

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



Foreign and European Policy in 2014

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



**Foreign and European Policy in 2014
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and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic**

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Table of Contents

Forewords.....	5
1 European policy.....	13
2 Neighbourhood relations, regional and bilateral cooperation.....	19
3 Safe and democratic world	25
4 Economic diplomacy.....	31
5 Development cooperation	37
6 Services for the people.....	41
7 Public and cultural diplomacy	45
8 A modern and professional foreign service	51

2014 – the year of the 10th anniversary of Slovak membership of the EU and NATO



“Slovakia is a key partner for the United States, including through important institutions such as the EU and NATO. We value our work together, from promoting stability in Afghanistan to addressing challenges such as European energy security.”

Barrack Obama, President of the United States of America in a letter congratulating Andrej Kiska on his election as President of the Slovak Republic, 6 July 2014

“Your country is a shining example of the EU membership, a small democracy with a centuries-old history has become a stable, prospering country, a full member of the EU.”



Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, at a gala celebrating the 10th anniversary of Slovakia’s accession to the EU, Bratislava, 30 April 2014

“Slovakia went through a very important process of modernization. What was done here was done by the Slovak society and that is why I say that the most important credit comes to the Slovak people themselves.”



José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission on a visit to Slovakia, Bratislava, 28 April 2014



“My mission is congratulations. You have done a lot of work in a difficult environment, but there is still a lot of work to be done. You can count on the OECD in the preparation of better policies for a better life in Slovakia.”

Ángel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD on the state of the Slovak economy, Bratislava, 5 November 2014

2014 was an extraordinarily complicated year in international relations



Dear friends, I am pleased you have found the time to read the 2014 Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, thereby showing an interest in our work and outcomes.

The year 2014 saw us remember a number of key events that have fundamentally shaped the identity and standing of Slovakia, a respected and active member of the international community. We celebrated 25 years of democratic change in Slovakia brought about by the Velvet Revolution, 10 years of being a member of the European Union and NATO, and also the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings, and, a key historical event for us Slovaks, the Slovak National Uprising.

In terms of international relations, 2014 was an extraordinarily complicated year – to put it very diplomatically. It reminded us that not even today can we take security and stability for granted, not even in Europe, which has thus far been relatively calm.

On the contrary, 2014 showed us that we need to think about how we can more effectively defend our security and values and protect our prosperity. Equally, we came to the realisation that these days indirect and asymmetric threats can cause almost as much damage as a direct confrontation of strength.

The severe crisis affecting our biggest neighbour Ukraine, threatening its statehood and integrity, has dominated foreign policy decisions not only across Central and Eastern Europe but also in the European Union. The conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea – an unacceptable violation of international law – have cast doubt on the fundamental principles underlying present

international arrangements and the relationships between sovereign states.

Following years which saw security gradually slip down the notional ranking of European governments' priorities, this strategic area is once again one of pressing importance. Consequently, working closely with our allies, one of our commitments is to increase defence spending by 2020.

We see the solution to the complicated situation in Ukraine lying uppermost in diplomatic dialogue. It is within this context that our European sanctions against Russia must be viewed. We do not consider them to be a goal in themselves but a means by which we are attempting to get Russia to take a more constructive stand.

Slovakia has long supported Ukraine's shift towards the EU. We see something of our own transformation story in this, and it is a story that would not have been possible without the difficult reforms we undertook. Solidarity is not something we simply pay lip service to. In September 2014 we launched reserve gas flow to Ukraine, which covers three-quarters of Ukraine's imports and a third of its total gas consumption. This is perhaps the most substantial step towards tangibly reducing Ukraine's energy dependency on Russia.

Again in this, we can see a parallel in our own steps towards the diversification of energy which we have been purposefully pursuing since winter 2009. Another dimension is the humanitarian aid and development projects through which we seek to share our own transformation experience. Within the European Union and the international community, we have also initiated debate on the need for greater synergy between all activities in support of the reforms in Ukraine.

Our development cooperation work has primarily been aimed at three *SlovakAid* programme countries – Afghanistan, Kenya and Moldova. In sharing our experience, especially in relation to the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, our most important instrument is the Centre for Experience Transfer from Integration and Reforms (CETIR).

On 1 July 2014 Slovakia took over the annual presidency of the Visegrad Group. The V4 has proved to be a successful platform for cooperation with our neighbours, and every month we use it to coordinate our positions in the EU. We have also used this platform to coordinate our support for Ukraine. A key role is also played by the International Visegrad Fund, which is an extension of the intersecting foreign policies of the V4 countries. Last year it succeeded in attracting several donors from countries outside the V4, which is evidence of the confidence placed in the efficacy of jointly organised project support work.

European policy in 2014 was predominated by the European parliamentary elections. These were the first elections in which voters could influence the composition of the European Commission – its new president, Jean-Claude Juncker, was elected as the winning party candidate, strengthening his position and legitimacy. I am particularly pleased that Maroš Šefčovič will be again a European Commission Vice President for the next five years. This time he will be responsible for the energy union, which is strategically important to Slovakia. Under his leadership, the energy union will take on particular features.

We have also taken another step forward in building an economic and monetary union. Despite the crisis, the euro remains popular – since 1 January 2014 we no longer have to exchange money when travelling to Latvia, nor in Lithuania which joined the euro zone on 1 January 2015.

However, partly in relation to the Ukrainian crisis and overall developments in the post-Soviet sphere in 2014, we have to revise and update the EU Eastern Partnership policy.

We also devoted great attention to preparations for our first Presidency of the Council of the EU, awaiting us in the second half of 2016. In addition to organisational and logistic preparations, we also began training our state administration staff to deal with the demanding work the Presidency entails. We have also had our first meetings with the presidency “trio” partners on the agenda of the Presidency and initial discussions on seeking common priorities.

In economic diplomacy, we continued to strive for frequent, strategic and operative communication

between the Ministry and businesses. In part, this involved us laying the groundwork for the Slovak business community to enter into more active involvement in development cooperation projects.

The negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement (TTIP) between the EU and the USA also attracted our attention. In addition to its enormous economic importance, the signing of the agreement would further strengthen traditional transatlantic relationships.

An increasingly serious cross-border threat is found in the extremist movements that attract great media attention with their perverse brutality. Their ability to recruit citizens of European countries, together with cyber terrorism, represent one of the greatest security challenges of the future. Slovakia helped identify ways of dealing with similar threats through our work on security sector reform as part of international organisations, especially the UN and the OSCE, where we lead working groups that have made this issue more globally significant.

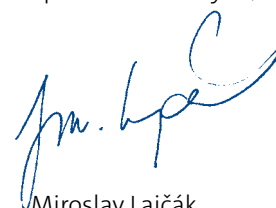
We have to re-learn the skill of actively listening to each other since it is the only way to the long-term sustainable solutions and compromises that are the fundamental building blocks of multilateralism.

I am also very pleased that last year the Ministry and its staff, despite the long-term saving measures, demonstrated a high level of professionalism and expertise, which is something that not only I expect but also the people of Slovakia. We are working consistently to ensure that the Ministry is a transparent institution open to the people. We therefore concentrate particularly on helping our citizens abroad and last year this service was both more effective and more up-to-date.

Dear friends, 2014 was by no means an easy year. We can, however, state that Slovakia has, for many years now, been maintaining its image as a stable, trustworthy and readable partner in both good times and bad.

In this Annual Report, you will find out about everything we did to achieve that in 2014.

I hope this publication will prove useful to you,



Miroslav Lajčák
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister
of Foreign and European Affairs
of the Slovak Republic

President Andrej Kiska meets President of the USA Barack Obama during a meeting of the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2014 (Photo: White House)



Prime Minister Robert Fico at a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Bratislava, 20 October 2014 (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)

Speaker of the Parliament Peter Pellegrini received the President of Hungary János Áder during his visit to Slovakia, 10 December 2014 (Photo: NC SR/Matúš Zajac)



Our great success was providing comprehensive and systematic assistance to Ukraine



2014 was a year in which the international community was faced with many challenges, especially in terms of security. How did you see 2014?

There is no question it helped us see the importance of security and peace. The armed violence in one of our neighbouring countries and the increasing instability in the Middle East and northern Africa were issues that did not go away. Slovakia backed the North Atlantic Alliance's key decisions in responding to security challenges and developments, including the adoption of a *Readiness Action Plan* at the September 2014 NATO summit in Wales and the decision to halt the drop in defence spending.

We also succeeded in shifting international understanding on the importance of Security Sector Reform (SSR) processes. The UN Security Council unanimously adopted its first ever resolution on SSR (2151/2014). To gain backing for its adoption, we used our position as permanent co-chair of the Group of Friends of SSR at the UN to engage actively. Within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), we worked with the Swiss Presidency to initiate the process of formulating OSCE internal procedures to improve the links between SSR activities and programmes. We also created a Group of Friends of SSR within the OSCE attracting the support of more than twenty participating states.

Our efforts included creating conditions for better coordination of international organisations providing aid to countries interested in reforming their security sectors or already implementing reforms in this area.

With this goal in mind, we were able to co-organise a number of international events – a panel discussion at the GLOBSEC conference in Bratislava, a Slovak–Swiss organised conference in Vienna on potential UN/OSCE collaboration in SSR, an expert seminar in Bratislava on preparing internal OSCE guidelines on SSR, and above all, the Africa Forum on SSR held in Addis Ababa and organised in cooperation with the African Union, the EU and the UN.

Which Slovak foreign policy activities would you highlight, and where was Slovakia particularly prominent in the world in 2014?

As a friend of Ukraine greatly interested in finding a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the crisis, we sought to increase aid to help stabilise the security, economic, financial and social situation in the country. We want our neighbouring country to be strong, democratic and prosperous. Slovakia and the V4 countries as well as other partners have provided and will continue to be prepared to provide assistance to Ukraine and to share our experience of the transformation and reform processes.

We have provided material and financial aid to Syrian refugees in addition to aid to internally displaced Iraqis fleeing persecution by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). We also systematically, as affirmed by my visit, strengthened relationships with Egypt, which we consider an important guarantor of stability and security in the region as a whole. The Ministry also made several visits to the African continent. In my case, these were bilateral visits to Mozambique and Sudan.



2015 will be the European Year for Development. Are we prepared for it?

In terms of development cooperation, 2015 will truly be an exceptional year. The international community will be assessing the outcomes of the 15-year long efforts to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals and talks on post-2015 sustainable development goals will reach their highpoint. These are not only challenges for the foreign affairs ministry but for all ministries. There are keen discussions going on in Slovakia about the post-2015 development agenda in which our positions are being specified in greater detail and Slovakia will continue to actively engage in international negotiations. The other exceptional aspect of 2015 is that it will be the European Year for Development 2015 as announced by the European Union. There will be a series of events in Slovakia, presenting us with a unique opportunity to familiarise the general public on EU and Slovak development activities.

2014 was both a difficult and exceptionally turbulent year in terms of humanitarian crises, but Slovak development aid stood up to the test. Last year thoroughly tested our ability to respond quickly and flexibly to crises across the world. Our great success was providing comprehensive and systematic assistance to Ukraine. On short notice, we were able to respond to our eastern neighbour's needs, thanks in part to close cooperation with the ministries of interior, defence and health. The aid provided exceeded 800,000 euros and included a wide range of projects, from medical trips for victims of the conflict to the transfer of transformation experience. I was pleasantly surprised by the response of Slovak businesses who, for instance, provided the Ukrainian Red Cross with pharmaceutical products worth 75,000 euros. As I have mentioned, we were also engaged in resolving the critical situation of Syrian refugees and in the fight against Ebola, and we also achieved our development goals in the ten *SlovakAid* priority countries.

What, in your opinion, did 2014 bring in terms of economic diplomacy?

In recent years, when we have sought to target the Ministry's activities at the specific needs and requests of the Slovak business community, we have also concentrated on diversifying business activities into non-EU countries, especially those with high export growth potential. Part of this approach has been to promote the development of a knowledge economy, the internationalisation of Slovak science, research and innovation.

