

Foreign and European Policy in 2020

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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Crisis, resilience and recovery



The world will remember 2020 as the year of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a major impact on virtually all areas of life, from healthcare, education, economy to sport and the arts. The shifts in foreign and security policy will perhaps emerge more gradually, and we may only become fully aware of them once the crisis has ended. However, we have already witnessed some of the effects. Multilateralism has been weakened. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of the current international order. A natural response has been for states to emphasise protectionist, often unilateral measures, strengthening their own resilience and self-sufficiency.

The pandemic will also redefine economic relations. We have long known that China will become the world's largest economy sooner or later. It is now obvious that, as a result of the pandemic, this moment will come a little earlier than expected.

Last but not least, the pandemic has underlined the importance of the digital sphere, not just its technological sophistication or the security of hardware and software, but also the content. When we come to characterise the consequences of the pandemic one day, one of the main attributes should be the *infodemic*.

The situation was not easy in our field either. The political West has been facing a difficult period. The United Kingdom left the EU, we have been witnessing tensions on the eastern flank of the Alliance and a rocky presidential handover in the western flank. Both the EU and NATO are aware of the need to respond to this. NATO has gone through a *reflection process* and has been considering revising its Strategic Concept, while the European Union has been preparing its Strategic Compass. It should be noted that despite the turbulence, both the European Union and NATO continue to do

well in fulfilling their main tasks. However, it is important that these conceptual processes succeed and bring what the Euro-Atlantic area needs most – strategic unity – both within the EU and across the Atlantic Ocean.

It is too early to draw lessons from the pandemic as we are now in the middle of the second wave, but at least in two areas we can come to important conclusions:

Firstly, the pandemic highlighted the value of good neighbourly relations. We already knew that, but the pandemic has revealed just how closely interconnected we are. That applies not only to regional or global issues, but first and foremost to the everyday reality of cross-border mobility and, in particular, many individual destinies, which are intertwined with the open borders of a unified Europe. It is also this experience that has strengthened my conviction that foreign policy begins in the neighbourhood, and that the starting point of any diplomacy is to cultivate good and close neighbourly relations.

Secondly, we have realised just how much we benefit from European integration and how easily we can lose it. This second point – the fragility of the European Union and its four fundamental freedoms – was particularly evident in the early stages of the crisis, when the borders became closed overnight. But we also experienced something more important – the enormous power of the European Union – once its coordination abilities were in full flow and, above all, when we were able to agree on a recovery plan. Europe thus became the only region in the world where the post-pandemic recovery has quite literally taken on a pan-continental dimension. I am truly glad that Slovakia is part of this effort, and that we do not have to rely only on ourselves in times of crisis and we can participate in the recovery plan together with the other 26 EU member states. Nowhere else in the world can gov-

Our ability to both understand the crisis as an opportunity for structural changes and to grasp that opportunity will determine whether we emerge from the crisis weakened or strengthened.

ernments rely on this kind of external help. Nonetheless, it is equally important that, in addition to the financial cushion, the EU has a vision of how to use it to modernise Europe. This vision lies in the green and digital transformations and, if we get this right, there is a chance that the EU will, after a decade of crisis, finally break out of the vicious circle it became trapped in shortly after the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

The year 2020 was an unprecedented one in Slovak diplomacy and for other countries too. We have passed the test of our ability to provide citizens with adequate services in a crisis of global scope. The repatriations represented the single biggest crisis management operation since the founding of the Slovak Republic. Coping with international mobility, a most complex issue, and the dynamically changing cross-border regimes were equally big challenges.

The year 2020 was special in another way for Slovak diplomacy, as it was the first year of the new government, which brought a new emphasis to Slovak foreign policy. We made an effort to clarify our foreign policy values internationally, at the heart of which lie respect for human rights, international law and the rule of law. And we did so consistently in our bilateral, regional and multilateral relations with all countries from Venezuela to Belarus and China. We also placed Slovak and European interests at the centre of our endeavours and consistently promoted them in areas that are extremely important and even sensitive for Slovak foreign policy, such as Visegrad cooperation and EU enlargement.

This position is also reflected in the new Security Strategy, which sets out our assessment of the security environment, identifies our vital interests, and the partners and allies with whom we want to promote this vision. It also sets out how we want to ensure the security of our citizens in an international environment that is changing dynamically and dramatically.

We also worked conceptually on our other foreign policy instruments. The success stories of our innovators such as Chirana and MultiplexDX have filled me with joy, just like the ability of our economic diplomacy and development cooperation to multiply these success stories.

Our response to the growing disinformation was not just to internally strengthen our departments dealing with strategic communication and combating hybrid threats but also to launch new projects, such as HlbokáOnline. As I see it, cultural diplomacy plays an equally important role in disseminating positive narratives, and we hope to draw on this potential in 2021, when the pandemic will hopefully be fading and we will be able to shift culture away from the virtual world and back into the real one.

In these turbulent times, it is increasingly important to pursue a consistent foreign policy. The direction of our foreign policy is clear, and I summarised it in the ten key principles of the foreign policy I presented in the autumn of 2020 to the Slovak parliament: 1. A clearly geopolitically anchored Slovakia; 2. Good relationships with our neighbours; 3. A strong and relevant Europe, with EU and NATO unity at its core; 4. Promoting effective multilateralism and respect for international law; 5. Strong partnerships; 6. Effective consular assistance and crisis management; 7. Effective strategic communication; 8. Successful economic diplomacy; 9. Modern development cooperation and humanitarian aid; 10. Strong cultural diplomacy.

2020 was the year of the pandemic, but it would be a mistake to see this year just as a crisis year. The pandemic tested our resilience, revealed our vulnerabilities and shortcomings, but it also created an opportunity for a substantial recovery. That is the key take-away of 2020. Our ability to both understand the crisis as an opportunity for structural changes and to grasp that opportunity will determine whether we emerge from the crisis weakened or strengthened.



Ivan Korčok
Minister of Foreign and European
Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Martin Klus

State Secretary



Emergencies require extraordinary efforts. Immediately after taking up the position of State Secretary, you became responsible at the Ministry for resolving the critical situation regarding the border closures and the thousands of Slovak citizens stranded abroad. What did the Ministry have to tackle at the beginning of the pandemic?

There were moments when we lurched from obstacle to obstacle. The invisible virus paralysed life both at the Ministry and the embassies abroad, and this was obvious to me as head of the Ministry crisis team. An open Europe without borders is our home, and suddenly it was closed to us. At that moment we truly understood just how many of our citizens were abroad, even in the remotest places on Earth. For the first time, young people discovered what border checks and restrictions on movement really mean. However, even in the most critical moments, we were able to adapt to the crisis and carry out our primary duty – to help our citizens.

What forms of assistance did the Ministry decide on, often after several-hour marathon meetings with the Expert Councilium, the Pandemic Commission, the Central Crisis Team and the government?

We monitored the situation across the border virtually around-the-clock, communicating with our neighbouring countries as to what was working and what to avoid, and in particular, we kept our citizens up-to-date on all the important things. At that time we and other countries were faced with an unprecedented situation so we weren't always able to act promptly and we made mistakes. Nevertheless, as a result of our teamwork, whether at the Ministry itself or at the embassies, the repatriation was handled well. In total, with our help, almost 7,000 people in more than a hundred countries were able to return to Slovakia. The introduction of so-called green lanes for the cross-border transportation

of goods was one of the steps that demonstrated the importance of cooperation within the EU. Back at home, and step by step, we attempted to remove the small, often bureaucratic, obstacles unnecessarily complicating the already difficult daily lives of citizens.

Because of the pandemic, instead of face-to-face meetings, diplomats and leaders had dozens of video conferences, hundreds of phone calls and thousands of emails or text messages. Has Slovak foreign policy and diplomacy succeeded in introducing new working conditions?

In terms of regional cooperation, you could actually say the coronavirus has given us a 'second wind'. The coronavirus pandemic tested the quality of our relations with our neighbours. There was mutual understanding and expressions of solidarity when Slovak citizens stuck abroad returned home, and we maintained mobility for cross-border workers and coordinated exemptions for students and non-resident cross-border workers. Besides the usual Visegrad Group (V4) platform, the Slavkov format (S3), which is a much more recent group of three Central European countries – Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria – has shown great potential. Denmark and Estonia were inspirational to us, and not just in terms of slowing the spread of the coronavirus. But we didn't hesitate to draw on experiences in countries outside Europe. When we felt the need to consult on what to do next, especially in relation to the pandemic, we contacted our partners in Australia, Japan and Singapore, who shared their experiences with us.

From the very beginning, Slovakia has supported a coordinated approach by EU member states, sharing both epidemiological data and 'best practices' in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus. Can you please give us some examples of this kind of cooperation between countries?

We cannot simply return to the days before the corona crisis – we need a ‘new normal.’

The first wave of the pandemic caught us unprepared, but during the second wave cooperation was more effective in many areas. The coordination was built around three main objectives. We wanted to streamline the many different rules across countries as much as possible, to avoid unnecessarily closing borders and to maintain the right of citizens to move freely across the EU. And although the spread of Covid-19 often interfered with our plans, we reached an agreement on the mutual recognition of tests, organised the joint purchase and distribution of vaccines, and a single set of ‘pandemic traffic lights’. These examples of successful coordination within the European Union are one response to the sceptics who tell us that the EU does nothing for its citizens.

One important signal to EU citizens that the member states are able to agree and act even in difficult times was the compromise agreement on the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027 and the related recovery plan, known as Next Generation EU. What’s your view on this unprecedented rescue package?

History will remember the July 2020 European Council as a four-day marathon of difficult negotiations. We came home from Brussels with a ground-breaking agreement, thanks to which we gained significantly more than we lost. Slovakia pushed for the traditional policies to have a strong role, and maintained a strong share of the budget. We have to strengthen the common market, especially in the digital and climate fields, in order to maintain the EU’s competitiveness. We have to care about what state the planet will be in when we pass it on to future generations. That’s why we welcomed the ambitious agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the EU, and we are ready to achieve this goal step by step. Climate ambitions cannot simply be allowed to become a burden, but must present opportunities for development as well. In order to achieve, this we will have to work hard on the reform preparations. Nevertheless, we should not forget that Europe’s recovery has to go hand-in-hand with respect for the rule of law and liberal democracy. We are also united by the values we share in the EU, and Slovakia repeatedly demonstrated this during the negotiations in Brussels.

It sounds like we have a great opportunity to get our country closer to a greener, more modern and more innovative future. Is our public ready to support these ambitious plans?

No matter how perfect our vaccines or reforms are, if we fail to gain the trust of our citizens, our efforts will be in vain. For months now we have been faced with a damaging ‘infodemia’, the spread of conspiracy theories and false information about

Covid-19 or the vaccinations. A lot of this false information appears on social networks, and it is true that the disinformation campaigns are becoming more and more pronounced in Central Europe. The social networks should therefore take on more responsibility and be much more active in exposing the violent, untruthful and misleading content that divides society.

EU unity also played a key role in the ‘post-Brexit’ negotiations between the European Union and the UK. The negotiators agreed the future trade relations right at the end of 2020, just before the end of the transition period. What’s your view on that?

I am sorry that the Brits left the EU, but of course we have to respect the decision of the UK citizens. I think the ‘Christmas’ agreement that guarantees mutual trade without tariffs or quotas is a reasonable basis for our new partnership. Our priorities included citizens’ rights and social security, as well as guarantees that Slovak businesses would be treated equally, especially the automotive industry. We are opening a new chapter in our relationship, but we continue to share many of the same values. We managed to prevent chaos on both sides of the English Channel, mitigated the effects of Brexit and maintained peace on the island of Ireland. Those are not insignificant things at a time when the coronavirus is surging across Europe.

The coronavirus has not disappeared – it is still with us. However, in 2020 we learned that international solidarity and cooperation are the best responses to a crisis. What should the EU countries not forget in 2021, if they want to be able to protect their citizens and resist threats?

The main priority is the vaccination strategy. The hopes of 2020 must become the reality of 2021. We should be clearer when setting out the rules we wish to follow in the future. Politicians cannot just sit around the table dictating the EU reforms. The citizens will decide what kind of Europe we want to live in for the years to come. And that is what the Conference on the Future of Europe should be about. It is also important to avoid concepts that have failed in the past, especially some of the EU migration concepts. In addition, we must not forget about the Western Balkans or Eastern Partnership countries. If the countries geographically close to us do not become EU members, that space will be filled by other geopolitical players, whose plans may be nothing like a cooperative, democratic and free Europe. The coronavirus crisis is an opportunity to think about what we want to change. The year 2020 showed us that no country can recover from the pandemic on its own. However, in 2021 we have a unique chance to show our citizens that we can do it together. Only in unity are we stronger.

Ingrid Brocková State Secretary



The novel coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on all of us and was the dominant issue last year. How is the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs helping combat Covid-19?

This unprecedented crisis has inspired a unique level of cooperation and solidarity. Society as a whole – the public and private sectors, scientists, NGOs, volunteers – has been actively engaged in tackling the pandemic. In addition to providing assistance to Slovak citizens abroad and mediating the purchase of basic medical supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) through our embassies, we have deployed our economic diplomacy and development cooperation tools. We supported the development of innovative Slovak solutions aimed at combating Covid-19, such as the Q-Vent compensatory pulmonary ventilators developed by Slovak scientists at the Faculty of Science, Comenius University – and their transportation to Brazil and Ukraine; the diagnostic tests developed by MultiplexDX Biomedical Centre at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Comenius University Science Park and Lambda Life which were delivered to Kenya and Ukraine; the development of the AXON Neuroscience vaccine; and the unique transfer of technology from Chirana Medical Stará Turá to the USA.

Has the pandemic become a stimulus for development or, on the contrary, is it an obstacle to international cooperation?

The corona crisis has proved that the twenty-first century world is truly globalised. There is no country that is immune to the world's problems, and no country is capable of facing them alone. Effective multilateralism and respect for international law are the basic guarantees of security, and that is particularly true for Slovakia, a small country in the middle of Europe. For our open economy, and hence our prosperity and social wellbeing, it is crucial that we support international trade liberalisation, that we maintain a high degree of integration

with our key European market and respect the agreed rules on the global market. Apart from the rules, another hugely important principle for a country like Slovakia is solidarity. Slovakia not only benefits from being a member of international integration groups, but is capable of becoming directly and actively involved in the international effort to combat the coronavirus in this difficult period. I am proud that Slovakia has been able to show solidarity and provide help both to countries outside the EU – from Eastern Europe, to the Balkans and Africa – and to our partners in the European Union.

