

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC FOR THE YEAR 2021



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

## Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic for the year 2021

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

Tel.: +421 2 5978 1111  
Fax: +421 2 5978 3638 (3639)  
E-mail: [info@mzv.sk](mailto:info@mzv.sk)  
Web: [www.mzv.sk](http://www.mzv.sk)

Illustration photographs: MZVEZ SR

Language editor: Mária Stanková

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# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC FOR THE YEAR 2021

The world experienced another difficult year. International developments in 2021 continued to be characterised by instability and a lower degree of predictability. Tensions in the area of global security were rising, pressure on democracy and human rights was increasing in several parts of the world, and the focus of global politics was shifting from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific area. These processes took place under the difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, migratory pressure, but also in the context of the acute challenges of technological progress. The world is irreversibly interconnected and all these developments have affected us too. Slovak diplomacy has learned to live with the coronavirus even in these difficult conditions and has tried to deal with current challenges in dialogue with partners and the professional community, and with a determination to protect the interests of the Slovak Republic.

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# LEADERSHIP OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



**Martin Klus**  
State Secretary

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

**Ingrid Brocková**  
State Secretary

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## RESPONSIBLE FOREIGN POLICY IN UNPREDICTABLE TIMES

The year 2021 was supposed to be a post-pandemic year. Our expectations in this respect have not been fulfilled. Also during this past year, the instability and unpredictability of developments remained defining characteristics not only in the public health sector, but also in the political, security and economic spheres.

Although we still haven't fully overcome the pandemic, we have gradually learned to live with it and other issues have come back to the fore that inevitably require a substantial and ideally coordinated response from the international community. Among these, climate change and the need for a long-term, sustainable and globally acceptable strategy for handing our world over to future generations in the best possible condition certainly stand out. Another challenge is our adaptation to unstoppable technological progress and the associated challenges in both the material and cyber worlds. Thirdly, we face ongoing conflicts both in our neighbourhood and in other regions of the world, accompanied by increasing geopolitical confrontation at a global level.

The year 2021 was full of milestones, however, I would identify four key development trends.

*First*, the year 2021 confirmed the trend of **questioning democratic principles and the undermining of human rights** across the world. The Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs responded by approving the Concept for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the World. In doing so, we signed on to our commitment in the Government's Manifesto that *"the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the promotion of the rule of law, will be a key criterion for the implementation*



*of the Slovak Republic's foreign policy interests."* I have appointed an ambassador for human rights, we have organised an international conference on human rights at the Ministry, and we have consistently spoken out on human rights violations around the world. Our stance is based on the conviction that the value of human rights and democracy lies not only in their intrinsic nature, but is also a prerequisite for increasing prosperity, stability and security in the world. I am therefore delighted that we rounded off 2021 focusing on this agenda by attending the Summit for Democracy, where we pledged our support for the rule of law, the fight against corruption and investigative journalism.

*Second*, in 2021, we **saw a rise of tensions in global security**. Alongside the traditional conflict regions, tensions were rising along crucial geopolitical lines - from Eastern Europe to East Asia - and we cannot remain indifferent to this.

Peace and stability in Eastern Europe is in the interest of the Slovak Republic. The fact that our neighbour is in the eighth year of an armed conflict on its territory, its territorial integrity is being violated and its sovereignty is being questioned, cannot be an acceptable state of affairs for us. At the same time, we are convinced that the tensions along Ukraine's eastern border can only be resolved by diplomatic means. Slovakia, together with its NATO and EU allies, stands on the side of such solutions. We have long advocated open dialogue without prejudice and confrontation, as a way out of this situation. However, this dialogue must respect international law and the sovereign equality of all states.

In January last year, the National Council of the Slovak Republic endorsed a new Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic, which defines our perception of the security environment, names our values and vital interests, and identifies our partners and allies. The Security Strategy defines, as vital security interests of the Slovak Republic, the preservation of our independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, the rule of law and democratic constitutional order, as well as the protection of life and health, and the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Slovak population. We are convinced that the protection of these interests belongs equally to every member of the international community.

*Third, the attention of not only our competitors but also of our allies has shifted to the Asian and Indo-Pacific regions.* We need to respond to this in two ways. We need to strengthen our European and transatlantic community at home, deepen our unity, strengthen our resilience, remove critical dependencies and work on what we have always excelled at - defining best practices and standards. At the same time, we must be present where the future shape of the world order is being decided. Europe needs to move beyond a decade of crisis management and an inward-looking approach and return to the global stage as a relevant actor. The preparation of the EU's Strategic Compass, the NATO Strategic Concept as well as the development of the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy are sound first steps in this direction.

*Fourth, I have long argued that foreign policy starts in one's neighbourhood.* That is why, in 2021, we opened up some long-ignored issues in relations with Hungary. This is not to escalate tensions, but on the contrary, to eliminate potential sources of tension as a precautionary measure on the basis of mutual respect and in an open partnership dialogue. The same applies to the EU. The EU's neighbourhood, from Eastern Europe through the Balkans to the Middle East and North Africa, is an area of enormous opportunities and challenges. Europe will not be a global player if it is not a player in its own neighbourhood. The EU has its own policies, institutions and resources for neighbourhood policy. However, a technocratic approach is not enough at a time of competition between global powers. The EU must learn to use these instruments strategically. In recent times, the opposite has been true; at times, the EU has taken steps backwards instead of making progress in neighbourhood policy. We pointed this out in 2021 and will continue to do so in the future.

What to wish for in 2022?

There are only a few signals to suggest that the global environment will change fundamentally in 2022. Although science has given us an effective tool to fight pandemics in record time, much of the planet remains poorly vaccinated, making it likely that the pandemic will be with us for some time to come. Along with it, the accompanying signs will remain, causing uncertainty in the economic and social spheres, tensions in societies and in the international arena.

However, this does not mean that we are powerless in politics. On the contrary, its development is very much in our own hands. That is - if we reject populism and demagoguery; if we make decisions based on facts and data; and if we fight, not generate, disinformation.

This is also true in foreign policy. Amidst turbulent geopolitics that is witnessing the return of great power rivalry, the responsible answer is to defend, uphold and develop the fundamental principles of multilateralism and international law, not the creation of new zones of influence. We do not need new red lines to be drawn, but rather their gradual dismantling on the basis of inclusive dialogue without prejudice. We need peaceful resolution of disputes, not the use or the threat of force and the escalation of tensions.

Even if these wishes are not always heard in the realpolitik of the 21st century, Slovakia can rely on stable partnerships and alliances. Therefore, a credible approach to European and transatlantic integration and a clear stance towards our allies in order to consolidate European and transatlantic unity must be part of our foreign policy.

The pandemic has brought a great deal of cooperation, but also a lot of tension and individualism. I am convinced that we have not yet succeeded in bringing out the best of us on the international stage. It is high time to seek, and find, truly common, multilateral solutions - to the pandemic, to climate change, to energy transition, to the technological revolution, to post-pandemic reconstruction, to poverty eradication and to conflict resolution.



Ivan Korčok  
Minister of Foreign  
and European Affairs

## MARTIN KLUS

### STATE SECRETARY



**In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when you took office as State Secretary, the diplomatic service managed to repatriate thousands of citizens and make it easier for many people to commute across the border to their families and work. What did the Ministry face in the second “pandemic” year?**

We faced similar, but also new challenges. Thanks to the professional commitment of my colleagues, we have continued to fulfil our primary tasks of defending Slovakia’s interests abroad and providing concrete assistance to its citizens. In doing so, we have also been able to actively benefit from the experience of the past, extremely difficult, year. In 2021, we continued to participate in the meetings of the Concilium of Experts, the Pandemic Commission, the Central Crisis Staff and the Government of the Slovak Republic, with the agenda of anti-epidemic measures. We continued to monitor the situation across borders, to coordinate with neighbouring countries, to take inspiration from good practices and to inform both the experts making these measures and the citizens of it all. This was all done with the aim of preventing border lockdowns as far as possible and preserving the right of citizens to move freely within the European Union.

**Slovakia is a country of tens of thousands of cross-border and so-called temporary workers who have been badly affected by the pandemic. How has the Foreign Ministry helped them?**

The EU single market is the backbone of our economy and maintaining the smooth cross-border movement of citizens, goods and services is therefore in Slovakia’s vital interest. We have adapted our regular communication

with our neighbours and other countries, where thousands of our citizens live. In this respect, I consider vaccination to be one of the milestones. Together with the other EU Member States, we have organised both the purchase and distribution of vaccines. I also consider the operation of the so-called EU digital COVID-19 certificates, which Slovakia was among the first to propose, to be a success. The alleged ‘bogeyman from Brussels’ has become a modern symbol of an open and safer Europe in times of the pandemic.

**In 2021, the EU moved closer to a greener, more digital or more innovative future and has shown that it has what it takes to be a leader in the fight against climate change. How do you see these ambitious plans?**

The scale of the economic and social impact of the pandemic will be extraordinary, which is why it is crucial for EU countries to implement national recovery plans as soon as possible. I am pleased that the Slovak recovery plan has already been approved and I welcome the fact that alongside the implementation of reforms we are not neglecting the rule of law. We also care about the condition in which we hand over our planet to future generations and I am therefore pleased that the EU has presented a plan on how it wants to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030. This is one of the most important packages of EU legislative proposals in recent years, called ‘Fit for 55’. However, for Slovakia, it is not only the target that is important, but also the way to it. We are aware that without nuclear energy or the transitional use of gas, Slovakia will not be able to meet its climate targets, which we are making clear in Brussels.

**The coronavirus mutations have further highlighted the need for operational communication between neighbouring countries. Will the 'second wind' that we have caught as part of regional cooperation, thanks to the corona crisis, also continue in 2021?**

Whether it is preserving mobility, various forms of relief for cross-border workers or students, we continue to help each other and cooperate. The success of our foreign policy depends to a large extent on the quality of relations with our neighbours, which we are trying to develop effectively within the framework of, for example, the Slavkov format (S3). It is important for Slovakia that the Central European regional formats are profiled as part of the EU's solutions, and this also applies to the Visegrad Group (V4) which has proven its worth over three decades. It is important for us that the V4 brand is perceived positively in the EU. We are developing our cooperation primarily in areas where we share the same priorities. The unquestionable pride of the successful cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries is the International Visegrad Fund, which was established on the initiative of Slovakia more than two decades after its foundation.

**Slovakia also continued to be one of the vocal supporters of the European integration of the Western Balkan countries last year. But the truth is that while enlargement was once one of the EU's most successful policies, in 2021 it often turned into a source of frustration. Has this status been reversed?**

At the end of the year, after difficult negotiations, we reached an agreement on the conclusions of enlargement. Slovakia cared a great deal about this agreement, not only in terms of form but also in terms of content, because we want the common area of peace, freedom and democracy that the EU represents to grow with more countries. With the conclusions adopted, I believe we have finally sent a clear signal to our partners applying for EU membership that we care about them and see their future in this community with us. It is high time to move from words to action, especially in the case of opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. It is no longer just the Union's credibility that is at stake, but also our security.

**In May 2021, the long-awaited Conference on the Future of Europe was launched to engage citizens in a debate on the future direction of the EU. How do you assess its progress so far and Slovakia's involvement?**

This is not just an initiative of Brussels, but a society-wide debate with citizens at the centre. It is an opportunity for the public to formulate their expectations of the EU and outline how they want our living space to function in the

coming years. Since May, hundreds of events have already taken place at the national and European levels. Slovakia has taken a responsible approach to getting bottom-up feedback. During the summer, we organised an EU Roadshow in the regions of Slovakia, visited twenty-five cities, organised dozens of discussions or interviews with interesting guests and collected more than five hundred questionnaires with citizens' opinions. At the expert level, we are continuing to hold the successful format of the National Convention on the EU. As part of the "Back to School" project, our diplomats also visited primary and secondary schools to discuss the importance of EU membership with young people.

**Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen an increase in hate speech and misinformation in the information space. Moreover, fake news about vaccines is one of the reasons why citizens are still hesitant to get vaccinated. Are EU countries paying sufficient attention to this negative phenomenon?**

The past has taught us that the values of democracy and the rule of law must be constantly protected. As we are increasingly dependent on the Internet and digital devices, we must also be aware of the threats that this lifestyle brings. The unlimited tolerance to misinformation on social networks has already translated into a real threat to public health in Slovakia. It is essential that the EU addresses this threat more actively, as the sharing of untruthful information has a serious negative impact on society as a whole. Slovakia calls for joint action by EU Member States, also in communication with the owners of social platforms.

**In addition to exposing our limits, the 2021 corona crisis also offered us the opportunity to gain experience from our mistakes so that we can more effectively face similar challenges in the future. As the so-called Minister for the Future, you represent Slovakia in European discussions on the EU's strategic foresight. What is your objective?**

Whether we will succeed in tackling the various challenges in the future depends on today's policy settings. The aim of the strategic outlook, also known as foresight, is the same as what Canadian hockey player Wayne Gretzky once famously pointed to: "I skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been.." That's what we strive to do. This is an innovative tool to shape our future policies. We need to get out of reactionary mode and into action mode. Also in the year 2022, we will continue to monitor current trends, analyse emerging issues and their possible consequences and, at the same time, identify opportunities worth seizing.

## INGRID BROCKOVÁ

### STATE SECRETARY



**Last year, you launched several unconventional initiatives. How do you perceive them? Do you plan to continue these in the coming years?**

Yes, we have launched two non-traditional public diplomacy formats, the **Women in Diplomacy Week** and **UN Week in Slovakia**. I would be very happy if they became an annual tradition. During both these weeks, we had the ambition to communicate to the wider public in Slovakia more information about the engagement of our country and our diplomacy on certain topics (UN themes), to sensitize certain topics, either in society or inside our ministry (the status of women). Both initiatives were the result of many departments of the Ministry, which leads us to greater cooperation and horizontal communication. Finally, we have been working on these themes throughout the year; it is a more concentrated form of communication from different aspects and actors involved in these topics.

We organised the Women in Diplomacy Week in March, each day of the week had a different thematic focus: development and humanitarian cooperation, Slovakia's involvement in improving the status of women in international organisations, women in economic diplomacy, and others. Through a series of events, we also presented prominent diplomats and women working in the fields of culture, multilateral organisations, science, research, business, sport and development. **The common ambition of these activities is to contribute to improving the Ministry's corporate culture, to achieve partnership, and to improve inclusion and mutual respect as this agenda is not just about women.** Today, I am very pleased that a Coordinator for gender equality, diversity and inclusion has been appointed at our Ministry. We have also launched "**Fridays about Women.**" Every month, we present stories of inspiring women who have achieved extraordinary success and who spread the good name of Slovakia abroad.

And I am delighted to see more women in decision-making positions.

We organised the UN Week in Slovakia in October with the aim of **making the United Nations and its specialised agencies, as well as Slovakia's involvement in them, more visible to the people in Slovakia.** The week's programme included lectures at several schools, a model UN conference for secondary school students within the Ministry's premises, and discussions were held with pupils from an international primary school on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Agenda 2030 and many other topics. The week also included an international conference on human rights, as well as an internal discussion on identifying cross-sectoral multilateral priorities of Slovak foreign policy.

**What have you been able to achieve in the recent period under review in the field of economic diplomacy?**

While 2020 was a period of planning, setting up systems and processes, 2021 was already a period of concrete implementation. I am pleased that we have managed to implement the **necessary changes within the Ministry.** We have strengthened the business centre financially and in terms of personnel and we have linked economic diplomacy with development cooperation. We intend to further strengthen the analytical link between sectoral issues such as energy, digitalisation and climate change with foreign policy. The Foreign Ministry is the coordinator, however, not the only actor from the public sector supporting economic diplomacy. We are working more intensely together, we want to be a more effective and synergistic partner. That is why I am very pleased that we have been able to successfully launch the "**Team Slovakia**" platform. Through this platform, regular meetings take place on a monthly basis with our key partners from ministries and support agencies to discuss current assignments and their implementation.

The fact that we want to be more active and more targeted is probably best expressed by the fact that, despite the difficult pandemic situation, we have successfully organised the first edition of the **Export Forum** for entrepreneurs, with ten series of the activity called the **Innovation Day** and the first **From Regions to the World** event held in the Trnava Region. The fact that this was the right decision is evidenced by 382 consultations of entrepreneurs with economic diplomats and the enormous interest of Slovak companies as well as ambassadors accredited in Slovakia in the Innovation Day. We have already planned events in the Prešov and Nitra Regions and other Innovation Days organised on a monthly basis.