The Ministry was involved in organising business forums linked to meetings with the highest state representatives (Malta, Slovenia and the Czech Republic), and also the Slovakia–Great Britain Business Forum, and the Slovak–Austrian Business Forum. Working alongside the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry we continued to build on open dialogue with the ten biggest Slovak exporters and to organise traditional round tables with French and German investors in the Slovak Republic attended by the Prime Minister and other ministers. Minister Miroslav Lajčák went on business missions to the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Singapore, Myanmar and Vietnam. My visits to Egypt, Sudan and Saudi Arabia had a strong economic dimension. Furthermore, Memorandums on Cooperation in Economic Diplomacy have been signed with Moldova and the Czech Republic.

Slovakia's external economic relations were partly affected by the Ukrainian crisis. One of the Ministry's main responsibilities was to respond to geopolitical developments in our eastern neighbourhood and these were reflected in the coordinated implementation of sanctions against the Russian Federation. Naturally, the role of the Ministry in this complicated situation was to minimise the negative impact upon our economy and at the same time maintain our traditional business relationships with the countries in question.

We have been working to take over the “European steering wheel” in a dignified manner



Which European issues attracted the most attention last year?

Foreign policy was clearly dominated by Ukraine and the related issue of sanctions against Russia. It was an extremely difficult year which unfortunately has not brought the desired resolution or relief on either side. The EU was significantly engaged in this issue and used all available tools to mitigate the conflict, including economic sanctions.

2014 saw institutions being shaped in the EU – the European Commission and the European Parliament – following the May elections during which the ground was laid for moving the European agenda forward over the next five years.

In addition to these challenges, at the highest level discussions were devoted to the parameters of the new framework for EU Energy and Climate Policy up to 2030. For countries where industry accounts for a high proportion of GDP, this was a very important issue. The Union decided how ambitious its goals should be for reducing emissions and promoting renewable resources and energy efficiency over the next ten years. By acting together with other V4 countries, it was possible to reach a balanced agreement including a number of financial instruments to provide sufficient increased investment for less wealthy member states. Instruments were also adopted to maintain the competitiveness of EU industry.

Slovakia is now halfway through the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group. What were the important moments in the first six months that will impact upon the direction of cooperation between the V4 countries?

Slovakia has taken over the leadership of the V4 in a very active manner. Our first six months leading the Visegrad Group were reflected in the motto we selected: A Dynamic Visegrad for Europe and the World. We consider the meetings and discussions held during the first six months of our Presidency to have been very frequent and successful. In terms of foreign policy, I would like to highlight our pragmatic use of a V4+ format for extending cooperation with other partners and for the prompt V4 response to the situation in Ukraine. Progress has also been made in long-term priorities in energy, defence and transport. A declaration on extending defence cooperation was adopted at the December Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group. We initiated an expert discussion on the regional plan for precautionary and emergency measures for V4 market gas supplies to ensure energy security in the region. It is also worth mentioning our efforts to accelerate the establishment of a Visegrad Patent Institute. We also see the digital agenda as a new area for cooperation between the V4 countries. The impetus to make use of the shared potential of the V4 countries came from the Slovak presidency. We are pleased by the positive response of our partners and the interest they have expressed in an issue that may significantly affect competitiveness and employment within the V4.

This is our fourth V4 Presidency. We are about to take over our first EU Presidency. Will the experience we have acquired from the Visegrad presidencies help us in the second half of 2016?

I am firmly convinced that is the case. It is one reason why we refer to the V4 Presidency as a “little presidency”; we coordinate the common positions



of the four countries on European issues, we prepare position documents and we try to find consensus between the V4 members. We also communicate with various other parties, especially European ones, and together we seek out those who share similar opinions on issues of common interest.

Our very first Council of the EU Presidency is approaching, and preparations have entered the deciding stages. Will they guarantee that the Presidency will be handled with dignity?

We have been working to take over the “European steering wheel” in a dignified manner and to positively promote Slovakia, its success story and people. We have launched cooperation within the Presidency trio (the Netherlands – Slovakia – Malta), we have prepared a transparent and economic budget and we have begun transforming the Reduta building into the main venue for Presidency events in Slovakia. We have also ensured that the staff who will not only be representing Slovakia but all the EU28 countries are very well prepared. This year preparations will focus on the priorities relating to the subject content of the Slovak Presidency programme. It must be said that the “European ship” will sail its course and our Presidency programme has to respect this. Of course, there is room for our own vision of the Union. This is being gradually developed through fruitful discussions with the various ministries and the public within the National Convention on the EU. We see the Presidency as a project that is important to society as a whole and one that is owned by society as a whole.

And what about public relations in Slovakia during the EU Presidency?

Last year we began preparing a public relations strategy. The Presidency represents a public relations challenge of unprecedented dimension. This applies to public relations regarding foreign media and the international public because Slovakia will be the “voice” of 28 EU member states. And it also applies to public relations with the domestic media and the Slovak public because EU issues are often perceived as “foreign” and it can be hard to attract media and general attention. We have set two main ambitions in

relation to the domestic environment. First, that the Presidency will be promoted in a visible and positive manner in terms of common ownership and appeal. We do not see the Presidency as a project of the elite, or politicians, or diplomats or officials. We want the public to feel that we are also part of Brussels, and that we too are the EU. Our second ambition follows on from this: to stimulate public interest, especially among young people, in the various EU policies and in what Slovakia has to offer. The fact that we are serious about this is evident in the specific steps taken by the Ministry. For instance, we are providing dozens of temporary job opportunities, mainly for young people, so that they will not simply be an “audience” to the Presidency but active participants as well.

What sort of year can we expect in terms of European issues in 2015?

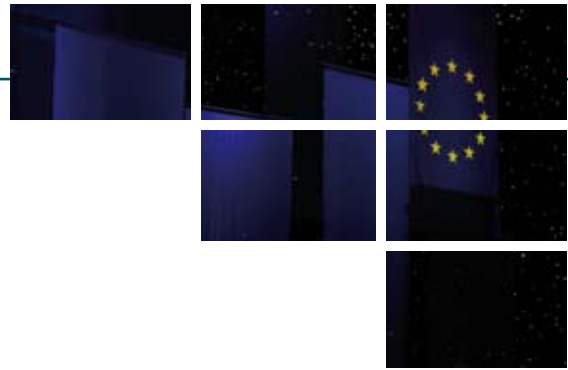
2015 will be a year in which the newly appointed EU institutions – the European Commission and the European Parliament – will be fully engaged. At the beginning of the year, the European Commission is expected to present a proposal on the formation of an Energy Union. Slovakia will be actively involved in forming it. We consider the issue of energy security to be fundamental to the overall security, stability and prosperity of European Union member states partly because of the way events have developed in our immediate neighbourhood. It will be interesting to see how discussion on promoting economic growth in the EU will evolve given that Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, presented a new 315 billion euro investment plan for Europe at the end of 2014. We expect there will be an important discussion on digital Europe in June at the EU leaders’ summit, and we want to engage significantly in that. 2015 will not only be a year rich in European issues, we still have the last six months of the V4 Presidency ahead of us. A V4 prime ministers’ summit to assess our Presidency over the year will take place in June. As part of the preparations for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU, we will make significant progress in preparing the subject content. Together with the Netherlands and Malta we will be involved in preparations for the Presidency trio programme, and we will be determining the framework priorities for the Slovak Presidency.



Celebrating the 10th anniversary of our accession to the European Union in 2014
(Photo: MFEA SR)

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European policy



In 2014, Slovakia succeeded in fulfilling its ambition to be an active and constructive partner at EU talks. In May, we celebrated our 10th anniversary of EU accession, the European parliamentary elections were held and a new European Commission was subsequently formed, taking up its mandate on 1 November. The Ministry, together with other ministries, prepared a comprehensive *Assessment Report on Ten Years of Slovak EU Membership* that was approved by the Government on 30 April 2014.

In Slovakia, the European parliamentary elections were adversely marked by record low voter turnout – 13.05 per cent. Despite activities designed to increase inhabitants' awareness of European affairs, it was demonstrated that increased voter awareness does not automatically guarantee higher participation in elections. There is generally in Slovakia a need to improve the link between European and national issues and to ensure there is more public media space for European issues.

Following the European parliamentary elections in May 2014, Slovakia's main goal was to create a strong and effective European Commission that will ensure continuity in stabilising the EU post-crisis and the implementation of political priorities in accordance with the *Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change* adopted by EU member states at the June summit. Jean-Claude Juncker, the new President of the European Commission, unveiled a number of changes that should make its work more effective. One such change is to form project teams of commissioners so their work can be coordinated in intersecting areas and thus greater synergy and better outcomes can be achieved. From the Slovak perspective, we view Slovak nominee Maroš Šefčovič's repeated appointment to the post of Vice-

President of the European Commission very positively. This time he is responsible for the energy union.

The euro zone was enlarged to include Latvia and stabilisation is partly down to Portugal successfully completing its recovery programme and returning to the financial markets. In 2014 recovery programmes continued to be implemented in Greece and Cyprus . As part of ongoing discussions on the four pillars for strengthening the economic and monetary union (banking union, fiscal union, economic union and the democratic legitimacy of the EU), Slovakia is formulating its positions on the principles of responsibility and solidarity, where solidarity is conditional on fulfilment of all commitments adopted by member states and at EU level.



In the European parliamentary elections, the concept of "Spitzenkandidaten" was used for the first time, meaning that the electoral leader of the party that won the elections was proposed as the new President of the European Commission. Voters thus indirectly decided who would be President of the European Commission (Photo: European Union)

European policy



The newly elected 28-member European Commission has been led by Jean-Claude Juncker since 1 November 2014. Slovakia's European Commission representative Maroš Šefčovič was appointed Vice-President of the Commission and is responsible for the Energy Union (Photo: European Union)

Greatest progress was achieved in relation to the banking union. In 2014, banks operating in Slovakia successfully completed comprehensive tests and there is no need for them to increase their capital. The Single Supervisory Mechanism was launched and a Single Resolution Mechanism was agreed for banks.

At the national level, the Ministry continued to coordinate the European agenda aiming to improve



At the end of the plenary session of the National Convention on the EU, Miroslav Lajčák awards the Gold Plaque of the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic to nine people who helped Slovakia with the EU accession negotiations, 6 May 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

cooperation with ministries, parliament and NGOs. We wish to improve the procedure for creating position papers, partly to aid the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2016.

The Work Programme of the new European Commission published in December 2014 is based on priorities that have already been announced. At first glance, it is sober and realistic, and has fewer new initiatives than in the past. It also tries to objectively assess the status of previously submitted proposals and define the Commission's next steps. Slovakia agrees with the priorities outlined in it and the general goals in the various areas and it welcomes most of the Commission's initiatives.

Slovakia continued to hold its discussion platform on European issues – the National Convention on the EU. Discussions were devoted to prospects for deepening EU integration, assessing Slovakia's ten years in the EU and the challenges in relation to the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The first stage of the convention culminated in a plenary session in May 2014, at which the recommendations of the various working groups were presented to the Government and the public. The second stage will continue in the next period in two working groups: Current Challenges for Europe – Deepening Integration and its Prospects and the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Investment, reform, growth and employment were the main challenges at both the national and the European levels in 2014. Since its accession to the EU, the Slovak Republic has been a net beneficiary of EU funds in the Multiannual Financial Framework with almost 80 per cent of all public investment in Slovakia being financed from the EU budget. Working with the European Commission, Slovakia was one of the first member states to approve and adopt all the strategic documents – *Partnership Agreement for the Use of European Structural and Investment Funds for 2014-2020* and the *Operational Programmes*. These will enable Slovakia to launch a new generation of programmes and invest in priority areas such as employment, education, transport infrastructure, environment, health, energy and support for small and medium-sized enterprises, research and innovation.

