

Foreign and European Policy in 2015

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



**MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic**

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2015 – a year of difficult security challenges



„I have always been moved by this country’s historic struggle to shape its destiny ... That courageous spirit lives on.“

Ban Ki-moon upon receiving Honorary Doctorate and Gold Medal from Comenius University Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Bratislava, 19 October 2015

“NATO is now implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. And Slovakia is playing its part contributing to this adaptation of our Alliance”.



Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary-General while on his first official visit to Slovakia, in Bratislava on 10 September 2015.

“Democracy, freedom of speech, free enterprise, equality of opportunity, human rights these are the things that unite us. And history shows that we succeed when we stand up for them – and when we do so together.”



David Cameron, key-note speech, GLOBSEC, Bratislava 2015



„Basically, the way we handle today’s multipolar world and its complexity resembles deliberate application of the black-and-white filter on where the color and hue-sensitivity is an inevitable condition to any potential success... But let me be clear, I am not in favor of creating new or alternative structures. Let us use the system of institutions that we have created and fine-tuned over the years. We need no new tools before we have really given a chance to the existing ones.“

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign & European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Miroslav Lajčák, conference on the UN in an Era of New Threats & Challenges, New York, February 2015

2015 – a year of deep crisis and encouraging results

Dear friends, I am pleased that in the pages of the Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic I can present the most important aspects of our foreign policy, especially the results of the Ministry's work in 2015.

Last year was a contradictory period in international relations. We were faced with serious crises but nonetheless were able to achieve a number of encouraging results. Major challenges included the migration crisis, instability in the European neighbourhood, the EU debt crisis and the fight against terrorism amid growing violence around the world. Last year was also a period of tremendous success for the UN. In particular, I would like to mention the outcomes of the COP21 Paris Climate Conference and the adoption of *Agenda 2030 on sustainable development*. Slovakia emerged from these challenges as a trustworthy, responsible and sympathetic partner.

On the international political scene, we proved that the EU continues to be a fundamental pillar of Slovak foreign policy. During the crises facing the EU last year, Slovakia emphasised the need for solidarity, cooperation and above all unity achieved by respecting common rules and adopting a sensitive approach to each country. Slovakia sought to strengthen confidence and faith in the EU and its future. These challenges will be the focus of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

In 2015 the international community was confronted with a serious crisis in the Middle East. Long-term destabilisation in the region triggered a wave of migration that had a major impact on Europe. By contrast, the agreement over Iran's nuclear programme was very positive and improved relations with Iran, an important regional player.



We clearly demonstrated that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is the second pillar of our foreign policy on security. Slovakia concentrated on implementing the outcomes of the NATO summit in Wales and preparing for the next high-level meeting in Warsaw. We pushed for complementarity between NATO and EU Common Security and Defence Policy. We joined other members of the OSCE in commemorating the 40th anniversary of the *Helsinki Final Act*, which is still a model example of how to resolve complex international political situations through dialogue.

In 2015 the UN celebrated its anniversary and we sought to develop closer cooperation with the organisation. Slovakia also continued to flag up security sector reform. Shortly after attending the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon visited Slovakia. Regionally, Slovakia's priority was the second half of our Presidency of the Visegrad Group. In keeping with the *Dynamic Visegrad* motto, we achieved progress in sectoral cooperation, in coordinating V4 countries' foreign policies in relations with Ukraine, and in cooperating with additional partners using the V4+ format. The creation of the trilateral Slavkov format, bringing together Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria, led to enhanced cooperation with our neighbours. One important contribution to regional politics was the deployment of members of the Slovak Police Force to Hungary and Slovenia to assist in the migration crisis.

Slovakia continued to develop Trans-Atlantic relations and closer bilateral cooperation with other strategic partners. Relations with EU countries were extended in all areas. Outside the EU, our priority remained the Western Balkans, Turkey and Eastern Europe. We highlighted the integration process achievements made in these two regions. One of our most important

priorities was Europe's position on Ukraine and the associated need for extensive systematic reform. We therefore provided our neighbour with assistance in the complex political and security situation. Much of our diplomatic activity was in support of a peaceful resolution that would respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Bilaterally, we attempted to give new impetus to relations on all fronts. Our priorities were the economy, energy and culture.

We continued implementing the *Slovak Strategy for External Economic Relations for 2014–2020*, concentrating on trade, the knowledge economy, research and innovation. The most important investment outcomes were the signing of an agreement with Jaguar Land Rover to build a plant in Slovakia and Ryanair's decision to create a regional base in Bratislava. We stepped up economic cooperation with rapidly-growing countries in Latin America and Asia. The Ministry continued to organise business forums and trade missions. A major success was the establishment of the Slovak Innovation Liaison Office in Finland. This is the first office of its kind abroad.

In energy security, the EU Energy Union project received the greatest attention. The Slovak V4 Presidency resulted in greater cooperation among members over energy. Our gas sector priorities were to make efficient use of existing transit capacities, create a north-south corridor and, above all, the Easting pipeline project. Slovakia and a number of international partners expressed concern over the Nord Stream 2 project and garnered opposition amongst EU partners with similar attitudes.

2015 was exceptionally important for development cooperation and not just because it was the European Year of Development. The previous *Millennium Development Goals* were replaced with *Agenda 2030*. We approved a new development cooperation law to enable us to respond more effectively to the dynamically changing external environment. Afghanistan, Kenya and Moldova remained our priorities. Slovakia also responded operationally to crises occurring in 2015 (the Middle East, Africa, migration).

The Ministry's consular assistance work was mainly affected by a significant increase in the number of Slovak citizens travelling abroad. The Ministry's response to this was to provide new kinds of assistance, including "consular days". The foreign service law was amended, and the electronisation of consular services was completed to improve assistance to Slovak citizens. We also devoted attention to our compatriots abroad. In addition to its usual activities, the Office for Slovaks

Living Abroad was engaged in drafting the strategy for the *National Policy for Slovaks Living Abroad 2016–2020*, which was approved by the Slovak government in October 2015.

In public diplomacy, the focus was on creating the Slovakia brand. One of the main ways in which we promoted Slovakia was through our participation at Expo 2015 in Italy.

Cultural diplomacy was concerned with commemorating important anniversaries in Slovakia, Europe and the rest of the world. We celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ľudovít Štúr and his work on Slovak language, literature, journalism, education and politics, although Štúr did not consider these to be goals within themselves. Rather, they were a means of laying the foundations for a more modern and freer Slovakia that would survive into the future. Slovak foreign policy will continue to build on and consolidate these foundations, since in the words of Štúr, "He who lives through his spirit lives in the whole world, and the world lives in him".

In 2015, we commemorated the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. Slovak diplomat Ján Papánek was one of the 14-member committee that drafted the final version of the UN Charter. It brings me great pleasure to note that Slovak diplomats have now brought benefits that extend far beyond the Slovak border and our priorities.

In 2015 the Ministry demonstrated it was ready to respond operationally to complex international political developments around the world. The Ministry achieved the goals of its *Slovak Foreign and European Policy Agenda in 2015* and showed flexibility in responding to dynamic developments, new external stimuli and the crises that struck the EU and, to a certain degree, global foreign policy. Despite the complications 2015 brought, the Ministry showed it was capable of promoting national priorities and protecting the interests of Slovakia and its people.

You will find greater detail on just how we achieved all this in the pages to come.



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



President Andrej Kiska discusses the deteriorating security situation around the world with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, 10 September 2015 (Photo: NIDS/ NATO Multimedia Library)



Speaker of the Slovak National Council Peter Pellegrini receiving President of the Republic of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović at Bratislava Castle, 9 December 2015 (Photo: NCSR/Matúš Zajac)



Prime Minister Robert Fico visiting Kyiv on 5 February 2015. Pictured with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko (Photo: TASR)

The Paris attacks of November 2015 show that we are never far from threats and dangers



Have perceptions on security and peace changed over the last year?

In terms of seeking answers to the long-term challenges we face, the year 2015 was not any easier. It was a year marked by the escalation of crises in Europe and beyond which directly impacted on our region. The four-year crisis in Syria and the two-year crisis in Ukraine remain unresolved. The Syrian crisis has shown us that we need to improve unity and cohesion among EU Member States. Europe has yet to develop a long-term strategy for dealing with the wider region, including the Middle East and Africa. The good news is that discussions are already taking place within the EU on how to better configure our instruments. It is also worth noting the successes of international diplomacy last year. At the beginning of the year, it was not clear that we would be able to achieve a nuclear agreement with Iran, a thaw in relations with Cuba and the successful conclusions of the Paris climate conference.

Which specific challenges did Slovak foreign policy have to deal with?

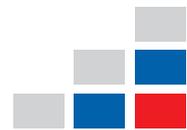
I would like to mention two security challenges in particular: energy security and unconventional or hybrid threats. Energy security has long been important in Slovak foreign policy. A particular concern of ours has been the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline which we believe violates the principles of the Energy Union and is indicative of how what are intended to be purely commercial projects are becoming politicised.

What prompted the intense Slovak debate on hybrid warfare and hybrid threats?

The general public began to display greater interest in hybrid threats when military exercises were conducted in Slovakia in the autumn of 2015. Hybrid warfare is a combination of conventional military tactics and irregular activities, including information and cybernetic operations carried out by state and non-state actors. There has been an increase in the volume and sophistication of disinformation and paid or otherwise sponsored political propaganda, often targeting national security. It was our duty to highlight this threat, inform the media and NGOs and identify ways in which the Ministry could prevent the widespread infiltration of the public arena.

How would you assess developments over the past year in terms of other security threats here at home and in our neighbourhood?

As far as threats such as terrorism are concerned, national security remains within the competence of the national government. The Paris attacks of November 2015 show us we are never far from threats and dangers. To handle them effectively, we must improve the exchange of intelligence information and global and regional cooperation. One measure taken by Slovakia was to adopt anti-terrorism legislation at the end of 2015. It is clear that combating terrorism requires us to focus on restoring peace and stability in the Middle East and North Africa in the medium- to long-term. One of the top priorities for the entire civilised world is to defeat the terrorist threat posed by Daesh. We recognise that the success of the international community depends on us having a good strategy, coordinating our common efforts and offering the inhabitants of the region realistic prospect of a decent and dignified way of life.



Did 2015 deliver positive outcomes for security and the stabilisation of our immediate neighbourhood?

One positive event contributing to the stabilisation of our neighbourhood occurred at the end of the year when Montenegro was invited to join NATO. Slovakia will continue to back the integration efforts of Montenegro and other Western Balkan countries and support EU association policy for Eastern Partnership countries.

I am pleased that preparations for the EU V4 Battlegroup were successfully concluded in 2015. It has been on standby for deployment on EU crisis management operations since 1 January 2016. Slovakia engaged in 14 international crisis management missions as part of EU, OSCE, NATO and UN activities in 2015.

And how would you assess the threat from the East?

Our relations with Russia continue to be influenced by the dynamics of the Ukraine crisis. While Slovakia supports dialogue with Russia, it should not be conducted under conditions stipulated by Russia. We are aware that greater attention must be focused on hybrid warfare and the root causes of certain actions taken by Russia. We understand that the country as a whole found itself in a complicated situation, resulting from growing modernisation debts and deepening internal contradictions. It would be a major mistake if Russia were to resolve its internal issues through more aggressive behaviour towards the region it calls the “near-abroad”, without having to bear the consequences.

What did 2015 bring neighbouring Ukraine? How do you see the coming year developing?

From the very outset, Slovak diplomacy has backed a diplomatic and peaceful resolution of the crisis. We are convinced that the solution to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not a military one. I became State Secretary in May, having served as Slovak Ambassador to Germany where I noted the German view of the Normandy approach to the Ukraine crisis. Unfortunately, peace and stability in neighbouring Ukraine is not inevitable. While 2016 will be an incredibly difficult year for the country, it will have to stay on its reform course and political leaders in Kyiv will have to act more decisively, especially on the economy. We have also seen that the EU needs to assert its role in ensuring the qualitative transformation of Ukraine, and I mean doing more than just providing financial assistance.

2015 was a turbulent year, partly due to the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing conflict. How has the migration crisis affected your portfolio?

I am pleased that the Ministry, with the Prime Minister's authorisation, was able to respond to a request from the NGOs *Výzva k ľudskosti (A Plea for Humanity)* and bring together the non-governmental and governmental sectors to resolve a number of practical issues related to the successful integration of asylum seekers into Slovak society. Together the sectors held a series of meetings enhanced by face-to-face meetings with both sides of the table where I met many people empathetic to the misfortunes of others.

At the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, the international community adopted a new development agenda. How will its implementation affect Slovakia?

The new development agenda is based around 17 sustainable development goals. The goals are universal and apply equally to all UN member states. In addition to the main goal to eliminate poverty and hunger and create decent living conditions in an effort to “leave no-one behind”, the new goals reflect other global challenges, such as maintaining peace and security, creating democratic institutions, building responsible governance and respect for human rights, without which development cannot be achieved. The emphasis is on the need to engage all actors including civil society, the private sector and academics. In Slovakia, the Ministry is responsible for overseeing these new goals, as part of Slovak foreign policy, especially development cooperation. At the national level, the Slovak Government Office is responsible for coordinating *Agenda 2030*.

The Ministry is also responsible for economic diplomacy. What key successes were achieved in this area in 2015?

The prime success was the creation of favourable conditions for pursuing economic and trade interests, including fostering a new wave of foreign direct investment. The greatest success last year, shared by a number of ministries, was convincing the car maker Jaguar Land Rover to build its new plant in Slovakia. The company is owned by Tata Motors, so I am also pleased that this is the first large investment an Indian company has undertaken in Slovakia. Slovakia not only produces the most cars per capita but also more cars overall than Italy or Great Britain, for example.