What strategic economic development trends does economic diplomacy have to focus on?

The pandemic has had negative economic and social consequences, but it has also brought opportunities and challenges in the form of structural reforms. The crisis has accelerated the onset of megatrends such as digitalisation or low carbon technologies. The vulnerability of global supply chains has increased demand for strategic commodities in Europe. That is why we focused on supporting the Slovak solutions I mentioned before. The post-pandemic world will not be the same world as before, and it is up to us whether we use the tools provided to us for the EU recovery effectively and sensibly and become more competitive with sustainable solutions.

Last year we were working on the preparation of a new economic diplomacy concept for the public and private sectors. We audited inter-ministerial cooperation, and together with the Ministry of Economy we have been preparing to set up the new National Council for Competitiveness and Productivity. We launched our Innovation Days, at which Slovak companies offering innovative solutions are presented to foreign ambassadors accredited in Slovakia. Last year, these included MultiplexDX, Sygic and the Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency. Our ambition is to present excellent solutions in various areas

In the face of strong global competition and rapidly changing conditions, only societies that are creative, innovative and have the necessary resources, financial but especially human resources, will succeed.

developed in Slovakia, and thus help showcase the competitiveness of the Slovak economy. Supporting international cooperation in innovation, science and research will therefore continue to occupy a crucial place in economic diplomacy.

What are the main development cooperation challenges for the Ministry in 2021?

The good news is that, despite the serious economic crisis, in 2021 the budget for the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAMRS) will remain at the same level as it was in 2020 (approximately €7 million). Nevertheless, finding more resources for long-term development cooperation commitments (0.33 per cent of GNI by 2030) will continue to be a major challenge.

In 2021 development cooperation will dominate efforts to achieve social and environmental sustainability in the post-Covid-19 recovery. I am pleased that we will carry out the first EU-funded project of 2021 to support building local media capacity in Moldova. Another priority is to continue helping Belarusian civil society and the victims of repression. We will also encourage business sector involvement in development cooperation through a special SAMRS subsidy scheme, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and through preferential export credits in cooperation with Eximbanka. We hope this will lead to better linkages between development and economic diplomacy. I would also like to emphasise our efforts to raise public awareness of the importance of development cooperation and thereby improve the prospects of better financing for SlovakAid activities and for meeting Slovakia's international obligations.

You mentioned the effect of the pandemic on multilateralism, economic diplomacy and development aid. Has the pandemic affected other areas of diplomacy as well?

The pandemic also had a major impact on our cultural and public diplomacy activities. A number of planned projects and events had to be cancelled or postponed to the following year, and our embassies had to quickly adapt their activities to the anti-pandemic measures. But I think we succeeded here too. By arranging online concerts, exhibitions,

lectures and webinars and virtual film projections we were able to at least partially compensate for the loss of personal meetings and events.

Last year, together with our partners in the other ministries, we focused on streamlining the unified presentation of Slovakia abroad. The success of any Slovak project or story helps spread a positive image of Slovakia abroad, increases our visibility and investment or tourist appeal. I hope we will gradually see more of these successful Slovak stories.

How has the situation affected cooperation with the Slovak communities abroad?

Unfortunately, we had to limit or cancel several traditional expatriate events. But we used that time for conceptual activities. In cooperation with the Office of Slovaks Living Abroad and other partners, we began preparing the State Policy on Slovaks Living Abroad for 2021–2025. Our priority is to actively support the Slovak community abroad, both the long-standing associations and those representing the new diaspora, a community consisting mostly of the younger generations of Slovaks who study or work abroad. We hope to focus on them as part of a pilot project we are preparing in the United States for the coming period.

What are your goals or wishes for 2021?

The current situation has once again shown us that in the face of strong global competition and rapidly changing conditions, only societies that are creative, innovative and have the necessary resources, financial but especially human resources, will succeed. Those who can attract and retain talented people, and further develop the abilities and skills of smart enthusiastic employees. This applies to the public sector as well. Human resources are crucial to diplomacy. Therefore I trust that we will be able to attract and retain the best people in Slovak diplomacy. And, of course, for me as a woman, another priority is to raise the proportion of women in managerial positions, embassy posts and posts in European and international structures. Nevertheless, my biggest wish is that we will win our battle against the pandemic as soon as possible, and move forward drawing on our experience.

SLOVAK DIPLOMACY DURING THE PANDEMIC

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 had an immediate impact on international relations. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic collaborated with partners at home and abroad to help coordinate the measures and lend a helping hand to our citizens, as well as to partners in severely affected countries. One of our main **communication channels** was the Ministry's dedicated coronavirus page on the Ministry website.

Both the pandemic itself and its consequences provoked an unprecedented crisis. In the initial phase, the priority was to **help citizens** return to Slovakia. The repatriation effort was the single largest crisis management operation in the history of the Slovak Republic, during which the Ministry, together with other ministries, helped more than 6,000 Slovak citizens return home safely. Despite the hectic state of affairs, Slovak citizens abroad were provided with consular assistance throughout the crisis.

The Ministry, with its network of diplomatic missions, put all its energies into helping with medical supplies, identifying best practices in tackling the pandemic and providing development cooperation and humanitarian aid. In the difficult stage when Slovakia itself was struggling with the lack of medical supplies, we were able to show **solidarity** and assist partners both within and outside the EU. We provided material and financial aid to partners in our immediate neighbourhood, in Ukraine and the Western Balkans, but also to vulnerable groups in Ethiopia, Kenya and Iraq endangered by the pandemic.

In this stage of the crisis, the usual diplomatic activities based around direct contact, meetings and negotiations came to a complete cessation. For a large part of 2020, diplomacy moved **online** and key international events had to adapt to the crisis – for the first time since the founding of the UN, the General Debate of the 75th UN General Assembly was held online in September. Other events that had to be held online included 8 European Council video confer-



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ences, 8 Foreign Affairs Council video conferences, 7 General Affairs Council video conferences, 10 Eurogroup summits, as well as the 130th Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the 27th OSCE Ministerial Council, the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting of 2020 (MCM) and the NATO foreign ministers meeting held in December.

But the pandemic also produced **success stories**. Slovak companies such as MultiplexDX, Q-vent, Axon Neuroscience and

IPM Chirana came up with their own unique global solutions. The Ministry helped share these success stories with the whole world through economic diplomacy, development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

The pandemic also had a direct impact on the Ministry's **modus operandi**. In 2020 a great many of our activities in economic, cultural and public diplomacy took place electronically.





▲ During the meeting of the V4 foreign ministers and their French counterpart, Minister Ivan Korčok stressed that we can tackle the current challenges effectively through joint solutions, Bratislava 8 October 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

GOOD NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

1

The crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic also affected both the form and the content of neighbourhood and regional cooperation. On the positive side, it revealed and underlined the value of this cooperation, highlighting our close connections, multi-faceted relations and mutual dependence. The initial unilateralism and delayed communication during the first days of the pandemic were promptly replaced by cooperation and solidarity in the coordinated repatriation of citizens and provision of transportation, the gradual re-opening of national borders, the sharing of know-how and the positive examples of public health and crisis management.

NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS

Our neighbourhood policy is based on the premise that a successful foreign policy starts with good neighbourly relations. Although the way we conducted foreign policy changed in 2020, its essence remained the same, cooperation with our neighbours, delivering a positive agenda and stressing our common interests and values.

Czech Republic

In keeping with tradition, the new Slovak government's first foreign visits were to the Czech Republic. The politi-

cal discussions, expert dialogue and mutual cooperation continued in a dynamic spirit. The scope and intensity of Slovak–Czech relationship was evident during the coordination of repatriations and cross-border flows. Particular emphasis was paid to coordinating steps and positions in implementing European policies aimed at the post-crisis recovery of the EU's economy, the EU enlargement agenda and in accelerating the mutual dialogue on security policy. Positive progress was also achieved in energy cooperation.

Hungary

Slovak–Hungarian relations continued in their pragmatic setting, reinforced by the intensive political dialogue, focusing on the implementation of projects benefitting citizens in both countries. The emphasis in tackling the pandemic was on making life easier for citizens and enhancing cross-border flows. Work continued on expanding and upgrading the cross-border energy and transport infrastructure, with the completion of the new bridge linking Komárno in Slovakia with Komárom in Hungary. The year 2020 was also the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon. Slovakia's aim was to make sure that the divergent views of this anniversary did not affect mutual relations and that we continue to cultivate relations to the benefit of citizens in both countries.



As usual, the first foreign trip of the new Slovak Prime Minister Igor Matovič was to the Czech Republic (Photo: Government Office SR)



Meeting with the Hungarian counterpart Péter Szijjártó in Budapest, June 2, 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ The discussion between the Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki and the Prime Minister Igor Matovič, during the latter's opening visit to Poland, focused on bilateral relations, Warsaw, 3 July 2020 (Photo: Government Office SR)

Poland

Relations with Poland continued amid positive dialogue and gained a new impetus following visits by the new Slovak cabinet and the favourable framing of the Polish V4 presidency. Cooperation was focused on building regional and European infrastructure, transport and energy interconnections, and further developing cross-border, economic, defence and security cooperation.

Austria

In 2020 Austria proved to be an empathic neighbour and a regional and European partner. Our outstanding relations



▲ Meeting with the Austrian Foreign Minister, Alexander Schallenberg, during the visit in Vienna, 9 July 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR)



▲ During the meeting with President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, President Zuzana Čaputová called for enhanced use of the collaborative potential between the two countries, Bratislava, 24 September 2020 (Photo: Office of the President SR)

were reflected in the responsive approach to adopting pandemic measures that reflected the priorities of both countries. The new uptick in mutual relations could be seen in the many meetings between high-ranking officials in the immediate aftermath of the spring wave of the pandemic. The renewed cooperation within the Slavkov format further bolstered relations.

Ukraine

Slovak–Ukrainian relations continued in a spirit of good neighbourliness. Slovakia has consistently supported Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, as well as its transition and reform process. The close political dialogue culminated in an official visit by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, to Slovakia in September 2020, and the signing of agreements on developing cooperation in transport and economy. The Ministry has actively supported Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations. In these difficult times, a tangible outcome of neighbourly solidarity was the provision of development aid worth €718,000 to Ukraine, including humanitarian and medical supplies and technical equipment for tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, and material and humanitarian aid to help with the aftermath following the flooding in western Ukraine.

REGIONAL AND BILATERAL PARTNERSHIPS

Visegrad Four (V4)

Visegrad cooperation again proved its worth as a platform for countries interested in cooperating in areas of shared interest while at the same time being open to cooperation with other partners. The main criterion of our engagement



▲ Multiannual Financial Framework and Next Generation EU were discussed during the summit of the V4 prime ministers in Lednice, Czech Republic, 11 June 2020 (Photo: Government Office SR)

in the V4 remains defending and promoting Slovak interests and ensuring that the V4 contributes to common solutions in the EU. In 2020 the V4 responded flexibly to the pressing challenges, adjusting its shared priorities to reflect them. The Visegrad countries announced a joint contribution of €3 million in assistance as part of the European Commission's Coronavirus Global Response initiative. The Czech V4 Presidency ended with the June V4 Leaders Summit in Lednice, the first face-to-face meeting between the prime ministers after the spring wave of the pandemic. The heads of government acknowledged the beneficial role played by the V4 in coordinating the pandemic measures. Then, at the September summit in Lublin, they mandated the Polish V4 Presidency to launch the virtual V4 Covid-19 Centre. The centre is a new online platform for the practical exchange of information to run alongside contacts within the EU, WHO and other international structures. The International Visegrad Fund also continued to prove its worth in 2020, the year of its 20th anniversary. Via the fund the V4 showed solidarity with the Eastern Partnership countries. Under the special financial support programme, V4 East Solidarity Programme, the V4



▲ State Secretary Martin Klus symbolically handing over the Slavkov Format leadership to Austria, Bratislava, 29 June 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ The third ministerial meeting of the Central 5 Format took place in Slovenia, 15 September 2020 (Photo: MFA Slovenia)

countries granted aid amounting to €250,000 in pandemic impact mitigation to boost the medical, social and economic resistance of vulnerable groups of citizens.

Slavkov format (S3)

The activities of the Slavkov format were formulated under the ambitious Slovak leadership (first half of 2020) and the Austrian leadership (second half of 2020). The practical challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic added extra dynamism. The more robust cooperation was underscored by two meetings between the parliamentary speakers, and a series of six ministry consultations on topical European, foreign-policy and security issues. The effective cooperation was further boosted by online communication between the foreign ministers and state secretaries. The highpoint of the work of S3 was the first head of governments summit in Vienna, held in September 2020, after more than three years. A new element in the cooperation was the S3's contribution to development cooperation, with the first common project being launched in Georgia, aimed at sustainable development in the protected area of Aragvi, which Slovakia supported with a donation of €200,000.

C5 format (Central 5)

The need for regional coordination in tackling the pandemic led to the first Vienna meeting in June 2020 of the new 'C5' Central European format, at which the foreign ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Slovakia and Slovenia sought practical solutions to help citizens. Cooperation within C5 continued with further meetings between the foreign ministers in Budapest and Ljubljana, and an online meeting in November.

Germany

Germany, a key political and economic partner, occupies a special place in Slovakia's strategic relations with the EU member states. The German Presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2020 helped to reinforce this. The intensity of bilateral contacts was hampered by the pandemic;



▲ German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas and Minister Ivan Korčok discussed various issues concerning bilateral cooperation, the rule of law and developments in Belarus, 21 August 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

nonetheless, both the German Federal Minister of Defence, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, and the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, visited Bratislava. The Slovak Prime Minister, Igor Matovič, had planned to visit Germany, but this was postponed owing to the pandemic. However, a bilateral meeting with the Federal Chancellor, Angela Merkel, took place in Brussels. Several meetings dedicated to bilateral issues, economic relations and the coordination of mutual approaches in relation to the German Presidency of the EU Council were held online. There was also a virtual meeting of the Slovak–Bavarian Joint Committee and the Slovak–German Reflection Group, attended by representatives of the governmental and non-governmental sectors. The framework for systematic contact between the govern-



▲ Talks with the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian confirmed the interest of Slovakia and France to deepen the bilateral economic ties, Bratislava, 8 October 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

ment ministries of both countries follows the Action Plan for Enhanced Dialogue for 2019–2021.

