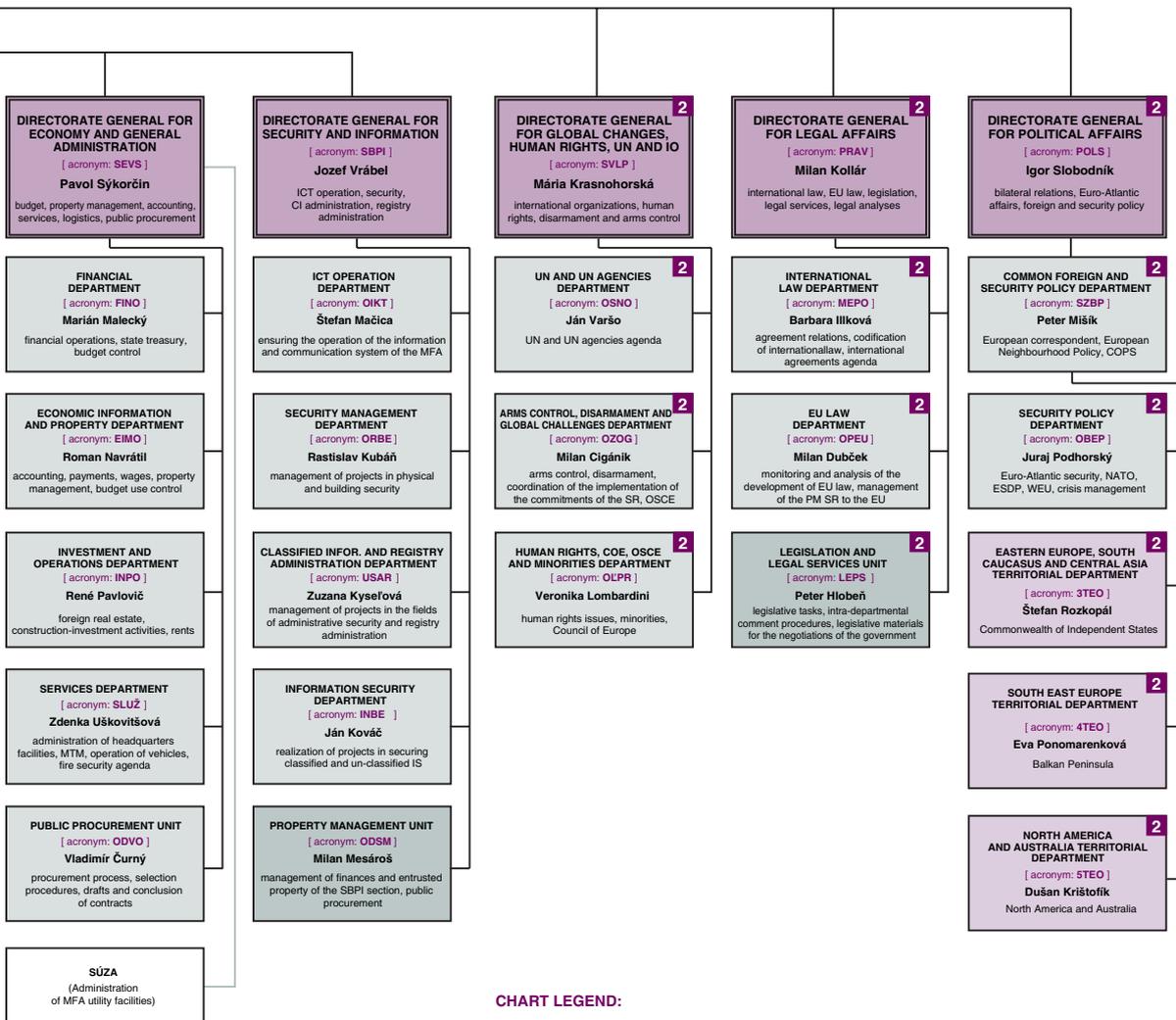
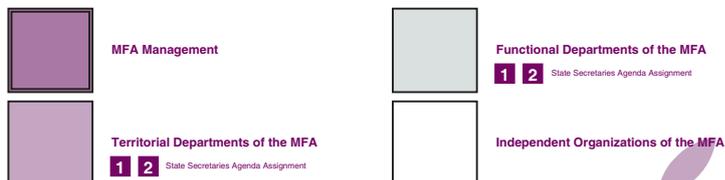


CHART LEGEND:



1. Which countries can I travel to without a visa?

The citizens of the Slovak Republic do not need visas to visit the states of the European Union and the Schengen area. If travelling to other countries, we recommend that citizens consult the webpage of the MFA, which includes a public list of the countries Slovak citizens can travel to with a valid passport and without a visa.