In order to create conditions for further economic growth, we continued to support business sectors with strong innovation potential. Here I would like to highlight President Kiska's visits to Germany, Estonia, Finland and Bulgaria, attended by start-ups and innovative technological companies as well as the academic and research sectors.



Good preparation is halfway to success

Which issues did the European Union have to face in 2015?

2015 was an extremely difficult year for the European Union. We were confronted with serious and complex challenges – unprecedented migration and refugee crises, terrorist attacks, the destabilization of neighbouring countries and, economically, the difficulties of boosting economic growth and employment. The cohesion of the EU has been repeatedly tested but efforts to seek common European solutions continued. A number of Council of the European Union meetings were devoted to migration – meetings between ministers of foreign affairs, defence and the interior as well as meetings between EU leaders. At the end of October there was a summit with Western Balkan leaders, while in November there was a summit in Valletta attended by African leaders and also the EU–Turkey summit. These demonstrated that the current migration crisis can only be solved in close cooperation with our partners, and only if we consistently implement what has previously been agreed.

Which other issues were discussed at European meetings and summits?

In 2015, Ukraine continued to be a frequent topic of discussion at meetings between EU leaders – the concern was to stabilize the situation in the East, support the reform processes and promote energy security. During Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2015, the EU's relations with Eastern partners received most attention. In May, the Eastern Partnership Summit was held in Riga which determined the direction of future

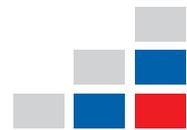
cooperation. The Luxembourg Presidency in the second half of the year can actually be seen as an example of a European exercise in crisis management – the migration crises overshadowed almost all positive initiatives and outcomes, dominating discussions until the end of the year.

How might the changing relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom affect the Slovak EU Council Presidency?

In terms of the preparations for the Presidency, we are naturally interested in how the outcome of the negotiations will affect the setting of the date of the UK referendum on whether it should remain in the EU or leave and other aspects relevant to our Presidency. And as far as the proposed EU reforms are concerned, we would welcome a more competitive Union, a smaller administrative burden for businesses and the fight against the abuse of social security. However, we are sensitive to proposals that would restrict the freedom of movement or social security payments to people from other member states working in the United Kingdom. As a Eurozone member, we have been closely monitoring negotiations on relations between Eurozone members and non-Eurozone members.

In July 2015, you were appointed Government Plenipotentiary for Slovakia's EU Council Presidency. How do you assess the ongoing preparations for the Presidency?

My assessment of the preparations is positive. We have undertaken them seriously and carefully considered what remains to be done. Since my return from Brussels at the end of July 2015, I have devoted



my full attention to coordinating the Presidency preparations. As the main coordinator, we are in close contact with the other ministries, social partners, party leaders, businesses and local government. Weekly meetings are held at the Ministry with the team responsible for the Presidency preparations, where we discuss the organisation, logistics and finances of the Presidency as well as the programme itself. In 2015, the Interdepartmental Coordination Board, comprising state secretaries and other state administrative representative, also convened regularly.

What progress is being made with preparations for the Presidency programme?

In the second half of the year, we were mainly engaged in preparing the Trio programme – the Council of the EU programme for the next 18 months put together by the Presidency Trio countries of Slovakia, the Netherlands and Malta in conjunction with EU officials. The framework of the Trio programme is based around points approved by the Slovak government on 1 July 2015. Negotiations were subsequently held with leaders in Brussels and at the ministerial and state secretary level with our Dutch and Maltese partners and then the final version of the Trio programme was approved by the Council of the EU at the Council for General Affairs meeting on 15 December 2015.

At the beginning of 2016, the government subsequently approved the priorities of the Slovak EU Council Presidency, which will then form the basis of the Presidency programme. It will be approved just before the beginning of our Presidency so as to best reflect the most recent EU developments including legislative ones.

We have often emphasised that our aim is to engage as many actors as possible including the general public in the preparations and the actual Presidency.

In 2016 we will enter the final stage of the Presidency preparations. In your opinion what are the biggest challenges and key moments in the run up to the Presidency? Do you have a “recipe” for success?

The Presidency preparations will be concluded in the first half of the year. They say that good preparation is halfway to success. In terms of timetabling we have to bear in mind the Slovak parliamentary elections in March. After the elections we will have to take best advantage of the time remaining until the Presidency.

I am strongly aware of my responsibility to explain exactly what the EU Council Presidency is and what

falls under the responsibilities of the presiding country and what does not. This is one of my most challenging tasks. The way I see it, there are three basic ingredients in the recipe for the successful handling of the Presidency. They are skilled and professionally trained staff, good realistic priorities and favourable circumstances. I am increasingly aware of the need to calibrate our priorities and ambitions correctly. Other member states and EU institutions have certain expectations of us and we do not want to disappoint them. On the other hand, some previous presidencies found themselves in difficulties because they had overestimated their strengths and had over-ambitious priorities. We are also fully aware that a great deal will depend on how we cope with any unexpected challenges or sudden changes and twists and turns. All presidencies have to deal with the unexpected and the final assessment on the success of our Presidency will depend on our crisis management.

We have to see this EU Council Presidency as an opportunity and take full advantage of it. I strongly believe that if we handle the Presidency successfully we will be much better placed to defend Slovakia’s priorities within the EU in the future.

Slovakia held the V4 Presidency in the first half of 2015 before it passed to the Czech Republic. How do you assess cooperation within the V4 in the past year?

In 2016, we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Visegrad Group and I am pleased to note that this regional group has proved its worth even following our accession to the EU. The V4 is becoming more visible as a partner. We communicate closely with V4 partners on various EU issues, whether they concern the migration crisis, the fight against terrorism, energy security or the UK Prime Minister’s proposals for EU reform. When preparing for sessions of the European Council we are in almost daily contact and regular coordination meetings are held before the sessions – at state secretary, ministerial and prime minister level as well.

Cooperation with non-EU countries using the V4+ format has also taken off. The Slovak V4 Presidency ended in June with the Summit of the Heads of Government of the V4 Countries and France. A meeting between the V4 prime ministers and the President of South Korea took place in December under the auspices of the Czech V4 Presidency.

The V4 is a positive example of regional cooperation in areas of common interest that is an inspiration for others.



■ New building of the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the European Union, Brussels (Photo: MFEA SR)



1 New challenges for European policy

Slovakia continued to fulfil its EU ambition of remaining at the core of European integration by actively helping to shape the future of the EU and by supporting constructive proposals within the existing framework of primary EU law. The Ministry coordinated its European agenda seeking to improve cooperation with other ministries, parliament (the National Council of the Slovak Republic) and the private sector and also to improve the process of drafting position documents, especially given the forthcoming Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2016.

Preparations for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016

In 2015 preparations of the programme for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union were stepped up. It is based on the draft Trio programme and around the following topics:

- employment, growth and competitiveness
- a Union protecting all inhabitants
- Energy Union with progressive climate policy
- freedom, security and justice
- the Union as a strong global player

The priorities of Slovakia's EU Council Presidency will be based on the official Presidency Trio programme. The programme will then be approved by the Slovak government and presented to the public in June 2016. The basis of the programme is currently being prepared and priority areas are being identified. This is still ongoing, but the key areas of Slovakia's EU Council Presidency include:

- Energy Union and energy security

- deepening Economic and Monetary Union
- implementing the *Action plan on building a Capital Markets Union (CMU)* (improving access to capital for small and medium enterprises)
- revising the *Multiannual Financial Framework* – likely to be the most important topic; the goal will be to maintain allocations for all EU programmes, especially cohesion policy
- improving conditions for small and medium enterprises
- developing relations with Eastern Partnership countries and the Western Balkans
- foreign policy – keeping expansion policy on the EU agenda

Preparations for Slovakia's EU Council Presidency include cooperating closely with Presidency Trio partners and EU institutions. Of particular interest are meetings held at the state secretary level involving representatives of EU institutions (held in Valletta, Bratislava and Brussels), the outcome of which is agreement on an innovative eighteen month-long Trio Programme,



Minister Miroslav Lajčák at a meeting with the leaders of seven political parties to discuss the Presidency Trio agenda and to brief them on the time frame and process of approving national priorities, 17 September 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

New challenges for European policy



The fourth Eastern Partnership Summit held in Riga, Latvia on 21–22 May 2015. EU and Eastern Partnership representatives assessed progress achieved since the 2013 Vilnius Summit and set future priorities (Photo: European Union)

laying out the common priorities of the three presidencies. The Trio Programme was approved by the General Affairs Council in December 2015.

The Presidency Trio prepared the priorities of the Slovak EU Council Presidency agenda and produced a strong joint programme including common defence and security policy.

Eastern Partnership

In the first half of 2015 Slovakia held the Presidency of the V4 and thus had the role of coordinating partner countries in performing V4 activities. Partners and EU member states recognised the contribution made by the expanded Bratislava meetings of the V4 and Eastern Partnership at foreign affairs minister level, which helped formulate conclusions from the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit. Slovakia also supported various partners and continued to back the transformation processes in partner countries, particularly Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Slovakia helped thaw relations between the EU and Belarus.

During the Slovak Presidency of the V4, an expanded V4+ meeting involving Eastern Partnership countries from the South Caucasus was held in Bratislava (15 May 2015). This meeting was timed to occur just prior to the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga to provide the South Caucasus with a forum for discussion and, above all, to align expectations of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga.



Minister Lajčák opening the plenary session of the National Convention on the EU. He spoke about the upcoming Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 19 November 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Coordination of European policies

As a Eurozone member, Slovakia advocated maintaining the stability of the common currency and preserving the integrity of the Eurozone and continued to engage with other member states in efforts to identify a solution to the debt crisis.

One of the most crucial and possibly most complex topics that resonated in the second half of the year was the refugee crisis in Europe in all its humanitarian, social and security policy dimensions. Since discussions began, Slovakia has insisted that we need to concentrate on the causes, not just the consequences, of migration, that common efforts should be made to identify all-round solutions, particularly when cooperating with non-EU countries and increasing voluntary returns and readmissions, and, equally importantly that there is a need to strengthen protection of the EU's external borders. The tragic Paris terrorist attacks in November merely served to underline the pressing nature of these tasks. The impact of the attacks is also reflected in the approach adopted at head of state and government level.

Slovakia is an industrial country that is highly dependent on external supplies of energy resources and so its ability to achieve sustainable economic growth and competitiveness is determined by it having access to a reliable, secure and economically-sustainable energy supply. We have therefore engaged in the EU Energy Union project proposed in February 2015 by the European Commission and supported politically in May 2015 by the European Council. Building the Energy Union has become a key EU integration project and thus forms part of the agenda of the Slovak EU Council Presidency.

Slovakia has advocated a consistent position in the negotiations on diversification of energy resources and routes and also on strengthening energy security.

Diversification and energy security were the main driving forces behind the decision to create the energy union. It is in this light that Slovakia interprets the December 2015 conclusions of the European Council confirming that all new energy infrastructure projects must comply with the Third Energy Package and the objectives of Energy Union. Slovakia has long promoted free choice on energy mix in EU countries, so that member states can decide which mix best suits them.

Given the tremendous potential the digital agenda has to offer in terms of economic growth, Slovakia



European Commissioner for Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič at the ninth annual Central European Energy Conference (CEEC 2015) speaking in Bratislava about progress on the Energy Union, 23 November 2015 (Photo: RC SFPA)

backed digital initiatives and measures at the EU level and as a V4 priority during Slovakia's V4 Presidency. We also welcomed the *Strategy for the Digital Single Market for Europe*. Our priorities on implementing the measures in this strategy include eliminating barriers against cross-border e-commerce, simplifying regulatory conditions for start-ups, developing the electronisation of public administration, and improving interoperability and cyber security.



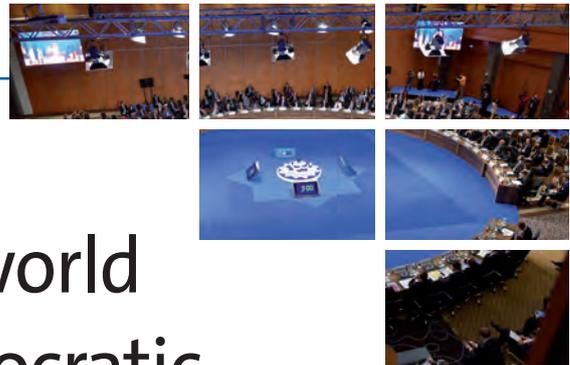
Minister Lajčák awarding a Gold Plaque to Peter Burian, former State Secretary and, since 1 May EU Special Representative for Central Asia, for his contribution to Slovak diplomacy, 29 April 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)



Strengthening security in the region of Central Europe was the primary topic of the meeting between Minister Miroslav Lajčák and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg in Bratislava, 10 September 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

2

Keeping the world safe and democratic in the face of new threats



The deteriorating security situation in the Middle East and in North Africa poses a tremendous security challenge. Fighting in Syria, Libya and Yemen is a continual source of instability and has caused humanitarian crises in the region and beyond.

In relation to irregular migration caused by economic and security factors, key aspects of Slovak foreign policy have included improving economic cooperation and exchanging experiences with countries in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood and other partners in the region. The opening of a Slovak Embassy in Beirut is a reflection of the dynamic developments in the area. Slovakia also backed steps to renew the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations and strengthen mutual trust between the parties and other actors in the region.