#### **What are we planning for the next period?**

We cannot expect the future to be less disruptive. The pandemic is both the catalyst and the accelerator of many mega-trends such as digitalisation, automation, and changing global supply chains. Therefore, we also need to focus more on **identifying trends and bringing best practices from abroad to our businesses as well as to the public sector.**

I believe that already in the first months of this year we will present, together with the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, the **Concept of External Economic Relations and Economic Diplomacy**. It will be the basic framework for cooperation, which will specifically materialize in targeted assignments of individual embassies and, if necessary, we will review Slovakia's territorial priorities in terms of economic diplomacy. As **a sectoral service, we want to open up more cooperation with sectoral ministries** in areas such as innovation, agriculture, education and/or tourism. This is linked to creating the conditions for their experts to work at embassies in selected countries, while maintaining a unified management of the foreign service. We will certainly continue to organise time-tested events and, I hope, that we will be able to carry out a number of business missions abroad with the presence of the country's top constitutional officials.

#### **During this unrelenting COVID-19 pandemic and constant emergence of new mutations of the virus, what has been the focus of the foreign service in the area of development cooperation and humanitarian aid?**

The Slovak Republic has a number of development cooperation and humanitarian aid instruments at its disposal through which it has been able to respond promptly and **lend a helping hand to the most vulnerable populations in other countries** such as Kenya, Rwanda, Lebanon, Ukraine, Albania and Moldova. By donating vaccines, we have contributed to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, and by providing material and financial humanitarian aid, we have expressed solidarity with our development cooperation partners, as well as with countries affected by increasing illegal migration. In **Belarus**, we supported civil society and victims of repression and, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, provided additional government scholarships for Belarusian students.

The pandemic year of 2021 was marked by constantly emerging challenges that needed to be addressed without delay, which could not be done without coordination with other involved ministries, NGOs and the private sector. In order to streamline the delivery of humanitarian aid, we worked this year with our main partners to develop the first ever **Humanitarian Aid Strategy**. We have approved three **new development cooperation strategies** with Georgia and Moldova – the programme countries, which I was also able to visit this year, **and Kenya**. The challenge for the coming year will continue to be a more significant involvement by the private sector in development cooperation.

The mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019 - 2023 resulted in recommendations for a revision of the development cooperation system with the ambition to streamline the system and **strengthen the integration of cross-sectoral themes such as environmental protection and gender equality**. The third cross-sectoral theme has been the **observation of human rights**.

#### **Multilateralism and human rights, the Summit for Democracy, the media; which priority themes was the foreign service promoting at multilateral forums?**

Common cross-sectoral themes in multilateral cooperation that our Ministry focused on in 2021 were protecting the environment and combating climate change, strengthening the health architecture and eliminating the effects of the pandemic, promoting peace and security in the world, promoting and protecting human rights, and fostering digital transformation and harnessing innovation.

**Promoting the rule of law, democracy and the human rights agenda** was a prominent theme in the engagement of our Ministry and of Slovakia. This has translated into the adoption of the Concept for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the World and the appointment of an Ambassador with a special mission for human rights. During the UN Week, we organised an international conference *By Protecting Human Rights in the World We Are Also Protecting Our Rights*, which was a clear **confirmation of the value orientation of the Slovak foreign policy**.

Strengthening the rule of law and supporting a free media are closely linked to the fight against corruption, which is one of the Slovak Government's key priorities. Slovakia's commitment was reflected in the invitation to the Summit for Democracy, where world leaders as well as representatives of civil society from many countries, discussed the need to strengthen democracy and protect it from authoritarianism. But the Summit is not the end of our ambitions; there are many challenges ahead. **If we want to be credible, we need to address our domestic challenges in dialogue with civil society and the private sector.**

# 1 + 10 MAIN OUTCOMES OF SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY IN 2021

The Foreign Ministry has learned to live under temporary pandemic circumstances that were accompanying all the activities of the diplomatic service. With the EU and other individual government sectoral ministries, the diplomatic service closely coordinated how to combat the pandemic, in particular, in the process of joint procurement of vaccines and managing the operation of the European digital COVID-19 passport.

1. In January 2021, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted a new Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic which, together with the new Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic, responds to the security challenges of the international environment, defines the values, starting points and interests of the Slovak Republic in the field of security policy, and provides a strong backing for the shaping of Slovak foreign policy.
2. The Slovak Republic submitted a National Recovery and Resilience Plan to the European Commission, which represents an ambitious programme for the reconstruction of the country. The Plan was endorsed by the EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council in July 2021.
3. Slovak diplomacy actively promoted an international order based on respect for international law, human rights and the values of the rule of law and democracy in the world. The Ministry has endorsed the Concept for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the World, as well as the Concept for the Promotion of Media Freedom. Slovakia's voice was heard in all international forums important for the protection of democracy and human rights.
4. Through its foreign policy activities, Slovakia clearly confirmed its Euro-Atlantic orientation and it considers being anchored in the strongest democratic integration structures - the EU and NATO - to be in the country's vital interest.
5. Slovakia has been an active part of global and European efforts to limit climate change, made a positive contribution to the UN Climate Change Conference 2021 in Glasgow, and supported the EU's climate goals.



President Zuzana Čaputová and Britain's Prince Charles discuss how both countries are contributing to climate protection and how the urgency of the climate crisis is felt especially by young people during the UN Climate Conference, 1 November 2021, Glasgow.  
(Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic)

6. Slovakia pursued a more active neighbourhood policy, including moving Slovak-Hungarian relations towards an open and substantive partnership dialogue oriented towards the future.
7. Pope Francis' historic four-day official and pastoral visit to Slovakia demonstrated extremely good relations between the Holy See and Pope Francis - a global secular and spiritual authority - and Slovakia.
8. Slovakia's all-round support for Ukraine, for the democratic opposition in Belarus, as well as its solidarity with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia in their ability to counter the artificial migratory pressure on the EU's eastern external borders, were an expression of Slovakia's special interest in a secure Eastern European neighbourhood.
9. Slovakia has supported the EU enlargement policy consistently, and initiated a strategic discussion on the Western Balkans in the context of foreign policy.
10. Last year, Slovak diplomacy, recognising the fundamental importance of cultural diplomacy as an effective tool for external engagement, promoted a greater dissemination of Slovak culture and presentations of Slovakia abroad.

## 10 KEY MOMENTS OF SLOVAK DIPLOMACY IN 2021

1. 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Visegrad Group (February).
2. Evacuation of dozens of Slovak and foreign nationals from Afghanistan (August).
3. High-level international conference on the promotion of human rights and democracy in the world (October) and appointment of the First Ambassador at Large for Human Rights (May).
4. Slovak participation in the Virtual Summit for Democracy (December).
5. Conference on the Future of the EU (KOBÉ) and the Roadshow in 25 Slovak cities - communication with citizens on the future of the EU and the #MYSMEEU project.
6. Export Forum as the flagship conference of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic in the field of economic diplomacy (September).
7. Donation of 840,700 COVID-19 vaccines worth €3.6 million to the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Montenegro, Vietnam, Rwanda, Kenya, Armenia and Taiwan.
8. Digitalisation and computerisation of consular service procedures in the process of providing consular services to our citizens abroad and communication with compatriots during the pandemic period.
9. The Year of Slovak Design - representative launch in Milan, Jerusalem, The Hague and Prague.
10. Publication of the representative book "Slovakia in the Artworks of the Slovak National Gallery."

## 10 KEY PROJECTS OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN 2021

1. The UN thematic Week in Slovakia.
2. The Women thematic Week in Diplomacy.
3. Štefan Osuský Summer School of Diplomacy.
4. Establishment of a coordination platform of central government bodies for external economic relations "Team Slovakia."
5. From Regions to the World and Innovation Days - active linking of entities from the private, public and scientific research sectors in the regions, in order to support their internationalisation and the presentation of Slovak technology companies and institutions to foreign partners.
6. Presentations of foreign exhibitions and social events in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alexander Dubček, a prominent figure in Slovak history.
7. Goodwill Envoy - awarding successful Slovaks abroad as part of the Slovak Diplomacy Day.
8. Analytical Days of Svetoslav Bombík and the use of a strategic foresight in defining the medium-term priorities of Slovakia's foreign and European policy.
9. HlbokáOnline - a series of interactive online discussions on Slovak foreign policy and Slovak interests in the EU and the world.
10. The Concept for Improving the Human Resources Development System and establishing the position of Coordinator for the Status of Women, Diversity and Inclusion and the position of Advisor for Ethical Conduct in Civil Service at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

## 2021 in Pictures





# 1 GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

In 2021, Slovakia continued to enjoy a good international position. The country maintained a clear pro-European and Euro-Atlantic strategic foreign and political orientation. Slovakia is part of all Central European regional groups and is fully integrated into the EU cooperation formats. Even in the challenging situation of weakening multilateralism and growing geopolitical confrontation at the global level, Slovakia acted as a credible partner and ally in both NATO and the EU, respecting and defending democratic rules, human rights and international law.

## Good Neighbourly Relations and Partnerships

Good neighbourly relations, unburdened with the past and oriented towards the future, positive agendas, common values and interests were constantly present in Slovak foreign policy in the Central European region throughout the whole course of 2021.

## Neighbourly Relations

**Czech Republic:** The outstanding level of our mutual relations was reconfirmed in 2021. Both countries paid

special attention to harmonizing their actions and attitudes in European policies aimed at post-crisis recovery of the EU's economy and intensification of a mutual dialogue. Slovakia showed solidarity with the Czech Republic in the Vrbětice situation, standing by its side after a devastating tornado in South Moravia. Slovakia also intensively cooperated in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Czech Republic continues to be the second most important trading partner for Slovakia (after Germany). In keeping with tradition, the first foreign visit of the Slovak Prime Minister in April was to Prague and the visit of the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs in December was to Bratislava. The new Czech Prime Minister confirmed his intention to uphold this tradition in December 2021.

**Hungary:** In 2021, Slovakia continued to emphasize a pragmatic and constructive agenda in Slovak-Hungarian relations. It focused on strengthening economic cooperation, expanding energy and transportation infrastructure, mainly enhancing the interconnectivity of the grid and achieving progress in the Danube-Ipel-connectors. The intensity of mutual relations was attested to by the negotiations of the Slovak Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs in Hungary and a visit by the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Slovak Republic. The talks also covered topics that are the



Minister Ivan Korčok welcomes his Czech counterpart Jan Lipavský during his first working trip abroad, 20 December 2021. (Source: MFEA SR/ Tomáš Bokor)



Minister Ivan Korčok meets with the Chief Hungarian diplomat Péter Szijjártó, 5 October 2021, in Bratislava. The ministers met in a friendly and open dialogue and discussed the current issues of bilateral cooperation (Source: MFEA SR/ Tomáš Bokor)

subject of divergent views. Slovakia called for the activities of the Hungarian government related to the Slovak Republic to respect the standard framework of bilateral agreements on cooperation.



President Zuzana Čaputová welcomed the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, on 9 November 2021, at the time of escalating tensions at the Polish-Belarusian border. The President also took an interest in the outstanding issues between Poland and the EU institutions in the field of the rule of law. (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic)

**Poland:** Bilateral relations with Poland continued in a dynamic dialogue between the top constitutional representatives. They focused on broader security issues, including energy safety, interconnecting regional transportation and energy corridors, cross-border cooperation and activities under the framework of various formats of regional cooperation. Polish presidency of The Visegrad Group (V4) during the first half of 2021 contributed to the enhancement of bilateral communication. In the area of economic cooperation, Poland kept its prominent position, remaining Slovakia's third most important trading partner, as it has been for a long time. Slovak-Polish economic forum held in Poprad also contributed to a positive development in the area of cross-border cooperation.



Minister Ivan Korčok with Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg on a walk in the old Town of Bratislava, Bratislava, Date: 2 September 2021. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

**Austria:** 2021 affirmed the uptick in mutual relations. Bilateral dialogue concentrated on the area of regional cooperation, cross-border cooperation and rules during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, solutions to some legal issues concerning the work of Slovak nurses and caretakers in Austria, but also mutual economic cooperation, since Austria continues to represent one of the most important economic partners and foreign investors in Slovakia. Expert institutions maintained a sound dialogue about the safety of the Mochovce nuclear power plant. Both countries demonstrated their interest in promoting the agility of the Central 5 group and the so called Slavkov format. Visits by the Slovak Prime Minister to Austria as well as those by the Austrian Chancellor and the Speaker of the Austrian Parliament to Slovakia just underlined the strong interest in productive mutual relations.

**Ukraine:** Ukraine continued to be the most tormented of Slovakia's neighbours. Slovakia continued its support for Ukrainian transformation efforts and European perspective. It reiterated its position on the issue of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine based on the core principles of international law. Frequent bilateral negotiations at the highest political level (heads of state, prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs) underpinned the high level



On 16 February 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok also discussed EU cooperation with Kyiv and regional policy and international security issues with the head of Ukrainian diplomacy Dmytro Kuleba. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

of political dialogue, and mutual, including cross-border, cooperation. In May 2021, the Slovak Prime Minister paid an official visit to Ukraine, while in August he participated in the inaugural summit of the Crimea Platform. In September 2021, he also met with the Ukrainian Prime Minister in Uzhhorod. The Slovak President signed a joint Declaration on the European Perspective of Ukraine with the Ukrainian President. Slovakia also expressed its support for the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine both at European and NATO institutions.

## Regional and Bilateral Partnerships

**The Visegrad Group (V4)** celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021. The Slovak diplomacy strived to pursue a pragmatic cooperation beneficial to all countries under this format, contributing to common European solutions. In February, on the occasion of its 30th anniversary, the V4 leaders adopted a jubilee declaration specifying further joint



President Zuzana Čaputová at the summit of Presidents of V4 countries in Budapest. The Presidents agreed to support the vaccination and also expressed their solidarity with Poland, Latvia and Lithuania in the context of the migration crisis triggered by Belarus, 29 November 2021, Budapest. (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic)

steps at their summit in Krakow. The leaders reacted to the growing importance of the EU digital transformation through adopting a declaration on cooperation in digital projects. In 2021, Slovakia was the presiding country of the International Visegrad Fund. The leaders acknowledged its exceptional importance and role in strengthening regional cooperation by increasing its annual budget to 10 million euro as of 2022. This step will allow it to expand its activities mainly in the area of youth mobility.



State Secretary Martin Klus at Štiřín Castle near Prague during a meeting of national coordinators of cooperation within the Slavkov Format, 30 September 2021, Czech Republic. (Photo: MFEA SR)

**Slavkov format (S3)** focused on practical cooperation in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, but also paid attention to current EU topics and foreign policy, both under the Austrian and Czech presidency in the first and second half of 2021, respectively. The parties assessed the question of strengthened cooperation in transportation, the energy sector, industry, development cooperation and the Western Balkans. This action also resulted in a joint letter from the ministers of foreign affairs to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, presenting specific initiatives that could be implemented under the EU umbrella in the Western Balkans.

Slovakia, together with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia maintained more intense communication not only in the area of coordinating pandemic-related activities and border management, but also in focusing on the issues of economic cooperation, development of regional infrastructure and security in a broader Central European context. Four informal meetings of the foreign ministers of C5 countries – Central Five were held throughout the year. Slovakia hosted one of these meetings in May 2021 in Bratislava, with the participation of the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs.



At the invitation of Minister Ivan Korčok, a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and Slovakia took place in Bratislava on 13 May 2021, and the Ukrainian Foreign Minister joined the negotiations. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

**Three Seas Initiative:** Slovakia assessed the possibilities of capitalizing on the potential of this regional platform for the involvement in macro-regional projects in the North-South corridor in the area of infrastructure, energy and digital agenda, emphasizing the importance of strengthened connectivity in the Central European region.

**Germany:** 2021 attested to the importance of good and friendly relations between Slovakia and Germany in both political and economic areas. A bilateral dialogue at the political and expert level focused on the European agenda in the context of adopted national recovery and



On 27 April 2021 in Berlin, Minister Ivan Korčok and his German partner, Heiko Maas, discussed bilateral issues with the emphasis on continuing intensive cooperation between Slovakia and Germany. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

resilience plans and discussions about the future of the European Union. Negotiations between the Slovak Prime Minister and the German Chancellor, an official visit by the German President to Slovakia along with the trip by the Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs to Berlin underscored the strategic character of this relationship for Slovakia. Activities in the area of economic relations concentrated on enhancing cooperation in such progressive areas as digitalization, electro-mobility, hydrogen technologies and energy transformation. In 2021, the Action Plan for Enhanced Dialogue for 2022-2024, providing a framework for a new phase of cooperation, started to be prepared.