France

The positive trend in mutual relations between Slovakia and France was boosted by the Action Plan of the Slovak–French Strategic Partnership for 2018–2022. A very good level of cooperation level has been achieved especially in defence, agriculture, culture and education, and in economic relations. The dynamic political dialogue was reflected in a visit by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, to Bratislava in October, during which he attended several meetings, including a bilateral meeting with the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Ivan Korčok, and a Visegrad Four meeting in the enlarged V4 + France format. During the meetings, particular stress was laid on the need to strengthen unity and cooperation in dealing with the challenges in the EU’s southern and eastern neighbourhood, as well as the partners’ continuing interest in close business, political and cultural cooperation.

Eastern Mediterranean

Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2020 represented a challenge for both the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Given our continuous engagement and allied relations with the Eastern Mediterranean countries, Slovakia actively sought means of resolving the situation in the region. One of our efforts to facilitate dialogue in the region was the joint meeting of the foreign ministers of Greece and Turkey in Bratislava. In November 2020 Minister Ivan Korčok and the Minister of Defence, Jaroslav Nad’, visited the Slovak troops deployed in Cyprus as part of the UN mission. The visit provided an opportunity to meet with both the Foreign Minister of Cyprus and the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. Slovakia expressed an interest in deepening mutual relations and in helping maintain peace and security in the region.

Transatlantic relations

Slovakia continues to strengthen relations with the **United States of America (US)**, with whom we share a close alliance, the values of freedom, democracy and human rights protection, and a strategic interest in maintaining strong transatlantic ties. Slovakia promoted a common EU–US approach to address global challenges such as Covid-19, climate change, the fight against misinformation and cyber threats, and for closer cooperation on technological development and security. In transatlantic relations, we advocated effective multilateralism, rejected exterritoriality and called for an end to unilateral actions in economic relations. As part of our efforts to pursue strategic Slovak–American relations, Minister Ivan Korčok visited the US in October 2020, at which time the Joint Slovak–US Declaration on the Security of 5G Networks was signed and the strategic dialogue between Slovakia and the US was launched. Slovakia and the United States continue to engage in close cooperation in enhancing the capabilities of the Slovak Armed Forces, including the continuing cooperation in the modernisation of the Slovak army.



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok and the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, signed the Joint Slovak–US Declaration on the Security of 5G Networks and the Slovak–US Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of the strategic dialogue, Washington, 22 October 2020 (Photo: Ron Przysucha)

Western Balkans

The year 2020 was important in terms of Western Balkan integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. The Ministry actively engaged in the decision to open EU accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, and we ac-



▲ Visit of the President of North Macedonia Stevo Pendarovski reinforced the process of sharing best practices from the transition between the two countries, Bratislava, 8 October 2020 (Photo: Office of the President SR)

tively backed North Macedonia's NATO accession in March 2020, as a means of improving security and stability in the region as a whole. However, as the year went on, these positive integration dynamics lost momentum in the EU. Slovakia actively supported consensus-seeking aimed at achieving a balanced framework of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. However, sensitive bilateral historical issues framed the discussions in an unfortunate manner and Slovakia therefore blocked the Council of the EU's conclusions on enlargement in December 2020. We took a principled stance against allowing historical issues to hamper the progress of EU enlargement and hence cast doubt on the credibility of the entire process.

Cooperation with Albania under the OSCE trio of presidencies was an important part of cooperation with the region. The signing of the bilateral debt settlement agreement confirmed the high level of relations with Montenegro. Besides the accession negotiations, an important aspect of our relations with Serbia was the €46,000 of assistance to help mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. Slovakia continued to actively assist the Balkan countries with the transformation process, and one outcome of this was the continuation of the National Convention on the EU in North Macedonia, while another was the implementation of two projects on the effective utilisation of public finances in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The regional expertise Slovakia has accumulated was underlined



“I had the honor to meet a truly brave woman, who did not hesitate to articulate a clear message, a message which is now personified on the streets of Belarus,” said the Minister Ivan Korčok after meeting the Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Bratislava, 8 October 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

by the appointment of the former foreign minister, Miroslav Lajčák, as EU Special Representative for the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues.

Eastern Europe

In 2020 the Slovak Republic actively engaged in discussions on the new long-term priorities of **Eastern Partnership** Policy and translating these into ambitious targets on economic integration, connectivity, consolidating the rule of law, climate and digital agenda, building an inclusive society and strengthening the overall resilience of partners. The Eastern Partnership leader's conference in June 2020 underlined the strategic character of the partnership, the display of solidarity during the pandemic and a shared interest in the security, democratic development and prosperity of the Eastern neighbourhood.

Nonetheless, besides the pandemic, the Eastern Neighbourhood faced other major political and security challenges. Against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, the Caucasus region found itself embroiled in a 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Slovak diplomacy advocated finding a diplomatic and political resolution to the conflict and provided humanitarian assistance to citizens on both sides of the conflict. In response to the rigged presidential

elections in **Belarus** and subsequent use of violence by the Belarus regime against its own citizens, Slovakia actively supported the EU's restrictive measures and enhanced its support for Belarusian civil society. An example of our engagement was the visit by leader of the Belarusian opposition, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, to Bratislava. The Slovak gov-



Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region and the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict were the main topics discussed during the meeting between Minister Ivan Korčok and his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

ernment agreed to provide aid worth €250,000 for Belarusian civil society and 20 scholarships for Belarusian students wishing to study at Slovak universities.

In 2020 Slovakia continued its efforts to develop good mutual relations with the **Russian Federation**; but did not refrain from engaging in critical dialogue on issues where our values and interests diverged. Slovak foreign policy towards Russia was coordinated with EU partners and NATO allies, in compliance with jointly agreed principles. We actively participated in EU discussions regarding relations with Russia, whom we regard as both an important party and partner in tackling international threats and challenges, and at the same time as the main challenge to Euro-Atlantic security.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AROUND THE GLOBE

Despite the Covid-19 restrictions, Slovakia continued to cultivate political and economic relations with partners across the world. For practical reasons, the number of foreign visits fell in 2020. In the autumn Minister Ivan Korčok visited the Middle East, a dynamically developing region. The visit to the United Arab Emirates provided an opportunity to discuss the developments in the region and to survey Slovakia's preparations for the EXPO exhibition to be held in Dubai in 2021/2022. In 2020 Slovakia's approach to China followed that of the EU, taking account of China's continued growth and assertiveness regionally and globally, and perceiving China as a partner in tackling global challenges, and as an economic and technological competitor and systemic rival



▲ The state of EXPO preparations in Dubai was the key topic of the meeting between Minister Ivan Korčok and his counterpart Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, 24 November 2020 (Photo: Saeed Jumoh)

to the EU. Several activities with China were postponed until 2021, but the completion of negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investments between the EU and China at the end of 2020 may strengthen mutually favourable relations. Slovakia, represented by the State Secretary Ingrid Brocková, backed the move to strengthen cooperation between the EU and ASEAN at the 23rd joint ministerial meeting. In December 2020, the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, paid an official visit to the Holy See, where she was received by Pope Francis. Her visit underlined the good nature of bilateral relations and paved the way for a possible reciprocal visit by Pope Francis to Slovakia.



▲ President Zuzana Čaputová at her audience with Pope Francis. Among the gifts exchanged was a painting of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, a patroness of Slovakia, by Slovak artist Katarína Vavrová, Vatican City, 14 December 2020 (Photo: Office of the President SR)



▲
By signing the Joint Declaration, the three highest state officials – President Zuzana Čaputová, Speaker of the National Council Boris Kollár and Prime Minister Igor Matovič – declared their will, joint responsibility and commitment to a united and responsible foreign, European and security policy for Slovakia, 9 May 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

#WEAREEU – SLOVAKIA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

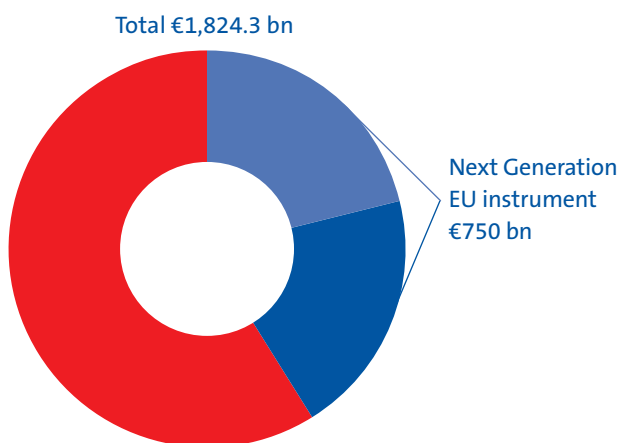
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The pandemic has exposed a series of vulnerabilities in the EU project. However, after the initial shock, the EU adopted specific measures to boost the resilience of the economic and public sectors. Cooperation and solidarity was manifested during the repatriations, the provision of cross-border medical assistance, the coordination of rules for cross-border workers, and the establishment of ‘green lanes’ for the free movement of goods. Coordination of the vaccination programme at the end of the year is also a good example of cooperation. However, the EU’s most comprehensive joint effort is the European Recovery Plan, also known as Next Generation EU (NGEU). The temporary NGEU instrument represents, along with the Multiannual Financial Framework, a financial package totalling in excess of €1.8 trillion. Another key event was the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU and the subsequent transitional period until the end of 2020, at the end of which the Trade and Cooperation Agreement was concluded.

MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK AND NEXT GENERATION EU

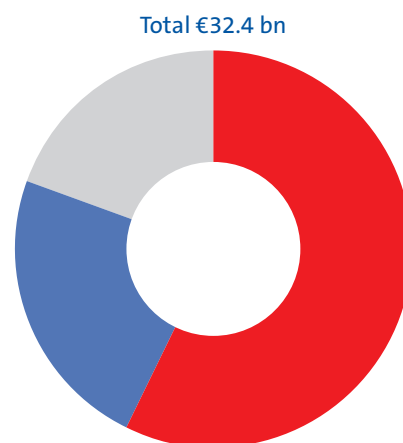
The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on all the EU member state economies; nonetheless, it has also been

an opportunity to modernise the European economy and strengthen the EU’s overall resilience. In response to the crisis, the European Union adopted an unprecedented package of proposals, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021–2027 and NGEU totalling more than €1.8 trillion is designed to help the EU to recover from the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and to lay the foundations of a modern Europe with an emphasis on the green and digital transformation. The European Recovery Plan is a unique project providing member states with funds over and above the normal EU budget; moreover, to finance the recovery, the European Union will, for the first time ever, borrow money on the financial markets. Together with other instruments, including the unspent funds from the 2014–2020 programme period, Slovakia will have approximately €40 billion to invest in the post-crisis recovery. In order to comply with the aims of the European instruments for supporting the recovery, Slovakia began preparing its national Recovery and Resilience Plan. That will provide access to the funds for structural reforms and investments under the Recovery and Resilience Facility and Partnership Agreement, enabling the deployment of funds from the EU Cohesion Policy for 2021–2027. The aim is to correctly define the priorities of the post-crisis recovery of



- Grants €390 bn
- Loans €360 bn
- MFF 2021–2027 €1074.3 bn

▲ Recovery plan for Europe



- MFF 2021–2027 €18,6 bn
- Grants, Next Generation EU €7.5 bn
- Loans, Next Generation EU €6.3 bn

▲ Funds from the Recovery plan for Europe allocated for Slovakia



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok and EC Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič exchanged views on the European recovery instruments and the planned Conference on the Future of Europe, Bratislava, 29 June 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

the economy and state administration, stressing areas such as a sustainable and innovative economy, education and health system reforms, and an efficient public sector.

CLIMATE POLICY

In response to the severe consequences of climate change, one of the EU's central priorities is to continue its efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The Slovak Republic backed the European Green Deal, both out of a sense of environmental responsibility and because it is a means of building a modern economy through innovation and technological progress, and represents one of the components of the EU's economic recovery. In addition to the commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, we also supported raising the 2030 climate goal, aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions by 55 per cent by 2030, in comparison with 1990. An

important aspect of our diplomatic efforts was to highlight the fact that goal-setting does not suffice on its own but must come with the requisite support measures, and the competitiveness of Slovak and European industry must be maintained as well.

DIGITALISATION

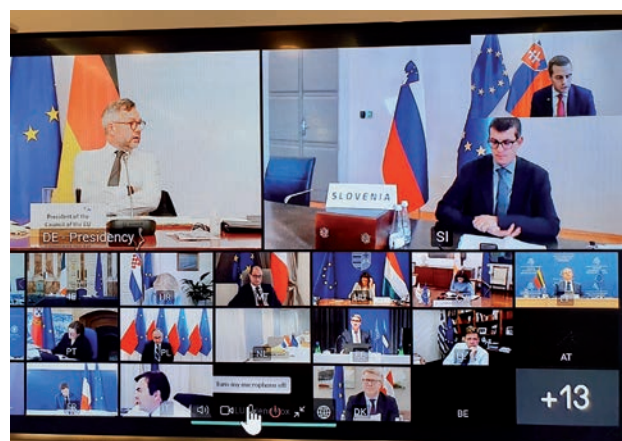
The pandemic has focused attention on the importance of digitalisation. Digital tools and services have a crucial role to play not only in the formation of the EU's digital future, but also in securing the basic functionality of European societies in governance, communication, education and trade. Slovakia's priority areas in digitalisation are connectivity, data policy, building 5G networks, strengthening cybersecurity, improving digital education and using artificial intelligence in healthcare and transport. As part of its economic diplomacy, the Ministry also lent support to Slovakia's leading digital companies and start-ups providing digitalisation and ICT for foreign markets. The role of state actors is also important when setting the required legislation, security and standards. In February Slovakia supported the European Commission's new core strategic document, *Shaping Europe's digital future*, and its new policies, the *European Strategy for Data* and the *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence*. Along with other tools, such as the '5G toolbox' these will gradually be reflected in updated national targets and measures for the digital transformation of Slovakia. In this respect, an important moment in 2020 was the publication of legislative amendments on digital services and digital markets, updating the legislation, so as to improve online security and regulating online shopping, content sharing and the purchase of online services. Slovakia sees these initiatives are part of the move towards strengthening the digital single market and the EU's position as a global standard-setter. Slovakia is also active in this area within the OECD, following on from the successful outcomes of its presidency of the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting (MCM) in 2019 that was devoted to digital transformation.