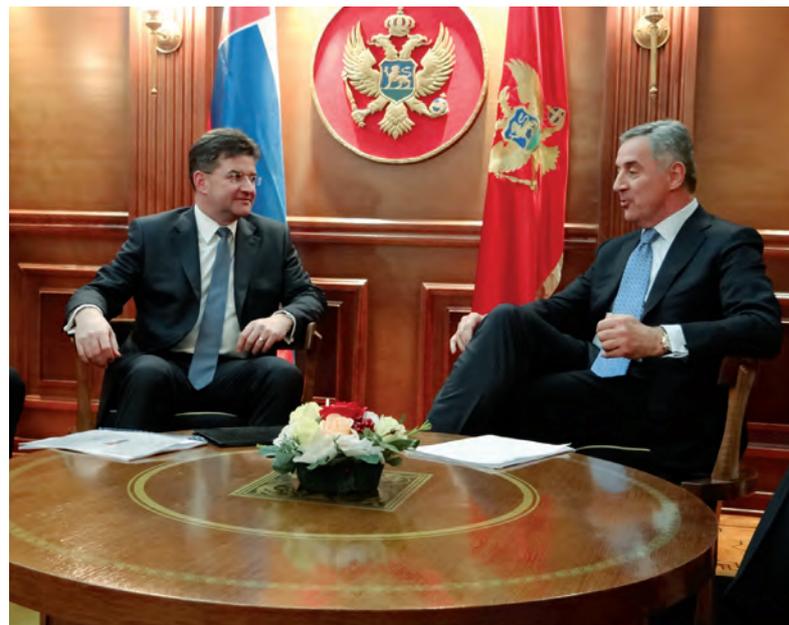
Slovakia sought to utilise new opportunities for bilateral cooperation with Iran once the E3+3 group reached agreement with Iran over its nuclear programme. The renewed diplomatic dialogue began by identifying suitable bilateral economic projects and preparing for ministerial visits.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Being a member of NATO continues to be the main driver behind Slovakia's external security. NATO's primary concern was to implement the decisions reached at the NATO Summit (Wales, September 2014) and take steps to strengthen its southern and especially eastern flanks as part of the *Readiness Action Plan* adopted in response to the crisis in Ukraine. The presidents of the countries on NATO's

eastern flank, including Slovakia, committed to broader NATO adaptation at a meeting in Bucharest on 4 November 2015.

In order to achieve commitments it gave at the Wales Summit, Slovakia increased its defence budget by 0.1 per cent of GDP with a view to raising defence spending levels to 1.6 per cent of GDP by 2020. Slovakia allocated 20 per cent of its total defence budget to the modernisation of military equipment. As part of the *Readiness Action Plan*, Slovakia contributed to NATO's rapid reaction forces and backed the creation



Minister Lajčák meeting Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Đukanović. The main subject of the meeting was Montenegro's NATO integration, 18 November 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

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of new NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) along NATO's eastern border. At an October meeting of NATO defence ministers, the decision was taken to create NFIUs in Slovakia (November 2015) and Hungary, which will be operational in 2016.

Together with several other allies, Slovakia pushed for NATO partnership policy to focus more on supporting stability and strengthening the resilience of partner countries, particularly in the east. This should include better cooperation and coordination between NATO and the EU. One way in which Slovakia assisted Ukraine was by providing four training courses for Ukrainian mine-clearing specialists.

As a long-time proponent of NATO's open door policy, Slovakia was one of the most active members behind the successful push for Montenegro to be invited to join NATO (December 2015). Slovakia continued to support NATO's individualised approach to the three other countries seeking membership – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Macedonia – contingent on their making real progress in fulfilling the accession criteria. Georgia is the best prepared candidate and a very active contributor to NATO operations and continues to receive Slovak backing for recognition of its all-round efforts.

In 2015 the Slovak Embassy in Belgrade began the second year of its mandate as the NATO contact point embassy in Serbia, and conducted a number of promotional activities to increase NATO awareness among the Serbian public.

Following the conclusion of ISAF (end of 2014) – NATO's largest and longest operation in Afghanistan – Slovakia and its allies and partners continued to support the country in 2015 by participating in a NATO-led non-combat advisory mission (*Resolute Support Mission*) providing training and education for Afghan security forces. Slovakia also upheld its commitments to further development by contributing financially 500,000 US dollars. It was also involved in planning NATO's future civilian and military advisor presence in Afghanistan,

Slovakia successfully concluded its term as Chair of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, having contributed to supporting and developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Slovakia was elected to the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons from 2016 to 2018, and will be involved in shaping its future direction and operations.

which will eventually replace the current *Resolute Support Mission*.

EU Common Security and Defence Policy

2015 was a key year for Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) for a number of reasons. The Foreign Affairs Council assessed progress in all CSDP areas in May and adopted guidelines for advancing in key areas. The June meeting of the European Council lent support to the further strengthening and streamlining of CSDP and authorised High Commissioner/Vice-President Mogherini to complete the *EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy*.

One of the major successes of the Slovak V4 Presidency was the adoption of the *Bratislava Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government*, underlining its determination to improve the EU's ability to handle rapidly developing security challenges, such as hybrid threats.

The V4 Battlegroup gained certification in 2015 and is on standby for deployment from the first half of 2016 to protect and defend the interests of EU countries.

In response to the growing refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, Slovakia backed acceleration of the launch of the EUNAVFOR MED naval operation, later renamed *Sophia*, designed to disrupt human trafficking routes into Europe.

Slovakia continued its active engagement, including providing personnel, in EU civilian and military operations, specifically the EUFOR and ALTHEA operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUMM in Georgia, EULEX in Kosovo, EUPOL in Afghanistan and EUBAM in Ukraine and Moldova. It backed the further development of EU partnerships, emphasising cooperation and complementarity between NATO and the UN, and cooperation with countries in the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood.

United Nations (UN)

Minister Lajčák's visit to the UN Headquarters in New York 24 September–3 October 2015 and Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon's subsequent visit to Slovakia 17–20 October 2015 attested to Slovakia's reputation as an active and responsible member of the UN. Slovakia advocated upholding the principles of the UN Charter and strengthening the UN's standing in international



Minister Miroslav Lajčák addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit held in New York, 28 September 2015
(Photo: MFEA SR)

relations, primarily to ensure it can respond effectively to existing global threats. One of Slovakia's priorities within the UN has been and continues to be conflict prevention and mediation. Slovakia engaged in discussions on the situations in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Ukraine, tensions between Sudan and South Sudan, Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo and, just as importantly, events in the Middle East.

For the first time, Slovakia was elected to the Executive Council of the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in September 2015 and will serve on it from 2015 to 2019. Slovakia's membership of the UNWTO Executive Council is an unprecedented opportunity for it to promote Slovak tourism and benefit from its further development.

The year 2015 was the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), whose founders include Slovakia when it was part of former Czechoslovakia. At the UNESCO General Conference (Paris, November 2015), the Leaders Forum, attended by Minister Miroslav Lajčák, affirmed that the organisation's key role was to combat extremism and make headway with *Agenda*

2030 for sustainable development. Slovakia contributed 30,000 euros to support UNESCO in its work protecting the world's cultural heritage, particularly in countries experiencing armed conflict (Iraq, Syria, Libya and Mali). Slovakia's nominees were elected to the International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, the Intergovernmental Council of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme and the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Bagpipe culture was added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2015 in Namibia. This is Slovakia's third entry after the music instrument *Fujara* and its music as well as *Terchová*.

Security Sector Reform

As a keen proponent of security sector reform (SSR), Slovakia sought to promote this subject and seek potential synergies with international organisations. This resulted in high-level meetings at the UN Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform in New York (February 2015, in cooperation with South Africa) and specific recommendations on the UN's approach

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Slovakia's contributions to international crisis management operations and missions 1 November 2015

Operation/Mission	Area of engagement	Number of members of the Slovak armed forces	Number of police experts
NATO			
RSM (<i>Resolute Support Mission</i>)	Afghanistan	50	
UN			
UNFICYP (<i>United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus</i>)	Cyprus	159	3, Ministry of Interior
UNTSO (<i>United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation</i>)	Egypt and Syria	2	
UNSTAMIH/MINUSTAH (<i>United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti</i>)	Haiti		6, Ministry of Interior
EU			
EUFOR ALTHEA (<i>European Union Force Althea</i>)	Bosna and Herzegovina	38	
EUPOL (<i>European Union Police Mission</i>)	Afghanistan		1, Ministry of Interior
EUMM (<i>European Union Monitoring Mission</i>)	Georgia	1	2, Ministry of Interior
EULEX (<i>European Union Rule of Law Mission</i>)	Kosovo		6, Ministry of Interior
EUBAM (<i>European Union Border Assistance Mission</i>)	Moldova and Ukraine		3, Ministry of Interior
EUPOL COPPS (<i>European Union Co-ordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support</i>)	Palestinian Territories		1, Ministry of Interior until June 2015
OSCE			
OSCE SMM in Ukraine (<i>OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine</i>)	Ukraine		2, Ministry of Interior
OSCE Mission to Macedonia	Macedonia		1, Ministry of Interior
OSCE Mission to Tajikistan	Tajikistan		1, Ministry of Interior until August 2015

to strengthening links between SSR and development assistance, including financing SSR out of development funds. This issue was explored at the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends led by Slovakia on achieving the sixteenth Sustainable Development Goal on the UN 2030 Development Agenda (October, New York). The meeting indicated political support for measurable indicators capable of accurately expressing the benefits of SSR for development. In March 2016 the UN Statistical Commission adopted a set of sustainable development goal indicators.

As Chair of the Group of Friends of SSR, Slovakia worked hard with the Serbians to produce internal OSCE guidelines on SSR. At Slovakia's behest a Swiss–Serbian workshop was held on the *Code of Conduct on Political and Military Aspects of Security* (Belgrade, 6–9 October 2015).

Slovakia and the Netherlands initiated a more effective EU approach to SSR, resulting in the Foreign Affairs Council decision to elaborate an EU-wide strategic framework for Security Sector Reform (18 May 2015).

As part of bilateral cooperation, Slovakia shared its reform experiences and lent support to NGO projects. In addition to its diplomatic efforts, Slovakia provided SSR assistance, including practical assistance, to countries in the Western Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro), the Eastern Partnership (Ukraine, Moldova) and in Afghanistan. Slovak soldiers, police officers and customs officials provided training and acted as advisers to local security units and Slovakia made voluntary contributions to related trust funds and other initiatives.

Assistance to Hungary

In total, 50 members of the Slovak Police Force were sent to Hungary to patrol the Hungarian border with Serbia for one month from 20 October 2015 on the basis of an agreement between the Presidium of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic and the National Police Headquarters in Hungary. This group was relieved by another team of 50 police officers on November 20, 2015 for another month of service.



Slovakia's decision to send police officers to Hungary to protect the EU's external border is an expression of V4 solidarity.

Assistance to Slovenia

In response to an official request by the Slovenian Minister of the Interior, addressed to the Czech Minister of Interior as Chair of the V4, for police reinforcements to assist in patrolling the external Schengen border and maintain domestic public order, the Slovak Ministry of Interior sent 20 members of the Slovak Police Force to Slovenia on 6 November 2015.

Increasing the number of Slovak police officers in UN missions

Slovakia demonstrated its willingness to take responsibility for global security by increasing the number of Slovak Police officers participating in UN missions, sending four officers to the UNFICYP mission and six officers to a new assignment, the MINUSTAH mission in Haiti.

OSCE

In the year of the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, Europe's security architecture once again faced serious challenges, both old and new.

In support of the global effort to combat the proliferation of WMD, Slovakia signed an agreement with the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) Organization on mutual cooperation in training and carrying out the committee's work relating to on-site inspections.

Slovakia fulfilled its action plan for becoming a signatory of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The ratification process was completed by Slovak parliament, then signed by the president and deposited with the United Nations, whereby Slovakia acceded to the Convention. Slovakia thus became a contracting party on 1 January 2016.

Slovakia pursued a number of issues at the OSCE including energy security, particularly protecting critical energy infrastructure/networks against malfunction or failure resulting from human error or natural disaster as well as OSCE reform and maintaining the autonomy of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Slovakia was founder of the Group of Friends of SSR of which it is also Chair.

In relation to the crisis in Ukraine, Slovakia worked to de-escalate tensions in the country, including through the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. In an effort to ensure that Slovakia is represented in international organisations and institutions, dozens of Slovak candidates for missions in the field and in OSCE institutions received help and guidance in processing their applications.



Slovak delegation led by Minister of Environment Peter Žiga at the 30 November–12 December 2015 UN Climate Summit in Paris, 30 November 2015 (Photo: Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic)

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Response to global challenges and threats

Combating terrorism

Slovakia joined the broad US-led Global Coalition against Daesh, providing financial support for the coalition's activities and contributing to the UNDP fund for stabilising liberated areas of Iraq.

At international forums (the OSCE, UN and EU), Slovakia supported the exchange of information, knowledge and best practices on the international political and legal framework for combating terrorism and implementation of related UN Security Council resolutions.

Slovakia worked alongside the United States to continue implementing the Joint Action Plan on Cooperation to Counter Nuclear Smuggling to prevent the potential misuse of nuclear materials for terrorist purposes and organised work on preparations for the protocol for the rapid mobilisation of resources and a national response plan.

Slovakia also continued working with US specialists on the theoretical and practical aspects of handling crises resulting from the misuse of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear substances.

Refugee crisis

Slovakia has been a full member of the UNHCR Executive Committee since 2014 and, with the dramatic influx of refugees, worked closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The Slovak government approved the sixth agreement between Slovakia, the UNHCR and IOM on the humanitarian transfer through Slovakia of refugees requiring international protection until the end of 2017 (7 October 2015). Since 2009 Slovakia has also provided capacity for hundreds of refugees, particularly vulnerable refugees such as women and children, in conflict zones and in need of immediate evacuation.