**France:** The Action Plan for 2018-2022 continued to provide a sound basis for the partnership with France. A strategic framework for bilateral relations was reinforced by negotiations between the French President and the Slovak Prime Minister in Paris and later on in Budapest in December 2021. The coordination in the field of European policies, especially in the energy sector was particularly beneficial, also within the context of the upcoming French



On 9 June 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok led talks with Minister of State for European Affairs, Clémental Beaune, in Paris. The partners addressed bilateral relations between Slovakia and France, the Conference on the Future of Europe, but also the forthcoming French Presidency of the Council of the EU and EU enlargement. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022.

**The Vatican:** 2021 was a historical success for the relations between Slovakia and the Holy See. After the visit of the head of state, Zuzana Čaputová, in the Vatican in December 2020, the fourth papal visit in modern Slovak history took place. The four-day official state and pastoral visit of Pope Francis, both a spiritual and secular authority, represented the peak of mutual bilateral activities in recent years.



Following the official welcome ceremony, President Zuzana Čaputová and the Pope moved to the Presidential Garden, where a meeting with representatives of political and social life took place. (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic)

## Strong Trans-Atlantic Relations

After the change of the presidential administration in the United States of America (USA), Slovakia continued to strengthen bilateral cooperation, reinforcing transatlantic unity and promoting rules-based international order. Slovakia actively supported the Summit for Democracy aimed at the protection of democratic values, principles and institutions. Slovakia's efforts within the EU were aimed at boosting EU-US cooperation and joint action in



President Zuzana Čaputová attended the North Atlantic Alliance Summit in Brussels on 14 June 2021, where she first met the new US President Joe Biden. (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic)

solving global problems and challenges. Slovakia continued its intense defence and military cooperation with the USA, as a strategic NATO ally, particularly in the training and modernization of the Slovak Armed Forces. In addition, the second year of the Strategic Dialogue took place and the intense coordination in development cooperation continued to materialize. More resources were also allocated to the bilateral scholarship programme. The negotiations on a Defence Cooperation Agreement at the end of the year created space for a strengthened partnership and cooperation in the area of security and defence.

## Eastern Europe

Stability, security, prosperity and democratic development in our immediate neighbourhood is in Slovakia's strategic interest - in line with the approved Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic. Slovakia appreciated the fact that the sixth summit of the **Eastern Partnership**, postponed multiple times, materialized in December 2021. The Summit substantiated the strategic character of the partnership, setting new mid-term priorities. It approved concrete measures and goals under the title *Recovery, Resilience, Reforms* until 2025, supported by a development economic and investment plan for partner countries with the potential to mobilize more than 17 billion euro. Slovak diplomacy also contributed to the endorsement of an ambitious programme of the Eastern Partnership and its confirmation in the joint Summit Declaration, along with the enhancement of sectoral cooperation with an emphasis on the gradual integration of partners into the EU internal market and on strengthening their overall resilience against both internal and external challenges. Significant progress has been achieved since the establishment of the Eastern Partnership 12 years ago, mainly in the area of economy, trade, connectivity and academic mobility. Still, the partner countries demonstrate shortcomings in the area of structural reforms, judiciary, the fight against corruption, rule of law and media freedom. Future support programmes

in the Eastern Partnership therefore focus mainly on the above-mentioned areas. Slovakia also welcomed the establishment of the EU Associated Trio Countries of the Eastern Partnership (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova). Those countries have signed their EU Association Agreements, including enhanced and comprehensive agreements on free trade, supporting their integration ambitions into the EU.

The Russian Federation continued its assertive security policy and political approach towards Western countries. Slovakia applied valid principles of a joint EU and NATO approach to Russia. In a bilateral dialogue, we confirmed to our Russian counterparts our interest in expanding bilateral relations and to openly discuss all questions. This attitude was also made clear during a trip by the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister Richard Sulík, and the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Ivan Korčok, to Petersburg in June 2021 as well as during the meeting between Ivan Korčok and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov in New York in September 2021. Slovakia puts an emphasis on trade and economic areas, expecting a new impetus as a result of the 21st Meeting of the Slovak Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation held in Bratislava in November 2021.

No progress was observed in the internal political situation of Belarus in 2021. Slovakia denounced the violence against Belorussian opposition and civil society, attacks on non-governmental organizations and free independent media. Slovakia supported democratic processes in Belarus by awarding 20 government scholarships and joining the OSCE Vienna Mechanism with regard to Belarus. To show its solidarity, Slovakia also offered both political and material help to the EU countries bordering Belarus during the hybrid attack of the artificially organized migration crisis.

## South-East Europe

Slovakia continued to pay special attention to the situation in the **Western Balkans**, supporting the European perspective of the countries in the region. Our bilateral contacts intensified, with Foreign Affairs Minister Ivan Korčok touring Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania. He handed over humanitarian aid to our partners amounting to a total value of 3,151,000 euro. State secretaries Martin Klus and Ingrid Brocková also repeatedly visited the region while the president of Montenegro and the Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Slovakia.

The EU enlargement policy is the basic stability instrument promoting our interests in this region. Slovakia thus continues to be one of the main advocates for a fair accession process and the future membership of the Western Balkan countries in the EU. Slovakia exercised substantial effort to mitigate obstacles to the accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.



On 9 February 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok held talks with the President of Montenegro Milo Đukanović during a working visit (Photo: Tomáš Bokor, MFEA SR)



On 28 June 2021, the Croatian Foreign Minister Gordon Grlić-Radman and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues - Pristina dialogue Miroslav Lajčák also attended the traditional meeting of V4 and Western Balkans ministers in Poznań. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

The conviction of the EU Member States to pay attention to the Western Balkans beyond the scope of the enlargement policy grew stronger as the negative trends in the region intensified. Further contributing factors included the dynamic development in the region and intensifying involvement of third countries. Slovakia had taken the initiative that resulted in two strategic discussions aimed at the EU-Western Balkan relations in the Council of the European Union (May, November 2021). One of the outcomes was to enhance the EU's engagement based on specific initiatives presented by its members. Slovakia coordinated its steps with the Czech Republic and Austria under the Slavkov Format.

Slovakia continued to support acceleration of reforms and integration processes through specific projects, including those aimed at the transfer of Slovak know-how implemented under the EU and UNDP umbrella, all within the framework of a more intense political dialogue with its partners in **Bosna Hercegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia**. Other activities included the



Martin Klus on Wednesday 21 July 2021 in Sarajevo on an official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to bilateral relations, the main topics of the negotiations were, in particular, the issues of maintaining stability and peace, advancing the EU integration process, but also migration, security issues or developments in the Western Balkans region. (Photo: MFEA SR)

exchange of best practices under the SlovakAid initiative – Sharing Slovak Expertise, initiatives under the National Convent on the EU, twinning projects and those aimed at reaching Schengen parameters of the EU's external borders, including the presence of Slovak police officers at the border of North Macedonia and Greece.

Active engagement by Slovak diplomacy contributed to two top-level meetings under the **Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue**. However, the pace of the discussion remained decelerated.

**Eastern Mediterranean** - with its engagement for the benefit of both communities on **Cyprus** and its prudent actions at the EU level, Slovakia assisted in maintaining a dialogue that searches for solutions in line with international law. A visit by Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok to Ankara along with the meeting of both ministers of foreign affairs on the side lines of the UN General Assembly in New York aimed at strengthening bilateral dialogue on mutual relations, the regional situation and enhancing trust between the EU and Turkey.



The talks with Serbian Minister Nikola Selahović on 8 February 2021 also focused on issues related to the accession process and the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue. At the same time, Minister Korčok handed over to the Minister for European Integration Jadranka Joksimović material humanitarian aid to support the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

## STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP AROUND THE GLOBE

### Asia and Pacific

2021 witnessed a further shift of the core global geopolitical development into Asia. Slovak foreign policy endeavours in this area focused on bilateral economic cooperation and political dialogue, together with multilateral activities within the regional structures (V4 + Korea Summit and the meeting of foreign ministers with Japan). In this context, the 13<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit (Asia-Europe Meeting) was of importance, reaffirming interest in fostering cooperation and dialogue between **Europe** and **Asia** in the post-



On May 7, 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok met on the sidelines of a meeting of the heads of diplomacy of the V4 countries in Warsaw with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

covid era and the importance of fostered multilateralism, green transformation and joint growth. The Slovak Prime Minister addressed the importance of progress in the social and economic recovery for joint growth. The EU countries activated mutual relations with **India** by adopting the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Introduction of Chinese counter-sanctions against the EU structures and natural persons impacted Slovak relations with **China**. In spite of that, China remains an important economic partner both for Slovakia and the EU. Slovakia respected the One China policy, however, it simultaneously strengthened its economic ties with Taiwan. In October 2021, Slovakia received an investment-trade mission from Taipei and in December 2021 it sent a trade delegation to Taiwan.

## Middle East and Africa

The dialogue and economic cooperation between Slovakia, Israel and the United Arab Emirates was intensified in 2021. Visits by the Slovak Foreign Minister to the region underscored this positive development. The Slovak ties in the region were also strengthened by bilateral negotiations between Ivan Korčok, the Slovak Foreign Minister, and the foreign ministers of Qatar, Palestine and Morocco.

Ministerial meetings of V4 countries + **Egypt and Morocco** were held under the Hungarian Presidency. For a long time, these countries have represented the biggest Slovak trade partners in the region, while Slovakia maintains a useful expert and political dialogue with them, focusing on the fight against terrorism and illegal migration.

The EU engaged in the social and economic stabilisation of the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). It participated in both the 6<sup>th</sup> regional forum of the Union for the Mediterranean and the ministerial meeting of the **EU and the Southern Neighbourhood**. Assessment of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean, transformation

process, EU strengthened post-pandemic engagement and following social and economic regional stabilisation only underscored their importance.



The topics of talks between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Morocco on 7 December 2021 were the current cooperation projects in the areas of development cooperation and the fight against illegal migration. (Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary)

In its support to renew the peace process and arrive at a fair settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, Slovakia permanently emphasized the importance of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine. In this context, Slovakia offered its positive assessment of normalization and also Israel's establishment of diplomatic ties with a number of Arab countries under the framework of the Abraham Accords.

One of the most important security and stability questions in the region for many, including Slovakia, was continuation of the international negotiations on renewing the Iranian Nuclear Agreement (Joined Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA) and upholding the related commitments.

Slovakia supported the conclusions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> African Union – European Union Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting from October 2021 in Kigali, Rwanda. It welcomed the agreed upon actions strengthening partnership dialogue and the mutually beneficial sectoral cooperation between EU countries and African states.



On May 20, 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok held talks in Israel with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Foreign Minister Gabriel Ashkenazi on the current security situation in Israel and the Gaza Strip. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

## Central and Latin America

Slovakia focused on relations with Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba. Although this is a distant region, Slovakia expects to benefit from the promotion of broader EU trade agreements (EU-MERCOSUR, **renewing** the Global Agreement with Mexico, upgrading the Association Agreement with Chile). In this spirit, it welcomes the start of the ratification process of the establishing agreement based on which the EU-LAC Foundation has become an international organisation.

## A SECURE SLOVAKIA IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD

The weakening of multilateralism in the world, the growing rivalry between major powers and the pressure of hybrid threats have framed the activities of Slovak diplomacy in the security environment.

### The North Atlantic Alliance

For Slovakia, the Alliance is a fundamental pillar of national security and defence. The country's strategic interest is transatlantic unity, credibility and the operational capability of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO). Slovakia has therefore supported the Alliance's adaptation, as of June 2021, to security changes in the Euro-Atlantic area and has engaged in discussions on NATO's future Strategic Concept. In coordination with other allies of the Bucharest Nine Platform, it has promoted the adaptation of the Alliance's tasks pertaining to the new security challenges on its eastern flank. The Slovak Republic advocated for a deepening of the EU-NATO strategic partnership and the harmonisation of EU defence initiatives with NATO processes.



President Zuzana Čaputová at the North Atlantic Alliance Summit in Brussels on 14 June 2021. The leaders discussed the direction of NATO. (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic)



Meeting of V4 Ministers with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on current security issues, strengthening transatlantic cooperation, as well as the revitalisation of the North Atlantic Alliance, in Brussels, on 23 March 2021. (Photo: MFEA SR/Juraj Tomaga)

Although in 2021, there was a decrease in Slovakia's defence spending due to the decline in GDP as a result of the pandemic, the modernisation and development of the military capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic continued. Slovakia continued to participate in the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia (eFP) and in the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NMI). Together with other allies, Slovakia ended its participation in the NATO Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan in the summer of 2021.

Slovakia continued to support NATO's open-door policy and partnership building. Slovakia was in favour of the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia and strengthening the Alliance's practical cooperation with Ukraine. In August 2021, as the lead country, it successfully completed the NATO Trust Fund project in Ukraine for the destruction of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices. We supported the enhancement of cooperation with Finland and Sweden in the area of Baltic Sea security, and also the dialogue with Asia-Pacific partners. From January 2021 (until the end of 2022), the Slovak Embassy in Tel Aviv has acted as the NATO Liaison Embassy in Israel.

In October 2021, the Slovak Republic expressed its interest in joining the new NATO instruments under formation (DIANA, the civil and military innovation accelerator and the



The head of Slovak diplomacy visited the administrative border line with the region of South Ossetia on 18 October 2021 together with Marek Szczygiel, Head of the EU Monitoring Mission, where there are currently eight Slovak citizens. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

NATO Innovation Fund) aimed at promoting technological cooperation between the Allies.

The Slovak Republic continued to actively participate in the #WeAreNATO communication project. With the goal of increasing public support for NATO, it has strengthened public diplomacy activities and cooperation with think tanks.

## EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

A crucial policy initiative in 2021 was the preparation of a new EU strategic document, the Strategic Compass. Its aim is to enhance the EU's preparedness and enable it to respond more quickly and effectively to security threats. The Slovak Republic has been actively involved in discussions and will actively continue to be involved in the process of preparing the Strategic Compass, with the ambition of its adoption in March 2022. In May 2021, the EU approved a new financial instrument for the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) called the European Peace Facility and approved the first measures to strengthen the military and defence capabilities of our partners in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Africa.

Slovakia was part of a coordinated EU approach and common line in a continued effort executed by the international community to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the conflicts and civil wars in Syria, Yemen, Libya and the countries of West and East Africa.

The Slovak Republic continued its active participation in EU international crisis management. In 2021, it increased its presence in the EU operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea) and also engaged in training missions in Africa through the EU mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) and the EU mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM CAR). Slovak experts continued to participate in CSDP civilian missions, the Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), the Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia), the Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo) and the Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia).

The Slovak Republic implemented its commitments under the CSDP Civilian Compact and cooperated intensely with the European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management in Berlin.

## Hybrid Threats

In 2021, Slovakia actively participated in international efforts to increase resilience to hybrid threats. The aim was to strengthen the respective tools and capabilities of the international organisations of which Slovakia is a

member, primarily NATO and the EU. Therefore, Slovakia supported the EU's initiative to prepare instruments to combat external hybrid interference, which would bring together various measures to detect hybrid activities against the EU and its members, while also focusing on their prevention, as well as possible retaliatory actions against those who perpetrated them.

## Terrorism

Slovakia is part of the international community's fight against terrorism which is why it actively participated in the ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition against Da'ish in Rome and made another contribution to the UN Trust Fund for the financing of a mechanism to investigate the crimes committed by Da'ish (UNITAD). Slovakia also joined the „Christchurch Call“ initiative to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online.

## Disarmament

In the area of arms control, disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Slovakia continued its consistent policy of maintaining and strengthening the existing disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. It has resolutely rejected individual efforts to discredit or weaken universally recognised and accepted global norms. It welcomed the extension of the New Start Treaty, while clearly stating the need for a more comprehensive, inclusive and, at the same time, verifiable arms control framework across the nuclear weapons category.

Slovakia became a member of the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague for a 2-year term and contributed financially to special funds to strengthen its capacity. It continued to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna in the implementation of its mandate and submitted offers to the Provisional Technical Secretariat of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) to host the CTBTO inspectors' courses for Eastern Europe in 2023.