▲ The digital dimension of European politics in 2020, Bratislava, 24 June 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ Prime Minister Igor Matovič at the EU-Western Balkans Summit. Slovakia supports the integration prospects of the countries in the region, 6 May 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ State Secretary Martin Klus during the final General Affairs Council held under German presidency, Bratislava, 8 December 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

RULE OF LAW

Slovak foreign policy is grounded in the fundamental values inherent in the basic principles of modern democratic societies, which include an independent judiciary, respecting the division of powers and the transparent handling of public

resources. The principles of the rule of law underpin the European Union as well. Slovakia therefore backed the EU in making access to EU funds conditional on the rule of law. The Slovak Republic was actively involved in preparing the European Commission's Rule of Law Report, which we consider to be both an objective and balanced assessment tool.



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok talking about the complex negotiations on the next EU budget. Minister emphasized that Slovakia supports the rule of law conditionality as a part of the EU budget, Bratislava, 19 November 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok discussed the EU's role in the Western Balkans with the Special Representative for the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák, Bled, 31 August 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

BREXIT AND RELATIONS WITH THE UK

Following difficult negotiations, the decision taken by the citizens of the United Kingdom in the referendum of 2016 to leave the European Union came into effect on 31 January 2020. Thanks to the efforts of both parties, the UK's departure took place in an orderly manner based on the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the UK, which settles previous obligations. The months from February to December 2020 served as a transitional period, during which both parties prepared for the new phase in the partnership. Follow-

ing approval by the member states, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement of December 2020 took provisional effect on 1 January 2021. The full ratification process will be completed by spring 2021. The agreement sets out the arrangements for trade relations between the EU and the UK and the conditions for economic cooperation, state aid, air and road transport, energy and sustainability, fishing, data protection and social security coordination. It limits some of the consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and maintains the free trade area and security cooperation. It allows for zero-tariff and quota-free trading provided that fair conditions for businesses apply. In addition, the agreement will provide citizens and businesses on both sides of the Channel with legal certainty, limit barriers and ensure the continuation of trade, transport and mobility. Slovakia would like to see the agreement laying down firm foundations for the maintenance of a long-term partnership and cooperation between the EU and the UK, and we are prepared to build on these firm foundations to develop our bilateral partnership and tackle global challenges.

MIGRATION

In September 2020 the European Commission unveiled its New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Slovakia has continually advocated an EU migration and asylum policy that is based on a systematic, sustainable and ambitious whole-EU approach, with flexible solidarity towards the countries facing the greatest migratory pressures. We have provided assistance on the ground on numerous occasions, for instance, by providing humanitarian aid to endangered groups in refugee camps on the Greek island of Lesbos and at the Greek–Turkish border or by donating Slovak MultiplexDX PCR tests to refugees in the Vatican. Slovakia has also helped tackle the causes of migration through the implementation of humanitarian and post-humanitarian projects under the SlovakAid brand in Ukraine and in the Middle East, thereby improving



▲ At the European Council meeting, EU leaders focused on the management of the pandemic, climate change, security and external relations, 10–11 December 2020 (Photo: EU/Zucchi Enzo)



▲ At the April Foreign Affairs Council, Minister Ivan Korčok expressed support for Ukraine's integration prospects, Bratislava, 22 April 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

the conditions for refugees and internally displaced persons. We are prepared to further strengthen these efforts, by providing financial, technical and expert assistance. We support solutions aimed at the effective protection of the EU's external borders, the implementation of the returns policy and tackling the causes of migration in the countries of origin. We consider the policy of mandatory relocations to be problematic, and so we argue that asylum decisions should remain within the competence of the member states.

EU SINGLE MARKET

Economic growth and greater competitiveness and resilience, at both the European and national levels, are dependent on a fully functional EU single market. This key European integration project is the basis for raising prosperity in all member states. The crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions on the four freedoms of the single market made us all the more aware of this. Consequently, in 2020 our attention was focused not only on long-term priorities such as further deepening the single market and better implementation and enforcement of the rules, but also on eliminating the barriers erected under the pandemic measures that impede the full functionality of the single market.

FUTURE OF THE EU/CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

In her programme statement of December 2019, the EC President Ursula von der Leyen, unveiled the idea of holding the Conference on the Future of Europe. The intention is to create an inclusive and open platform for citizens, particularly young people, civil society, EU institutions and member states, that will generate reform ideas for EU policies. All three main EU institutions came round to the idea of organising the Conference on the Future of Europe in 2020. In order to determine Slovakia's interests and fully involve the public in the debate, the Ministry drafted the *Concept of the Conference on the Future of Europe in the Slovak Republic*, containing the basic national framework for holding the Conference. The aim is to build the Conference around two pillars that have proved successful in the past: the National Convention on the EU, and #WeAreEU project. In the Council of the EU, Slovakia backed the adoption of a common position by stressing core principles, such as transparency, inclusiveness, maintaining institutional balance and unity among the member states. The original plan was to launch the conference in May 2020, but that was postponed owing to the pandemic. Instead, the conference should be officially launched during the Portuguese Presidency in the first half of 2021.



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok took part in the Informal meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers, known as Gymnich, which was organized in Berlin on 27–28 August 2020. Ministers focused on developments in Belarus, the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, relations with Russia and also had an opportunity to engage with the Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi (Photo: Auswaertiges Amt/photothek)



Close collaboration with the Ministry of Defence led to the adoption of a new Security Strategy and a new Defence Strategy by the Slovak Government on 8 December 2020. The documents reflect the latest shifts in the global security environment and reacts to new phenomena such as climate change, pandemic or hybrid threats (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

A SECURE SLOVAKIA IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD

3

Despite the dominance of topics related to the pandemic, the year 2020 saw major challenges in security policy. The global security situation has changed and deteriorated in a number of ways, with a direct impact on the security and the resilience of our state and society. The pandemic has had, and continues to have, a considerable effect. Not only has it highlighted some of our vulnerabilities, but it has also accelerated and deepened existing trends: the weakening of multilateralism, renewed geopolitical rivalry, assertive advocacy of individual interests and international law infringement, continuing instability in the European neighbourhood, along with regional crises around the world. The growing number of disinformation campaigns and hybrid actions, and the rise in cyber-attacks, and terrorism in the vicinity of Slovakia point to a world that has become less stable, less predictable and therefore less safe.

THE NEW SECURITY AND DEFENCE STRATEGY

The ongoing changes in the security environment are reflected in the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic and

the Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic, both approved by the government in December 2020 and submitted to parliament for its approval. The new Security Strategy assesses the current challenges and sets out Slovakia's security interests and policies. In it, Slovakia espouses the values of democracy, freedom, human rights and responsibility. These values underpin our membership of NATO and the EU, which are the fundamental security pillars of the Slovak Republic. The security strategy is a response to the growing threats and instability in the international arena, which also affect developments in Slovakia. One of the crucial roles of the state is to ensure the security of its citizens. In the strategy, we reinforced the state's preparedness to tackle external as well as internal security risks and set out the key aspects and priorities of our complex approach to security and to enhancing the resilience of state and society. In addition to the traditional security threats and challenges, the document reacts to new, complex ones such as cybersecurity and technological security, climate challenges, hybrid threats, access to raw materials, and health security.



▲ Bilateral talks between Minister Ivan Korčok and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg focused on the ongoing NATO reflection process and Slovak priorities within NATO adaptation plans for the next decade, 7 December 2020 (Photo: NATO)

NATO

NATO is the basic cornerstone of Slovakia's security and defence. Its credibility and capacity to act is therefore in our strategic interest. In 2020 the changes in the global security environment had an impact on Euro-Atlantic security. The pandemic brought a new perspective and fresh impetus for closer cooperation between civilian and military branches and for deepening cooperation between the state and private sectors. Slovakia backed intensified cooperation between NATO and the EU via information exchange, common activities and developing the military capabilities required to strengthen the European pillar of transatlantic security and defence.

In spite of the extraordinary events of 2020, NATO has continued to fulfil its main commitments and obligations. Following on from the conclusions of the London summit in December 2019, the reflection process on NATO 2030 was initiated, aimed at strengthening NATO's political dimension and determining its vision for the upcoming decade.

We increased our spending on defence and participation in common operations, thereby confirming our intention to share the burden with our allies. The 2020 increase in defence spending reflects our commitment made at the summit in Wales to



▲ During his trip to Poland, Minister Ivan Korčok visited the NATO Counter Intelligence Centre of Excellence in Krakow, 7 July 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR)



▲ The two-day GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum conference was held under strict sanitary measures. This year the theme was 'Let's Heal the World Together', Bratislava, 7 October 2020 (Photo: GLOBSEC)



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok with Minister of Defence Jaroslav Nad' and deployed Slovak soldiers during a visit to Cyprus. Slovakia is one of the largest contributors to the UNFICYP Mission and since 2018 has been responsible for command in Sector Four, 24 November 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Juraj Tomaga)

achieve a consistent level of defence spending of 2 per cent of GDP by 2024 and to modernise and develop the military capabilities of the Slovak Armed Forces in compliance with NATO's capability objectives. In fact, in 2020 Slovakia spent more than 2 per cent of GDP on defence, though this was partly down to the fall in GDP. The Slovak contingent continued to participate in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic Sea region. We have also contributed to the NATO missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have maintained our financial support for the defence and security forces development in Afghanistan, contributing US\$500,000 annually to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund and will continue to provide this support until 2024.

Slovakia supports NATO's open door policy. We backed North Macedonia's NATO accession in March 2020, which we believe will play an important role in preserving and strengthening peace, stability and security in the Western Balkans region. Moreover, Slovakia supported cooperation aimed at bolstering defence and security reforms in countries aspiring to become NATO members.

In 2020 Slovakia backed the practical cooperation between NATO and Ukraine focused on defence and security reforms. We also supported the implementation of NATO measures regarding the Black Sea, which, in addition to the intensive cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, include a strengthened NATO military presence in the region. Slovakia continued in its role as NATO Trust Fund leader in Ukraine in relation to the explosive ordnance disposal and improvised explosive devices, and Slovak experts in Ukraine assisted with the security sector reforms. Together with several al-

lies, we initiated and advocated for Ukraine to be included in the NATO programme for improving the interoperability of Ukrainian and NATO armed forces.

Slovakia continued to support Georgia's defence reforms as part of NATO's activities. The exchange of classified information between Tbilisi and NATO has improved thanks to a contribution of €60,000 to the Trust Fund for Georgia's defence sector as part of the safe communication project. We actively participated in the renewal and updating of the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package approved in December 2020.

The Slovak Republic is one of the participating countries in the #WeAreNATO strategic communication initiative. We also plan to make active use of NATO communication outputs, including NATO 2030 Young Leaders, which was established by the NATO Secretary General as part of the NATO 2030 process, and which has one Slovak participant.

EU COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Enhancing the EU's influence in the world means enhancing the influence of its member states. Therefore, in EU external relations, Slovakia strongly emphasised the EU's global engagement, especially within its immediate neighbourhood. An important part of strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was the common threat analysis and assessment of the EU's security environment that served as the fundamental baseline for preparing the Strategic Compass. It will specify the EU's security and defence ob-

jectives set out in the 2016 EU Global Strategy. The Strategic Compass will serve as the EU's basic planning document for the upcoming years, covering and guiding activities in four areas: operations and missions, developing the EU's capabilities, developing partnerships and strengthening resilience against hybrid threats.

Slovakia helped develop the CSDP, working on the EU's capabilities by strengthening engagement in EU operations and missions and providing support to partners.

In 2020 Slovakia actively contributed to the agreement on enabling third-country participation in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects. The agreement makes it possible to engage key partners in EU projects, which will enable links between defence industry research and development on both sides of the Atlantic and has the potential to strengthen the transatlantic tie as well. Agreement was also reached on establishing the European Peace Facility (EPF), which will facilitate the funding of peacekeeping operations and the military capabilities and capacities of EU partners.

In relation to military operations and missions in 2020, the Slovak government decided to send members of the Slovak Armed Forces on EU military training missions in Mali (EUTM Mali) and the Central African Republic (EUTM CAR), to EU operations in the Eastern Mediterranean (Irin) and to enhance participation in the EU operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Althea). In this way, the Slovak Republic is taking its share of the responsibility for maintaining security in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, including in the outermost regions that have a direct impact on EU security. In the EU's civilian crisis management, Slovakia extended its geographical presence by sending an expert to the civilian mission in Somalia



▲ On 6 August 2020, Slovakia became the 28th member state of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats located in Helsinki. This reflects our interest in strengthening capacities in the fight against hybrid threats and the desire to increase our resilience (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

(EUCAP Somalia). We also continued to support missions in the immediate neighbourhood (EUAM Ukraine, EULEX Kosovo, EUMM Georgia).

As a founding member, Slovakia participated in launching the new European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management in Berlin.

HYBRID THREATS

In 2020 Slovakia actively participated in the international efforts to strengthen the tools and capacity of international



▲ Transfer of Authority of the Slovak contingent within the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Latvia, 9 December 2020 (Photo: NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia)

organisations to act. Our aim is to improve the resistance to hybrid threats in both the organisations and their member states. Following the mass dissemination of misinformation in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, we joined a group of states promoting a more resolute EU approach towards misinformation, involving better coordination of activities, a single regulatory framework for social networks, and the public naming of those spreading misinformation. Slovakia has continued to strengthen the institutional framework, and shared and drew experience from enhancing resistance to hybrid threats. With this aim in mind, in August 2020 Slovakia joined the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki.