Slovakia helped Austria reduce the overcrowding in its asylum seeker facilities by committing to providing accommodation for a maximum of 500 asylum seekers in Austria, to be relocated to the refugee facility in Gabčíkovo while their asylum cases are reviewed. This commitment was carried out in coordination with the UNHCR and IOM and was acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General when he visited Gabčíkovo (19 October 2015).

Since making progress in humanitarian areas is complex, Slovakia has been monitoring the situation as well as developments in international humanitarian rights. It was therefore essential that Slovakia continues to work more closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in providing humanitarian aid and exchanging information on international humanitarian law, particularly in relation to the Geneva International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent held on 8–10 December 2015.

Environmental protection

Slovakia helped bring about the *Paris Agreement* – the new universal climate change agreement (adopted after intense negotiations on 12 December 2015 at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), designed to ensure global warming remains below the 2°C threshold. It is a compromise that will ensure the rigorous monitoring and gradual reduction of emissions. This agreement is only the beginning of work on a new global climate regime. It also contains many enabling provisions (market mechanisms, financing and emissions monitoring) that will require further decisions to be adopted at the upcoming Climate Conference in Marrakesh (December 2016) where Slovakia will lead the EU during the negotiations.



V4 heads of government meeting the President of France François Hollande in Bratislava. The meeting concluded the Slovak V4 Presidency, 19 June 2015 (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)



Human rights

International dimension

At sessions of the Human Rights Council, the supreme UN human rights body, and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, Slovakia spoke on the regions causing serious human rights concerns (e.g. Syria, North Korea and Ukraine) and on human rights issues such as religious freedom.

Slovakia defended its third report on fulfilling the *Convention against Torture* in Geneva (July). As part of its commitments arising from ratification of international human rights treaties, Slovakia submitted a report to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the implementation of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

At the Council of Europe, Slovakia was involved in organisational reform processes and supported measures that will increase the effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights. Alena Poláčková passed the national selection process and was elected as judge for Slovakia at the European Court of Human Rights (September 2015).

Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muižnieks visited Slovakia in June, where his prime interest was in issues relating to the Roma, disabled persons and LGBTI. His report of the visit was published in October 2015 and contains recommendations for improvement and on how human rights protection can be further improved in Slovakia.

Slovakia worked with the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages when they visited Slovakia in September. Russian and Serbian were recognised as minority languages in Slovakia as defined in Part II of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*.

Domestic dimension

Minister Miroslav Lajčák served as Chair of the Slovak Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality from October 2012 until August 2015. Over this period, the Council became the leading forum and authority on human rights in Slovakia. An in-depth public debate on human rights improved the dialogue between government institutions, non-governmental organisations and the academic community.

From 1 September 2015 competency for drafting and coordinating human rights policies was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs to the Ministry of Justice. The foreign ministry continues to be responsible for providing human rights subsidies and for backing projects that promote, support and protect human rights and freedoms and prevent discrimination, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The Ministry launched a call for grants applications to be awarded mainly to civil society projects supporting human rights activities. A total of 54 projects relating to human rights education and the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups were accepted and received funding totalling 769,500 euros.

The Slovak government approved the *National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and Promotion in Slovakia* (February 2015), thus concluding a more than two-year-long process, conducted in an open participative manner with the direct involvement of the professional and lay public. The strategy is an up-to-date document based on Slovakia's international commitments and reflects the principles underpinning the universal and European conception of the protection of human rights in the twenty-first century.



Minister Lajčák honouring the winners of the third year of the artistic and literary competition *Ludské práva očami detí* (*Human rights through the eyes of children*). The competition promotes the teaching of human rights in Slovak schools, 15 June 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)



Slovak President Andrej Kiska and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko at the welcoming ceremony in Kyiv, 20 May 2015
(Photo: TASR)

3

Neighbourly relations, regional and bilateral cooperation



V4 and the Slovak Presidency

Slovakia successfully completed its fourth annual Presidency of the Visegrad Group in June 2015. It officially handed over the Presidency to its Czech partner in July with the knowledge that the V4 remains in good shape nearly 25 years after its establishment. The second half of our Presidency is testimony to the V4's growing reputation among European and global players interested in regular political dialogue. We initiated meetings using the successful V4+ format at the minister of foreign affairs level, this time including Eastern Partnership countries, the Nordic and Baltic Eight (NB8), and Germany and Turkey. Long-term cooperation with our Balkan partners led to the signing of an agreement between six countries on the creation of the Western Balkans Fund (Prague, November 2015), inspired by the successful track record of the Bratislava-based International Visegrad Fund. The Slovak Presidency initiated a joint project called the V4 Roadshow in Ukraine in support of our eastern neighbour's reform efforts on transferring transformational know-how on decentralisation, energy, civil society, education, the promotion of entrepreneurship etc.

The Slovak Presidency continued to coordinate common V4 positions at the EU level on the pressing issues of climate change, energy security, the digital agenda and the Eastern Partnership. The *Agreement on the Visegrad Patent Institute* was signed in Bratislava and will benefit creative scientists, entrepreneurs and students in central Europe (February 2015). Our Presidency introduced the digital agenda as a new element in V4 cooperation, which resonates strongly at the European and global levels. We also promoted

regional start-ups involving global investors. The idea of creating a common platform for V4 countries in Silicon Valley was presented at the We4Startups event in Palo Alto (April 2015). Another priority of the Slovak Presidency was to raise media awareness of the V4 among the general public. Central government bodies organised roughly 140 events at the political and expert levels during the year-long V4 presidency.



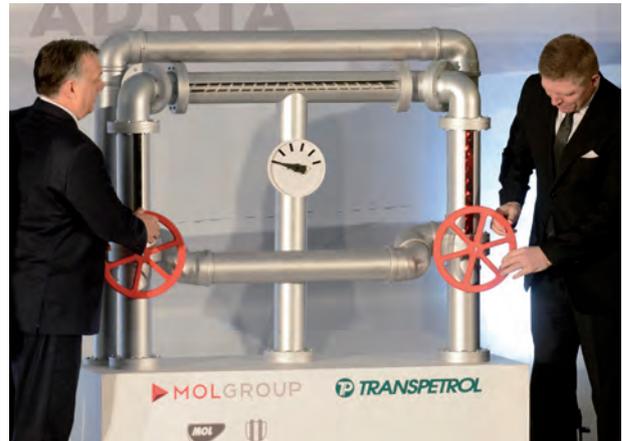
An agreement on the Visegrad Patent Institute was signed by the heads of V4 intellectual property and patent offices. Minister Lajčák and embassy representatives also attended, Bratislava, 26 February 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Neighbourly relations, regional and bilateral cooperation

Slovakia boosted cooperation with the Asian and Pacific regions using the V4 format. Meetings were held in Luxembourg (November 2015) between foreign affairs ministers using the V4+Japan and V4+South Korea formats. A Summit of the Heads of Government of the V4 Countries with the President of the Republic of Korea Park Geun-Hye was held in Prague (December 2015).

Relations with neighbours

In 2015 the special nature of relations with the **Czech Republic** was evident in the frequent meetings, new negotiation formats and the coordination of positions in multilateral forums, particularly the EU and V4. The Third Joint Government Session was held in Valtice, at which mutual interest in deepening cooperation in European policy was confirmed as well as the desire to promote investment, growth, cross-border cooperation, energy, Visegrad and regional cooperation, defence and transport. One important aspect is cooperation in crisis situations, as in the case where assistance was provided to a Slovak citizen returning home following the earthquake in Nepal. The *Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Certificates* will mean that university graduates will no longer have to obtain certified copies, wait for their certificates to be officially recognised and incur the associated costs. Good cooperation continued in defence as was evident in the joint activities of the armed forces, including the Engineer



Prime Minister Robert Fico and Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán opening the gas pipeline network connector. The connector is an important link in the north-south corridor that will enable gas to be transited from Poland to Croatia, 27 March 2015 (Photo: TASR)

Rescuer 2015 joint exercises between the engineering units of the Slovak Armed Forces and the Czech Army.

Slovakia and **Hungary** engaged in a full and constructive dialogue on further developing joint projects on cross-border transport infrastructure and on strengthening energy security. The prime ministers opened the refurbished oil pipeline connecting Slovakia and Hungary that joins the Adria oil pipeline (February 2015). Fifty members of the Slovak Police Force were sent to the Hungarian–Serbian border to protect the EU's



Third Joint Session of the Slovak and Czech Governments held in the south Moravian town of Valtice, 12 May 2015 (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)

external border 20 October 2015 where Slovak police officers assisted by monitoring the field. At the Slovak–Hungarian border (September 2015), the presidents of the two countries commemorated the 20th anniversary of the inclusion of the Caves of Aggtelek Karst and Slovak Karst on the UNESCO world heritage list.

Political dialogue with **Poland** continued with a great deal of communication between presidents, governments and parliaments. In energy, the two countries continued to cooperate over the north-south gas pipeline connection, scheduled to open in 2019, which will help diversify transport routes and strengthen energy security for the two countries and the region generally. In regional transport infrastructure, a new cross-border bridge was constructed over the River Poprad, connecting the towns of Piwniczna-Zdrój and Mníšek nad Popradom. The Euroregions on the Slovak and Polish sides of the High Tatra Mountains continued to work together as part of the 2014–2020 programme. In Kežmarok in October 2015, representatives of the Tatra Euroregion Association based in Kežmarok and the Tatra Euroregion Union based in Novy Targ signed a cross-border cooperation agreement on culture, tourism and the protection of historical landmarks

Slovakia's relations with **Austria** were dominated by coordinated planning of Slovakia's transport infrastructure and the continued successful cooperation over the introduction of a dual education system. Austrian President Heinz Fischer paid an official visit to Slovakia and the prime ministers of the two countries made reciprocal visits. Slovakia provided accommodation for refugees awaiting rulings on their asylum cases to show solidarity with Austria in resolving the migration crisis.

A new format of regional cooperation between Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria (**Slavkov format**) was set up, which Slovakia is interested in developing as a pragmatic, realistic goal-based form of cooperation alongside other proven forms of regional cooperation.

Slovakia continues to support a peaceful resolution to the crisis in **Ukraine** that ensures the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country is respected. It also backed the reform processes related to the *Association Agreement* which will bring Ukraine in line with EU standards. Slovakia also sought to invigorate relations with Ukraine, extending cross-border cooperation on the economy and energy, not simply in relation to the transit of gas and oil but also to encourage business participation in projects in Ukraine. The Slovak president visited Ukraine in May and the prime minister visited in February. During his visit, Prime Minister Fico signed the updated *Agreement*



The prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria meet in the Czech town of Slavkov to adopt the Slavkov Declaration on greater contact between the countries, 29 January 2015 (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)

on *Cross-Border Rail Transport* and the *Protocol on Border Crossings*. Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk visited Slovakia in September. Major topics of the meetings included energy cooperation and inter-parliamentary cooperation. Slovakia provided Ukraine with 2.9 million euros in assistance.

Bilateral cooperation with other EU member states

Germany remained one of Slovakia's strategic political and economic partners in European and bilateral policies



President Andrej Kiska and Minister Miroslav Lajčák meet Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk in Kyiv to discuss the potential for large-scale reverse flow gas into Ukraine, the war in Donbas, visa liberalisation and reform, 20 May 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Neighbourly relations, regional and bilateral cooperation



V4 foreign ministers held meetings with Germany in Bratislava in March. The main topic of discussion was the Ukraine crisis, 23 March 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

in 2015. The close bilateral political dialogue between the two countries was evident in Minister Lajčák's three visits to Germany and the visit by his German counterpart Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Slovakia as part of the V4+Germany+Eastern Partnership meeting. The differing views of the two countries on the refugee issue in Europe did not affect the atmosphere of bilateral relations. Germany's share of foreign trade is the largest of all Slovakia's partners and it continues to play a key role in Slovakia's economic development.



Prime Minister Robert Fico receiving Prime Minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron in Bratislava on the latter's tour of European Union countries, Bratislava, 19 June 2015 (Photo: Andrea Veselá)

2015 saw a revitalisation in **British–Slovak** relations with Slovak President Kiska visiting the United Kingdom and UK Prime Minister David Cameron visiting Slovakia in June 2015, immediately after the UK parliamentary elections in May. These visits laid solid foundations for the development of bilateral relations following the UK elections in May 2015 and for dialogue over British views on EU reforms during the Slovak EU Council Presidency in 2016 and the UK EU Council Presidency in 2017.

Slovakia continued to work with **France** as part of the *Strategic Partnership Action Plan for 2013–2018*, focusing on political cooperation on the economy, trade, energy, justice, interior, administration, science, education and culture. Visits to Slovakia by President François Hollande and Chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly Élisabeth Guigou and National Assembly MPs in the Group of Friends of Slovakia testified to the mutual interest in extending economic cooperation and investment, strengthening the energy and car industries and developing tourism. The ministers of foreign affairs and state secretaries for European affairs maintained close political dialogue. Slovakia expressed solidarity with France following the Paris terrorist attacks in November. Slovakia responded positively to France's request for assistance in security and defence by sending a contingent to the EUTM training mission to Mali.

The extensive political dialogue with **Italy** was attested to by the Slovak President's April visit to Italy, the Chair of the Defence Committee's May visit to the Italian Senate and the July visit by Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to Slovakia. Economic and scientific relations were strengthened by Slovakia's successful presentation at Expo Milan 2015, the establishment of a Slovak–Italian business forum and the promotion of the Slovak spa and tourism industry. Conditions were created to strengthen small and medium enterprises and strategic technical partnerships in the defence industry. Three contracts provided stimulus for collaboration in culture, education, science and technology.