## Multilateralism - Common Solutions to Global Problems

For Slovakia, using the potential of multilateral institutions and respecting the principles of international law was also a way to promote its national interests last year.

## United Nations

The United Nations Organisation remains an important platform for Slovakia to promote both national and common European values. Slovakia focused on five main priorities in 2021: 1. Protecting the environment and combating climate change; 2. Strengthening the health architecture, eliminating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; 3. Promoting peace and security in the world; 4. Promoting and protecting human rights, and 5. Strengthening digital transformation and harnessing innovation. When it comes to pursuing its priorities, Slovakia followed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 2021, Slovakia was appointed Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The PBC is a key supporting body in the broader peacekeeping agenda. Through this important post, Slovakia was also able to actively support peacebuilding activities in conflict-affected countries. Slovakia co-chaired, together with South Africa, the **UN Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform**, where the country was particularly involved in supporting the building of reliable and credible institutions in post-conflict countries.



*Slovak soldiers and police have been involved in Cyprus for two decades in upholding the ceasefire and respecting peace agreements. In doing so, they contribute significantly to preventing a resumption of the conflict. (Photo: MFEA SR)*

Together with other UN members, Slovakia continued to promote the UN Secretary-General's „Action for Peace Operations“ initiative and actively contributed to **UN peacekeeping operations**. The main contribution was the deployment of 241 Slovak soldiers and 5 police officers in the **UNFICYP peacekeeping mission in Cyprus**. Slovak soldiers have also been serving for a long time in the UNTSO mission, whose task is to monitor the ceasefire in the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria.

With regards to the pandemic, the Slovak Republic supported the exchange of information, the sharing of data and best practices in multilateral forums, particularly as part of the **World Health Organization (WHO)**. Slovakia became a member of the Friends of the Pandemic



*State Secretary Ingrid Brochová opened the UN Model Conference as part of the events called UN Week in Slovakia. 46 students from nine schools discussed current global challenges, 25 October 2021 in Bratislava. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)*

Treaty group and advocated for the nomination of a Slovak candidate to the **WHO Executive Board**. This will be Slovakia's first ever seat on this body. To combat the pandemic, Slovakia has provided financial and material assistance to partner countries via WHO, the COVAX programme and direct donations of vaccines.

In the context of global challenges, Slovakia supported the German and French initiative **Alliance for Multilateralism** established in 2019. In the context of efforts to reform the UN system and make it more efficient, Slovakia was active as a co-chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Revitalizing the Work of the UN GA.

The Slovak Republic took part in joint activities with agencies and organisations from within the UN system. Since 2021, the Slovak Republic has been a member of the **UNICEF Executive Board**. In cooperation with the **UNDP**, the country has helped implement joint projects in the Western Balkans. It has succeeded in promoting the inclusion of two ancient Roman monuments in Bratislava and Iža on the **UNESCO World Heritage List**.

The Foreign Ministry placed great emphasis on communicating global issues to the broader Slovak general public. In October, for the first time, a series of events called **UN Week in Slovakia** took place, in which hundreds of interested people, especially young people and students, actively participated.

Slovak diplomacy actively participated in the **UNGA** and **ECOSOC** reform processes, with an emphasis on the role of multilateralism and the importance of the UN in guiding the implementation of the sustainable development goals. We paid significant attention to the **2030 Agenda**.

## International law

The codification and development of international law has been an important area of interest for the Slovak Republic.

During the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly, the Slovak delegation was actively involved in the negotiations on the report of the **International Law Commission**, as well as on the issue of the possible adoption of a convention for the prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity.

In 2021, the Slovak Republic became a member of the **Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)** for the years 2021-2023. The Slovak Republic actively supported the International Criminal Court (ICC) as the only body with universal jurisdiction in relation to crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

## Promoting Human Rights and Democracy

On 24 May 2021, the Ministry approved the first **Concept for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in the World**. The Minister appointed the first Ambassador at Large for human rights, Peter Burian. In 2021, the priorities of the Slovak Republic in the area of human rights included the right to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of the media and safety of journalists, and the fight against discrimination and xenophobia. The Slovak Republic referred to human rights violations in the occupied territories of Crimea and Belarus.

In 2021, the Government of the Slovak Republic was an active part of efforts to promote the rule of law, human rights and democracy at home and around the world. This was confirmed by a high-level international conference organised by the Foreign Ministry in October 2021. The opening remarks were delivered by Prime Minister Eduard Heger who stressed that a fundamental prerequisite for stability and prosperity in the world is the strengthening of these values.

In December 2021, Slovakia participated in the Summit for Democracy. The President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, reaffirmed our focus on three areas - freedom of the media and the protection of journalists; the fight against corruption; and cooperation with civil society - at home, within the EU, and in international organisations and bilateral relations.

## UN Human Rights Council

In 2021, Slovakia was no longer a member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) but still remained a supporter of the multilateral response to human rights crises as well as the independence of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Slovakia's



*The first international high-level conference on the promotion of human rights and democracy in the world at the Foreign Ministry in Bratislava. The conference was opened on 28 October 2021 by Prime Minister Eduard Heger. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)*

positions in the HRC during the year demonstrated our pro-European values. Slovakia's support for the human rights agenda, transparency and commitment to responsibly fulfil its obligations in the area of universal human rights was also confirmed by the interim report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review.

## Freedom of the Media

Minister Ivan Korčok supported the European Commission's plan to increase the protection of journalists and the independence of the media in EU Member States. An objective and independent media is at the heart of a democratic society and its importance will increase in the light of the current disinformation campaigns. Slovakia is an active member of the Media Freedom Coalition. In 2021, it joined the Coalition's joint statements on the state of media freedom in China, Russia and Belarus. At the end of the year, it became a member of the Partnership for Information and Democracy, which associates 43 UN Member States from around the world and was established to protect journalists and uphold democratic principles when working with information.

## Fighting Anti-Semitism

In September 2021, eighty years after the adoption of the Jewish Code, the government apologized for the crimes committed under the Code. On this occasion, the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic awarded a Golden Plaque to three important figures from the Jewish community in Slovakia, who were also active in the international environment, and, in memoriam, to the diplomat Jan Spišiak, who contributed to saving the lives of many Jews during the Second World War. The



On the eve of Memorial Day to the Victims of the Holocaust and Racial Violence on 8 September 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok awarded a gold medal to four personalities who participated in developing cultural and inter-religious dialogue, promoting tolerance, educating the young generation and combating any discrimination in society. The in memoriam award for Ján Spišiak was received by his daughter Daniela Kotulová. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic participated in the International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and the Fight against Anti-Semitism in Malmö, Sweden, held on 13 October 2021. At the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council (September 2021), the Slovak Republic, together with the Czech Republic and Austria, prepared and presented a joint statement on anti-Semitism.

## OSCE

The weakening of multilateralism and deepening of mistrust among the participating states of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) corroborated the negative trend in the functioning of the organisation. Despite the efforts supported by Slovakia, arms control in the OSCE area continued to erode, culminating in the withdrawal of the Russian Federation from the Open Skies Treaty at the end of the year. Slovakia and other like-minded countries were trying to ensure that the potential of the OSCE in conflict resolution and confidence building throughout the OSCE area was fully utilized. It has repeatedly called on the countries and parties involved in conflicts to abide by OSCE commitments and to engage in meaningful dialogue within the framework of the OSCE, particularly in the key area of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

## Council of Europe

The key themes of the Council of Europe (CoE) in the past year were the consequences of the pandemic that had a negative impact on the development of democracy in Europe, the 10th anniversary of the Convention on

Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention) and the link between human rights and the environment in the Parliamentary Assembly. The social impact of the pandemic crisis was reflected in the efforts to highlight the significance of the European Social Charter, the 60th anniversary of the signing of which we commemorated. At the end of the year, the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Cybercrime (The Budapest Convention) and the adoption of the Second Additional Protocol to that Convention dominated the scene. Despite the efforts exerted by a number of countries, no progress was made on the topic of human rights and artificial intelligence with regard to which there is no consensus on the adoption of a legally binding document.

## Freedom of Religion

Speaking at the second ministerial forum of the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Alliance, on 23 November 2021, Ingrid Brocková, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, emphasized that „religious freedom or the rights of members of religious minorities are grossly violated in many countries, whether in the Middle East, Africa or Asian countries such as Afghanistan. The Alliance and its members should pay more systemic attention to this.“ Violations of freedom of religion or belief not only have implications for human rights, but also affect international security and stability. The Slovak Republic is an active member of the International Alliance for Freedom of Religion or Belief. In 2021, it supported the Alliance's declarations on Afghanistan and on kidnapped Yazidi women and children.



On 23 November 2021, State Secretary Ingrid Brocková addressed the second Ministerial Forum of the International Alliance for Freedom of Religion or Belief. (Photo: MFEA SR)

# 2

## EUROPEAN POLICY

Slovakia and other partners from the European Union faced similar difficulties and problems in 2021. Everyone was looking for an answer to the question of how to deal with the difficult consequences of a pandemic on the economy of a country and society as a whole, while contributing to finding answers to the most fundamental challenges and dilemmas facing the European Union today. The EU's fundamental response is the recovery plan for Europe. Its successful implementation will depend on whether the Union will emerge from this difficult situation as a stronger and more respected actor capable of influencing what is happening on a global level.

### Slovakia in the European Union

Slovakia has prepared its national recovery and resilience plan. It is intended to help with our post-pandemic economic recovery in a way that will put green technologies, innovation and a more responsible approach to environmental protection at the forefront. In shaping a vision for vital areas of our life, the EU needs to listen to the voices of its citizens. Therefore, throughout the year, as part of the Conference on the Future of

Europe and also in Slovakia, discussions by citizens and with citizens took place focusing on what form of Europe we actually want.

In the EU, Slovakia has advocated strengthening the capabilities and capacities of the Union that will have positive impacts on the transatlantic partnership. It has



State Secretary Martin Klus at the General Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on 1 May 2021. A meeting of ministers and state secretaries for European affairs of EU Member States took place after more than six months of videoconferencing. The main topic was the preparation of the forthcoming extraordinary European Council meeting. (Photo: the European Union)

consistently supported the EU's value-based Common Foreign and Security Policy and, in line with it, has also supported, in a number of cases, the use of EU restrictive measures to put pressure on regimes that suppress human rights.

### COVID-19 Pandemic

The European Union's agenda has been strongly marked by continued efforts to best manage the fight against the coronavirus. The activities of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in this area were focused on cooperation in managing the situation with our neighbours and within the EU. The joint procurement of vaccines was a positive result of this effort. The mutual coordination

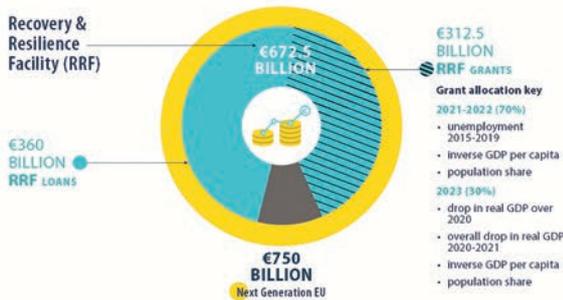


Brussels, European Council meeting. The Slovak Republic represented by Prime Minister Eduard Heger. The topics were the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the Digital Agenda, the rise in energy prices, migration, trade and external relations; 21 - 22 October 2021, Brussels. (Photo: the European Union)

## Recovery and Resilience Facility

**The Recovery and Resilience Facility** is the central pillar of the **recovery plan for Europe**, Next Generation EU. It provides financial support to EU countries to mitigate the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

### How much money?

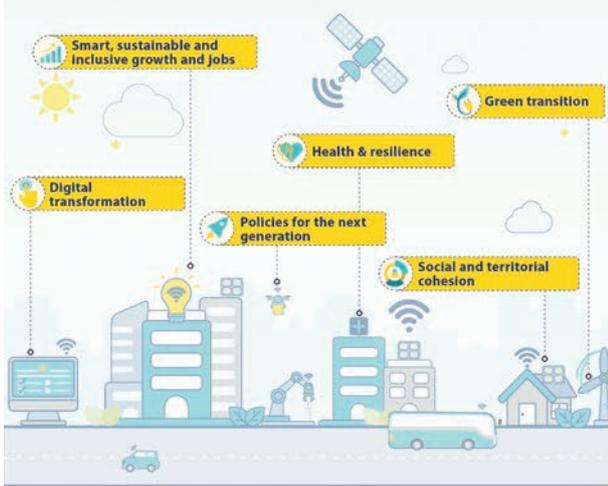


\*Figures expressed in 2018 prices. In current prices, the Next Generation EU envelope amounts to €807.1 bn, including €724 bn for the Recovery and Resilience Facility (€338 bn grants, €386 bn loans).

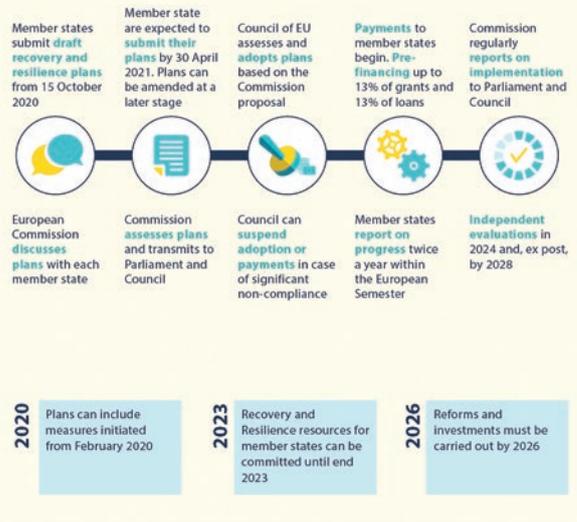
### How will the money be used?

Funds disbursed to member states are based on **national recovery and resilience plans**, which include reforms and public investment projects. Plans must:

- align with EU priorities**  
boost growth, job creation and economic & social resilience
- support the green transition**  
at least 37% of resources contribute climate action and environmental sustainability
- reflect country-specific challenges**  
in line with European Semester country-specific recommendations
- foster digital transformation**  
at least 20% of resources contribute to the EU's digital transition



### How does it work?



Council of the European Union  
General Secretariat

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helped to preserve the integrity of the EU Single Market and the rules on travel for third-country nationals to the Union. The adoption of the so-called digital COVID-19 passport can be considered a successful instrument, allowing citizens to travel substantially more freely and more safely across EU countries.

## National Recovery Plan

The European Union continued to recover from the economic crisis caused by the overall economic slowdown as a result of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main prerequisite for the economic recovery of Europe was the implementation of the so-called EU Instrument for Future Generations, the core of which is the Recovery and Resilience Facility. It will provide EUR 672.5 billion in grants and loans to Member States to support key reforms and investments.

EU Member States had to submit their national Recovery and Resilience Plans during the year. Their approval is a condition for drawing funds. The Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan foresees the drawing of funds amounting to EUR 6.3 billion, of which up to 43% will be directed toward progressive climate measures. Bearing in mind the responsibility for environmental protection and the promotion of eco-advanced solutions, Slovakia will concentrate primarily on investments in renewable energy sources, and a cleaner and more functional public

transport. It will also address long-term challenges in the areas of education, health and justice. The key challenge in the near future will be to deliver on concrete plans, which will be evaluated by monitoring the achievement of the milestones and targets. Their achievement is a condition for Slovakia to continue to use the allocated funds successfully.

## Climate Policy and the Green Agenda

Environmental protection is becoming one of the most important priorities on both a national and global level. The European Union has ambitions to become a model of responsible behaviour for other countries that will enable emerging generations to live in a greener, healthier and more pleasant environment. Under the so-called European Green Agreement, the European Climate Law was adopted under the Portuguese Presidency in the Council of the EU, which enshrined the achievement of climate neutrality by 2050. It also includes further actions by the European Council of December 2020, including a reduction target of 55% of net emissions for 2030. Slovakia has been actively involved in the work on a political agreement to increase the EU's climate ambitions. It was followed up by the "Fit for 55" legislative package presented by the European Commission in July 2021. With the support of Slovakia, the Union continued to update the rules aimed at creating a sustainable and functional energy sector. The accompanying elements of



During his working visit to Portugal on 7 - 8 May 2021, Prime Minister Eduard Heger attended the EU Social Summit in Porto. (Photo: Government Office of the Slovak Republic)

this process are the stimulation of necessary investments by both the private and public sectors, which should lead to a so-called "low-carbon society" and the use of clean energy. A significant step forward over the past year was also the agreement on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027, which aims to strengthen the modernisation and sustainability of the agricultural sector.

