

Slovakia: A Small Country with Potential

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Abstract

As a small country and a young democracy, the Slovak Republic has a lot to learn in shaping its own foreign, security and military policy in the international arena. Slovakia has experienced and changed a lot in a short period. First, the fall of communism (1989) with its long-term and painful socio-economic outcomes; a few years later the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia; thirdly the road of integration in NATO and the European Union followed. Not all of the governments were committed fully to meet certain democratic, economic and military standards set by NATO or the European Union. The story of Slovakia is thus a story of hard-earned reputation. The current study highlights the key historical moments, policies and strategies, the institutions, the various stakeholders and some practical cases of the Slovak foreign policy that significantly influenced Slovakia's international position.

Introduction

As a small country and a young democracy, the Slovak Republic has a lot to learn in its own foreign, security and military policy in the international arena. Slovakia has experienced and changed a lot in a short period. First, the fall of communism (1989) with its long-term and painful socio-economic outcomes; a few years later the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia; thirdly the road of integration in NATO and the European Union followed.

Not all of the governments were committed fully to meet certain democratic, economic and military standards set by NATO or the European Union. The story of Slovakia is thus a story of hard-earned reputation. The current study highlights the key historical moments, policies and strategies, institutions, the various stakeholders and some practical cases of the Slovak foreign policy that significantly influenced Slovakia's international position.

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Historical overview

Evolution of threat perceptions in the Slovak defence and security policies

Since the birth of Slovakia in 1993, all elected governments of the country have proclaimed their main aim by joining different international and European co-operations, which support peace, security and collaboration (political, economic and cultural) between nations. Even when the domestic political landscape was full of contradictions. The first five years (1993–1998, the so-called Mečiar era) were determined mostly by internal developments,² which had taken a toll on foreign, security and military policies by postponing the possibility of joining the EU and NATO. After the groundbreaking elections in 1998, the integration to transatlantic and European institutions picked up pace, peaking in 2004, when Slovakia caught up with other aspirant countries and joined both the European Union and NATO. Other international developments (terrorism, migration crisis, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea) also left their mark on the country's institutions and policies. The following official documents³ highlight these shifts and the development of threat perception in the Slovak defence, security and military policies, as found in the Reference at the end: Defence Strategy (2005), Security Strategy (2005), Military Strategy (2005), the White Book on Defence (2013 and 2016).

The Security Strategy⁴ highlighted the changing global security environment. The document emphasises the importance of failed states, as the roots of various terrorist groups and uncontrolled activities locally and internationally. Further important items include:

- The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by different hostile state or non-state actors
- Regional armed conflicts
- Organised crime through corruption and illegal economy that are enhancing the threat of illegal and uncontrolled migration
- Vulnerability information and communication systems
- Activities of foreign intelligence services
- Outcomes of globalisation as economic imbalances, which can fuel radical nationalism
- Natural disasters and unbalanced demographics (SSSR 2005, 4–7)

The Security Strategy also highlights key international organisations,⁵ which play an important part in the Slovak security, defence, military and foreign policies. The documents highlight the following geographical areas of special interest:

² After the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the establishment of the Slovak sovereignty was the priority, followed by reforming of institutions, a wave of privatisations and development of a market economy.

³ Unfortunately the Defence Doctrine (1994) and the Fundamental Aims and Principles of the National Security of the Slovak Republic (1996) documents are not available online and in public versions, and their content was thus not analysed here.

⁴ The Slovak Parliament accepted the first version in 2001, which was followed by an enhanced version in 2005 due to the achieved NATO and EU membership.

⁵ UN, NATO, EU, OSCE, Council of Europe, OECD, Visegrád Group and Central European Initiation.

- Ukraine and Western Balkans – the active supports of integration into NATO and the EU structures
- Commonwealth of Independent States – strengthening democracy, the rule of law, security and stability in case of raw materials and for the fights against terrorism, illegal migration and drugs
- Russia – importance of natural resources and global potential, with a focus on mutual beneficial economic cooperation and political partnership
- Rest of the world – supporting the peaceful resolution of local conflicts, increasing focus on developing democracy, stability and security (SSSR 2005, 15–16)

The Defence Strategy⁶ is based on a similar evaluation of the international environment as the Security Strategy enhanced by NATO and the EU members. The document concludes that the “Slovak Republic is not threatened by an imminent extensive conventional military conflict” directly; however, the danger of international terrorist attacks shows an increasing global and European trend. The Strategy acknowledges the aims of the Slovak defence policy in alignment with internationally accepted basic principles, NATO and EU members. It also emphasises the “mission of defence” as a basic goal, to be able to defend the state sovereignty, territorial integrity and its citizens against external threats (terrorism or WMD). Slovakia relies on its own forces and as NATO member can count on the collective defence, as well as on the EU wide defence cooperation, too.