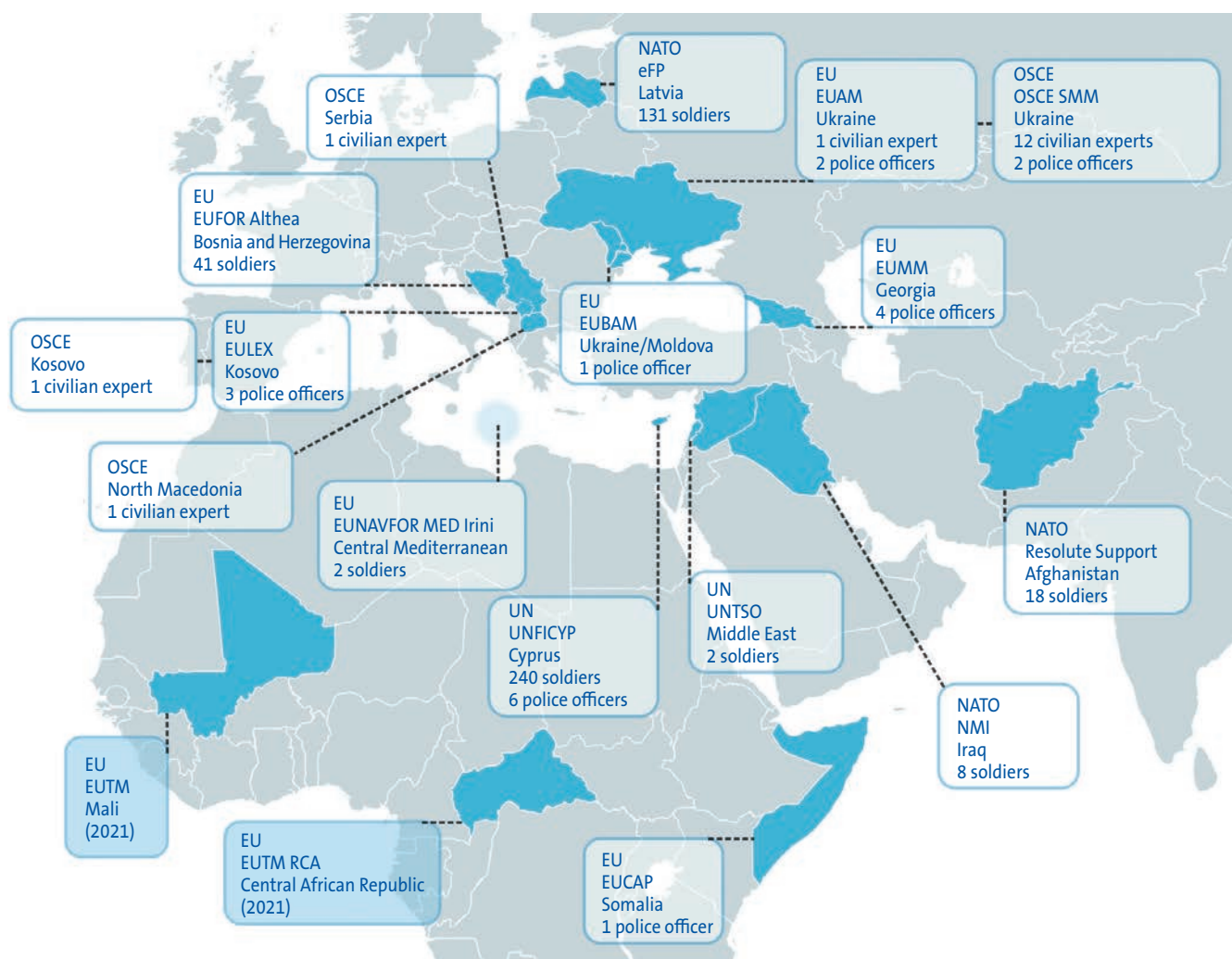
COMBATING TERRORISM AND DISARMAMENT

The fight against terrorism was a firm element of Slovakia's foreign policy activities. We continued our engagement in the Global Coalition against Daesh. The fifth round of the assessments by the Council of Europe's Moneyval Committee, tasked with combating the funding of terrorism, was completed.

On arms control, disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, we supported maintaining and strengthening the existing system of global standards, and promoted their universalisation and strict implementation. Slovakia actively expressed its support for extending the New START Treaty and supported efforts to include China in further talks on nuclear disarmament.

The events of 2020 showed how important effective multilateral frameworks are for preventing the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. Slovakia hosted its first international meeting of the Australia Group, consisting of experts seeking to restrict the distribution of substances used in the production of chemical and biological weapons. It was decided that the precursors required for the production of Novichok, a neuro-paralytic substance, should be added to the Australia Group control list.

In cooperation with the Provisional Technical Secretariat (PTS) of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) the technical and organisational provision of CTBTO inspector training continued at the Training Centre in Lešť.



Slovakia's participation in foreign military operations and observer missions

UN 75
2020 A POTOM

**TVORÍME
NAŠU
BUDÚCNOSŤ
SPOLOČNE**



▲ Thanks to Slovak diplomats, peacekeeping troops, humanitarian workers, experts and volunteers Slovakia has been part of the remarkable UN story for more than 75 years

#MULTILATERALISMMATTERS – COMMON SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL PROBLEMS 4

The weakening of multilateralism and erosion of international frameworks and institutions continued in 2020, and this trend was exacerbated by the global pandemic. The assertive enforcement of individual objectives often took precedence over the search for common solutions, which resulted in rising global tensions, polarisation and volatility in the international system. The international rules-based system is being tested by the growing pressure on multilateral institutions and a chronic lack of financial resources, which jeopardises both the functioning of the institutional system and the integrity of the rules. There has never been a more pressing need to enforce multilateral solutions. In the current geopolitical environment, Slovakia, in close cooperation with its EU partners, has intensified its efforts to support and strengthen multilateralism and EU unity in the relevant international fora. In particular, Slovakia advocated a strong and effective role of the UN, peace and security, strengthening of human rights, fair globalisation, the acceleration of the global transition to a sustainable and climate neutral future, as well as the development of digitalisation and innovation.

UNITED NATIONS

Slovakia considers the UN a crucial global platform for pursuing both national and shared European interests and values. In 2020 we celebrated the 75th UN anniversary. Slovakia supported the UN General Assembly Declaration adopted on the occasion of the 75th anniversary and fully advocated the idea that the UN is the keystone of multilateralism. Slovakia's main contribution was the deployment of 240 Slovak soldiers and six police officers to the UNFICYP peacekeeping mission in Cyprus. In 2020 Slovakia became a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, whose aim is to support recovery in conflict-affected countries. We continued to back the Franco-German initiative, the Alliance for Multilateralism.

In September 2020 we adopted a national action plan for implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security for 2021–2025, which lays down the conditions for a comprehensive national policy focused on guaranteeing rights and taking account of the specific needs of women and girls in relation to peace and security. As part of the international response to the



▲ President Zuzana Čaputová speaking at the Austrian World Summit where leaders discussed the link between the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis (Photo: Office of the President SR)



▲ Judge Peter Tomka was elected for a third nine-year term (2021–2030) to the International Court of Justice by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council, New York, 13 November 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR)

Covid-19 pandemic, we actively supported information exchange, data sharing and the sharing of best practices in multilateral fora and, via the WHO, ICRC and UNHCR, provided material and financial aid to partner countries.

INTERNATIONAL LAW

Slovakia’s long-term priorities include promoting and fostering adherence to international law. We support the activities of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Our efforts in this area were recognised in 2020, when Peter Tomka, a Slovak judge, was re-elected for his third term of office (2021–2030). In the field of international criminal law, Slovakia works to strengthen relations and cooperation with the International Criminal Court. This is reflected in Slovakia again putting forward a candidate for the Bureau of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court for 2021–2023. In this, we are following on from our successes in 2018–2020, when we held the post of assembly vice-president.

HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2020 Slovakia paid special attention to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and observance of the rule of law, in pursuing our foreign policy interests. This was evident in our actions within the international organisations, as well as in the change of our position towards Venezuela and clear stance on the situation in Belarus.

In 2020 we completed our three-year membership of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), where we carried out the duties of HRC Vice-President and participated in initiatives to effectivise the activities and functioning of the HRC. Slo-

vakia’s positions during the three years of HRC membership demonstrated our pro-European attitude and values. We devoted particular attention to promoting and protecting the rights of the child; respecting the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law; media freedom and the safety of journalists; and combating discrimination and xenophobia. Our diplomacy took a principled stance in the debate on the human rights situation in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Slovakia backed the Joint Statement of 39 countries in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly on the human rights situation in China. We also supported the convocation of the HRC urgent debate on the human rights situation in Belarus in relation to the rigged presidential elections of August 2020.

ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

Even after our successful OSCE presidency in 2019, Slovakia remained at the heart of events within the organisation. In 2020 we chaired the Group of the OSCE’s Asian Partners for Cooperation consisting of five partner countries – Australia, Afghanistan, Thailand, Japan and South Korea. The objective of the Slovak presidency was to strengthen informal dialogue on comprehensive security with Asian partner countries so as to ensure a geopolitical connection between Europe and Asia. The importance of cooperation with Asian partners was visible in the adoption of the Declaration on Co-operation with the OSCE Asian Partners at the Ministerial Council, where Slovakia was represented by State Secretary Ingrid Brocková at the OSCE Troika meeting with Asian Group representatives. As a member of the OSCE Presidential Troika we actively supported Albania in pursuing its priorities, which largely followed on from the priorities of the Slovak OSCE Presidency, especially in relation to improving the standing of people within the OSCE



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok opening the OSCE Security Days. The event was co-hosted by Slovakia under the theme *Revitalizing Trust and Co-operation in Europe: Lessons of the Paris Charter*, Bratislava, 16 October 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

area, supporting dialogue between the participating countries and promoting effective multilateralism.

The weakening of multilateralism was evident in the deepening distrust of OSCE participating countries especially along an 'East-West' line, and the gradual erosion of the arms control architecture, which is partly down to the US withdrawing from the Treaty on Open Skies in response to Russia's selective implementation of the treaty. These trends were also visible in the OSCE's functioning when the mandate of the four most senior OSCE representatives expired in summer 2020. During the selection process, Slovakia advocated a regionally fair and balanced approach to filling the vacancies, and actively participated in finding the final compromise, achieved at the December OSCE Ministerial Council.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

In the Council of Europe (CoE), much of 2020 was spent seeking responses to the situation caused by the pandemic and relating to observance of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Slovakia promoted positions based on the need to strengthen the CoE's mandate in pursuing effective multilateralism and respecting international law. An important part of the CoE's work in 2020 was the adoption of the Athens Declaration at the November session of the CoE's Committee of Ministers, which assessed the Council's work in 2020 and called on member states to introduce adequate anti-pandemic measures that kept restrictions on human rights and freedoms to the absolute minimum. The lack of contact and high-level summits affected the parliamentary side most of all, with only the January Plenary Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE taking place.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In February 2020 Slovakia became a founding member of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, which brings together states upholding religious tolerance and the protection of religious minorities around the world. The Minister delivered a speech at the Ministers' Forum of the Alliance in November 2020, in which he emphasised that the Slovak government was actively promoting freedom of religion or belief in the UN Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly and supported reinstating the post of EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU. At the 45th session of the Human Rights Council, Slovakia signed the Joint Statement by Alliance members, endorsing the commitment to combat intolerance, discrimination and violence against individuals, communities and minorities on account of their religion or belief.

FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

Slovakia has been a member of the Media Freedom Coalition since 2019, which is a partnership promoting freedom of

speech, the safety of journalists and guaranteeing their ability to do their work in a safe environment. The first ministerial meeting of the Coalition was attended by State Secretary Martin Klus, who stressed that an independent media can help expose attempts to install authoritarian regimes and enable liberal democracy to survive. At the UNESCO World Press Freedom Conference 2020, Minister Ivan Korčok pointed out that while freedom of media and fact-based journalism are guarantees of democracy, democracy itself has to guarantee the freedom of the media and factual journalism. At the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, Slovakia signed the Joint Statement on the situation of journalists in Belarus and in the Human Rights Council, we supported the resolution on the safety of journalists.

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE AND 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In 2020 the international community marked a number of anniversaries related to the end of the Second World War. Slovakia took part in multilateral events at the highest level, held on the occasion of these important anniversaries. President Zuzana Čaputová attended the two most important commemorative events, at Auschwitz and in Jerusalem, while Minister Miroslav Lajčák attended the Ministerial meeting on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). In Bratislava, on the evening of the Memorial Day for Victims of the Holocaust and Racial Violence, Minister Ivan Korčok opened a concert in memory of the victims of the Holocaust and racial hatred. He stressed the importance to maintain the legacy of past generations, denounced the rise in hatred and intolerance in society and noted the importance of historical memory building, especially among the young generations.



▲ President Zuzana Čaputová during the commemoration event on the 75th Anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp, 27 January 2020 (Photo: Office of the President SR)



▲ Commemorative €2 coin issued on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the accession of the Slovak Republic to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

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In 2020 economic diplomacy was affected by the pandemic shock, with the global anti-epidemic measures triggering the largest global economic decline since the Second World War II. The global economy shrank by more than 4 per cent, world trade by more than a tenth and global foreign direct investment by 30 per cent. At the same time, demand grew for medical supplies and innovative solutions to combat the pandemic. These were the new challenges economic diplomacy had to grapple with in 2020. Due to the pandemic restrictions, a large part of economic diplomacy was conducted online – such as online consultations with trade and investment partners in Bavaria, Belgium, Czechia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Wales and the UK, the US, Sweden, Australia and Vietnam. Another online event was the fifth virtual summit of The Three Seas Initiative, held in November, at which partners discussed deepening cooperation in infrastructure, digitalisation and energy. Slovakia is interested in the potential this initiative offers as a complementary platform to EU cooperation in infrastructure development.

BILATERAL ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

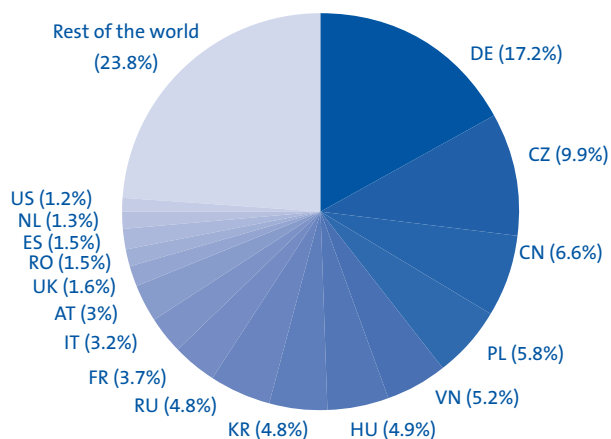
Much of the work conducted in economic diplomacy in 2020 concerned the fight against the pandemic and the post-pandemic economic recovery. Economic diplomacy was concentrated on the procurement of PPE and medical equipment from abroad, on providing practical assistance to

domestic and foreign businesses in relation to cross-border transportation and travel by professionals and managers, and on monitoring the various different national economic measures adopted by different countries in the fight against the pandemic. Nonetheless, there were opportunities to be seized, and economic diplomacy actively promoted Slovak medical products used for fighting the pandemic.