## Social Policy

The social dimension of European integration is an important part of the European project. The Portuguese Presidency in the Council of the EU succeeded in organising a social summit in Porto, which strengthened



Opening ceremony of the premises of the European Labour Authority in Bratislava on 9 November 2021. (Photo: ELA)

the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. An important event for European social policy and for Slovakia's deeper and more active integration into the agenda of European structures was the opening of the European Labour Authority (ELA) in Bratislava in November 2021. It was the first European decentralised institution to be based in Slovakia. The priority for ELA in 2021 was the implementation of the Action Plan to support seasonal workers, whose vulnerability was fully demonstrated during the pandemic.

## Migration

Migration continued to be one of the most delicate areas of EU action. During the past year, discussions within the organisation focused on the continuation of negotiations on the so-called New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was introduced by the European Commission in September 2020. However, despite efforts to make progress, the most politically sensitive issue of the fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity in managing migration flows to the European Union remains unresolved. There is general agreement on the need to support those Member States that are under the greatest pressure from migratory waves. However, differences remain as to the particular form of this solidarity. Slovak diplomacy is based on the long-standing opposition of the Slovak Republic towards the mandatory deployment of migrants to individual Member States. It continued to promote flexible solidarity-based solutions that will allow for the flexible identification of how to assist those Member States facing crisis situations.

In terms of world developments, the events in Afghanistan and Belarus had a significantly destabilising effect on the migratory situation. Slovakia was extremely concerned about the abuse of the status of migrants by President Lukashenko's regime, which has triggered artificial pressure on the EU's external border and, in turn, a migration and humanitarian crisis. Slovakia contributed to a more effective protection of the EU's external borders and required consistent implementation of a systematic return policy and intensive EU cooperation with countries of origin and transit.

The future of the Schengen area was also addressed. At the end of the year, the European Commission presented a proposal for a revision of the Schengen Borders Code. One of the objectives of this revision is to reflect the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and to strengthen the coordination mechanisms between Member States so that the possible introduction of border controls at internal borders will always remain a last resort and a temporary solution.

## Conference on the Future of Europe

The first activities of the Conference on the future of Europe (COFE) as a result of the pandemic started in May 2021. The primary objective of this project was to bring European institutions closer to the citizens of the Member States and, at the same time, to draw inspiration and incentives for the future functioning of the Union and the position of the Member States within it. It was exactly with this setting of priorities that Slovakia joined COFE and the Concept of the Conference on the Future of Europe was approved in the Slovak Republic in March 2021. Slovak activities took place on two main levels:

1) public debates on the EU with an emphasis on individual regions within the Slovak Republic and young people through the #MYSMEEU (WE ARE THE EU) project, and 2) expert analysis of priority sectoral areas for the EU through the National Convention on the EU. These activities of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic were accompanied by strategic communication aimed at generating the widest possible involvement of citizens and political representatives, as well as the non-governmental sector or non-state actors in the activities of the conference. Slovakia was also an active part of the events of COFE on the European level. Citizens of the Slovak Republic also participated in the pan-European citizens' debates and digital platform.



On 9 May 2021, the three highest constitutional officials - President Zuzana Čaputová, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Boris Kollár and Prime Minister Eduard Heger - opened the Conference on the Future of Europe at Bratislava Castle together with Minister Ivan Korčok. This unique pan-European project, launched symbolically on Europe Day, is aimed at an open debate with the citizens of the European Union about its advantages, challenges and future orientations. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

# PRESENTATION OF FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Slovak culture has been an increasingly visible and appreciated envoy of Slovakia throughout the world. Well-targeted cultural projects, as well as a more sophisticated country presentation and diplomatic service communication with both the domestic and foreign public have increased the brand recognition of Slovakia and at the same time helped to detect ever-present misinformation.

## Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy was also an extremely important and natural part of Slovak foreign policy in 2021. A new and more ambitious approach to cultural diplomacy required an increase in resources, which we managed to achieve and the result can be evaluated very positively today.



On 10 June 2021, at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, Minister I. Korčok inaugurated an exhibition of works of Slovak students from the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica, from the Technical University of Košice and from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava, opening the event entitled the Month of Slovak Culture in France. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

The Ministry fulfilled the *Concept of the Ministry's Procedure in the Field of Presentation of Slovak Art and Culture Abroad for the Years 2020 - 2024*. This consists of the long-term planning of large flagship projects and also multi-genre weeks of Slovakia in selected priority countries throughout the world with an emphasis on the foreign political and economic interests of our country.

Year 2021 was declared the Year of Slovak Design by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. The reason was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slovak design and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Slovak design Centre. The flagship projects were therefore thematically focused on precisely this type of art. The priority countries were Italy and its metropolis of design and fashion - Milan, in Israel the Jerusalem Design Week and the metropolises of the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. We utilised the unfavourable pandemic situation to our advantage and we moved the presentations outdoors.



On 1 July 2021, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs held a concert for the diplomatic community, where world-famous opera stars performed. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

We successfully implemented the Weeks of Slovakia in seven countries. To priority countries such as Germany, France, Austria and Serbia, we subsequently added Slovak institutes in Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland. As part of Weeks of Slovakia, the country was presented using music, fine and sculptural arts, theatre, literature, film, etc. These activities were also directed at regions and cities outside the capital, for example: Leipzig, Frankfurt am Main, Marseille, Niš and many others.

Through representative offices, Slovak culture and art were also presented in other countries of the world. The natural



A concert by the Slovak Chamber Orchestra conducted by Ewald Danel was held in Berlin Dome on 24 June 2021. The concert was organised by the Slovak Institute in Berlin as part of the events called Slovak Cultural Days in Germany. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

partner in this area was the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and its controlled organisations. Intensive cooperation was also carried out with other partners, e.g., the Academy of Performing Arts, the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, the Conservatory in Bratislava and Bratislava City Hall.

The presentation of the Slovak Republic abroad also focused on commemorating important historical milestones and personalities in 2021. The main topics were three centuries: 100 years since the birth of Alexander Dubček (1921-1992), 100 years since the death of Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav (1849-1921) and 100 years of Slovak cinematography. The most representative events were attended by Minister Ivan Korčok in Bologna, Italy, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, but also in Romania and other countries. Events in Canada and the USA, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and other countries were dedicated to Pavel Országh Hviezdoslav.

The performance of five Arena theatre plays in Prague was also a success within the framework of the project entitled



President Zuzana Čaputová opened a Children's School of Architecture and Construction on 11 May 2021 during a visit to Denmark, where children learn about belonging to a community, how important public spaces are and also how important sustainable architecture is in the city. (Photo: Office of the President of the Slovak Republic).



The representative publication Slovakia in the Works of the Slovak National Gallery was presented by the Head of Slovak Diplomacy, Ivan Korčok on 18 November 2021 with the Director General of the Slovak National Gallery Alexandra Kusá. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

Slovak Theatre Week in Hybernia, which was organised under the auspices of Minister Ivan Korčok. The exhibition of Slovak design Fragile Concrete in Marseille, the performance by the Slovak Chamber Orchestra in the Berlin Dome, the concert by jazz musician Martin Valihora in the cult music club Quasimodo also in Berlin, as well as the successful concert by the Janoska Ensemble opened by Minister Ivan Korčok in Paris, was also interesting. An exceptional event was the opening of the children's School of Architecture and Construction set up by BIBIANA Danmark, President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová in the centre of Copenhagen, exhibition of works by Andy Warhol in the Brussels private gallery Noon ConsultinG ART, with the sub-title from Varhoľa to Warhol.

Slovakia also continued international cultural cooperation abroad within the framework of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC). In EUNIC we presented Slovakia with projects such as International Poetry Day with video presentations by 15 poets from EU countries.



Designer Igor Didov created the shape of Tesla Talisman 308 U. His work was presented in April by the Slovak representative offices on social networks as part of the Year of Slovak Design under the auspices of the Slovak Design Museum. (Photo: Slovak Design Centre)



On 2 July 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok handed over diplomas to 20 successful graduates of the first year of the Summer School of Diplomacy of Štefan Osuský. The aim of the project is to stimulate the younger generation's interest in foreign policy and to build on the values, traditions and life stories of leading personalities of Slovak diplomatic, public and political life. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

Slovak cultural diplomacy co-operated with the V4 countries and Austria in the Central European Cultural Platform with the joint presentation of culture. In 2021, under the Polish Presidency, the joint event *Film Music and Culture* was prepared in Reykjavík, Iceland .

Minister Ivan Korčok once again took over the patronage of the traditional project of the International Women's Club Bratislava – the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Christmas Charitable Bazaar.

Another success of 2021 was the opening of the ninth Slovak Institute in Jerusalem, which joined the eight existing ones: in Berlin, Budapest, Moscow, Paris, Prague, Rome, Warsaw and Vienna. This increases our activity, which we consider to be the institutional basis for the presentation of Slovakia abroad.

## Public Diplomacy

During the year, the epidemic situation significantly affected the planned public diplomacy activities. After a year-long break, a significant awarding event for successful Slovaks abroad called Goodwill Envoy was held, this time linked to a new public diplomatic format – the *Day of Slovak Diplomacy*.

The key theme was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Alexander Dubček, accompanied by preparation of the exhibition and presentation project *Alexander Dubček (1921 - 1992) Symbol of the Czechoslovak Spring*, which was successfully presented at several embassies abroad as well as on the premises of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

The transfer of most of the presentation activities of public diplomacy to the digital environment and to social networks is documented by the production of video spots of personalities. Apart from Alexander Dubček, they also included prominent representatives of Czechoslovak diplomacy from the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Štefan Osuský (1889-1973) and Ján Papánek (1896-1991). The spots were published on



On 26 August 2021, Minister I. Korčok awarded the "Goodwill Envoy" award to opera diva soprano Edita Gruber, respected hotelier Henry Kallan and scientist Luboš Pástor. The highest award of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, the Medal of Merit for Slovak Diplomacy, was received by the diplomat and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Eduard Kukan. (Photo: MFEA SR/ Lubo Špirko)

the social networks of the Ministry and also presented during the summer school of Štefan Osuský<sup>1</sup> and the UN Week in Slovakia. In order to map up-to-date data on the Slovak brand recognition, a representative public opinion survey was carried out. Its results are continuously applied in subsequent activities as part of the management of the country brand, which is also done in cooperation with the Slovak Government Office, the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic, ministries and other partners. The institutional solution of our country's presentation abroad remains a challenge, especially the issue of financing the core presentation activities of the state.

Slovak diplomacy has the ambition to strengthen the presentation of Slovak science and research abroad. So far, a Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Academy of Sciences has been signed to deepen the cooperation.

The presentation potential of Slovak art was highlighted by the published representative publication *Slovakia in the Works of the Slovak National Gallery*, which was solemnly presented in November 2021 directly at the Slovak National Gallery by Minister Ivan Korčok and the Director of the Slovak National Gallery Alexandra Kusá.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mzv.sk/letnaskola>

## Strategic Communication

The Foreign Ministry continued to use strategic communication as an effective tool to fight disinformation, but also to actively inform the public about the priorities of Slovak foreign policy. However, the communication environment is becoming increasingly challenging. Among the basic conceptual pillars of communication were the values anchoring the Slovak Republic in the EU and NATO, effective multilateralism as a tool for addressing global challenges, as well as the topic of the protection of human rights and media freedom. For this purpose, the Ministry used communication via official social networking profiles (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube).



Minister Ivan Korčok evaluated year 2021 in foreign policy together with Braňo Závodský and journalists from the daily newspaper SME, Aktuálny.sk and Új Szó in the discussion programme HlbokáOnline. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

The Ministry continued to organise interactive discussions on foreign policy and the interests of Slovakia in Europe and the world under the title HlbokáOnline<sup>2</sup>. In 2021, we managed to organise ten discussions in this format, in which the top representatives of our Ministry together with experts from the external environment participated. The debates were broadcast live through our social networking profiles. Thanks to cooperation with the media that broadcast the debates, we saw a multi-fold increase in the number of viewers compared to 2020. The section on women in foreign policy (*twenty-nine thousand views*), the future of the EU and Slovakia following the pandemic (*twenty-three thousand views*) and the future of transatlantic relations (*nineteen thousand views*) attracted the most attention.

The new communication format introduced in 2021 is the project Facts from the Hlboká Street<sup>3</sup>, which, through short videos that are based on facts and real context, aims to bring to the public foreign policy events misinterpreted by hoaxes, manipulations and conspiracy. During 2021, 8 videos were published in this format. The most popular was a video on the topic of the 20-year presence of Soviet troops on our territory. They also talked about the “dictate” of Brussels and the situation in Belarus.

As part of the Conference on the Future of Europe<sup>4</sup>, the Ministry organised a roadshow in August 2021 in 25 cities in Slovakia. Within its framework, State Secretary Martin Klus, as well as other representatives of the Government of the Slovak Republic, representatives of the ministries, European institutions, experts, diplomats and other guests led discussions with citizens. The aim of the events was to reach the widest possible public from various regions of Slovakia, to talk about the advantages and importance of the Slovak Republic’s membership in the EU and to obtain feedback from participants about the perception of the EU and its future.



At the end of the summer, State Secretary Martin Klus was personally convinced at the Roadshow in the regions of Slovakia that the public wants to be more actively involved in what is happening in the EU. He also spoke very openly about the issue with citizens across the country. For example, why there is such a low turnout in the European Parliament elections in Slovakia. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

During 2021, the Foreign Ministry organised two thematic weeks called Women’s Week in Diplomacy<sup>5</sup> and UN Week in Slovakia<sup>6</sup> in order to increase awareness of the work and irreplaceable role of women in Slovak diplomacy, as well as to highlight the importance of the UN in today’s complex world and the benefit of membership in this organisation for the Slovak Republic.

2 <https://www.mzv.sk/ministerstvo/hlboka-online>

3 <https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/fakty-z-hlbokej>

4 <https://www.mzv.sk/europske-zalezitosti/konferencia-o-buducnosti-euroopy/o-konferencii>

5 <https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/tyzden-zien-v-diplomacii>

6 <https://www.mzv.sk/zahranicna-politika/slovensko-v-osn/tyzden-osn>

# 4 PROSPERITY AND SOLIDARITY

The pandemic emphasised the importance of the greater involvement by the Slovak Foreign Service in economic and innovation activities and specific projects that helped domestic economic development, as well as in expressions of solidarity that could contribute to the global struggle against the pandemic and poverty through Slovak development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

## Economic diplomacy

Economic diplomacy activities in 2021 were also marked by the pandemic. A number of events and business missions were transferred to the online space. At the beginning of the year, Brexit resonated the most. Therefore, the Foreign Ministry, together with other partners, regularly informed entrepreneurs about the new business regime with the United Kingdom after the end of the transitional period. The main focus of the activity of economic diplomacy was the continuous support of presentations by Slovak companies at fairs and exhibitions, mediation of business contacts and support for bilateral partnerships between them. These focused on Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Serbia and Uzbekistan during the last year. In addition to providing

practical assistance to entrepreneurs and mapping out measures mitigating the consequences of the pandemic abroad, Slovak diplomacy sought to seize the opportunities created by the crisis. The Ministry actively supported activities aimed at implementing latest trends – digitalisation, green economy, electro-mobility and biomedicine. In this sense, economic diplomacy was primarily about the synergy of its actors. In autumn 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as coordinator of these Slovak activities abroad, created a coordinating platform of central state authorities in the field of external economic relations called “Team Slovakia”.