The most recent documents are the White Paper(s) on Defence of the Slovak Republic (2013 and 2016 editions), which draw a clear picture about the threat perception of the country. Although there are some differences between the two documents, both of them acknowledge that the global environment is characterised by dynamic geopolitical and geo-economical changes, which causes instability (White Paper 2013; White Paper 2016). The version published in 2013 presents the following findings and assumptions:

- Does not count with a conventional armed conflict in the Euro-Atlantic area, but views the growing military capabilities of some countries with concern
- Countries that do not respect the international law and carry out an aggressive foreign policy, developing weapons of mass destruction and missiles, are a major threat
- Threat of new local military conflicts, mostly in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, North Africa, Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia
- Terrorist groups that may use the territory of Slovakia as a transit or logistical base to support their own activities
- Deepening inequalities, as well as the problems of the EU monetary and economic development
- Populist and extremist groups that decrease the confidence in democratic institutions
- Activities of foreign intelligence services, organised crime, also exploiting various information and communications channels (White Paper 2013, 46–49)

⁶ In case of the Defence Strategy, the same history applies: the Slovak Parliament accepted it in 2001, later on an enhanced version followed it in 2005 after achieving NATO and EU membership.

The updated document published three years later made further acknowledgements, reflecting on more current issues such as: the annexation of Crimea by Russia, NATO positions towards Ukraine and Russia, the use of propaganda for polarising societies, cyberattacks and the rise of terrorism globally. The study also highlights that the security perception of Slovakia will be influenced increasingly by asymmetric threats and non-state actors (White Paper 2016, 32–36). Both papers made a step forward viewing and understanding the global trends in security and threats compared to strategies adopted in 2005. The military related content of these White Papers will be discussed further in the upcoming chapters.

Achieving sovereignty and Euro-Atlantic integration

Through the course of history, the Slovaks lived within larger states such as the Hungarian Kingdom, the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy and Czechoslovakia, which meant that they had little influence in shaping foreign policy. However, it did not mean that the Slovak elite had not had any concepts related to this. The foreign policy of the Slovak Republic, more precisely the Slovak society and political elite, is historically divided into three major orientations: the Slavic bloc idea, looking towards Russia; national liberation based on a nation state and international and European cooperation (BÚTORA 2017, 13). These historical concepts changed during the different political systems or were overridden by greater powers, especially during the Cold War period.

The peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992 and the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993 were the biggest political decisions made by the Slovak political elite. Although the process was fuelled by nationalism and the desire for independence, it did not lack the idea of long-term goals: joining the European integration and various international structures. Martin Bútora⁷ divides the development of the Slovak foreign policy since 1993 into ten phases:

- Establishment of the Slovak Republic (1993)
- Long-term commitment towards the Euro-Atlantic integration (1993–1994)
- Foreign policy trapped by the sidetracked domestic political development (1994–1997)
- International isolation and missed chances with NATO (1997–1998)
- Political changes – back to the original direction (1998–2002)
- “Tiger of the Tatras”⁸ (2002–2004)
- Integrating into the various Euro-Atlantic structures (2004–2007)
- Eurozone crisis (2008–2012)
- Growing influence of think tanks, civic sector and experts (2013–2015)
- Liberal democracy in danger (2016–present) (BÚTORA 2017, 15–16)

⁷ Martin Bútora is one of the first politicians and influencers, who took the responsibility shaping the foreign policy of Slovakia through consultation and representation after 1993. Source: <https://osobnost.aktuality.sk/martin-butora/> (Accessed: 17.03.2018.)

⁸ Slovakia received this label since it was one of the fastest growing economy in the early 2000s in Central Europe: “Tatra from the mountain range here and tiger after the Irish Tiger, the term used to describe Ireland’s economic transformation in the 1990’s” (REYNOLDS 2004).