2. What documents do I need to travel in EU countries?

To travel in EU countries you either need a valid citizen's ID card or a valid passport.

3. How do I go about getting married abroad?

A citizen of the Slovak Republic can get married abroad at a registry office or at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic. If the marriage is taking place at a registry office we recommend that citizens of the SR directly contact the registry office where the wedding will take place, due to the fact that every country has its own specific requirements, and this also applies to the countries in question recognizing the documents. The most commonly required documents when getting married are: birth certificate, passport, personal status declaration on word of honour, divorce verdict in the case of a second or each ensuing marriage, a document proving state citizenship may also be required, a permanent residency certificate, and so on. If the wedding is to take place at a diplomatic mission of the Slovak Republic, the MFA advises citizens to phone and check that it is possible to enter into marriage at the embassy in question and that there are dates available for the wedding. Once the embassy has been contacted, the instructions provided by the employee of the embassy should be followed.

4. What should a foreigner invitation include?

There are two kinds of invitations. The first is an invitation verified by the foreign police, which has a regulation form (to be found on the webpage of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic). To fill out the form the person issuing the invitation must know the personal data of the person being invited (name, surname, nationality, identification document number, date of birth, and so on). The verification of this invitation is subject to a fee to be found in the tables provided by the Min-

istry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. The second type of invitation is either a personal invitation, which must be signed and witnessed by a notary public or an invitation provided by a corporate entity on company headed paper. The invitation must include the name of the inviting person, permanent address, date of birth, and identification document number at the top of the page. The body of the text should state the name of the invited person, date of birth, travel document number, permanent address, and the duration of the period in which the invited person will stay on the territory of Slovakia (the maximum period is 3 months in 6). The type of invitation is decided by the Consul of the given diplomatic mission.

5. Will our Embassy help me in arranging inheritance affairs?

The Embassies of the Slovak Republic protect the interests of Slovak citizens abroad regarding heritage affairs as well. Based on information regarding the inheritance concerning a Slovak citizen, the consular office will take all possible steps to protect his interests. It will primarily ensure:

- a) originals or certified copies of the death certificate and the will of the deceased;
- b) cooperation with local authorities in listing the assets of the deceased, in naming the administrator of the estate, and in ensuring the necessary documents;
- c) assistance in the protection of the estate;
- d) representation of the heir in dealings with the corresponding authorities of the accepting state until the heir chooses the form of his representation for further inheritance procedures himself.