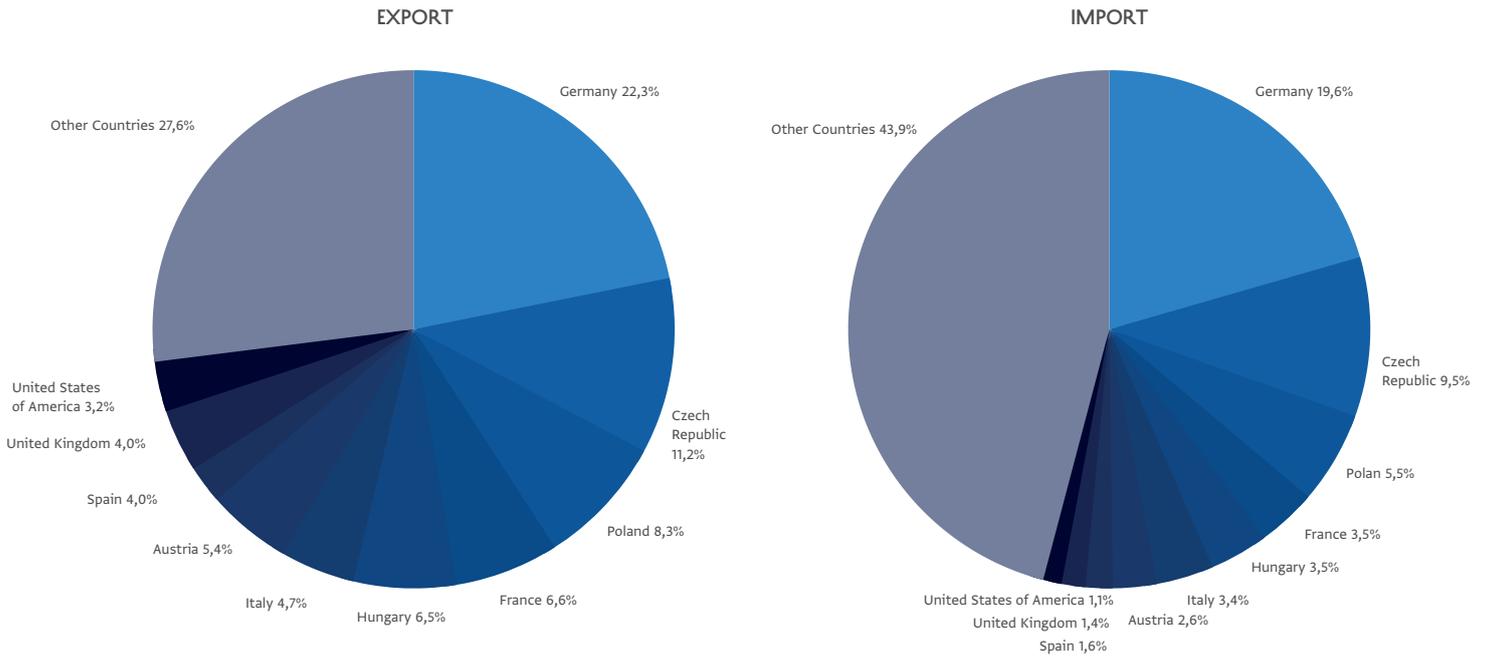
## Bilateral Economic Diplomacy

Slovak economic diplomacy helped the private business sector, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as state institutions. Several business missions abroad were carried out. In Bratislava, two intergovernmental commissions were held in the area of economy – Slovak-Serbian and Slovak-Russian. Events with the US, Iceland and Ireland in the pharmaceutical field and biotechnology were beneficial to the start-up environment. The promotion of cooperation in science and research played an increasingly important role. Agreements were signed with Ukraine and memoranda of understanding with Montenegro and South Korea. The Slovak economic potential was presented at important trade fairs, e.g., at the defence industry fair “DEFEA” in Athens, at the technology fair “Collision,” at the urban innovations fair “Smart City Expo World Congress” in Barcelona, at the biotechnology fair “USA BIO Digital,” as well as at the industrial development fair “Innoprom” in Ekaterinburg. Slovak winegrowers managed to win significant awards in Japan and Chile.



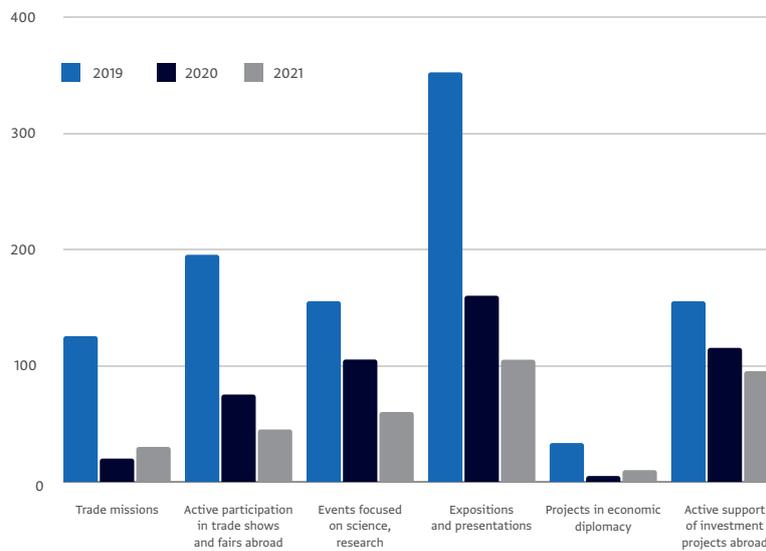
At the Innovation Day event, successful innovative Slovak companies are presented to foreign ambassadors and ambassadors directly in the companies. In the picture, State Secretary Ingrid Brochová at Matador's headquarters on 20 September 2021. (Photo: MZVEZ SR/Pavol Matejka)

SHARE OF FOREIGN TRADE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC (JANUARY - AUGUST 2021)



Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY



Source: MZVEZ SR

### Multilateral Economic Diplomacy

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) commemorated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Slovakia was an active member, contributing to the adoption of two strategic documents – a declaration on the pandemic crisis and a strategy for relations with third parties. October 2021 brought substantial progress on the reform of the international taxation system, based on a

proposal by the so-called OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework (IF), which includes Slovakia. The aim is to introduce common tax rules for companies to pay a fair share of tax, regardless of where they operate and generate profits. National and private sector representatives participated in regional cooperation activities with Western Balkan countries and the Eastern Partnership under the Central European Initiative (CEI) Action Plan 2021-2023.

## Services for the entrepreneurial public

## Activities to Support Entrepreneurs

- ▶ In 2021, the Ministry's Business Centre processed 1,100 and the representative offices processed 1,800 requests from the business community.
- ▶ In 2021, the sum of EUR 202,000 was allocated under the project scheme to support economic diplomacy. 26 of the 29 activities were successfully implemented.
- ▶ 15 issues of the newsletter on business opportunities abroad and 12 issues of the report "Trends and News from the Economic World" were published.

To further bring economic diplomacy closer to the business environment, an interactive communication platform called "Export Forum" with pro-export information and services for entrepreneurs was created in 2021. In September 2021, 251 representatives of Slovak companies and associations took part in its pilot meeting in Bratislava. 382 consultations between the public administration and the business community in the format of "G2B" were held. Another contribution by the Ministry to increase the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises as well as scientific and educational institutions in the foreign activities of Slovakia was the cycle of professional events "From Regions to the World" organised in cooperation with higher territorial units. In June 2021, 74 subjects participated in the first one in the self-governing region of Trnava.



Historically the first ever event of economic diplomacy Export Forum 2021 was held on 28 September 2021 with the participation of Minister Ivan Korčok, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic Richard Sulík, State Secretary Ingrid Brochová, Slovak exporters, economic diplomats and representatives of public institutions providing pro-export services. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)



At the ceremonial event on 28 September 2021, for their exceptional contribution to the promotion of the interests of the Slovak Republic and cooperation in the field of economic diplomacy, the Head of Slovak diplomacy Ivan Korčok awarded the gold medal to three Slovak innovative companies – Ján Brhal, Director of the company Chirana Medical, a. s., Pavol Čekan, Director of the company Multiplex DX, s. r. o., Heliodor Macho, Director of the company SEAK, s. r. o. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

## Knowledge-based Economy and Innovation

The Ministry supported foreign activities with strong international potential conducted by Slovak companies and scientific research centres. The Ministry was also active in supporting innovation at home, when during the regular "Innovation Days" event the companies Slido, AXON Neuroscience, IPM Group/Tachyum/InoBat, Aliter Technologies, Biomedical Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, MATADOR Holding, Pixel Federation and HB Reavis were gradually introduced to foreign ambassadors in Slovakia. The concept was linked to the cycle "From Regions to the World." The top manufacturer of ultralight aircraft SHARK.AERO (Senica), the Faculty of Materials Science and Technology of the Slovak University of Technology (Trnava) and the project "Courtyard" were presented in the Trnava self-governing region.

The Ministry supported the presentation of Slovakia at the EXPO Dubai world exhibition focused on hydrogen technologies, aviation and space. Slovakia fulfilled its obligations under the "Digital Coalition" platform. The involvement of Slovaks abroad, who are among the top in their fields, in events at home was an important part of the Ministry's work. The Ministry supported the initiative of the "Slovak Global Network" civic association, which seeks to identify domestic and foreign capacities, talented young people and foreign scientists who can move Slovakia forward and popularise science and innovation in Slovakia.

## Energy Security

2021 was an important year for energy policy and energy diplomacy in terms of maintaining Slovakia's energy security and a secure transition to green energy. It was difficult to meet ambitious climate objectives while placing emphasis on the security and reliability of the energy supply, cost-effectiveness and the impact on industrial competitiveness. That is why Slovakia advocated maintaining the right of EU Member States to establish a national energy mix in the context of the transition to green energy. It was in favour of applying the principle of technological neutrality, including the safe and sustainable use of low-carbon sources and gas as a transitional fuel.

The backbone of the future hydrogen transmission network should eventually replace the current gas system within the EU. Slovakia therefore is purposefully strengthening its position as a traditional and reliable transit country. Slovak entities established partnerships with partners in Ukraine, Austria and Germany to ensure the future transit of green hydrogen produced in Ukraine to Central European EU States in a timely manner. In order to maintain its energy security, Slovakia continues to support the maintenance of gas transit through the Slovak-Ukrainian transit corridor. At the same time, it continued to function reliably as the most important bulk channel for the supply of reverse gas to Ukraine.



The humanitarian aid provided by the Slovak Republic to Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Slovak Aid brand consisted of clothing, hygienic packages, disinfectants, power generators and respirators from the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bokor)

## Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

Even in 2021, the issue of managing the COVID-19 pandemic and helping the most vulnerable population groups dominated development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Through several development cooperation instruments, Slovakia engaged in combating the spread of the disease and reducing its negative consequences in the world.

Material and financial humanitarian aid in 2021 was aimed at supporting partner countries within the framework of official development assistance from the Slovak Republic (e.g., the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, Lebanon), but also at expressing solidarity with partners within the EU (e.g., Greece, Lithuania, Romania) or supporting international initiatives and activities of international organisations. The provision of material humanitarian aid was under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, which provided it in partnership between the public sector and the non-governmental and private sectors. The Foreign Ministry helped people suffering from the conflict in Ethiopia with financial support for four humanitarian projects in the Tigray region as part of the NGO campaign "Together for Ethiopia."



On 22 September 2021, State Secretary Ingrid Brochová visited the Metadrasi Refugee Children's Home in Greece. Slovakia provides humanitarian aid to Greece in order to mitigate the consequences of migration flows. (Photo: MFEA SR)

Slovakia also actively participated in addressing the causes and consequences of the **migration crisis**, which is further exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. In 2021, it supported five humanitarian projects worth a total of nearly EUR 1 million in the Middle East region (Syria,

Iraq and Lebanon), focusing on providing health care to affected communities of the local population, as well as ensuring access to drinking water and sanitation. Humanitarian assistance in dealing with the growing illegal migration across the Lithuanian-Belarusian border was provided by Lithuania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the form of humanitarian material for the Lipa Migration Centre. The Slovak Republic reiterated its solidarity with Greece, which has long been facing exceptional migratory pressure. It donated a dental unit to the refugee camp on the island of Samos. In order to prevent further escalation of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan after the takeover of power by the Taliban, the Slovak Republic provided a contribution of EUR 500,000 to three international organisations operating in the country (ICRC, UNHCR, IOM).



On 30 April 2021, the State Secretary Ingrid Brocková received the representatives of the Peace for Tigray campaign, who presented her with an angel of peace, symbolising the awareness campaign of Slovak non-governmental organisations calling for peace in the Ethiopian Tigray Region. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

The Slovak Republic also joined the EU initiative aimed at supporting partner countries in the fight against the pandemic of the coronavirus under the heading of the so-called “Team Europe” through **the donation of vaccines**. In order to support the regional dimension of public health and to help increase the level of vaccination worldwide, in 2021, Slovakia donated 840,700 vaccine doses with a total value of over EUR 3.6 million to eight recipients (Czech Republic, Ukraine, Montenegro, Rwanda, Kenya, Vietnam, Armenia, and Taiwan). It also provided 1,512,000 doses of the vaccine to less developed countries via the COVAX mechanism. It also contributed EUR 150 thousand to the Fund of Initiatives for the Development, Production and Fair Distribution of Tests, Drugs and Vaccines against COVID-19 through the WHO.

In 2021, Slovakia made progress in preparing its historically first ever **Humanitarian Aid Strategy of the**



To deal with the consequences of the migration crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, on 20 September 2021, material humanitarian aid for Bosnia and Herzegovina was dispatched from the Logistics Base for Crisis Situations of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

**Slovak Republic.** Under the Coordination Committee for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic, a working group was established to streamline Slovak humanitarian aid abroad and in cooperation with the non-governmental sector, the technical discussion was intensified, which resulted in a preliminary draft strategy and follow-up action plan under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic.



On 21 April 2021, Minister Ivan Korčok visited the Eleonas refugee camp in the centre of Athens, accompanied by the Greek Minister for Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarachi. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

The peer OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) recommended that Slovakia further improve its development cooperation system. In 2021, the Foreign Ministry approved **three new development cooperation strategies with the program countries** (Georgia, Kenya and Moldova). An external, independent and objective evaluation of the implementation of the Slovak Republic’s

**Mid-term Development Cooperation Strategy** for 2019-2023 was conducted. The above evaluation resulted in several recommendations for adjustments in setting up the Slovak Republic's development cooperation system so that it will become more effective and achieve greater impact in partner countries. The selected recommendations were reflected in the focus on the Slovak Republic's bilateral development cooperation for 2022, in particular the narrowing of territorial and sectoral priorities. In order to strengthen the integration of two cross-sectoral issues - environmental protection and climate change and gender equality - into development interventions in 2021, handbooks and training for the professional public were developed in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

In 2021, we continued through development cooperation instruments to support civil society and victims of repression in **Belarus**. The support included the provision of an additional twenty government scholarships in the Slovak Republic under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

The Ministry has also made efforts to strengthen the involvement of the private sector in development cooperation. In 2021, another call for project support through the Slovak Challenge Fund was launched within the framework of the MFEA SR in partnership with UNDP, aimed at transferring innovative Slovak ideas to support the sustainable development of partner countries. Two projects were approved focusing on the testing of water quality and building early warning systems in Moldova. In 2021, the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) supported four projects under the Enterprise Partnership Program aimed at developing telemedicine in Albania and Moldova and capacity building in IT and eGovernment in Georgia and Moldova. In 2021, co-ordination between institutions with tools for involving entrepreneurs in development cooperation (MFEA SR/SAIDC, Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, Eximbank Slovak Republic) was launched in order to increase their synergies and transparency.

In total, in 2021, SAIDC launched **11 calls** for funding for development and humanitarian projects. Out of the total number of project applications submitted, **45 were approved** with a total financial volume of more than EUR 4 million.

In 2021, the Slovak Republic also participated actively in shaping the EU development cooperation policy (in preparation of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, in preparation of the new “Post-Cotonou” Partnership



*The Slovak Republic delivered 440 thousand doses of vaccines against the coronavirus to two partner countries, Rwanda and Kenya. The vaccines were handed over to the partners in Kigali and in Nairobi by Ambassador Katarína Žuffa Leligdonová, 8 October 2021, Bratislava. (Photo: MFEA SR)*

Agreement with African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries, and in reforming the European Financial Architecture for Development) and international partnerships with partner countries through participation in a coordinated approach of “Team Europe” and through pro-active participation in the meetings of the development segment of the Council on Foreign Relations. The Slovak Republic expressed its readiness to engage in several activities of “Team Europe” in the EU Neighbourhood and Kenya partner countries and in the global thematic initiative “Team Europe Democracy.” An opportunity for Slovak entities to participate in EU development cooperation is also the first pilot project of the so-called delegated cooperation of the EU, which will be implemented by SAIDC in Moldova in 2022-2024. The project worth EUR 1 million is focused on the capacity building of local independent media.