As a young democracy and society, the Slovaks quickly fell into the trap of populism under Vladimír Mečiar, which sidetracked the country and its citizens between 1994 and 1998. These four years nearly excluded Slovakia from the Euro-Atlantic integration process. However, in 1998 the pro-European and democratic parties won the parliamentary elections that had a long-term and decisive effect: the ensuing governments were all committed to strengthening the efforts for achieving NATO and European Union memberships. This gave the country international visibility and led to the adoption of the European single currency (EUR) in 2009. Although the Eurozone crisis left its mark both on economics and society, it did not change the Slovak foreign policy fundamentally.

Parallel to this, the number of actors shaping foreign policy multiplied in addition to the President, the PM, the cabinet and the National Council, several think tanks, civil society and experts raise their voices or work together with the government and the ministries, contributing to the overall strategy.

However, it does not mean that all the political parties or the whole of the Slovak society are clearly committed to seeing the future of the country in the European Union. The Eurosceptic politicians and opinion leaders question the direction towards closer integration, while they call for further reforms and strengthening of the member state level against the federation. Moreover, the current international trends also affect the domestic political scene, the increasing focus on international migration and other contemporary developments.

MFA reorganisation since 1989

The story of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic started in 1989, with the establishment of the Division of International Relations within the Government Office structure. This section was neither independent nor autonomous, since it was overseen and reporting to the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its status, however, quickly changed after the elections in June 1990, when the Slovak Ministry of International Relations was established (1990–1992). Until the dissolution of Czechoslovakia both the Slovak and Czech Republic had the rights and autonomy within the federal structure to build international relations and close agreements with states and international organisations, and to send and receive diplomats or representatives (Teraz 2014). In 1990, the Ministry was operating approximately with 40 employees and most of them lacked any professional experience in diplomacy. By 1993, the staff increased to 400 members and additional 350 employees were working in representative offices abroad (BÁTORA 2003, 340).

After Slovakia became an independent country, many institutions changed their name, so did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1993–2012). During the Mečiar era, the Ministry was affected by the domestic political developments that resulted in frequent leadership changes: six ministers led the institution between 1993 and 1998, changes based on personal and competence conflicts with PM Vladimír Mečiar. The Ministry was at this time clearly affected by clientelism, most visibly the representative offices abroad, when PM Vladimír Mečiar decided to call back 28 ambassadors in 1998, to replace them with HZDS party members, despite their lack of experience in international diplomacy (MARUŠIAK 1999, 279). Mečiar's defeat in the general elections in 1998 also affected the MFA rather positively; under the leadership of Eduard Kukan, the Ministry underwent a huge restructuring process (creating

new departments and groups) and a wave of professionalisation. Kukan also strengthened the domestic and international reputation of the MFA by the active participation in searching for solutions for the Kosovo crisis (MARUŠIAK 1999, 285).

In 2006, the MFA under the leadership of Ján Kubiš conducted an audit about itself to understand the key weak points and untapped potentials, which resulted in the first big restructuring project called TREFA (permanent effective management) between 2007 and 2008. The project was inspired by the Danish MFA and focused on achieving the following goals:

- Create tools for strategic planning and management
- Streamline processes, so the employees can focus more on the MFAs overall strategic goals
- Increase the quality of human resources, implement competitive remuneration and promotion
- Streamline the budgetary and financial processes
- Optimise IT and communication technologies and access of information (Výročná správa 2008, 44)

In 2008, the MFA conducted another major round of restructuring: the leadership reduced the number of management levels from four to three, and several sections were cancelled (Výročná správa 2008, 67). Since then, no similarly new major reforms were implemented in spite of several changes of government, the Slovak EU Presidency in 2016 and new trends in international affairs.

Defence reform since 1989

During the communist era, the Czechoslovak army was a key point of the regime and the ruling party. It was a segregated group from the society, with little transparency about its budget and operation. Following the change of system and democratisation, civic control became an important aim for the Slovak Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence. Its achievement may be validated by the high trust ratio in society towards defence institutions, according to polls since 1993. The Army was also among the key interested parties, which supported the ever-closer integration of the Slovak Republic in international community (OECD, UN, OSCE) and Western institutions (NATO, WEU, EU, EC). The Armed Forces regularly provide open-source information to the public since 1993 through annual reports and quarterly published magazines (WLACHOVSKÝ 1997, 101).