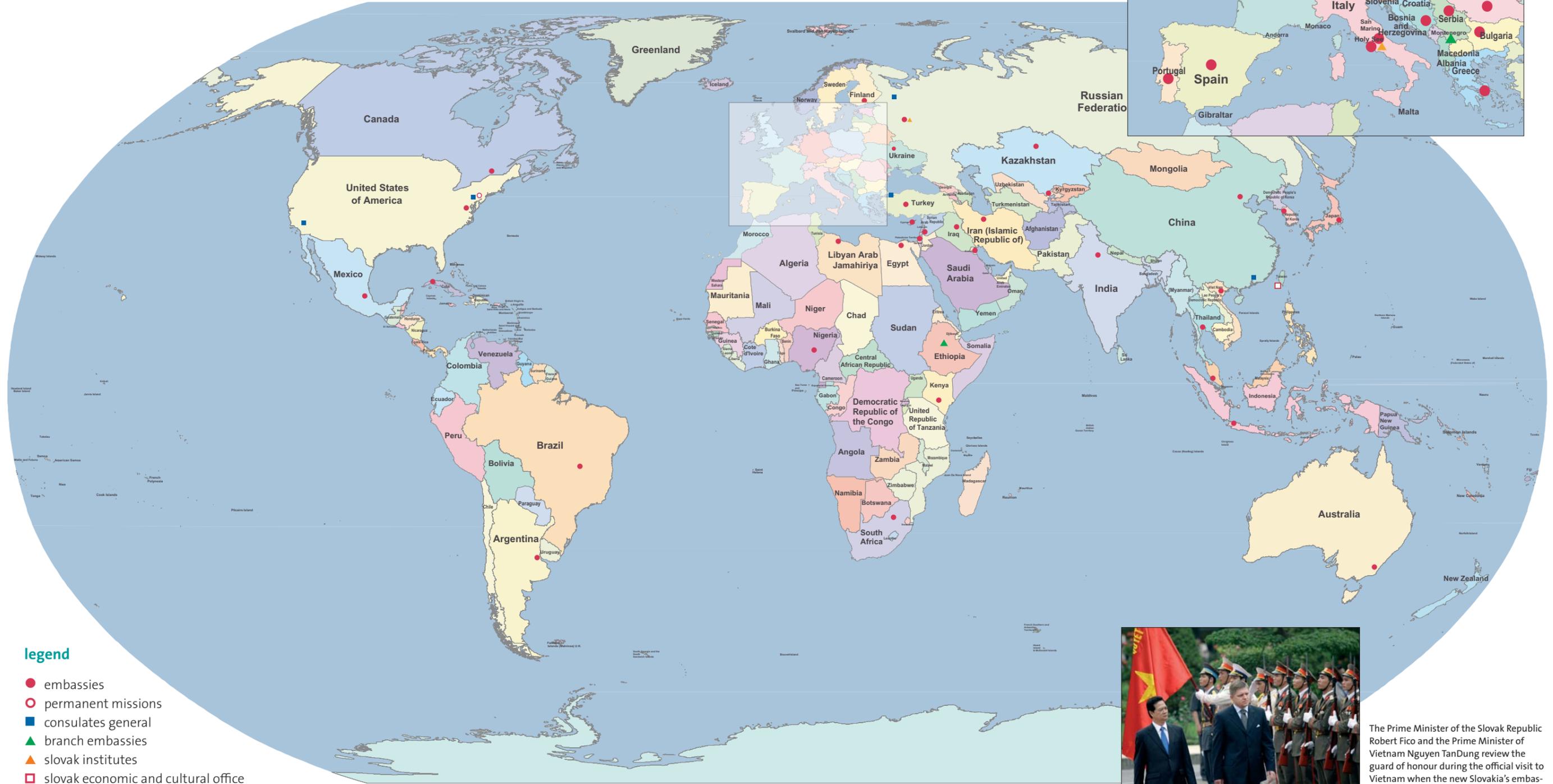
Through the Consular department the MFA will inform the heirs in the Slovak Republic of the inheritance and the steps it has taken to protect their interests. At the same time, it will recommend a form of representation for dealing with the corresponding authorities of the accepting state with regard to its legality.

6. Can I request a new citizen's ID card at our diplomatic mission?

No. A new citizen's card can only be obtained in person at the corresponding Regional Directorate of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic at the place of permanent residency. ■

* The following is a selection of the frequently asked questions to the Citizens Assistance and Services Centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
e-mail: info@mzv.sk; tel.: +421-2-5978-5978; fax: +421-2-5978-4499

diplomatic posts of the Slovak Republic



The Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic Robert Fico and the Prime Minister of Vietnam Nguyen TanDung review the guard of honour during the official visit to Vietnam when the new Slovakia's embassy was opened in Hanoi, October 2008.

Heads of the diplomatic missions of the Slovak Republic, who assumed the office in 2008

Embassies



■ Ing. Dagmar Repčėková,
Bucharest



■ JUDr. Roman Bužek, Dublin



■ Ing. Peter Svitek, Hanoi



■ Ing. Zdenek Rozhold,
Havana



■ RNDr. Jaroslav Jarunek,
Lisbon



■ PhDr. Marianna Oravcová, PhD.,
Ljubljana



■ PhDr. Marián Servátka, CSc.,
Minsk



■ Ing. Peter Brňo, Prague



■ Mgr. Ladislav Straka, Pretoria



■ Ing. Karol Mistrik, Sofia



■ PhDr. Peter Burian,
Washington



■ Ing. Marián Záhora, Tripoli



■ JUDr. Ivo Hlaváček, Tel Aviv



■ Ing. Roman Supek, Zagreb

* Ing. Branislav Hitka assumed the office of the Ambassador in Brasilia in November 2008.

Permanent Missions

Mgr. František Kašický assumed the office of the Head of the Permanent Mission in Brussels (NATO) in May 2008.