Cooperation with international donors, e.g., **USAID**, helped to carry out the fourth project by the Slovak Republic and the USA in 2021, this time in Georgia. It was aimed at supporting an international election observation mission during the local elections. Partnerships with the **Visegrad Group** countries also continued through joint projects to help countries of origin fight illegal migration and promote their sustainable development. The V4 project **in Kenya** managed to obtain financial resources (EUR 580 thousand) for the construction of a cashew-nut and sesame factory in Kilifi, as well as a grant from the Norwegian Development Cooperation Agency (EUR 2,81 million) for follow-up activities. The **V4 and Italy** project to promote integrated border management and migration in **Libya** will continue until 2023 with a part of it already used to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in health facilities on the southern border of Libya.

# 5 CONSULAR SERVICES

Assistance to Slovak citizens abroad in need and maintenance of contact with the regional community was also the focus of the Slovak foreign service last year. We continued to raise the standards of the consular service within its visa service, including the modernisation of its tools in terms of accessibility and user comfort. The Foreign Ministry paid special attention to the development of human resources.

## Consular Service

Consular service provided the necessary assistance to Slovak citizens and citizens of other EU Member States when they stay abroad by protecting their interests, providing information or helping to solve problem situations. In connection with the increasing mobility of foreigners and our citizens, the Foreign Ministry continues to strive to improve the geographical accessibility of visa services of the Slovak Republic.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these trends. This applies to remote working, virtual meeting, e-government, electronic document transmission, and online banking. It also led to changes in citizens' behaviour. The pandemic substantially increased demand for consular online services and services performed at a distance, i.e., by post, courier, telephone, e-mail, website and social media. Citizens' ability and willingness to use online services, as well as the number of e-mail requests and searches for information on consular websites increased.

At some consular sections of the representative offices, due to travel restrictions and the need to comply with strict anti-pandemic measures, individual consular submissions accumulated. Increased demand and capacity constraints led to an increase in waiting times for applications. Not only the Slovak consular service, but also other countries encountered difficulties in performing consular services, which are most in demand,

e.g., issuing passports because of the impossibility of personal presence for collecting biometric data. Some of the solutions adopted used ways that do not require personal presence, such as postal services, video conferencing, and non-cash remote payments.

Within the framework of the national project Digitalisation of Services in the Area of Protection of the Rights and Interests of Citizens and Entrepreneurs under the remit of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, applicants for certain consular activities may request them electronically. Electronic submissions were most frequently used in applications for passports, identity cards, driving licenses, criminal records and civil registry certificates. Electronic modules are operational at all representative offices and the use of online ordering made it possible to avoid waiting in long queues.



Minister Ivan Korčok awarded the Gold Medal to Colonel Peter Kovalík and the team of the ground forest fire extinguishing module for spreading the good reputation of the Slovak Republic abroad. He praised their merits in fighting the devastating fires in Greece, 31 August 2021, Bratislava. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

However, there is no digital alternative to the obligation to take biometrics from citizens and applicants for passports and citizens' cards, as well as from foreigners and visa applicants. The main challenges in the development

of digital consular services concern the protection of personal data, the current legislation requiring personal participation in the application, cyber security and the time and cost of developing and implementing these systems, which will take several years.

Our efforts have been and remain focused on the permanent monitoring of the security and epidemic situation in the world in order to identify potential risks for Slovak citizens and thereby to create space for an early response by the crisis management components. In response to a significant increase in public requests for travel conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, it

was necessary to increase information activities at the headquarters, i.e., the Consular Information Centre, consular department and individual representative offices by issuing travel recommendations, alerts and up-to-date information.

The consular application *Svetobežka* recorded 3,603 downloads. The consular service was opened up even further to the client public through social networks and electronic media, especially on subjects that needed to be proactively communicated - travel recommendations, border regime and conditions for entry into Slovakia and other countries, repatriation, and quarantine conditions.

## Comparison of consular activities 2017–2021

TYPE OF CONSULAR SERVICE/ACTIVITY	Year				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Consular assistance for Slovak citizens in need	3 885	5 490	6 094	39 604	17 372
Certifications performed at embassies abroad (including translations)	51 209	44 029	46 518	39 581	47 126
Certifications performed by the Ministry's legalisation department	5 247 (of which 1047 apostilles)	4 680 (of which 1070 apostilles)	3 960 (of which 954 apostilles)	2 706 (of which 888 apostilles)	3 430 (of which 1243 apostilles)
Passport applications	15 384	13 856	16 428	14 465	22 649
Diplomatic and service passports issued	691 + 604	604 + 457	603+530	626+385	685+425
Identity cards required	3 691	3 245	3 660	4 633	7 362
Driving licences required	685	579	543	376	565
Registry records and applications	8 253	7 779	9 134	7 844	8 843
Slovak citizenship certificates/confirmations	2 418	2 427	2 386	1 838	2 121
Slovak citizenship applications	159	136	137	124	181
Renouncement of Slovak citizenship	231	264	235	202	239
Criminal record extracts	1 327	1 533	1 728	1 381	1 296
Accompanying letters for the transport of physical remains	63	75	69	60	114
Varying types of assistance relating to the death of a Slovak citizen abroad	826	917	913	945	1 106
Replacement travel documents for Slovak	4 447	4 354	4 671	3 062	3 288
Marriages performed at embassies	38	34	28	5	10
Replies to email requests for information	78 625	88 610	101 442	215 480	199 965
Total number of selected consular actions	177 783	179 069	198 166	333 317	316 777*
Visa applications	44 540	29 788	32 088	7 889	9 294
Visa applications on behalf of other states	1 406	1 262	1 382	441	394
Income from visa fees	1 271 710,66	1 096 867,59	1 080 065,71	247 162	397 502
Income from consular fees	2 142 302,95	1 921 744,17	1 986 342,10	1 731 849	1 879 263
Total income	3 414 013,61	3 018 611,76	3 066 407,81	1 978 951	2 276 765

\*Details including e-mail inquiries.

We want to make more efficient use of shared competences on international soil. That is why we promote the exchange of experience in building national emergency and crisis capabilities to respond to emergencies and crisis situations. We participated in the activity of the Working Party on Consular Affairs of the EU (COCON) with regard to the situation in Member States' consular services during the pandemic and after the COVID-19 pandemic. We were also active in the adoption of the *Assessment paper on the Digitisation of Consular Services in a Post-COVID World* on 31 May 2021.

Also during the pandemic, consular protection was granted to Slovak citizens in full compliance with national legislation and the EU acquis. In performing consular activities and communicating with clients, a high emphasis was placed in 2021 on the timeliness, empathy and professionalism of the services provided and the improvement of their client standard. Special mention should be made of the introduction of a software cash desk and POS terminal in the legalisation section of the consular department.

In addition to the professional network of representative offices, we use 197 consulates led by honorary consuls, of which 26 are in Africa, 40 in America, 5 in Australia, 44 in Asia, 21 in Europe (apart from the EU), and 61 in the EU. 18 new honorary consuls were added to this network in 2021.

**Crisis management** of the Foreign Ministry also represented an extremely important part of its activities during 2021. Also in the past year, several Slovak citizens found themselves in an emergency situation abroad as a result of the pandemic. In these situations, the usefulness of cooperation between EU Member States proved to be useful.

A specific chapter in crisis management activity was the emergency evacuation from Afghanistan in August 2021. In extremely difficult conditions, a few dozens of Slovak citizens and other persons were evacuated by the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with the Ministry.

The assistance of 75 Slovak fire-fighters helping Greece in August during the devastating forest fires on the island of Evia was an extraordinary event.

## Compatriots

Slovak foreign service maintained direct and permanent contact with Slovak compatriots abroad. The service worked closely with the executor of the state policy of the Slovak Republic in relation to Slovaks living abroad, which is the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad (OSLA). Also in 2021, the Office focused on activities, particularly on two basic levels: it issued certificates for Slovaks living abroad and financially supported the activities of compatriots through a subsidy system. The Office issued a total of 723 certificates in 2021.

According to the Program Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic, in order to develop new forms of strengthening the mutual ties between Slovakia and the so-called new Slovak diaspora and professionals abroad, the Foreign Ministry began to implement a pilot project of cooperation with the diaspora in the United States through its representative offices in Washington and New York.

In 2021, OSLA started working on a strategic role – preparation of a new concept of state policy of the Slovak Republic in relation to Slovaks living abroad for the period 2022 – 2026. At the same time, it started working on the preparation of a new law on Slovaks living abroad.

## Subsidies from the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad (OSLA)

In 2021, OSLA supported 741 regional projects in 30 countries around the world with a total amount of EUR 4,737,073.

In the field of culture, 371 projects worth EUR 3,694,729.

In the field of education, science and research, 224 projects worth EUR 787,325.

In the field of information, 105 projects worth EUR 170,547.

In the field of media, 41 projects worth EUR 84,472.

Important investment projects by compatriots in Hungary, Serbia and Croatia were also supported.

# 6 EFFECTIVE FOREIGN SERVICE

Last year, the Foreign Ministry made continuous efforts to modernise foreign service in order to be able to respond to new foreign policy challenges. The revision of internal processes also led in this direction. In March 2021, the Ministry's management approved the strategic reform document "Improvement of the System of Human Resources Development in Foreign Service". The strategy is intended to help increase the skills and competences of employees and to help minimise undesirable human resource management phenomena. The aim is, among other things, to prevent misunderstandings, to manage conflicts rationally, to emphasise ethical behaviour, to prevent employees from becoming less efficient and to avoid their work being less effective. Through performance assessment, the Ministry is hoping to



On 13 July 2021, Ambassadors were addressed by President Zuzana Čaputová at the consultation of the Heads of Representative Offices of the Slovak Republic through a video message. The Forum serves as a platform for discussion on key issues of Slovak foreign policy, but also as an opportunity to analyse the results achieved. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

improve the system of employee career growth and ensure a stable working environment.

The implementation of the new strategy was also reflected in the new aspects of education. Activities in existing programs (e.g., language, attestation, vocational training and practical diplomacy, negotiation skills, etc.) were strengthened and new trainings were introduced (e.g., developing skills in the use of social networks,

media training, psychological aspects of pre-departure training, strategic communication, hybrid threats).

The implementation of the strategy required an amendment of some internal regulations of the Ministry, e.g., a Directive regulating the procedure for verifying the required professional knowledge and skills of the applicant in the selection procedure by means of a case study (already in force) and a Directive on the filling of civil



On 18 October 2021, State Secretary Ingrid Bročková opened the first year of Analytical Day of Svetoslav Bombík. Thematically, the Analytical Days are part of the process of preparing for the Medium-term Strategy of the Slovak Foreign and European policy. (Photo: MFEA SR/Tomáš Bohor)

servant posts and job positions in selection procedures with an expected effective date in Q1 of 2022.

Cooperation with the non-governmental sector was particularly important for the Foreign Ministry. Through the subsidy scheme, it supported projects focusing on analytical, publication and communication activities in the field of international relations. Following the evaluation of the three calls, 20 applications were approved and the total amount of the grants was EUR 200,790.

A new challenge for the analysts of the Ministry was working together with the OECD expert team on the project **Use of the Strategic Perspective in Defining the Medium-term Priorities of the Foreign and European**

**Policy of the Slovak Republic.** The intention is to use the Strategic Foresight method to identify key megatrends and drivers of change from the perspective of the Slovak Republic and to define possible scenarios for development with a decisive impact on foreign and European policy. In cooperation with non-governmental partners, the first year of **Analytical Days of Svetoslav Bombík** was organised. The aim of the event is to create a new wide-ranging expert platform for in-depth technical discussion on key issues of Slovak foreign policy.

Representation offices abroad represent a key part of foreign service. As of 1 December 2021, Slovakia had a total of 92 representative offices abroad, including 65 embassies, 8 missions to international organisations, 8 consulates general, 1 branch of the representative office, 1 Slovak Economic and Cultural Office and 9 Slovak

institutes. The professional network of representation offices of the Slovak Republic abroad is complemented by 197 honorary consulates of the Slovak Republic, including 18 new ones opened during 2021. There are 85 honorary consuls from other countries in Slovakia. 30 Slovak citizens worked in the European External Action Service, of which six are permanent employees of the Foreign Ministry.

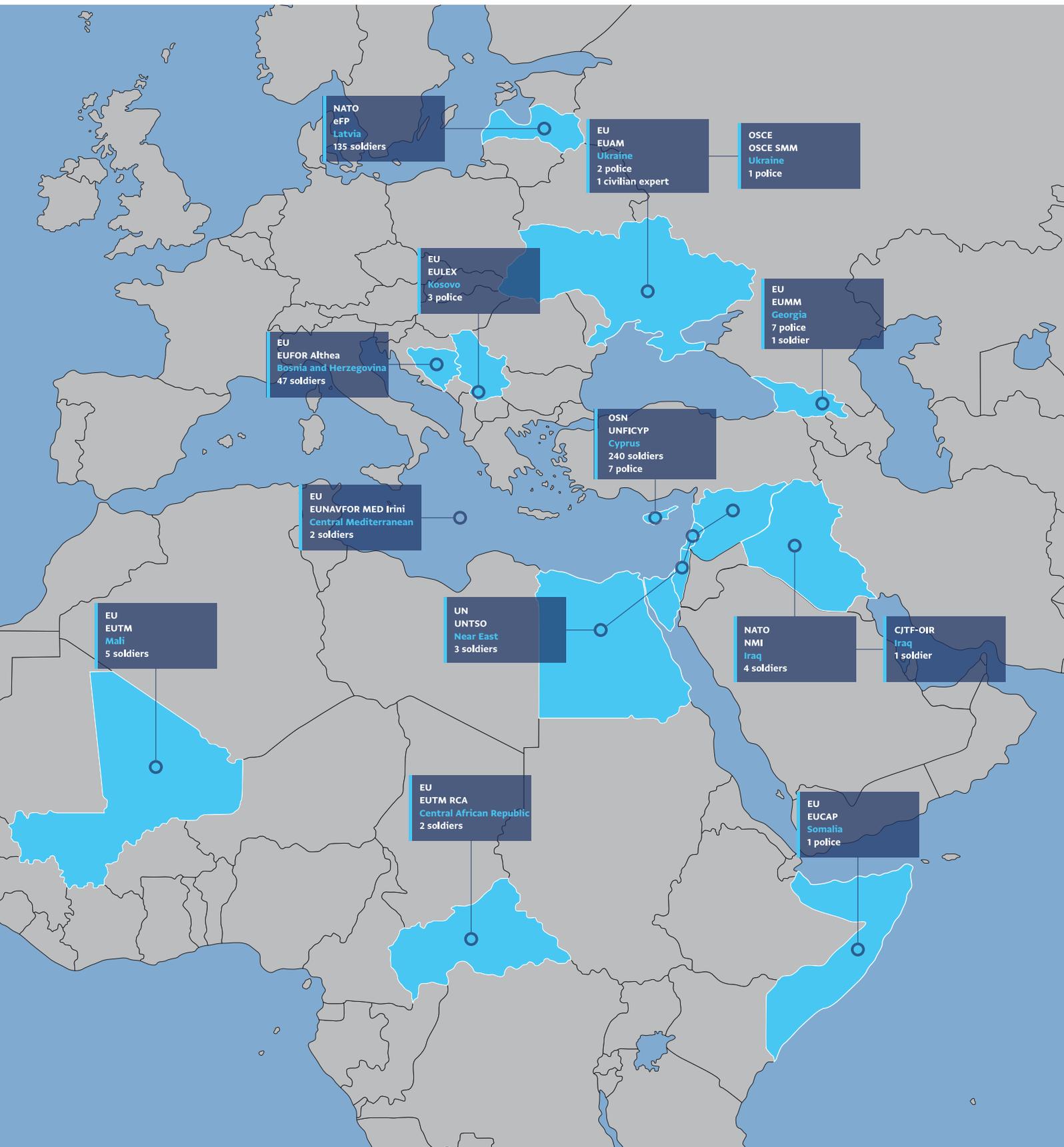
The revenue of the chapter for 2021 was set at EUR 4,300,000. Out of the total volume of expenditures of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic for 2021 in the amount of EUR 154,709,431, a limit of wages, salaries, service income and other personal compensation was set at EUR 55,304,898 and a capital expenditure limit at EUR 3,419,000.