Eastern Europe

Bilateral relations between the **Russian Federation** and Slovakia and other EU members were affected by the complicated situation arising from the armed conflict in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Syria. As an EU member state, Slovakia respected the EU's common sanctions against Russia,



Prime Minister Fico meeting President of France François Hollande in Bratislava. Bilateral meetings were held on Slovak–French relations and current European issues, 19 June 2015 (Photo: Andrea Veselá)

the consequences of which were in a fall in mutual trade. However, political dialogue was maintained, with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov making an official visit to Slovakia and Prime Minister Fico participating in the Moscow commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, which he combined with a working visit. Slovakia sees Russia as an important economic partner. We are seeking to further develop economic cooperation, particularly in energy, since our interests lie in having a long-term and stable energy resource supply that takes good advantage of Slovakia’s potential as a transit country. The Intergovernmental Committee for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation recommenced its activities. Slovakia has a number of unresolved military issues (licences, helicopters) and a number of other projects (cyclotron, broad-gauge track).

In 2015 Slovakia recognised the significant shift in **Belarus’s** position, particularly its work on resolving the crisis in Ukraine and releasing political prisoners. In terms of bilateral relations, the ministers of foreign affairs held two meetings, a delegation from the Slovak parliament visited Minsk, the Intergovernmental Committee for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation held a meeting in Belarus and the foreign ministries of the two countries consulted regularly.

Western Balkans and Turkey

The changing global dynamics further amplified the need for stability and security in the EU’s neighbourhood. Slovakia therefore continued to support the NATO ambitions of Western Balkan countries, assisting with the reform processes in the region. In terms of bilateral relations, Slovakia was careful to see that the high level of political dialogue was reflected in economic cooperation.

Thanks in part to Slovakia’s support, **Montenegro** emerged as leader in the integration processes in the region. The country has begun 20 of the accession negotiation chapters and provisionally completed two of them. Montenegro passed one of its milestones when it hosted the December meeting of NATO foreign affairs ministers and was invited to join NATO.

Slovakia’s long-term special relations with **Serbia** were underlined by Minister Lajčák’s visit to Belgrade (December) and Prime Minister Vučić’s first visit to Slovakia (April). Slovakia gave priority support to launching the first negotiation chapters with Serbia. This will strengthen Belgrade’s resolve to implement the necessary reforms and adopt an EU strategy. In this vein, Slovakia did not block the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and **Kosovo**. We consider the August shift in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina to be an important step, as it is an effective tool for normalising relations.



Minister Lajčák meeting his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. Slovak–Russian relations, Ukraine, the Middle East and migration were discussed at the meeting. Minister Lajčák expressed concern over a documentary on the 1968 invasion, 1 June 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Neighbourly relations, regional and bilateral cooperation



Prime Minister Fico receiving Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić on an official visit to Slovakia, 2 April 2015
(Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)

In relations with **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Macedonia**, Slovakia encouraged the two countries to fulfil their commitments, which are contingent to the creation of a more stable political, economic and social environment, and sought EU engagement to help



Minister Lajčák at the opening plenary session of the National Convention on the EU in Albania, 9 March 2015
(Photo: RC SFPA)

overcome stagnation. Minister Lajčák unveiled a multi-use sports ground in Srebrenica which was constructed with the help of Slovakia which contributed 70,000 euros. The aim is to promote coexistence and strengthen ties among the inhabitants of Srebrenica.

Minister Lajčák visited Tirana (March 2015) in order to encourage **Albania** not to waver in its efforts and to concentrate on adopting and implementing its reforms which must be carried out before EU accession negotiations can begin. During his visit, he spoke at the plenary meeting of the National Convention on the EU in Albania. A particularly important topic of discussion was the establishment of the Western Balkans Fund, modelled on the International Visegrad Fund and based in Tirana.

Slovakia stepped up relations with **Turkey**, as evidenced by the visit of the Turkish president to Slovakia. A business forum was held and two memoranda of understanding (between SARIO and its partner organisation DEIK, and the Slovak Business Agency and the Turkish Association of Small and Medium Enterprises KÖSGEB) were signed during the visit. The organisation of the Sixth Innovation and Technological Forum in Istanbul pointed to increased economic, scientific and technological cooperation. Another major event was the creation of a permanent Slovak–Turkish innovation and technological forum at Bilgi University in Istanbul. At the international level, Slovakia supported dialogue with Turkey, a country key to resolving the refugee crisis.

Transatlantic Relations

Given developments in the Ukraine–Russia conflict, political dialogue with the **United States** was dominated by coordination of EU and US sanctions against Russia, implementation of the Minsk Agreement, supporting the reform efforts of the Ukrainian government and strengthening NATO’s collective defence. Slovakia stepped up communication with the United States regarding Montenegro’s invitation to join NATO (in December) and particularly over Slovakia’s energy security and the modernisation and improved combat readiness of Slovakia’s armed forces, including the holding of joint exercises in Slovakia.

Slovak and US armed forces continued to cooperate in Afghanistan. Slovakia also engaged in the activities of the Global Coalition against Daesh led by the United States.

Slovak diplomacy was exceptionally active in **Latin America and the Caribbean**. Visits were made to Brazil and Mexico – the most important regional players – and to Columbia, Peru, Uruguay, Cuba as well as San Salvador – the most dynamic economies in the region.

Negotiations with Cuba involving Prime Minister Fico accompanied by Minister Lajčák and Finance Minister Peter Kažimír, on 7–10 October and a subsequent visit by Minister of Economy Vazil Hudák were appropriately timed to profit from the significant progress made in EU–Cuba relations since the start of 2014. Slovakia demonstrated that it can effectively rely on its reputation as a proponent of a rational and constructive approach to Cuba. The success of the meetings in Havana, including the signing of an *Agreement on the Settlement of Cuba's Debt*, the conclusion of the amended contractual basis and *Memorandum of Understanding on the Agreement to Construct a Unit at Mariel Thermal Power Plant*, was no doubt partly because they were conducted during a new phase in the significant thaw in relations between the United States and Cuba.



Minister Miroslav Lajčák welcomed President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President Andrej Kiska and Turkish Minister of Economy Nihat Zeybekci to the Ministry, where they jointly addressed delegates of the Slovakia–Turkey business forum, 31 March 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

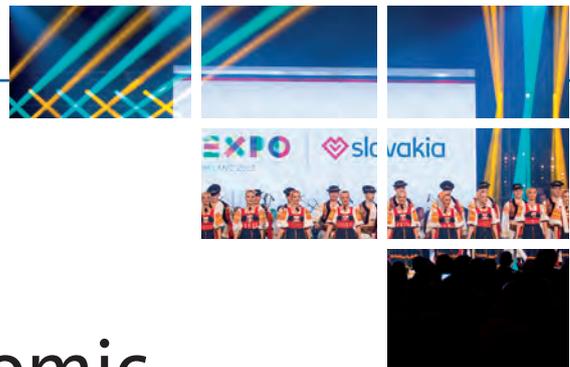


Minister Miroslav Lajčák meeting President of the United States Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama at the UN General Assembly in New York, 28 September 2015 (Photo: Lawrence Jackson)



Slovak National Day at Expo 2015 Milan. Pictured here are President Andrej Kiska and Minister Miroslav Lajčák, 24 June 2015
(Photo: MFEA SR)

4 Success of new economic diplomacy tools



As part of our economic diplomacy, the Ministry met the goals outlined in the *Strategy for External Economic Relations of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2020* relating to research and innovation cooperation abroad, the unified promotion of Slovakia and on trade, politics and investment. Issues such as innovation, promoting the knowledge economy, research and development, dual education and foreign trade opportunities and barriers dominated at events, meetings and negotiations.

In the second half of 2015, the Ministry directed its attention to challenges of a broader nature, including the influx of migrants, the marked fall in oil prices, the economic sanctions against Russia, the economic crisis in China, the international scandal involving the Volkswagen group, the signing of memoranda relating to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and the negative impact of internal economic differences between EU member states on the economic stability of the Eurozone.

The foreign and economic ministries worked with SARIO, the regional branches of the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Slovak diplomatic missions to organise numerous **trade missions** to accompany the President on his visits (United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Estonia and Bulgaria), mainly in relation to innovation, science and research, including education and start-ups. Missions were also held in Slovakia during presidential visits from Romania and Croatia. The emphasis was on business-to-business (B2B) meetings, meetings between chambers of commerce and professional, scientific and educational institutions. Trade missions accompanying the Slovak president to Estonia and Finland were largely related

to the economy and cooperation in innovation, science, research, education, digital services, e-government and cyber security. The first Slovak Innovation Liaison Office (SILO) was opened in Finland.

In addition to the trade missions, a number of **business forums** were also held, including the third Eastern Partnership Business Forum in Riga, the Slovak–Italian Forum at Expo Milan 2015 and the fourth Vienna Energy Forum. Business forums with our traditional trading partners Turkey and Serbia recorded high



Two memoranda of understanding were signed during an official visit by President of Turkey Erdoğan to Slovakia. One was between SARIO and Turkey's DEIK and the other was between the Slovak Business Agency and KÖSGEB, the Turkish Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, 31 March 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Success of new economic diplomacy tools



Prime Minister Robert Fico opening the Permanent Slovakia–Turkey Forum for Science, Innovation and Trade at Bilgi University in Istanbul, 14 May 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

levels of participation. Entrepreneurs from the food, construction and pharmaceutical industries investigated new collaborative opportunities at a forum with Georgia. Vietnamese entrepreneurs from the IT, construction, automotive, energy, agriculture and food industries from various provinces in Vietnam attended the Vietnam–Slovak cooperation forum.

Other successful projects include the Slovakia–Sweden innovation seminar, the CEI–JRC workshop with partners from the Netherlands, Germany and Italy, the CERN–Slovakia Industry and Knowledge Transfer Event workshop with leading representatives from CERN, the economy, education and foreign affairs ministries, chambers of commerce and industry. Slovak stakeholder institutions from the academic sector also attended along with Slovak companies with potential and interest in collaborating with CERN in public procurement and the transfer of knowledge and technology from March of this year. There were also delegates from Switzerland, seminars on the *Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement*

(*CETA*) with Canada and many others. On 30 March the commercial interests of the Irish airline Ryanair and accommodating position adopted by Slovakia resulted in the opening of a new base at M R Štefánik Airport in Bratislava. A total of 200 million US dollars is being invested and the airline will fly to 22 destinations from Slovakia. Ryanair welcomed aboard its eight-millionth passenger to Bratislava in September 2015.

High-level political dialogue with our strategic partners of China, Japan, India and the Republic of Korea and with key countries in Southeast Asia were devoted to supporting collaborative economic, scientific and technological projects.

New economic policy tools were primarily used to identify sales opportunities for Slovak companies in non-European markets. Long-term, this will be essential for Slovakia and was the main motive for effectivising international working trips undertaken by leading officials, and in particular for promoting the potential of small and medium enterprises.

Examples include working visits by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Philippines, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand, on which he was accompanied by business representatives.

Seminars in support of small and medium enterprises and collaboration in science, research and innovation were conducted using the Japan+V4 format. A seminar on the licensing processes was organised at the Ministry to promote the export of defence industry products. Innovation, spa and tourism investment opportunities were presented to a delegation led by a Saudi prince with the aim of identifying common interests between Slovakia and Saudi Arabia.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs made his first ever working trip to Uruguay and Peru since Slovakia was founded and following Slovakia's engagement in different forms of regional cooperation in support of and to diversify Slovak exports. During the visit, Slovakia submitted a request for observer status in the Pacific Alliance, a group of countries (Columbia, Chile, Mexico and Peru) interested in dynamic economic development and close trade. Observer status in the Alliance would provide Slovakia with an opportunity to develop closer contacts and gather more information on the economic development of the members of the Pacific Alliance that could then be provided directly to the business community.

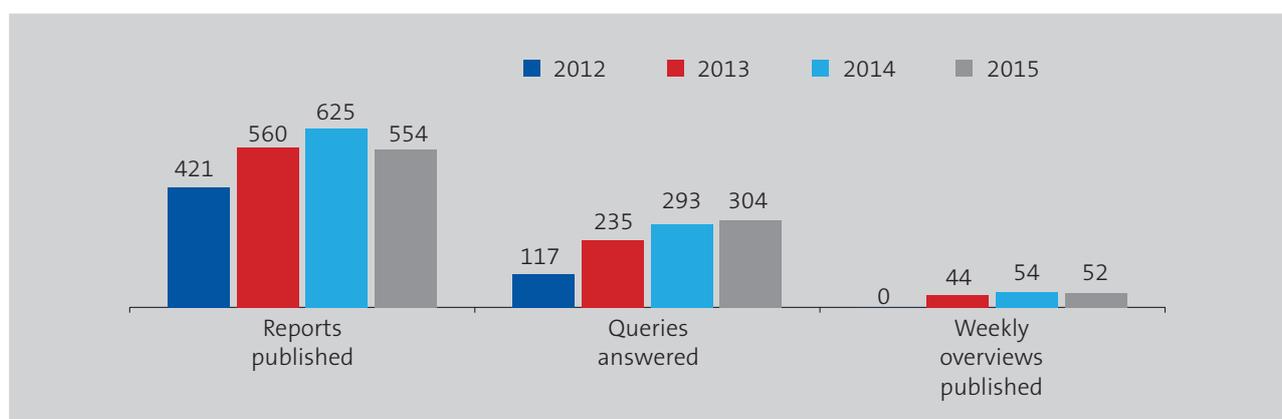
In June Slovakia's foreign economic and trade diplomatic representatives held a meeting underlining the need to improve the knowledge and presentation training of business sector representatives prior to participation in trade missions and business forums. Economic and trade diplomats met up with more than 80 Slovak businesses. The Ministry launched a new tool in 2015, a scheme to promote



Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anifah Aman receiving Minister Miroslav Lajčák on his visit to Malaysia, where they both attended the Slovakia–Malaysia business forum, 25 May 2015 (Photo: MFEA)

economic diplomacy and provide diplomatic missions with funding for economic diplomacy activities. Diplomatic missions and partners from the business sector used these funds in 2015 to support 15 projects in 14 countries (trade missions, cooperative events, innovation forums, etc.).