The first reorganisation of the Armed Forces (1993–2000)

The dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993 was followed by the establishment of the Armed Forces of the SR and the separation of the Federal system. Before 1989, the Federal Army was primary focused on a direct confrontation with Western (NATO) forces, which in practice meant that most of the units were placed (air force, ground forces and anti-aircraft system) on Czech territory. Meanwhile the Slovak side was a hinterland providing for the site of defence industry production and training. According to the dissolution agreement

between the Czech and Slovak Republics, the Federal Army was divided in a 2:1 ratio in favour of Prague. In details, it meant:

- The number of soldiers per kilometre on the borders were 404 in the Czech Republic, and only 273 in Slovakia
- The number and quality of airfields were superior on the Czech side
- Most of the anti-aircraft system (missiles, radio network and aircraft) remained on the Czech side (WLACHOVSKÝ 1997, 102)

Thus, the established Armed Forces of Slovakia (VIDA 2007, 92) had 58,346 soldiers, 995 tanks, 1,370 armoured vehicles, 1,058 artillery pieces, 146 fighter aircraft and 19 support helicopters in 1993. Due to the ratified Treaty of Conventional Armed Forces, the Mečiar Government had to reduce the number of forces in every category, except helicopters by 1995. Moreover, the Army required a full-scope transformation on all levels, also on a conceptual basis due to the extensive political and military changes worldwide. The need for restructuring of the Armed Forces to become efficient and to join NATO was declared regularly since the time of the very first security and defence related documents, as well as in government programs. The first concept published in 1994 aimed to complete the whole process until 2000 (GÖRNER 2018, 121–123). The plan was divided into three periods, from which only one was fully closed, the second had partial achievements, while the third failed to reach the main goals (WLACHOVSKÝ 1997, 101–104; PURDEK 2012, 60–70):

1. First phase 1994–1995 (achieved)
 - Reorganisation of the General Staff, redevelopment of the mechanised, tank and artillery units
 - Unification of the command system for tactical and operational levels
 - Establishment of military education and preparation of commanding corps
 - Slovakia joined to Partnership for Peace NATO program (1995)
 - Slovakia started to participate in missions in the Balkans (UNPROFOR)
2. Second phase 1996–1997
 - Stabilisation after general reorganisation, focus on military training, preparation, rearmament and modernisation of the army
 - Increase the readiness of military units within new structures
 - Creating conditions for starting the overall professionalisation of the Armed Forces
 - Accomplish the tasks set by the Partnership for Peace program
 - Reasons of (partial) failure: Although the second phase met some goals in case of the completion of military units, it was unsuccessful due to budgetary issues and domestic political developments, which negatively affected the whole process as well as the integration dialogue with NATO
 - As a result, Slovakia did not receive a NATO invitation to begin the accession period
3. Third phase 1998–2000
 - This period aimed on the development of a modern command system that can easily cooperate with NATO
 - Finish the overall military modernisation and rearmament

- Creating conditions for joining the security structures of NATO
- Reasons of failure: After the parliamentary elections and changes in the domestic political landscape, the new Dzurinda Government reviewed the reforms timeline and structure, which was followed by new documents, goals and strategy. This phase never really started since the new government re-shaped the entire process.

The concepts of 2002 and “Models” 2010 and 2015

After the failure of the previous reform and the domestic political changes, the MoD decided to review the reform plans and create a new concept in 1999, to be implemented until 2010. This plan counted on Slovakia's NATO membership as well as the involvement in international missions. The concept goal was to reduce the Armed Forces to 30,000 soldiers (a reduction of 13,500), to continuously dismantle the old T-55 type tanks, OT-90 armoured vehicles, D30 and 2S1 artillery; and also prepare for a bid on new aircraft models. The plan aimed to create quick reaction forces until 2002. The concept was successfully implemented and the goals were achieved (VIDA 2007, 107–110).

After the domestic political changes with the Dzurinda Government, the reform and transformation of the Armed Forces were again on the main agenda with NATO accession. In 2001, three important documents (Defence Strategy, Security Strategy and Military Strategy of the SR) as well as a series of new laws were adopted by the Slovak Parliament.

Based on these strategies, Model 2010, Model 2015 and White Papers of Defence of the SR (2013 and 2016), the Ministry of Defence decided to start a new restructuring, transformation and modernisation process.