#### Expenditures of MFEA SR in 2021

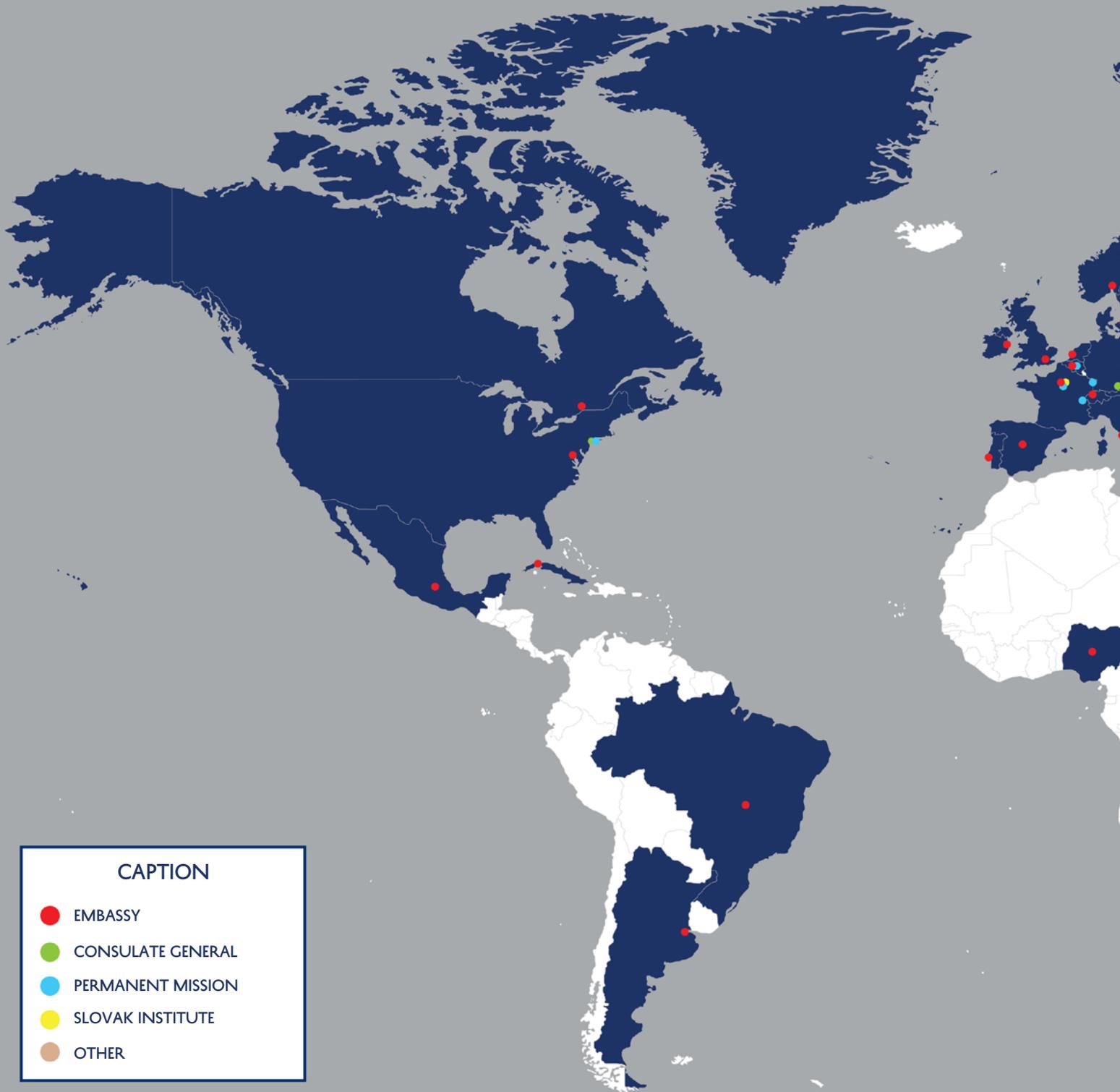
(simplified overview of the program structure – actual spending in EUR)

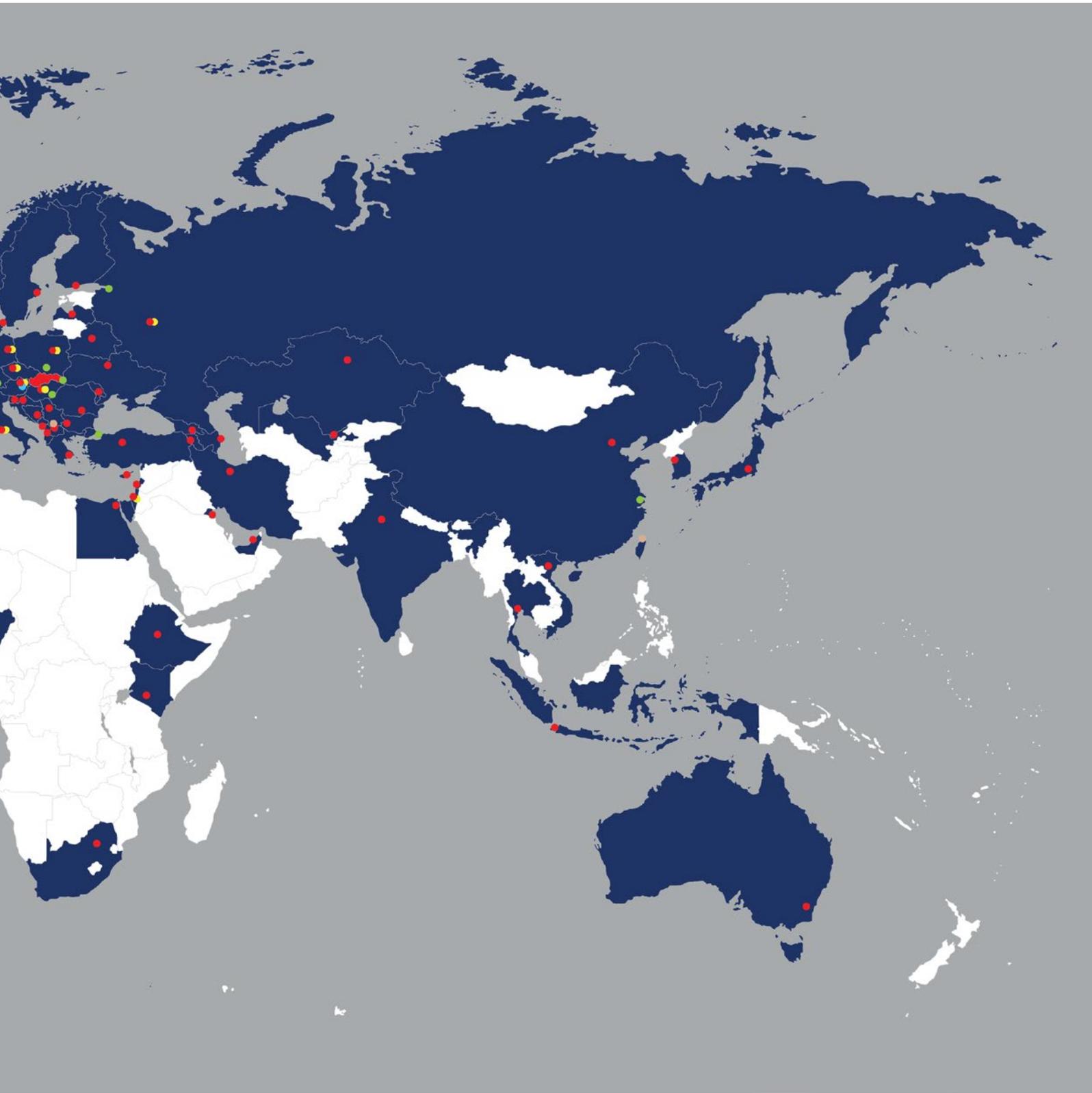
MFEA SR programs:	123 426 641
<b>development of international relations</b>	<b>117 886 283</b>
out of that:	
Program Management	34 640 691
Cooperation with the NGO sector	199 290
Training of Employees	153 308
Reimbursement of Expenditure under the Technical Assistance Operational Program	452 610
Economic Diplomacy	163 435
Diplomatic Representation of the Slovak Republic Abroad	76 969 901
Cultural Representation of the Slovak Republic Abroad	1 420 678
Labour Force from Foreign Local Sources	3 886 370
<b>state policy toward Slovaks living abroad</b>	<b>5 540 359</b>
Inter-Ministerial Programs:	35 937 860
<b>development cooperation — MFEA SR</b>	<b>6 948 192</b>
<b>information technologies financed from the state budget - MFEA SR</b>	<b>5 248 779</b>
<b>contributions of the Slovak Republic to international organisations — MFEA SR</b>	<b>23 740 890</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>159 364 502</b>

## Slovak Representation in Foreign Military Missions

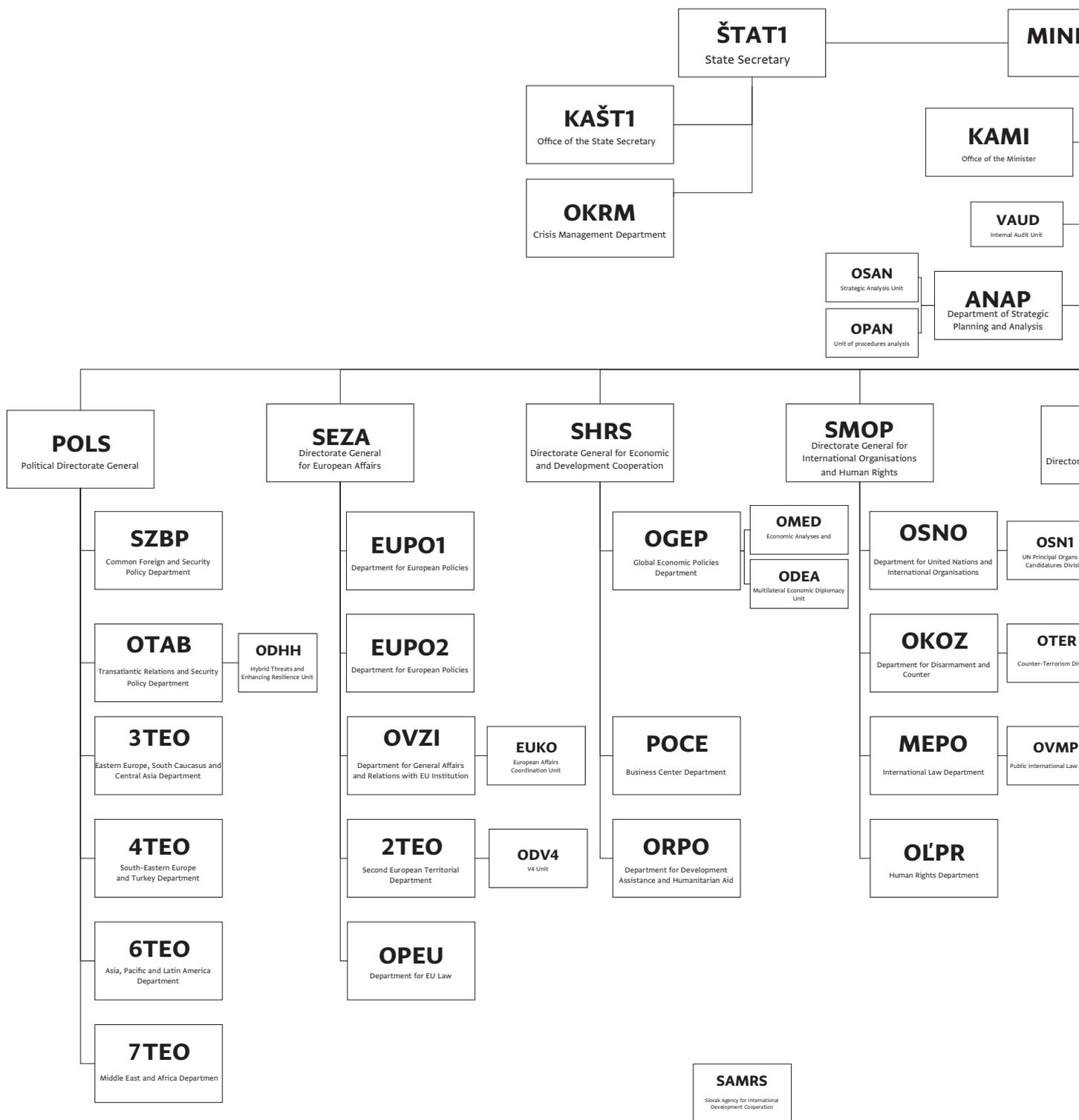


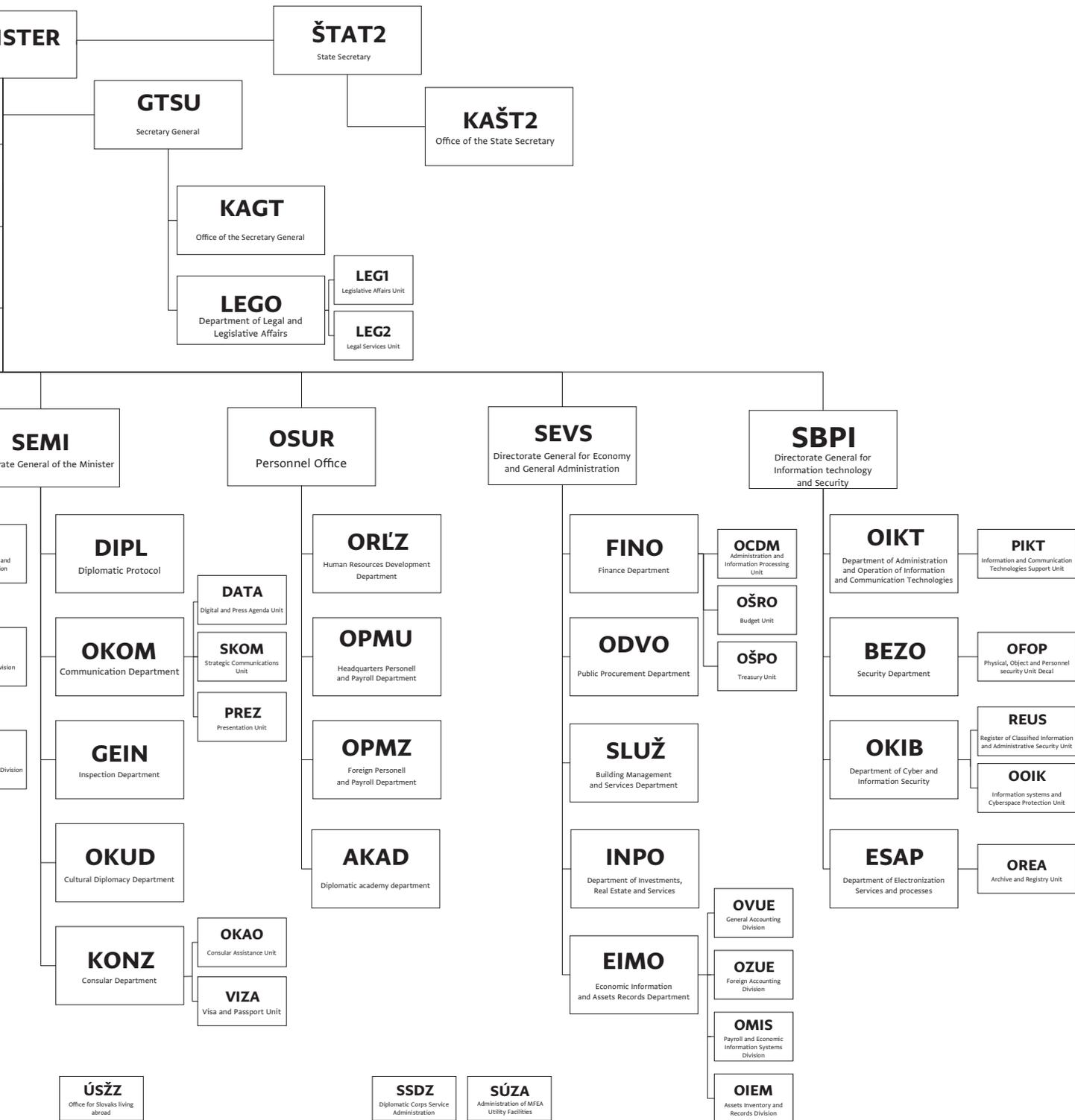
## Map of the network of representative offices of the Slovak Republic





# Organisational Structure of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic





# GOOD IDEA SLOVAKIA

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