The Business Centre is a major component in economic diplomacy. The Podnikajme v zahraničí (Doing business abroad) portal and the Weekly Overviews of Economic News from Abroad providing the business community with financial and economic information from



Overview of the Business Centre's activities in 2015 compared to previous years

Success of new economic diplomacy tools



On the first visit by a Slovak government representative to Uruguay, Minister Lajčák and Vice-President of Uruguay Raúl Sendic sign the *Memorandum of Understanding between Foreign Ministries*, 27 October 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

the diplomatic missions were expanded to include information on trade fairs, exhibitions, tenders, trade missions and new international business opportunities, facilitating a number of successful international transactions. The number of economic reports published in 2015 fell in absolute terms owing to greater selectivity in a move to improve quality. The Business Centre was also qualified to handle the ever-increasing number of direct requests from entrepreneurs.

One innovative outcome of the Business Centre's activities was the completion of the first econometric analysis of countries around the world, which identified Slovakia's comparative advantages in commodities compared to other countries and assessed the sales potential of Slovak export goods by territory. This improved company and public administration awareness on potential opportunities for the territorial diversification of Slovak exports.

Energy security

Slovakia's energy security is closely tied to the Energy Union project. The Ministry made use of the synergy of the Slovak V4 Presidency to support its principles (security of energy supplies, a common market,

energy efficiency and de-carbonisation, maintaining technological neutrality and freedom to choose the national energy mix) and highlight the specific characteristics of the Central European situation. Tangible evidence of this was provided by Slovakia's June initiative on the common risk assessment of gas supplies in V4 countries presented at the EU Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council session.

One of the priorities of the Energy Union and Slovak foreign policy is the interconnection of energy markets, and the subsequent strengthening of the north-south corridor whilst making maximum use of existing infrastructure. Slovakia delivered on this objective with the completion of the Slovakia–Hungary gas pipeline connection which began operating on 1 July 2015. The Ministry also backed the construction of the Slovakia–Poland gas pipeline which has been added to the EU list of common interest projects.

One of the Ministry's strategic tasks is to continue pushing for the new Eastwing gas pipeline, which will meet the Energy Union goal to diversify sources and transport routes. Slovakia initiated a memorandum at the May Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga

Joint Intergovernmental and Interdepartmental Committees for Economic Cooperation were held to support joint investment and trade projects. The foreign and economic ministries held committee meetings with Russia, Belarus, China, the United Arab Emirates, India and Serbia. They led to a number of very specific outcomes: the committee with Belarus resulted in the signing of the *Agreement between Slovak Eximbanka and BeleximGarant on the Re-insurance of Export Credits* (the intergovernmental committee with Serbia resulted in support for the implementation of investment projects by Slovak companies, particularly in energy, delivering the following tangible results: the photovoltaic power plant project in Beočin, three biogas stations under construction at Báč, and an already completed project to deliver and implement an information system for the sale of electricity). One outcome from the meeting of the first Joint Economic Committee between the United Arab Emirates and Slovakia is Emirate interest in agriculture, tourism, energy, renewable resources, education, science, research and innovation and aviation. The first meeting of the Slovak–Palestinian Ministerial Committee was held in Bratislava in order to strengthen bilateral cooperation and it was attended by the ministries of culture, education and health of the two countries. The 20th meeting of the Slovakia–Bavaria Committee (April 2015) indicated that Slovakia has now shifted away from simply being the beneficiary of German experience to reciprocating in much of the work.

signed by Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, highlighting their overlapping energy sector interests. Eastring will connect markets in western and south-eastern Europe, increase the energy security of participating countries and improve the effectiveness of the Ukrainian transit system, which remains key to supplying the EU with gas. The economic justification for the new gas pipeline is underlined by its inclusion on the EU list of common interest projects. We also promoted the modernisation of key infrastructure supplying gas to Europe, such as the Ukrainian gas corridor. We consistently supported Ukraine as is evident in January's increase in reverse flow capacity to Ukraine to the current 40 million m³/day or 14.6 billion m³/year. Supplies from Slovakia account for up to 70 per cent of reverse flow supplies, improving Ukraine's energy security and producing significant cost savings. Reverse flow has been very positive for Ukraine during the conflict, ensuring Ukraine

could survive the winter and having a positive impact on gas prices, and not only in Ukraine.

The declared intention to construct the Nord Stream 2.0 gas pipeline fundamentally undermines the principles of EU energy policy. The Ministry actively opposes this project and brought together the countries most affected in support of its position.

Promoting the knowledge economy and innovation, and engaging in global policies

This new area is set out in the *Research and Innovation strategy for the Smart Specialisation of the Slovak Republic* and the *Strategy for External Economic Relations of the Slovak Republic for 2014–2020 for Building a Knowledge Economy and the Innovation and Development of Technologies*. Last year, in addition to the innovation forums held in Slovakia, pioneering



Prime Minister Robert Fico, Minister of Finance Peter Kažimír and Minister Miroslav Lajčák meeting President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers change to ‚Raúl‘ Castro and other senior officials on a visit to the Republic of Cuba. The focal point of the visit was to sign the agreement on the settlement of Cuba's debt to the Slovak Republic, 8 October 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Success of new economic diplomacy tools



Miroslav Lajčák and his counterpart Ana María Sánchez de Ríos on the first official Slovak government visit to Peru, 29 October 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

steps were taken such as the founding of the first Slovak Innovation Liaison Office (SILO) at Espoo Innovation Garden in Finland, the launch of two scientific research twinning projects on the application of advanced material technologies in collaboration with Finnish and Turkish academic partners and the creation of a start-up environment (We4Startups).

The V4 and V4+ formats (We4Startups and the *Memorandum of V4 Understanding for Regional Cooperation in Innovation and Start-ups*) were also used to promote science, research, innovation and innovative technology companies, while the China+16 format was used to promote technology transfer (Second Bratislava Symposium on Innovation, Technological Cooperation and International Technology Transfer, the signing of the *Declaration of Mutual Cooperation in Support of Technology Transfer between China and Central and Eastern European Countries* and to create the 16+1 Virtual Technology Transfer Centre in Bratislava).

However, it was with Finland that Slovakia collaborated most closely in these areas. As part of the EU Horizon 2020 science and research framework programme,

the Ministry facilitated preparations for a unique Centre of Excellence for Advanced Materials Applications. Long-term strategic collaboration between scientific institutions in Slovakia and Finland, namely the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland and the Faculty of Chemistry at Helsinki University, will result in the establishment of a new institute at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava for basic and applied materials research in nanotechnology, biotechnology and biomedicine. The University of Žilina and the Central European Institute of Technology (CEIT) in Žilina signed a memorandum with the innovative Aalto University and VTT Finland on the exchange of students and professors, joint research and the transfer of technology, intelligent transport systems and robotics.

The Ministry was involved in drafting global policies (within the EU and UN) for an information society (WSIS+), raw material and food safety, cyber security and the application of know-how, primarily in relation to water safety (flood defences, protection of drinking water sources, drought prevention and irrigation). It also pursued Slovakia's interests in relation to prevention and the dangers associated with security risks in these areas.

Slovakia helped shape the EU's common positions on the *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP) in negotiations with the United States. The government also devoted effort to ensuring the aims of TTIP and the benefits it would bring Slovakia are such that the treaty will be accepted by the public. Slovakia engaged its expertise in the on-going negotiations on EU free trade agreements with Japan and some MERCOSUR and ASEAN countries. Slovakia's goal is to ensure that the free trade agreements and economic partnerships will help increase the country's exports in its traditional sectors (the car industry, consumer electronics and metallurgy) as well as other areas (energy, services and transport).

Economic diplomacy concentrated on global EU, UN and OECD policies, such as energy security, climate change, water, migration, the knowledge economy and innovation, food safety and cyber security.

International economic and financial organisations and institutions

Sectoral policies pursued by the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development** (OECD) of key interest to Slovakia were improving public administration, combating corruption,



greater engagement in OECD regional initiatives and development assistance.

At Slovakia's behest, the OECD organised an event called Ukraine Day on 16 June which was attended by Minister Miroslav Lajčák. The intention was to focus the attention of OECD member states on the need for greater synergy internationally in support of Ukraine's reform efforts.

Slovakia continued to work with the OECD on preparing *Effective Governance in Slovakia*, a document containing an analysis of public administration in Slovakia and the OECD's recommendations for reform. Given the high levels of unemployment among young Slovaks and the lack of skilled labour on the market, Slovakia collaborated with the OECD to produce the *Review of Vocational Education in Slovakia*.

Slovakia's work within the OECD's energy agencies was highlighted when Marta Žiaková, who chairs the Slovak Nuclear Regulatory Authority, was elected Chair of the Steering Committee of the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), making Slovakia the first V4 country to be represented at the highest level of the NEA. A representative of the International Energy Agency spoke at the ninth CEEC international energy conference held in Bratislava in November 2015 and presented the latest findings of the Agency's flagship publication, *World Energy Outlook 2015*.

In April the **International Investment Bank (IIB)** opened a regional office in Bratislava, serving the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. This is its only branch apart from its headquarters in the Russian Federation.

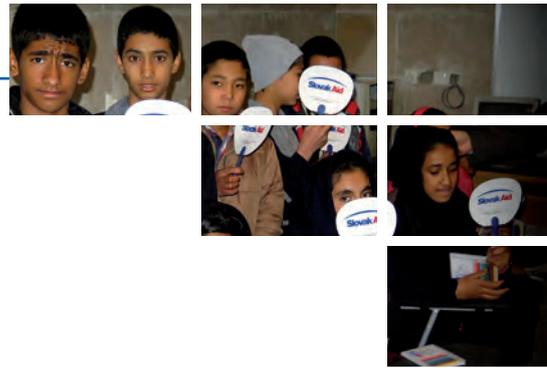


Minister Miroslav Lajčák meeting OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría on Ukraine Day, organised at the Minister's initiative at the OECD in Paris, 16 June 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)



Island of Hope Community Centre project of the Narovinu Centre on Rusinga Island in Kenya is a long-term project funded by SlovakAid (Photo: SAMRS/Eva Klanduchová)

5 Development cooperation



Development cooperation has changed significantly in the last few years, and there is now a need to identify more effective solutions via partnerships with donors, partner countries, civil society, the private and academic sectors, international organisations and other organisations. Slovak development has seen new organisations become involved in its activities and this has required the use of more flexible development cooperation tools capable of delivering sustainable results in partner countries as effectively as possible. Therefore one of the goals the Ministry set in 2015 was to produce a new legislative framework for development cooperation, the *Act on Development Cooperation*, approved by parliament in November 2015. These new tools are being introduced in response to the latest trends and challenges in this area.

The September global development summit held in New York, attended by a delegation led by Minister Lajčák, saw the adoption of the final universal version of the new development agenda up to 2030, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, aimed at all countries not just developing ones. Its primary objective is to eliminate poverty and hunger and create decent living conditions and the emphasis is on maintaining peace and security, creating democratic institutions, good governance and respect for human rights, for without these development is impossible. The goals set out are all interrelated and constitute an indivisible whole; hence, equal attention should be paid to all three dimensions, i.e. economic, social and environmental sustainable development.

In 2015 Slovak development assistance was provided in accordance with the strategic guidelines laid down in the *2014–2018 Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation*. One of its basic principles is that development assistance should be closely tied to the needs of the beneficiary country. All development projects financed through Slovak Official Development Assistance (ODA) must involve effective cooperation with a local partner. In 2015 Slovak ODA was targeted at programme countries. The Ministry provided bilateral ODA of 6,779,769 euros in 2015. The priority countries to receive most Slovak ODA were Kenya and Ukraine.



Development Day 2015 was held at Stará tržnica, the Old Market, in Bratislava on 14 October 2015. The event is held regularly on International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (Photo: Slovak NDGO Platform)

Development cooperation

Slovakia's Strategy for Development Cooperation with Afghanistan in 2014–2018 sets out three main areas of development cooperation in Afghanistan: education, agriculture and security sector reform. However, the deteriorating security situation meant that no new development projects were begun in 2015. The only functional aspects of development cooperation with Afghanistan were the awarding of government scholarships and the use of micro grants to help Afghan children who had become refugees in Iran. These were used to provide courses to help them integrate into society through the acquisition of new skills and education. In 2016 we will need to find other ways to conduct development work in Afghanistan, for instance by contributing to trust funds run by international organisations whose work fulfils ODA priorities.

In 2014–2018 development cooperation with **Kenya** was focused around four main objectives goals: to improve the health of the people of Kenya, to decrease youth unemployment levels, to reduce poverty and improve food safety and to help strengthen the democratic political system, rule of law, good public governance and implement reforms. To these ends, use was made of a wide range of programmes proposed in the mid-term strategy: a small subsidy scheme, micro grants, a volunteer programme and government scholarships. A number of projects approved in previous years continued to be implemented, for instance *Agriculture, Farming and Running a Health Centre to Improve*



IT club teacher and students on a programming course at Sote Hub, Sote ICT: Start-up Development in Kenya as part of a secondary school project run through training companies (Photo: SAMRS)



Herat University students, Basic Bio-processes Laboratory for Food Analysis project at Herat University (Photo: SAMRS)

the Economic and Food Self-Sufficiency of the Community Centre on Rusinga Island. Projects relating to the acquisition of practical work skills in disadvantaged communities continued as well. In 2015 grants were awarded for the following projects: *Improving the Economic Position of Smallholder Farmers in the Busia Region through the Cultivation of Sesame Seeds and by Improving Market Access*, and *Encouraging the Production and Marketing of Fair Trade Oil Crops: Developing the Economic Independence of Smallholder Farmers in Kenya.*

The aims of the *Development Cooperation Strategy with Moldova for 2014–2018* are to support the country in building a stable and functioning democratic state and improving people's living conditions, and there are two priority areas – *Good Public Governance* and *Water and Sanitation*. In 2015 the projects designed to implement this strategy were funded through a small subsidy scheme, micro grants, CETIR, a volunteer programme, Slovak and UNDP cooperation tools and government scholarships.