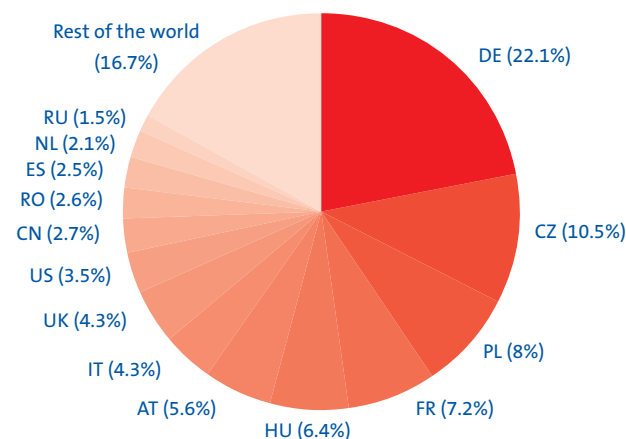
Despite the restrictions, the Slovak–Slovenian Business Forum was held in July, attended by the presidents of both countries. The goal was to establish bilateral cooperation in the green economy, intelligent technologies, e-mobility and artificial intelligence. The President of Ukraine visited Slovakia in September and signed the Memorandum of Cooperation on Multimodal Transport between Asia and the EU across the territories of Slovakia and Ukraine, deepening the economic side of cross-border cooperation. Despite the difficult situation, in 2020 we exploited opportunities to showcase Slovakia’s economic potential at a number of trade fairs and exhibitions, in Ireland, Latvia, France, Belgium, Norway and Chile, where Slovak winemakers and glassmakers were a particular success.

MULTILATERAL ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

In December 2020 Slovakia commemorated its 20th anniversary of membership of the Organisation for Economic Coop-



Slovak imports January–October 2020



Slovak exports January–October 2020



▲ On 22 July 2020, President Zuzana Čaputová, and President of Slovenia Borut Pahor, opened the Slovak–Slovenian Business Forum. The main topic of discussion was innovation in the economy (Photo: MFEA SR/Kristína Spišáková)

eration and Development (OECD). This organisation is an important platform for sharing lessons learned from economic transition, and it proved very helpful when Slovakia was undergoing its economic transition and in relation to the adoption of other sectoral policies. On this occasion, a publication was issued analysing progress in transforming sectoral policies over the twenty years of Slovakia’s OECD membership, with specific recommendations for education, healthcare and public administration. This valuable OECD knowledge, drawn from research and data collection, presents the Slovak Republic with an opportunity to draw up new reforms aimed at tackling the economic recession, which the pandemic has exacerbated. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the OECD Convention, Slovakia participated in a reflective event in December 2020, assessing the benefits of the OECD and noting its role in coordinating the post-pandemic sustainable economic recovery. Slovakia also actively engaged in the process of electing a new OECD Secretary General.

In connection with the growing tensions and protectionism in global trade relations, Slovakia has emphasised the obligation to strengthen the rule-based multilateral trading system, with a market offering equal conditions to all players and the need to pursue a trade policy that stimulates open markets. We will continue to stress the need to reform the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and improve its credibility.

SERVICES FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The year 2020 proved very challenging for businesses and exporters, who faced falling demand and difficulty travelling and distributing goods.

In 2020, working with the higher territorial units, we launched a series called *From Region to World*, where the

Business support activities

- In 2020, we handled more than 1,300 inquiries from the business community by telephone and email.
- The Economic Diplomacy Grant Scheme was allocated €200,000. In total, 9 projects were implemented.
- We published 23 issues of our newsletter on business opportunities abroad, which was distributed to 1,350 email addresses.
- The Ministry also published 12 issues of *Trends and News in the Business World*

plan is to visit all the Slovak regions, one after another, to initiate discussions with businesses and academia. The intention is to promote new types of government support available to private sector companies, scientific research entities, educational institutions, cities and municipalities as part of cooperation with foreign countries.

KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND INNOVATIONS

In 2020 the Ministry continued to support international cooperation in innovations and launched a number of new initiatives. As part of our *Innovation Days*, innovative Slovak companies and research institutions with strong international potential (e.g. MultiplexDX and Sygic) were presented to foreign ambassadors accredited in Slovakia, and the Ministry also arranged a presentation of the unique multi-level pulmonary ventilators manufactured by IPM Chirana. Economic diplomacy also played a role in the diversification of the Slovak economy, highlighting opportunities for Slovak companies in the European space industry. On 7 October 2020, the government granted approval for Slovakia to apply for associated membership of the European Space Agency. The Ministry also helped meet the objectives of the *Digital Coalition* – a platform for promoting changes in digital technologies to ensure that everyone acquires the digital skills they need to remain employable and productive. Talent management is a key area. As lots of talented Slovaks live abroad, the Ministry backed an initiative by Slovak Global Network, a civic association whose goal is to identify domestic and foreign potential and advance Slovakia’s knowledge economy with the help of talented young people. Slovak diplomacy also continued to develop cooperation and implement Smart City activities both at home and abroad.

ENERGY SECURITY

In 2020 we employed all our energy industry policy and diplomacy tools in actively supporting energy security, energy efficiency and energy savings in Slovakia. In addition



▲ The participation of private companies in development projects is directly linked to their sustainability. Meeting with representatives of the National Union of Employers, Bratislava, 8 July 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/ Tomáš Bokor)

to meeting ambitious climate targets, the emphasis was on secure reliable energy supplies, cost-effectiveness and industrial competitiveness. Slovakia advocated the right of EU member states to determine their own national energy mix, including the safe and sustainable use of low-carbon resources. As the existing gas pipeline system might form part of the backbone of the EU's future hydrogen transport network, Slovakia has been purposefully strengthening its position as a traditional and reliable transit country. In terms of diversification activities, we focused on strengthening our participation in the development of the north–south transit

corridor. In relation to the Slovak–Ukrainian transit corridor, the contract for gas transit across Ukraine was successfully extended from 1 January 2020, with our support as an EU member state. Moreover, the most important channel for reverse gas supplies to Ukraine through Slovakia continued to prove reliable. Crucially, the projects relating to the Slovak–Polish gas interconnection and the expansion of the transmission capacity of the Slovak–Hungarian interconnection were re-added to *the Fourth list of Projects of Common Interest*, which is primarily aimed at improving energy security and integrating EU energy markets.



▲ The main goal of the 14th Annual Central European Energy Conference 2020 was to discuss Slovak energy priorities in the National recovery and resilience plan and compare them with those of other countries. Panelists also discussed aspects of the energy transition and its contribution to the green economic recovery (Photo: SFPA)

POMOC! *HELP!*

Ako Slováci pomáhajú v zahraničí
SlovakAid abroad

17.-30. OKTÓBER 2020
HVIEZDOSLAVOVO NÁMESTIE, BRATISLAVA

17TH-30TH OCTOBER 2020
HVIEZDOSLAV'S SQUARE, BRATISLAVA

▲
The exhibition HELP! organised by the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation cast light on the harsh living conditions of vulnerable communities in Kenya, South Sudan, Iraq, Somalia and Lebanon

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND HUMANITARIAN AID

6

In 2020, as in previous years, Slovakia's official development cooperation was implemented in accordance with the *Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019–2023* and the *Bilateral Development Cooperation Plan of the Slovak Republic for 2020*. We continued in our efforts to be a responsible partner and donor, responding flexibly to the needs of partner countries under the SlovakAid brand.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the implementation of development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Slovakia displayed solidarity and helped individual partner countries and the international community prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus and mitigate serious consequences. Slovakia was flexible in redirecting available resources to help afflicted countries and responded promptly to their needs, by providing material humanitarian aid and financial contributions or adjusting the implementation of development projects. Slovakia showed solidarity with Western Balkan, Eastern Partnership, Middle Eastern and African countries.

Humanitarian aid in the form of PPE and medical equipment was delivered not only to development cooperation partner countries, but also to EU member states. In these efforts, private companies and non-governmental organisations were important partners to the Ministry, alongside other government institutions, in contributing to humanitarian shipments and showing great generosity.

Slovakia also participated in international initiatives aimed at combating the spread of Covid-19 and provided financial contributions to selected international organisations, such as the International Red Cross and the World Health Organisation. Within the European Union, Slovakia contributed to the 'Team Europe' coordinated assistance, which had collected €38.5 billion by the end of 2020. Team Europe is focused on providing joint support to partners to address urgent needs and mitigate the health, social, economic, humanitarian, security and political impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to the humanitarian pandemic-oriented aid, we responded promptly to the tragic events in Lebanon and the earthquake in Croatia, and provided material humanitar-

ian aid in the form of medical supplies, medicines, long-life food, sleeping bags and power generators.

Slovakia also paid particular attention to supporting civil society in **Belarus** and citizens affected by the reprisals following the rigged presidential elections in August 2020. Together with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, we offered an additional 20 government scholarships for Belarus citizens wishing to study at Slovak public universities, which were all taken up by Belarus students.

Partnerships with the **V4** countries also continued in 2020 through joint projects focused on helping combat illegal migration in the countries of origin and supporting sustainable development to prevent migratory flows. Although implementation of the V4+Italy projects in Libya and the V4+Germany projects in Morocco was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic, in the case of the first project the partners agreed to a modified version aimed at strengthening Libya's capacity to combat the novel coronavirus.



▲ SlovakAid opportunities in the fight against the pandemic in partner countries and future cooperation with the NGO sector were discussed with representatives of Ambrela – Development Organisations Platform, Bratislava, 21 April 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

Overview of the humanitarian aid provided to combat Covid-19

Country	Amount (in €)	Type of aid
Montenegro	30,000	Financial humanitarian aid for the purchase of medical equipment and supplies for two hospitals
Serbia	50,000	Financial humanitarian aid for the purchase of medical equipment and supplies for one hospital
Moldova	50,000	Financial humanitarian aid for the purchase of medical equipment and supplies for five hospitals
Georgia	45,000	Purchase of medical devices and equipment in the context of the Covid-19 epidemic
Ukraine	186,600	Supply of medical equipment and supplies and three ambulances
Italy	317,000	Delivery of medical supplies
Ukraine, Serbia, Ethiopia	298,100	Call for humanitarian projects in the field of healthcare
Moldova, Kenya, Georgia, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Kosovo*, Bhutan, Lebanon, Serbia, Ethiopia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Belarus	430,500	Financial contributions granted through Slovak embassies (so-called micro-grants)
Kenya	213,000	Supply of medical equipment and supplies, including Covid-19 tests developed in Slovakia
North Macedonia	204,000	Supply of PPE and resources for use in crisis situations

* In line with UNSC Resolution 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

Slovakia also made a special contribution in relation to the **migration and refugee crisis**, granting a donation in excess of €1.6 million to the EU facility for helping Syrian Refugees in Turkey.

Another regional format in which donor cooperation was strengthened is the **Slavkov format (S3)**. Under the Slovak

leadership of this informal platform encompassing Slovakia, Czechia and Austria in the first half of 2020, the first joint project in Georgia was agreed, aimed at fostering development in the mountain regions by supporting local communities and self-governments through sustainable tourism and agriculture in the Aragvi protected area.



▲ A shipment of nearly six tons of medical supplies and food was sent to Lebanon on 11 August 2020, following the tragic accident in Port of Beirut. Humanitarian response was coordinated with non-governmental organisations People in Need Slovakia and ADRA (Photo: MFEA SR /Kristína Spišáková)



▲ An official shipping of humanitarian aid to Kenya. Pictured here: Deputy Head of Mission of the Republic of Kenya seated in Vienna, Stella Mokaya Orina, CEO of MultiplexDX Pavol Čekan and State Secretary Ingrid Brocková, Bratislava, 24 July 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Kristína Spišáková)



▲ We assisted medical centers and health facilities providing care to elderly citizens in Belarus in the fight against the pandemic (Photo: MFEA SR)

In 2020 we took steps to meet the recommendations of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) arising from the peer review of Slovakia's development cooperation system. In cooperation with UNDP, draft manuals for integrating two cross-cutting issues (environment and climate change, equal opportunities) in SlovakiaAid project activities were drawn up and an external pilot assessment of global development education projects was implemented.

Another important success in 2020 was the awarding of a certificate for the implementation of EU delegated cooperation (Pillar Assessment) to the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAMRS). The agency is thereby now authorised to implement EU-funded development projects. In the near future, SAMRS could participate in delegated cooperation in Moldova as part of the EU's Joint Programming. SAMRS will also be able to use its existing experience of EU Joint Programming in Kenya, where Slovakia is helping improve food security through its contribution to the AgriFI Kenya programme and is involved in a joint V4 project on the Kenyan coast.

In 2020 the Ministry sought to engage the private sector more in development cooperation, in particular by creating synergies between existing instruments and intensifying communication with businesses. SAMRS provided approximately €455,000 in support for six Business Partnership Programme projects. Under the Ministry's strategic partnership with the UN Development Programme, a call was announced to support projects through the Slovak Challenge Fund, aimed at involving the business sector in sustainable development in certain partnership countries (Moldova and North Macedonia) through the transfer of innovative Slovak ideas. The first five projects were supported in 2020. Over the course of the year, a scheme for providing preferential



▲ Humanitarian aid for Ukraine comprising 200 000 surgical masks, 200 liters of liquid sanitizer, 450 portable tables and 480 blankets (Photo: MFEA SR)

export credits was finalised between the Ministry, the Finance Ministry and Eximbanka to assist Slovak exporters entering emerging markets.