At the end of 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the Commission, unveiled a package of measures on employment, growth and investment – the Investment Plan for Europe – calling for the mobilisation of additional private and public resources for priority investment projects for 2015-2017, and also for



improvements to the investment environment in Europe. The main instrument for this initiative will be the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which is to provide investment for transport, energy and telecommunication infrastructure and for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Slovakia fully complied with the principles of budgetary responsibility. Thanks to successful consolidation efforts, Slovakia completed its Excessive Deficit Procedure in budget assessment and joined the five member states whose budgets fully comply with the Stability and Growth Pact.

One of Slovakia's key areas of interest within the EU was the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework. Thanks to its combined approach with other V4 countries, Slovakia believes the October European Council session resulted in a balanced agreement on climate goals compared with the previous period. The agreement includes financial instruments to cover additional increased investment for poorer member states (with less than 60 per cent of average EU GDP) and also for large polluters. These instruments will help to modernise the energy sector, improve energy efficiency and fund industrial innovation, which is particularly important for Slovakia because a high proportion of its GDP comes from industrial production.

Slovakia fully backs the building of an internal EU energy market as a precondition to meeting EU energy goals. Therefore, in 2014 we continued to work hard to improve our energy security, for example, by connecting up the gas networks in Slovakia and Hungary. Commercial operation has been scheduled for the first half of 2015.



European Parliament President Martin Schulz attends a ceremony in Bratislava on the 10th anniversary of Slovakia's accession to the European Union, 30 April 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Preparations for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU

Preparations for the 2016 Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union continued apace. The central bodies of state administration involved in the Presidency were boosted at the personnel level, and stage one language training for state administration staff was launched as part of the training programme.

In addition to staff training, the following areas attracted attention: the organisational and logistics side of the Slovak Presidency, including space and technical solutions for the main conference venues (Reduta, the historical building of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, and Bôrik Hotel); preparations for public procurement of transport, catering and accommodation for delegates; and the establishing of the technical requirements and parameters for the teleconferencing and accreditation systems.

In September, the Government approved the 2015 Slovak Presidency budget and also the initial budget proposals for 2016 and 2017, thereby formally framing the main areas of Presidency funding.

At Slovakia's behest, the first consultations with the Presidency trio countries – the Netherlands and Malta – took place in spring 2014. They continued in autumn in Amsterdam, where potential areas for cooperation in preparing for the Presidency were discussed and talks begun on the trio countries' priorities and common issues.

Finally, in presentation and PR, media strategy materials were prepared for the Slovak Presidency and these will be used to produce a detailed public relations manual. A tender is also being organised for the logo and work has begun on Internet-based PR and a mobile app.

Eastern Partnership

The EU Eastern Partnership was another of Slovakia's main foreign policy priorities in 2014. At the European level, this was dominated by issues relating to the signing of association agreements, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements, between the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The fact that the agreements were signed at the June European Council is one of the most important outcomes of the Eastern Partnership in its five year existence.

In the second half of the year, the focus was mainly on ratifying the association agreements (Slovakia ratified them on 21 October 2014) and their implementation. Once the DCFTA enters into force, the EU, member states and partner countries will not only acquire liberalised access to new markets and business opportunities through lower import customs duties but also, and most significantly, through the elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade. Given the political situation, and at

European policy

Ukraine's request following talks with the EU, the DCFTA has been postponed for one year, i.e. until 1 January 2016.

Another success was the significant progress made in mobility, with Moldova becoming the first Eastern Partnership country to have its visa requirement fully waived. From 28 April 2014, the citizens of Moldova can travel freely within the Schengen area for 90 days. Georgia and Ukraine have entered the second phase of the implementation of visa liberalisation programmes.

On the negative side, EU common policy in the region found itself confronted with strong external pressure (political, economic and military). This pressure is designed to weaken and derail the Eastern Partnership processes. It resulted in the Russian Federation annexing Crimea, part of Ukraine, and armed conflict in south-eastern regions of Ukraine.

Moldova is one of our foreign policy priorities within the Eastern Partnership and we are one of the most active supporters of Moldova's EU integration ambitions. Slovakia is backing the reform processes in the country in several areas, especially the organisation of an information campaign on the EU. As part of this campaign, many experts from the Slovak state administration and the private and NGO sectors have travelled to Moldova to share Slovakia's transformation experience.

The importance Slovakia attaches to Moldova is underlined by the fact that it is one of the three

programme countries for Slovak development aid, and there is an agreement between the two countries on development cooperation.

Of the southern Caucasus countries, Slovakia has traditionally had closest bilateral relations with **Georgia**. Spring saw the opening of a Slovak diplomatic mission in Tbilisi at which Minister Miroslav Lajčák was present. We number among those who actively support Georgian ambitions to be integrated into the European and Euro-Atlantic political, economic and security structures. In this regard, 2014 was a very successful year for Georgia. In June it signed an *Association Agreement* with the EU and entered the second implementation phase of its *Action Plan for Visa Liberalisation* with the EU, and at the September NATO summit in Wales it gained what is known as a substantive package, whereby NATO committed itself to closer cooperation with Georgia.

Despite **Armenia's** decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union, Slovakia remains committed to greater communication with a view to outlining opportunities for further cooperation. **Azerbaijan** is an important partner in the region, especially in terms of energy security.

In 2014, discussions were held with **Belarus** between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs as were meetings between the State Secretary and his Belarusian counterpart. Belarus's constructive approach following the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, together with the release of most of its political prisoners, has helped improve relations with the EU. Belarus's position on the Ukrainian crisis and Minsk's mediation initiative in relation to the conflict in south-eastern Ukraine were particularly helpful. The EU responded to these friendly steps by reducing the sanction list and by being prepared to hold negotiations on simplifying visa procedures.

Western Balkans

Slovakia has long been one of the strongest supporters of the Western Balkans' EU integration ambitions and this continued to be true in 2014. In addition to political dialogue, the emphasis in bilateral relations was on increasing mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

The Slovak Republic promoted and supported EU and NATO enlargement policy and the reform efforts of the Balkan countries, which will not only contribute to greater stability, democracy and prosperity in the region but on the European continent as a whole. Slovakia's active support also contributed to the start of accession negotiations between the EU and **Serbia** in January 2014. Slovakia has not changed its



Minister Miroslav Lajčák and his Georgian counterpart Maia Panjikidze ceremoniously open the Slovak Embassy in Tbilisi, 8 April 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)



position on recognising Kosovo, but this is no obstacle to developing initiatives that are in keeping with the EU prospects of the region (e.g. in development cooperation or more bilateral contact). We supported EU-mediated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

Slovakia is one of the countries that advocated maintaining the pace of **Montenegro's** EU accession, encouraging the reform processes by opening another four negotiation chapters and supporting the NATO accession process.

We consider the decision to grant candidate status to **Albania** fair recognition of the reform efforts and activities of the Albanian government in the fight against corruption and organised crime. Slovakia's specific contribution to the public discussion on EU issues in Albania was its support for the National Convention on the EU project.

Slovak diplomacy efforts were also aimed at moving Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia forward on their paths to EU integration. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina's** case, the focus was on supporting the socio-economic reform processes, establishing a coordination mechanism and improving the efficiency and functioning of institutions at all levels. **Macedonia's** integration success mainly depends on it developing good neighbourly relations and particularly on moving constructively forward in settling its dispute with Greece over the name of the country.

As part of the Slovak V4 Presidency and in cooperation with the Justice Academy of the Slovak Republic, an



Minister Miroslav Lajčák spoke at the opening panel of the Croatia Forum 2014, EU integration of the Western Balkans: Similarities and differences, moderated by Tim Judah, editor of *The Economist*, Dubrovnik, 11 July 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

expert meeting was organised in Omšenie on the transfer of experience relating to the rule of law and was attended by members of the Ministries of Justice of the various Western Balkan countries.

At the end of October 2014, the meeting regularly held by V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs took place in Bratislava. It was attended by Federica Mogherini, the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Sebastian Kurz, Austrian Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. The meeting testified to the fact that the Western Balkans are an EU enlargement policy priority. Further evidence of the successful work conducted by V4 countries in the region is the establishment of a Western Balkans Fund based in Tirana and inspired by the International Visegrad Fund.



Prime Minister Robert Fico is received by his Serbian counterpart, Ivica Dačić, while on an official visit to Serbia, 24 January 2014 (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)



SLOVAK PRESIDENCY
2014/2015 OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP

DYNAMIC VISEGRAD

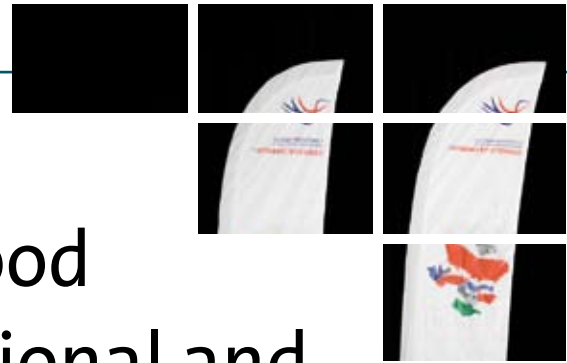


MINISTRY OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Slovak V4 Presidency logo was selected from entries to a competition for talented college students. This logo was selected in this way so as to promote the V4 and raise young people's awareness of the organisation. 70 students entered the logo design competition

2

Neighbourhood relations, regional and bilateral cooperation



The Slovak Republic took over the annual Presidency of the Visegrad Group for the fourth time on 1 July 2014 under the motto: A Dynamic Visegrad for Europe and the World. The main goals of the Slovak Presidency are to promote the V4 area as a successful region with economic growth prospects, to fulfil its long-term strategic priorities in energy, transport and defence cooperation, and also to strengthen the V4 “brand” externally. The first half of the Presidency was particularly active as evidenced by a number of meetings, among Ministers of Foreign Affairs using the V4 plus format - V4 + the Republic of Korea, as well as V4 + the Western Balkans which was attended by Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Sebastian Kurz, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria, and also V4 + United Kingdom.

Slovakia took advantage of the Presidency to coordinate the activities of the V4 countries in support of Ukraine. At Slovakia’s behest, the V4 Ministers of Foreign Affairs visited Kiev together, where it was announced that assistance would be provided to Ukrainian partners in relation to sharing transformation and integration experience. Meetings were held between the State Secretaries of the V4 Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ukrainian counterparts in L’viv, and in Bratislava there were V4 + Germany meetings on Ukraine. On the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Presidents of the V4 countries and Germany met with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

In December, the regular prime ministerial summit of the V4 governments took place in Bratislava, with Didier Burkhalter, President of the Swiss Confederation,

attending as special guest. The intention to extend mutual cooperation was expressed in the adoption of a common declaration. The declaration – *Deepening V4 Defence Cooperation – Bratislava Declaration of V4 Heads of Government* – was adopted on the margins of the summit. Good progress was made in defence on preparations for the V4 Battlegroup and also on preparations for the multiannual *Action Plan for V4 Defence Cooperation*.

In seeking to extend mutual cooperation in innovation, the Slovak Presidency introduced a new element into V4 cooperation – the digital economy. Under the logo of the Slovak Presidency, start-up companies in V4 countries delivered joint presentations abroad (in the USA and the Netherlands).

In its sectoral policies, the Slovak Presidency continued with its priorities and the work of the high level



The Summit of the V4 Prime Ministers and the President of Switzerland in Bratislava was the most important event of our Visegrad presidency in 2014, 9 December 2014 (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)

Neighbourhood relations, regional and bilateral cooperation



The second round of talks between the Governments of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic were held on 24 April 2014 in Skalica, attesting to the quality of mutual relations (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)

working group for connecting up transport. A meeting of V4 ministers responsible for energy was held in Bratislava during the regular Central European Energy Conference organised by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, attesting to the need and desire to continue projects devoted to energy security in the region and neighbouring countries.