Examples of the main activities include *Transparent, Financially Healthy and Competitive Local Government in Moldova*, and a human rights education project in schools called *One World*. Other projects, such as *Building Capacity in Local Government and Civil Society in the Gagauzia region* build on previous joint activities involving local government organisations in Moldova and Slovakia. *Improving Sanitation and Hygiene in Hincesti district* is a project that aims to improve the waste water treatment system and water protection inspections in Moldova.

In 2015 a trilateral development project was launched in Moldova in collaboration with the Czech



Embassy in Chisinau. The project area chosen was water and sanitation in educational institutions in the Causeni and Leova districts. Work also continued on CETIR projects and in relation to micro grants for building capacity in emergency rescue services among other things.

The Ministry also provided assistance for Moldova's health system, which is in a deplorable state, by supplying ten ambulances (used but in good condition) and new medical equipment and supplies in 2015. This followed on from efforts begun the previous year with the provision of two emergency rescue vehicles.

Humanitarian aid was exceptionally important in 2015 and Slovakia provided assistance to countries and their populations affected by armed conflict, natural disaster, etc. The crisis caused by the on-going military conflict in Syria and the resulting refugee crisis was the dominant humanitarian issue. More than 843,000 euros of the Ministry's budget was spent funding various kinds of direct humanitarian aid. The Ministry had an important role to play in securing effective coordination between the government and the NGO sector as part of its *A Plea for Humanity* work.

Slovakia is engaged in the preparations for the **World Humanitarian Summit** scheduled for May 2016, 25 years after the last global talks on humanitarian aid. Since then, the world has faced dramatic challenges and we have been unable to respond to them adequately, especially given that the number of people affected by humanitarian crises has nearly doubled over the last decade.

The year 2015 was remarkable in that the European Commission announced the first ever **European Year**

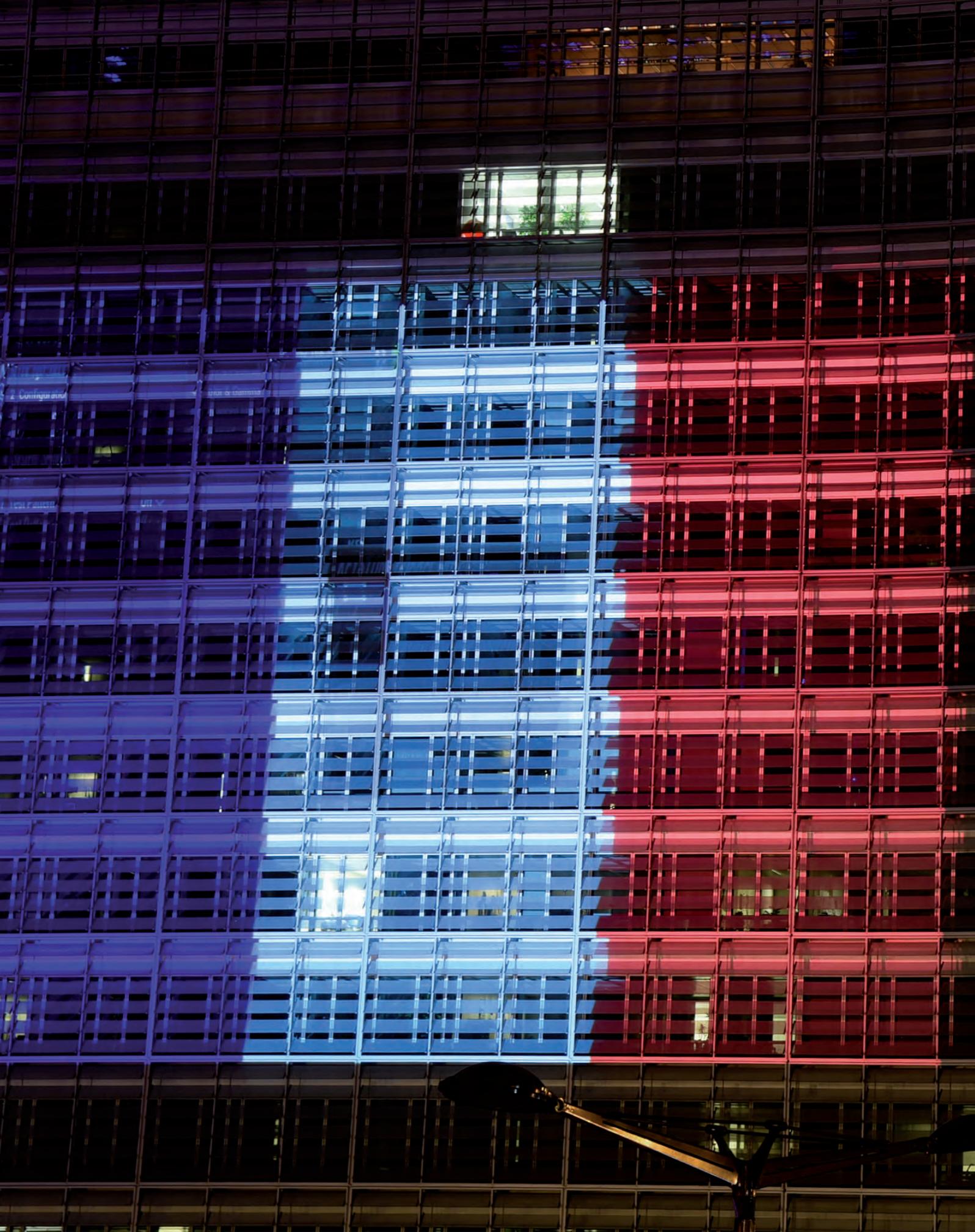


Ambulances for the Moldovan health system and training for Moldovan health workers provided by Slovak emergency rescue services (Photo: SAMRS)

for Development with the motto: *Our world, our dignity, our future*. It was an opportunity to inform the Slovak public about the purposes of EU and Slovak development cooperation and spread awareness of the work performed by the many Slovak volunteers and specialists in developing countries. The message behind the European Year for Development was spread by the Slovak NDGO Platform, its member organisations and development ambassadors, long-standing development worker Marián Čaučík, presenter Adela Banášová and writer Michal Hvorecký at a range of events including Development Day, *Pohoda* Festival, *Dobry trh* market on Jakubovo Square in Bratislava, the Café Európa development debates, Europe Day, a photography competition for amateur and professional photographers, and many more.



Shelters for refugees in Slovenia (Photo: SAMRS)



The new security situation in Europe following the January and November attacks in Paris places new demands on consular services
(Photo: EC Audiovisual Service)



6 New services for the people

The people of Slovakia travel extensively and so require effective protection and assistance when facing an emergency abroad. This means there is demand for accessible, fast, effective, high-quality consular services. We have therefore concentrated on introducing more effective measures and, given the deteriorating security situation in many parts of the world, on providing timely and precautionary information and advice to those travelling abroad.

To achieve this *Act No. 151/2010 on the Foreign Service* was amended from 1 January 2015. The amendment strengthened the legal framework within which the consular service operates to the benefit Slovak citizens and foreigners to include activities that had previously been solely in the power of other bodies.

One of the key ways of bringing consular services closer to Slovak citizens, particularly in larger countries, is the use of a mobile consular service. This was most frequently provided by the Embassy in London which provided mobile consular services on 20 different days in 9 cities in the United Kingdom, responding to 3,957 consular requests and collecting 43,103 euros revenue in fees for services. Mobile consular services were also used by the embassies in Ottawa, Brussels and the consulate general in New York.

The electronisation of consular services was completed, further streamlining consular services for citizens and non-citizens alike.

The consular service gained further practical experience from a pilot project to outsource visa services at the Slovak embassies in Moscow and Kyiv

and general consulate offices in St Petersburg and Uzhhorod. This form of cooperation brings added value for applicants by reducing the time and money expended in obtaining a visa, and so preparations are under way to expand visa centres in the Russian Federation and Ukraine to cover both countries fully.

Slovakia continued to conclude agreements enabling EU member states to issue visas on its behalf in non-EU countries. In addition to the existing agreements with 13 EU member states from 2015 there is an agreement allowing Italy to issue visas in Bangladesh (Dhaka), Bolivia (La Paz), Congo

Coordinated efforts on the part of EU member states to reduce visa obligations and make it easier for citizens to obtain visas led to the signing of further agreements. Visa-free travel for Slovak citizens was expanded to include Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Vanuatu, Trinidad and Tobago, East Timor, the United Arab Emirates and Bialowieza Forest national park in Belarus. The list of Chinese cities permitting 72-hour visa-free transit for Slovak (and EU) citizens now includes the Chinese cities of Xiamen (via Tianhe International Airport) and Wuhan (via Xiamen Gaoqi International Airport). Senegal no longer requires Slovak citizens to hold 90-day visas and Indonesia no longer requires 30-day tourist visas to be obtained at certain border crossings. The agreement with Cuba abolishing visa requirements for holders of diplomatic and service passports entered into force in March 2015. Slovak passport holders now have visa-free travel to 161 countries around the world.

New services for the people



Pasang Dawa Sherpa, Honorary Consul in Kathmandu, being awarded a Ministerial Gold Plaque by Minister Lajčák for the assistance he provided to Slovak nationals in Nepal, 19 May 2015 (Photo: MFEA)

(Brazzaville), Eritrea (Asmara), Oman (Muscat), Sri Lanka (Colombo), Uganda (Kampala), Zambia (Lusaka), Zimbabwe (Harare) and with Switzerland in Nepal (Kathmandu), Tanzania (Dar es Salaam), South Africa (Cape Town), Sudan (Khartoum), Tunisia (Tunis) and Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek). Existing agreements with the Czech Republic, Hungary

and Austria were amended to expand the number of non-EU countries in which they can issue visas on Slovakia's behalf. These are Ethiopia (Addis Ababa), Iraq (Erbil), North Korea (Pyongyang), India (Mumbai), China (Chongqing), the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi) and the United States (Los Angeles). Slovakia currently issues visas on behalf of six member states in eight locations and 13 member states do the same for Slovakia in 53 locations.

The number of Slovak citizens travelling abroad who took the opportunity to register before departure using our Registration Form application quadrupled in 2015 to 55,138 from 17,329 in 2014. Most of those registered travelled to Turkey (12,006), Egypt (6,149), Greece (5,040), Croatia (4,905), Italy (3,057), Bulgaria (2,181), Spain (1,708), Cyprus (1,323), Tunisia (1,267), Thailand (1,113), the United States (1,109), Albania (1,023), France (842), the United Kingdom (836), UAE (733), Morocco (656) and Indonesia (640).

The number of travellers making use of Globetrotter, a travel information application, and whose mobile network operators sent welcoming SMS messages upon arrival in other countries also increased.

The quality of services for citizens abroad was improved via the existing network of consular offices headed



The meeting of honorary consular officers of the Slovak Republic that reviewed current cooperation and discussed the opportunities was addressed by the State Secretary Igor Slobodník, 18 May 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)



The seventh meeting of honorary consular officers of the Slovak Republic was held on 18–20 May 2015. Approximately one hundred honorary consuls from more than forty countries attended the meeting in Slovakia. Honorary consuls met representatives from the foreign, economic and transport ministries, SARIO, the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the regions in addition to mayors (Photo: MFEA SR)

by honorary consular officers (at the end of 2015 there were around 180 compared to 73 previously). By the end of the year, a total of 65 honorary consular officers in 43 countries had issued replacement travel documents.

The sensitive issue of international parental abductions continued to receive attention and requires

a great deal of time, organisation and negotiation and an individualised approach. In many cases progress is slow; nonetheless, in 2015 the Ministry and diplomatic missions concerned worked alongside the Centre for the International Legal Protection of Children and Youth and other organisations to resolve these cases using a whole host of different, and often very specific, measures.

The Ministry in 2015:

- handled 77,921 visa applications (1,629 rejections; 31 appeals against a decision to refuse, cancel or not grant a visa; 1,515 applications handled by embassies of other EU countries),
- issued 43,669 certified documents, copies, signatures, translations or apostilles,
- handled 21,710 applications for passports (14,430), national identification cards (1,332), driving licences (615), replacement travel documents for Slovak citizens (5,324) and for citizens of other EU member states (9).
- processed 115 applications for permanent residency and 1,691 applications for temporary residency,
- processed 1,682 applications for local border traffic permits (for Ukrainian citizens),
- dealt with 12,957 registry requests (special registry, Slovak registry documents, registry exchanges),
- handled 1,032 applications for Slovak Living Abroad status
- provided consular assistance to 107 citizens of other EU member states,
- resolved 2,532 cases involving citizenship,
- assisted in 140 inheritance (probate) matters,
- married 32 couples,
- delivered 6,604 personal items lost abroad to their owners in Slovakia,
- mediated in 1,833 requests from the Slovak judicial authorities seeking legal assistance from abroad,
- requested 950 transcripts from the criminal register,
- recorded 2,539 instances of crimes committed by Slovak citizens abroad and information on 1,188 Slovak citizens detained and imprisoned abroad,
- handled the deaths of 770 Slovak citizens,
- assisted 336 injured and hospitalised citizens,
- provided assistance to 15 victims of human trafficking,
- provided emergency assistance in 4,701 cases,
- answered 77,653 emails,
- and performed an additional 9,160 consular activities.