▲ Improving the availability and quality of health care for mothers and children in South Sudan (Photo: St. Elizabeth University)



Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry launched a logistical operation in order to transport stranded citizens to Slovakia. In total, we helped more than 6,000 Slovak citizens in more than 110 territories (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

CONSULAR SERVICE AND SLOVAK COMMUNITIES ABROAD



The activities of the consular service were significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first half of 2020, this was reflected primarily in the fact that human and logistics capacities were used to secure the repatriation of Slovak citizens, with the consular services working in close synergy with the Ministry's crisis management team and in cooperation with other EU countries. The pandemic limited the implementation of some activities, particularly visa and residency services, owing to the reduced mobility and restrictions on the Slovak border. Services for citizens were adapted to reflect the pandemic measures and conditions, while information activities at headquarters and embassies were intensified in response to a significant increase in public enquiries about travel conditions. Throughout the pandemic, Slovak citizens were provided with full consular protection. Great emphasis was placed on timeliness, empathy and professionalism when carrying out consular activities and communicating with clients, and raising customer service standards. Public access to consular services was improved further through the use of social networks and electronic media, particularly for those requiring proactive communication such as travel advice, border controls and conditions of entry into the Slovak Republic and other countries, repatriation and quarantine regulations.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND CITIZEN REPATRIATION

Repatriating citizens was the most challenging crisis management operation carried out by the Ministry since the

founding of the Slovak Republic, especially in terms of the logistics, costs and staffing levels required. The return of thousands of Slovak citizens from all over the world tested the Ministry's crisis management system at headquarters and at embassies, not to mention cooperation with other ministries and institutions in Slovakia and abroad. The Ministry set up a citizen repatriation team, which was in charge of the logistics, the arranging and organisation of the repatriations and providing information to Slovak citizens, the Slovak embassies and foreign embassies accredited to act on behalf of the Slovak Republic. The Ministry cooperated closely with European partners in organising the planned repatriation flights from non-EU countries to make best use of the available capacities in repatriating Slovak citizens and citizens of other EU member states.

The Ministry repatriated the first two Slovak citizens from China on 1 February 2020, and the formal repatriation process was launched under the government declaration of 15 March 2020.

The repatriations presented the Ministry with a large number of technical and logistical challenges. The biggest challenge was having to solve unforeseen situations relating to the safety of those being repatriated, meeting their basic vital needs during repatriation and whilst in the quarantine centres.

The air repatriation of Slovak citizens was made possible thanks to the close coordination and cooperation with the Interior Ministry and the Defence Ministry. The EU Civil Pro-

Citizen repatriations in numbers

- 6,469 Slovak citizens were repatriated from 110 countries and territories around the world, of which 4,534 citizens were directly repatriated via transport and another 1,935 citizens returned home with the assistance of the embassies.
- Repatriated citizens were transported by 189 repatriation bus connections and 30 repatriation air connections.
- Most Slovaks were repatriated from the UK – 1,547 persons, followed by Austria – 605, the US – 528, Sweden – 323 and Israel – 317.
- We helped a total of 618 citizens return home from 29 different countries, while international partners assisted 631 Slovak citizens returning to Slovakia.
- In the repatriation of Slovak citizens, 15 countries provided assistance, namely the Czech Republic – 341 citizens, Austria – 120, Hungary – 56 and Germany – 36.

tection Mechanism (UCPM) was activated twice using common European resources: on 1 May 2020, when Slovakia transported 69 citizens of 18 different countries out of Iraq, and on 14 May 2020, when 19 citizens of 5 different countries were flown out of Tunisia. Slovakia took part in joint EU operations.

In 2020 the Ministry issued more than 850 travel recommendations and public announcements. A coronavirus webpage was set up on the Ministry website www.mzv.sk on 4 February 2020 for the purposes of informing the public. The website also provided information on the border restrictions in different countries. This content was updated approximately 2,000 times in 2020.

In addition to the repatriations, the Ministry's crisis management team continually monitored and analysed the security situation around the world and kept an eye on any emergency events that might lead to crisis situations. It helped compile the Annual Security Report for 2020, updated the catalogue of the National Emergency Response System, and co-managed the Slovak Security System Concept. The team

is a member of *Early Warning Early Action*, an informal forum of EU countries for conflict identification, prevention and peace building.

COOPERATION WITH SLOVAK COMMUNITIES ABROAD

The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad fulfilled its obligations in two key areas: providing grants and issuing certificates for Slovaks living abroad. The Office issued a total of 1,172 certificates, mostly to Slovaks living in Serbia and Ukraine. The Office continued to provide grants for projects by Slovak community members, where implementation was unaffected by the pandemic and where they could be implemented in compliance with the measures in place in the applicant's home country.

Nonetheless, some activities were much reduced or even suspended. A number of traditional expatriate events could not take place in Slovakia, despite being an important and very popular means of fostering linguistic, cultural and national identity, as well as strengthening ties with the Slovak

TYPE OF CONSULAR SERVICE/ACTIVITY	Year				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Consular assistance for Slovak citizens in need	4,073	3,885	5,490	6,094	39,604
Certifications performed at embassies abroad (including translations)	47,875	51,209	44,029	46,518	39,581
Certifications performed by the Ministry's legalisation department	4,118 (of which 885 apostilles)	5,247 (of which 1,047 apostilles)	4,680 (of which 1,070 apostilles)	3,960 (of which 954 apostilles)	2,706 (of which 888 apostilles)
Passport applications	14,695	15,384	13,856	16,428	14,465
Diplomatic and service passports issued	685 + 478	691 + 604	604 + 457	603 + 530	626 + 385
Identity cards issued	1,081	3,691	3,245	3,660	4,633
Driving licences issued	618	685	579	543	376
Registry records and applications	8,324	8,253	7,779	9,134	7,844
Slovak citizenship certificates/confirmations	2,368	2,418	2,427	2,386	1,838
Slovak citizenship applications	76	159	136	137	124
Renouncement of Slovak citizenship	140	231	264	235	202
Criminal record extracts	848	1,327	1,533	1,728	1,381
Accompanying letters for the transport of physical remains	67	63	75	69	60
Varying types of assistance relating to the death of a Slovak citizen abroad	803	826	917	913	945
Replacement travel documents for Slovak citizens	5,039	4,447	4,354	4,671	3,062
Marriages performed at embassies	28	38	34	28	5
Replies to email requests for information	86,232	78,625	88,610	101,442	215,480
Total number of selected consular actions	177,548	177,783	179 069	198,166	333,317
Visa applications	64,958	44,540	29,788	32,088	7,889
Visa applications on behalf of other states	1,175	1,406	1,262	1,382	441
Income from visa fees (EUR)	1,576,163,00	1,271,710,66	1,096,867,59	1 080 065,71	247,162
Income from consular fees (EUR)	1,722,614,50	2,142,302,95	1 921 744,17	1 986 342,10	1 731,849
Total income (EUR)	3,298,777,50	3,414,013,61	3 018 611,76	3 066 407,81	1 978,951

Comparison of consular activities in 2016–2020



▲ Repatriation of Slovak citizens from various destination around the world became an integral part of our consular service in 2020 (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

Republic. Cancelled events included, for example, Expatriate Sunday, Expatriate Yard and summer camps for the children of expatriates. On account of the pandemic, the Office was unable to organise the 14th annual Standing Conference – Slovakia and Slovaks Living Abroad, which takes place every other year in Bratislava.

The main task of the Office of Slovaks Living Abroad in 2020 was to draft a new State Policy on Slovaks Living Abroad for 2021–2025. The Office plans to develop the policy in cooperation with expatriate communities, as well as the Slovak embassies, which have close and frequent contact with expatriates and are familiar with their concerns, problems and strong points, and submit it to the Government of the Slovak Republic in the first quarter of 2021.

Office for Slovaks Living Abroad grant mechanism

- The regular call for grant proposals attracted 948 applications in the fields of culture, education, information activities and the media.
- €1,766,050 was awarded in support of 794 projects.
- An additional 88 special applications received €614,834.
- Together 882 projects received support totalling €2,380,884 in 2020.
- When categorised by field, about 40 per cent went on educational projects, 40 per cent on culture, 15 per cent on publishing activities and 5 per cent on media.



▲ Minister Ivan Korčok at the first virtual meeting of Slovak compatriots in the USA, held on 26 May 2020. Parties discussed Slovak foreign policy priorities and diverse aspects of future cooperation (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ State Secretary Ingrid Brocková and Milan Ján Pilip, Chairman of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, during a preparatory meeting on new State Policy on Slovaks Living Abroad for 2021–2025, Bratislava, 24 September 2020 (Photo: Ľudovít Pomichal)



▲
HlbokáOnline is an online event aimed at communicating key foreign policy topics and introducing the people behind our diplomatic service
(Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

CULTURAL AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

8

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Cultural diplomacy has become an increasingly important part of our foreign policy and is part of the broader promotion of the Slovak Republic around the world. In 2020 the Ministry developed a new internal *Strategy for Promoting Slovak Art and Culture Abroad in 2020–2024*, which lays out the systematic and coordinated planning of cultural diplomacy in more detail. The idea is to set clear content and territorial priorities to be implemented primarily in the form of flagship projects in selected countries. The Ministry, its

embassies and the Slovak institutes, in cooperation with the Culture Ministry and other partners, have already started preparing the flagship projects for 2021, concentrating on Germany, Austria, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Serbia and Israel, and prospectively for the years 2022 and 2023. *Year of Slovak Design* will be the theme for 2021, and in 2022 the focus will be on music.

The Slovak institutes and embassies quickly adapted to the pandemic situation and moved their activities online, in cooperation with the Literary Information Centre, Bibi-



Despite the difficult circumstances, we organized a concert by the prominent Slovak artist Martin Valihora in New York's Carnegie Hall; a performance by operatic tenor Miroslav Dvorský at the 7th Czecho-Slovak ball held in Prague's Municipal House; an exhibition of sand sculptures with Slovak and Czech motives in the Japanese city of Tottori; fashion creations from Bratislava Art School were presented at the fashion show during the Slovak Evening organized in Warsaw (Photo: Diana Cernak, David Peltan, Tottori City Council, Bratislava Art School)



▲ A virtual exhibition showing diverse cultural activities of the Canadian Slovak community organized by the Slovak Embassy in Ottawa on the occasion of Slovak Constitutional Day; Slovak-Lebanese Evening in Beirut; 3rd annual Slovak prose and poetry recital at Lipka Academy, New Jersey (Photo: Peter Kolejak, Branislav Ondrejka, MFEA SR)

ana, ÚĽUV, Danubiana, the Slovak Film Institute, the Slovak Philharmonic, the Slovak National Theatre and other partners.

A joint project involving all eight Slovak institutes proved to be extremely successful. *One Day Jazz Festival A-live* was held under the auspices of Minister Ivan Korčok and consisted of a series of online concerts and interviews with foreign guests conducted by well-known musician Martin Valihora. The first concert was dedicated to Italy, the most badly-affected country in the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Other successful projects included the Hot Jazz and Swing concert, concerts by singers Katka Koščová and Simona Martausová, art shows, film projections, authors' presentations, virtual exhibition and sightseeing tours around Slovakia, and literary readings.

The Slovak Institutes abroad promptly switched from personal contact with the public to issuing eBulletins about Slovakia.

In the summer, when restrictions were temporarily relaxed, the institutes and embassies began exhibiting Slovak art

and culture in a more traditional fashion, including projects under the Framework Priorities for Promoting Slovak Art and Culture Abroad for 2020. Themes included the centenary of Slovak professional theatre, the 140th anniversary of the birth of Milan Rastislav Štefánik and the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Preparations continued on long-term projects such as the memorials to M. R. Štefánik in Washington and Tajikistan and an exhibition on the life and work of M. R. Štefánik at the Meudon Observatory near Paris.

In 2020 the Slovak institutes continued their fruitful long-term cooperation with the Municipality of the Capital City of Bratislava. Major projects included a contemporary Slovak glass exhibition at the Museum of Glass in Conches, France.

Abroad, international cultural cooperation continued under EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture) a group of national cultural institutes in the EU. In November Ľubica Mikušová, the director of the Slovak Institute in Rome, was elected President of the Rome EUNIC Cluster for 2021. The Slovak institutes participating in EUNIC presented

Slovakia through various projects, such as *Europa in Musica* in Rome in the Academic Hall of the St. Cecilia Conservatory, and *Poems in the City* as part of the Warsaw Cluster project. Events organised under the V4 brand included a gala concert by opera singers in the Ehrbar Saal Vienna concert hall, and Virtuózi V4, a classical music competition for young talent in Budapest.

Despite 2020 being far from a normal year, eight of the Slovak institutes abroad either organised or co-organised almost 100 events in their own institutes, more than 150 events in cultural institutions of the host country and almost 120 online events.

For 20 years the Ministry has been actively cooperating with Platform Culture – Central Europe (encompassing the V4 countries, Austria and Slovenia). As the presiding country of the platform in 2020, Slovakia prepared a joint blueprinting (on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list) project in cooperation with the Geneva School of Art and Design. The outcomes of this cooperation included clothing and designs produced by students of the Geneva School of Art and Design using blueprint material supplied by the countries represented in Platform Culture – Central Europe.

The Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) reacted to the pandemic crisis by supporting online and virtual cultural events, and by hosting cultural and educational webinars throughout much of the year.

As usual, the Ministry again supported the Christmas Charity Bazaar, now in its 29th year, organised by the International Women's Club of Bratislava. This year – owing to the pan-



▲ Nina Constantinou, a student of Slovak Heritage School in Edmonton, won the drawing competition of Canadian Slovak schools organized on the occasion of the 140th anniversary of the birth of Milan Rastislav Štefánik (Photo: MFEA SR)

demic – it took the form of a charity online auction of traditional products from various countries around the world. It was held under the auspices of Minister Ivan Korčok.

Znovuzrodenie Palagyayovho paláca

Aj veľká obkladná odborná rekonštrukcia, ktorá sa uskutočnila v rokoch 2000 – 2002 pod dohľadom Pamiatkového ústavu SR a Krajského pamiatkového ústavu Bratislava, túto cennú historickú budovu ministerstvo v súlade s množstvom iných, a to pri zachovaní unikátnych historických priestorov a jednotlivých zachovaných pôvodných historických prvkov interiéru. Projektantom rekonštrukcie historickej budovy bola spoločnosť ZNPNR, a. s., Michalovce a dohľadom stavebných prác bola spoločnosť Hornes, a. s., Bratislava.