Ministers Miroslav Lajčák and Péter Szijjártó, who chose to visit Slovakia as his first foreign visit destination, discuss opportunities to further improve relations between Slovakia and Hungary, 7 October 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Neighbourhood relations

In addition to cooperation within the V4, Slovakia has developed good bilateral relations with its neighbours. Slovakia's special relationship with the **Czech Republic** was in evidence in the frequent contact between the highest representatives of the two countries, the close bilateral cooperation between the two sides and the coordination of activities relating to multilateral relations. Both countries adopted a coordinated approach to advocating common interests within the V4 and the EU. The second round of talks between the Slovak and Czech governments in April testified to the countries' exceptional relations and resulted in further proposals for extending cooperation, especially in European policy, transport infrastructure, energy, finance and defence. The in-depth dialogue between the civic societies and executive bodies of the two countries continued in October at the fifth Slovak–Czech Discussion Forum.

We continued to develop pragmatic relations and mutual cooperation over specific projects with **Hungary**. In 2014 positive outcomes were achieved in infrastructure, energy and regional cooperation in particular. An important moment in relations was the prime ministerial meeting held in Szada in March at which a *Memorandum on Mutual Cooperation in Transport Infrastructure* was signed. President János Áder's visit to Slovakia in December significantly contributed to advancing relations. The height of the visit was bilateral activities at the highest level.



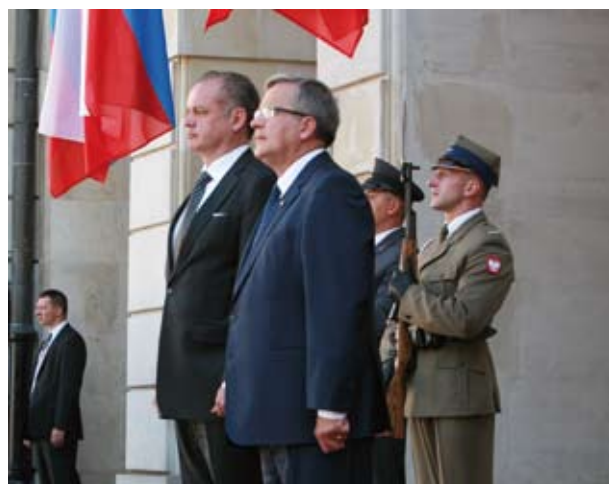
The numerous meetings between the Presidents and Foreign Affairs Ministers of Slovakia and **Poland** attested to the good relations between the two countries. The priority areas of mutual cooperation are completing the cross-border transport infrastructure and, in terms of energy infrastructure, building the gas connection between Slovakia and Poland, which is a crucial component of the North-South Corridor. At the end of the year, the third session of a bilateral discussion forum was held, attended not only by representatives from foreign ministries but also leading NGOs involved in international relations.

Cooperation with **Austria** was primarily aimed at fostering economic growth, employment, competitiveness and stability. In this regard the Slovak–Austrian Economic Forum, held in Bratislava in October and attended by heads of government and seven ministers, provided important impetus. In addition, a number of meetings were held at head-of-state or foreign affairs minister level during important international forums. One example of the bilateral activities was the launch of *Young Stars*, a project relating to dual education. In addition to cooperation with Austria using the proven V4 + Austria format, foundations for trilateral cooperation between Slovakia, Austria and the Czech Republic were also laid.

The position of **Ukraine** is a long-term Slovak foreign policy priority and developments beyond the eastern border emphasised the importance of this. Slovakia pushed for the EU to adopt a constructive position to resolving the crisis and backed economic integration and political association with the EU. In 2014, Minister Miroslav Lajčák visited Ukraine several times (Kiev, Donetsk and Odessa), and several meetings were held between the Presidents and Prime Ministers of the two countries. Within the EU, Slovakia organised a ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends of Ukraine and a session of the intergovernmental commission for national minorities, education and culture in December 2014.

In seeking to resolve the Ukrainian crisis, Slovakia backed the activities of the OSCE designed to de-escalate tension in the region by sending five observers to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and providing financial support.

In the energy sector, Slovakia implemented reserve gas flow to Ukraine, which is strategically important for its energy security and covers one third of Ukrainian consumption. Slovakia's response to the developing situation in Ukraine has been to provide medical and material aid and a substantially larger amount of humanitarian aid.



On his visit to Poland, President Andrej Kiska met President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski. In their statements, the two Presidents praised bilateral and regional cooperation as well as cooperation within the EU and NATO, 15 July 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Bilateral relations

Slovakia's Presidency of the Visegrad Group had a favourable impact on bilateral relations with EU member states. Visits by Slovak officials were enriched by public relations and promotional activities designed primarily to identify and encourage the inflow of direct foreign investment, develop trade and share experience of the workings of the knowledge economy.



The first Slovak–Austrian Economic Forum was held on 14 October 2014 in Bratislava and was opened by Minister Miroslav Lajčák and his Austrian counterpart Sebastian Kurz (Photo: MFEA SR)

Neighbourhood relations, regional and bilateral cooperation



Andrej Kiska's invitation to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution was accepted by President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, 16 November 2014 (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic/Marián Garaj)

Relations between Slovakia and **Germany** were characterised by the exceptional frequency with which political dialogue (the “German Autumn” in Slovakia) was held both generally and at the highest political level. On the 25th anniversary of the revolutions in Central Europe, there were exchange visits by heads of states. The parliamentary dimension of bilateral relations was highlighted by a working visit by the President of the Bundestag to the Slovak Republic and an official visit by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in October.

Slovak–French relations were shaped by the implementation of the new *Action Plan for a Strategic Partnership for 2013–2018*. In June, the Slovak president attended a formal ceremony of the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings. In June and August, Prime Minister Robert Fico paid working visits to Paris to coordinate positions before the EU summits.

Relations with the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** were mainly preoccupied with the European integration project, its future direction, common reform efforts and the United Kingdom's position within it. Within the V4, a certain dynamism was achieved in mutual communication and cooperation between V4 countries resulting in the British Foreign Secretary paying a working visit to Slovakia. There was also a bilateral meeting and V4 + the United Kingdom talks at the same time. The economic dimension was bolstered by visits to Slovakia by the UK Minister of State for Europe and the UK Minister of State for Trade and Investment.

Cooperation with the **Nordic and Baltic Countries** (NB8) was expanded at bilateral and regional levels. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of **Latvia**, **Lithuania** and **Sweden** visited Slovakia in May for the GLOBSEC security conference. Bilateral talks were held on the margins, testifying to the advantages of pragmatic cooperation and meaningful exchanges of view on the latest issues using a V4 + NB8 trans-regional format.

Last year there was frequent political dialogue with the **United States of America** which was dominated by international developments relating to the Ukrainian crisis. The main issues discussed included coordination of the EU and US sanctions, strengthening the defences of NATO's European allies, reserving the flow of natural gas to Ukraine and supporting the necessary reforms in Ukraine. Another important aspect was cooperation in the fight against the ISIL.

Slovakia played its role in the closing of the detention centre at Guantanamo by accepting two former detainees. It was also actively involved in preparations for the EU–US Summit held in Brussels in March 2014. The March talks between Miroslav Lajčák and his Washington counterpart, John Kerry, attested to the high level of Slovak–American relations. Slovakia continued to back adoption of the ambitious *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP) agreement, stressing the strategic importance of this agreement for strengthening transatlantic links. President of the Slovak Republic, Andrej Kiska, visited the East and West Coasts of the USA



Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel meets President Andrej Kiska on her visit to Slovakia, 20 October 2014 (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic/Marián Garaj)



in September 2014, providing impetus for extending cooperation with the USA in developing trade, innovation and education.

Relations with **Russia** were affected by the Ukrainian crisis that could be resolved by compliance with the Minsk Agreements. The Slovak position is based on the belief that the steps we take should be pro-Ukrainian, not anti-Russian. Therefore, we do not consider the sanctions against Russia to be the end goal of European policy but a necessary means when all other efforts to encourage Moscow to pursue a solution conforming to the spirit of international law have failed. Slovakia is interested in further developing pragmatic, constructive and transparent relations with Russia, concentrating on the trade and economic dimension. Russia remains a major supplier of energy to Slovakia. Minister Miroslav Lajčák engaged in bilateral dialogue with his Russian counterpart, and meetings were held at the bilateral level and on the margins of international events.



Miroslav Lajčák meets his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Moscow on 19 May 2014. Bilateral negotiations were held on current foreign policy issues particularly EU–Russian relations and developments in Ukraine as well as issues relating to the supply and transit of energy into and through the Slovak Republic (Photo: MFEA SR)



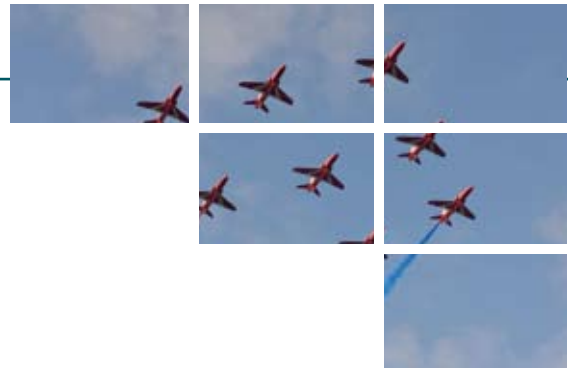
Minister Miroslav Lajčák and US Minister of Foreign Affairs John Kerry discuss the current situation in Ukraine following the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation in violation of international law on his working visit in March, 20 March 2014 (Photo: US State Department)



Slovak delegation at the NATO Summit in Wales led by President Andrej Kiska. Pictured with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and UK Prime Minister David Cameron, 4–5 September 2014 (Photo: NATO)

3

Safe and democratic world



Ten years in NATO

Slovakia's membership of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** continued to be important for external security in 2014. The onset of the Ukrainian crisis prompted a strengthening of the NATO military presence in the east of the Alliance and the adoption and gradual implementation of measures to help improve defence. After 20 years of concentrating on activities outside Europe, NATO clearly redirected its attention towards collective territorial defence.

The *Readiness Action Plan* adopted at the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014 was not only a response to the Ukrainian crisis but also to the increasing instability beyond the southern NATO border and in the Middle East. Slovakia fully backed plans to build up capabilities in the defence sector. In Wales we revealed our commitment to halt the decline in defence spending and to provide for a real increase in spending in relation to economic growth. We will also ensure 1.6 per cent of GDP goes on defence by 2020, and we intend to allocate 20 per cent of defence expenditure to the modernisation of our armed forces by 2016.

One of NATO's responses to the events in Ukraine was to provide direct aid through trust funds. The Slovak Republic provided 30,000 euros for the rehabilitation of injured members of the Ukrainian security forces and, in keeping with the commitment it made in Wales, organised two training courses in the autumn for Ukrainian demining specialists and offered to provide another four training courses in 2015 for NATO. Moreover, we also contributed by sending defence

planners to the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers of NATO in Europe.

We continued to promote NATO's open door policy and we backed the start of talks on Montenegro's accession to NATO. In the interest of consensus, we supported the decision that NATO will consider this issue by the end of 2015. Slovak diplomacy in NATO significantly contributed to the fact that before the summit all the NATO candidates were re-assessed separately on their preparedness to join the Alliance.

As part of NATO's engagement in the Western Balkans, we pushed for the NATO forces mission in Kosovo (KFOR) to be continued in keeping with the UN Security Council Resolution mandate to guarantee the security and freedom of movement for all inhabitants in Kosovo and



Heads of NATO Member States and other participating states at the summit in Wales on 4-5 September 2014 watching a symbolic fly-over of jet fighters (Photo: NATO)

Safe and democratic world

to ensure that any change in the scope of deployment be based on the Security Council mandate. The Slovak diplomatic mission in Belgrade is a NATO Contact Point Embassy in Serbia and it has carried out a number of activities, primarily to raise the awareness of the Serbian public about NATO. At Slovakia's request, NATO decided to continue this mandate in 2015-2016.