SLOVAKIA

inspiration for a more
beautiful, more
interesting
and safer world



Cover of the new brochure, *Slovakia: Inspiration for a more beautiful, more interesting and safer world*, one of the outcomes of the work conducted by the Working Group for the Coordinated Promotion of Slovakia Abroad (Picture: MFEA SR)

7

Public and cultural diplomacy



As part of public diplomacy, the Ministry continued to evolve its public relations at home and abroad, including extensive use of social networks and other electronic media. The Ministry maintained dialogue with NGOs, lending support to projects designed to inform the wider public about specialist topics. A number of activities were organised in relation to secondary school and university students in Slovakia, including lectures, internships, advisory sessions and a successful public competition to create the logo for the first ever Slovak EU Council Presidency. In seeking to develop relations with Slovaks who represent the country abroad, the Ministry continued its tradition of appointing Goodwill Ambassadors from among those who use their talents to become exceptionally successful abroad and of maintaining a dialogue with successful athletes representing Slovakia. International public relations also continued to evolve with the completion of projects of a historical and promotional nature reflecting major events in Slovakia.

The Slovakia brand and coordinating the promotion of a unified image of Slovakia abroad

The Ministry built on the conceptual process of preparing the Slovakia brand as part of its efforts to coordinate the promotion of a unified image of Slovakia abroad. Having analysed discussions among the public and experts on the kind of brand desired, the Ministry worked with partners from state institutions and the expert community to launch a public tender for the creation of the Slovakia brand. The preparation phase of creating the Slovakia

brand came to a formal end and once the public tender stage has been completed, the next stage will be to incorporate the brand into its PR work. The Ministry also launched an inter-ministerial discussion on how to systematically promote Slovakia abroad. The Working Group for Coordinating the Promotion of Slovakia Abroad continued to work well as a platform for communicating and coordinating the PR work of all the stakeholders in the process. Members of the group attended Expo 2015 in Milan where they successfully promoted Slovakia.



Slovak Pavilion at Milan EXPO 2015
(Photo: MFEA SR)

Public and cultural diplomacy



The Christmas meeting between Minister Lajčák and NGO representatives is a regular platform for holding informal discussion with the Ministry's important partners, 8 December 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)

In 2015 three main exhibitions were organised, intended primarily for diplomatic missions and Slovak institutions, commemorating the founding of the UN, the end of World War II and the Year of Ľudovít Štúr.

In cooperation with the Institute of History at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Ministry organised an exhibition to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN, the opening of which was launched in the Slovak parliament by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Minister Lajčák. The international public sees Slovakia as part of former Czechoslovakia, as a founding member of the UN and co-author of the UN Charter, drawn up with the help of Slovak Ján Papánek, the first Czechoslovak Ambassador to the UN.

The Ministry organised an exhibition *Slovak Memorials to Victims of the World War II* to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II which was presented in five languages at 37 Slovak diplomatic missions abroad.

2015 was the 200th anniversary of the birth Ľudovít Štúr and so the Slovak government declared it the Year of Ľudovít Štúr. The Ministry worked with his home town of Uhrovec to produce an exhibition entitled *Milestones in the Life of Ľudovít Štúr*.

During the Slovak presidency, the Central Europe Culture Platform (V4, Austria and Slovenia) organised an exhibition in Norway called *How Central Europe Helps the World* about how member states provide



SLOVAK MEMORIALS TO VICTIMS OF WORLD WAR II

Introductory panel of the *Slovak Memorials to Victims of the World War II* in Slovakia exhibition hosted by 37 diplomatic missions abroad (Photo: MFEA SR)



Opening of the *Slovak Memorials to Victims of the World War II* exhibition at the Slovak Institute in Moscow, attended by Red Army veterans (Photo: MFEA SR)

development assistance to people in countries around the world affected by humanitarian crisis, military conflict and natural catastrophe. A travelling exhibition was opened in Latvia and Finland and more promotional activities are planned for 2016.

In addition to this, Slovak diplomatic missions and Slovak institutes held a wide range of events involving the arts, film, music, science and literature.

Exhibitions

- *How Central Europe Helps the World* Central Europe Culture Platform photography exhibition on the development assistance provided by EU member states. Oslo, Helsinki, Riga
- *Slovak Press Photo* – Winning Photos from the 3rd Annual Journalism Competition – New York
- Photographer Martin Kállay at the BBLA Gallery and Peter Kašpar at the Lyons Gallery – New York
- *Encyclopaedia of European photography in the 20th century (1939–1969)*, Central European House of Photography in Bratislava – Riga

Concerts

- *Friendship concert in Uzhhorod* – Cooperation between the Prešov and Košice Self-Governing Regions and Ukraine
- Slovak folk and fujara music exhibition in Bukhara, Khiva, Tashkent and Dushanbe
- *Melodies of the East* – folk festival in Samarkand

- Juraj Filas Requiem at Carnegie Hall in New York
- Young Slovak violin virtuoso Filip Jančík: Rock in Violin and his group – Kuwait;
- Violin virtuoso Dalibor Karvaj – solo recitals at Roudaku Hall, concerts at Vahdat Hall in Tehran and two master classes with the Tehran Symphony Orchestra
- *Songs from Slovenia and Slovakia* – classical music concert at the National Opera of Greece in Athens
- Maroš Bango Concert on Slovak Constitution Day in Stockholm
- 17th year of the Slovak music and song festival in Croatia, *Keď sa ruža rozvíjala (When the rose unfolded)*
- Island of Stories, international literary and music festival in Sardinia

Theatre

The 55th MESS international theatre festival in Sarajevo. Žilina Puppet Theatre represented Slovakia at this event.

Film

- International CinéDoc documentary film festival in Tbilisi in cooperation with the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (VŠMÚ) and a screening of the film *Comeback* by director Miro Remo
- EU delegation in Tashkent in cooperation with EU member state embassies in Uzbekistan and the Uzbekkino national agency organised the 3rd annual European Film Festival in Tashkent, *Nicky's*



Minister Lajčák meets athletes who represent Slovakia: Peter Sagan, a world champion cyclist, and Matej Tóth, world champion race walker (Photo: MFEA SR)



Israeli students, delegates of the *Young Israeli Ambassadors* programme, being received by State Secretary Igor Slobodník, 28 October 2015
(Photo: MFEA SR)

Family, a film directed by Matej Mináč. A total of 15 EU countries were involved.

- Only one Slovak film, *Bathory*, was screened at the V4 film festival at the Embassy in Washington.
- Screening of the documentary film *Veterans of World War II* by director Dušan Hudec accompanied by an

exhibition of photographs, *Unknown Heroes* – Washington

- 11th year of the Europe Days European film festival, screening of *Tomas and the Falcon King* – Brazil (the only Slovak film at the festival)
- 24th year of the European Film Festival in Kenya (EFF 2015) in Nairobi, then in Mombasa, Kisumu and Eldoret. *Fairy Tale* (film), film trailer and music video clip *Love in your soul* by Celeste Buckingham;
- Czech and Slovak Film Festival in Melbourne, third year – Melbourne, Perth, Sydney – screened the films: *Children*, *Fair play*, *38*, *The Seven Ravens*, *In Silence*, *Pictures of the Old World*, *Organ* and *Sitting on a Branch*, *Enjoying Myself*



State Secretary Peter Javorčík discusses the first Slovak EU Council Presidency with students at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, 9 April 2015
(Photo: MFEA SR)

Literature

- Presentation of the first anthology of Slovak literature, *The Dedalus Book of Slovak Literature*, in English – selection of stories and examples of work by Slovak artists from the late 19th century to the present day – London
- Sixth year of the Berson Europinoy poetry recital – Manila, Philippines, with Slovakia participating for the first time

Other

- Belarus: unveiling of the refurbished memorial to Captain Ján Nálepka



- Slovak gastronomy week in Recife – Embassy in Brazil
- Slovakia at the Busan International Travel Fair, the second largest trade fair of its kind in Korea, Embassy in Seoul;

Slovaks living abroad

The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad was mainly concerned with issuing Foreign Slovak Certificates in cooperation with the Slovak Ministry of Interior in accordance with the *National Policy of the Slovak Republic on Slovaks Living Abroad*, particularly in relation to Ukraine given the conflict in the eastern part of the country.

A major document approved by the Slovak government was the *Report on National Policy on Slovaks Living Abroad and Providing State Assistance to Slovaks Living Abroad for 2014* and the draft programme for *National Policy on Slovaks Living Abroad in 2016*.

Agreements

The number of cultural agreements that extend beyond the responsibilities of any one ministry rose in 2015 to include:

Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Italian Republic on Cooperation in Culture, Education, Science and Technology and the Programme of Cooperation in Education, Culture and Sport between the Slovak Republic and Spain for 2016–2019 progressing to its final phase prior to signature.

An implementation programme for cooperation in culture, education, sport and tourism between the Slovak and Korean ministries of foreign affairs relating to the *Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Korea on Cooperation in Culture, Education and Tourism* was signed in Seoul in October 2007.

Work on the draft *National Policy of the Slovak Republic on Slovaks Living Abroad 2016–2020* was completed and approved by the Slovak government in October.



Minister Miroslav Lajčák with the Goodwill Ambassador laureates for 2015: Barbora Bobulová, an internationally acclaimed actress who lives and works in Italy, Juraj Hromkovič, a professor of computer sciences and information studies theory at the prestigious Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, and Ján Mojto, a leading European television and film producer who lives and works in Germany, 9 December 2015 (Photo: MFEA SR)



■ New building in Ministry's complex on Pražská Ulica in Bratislava
(Photo: MFEA SR)

8

Professional foreign service in the run up to the 2016 Slovak EU Council Presidency



Professional foreign service

Slovakia has a total of **89 diplomatic missions**, consisting of 64 embassies, seven missions with international organisations, eight general consulates, an embassy branch office, the Slovak Economic and Cultural Office and eight Slovak Institutes.

In August the Slovak government decided to close its embassies in Iraq and Syria due to the armed conflict. The temporary office of the Slovak Embassy in Damascus in Beirut became a full embassy in September, serving Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, until Slovakia's accreditation in relation to Iraq is resolved. The Slovak Embassy in Tripoli remains suspended for security reasons.

Human resources and staff training

Human resources management continued to improve human resources in the Slovak foreign service through the careful selection of new employees, changes to the organisational structure and training to improve the effectiveness of staff and work processes. The Ministry's new internal organisational structure includes an autonomous Secretariat for Slovakia's EU Council Presidency, opened in January to optimise the running of the department and ensure that foreign

policy is conducted professionally, including the work associated with the preparations for Slovakia's first EU Council Presidency.

The Ministry filled its civil service vacancies, primarily through the use of external selection procedures. The Ministry has long been popular with applicants as is demonstrated by the fact that more than 200 external candidates applied for ten civil service vacancies, with the best qualified and most suitable being selected. With the upcoming Slovak EU Council Presidency, additional temporary staffing was recruited using transparent external selection procedures for positions in the affected Ministry departments.

Staff training priorities are to prepare civil service employees for the Presidency. Much of the national programme sponsored by the European Social Fund, *Improving the Performance of State Administration Employees Working on the EU Preparations for Slovakia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union*, has been completed. The future chairs and deputy chairs of the Council of the European Union working groups, departmental experts and European policy coordinators began attending from March 2014. A total of 1,206 employees from 27 ministries and other state institutions applied for the programme, and 1,092 have completed it.

The Ministry provided continuous professional staff training through the following programmes:

- fourth year of the accredited *Preparation for Economic Diplomacy Work Abroad – 2015* programme, completed by 27 employees;
- first year of the specialist *Current Trends in Development and Preparations for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union* training programme, completed by 14 civil service employees;
- second year of induction training combined with rotation, completed by eight young diplomats;
- group and individual pre-trip training, completed by 96 employees;
- 28 professional training courses and four conferences in Slovakia on the rapid changes in IT and elevated security threats, on improving professional staff skills relating to changes in legislation, particularly in public procurement, management of state assets, audit and financial management, attended by 62 employees as part of their continuing education;
- 34 diplomats attended a total of 31 foreign diplomatic courses;
- 75 employees attended language classes at the Ministry.

2015 was a key year in the continued cooperation between Slovakia and the **Organisation internationale de la Francophonie** (OIF). In October Slovakia and the OIF signed a Memorandum of Partnership for 2016 to 2018 committing the OIF to co-financing group and one-to-one French lessons, professional seminars and intensive one-to-one language trips for Slovak public administration management. Last year more than 150 state employees participated in the *National Plan for French Lessons and Education in French*.

The Ministry accepted 215 university students on short-term work internships, 110 of whom completed their internships at the Ministry's headquarters and 105 at the diplomatic missions. Two interns were recruited nationally for a European External Action Service programme offering young professionals internships at EU delegations around the world (Junior Professionals in Delegations).

Ministry expenditure in 2015

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

Programmes:

Foreign relations	106,320,859
Managing programmes.....	38,028,709
Gabčíkovo Nagymaros legal dispute.....	503
Cooperation with the third sector.....	113,798
Staff education and training.....	57,166
Drafting and implementation of human rights policies.....	788,535
Reimbursement of expenditure from Technical Assistance Operational Programme.....	134,285
Diplomatic representation of Slovakia abroad.....	62,950,229
Cultural representation of Slovakia abroad.....	1,095,859
Staff employed locally abroad.....	3,151,775
Assistance for compatriots abroad	1,758,911
Inter-ministerial programmes:	
Official development assistance – Ministry	5,118,142
Slovakia's EU Council Presidency 2016	5,970,593
Human resources	1,051,450
Electronisation of Ministry services	9,596,916
Slovak contributions to international organisations – Ministry	22,926,842
Total expenditure	152,743,713