Palagyayov palác – historický interiér pivničného susediac

Azda najkrajšia miestnosť v paláci je hlavná veľká sála na prízemí, ktorá je obladená pôvodným bohato členeným dreveným obkladom po obvode stien, dvojkrídlovými dverami s bohatým tympanódom, ako aj kazetovým obkladom stropu a honosnými mosadzými lustrami. Ďalej tu nájdeme reprezentatívne salóny rôbného zamerania: ministerský salón, fajčiarsky salón, jedálský salón, rokovací salón, príčom všetky sú zariadené súčasným klasicizujúcim nábytkom s minimalistickým dizajnom. Predstavitelia ministerstva tu prijímajú delegácie zahraničných partnerov, taktiež sa tu organizujú štátové stretnutia s novinármi, stretnutia so zástupcami mimovládnych organizácií, ako aj so zahraničnými Slovákmi. V zrekonštruovaných historických priestoroch sa prezentujú tematické výstavy, každoročne sa tu odovzdvajú ocenenia Goodwill Envoy a taktiež sa v suterénoch priestoroch bývalých rozsiahlych vinných pivníc konajú diplomatické plety.

Historický interiér v Palagyayovom paláci
zdroj: Bedrich Schrabner

Reprezentatívny jedálský salón v Palagyayovom paláci
zdroj: archív MZVEV SR

Odozdváranie ocenenia Goodwill Envoy
zdroj: archív MZVEV SR

Palagyayov palác – stretnutie európskej diplomacie
zdroj: archív MZVEV SR

Počas predsedníctva Slovenskej republiky v Rade EÚ v priebehu druhého polroka 2016 sa stal Palagyayov palác na Pražskej ulici jedným z najdôležitejších centier stredečianskej európskej diplomacie. Napríklad tomu, že palác zažil výmenu dvoch rodín vlastníkov, znárodnenie, dve svetové vojny a tiež päť výrazných politických zmien, stále patrí medzi najkrajšie honosné mestské paláce v Bratislave a púť svoju reprezentatívnu funkciu.

Objekt 2

Obilná spoločnosť pre Slovensko na Hlbokej ceste 2

Pohľad na budovu Obilnej spoločnosti pre Slovensko z roku 1944
zdroj: archív PUSK

Vznik sídla Obilnej spoločnosti pre Slovensko

Počas druhej svetovej vojny bola v duchu funkcionalizmu na veľkej nezastavanej parcele postavená rozsiahla administratívna budova Obilnej spoločnosti pre Slovensko. Pozemok, na ktorom budova stojí, pôvodne patrili rodine Palagyayov, no na dražbe majetku v roku 1939 po krachu a konkurze slávnej vinnárskej firmy Jákob Palagyay a sýnovia bol predaný Obilnej spoločnosti pre Slovensko. Tá sa krátko nato rozhodla postaviť na tomto mieste svoje hlavné sídlo a oficiálne vyhlásila verejnú architektonickú súťaž. Na túto výzvu zareagoval okrem iných aj skúsený slovenský architekt Juraj

Tvoroček, ktorý ju aj právom vyhral. Ten okrem množstva kvalitnej architektúry navrhol prvú funkcionalistickú budovu v meste so závesnou sklenenou fasádou, ktorá dodnes plní svoju funkciu, len zmenila názov – z pôvodnej Mestskej športielne v Bratislave je dnes Slovenská športielňa. Projekt a začiatok realizácie výstavby ústrednej budovy Ministerstva zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí Slovenskej republiky je v odbornej literatúre kladený do roku 1940, respektíve 1941, archívne pramene to však nepotvrdzujú. Stavebné práce na budove boli realizované v rokoch 1942 - 1943.

▲ 30th anniversary of the founding of the former Ministry of International Relations was commemorated by the publication *Three Buildings, Three Stories* which maps the history of the Ministry's premises

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The pandemic also affected the implementation of public diplomacy activities in 2020. In an effort to inform the general public about the challenges facing the Ministry in this difficult time, we produced a publication titled *Slovak Diplomacy in the Time of the Corona Crisis*. Readers could also learn about the history of the Ministry's headquarters in *Three Buildings, Three Stories*.

Much of public diplomacy was conducted digitally and on social media. The most important of these were the activities commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the founding of the UN, the 140th anniversary of the birth of Milan Rastislav Štefánik, the centenary of Slovak–Japanese diplomatic relations and the 20th anniversary of Slovakia's OECD accession. The pandemic measures prevented us from holding our traditional Goodwill Envoy awards celebrating successful Slovaks abroad in 2020. Despite the challenging situation, the Ministry was twice able to run its Diplomatic Drop of Blood event, at which staff voluntarily donated blood, thereby demonstrating their sense of responsibility and willingness to help in difficult times.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The Ministry's strategic communication is both the primary means of mobilising public support for specific foreign policy goals and priorities and for combatting misinformation. It is derived from the new and updated strategic foreign and

European policy documents: the Government Programme Manifesto, and Joint Declaration by the three highest state officials, the Security Strategy and the Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic for 2020.

The Ministry's concept of strategic communication was substantially updated in 2020, and it applies across all units dealing with foreign policy and diplomacy.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the spread of conspiracy theories and misinformation presents a danger to the health of the nation and a deliberate attempt to cause social unrest and fragment society. Consequently, pandemic-related strategic communication is now a substantial addition to the three existing pillars of strategic communication – Slovakia's membership of the EU and NATO and effective multilateralism. The Ministry's strategic communication therefore focused on the pandemic-related assistance and support provided to us by the EU, NATO and the UN, as well as partner countries.

In light of the pandemic restrictions, strategic communication was conducted almost exclusively online. Key messages on important topics in the media were shared by the Ministry's political representatives. The Ministry has a Facebook profile for strategic communication called *Zahraničná politika sa nás týka* (Foreign Policy Affects Us), which is an important means of popularising communication activities. It was used to inform people about the work of the EU, NATO and international organisations in combating the pandemic in Slovakia and in the regions of strategic interest to Slovakia. Awareness raising activities relating to our strategic foreign policy direction, such as EU conventions and #WEARENATO educational activi-



In collaboration with the National Transfusion Service, the Ministry held two rounds of blood donations, known as the Diplomatic Drop of Blood as we sought to increase awareness, motivate first-time blood donors and support our healthcare system in these challenging times (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)



▲ With paradiplomacy gaining prominence in international relations, the Ministry is strengthening ties with cities and regions – pictured are meetings of Minister Ivan Korčok with the Governor of Trnava Region Jozef Viskupič and the Mayor of Košice Jaroslav Poláček (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor, Miroslav Vacula)

ties had to be postponed until the following year because of the pandemic. Workshops and conferences were held online, often in cooperation with the non-governmental, academic

and private sectors. In the last quarter of 2020, the main prong of public communication was *HlbokáOnline*, a series of online discussions with Ministry representatives on social networks.



▲ The publication *Slovak Diplomacy in the Time of the Corona Crisis* examines the Ministry's political and diplomatic activities during the first wave of the pandemic



 MINISTERSTVO
ZAHRAŇIČNÝCH VECÍ
A EURÓPSKÝCH ZÁLEŽITOSTÍ
SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY

EFFECTIVE FOREIGN SERVICE

In 2020 the Ministry continued its work on effectivising foreign service performance, bringing together existing tools used in, for example, the optimal identification of management and managerial skills, or in the provision of staff support, such as healthcare for deployed staff. The Ministry also began preparing a strategy to improve human resources development in the foreign service, which will be implemented in 2021. In light of the rapidly evolving working environment, the strategy will also take into account our experiences of the pandemic and the new institutes focusing on changes in human resources.

In 2020 the basic staff training scheme was finally put in place by the Ministry and the processes required to ensure effective staff training were launched. In relation to the epidemiological measures, staff training was moved online and a number of training programmes were implemented (such as the training programme for economic diplomats, induction training and language skills). Most importantly, young diplomats were able to complete their research fellowships provided abroad by partner institutions.

Cooperation with educational institutions in Slovakia was another success, particularly internships. The decision to make trainee selection an embassy responsibility bore fruit, and this is reflected in the quantitative, and especially qualitative, shift in internship provision for our students abroad (overall there were 82 trainees at Slovak embassies in 2020). Some of these also participated in the Erasmus+

programme for studying abroad in EU countries. Internships at headquarters continued to attract great interest, both among students and the Ministry's departments, with 56 students having completed an internship at headquarters.

Our diplomatic presence overseas plays a crucial role in the foreign service. With the opening of the embassy in Yerevan in February 2020, there are now 91 Slovak diplomatic outposts worldwide. Slovakia is represented abroad by 65 embassies, eight missions in international organisations, eight consulates general, a liaison office, an economic and cultural office and eight Slovak institutes. Besides the network of embassies, there are also the honorary consulates, and there are 191 of these worldwide. Eight new honorary consulates were opened in 2020, including three in South America, two in Oceania and one each in Asia, Africa and Europe. The Ministry continues to maintain a visible representation in international organisations and EU institutions. In 2020 the European External Action Service employed 22 Slovak citizens, five of whom are permanent employees of the Ministry.

In 2020 we continued to cooperate with the non-governmental sector. Projects focused on analytical, publishing and communication activities in international relations were supported through the grant mechanism. The Ministry issued two calls, and 15 grant applications received support totalling €84,570.



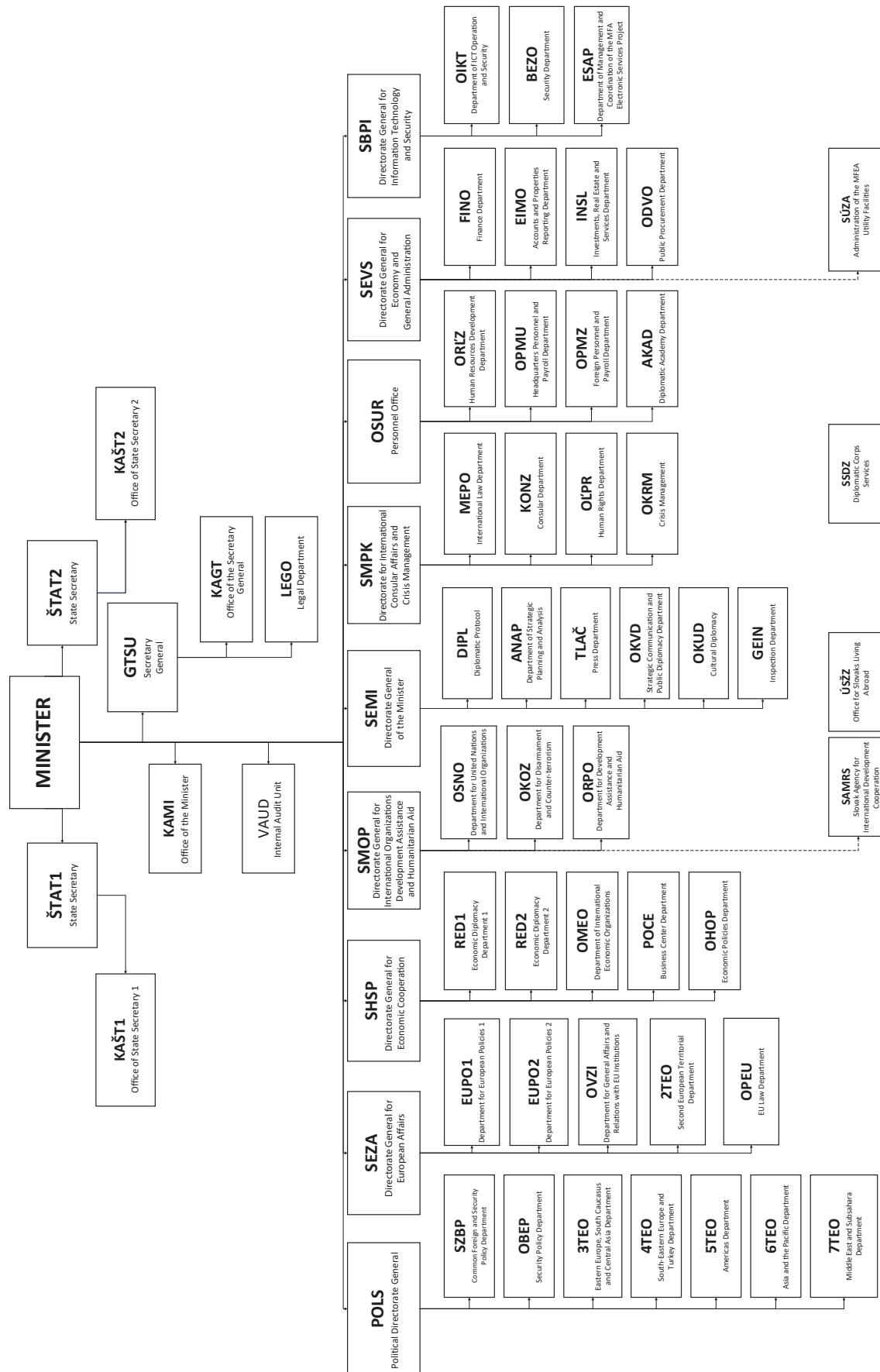
▲ On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Ministry, several notable personalities that shaped Slovak Foreign Service were awarded the Ministerial Golden Plaque. Awardees: Milan Kňažko, the first Minister of International Relations and the first Minister of Foreign Affairs; Vladimír Hasala, an architect who helped design the Ministry; Michaela Jurovská, a literary critic and publicist, who actively participated in the development of Slovak public diplomacy; in memoriam, Svetoslav Bombík, a founder of the Slovak Institute for International Studies. Minister Ivan Korčok also presented former Minister Pavol Demeš with a letter thanking him for the many years he devoted to the Ministry (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

Ministry expenditure in 2020

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

Ministry programmes:	118,755,341
Foreign relations	115,978,459
<i>of which</i>	
Programme management	33,078,490
Cooperation with third sector.....	84,570
Staff training	89,097
Reimbursement of expenditure from Technical Assistance Operational Programme.....	530,977
Economic diplomacy	54,962
OSCE Chairmanship.....	214,471
Diplomatic representation of Slovakia abroad.....	76,865,080
Cultural representation of Slovakia abroad	1,234,948
Staff employed locally abroad	3,825,863
National policy on Slovaks living abroad	2,776,882
Interministerial programmes:.....	33,504,045
Development cooperation – Ministry	6,727,849
IT technologies financed from the state budget – Ministry	5,182,476
Slovakia's contributions to international organisations – Ministry	21,593,719
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	152,259,385

Organizational Chart



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