Members of the Slovak Armed Forces were involved in the work of the NATO Headquarters in Bosnia and Herzegovina and were part of the final year of ISAF operations in Afghanistan, where they provided training and education to the Afghan Security Forces. The Slovak Armed Forces also helped launch a new NATO training mission in Afghanistan (*Resolute Support*) beginning in January 2015. We also affirmed our commitment made at the Chicago Summit to financially support the stabilisation of the Afghan National Security Forces.

United Nations

At the **United Nations**, Slovakia continued to advocate compliance with the principles of the UN Charter and strengthening the UN position in international relations so it can respond effectively to global threats. Slovakia's status as an active and responsible member of the UN was consolidated by President Andrej Kiska and Minister Miroslav Lajčák visiting the UN headquarters in New York in the autumn and the latter's subsequent visit to the Nairobi branch of the UN.

We continued to devote particular attention to the issues of effective management of the UN, financial resources and support for reforming the UN and its bodies. Our co-presidency with Thailand of the Ad-

Participation in international crisis management operations and missions as of 31 December 2014

Mission	Area of engagement	No. of members of the Slovak Armed Forces	No. of civilian experts, ministry
NATO			
ISAF (International Security Assistance Force / Resolute Support from 1 January 2015)	Afghanistan	66	
UN			
UNFICYP (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus)	Cyprus	157	2, Ministry of Interior
UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation)	Egypt and Syria	2	
EU			
EUFOR ALTHEA (European Union Force Althea) / NATO HQ in Sarajevo	Bosnia and Herzegovina	35 + 1 (NATO HQ)	
EUPOL (European Union Police Mission)	Afghanistan		2, Ministry of Interior
EUMM (European Union Monitoring Mission)	Georgia	1	2, Ministry of Interior
EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission)	Kosovo		6, Ministry of Interior
EUBAM (European Union Border Assistance Mission)	Moldova and Ukraine		0 (3 police officers scheduled to be sent in early 2015)
EUPOL COPPS (European Union Co-ordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support)	Palestinian Territories		1, Ministry of Interior
OSCE			
OSCE Office in Tajikistan	Tajikistan		1, Ministry of Interior
OSCE Mission to Skopje	Macedonia		1, Ministry of Interior
SMM Ukraine			1, Ministry of Interior
			1, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
			3, unassigned
OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia and Herzegovina		1, unassigned
OSCE Mission to Kosovo	Kosovo		2, unassigned
Total		262	23



hoc Working Group on the Revitalisation of the Work of the UN General Assembly (UN GA) gave us greater scope to promote our interests and share our opinions. Another example of Slovakia's active engagement was its Presidency of the Fifth Committee of the UN GA (administrative and budgetary).

In April 2014 Slovakia became a member of the Executive Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In July we signed a tripartite agreement with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the UNHCR, enabling the humanitarian transfer of refugees through the territory of the Slovak Republic into third countries, also known as resettlement. This is the fifth agreement of this kind between the Slovak Republic and the above institutions.

In October, Slovakia officially applied for membership of the executive committee of the World Tourism Organisation (UN WTO) in 2015–2019. Elections will be held in Columbia in 2015.

EU Common Security and Defence Policy

Within the Union, we were actively involved in discussions on developing the **Common Security and Defence Policy** (CSDP) and the associated crisis management taking into account priority interests such as the strategic strengthening of defence cooperation, developing capabilities and the EU's capacity to respond.

We engaged in EU civilian missions and military operations – members of the Slovak Armed Forces were part of the EUFOR ALTHEA operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where, since September 2012, Slovakia has been the leading country of the Regional Coordination Centre of Operation in Sarajevo, and of the EU Monitoring Mission to Georgia. Slovak civilian experts were involved in EU missions and operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, on the Moldova/Ukraine border, in Georgia, Afghanistan and in the Palestinian Territories.

Slovakia pushed for a comprehensive EU approach to be developed to facilitate the efficient utilisation of its broad spectrum of political, security, economic and development instruments in international crisis management activities. In this respect, we advocated close cooperation between the EU and NATO and the identification of the most effective solutions for building defence capacities within a pooling and sharing initiative. At the same time we attempted to make maximal use of the potential offered by



President Andrej Kiska speaking at a meeting of the UN General Assembly, 25 September 2014 (Photo: UN Photo/Cia Pak)

regional cooperation, particularly between the V4 countries.

As part of the Slovak V4 Presidency, a joint V4 military exercise, called *Ground Pepper 2014*, was organised on Slovak territory in cooperation with the USA. Preparations also continued for the EU V4 Battlegroup. The group will be on standby in the first half of 2016 and Slovakia also welcomed a Polish initiative to form another V4 Battlegroup in 2019.

Security sector reform

2014 was a successful year for Slovakia with a wealth of activities relating to Security Sector Reform (SSR), an area which developed in scope and breadth. The fact that this issue is growing in importance at the global level was attested to by the adoption of the first ever UN Security Council resolution on SSR (2151/2015) in April during the Nigerian Presidency. Slovakia, as permanent Co-chair of the Group of Friends of SSR, was deeply involved in supporting the resolution at the UN.

Slovakia also concentrated on extending discussion on SSR within other regional organisations, especially in cooperation with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Union. In keeping with the recommendations of the resolution, we primarily advocated more effective coordination

Safe and democratic world



Minister Miroslav Lajčák opening the GLOBSEC 2014 Security Conference in Bratislava. The conference was devoted to the security challenges of today, particularly in relation to events in Ukraine and their impact on European security, 14 May 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

procedures for cooperating on SSR with international organisations during the GLOBSEC conference in Bratislava attended by officials of the UN, EU, OSCE and the African Union.

Good outcomes were achieved through Slovak cooperation with the Swiss Presidency of the OSCE in efforts to further develop security sector reform within the OSCE. In July there was a Slovak–Swiss conference in Vienna on potential cooperation between the UN and the OSCE over SSR. At the OSCE, we created and lead a Group of Friends of SSR, and in October we organised a professional seminar in Bratislava to begin preparations for the OSCE SSR internal guidelines.

Our work in support of SSR was also aimed at the African continent. In cooperation with the African Union, the EU and the UN, Slovakia organised the Africa Forum on SSR in Addis Ababa in November.

of the work of the various organisations on SSR in the regions concerned. With this goal in mind, we were involved in organising a number of international events. Part of Slovakia's contribution to the debate was arranging a separate panel discussion on seeking

Response to global challenges and threats

In 2014, much of the attention was on the Middle East, especially on Syria and Iraq, Libya, the tensions between Sudan and South Sudan, and Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Last year, the global threats affecting international events included the



A group photograph from the Africa Forum on Security Sector Reform. The event was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and was opened by Minister Miroslav Lajčák. The forum was jointly organised by the African Union, the EU, the UN and Slovakia, 24 November 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)



increased radicalism and terrorism of ISIL and Boko Haram. Slovakia was co-sponsor of a UN Security Council resolution prompted by the unprecedented number of foreign fighters engaged in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq as members of militant terrorist groups.

Slovakia backed the Swiss call for the UN Security Council to authorise the International Criminal Court to investigate suspected violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Syria. We also provided humanitarian aid to northern Iraq in the form of a direct financial aid payment of 20,000 euros through the International Organisation for Migration. Similarly, through the UN, we provided 20,000 euros of humanitarian aid to Palestine, from *SlovakAid* funds.

Another pressing concern was the situation in West Africa with the Ebola epidemic, which not only represents a risk to health but is also an economic, humanitarian and security risk and a threat to peace and stability. Slovakia provided 15,000 euros of financial aid through the World Health Organisation.

On 2 April 2014, Slovakia submitted its ratification of the *Arms Trade Treaty* to the depositary in New York. Ratification will contribute to greater global security and the elimination of illegal trade. We were one of the first countries to submit the ratification and the treaty entered into force on 24 December, 90 days after the required number of ratifications (50) had been reached.

Slovakia engaged in the talks between signatory parties on the shape of the new United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to be adopted in Paris in 2015. Part of the global effort to mobilise preparations for the new global agreement was a climate summit convened at the initiative of the UN Secretary-General. Slovakia was represented at the summit by the Minister for Environment who backed the conclusions and recommendations of the climate summit and emphasised Slovakia's contribution to meeting the CO₂ emission targets and using renewable resources to produce electricity.

We continued to focus on the need to effectively counter new security challenges, including combating terrorism and cyber threats. We helped consolidate the present system of global standards on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation by fully complying with them and supporting their universalisation. Slovakia also advocated resuming the Conference on Disarmament to revitalise the international standard-setting process for disarmament. Slovakia continued to back early negotiations on a treaty banning the

production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and contributed to international efforts to destroy Syrian chemical weapons.

In September, Slovakia was elected President of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, one of the agency's two main bodies (with a mandate until September 2015). Gaining this post testifies to Slovakia's status as an experienced and reliable partner in the peaceful use of atomic energy.

Human rights agenda

December 2014 brought tangible results in human rights following two years of intense national discussion, including working meetings and expert talks with a wide range of organisations. The draft *National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and Promotion in the Slovak Republic* was submitted to the Government for discussion.

In 2014, the Ministry called for applications for grants to fund human rights activities, mainly from civic society. Grants totalling 850,000 euros were awarded to 48 projects. The projects primarily targeted human rights education and protecting the rights of vulnerable groups.

As a member state of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Slovakia was also involved in activities relating to the holocaust commemoration, education and research.



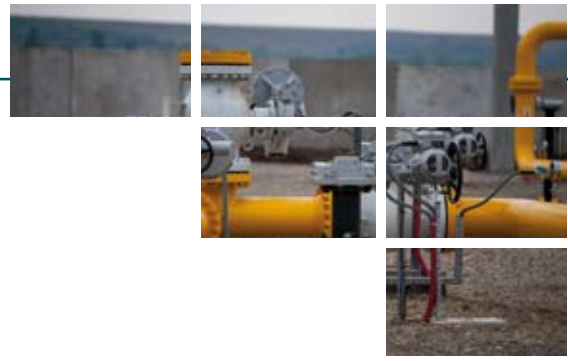
State Secretary Peter Javorčík attending the 25th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva on the current situation of human rights in various parts of the world, 3 March 2014 (Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe)



In his live broadcast for CNBC in Singapore, Minister Miroslav Lajčák spoke about investment opportunities for Singaporean enterprises in Slovakia, 3 November 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

4

Economic diplomacy



In 2014, the Ministry used its economic diplomacy competencies to promote Slovakia's trade and economic interests abroad. Coordination of trade and economic activities and promotion of Slovakia abroad were based on extensive communication between the state and the business sector within the Export and Investment Promotion Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the Council for Strategic Management, Coordination and Control of Activities of the Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO) and the Council of the Minister of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic for the Coordination of Activity of the Slovak Tourist Board (SACR). The main outcome was the adoption of strategic documents on external economic relations and tourism including marketing. Another outcome was more effective organisation of Slovakia's official participation in exhibitions and trade fairs abroad and in business missions and business forums linked to business trips abroad by senior officials and a new approach to organising intergovernmental commissions for economic cooperation.

The Strategy for External Economic Relations of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2020 was developed into a programme for economic diplomacy in bilateral relations up to 2016. The emphasis was on setting priorities for the various regions in relation to current and expected development.

In 2014, the Ministry collaborated with SARIO and the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) to organise a number of business forums and missions. These were in addition to visits by Slovak officials, and export-related events were jointly initiated with other

partners active in international economic cooperation (e.g. Malta, Slovenia, United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Croatia, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Jordan, Columbia and Afghanistan), and also the Slovak–Austrian Economic Forum.

As part of regular bilateral dialogue, the Ministry organised economic diplomacy discussions with partners from Austria, Slovenia and the Czech Republic so they could exchange experience and coordinate positions on issues of common interest. It also accepted an invitation from the SCCI to engage in dialogue with the top ten Slovak exporters and continued to



Minister Miroslav Lajčák led the 4th meeting of the Export and Investment Promotion Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic in 2014. Focal points were strategies for implementing major export projects and an update on the ongoing implementation of the tools and strategy measures in the *External economic relations of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2020*, 22 October 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Economic diplomacy



BUSINESS CENTRE

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organise the usual investment dialogue with French and German investors attended by the Prime Minister and ministers.

We also organised seminars to raise business sector awareness of opportunities to engage in various forms of international economic cooperation, e.g. international UN and NATO tenders or the opportunity to collaborate with the Eurasian Economic Union and support business women.

In order to expand sales opportunities for Slovak goods on non-European markets, a number of foreign trips were organised for Ministry officials including business delegations, in the United Arab Emirates (air transport), Singapore (innovative companies) and Vietnam (nuclear energy) for instance. The potential offered by the Slovak economy in various sectors was promoted during visits to Egypt, Pakistan and Myanmar.

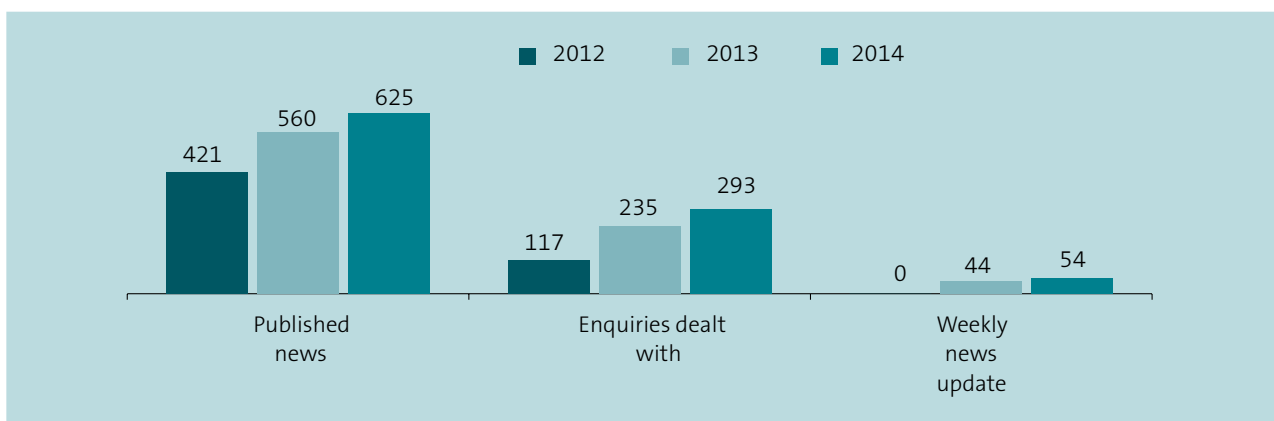
In relation to EU common trade policy, in 2014 Slovakia pushed primarily for better access to the biggest and fastest growing economies of the world through the drawing up and implementation of Free Trade

Agreements (FTAs). We completed negotiations on the *Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada* (CETA) and continued negotiations with other partners (Japan, India, ASEAN partners and the Eastern Partnership countries).

The *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP) with the USA is the most important agreement in terms of Slovak interests, and negotiations on this are continuing.

It is in Slovakia's particular interest that comprehensive Free Trade Agreements and economic partnerships should help improve Slovakia's export performance, not only in traditional sectors (automotive industry, consumer electronics and metallurgy) but also in new industries (energy, services and transport).

An important arm of the Ministry is its **Business Centre** through which it conducts economic diplomacy. Via its *Doing Business Abroad* portal and a weekly circular containing international economic news, the Ministry provides the business community with economic information from diplomatic missions,



Overview of Business Centre activities in 2014



A group photograph of the Slovak–Austrian Economic Forum meeting held on 14 October 2014 in Bratislava. In addition to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the forum was attended by the Ministers of Transport, Education, Labour and Social Affairs of Austria and Slovakia, the Bratislava mayor and more than 40 government experts from the two countries (Photo: MFEA SR)

information on trade fairs, exhibitions, tenders and new business opportunities abroad. It has also successfully mediated a number of commercial cases. The amount of economic news it published increased again in 2014. It sent email responses to two and a half times as many direct enquiries from the business community compared with when it was established in 2012.



State Secretary Peter Burian with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia Karl Erjavec, officially opening the Slovenian–Slovak business forum in Bratislava, 21 March 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Energy security

The dynamism of the international political scene and the global transformation of energy markets focused Slovak foreign and European policy attention on energy security issues.

Within the EU, Slovakia helped shape the EU's strategy for energy policy, which is based on competitiveness, true diversification, technological neutrality in reducing harmful emissions and improving energy efficiency. Slovakia helped secure the trans-European energy infrastructure of the North-South Corridor by launching a successful reserve gas pipeline project to Ukraine and connecting up the pipelines in Slovakia and Hungary.

In keeping with Slovakia's national energy policy, we also backed the creation of a competitive energy sector through diversification of energy resources and transport routes. Slovakia not only helped create the missing interconnections with energy infrastructure in neighbouring countries but also helped increase the capacity of the Adria oil pipeline, thereby enabling the use of unconventional resource capacities.

Economic diplomacy



A meeting of ministers responsible for energy in the Visegrad Group countries at the 8th annual Central European Energy Conference, Bratislava, 24 November 2014 (Photo: RC SFPA)

The Foreign Ministry worked alongside the Ministry of Economy, the OSCE and the Energy Charter to organise a conference on Securing Energy Supply – How to better protect energy networks from disruption and it

was also involved in the 8th Central European Energy Conference organised by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.

Supporting the knowledge economy and innovation

In relation to the knowledge economy and innovation, the Ministry was involved in implementing the aims and objectives outlined in the *Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Slovak Republic* and the *Strategy for External Economic Relations of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2020*. The knowledge economy, innovation and developing technologies are essential to improving the competitiveness of Slovak businesses. In June, in order to promote international collaboration in this field, the Ministry organised the second Slovak–Nordic Innovation Forum with Scandinavian countries on building science technology parks and expanding start-ups. It was also motivation for an agreement linking the cities of Žilina and Tampere, including universities and science and technology institutions in the two cities.

In cooperation with the Business and Innovation Centre in Bratislava, the Ministry organised an innovation forum on Internationalisation and Cooperation with



Prime Minister Robert Fico and Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk ceremoniously launch reverse flow on the Vojany-Uzhhorod pipeline on 2 September 2014 in Veľké Kapušany (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)



Non-EU Countries, and also SWISSNESS 2014, a Slovak–Swiss innovation forum organised in collaboration with the Embassy of Switzerland. The forums led to suggestions for legislative change to support small- and medium-sized enterprises working in innovation as part of the construction of a “silver economy”. There was also an important Slovak–Czech–Dutch event to promote Slovak participation in space research projects and in the European Space Agency (ESA).

International economic and financial organisations and institutions

At multilateral forums Slovakia actively sought solutions to overcome the global crisis and create preferential conditions for Slovak businesses.

Slovakia’s membership of the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** continues to be of benefit in the formulation, implementation and assessment of Slovak economic policies. The end of the year saw the release of a regular assessment report, the *OECD Economic Survey of the Slovak Republic 2014*. In addition to the usual regular sections of the survey, the report focused on the public sector and regionally balanced economic growth. The OECD’s main recommendations related to solving unemployment, regional differences and reforming the state administration and investing in education.

To mark the publication of the economic survey, Ángel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD, visited Bratislava, meeting senior officials of the Slovak Republic. A *Memorandum of Understanding between the Slovak Republic and OECD on Short-term Stays of Slovak Government Experts at the OECD* was signed as well. The memorandum creates a framework for improving the expert potential and analytical capacities of the central bodies of the Slovak state administration.

As a founding state of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Slovakia was involved in creating a new multilateral trade system as part of the Doha Development Agenda. This stems from the conclusions of the 9th Ministerial WTO Conference in Bali, which formed the basis for preparations for a number of multilateral trade agreements, especially the revised *Information Technology Agreement (ITA II)* and the new *Trade in Services Agreement (TISA)* which will create new opportunities for Slovakia to engage globally in the services trade.

On 13 October 2014, Li Yong, Director-General of the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization**



Minister Miroslav Lajčák speaking at the Slovak–Vietnamese business forum accompanied by a delegation of Slovak entrepreneurs while visiting the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on 4 November 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

(**UNIDO**), visited Slovakia while on a trip to Central European countries to discuss strengthening mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation between the Slovak Republic and UNIDO. An important part of the discussions were dedicated to the post-2015 development agenda, which is one of UNIDO’s industrial development priorities.

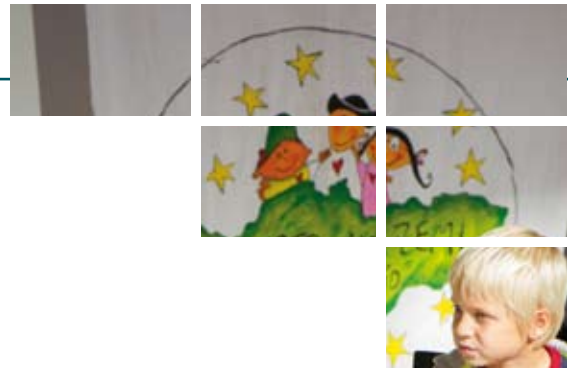


OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría signing the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Slovak Republic and OECD on Short-Term Stays of Slovak Government Experts at the OECD* together with State Secretary Peter Javorčík while visiting Bratislava, 5 November 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)



Despite their limited resources, Slovak organisations have projects in more than 20 countries thanks to the support of *SlovakAid* (Photo: SAMRS)

5 Development cooperation



In 2014, important progress was made in improving the Strategic Framework for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic. In January the Slovak government adopted the third *Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for the Years 2014–2018*. Slovakia also began meeting the OECD Development Aid Committee requirements and recommendations. Slovakia has been a member since September 2013. In order to reduce fragmentation of development cooperation activities, the number of priority countries was decreased from 19 to 10 and the sectoral focus of Slovak development cooperation was developed in more detail. The Ministry adopted a strategy for development cooperation with its three programme countries – Afghanistan, Kenya and Moldova.

To improve the effectiveness of development cooperation, planning and fulfilment of OECD commitments, we launched an information system to record and report Slovak development flows and also a new *SlovakAid* website. In 2014, development diplomats began work in Kenya and Moldova and consequently the Ministry expects improvements in *SlovakAid* work in these countries. The Coordination Committee for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic was reinvigorated and strengthened, and a pilot educational programme on development cooperation for state administration staff has been launched.

The Ministry also took a number of steps to make the project cycle more effective. It has adopted a *Strategy for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Bilateral Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic* and has launched new programmes and instruments and improved existing ones – support for emerging business partnerships (start-ups), the sending of

volunteers and experts, the activities of the Centre for Experience Transfer from Integration and Reforms (CETIR), financial contributions from the diplomatic missions of the Slovak Republic, and so forth.

Sectors and instruments

In geographic terms, greatest attention was paid to development cooperation with Moldova, where there are six approved projects, followed by Kenya with four, and other grants went to the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Georgia and Belarus. *SlovakAid* was used to fund projects by Slovak NGOs relating to education, two of these also received grants



Equipment, used to test patients' blood for viruses and bacteria at a clinic in Nairobi, Kenya was purchased thanks to *SlovakAid* funding. More than 17,000 patients are treated annually at the clinic, 26 November 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Development cooperation



Development Day 2014: For life in a fairer world was held on 14 October 2014 at Bratislava's Old Market Hall. The event is organised every year for International Day against Poverty (Photo: SAMRS)

from European Commission funds (overall, five projects were supported to a total of almost 140,00 euros). For the first time, in 2014 a grant was approved to support emerging business partnerships in Kenya.

The sector policies Slovakia prioritised were the promotion of democracy and good governance, infrastructure development (social, health and educational), environmental protection, and agricultural development. Another key component of development work was the sharing of Slovakia's experience of EU integration.

SlovakAid activities in the programme and project countries of Slovak development cooperation included:

- funding from Slovak diplomatic missions for small development projects (59 micro-grants of up to 5,000 euros in ten countries with a contractual value of 271,836 euros),
- sending volunteers to developing countries – 43 applications were approved to send volunteers to 15 developing countries to a total of 202,151 euros,
- providing technical assistance through CETIR for state-building and state institution building, the democratisation of society, the implementation of reforms and the creation of a market environment as well as the process of integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (28 activities were approved for 11 countries to a total of 141,906 euros).

In 2014, the Ministry allocated approximately 5 million euros to the implementation of bilateral development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Approximately 7 million euros was allocated to selected central state administration bodies to be spent on bilateral development cooperation. More than 48 million euros went to international organisations and financial institutions as part of Slovakia's (predominantly) obligatory contributions to the EU. In total Slovak official development aid in 2014 exceeded 61 million euros, thus ODA (Official Development Aid) accounted for around 0.08 per cent of GNI.

Geographical distribution of *SlovakAid* projects approved in 2014

Moldova	6
Kenya	5 (including a start-up project)
Albania	2
Ukraine	2
Afghanistan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, South Sudan, Kosovo	1



Doctor Juraj Benca, who helped the injured in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, being presented with the Gold Plaque for Development Cooperation Fieldworkers by Minister Miroslav Lajčák, 16 October 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Despite the limited budget (and delays in honouring financial international commitments), the experience of Slovak entities has shown that *SlovakAid* activities are practical, effective and produce visible results. Unlike many traditional donors, Slovakia does not provide aid to governments (contributions to state budgets) but directly to those who need it, e.g. to health and social facilities or schools. In this way, the aid can be monitored, measured and the risk of corruption at the local level is reduced.

During the Slovak V4 Presidency, we also highlighted cooperation with V4 partners over development aid. This resulted in involvement in a joint V4 project with Japan in Montenegro, where a Slovak expert was sent to share Slovak experience of building and developing the private sector.

One positive factor is that, in addition to the NGOs, more new stakeholders are gradually engaging in *SlovakAid* activities, such as the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia and its members, state institutions (especially through CETIR) and the media. The Business Platform for Foreign Development Cooperation has also begun its work to engage more businesses. There was a positive response from Slovak businesses to a workshop on the Persian Gulf countries' development funds, attended by almost 90 Slovak participants.

The Ministry is seeking to systematically raise public awareness and improve the provision of information on development cooperation. It therefore co-organised and supported several important events, such as

a campaign in Bratislava, held in October 2014, to raise awareness for Development Day 2014: For Life in a Fairer World and an international conference, Development Ecosystems in the V4: a new role for civil society organisations and business beyond 2015 also held in Bratislava in October 2014.

In addition, the Ministry is national coordinator for global development education, and in 2014, it continued to coordinate and prepare Global Development Education Working Group sessions. In February, it organised a presentation in Bratislava on the GENE Peer Review National Report on Global Education in Slovakia.

Slovakia responded promptly to humanitarian crises around the world. In 2014, the Ministry provided more than 635,000 euros of financial humanitarian aid, of which 115,000 euros was allocated to the situation in Ukraine and 410,000 euros was post-humanitarian aid for the devastating floods in Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ministry also helped Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, and Kurdish refugees in Iraq, and Palestinian refugees by contributing funds to international organisations (110,000 euros in total).

In 2014, talks continued in New York between the UN member states on preparations for intergovernmental negotiations on post-2015 development issues and other events associated with preparations for the Post-2015 summit. Slovakia was involved in preparations for the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including work for the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and as a member of the Working Group on Global Partnership for Civil Society. This working group is a unique association of donors, partner countries and civil society representatives, providing an arena for producing original solutions.



The Slovak Republic provided Moldova with two fully-equipped emergency ambulances as part of its Official Development Assistance, 20 November 2014 (Photo: Marián Angelovič)



President Andrej Kiska received the heads of Slovak diplomatic missions following the official opening of the three-day meeting on 1 July 2014. Minister Miroslav Lajčák gave the opening speech (Photo: MFEA SR)

6

Services for the people



Consular help and assistance

In an effort to ensure that our consular services and assistance are of the best quality and widely accessible, the Ministry not only adheres to best practices but also focuses on new ways of improving services.

In 2014, to enhance the availability of consular assistance in cases of emergency, we expanded the number of consular offices managed by honorary consular officials to 51.

In Croatia, the consular services provided to Slovak tourists on holiday in the country were extended with the opening of a seasonal consular office in Zadar, which issued 42 emergency travel documents, provided non-financial emergency assistance in 36 cases and legal assistance in 17 cases. In one case it helped repatriate a deceased citizen.

The increased security risks in Ukraine led to a significant rise in the number of Belarus citizens transiting through the Slovak Republic. This caused a substantial increase in the number of visa applications and the consequent increase in workload was resolved by allocating additional staff to the visa unit at the diplomatic mission in Minsk, which had issued almost 26,000 visas by 1 December 2014, approximately four times the number for the whole of 2013.

Since there is an extensive community of Slovaks living in United Kingdom, the only diplomatic mission in the country provided a regular mobile consular service to several British cities. In total, the mobile service was used 15 times in 2014 to deal with 3,317 requests. The

service was also used by the Consulate General in New York, which dealt with 166 requests in Chicago and Ohio.

As part of the national *Computerisation of Services relating to the Protection of Rights and Interests of Citizens and Businesses in the Slovak Republic* organised by the Ministry, a series of measures were drafted that will enable the gradual implementation of computerised consular services during the year. At the end of 2014, the final adjustments were being made to the Ministry's website, which contains travel and consular information.

Svetobežka mobile app

The Ministry has a mobile app for Android and iOS operating systems to help Slovak citizens when travelling abroad. The Svetobežka app is free of charge.

Svetobežka contains six main sections: Emergencies abroad, Register before you travel, Travel, What is consular assistance?, Assistance centres and Slovak embassies, and five of these have subsections providing information and advice on what to do in an emergency abroad, who to contact first, where to go for help, which rules to follow, what consular officials of Slovak embassies can and can't do for our citizens, and last but not least, it contains a list of all the Slovak diplomatic missions throughout the world with the relevant phone numbers and email addresses. These can be accessed directly from the app menu.

Services for the people



On 1–4 July 2014, the heads of diplomatic missions held their biennial meeting, a regular working meeting between the Minister and the Slovak ambassadors, at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Minister Miroslav Lajčák and Prime Minister Robert Fico both spoke at the event (Photo: MFEA SR)

Improving the standard of consular emergency assistance is dependent on amendments to the law regarding the issue of financial assistance for Slovak citizens abroad. These were carried out in 2014 and the new Ministry regulations will be in force from 1 January 2015.

By 1 December 2014, a total of 17,000 citizens had used our registration system to register short trips abroad, which is a slight increase on the previous year. The greatest increase was in the number of people who took the opportunity to inform us of their intended trips to Thailand (approximately a 45 per cent increase), Morocco, Russia, the USA, and Israel. There were fewer registrations of the intention to travel to Tunisia (half the number of the previous year), Egypt (approximately a third down) and Turkey.

There was greater focus on the issue of international parental abductions which is an exceptionally time-consuming problem requiring great organisational and mediational effort and an individual-based approach. In solving many complicated cases, the Ministry liaised with the Centre for the International Legal Protection of Children and Young People and other institutions to employ special measures.

The coordinated efforts of EU member states to reduce the scope of visa regulations or to make it easier for citizens to obtain visas resulted in the waiving of mandatory visas for travel to the United Arab Emirates (from 22 March 2014) for citizens of 13 EU member states, including the Slovak Republic. Qatar has made it possible for Slovak citizens to obtain visas at Doha

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- unforeseen events abroad
- contacting our consulates
- consular information



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airport since April 2014. In October, Bahrain also adopted this practice at Manama airport in the capital, and in December Tunisia extended short-term visa-free entry into its territory for Slovak citizens, providing the purpose of the visit is not employment. The list of places where 72-hour visa-free transit can be made also includes the Chinese city of Xi'an. On 1 September an *Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Facilitation of the Issuance of Visas* entered into force and, in June, Tajikistan simplified their visa-issuing procedures.

A joint memorandum led to the approval of a *Working Holiday Programme between the Slovak Republic and Taiwan*, making it easier for young people from both countries to enter, stay and work in the other country.

In order to make it easier to obtain visas in countries where Slovakia does not have a diplomatic mission, the Ministry signed further diplomatic mission agreements with other EU member states on issuing visas in third countries. So far, the Ministry has concluded agreements with 12 EU member states. Two were signed in 2014 (Portugal and Sweden), one with Switzerland, and existing agreements have been extended (Belgium and Latvia). The Ministry extended agreements with Austria and the Czech Republic and these should be concluded in the first half of 2015.

Agreements concluded thus far enable citizens of third countries to obtain visas to the Slovak Republic at 34 different places in 33 countries (diplomatic missions of other EU member states), and Slovakia represents seven member states in issuing visas at 9 of its diplomatic missions.

In 2014, we:

- dealt with 106,442 visa applications (1,205 were rejected, and we resolved 21 appeals against decisions to refuse, cancel or not grant a visa),
- granted 1,097 visas through the diplomatic mission of other EU countries,
- provided assistance to 3,382 citizens of the Slovak Republic,
- recorded 2,282 instances where Slovak citizens were detained and imprisoned abroad, and 1,110 cases of Slovak citizens being held in custody abroad,
- made 114 consular visits to Slovak citizens being held in custody abroad,
- certified 36,217 documents (signatures, copies, translations and apostilles),
- dealt with 8,121 registry requests (special registry, Slovak registry documents, registry exchanges),
- married 40 couples,
- dealt with 2,417 civil law cases,
- mediated 1,501 applications by foreign authorities to the Slovak judicial authorities for legal assistance,
- dealt with 623 applications for Slovak living abroad status,
- issued 1,133 consular acknowledgements for Slovak citizens abroad,
- assisted 6 times at deportation proceedings,
- responded to 57,905 emails, and
- performed another 16,550 consular activities.

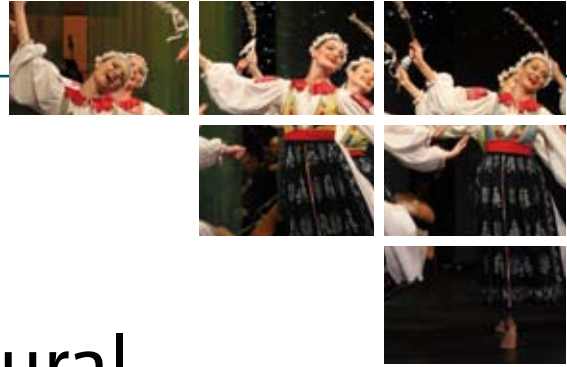
In 2014, preparations were finalised for the conclusion of a contract with an external visa service provider. From January 2015 citizens of Ukraine (in Kiev and Uzhhorod) and Russia (in Moscow and St. Petersburg) will be able to use this externally-run visa centre when applying for a visa and will not have to go to a Slovak diplomatic mission.



Baroness Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, speaking at a meeting of the heads of diplomatic missions along with Minister Miroslav Lajčák, Bratislava, 1 July 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)



The Ministry organised a gala event to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Slovakia's EU accession held in the historical building of the Slovak National Theatre on 30 April 2014. The event was attended by the highest representatives, political, cultural and social figures, as well as individuals who contributed to Slovakia's accession to the EU. Invitations were accepted by leading EU officials, including President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz, President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, and European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič. The event was broadcast live on Slovak state television channel RTVS. The evening was one of a series of events celebrating the anniversary, many of which were organised for the general public (Photo: MFEA SR)



7 Public and cultural diplomacy

Public diplomacy

In 2014, Slovakia celebrated several important anniversaries – the 10th anniversary of Slovakia’s accession to the European Union, the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, the 70th anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising and the First World War Centenary. The Ministry therefore prepared exhibitions representing these events and sent them to diplomatic missions and Slovak institutions abroad so they could present Slovakia to the international public as a dynamic and successful country with a rich heritage. On the 10th anniversary of Slovakia’s accession to the EU, the Ministry also organised a ceremonial cultural/social event held in the historic building of the Slovak National Theatre and attended by leading EU officials and representatives.

In 2014, the Ministry used a wide range of tools to communicate with the public at home and abroad, including social networks, university lectures and collaboration with the non-governmental sector.

Brand Slovakia

The Ministry continued to liaise with state institutions and the expert community to present a coherent image of the Slovak Republic abroad. Members of the Ministry continued to lead the Working Group for the Coordinated Presentation of Slovakia Abroad. The group was formed as an inter-departmental platform bringing together various stakeholders to help present the Slovak Republic abroad under the Government Council

of the Slovak Republic for the Promotion of Export and Investments.

The focal point of the Ministry’s work in coordinating the coherent presentation of Slovakia abroad was the progress made in creating Brand Slovakia and moving on from the analytical and preparatory stage to the implementation stage. In pursuing this goal, the



Minister Miroslav Lajčák being interviewed for BrandingSlovenska.com and thus symbolically launching the public debate on Brand Slovakia and its identity, 19 June 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Public and cultural diplomacy



Posters for cultural and PR projects prepared by the Ministry in 2014 to mark important anniversaries



Ministry launched a public discussion on the draft PR frameworks suitable for promoting Slovakia abroad along with existing sketches of graphic designs. Input for the planned creation of Brand Slovakia in 2015/2016 will come from feedback from the web

portal, a series of university lectures and working meetings with experts and those working in the media.

Liaising with the other ministries, the Ministry's goal is to create a professional Slovakia brand to prevent duplication and improve synergy in promoting Slovakia abroad, thereby gradually developing the political, cultural and economic potential of promoting Slovakia internationally.



Marketing and branding experts convene with the Foreign Minister to present their vision of Brand Slovakia to journalists. The work undertaken thus far was presented by sociologist Olga Gyárfášová, branding and marketing consultant Marian Timoracký, and Peter Littmann, Adviser to the Minister with responsibility for the coherent presentation of the Slovak Republic abroad, 18 February 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Cultural diplomacy

Slovak institutions and diplomatic missions organised a wide range of promotional activities in the visual arts, film, music, science and literature associated with the anniversaries mentioned above.

In order to promote and strengthen mutual relations in culture, education, trade and tourism, 2014 was declared the Year of Exchanges between the V4 Countries and Japan. As part of this initiative, Professor Vladimír Bužek, a university lecturer and respected figure in the field of quantum physics theory, was appointed a goodwill ambassador. In addition to the project, there were social-cultural exchange events (e.g. Month of Japanese Culture).

At Slovakia's initiative, the first ever session of the Joint Slovak–Korean Commission for Culture, Education,



Sport and Tourism took place. The goal was to extend and develop bilateral cooperation arising from the 2007 inter-governmental *Agreement on Cooperation with the Republic of Korea in Culture, Education and Tourism*.

The Ministry is also coordinator of the Inter-Governmental Slovak–Ukrainian Commission for National Minorities, Education and Culture, and its 13th session was held in Kiev in December. It functions as an advisory commission to the government cabinets of the two countries.

The Central European Cultural Platform countries again engaged within multilateral groups to promote joint activities in non-EU countries. The European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network is active in promoting mutual cultural relations and organises many traditional and successful events (e.g. European Day of Languages, Coffee Day and Literature Night).

Slovaks living abroad

In 2014, through the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, the Ministry continued to devote energy to its work relating to Slovaks living abroad.

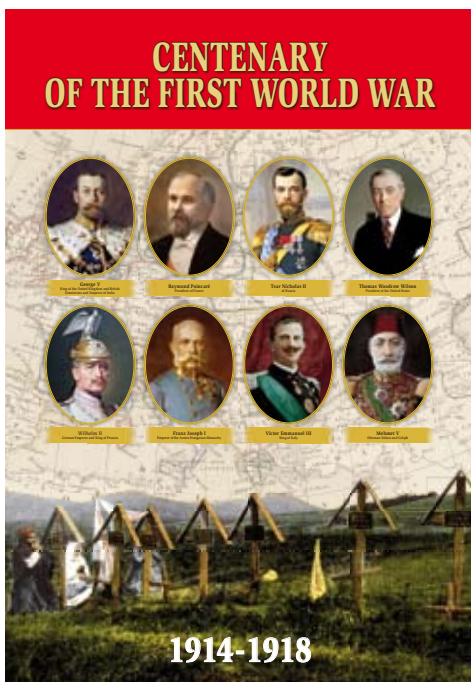
Working with the Ministry of Interior and the respective police force department, the Ministry focused on



Minister Miroslav Lajčák, Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria Sebastian Kurz and State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary Peter Szijjártó at the Tearing down the Iron Curtain – 25 years, Klingenbach, 27 June 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

procedures for accepting and awarding Certificates for Slovaks living abroad, especially in relation to Ukraine.

In addition to implementing the *Strategy for National Policy in Relation to Slovaks Living Abroad up to 2015*, the government also adopted a *Report on the National Policy in Relation to Slovaks Living Abroad and Providing State Support for Slovaks Living Abroad in 2013* and prepared a draft programme for 2015. During 2014, preparations were ongoing in relation to the draft *Strategy for*



Posters for cultural PR projects prepared by the Ministry in 2014 to mark important anniversaries

Public and cultural diplomacy



Postage stamp from the series of Figures Commemorating the 125th Anniversary of the Birth of Slovak Politician and Diplomat Štefan Osuský



Postage stamp commemorating the 10th anniversary of Slovakia's accession to the European Union

National Policy of the Slovak Republic in Relation to Slovaks Living Abroad in 2016–2020 to be submitted to the Slovak government in 2015 and, associated with that, preparations have begun in relation to the amendment to the Act on Slovaks Living Abroad.

The twelfth Permanent Conference of the Slovak Republic and Slovaks Living Abroad took place in 2014 under the auspices of President Andrej Kiska of the Slovak Republic. The main theme of the conference was How countries in which Slovaks live and work



Minister Miroslav Lajčák with *Goodwill Envoy for 2014* award recipients Andrea Rajňáková, a leading Singapore-based expert in gastroenterology, hepatology and endoscopy, Peter Biľak, a renowned graphic designer and one of the most well-known European font designers in the Netherlands, and Anton Zajac, co-founder and longstanding executive director of the American division of ESET. Minister Miroslav Lajčák established the tradition of rewarding key Slovaks in 2010 (Photo: MFEA SR)



The twelfth Standing Conference of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad on Slovak Republic and Slovaks Living Abroad was held in 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)

treat their National Minorities and Ethnic Slovak Communities.

Cooperation with the third sector

The NGO sector has an essential role to play in development aid, in preparing ministerial concept

documents, analytic materials and organising international relations events. In 2014, the Ministry also continued its tradition of collaborating with NGOs.

Financial support for NGO projects is delivered via a ministerial grant system for international relations and foreign policy. NGOs can use this system to apply for funding, particularly for projects relating to analysis and the organisation of events for experts and the general public. In 2014, a total of 34 projects received funding totalling 109,000 euros.

The biggest projects organised with the help of the Ministry include the GLOBSEC International Conference organised by the Slovak Atlantic Commission which is one of the most prestigious foreign policy forums in the world, the Centre for European Affairs Conference which is concerned with European issues, the Tatra Summit and the annual Central European Energy Conference organised by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.



Traditional New Year meeting between Minister Miroslav Lajčák and NGO representatives in Bratislava on 17 December 2014 (Photo: MFEA SR)



Building of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic
(Photo: MFEA SR)

8

A modern and professional foreign service



Last year, our Ministry faced many challenges relating to the significant deterioration in the international security situation. Despite the strict cuts in budgetary resources exacerbated by the “debt brake”, a growing amount of work and tasks still had to be undertaken.

In 2014, we organised a Bratislava meeting for our ambassadors working abroad with representatives from other ministries to ensure better coordination in meeting Slovak foreign policy goals.

Our priorities were preparations for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Here we might mention that our Ministry is managing the process of improving the language skills, particularly English and French, of those working in state administration.

We have improved the quality and competitive environment of the Ministry by filling vacant job positions through transparent external staff selection procedures.

Educational activities relating to economic diplomacy and the development of humanitarian aid attracted great interest. Students from 42 universities in Slovakia and abroad completed short-term internships at the Ministry alongside diplomats from European ministries of foreign affairs.

We are continually seeking out additional internal supplies and resources – we are gradually restructuring our intangible assets abroad, simplifying and centralising economic and financial work as much as we can, and we make great use of e-learning in training. We are introducing extensive computerisation for citizens and businesses in our pursuit to continually improve services for the people. Global developments are increasingly forcing us to deal with cyber security.

It can be said of last year that, albeit with extraordinary effort, we succeeded in maintaining the high quality of our work, the professionalism of our employees and in securing the right conditions to pursue Slovakia’s foreign policy and European interests.

Pavol Sýkorčin
Secretary General

A modern and professional foreign service

Network of diplomatic missions

On 1 December 2014, the Slovak Republic had a **total of 90 diplomatic missions**, consisting of 64 embassies, 7 missions with international organisations, 8 general consulates, 2 branch offices of diplomatic missions, a Slovak Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei (SECO), and 8 Slovak institutions.

During the year, a Slovak diplomatic mission was opened in Georgia, and armed conflict led to the diplomatic mission in Damascus being temporarily moved to Lebanon (Beirut).

HR policy and staff training

In 2014, our priorities in HR policy and management were to improve staff quality and performance in the Slovak Foreign Service and prepare for our first ever Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU.

To secure staff training for state administration employees for the Slovak Presidency, the Ministry succeeded in obtaining a European Social Fund grant of 1,672,116 euros to implement a national project entitled Improving the Performance of Government Employees on the EU Agenda – Preparations for the Slovak Republic Presidency of the Council of the EU. The project relates to three main training areas:

- language training,
- institutional and procedural preparations within the EU,
- communication, presentation and negotiation skills and the ability to lead negotiations in the EU.

In 2014, we introduced language training for 548 state administration employees who study English and French either in groups or individually. The remaining training courses along with traineeships in Brussels and media training will be carried out in 2015.

The Ministry also organised more than 20 training courses, from general IT training, rules and regulations, and language courses to professional lectures.

The Ministry has also begun e-learning economic training for staff at home and abroad.

In 2014, the Ministry ran its first ever mass recruitment project, “Year 2014”. More than 200 external candidates applied for ten vacancies, including university graduates from abroad, indicating how appealing working for the Ministry is in the eyes of the Slovak public. With the preparations for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU, selected ministerial departments received an additional eight temporary experts.

On 31 December 2014, the Ministry employed 1,202 staff members, including 503 at Ministry headquarters in Bratislava, while the diplomatic missions employed 699 (including agency staff). In 2014, 198 university students undertook short-term internships at the Ministry, including 106 based at Ministry headquarters and 92 at diplomatic missions. They came from 42 universities in Slovakia and abroad. Three foreign diplomats also took up internships at the Ministry.

2014 Ministry Expenditure

(simplified overview of the programme structure – actual expenditure in euros)

Programmes:

Development of foreign relations	100,792,270
Management of programmes	32,323,309
Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros lawsuit.....	41
Cooperation with NGOs	109,800
Staff training	97,470
Drafting and implementing human rights policies.....	899,631
Reimbursement of expenditure from the Technical Assistance Operational Programme	162,765
Diplomatic representation of the Slovak Republic abroad	63,010,474
Cultural representation of the Slovak Republic abroad.....	1,202,113
Staff employed locally abroad.....	2,986,667
Assistance for ethnic Slovaks abroad	1,896,941
Inter-ministerial programmes:	
Official development aid – Ministry	3,985,308
Sending civilian experts on crisis management outside the Slovak Republic – Ministry	33,743
Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU 2016	825,031
Human resources	148,273
Slovakia’s contributions to international organisations – Ministry	9,829,393

Total expenditure **117,510,959**