Model 2010 (Reform Concept of the Armed Forces of the SR – Model 2010) was accepted in 2001 by the Parliament. The document provides an overall picture about the complex transformation of the Armed Forces, restructuring the Ministry of Defence, aspects of defence planning and financial budgetary responsibilities (this was later followed by Model 2015). Model 2010 criticised the previous transformation attempts. Because of this, the “Army of the Slovak Republic is still largely a product of past inherited structure, which is not effective and financially sustainable” (Model 2010 2001, 6). Model 2010 also acknowledged the attempts of several reports (many of them are unfortunately not available for the public⁹) and emphasised that the most critical situation is in case of resources and planned size of the Armed Forces with a focus on equipment and armament, which require modernisation. It also targeted to reduce the number of employees at the Ministry of Defence in order to be more effective, financially sustainable and to avoid any duplication (Model 2010 2001, 15). The document advised further actions in the case of human resource management:

⁹ These are the following reports and documents: *Hodnotenie bojaskopnosti Armády Slovenskej republiky za rok 1999*, *Štúdia reformy obrany Slovenskej republiky z roku 2000* (Garrettova štúdia/Garrett case study), *Správa o stave obrany Slovenskej republiky z januára 2001* (Cubic application), *Prehľad štruktúry manažmentu a administratívy Ministerstva obrany Slovenskej republiky a Generálneho štábu Armády Slovenskej republiky – 2000* (Clarkova štúdia/Clark case study), *Hodnotenie PZM a PARP Slovenskej republiky Január 2001*.

- Suspending the compulsory army training and introducing a professional army
- Increasing the overall number of women within the AF SR
- Developing the wellbeing of soldiers in terms of accommodation and various benefits
- Introducing leadership and training programs
- Implementing a large-scale redundancy program (regarding military and non-military staff): through requalification courses, earlier retirement, supporting career changes and increasing pensions

Model 2010 also covered the various categories of army supply materials and logistical bases through reducing the number of warehouses (from 10 to 4 centres), moreover to create from the current one-dimensional bases multifunctional centres (foodstuff, weapon equipment, construction materials) (Model 2010 2001, 28). The document also reviewed all types of available mechanised and air force units in terms of ageing, which clearly showed that by 2010:

- From 7,567 mechanised units 77% will be over 21 years old and 42% will be over 30 years old
- In case of air force, the numbers were even worse – from 231 units 82% will reach more than 21 years and 37% is over 30 years old (Model 2010 2001, 35–36)

While Model 2010 was a concept that highlighted all the desired changes based on the demands for NATO membership, Model 2015 was created several years later (in 2006) by what was already then a NATO member country, reflecting on the current and potential military or security trends. The new document summarised achievements and set key goals for general readiness for self or collective defence; Slovakia should have to prepare two ground brigades with full fighting potential and support, different air wing groups (helicopters, air fighters, transports, anti-air and reconnaissance).

The document set further short and long-term goals for ground and air units focusing on extensive modernisation and acquisition of new armaments and technologies with the following timeline: Phase I (2007–2010) focusing on modernisation of logistical units, Phase II (2011–2015) development of field capabilities.

In 2015, Róbert Ondrejcsák (security expert and current State Secretary of the MoD) published a short paper about the dire situation of the Armed Forces, whose key points included:

- The level of troop's interoperability is around 54%
- Mechanised units meet 62% of NATO requirements
- Engineering units meet 39% of NATO requirements
- In case of aircraft and the NATO Integrated Air Defense System a level of 66% is fulfilled
- Ammunitions were nearly at the end of their service time
- Most of the technology and weapons are still Soviet–Russian, which is a source of dependency (ONDREJCSÁK 2015, 1)

The analysis clearly highlights that the Armed Forces are lagging behind in every type of unit and technology.

Future plans and the White Papers of Defence of the SR (2013–2016)

While these Models highlighted the necessary steps and goals for extensive restructuring and modernisation of the AF SR until 2012, the concepts were mostly not followed by necessary actions and large-scale acquisitions of new technologies, especially not for ground and air units. They also lacked the relevant funding and financial planning.

The MoD published two further documents, which determined overall threat perception as the future framework of defence, security and military plans of Slovakia. The reasons were obvious: “The current conceptual framework of the national defence system fails to fully meet the requirements” (White Paper 2013, 30). The first White Paper (2013) contained recommendations and calls to action, since “the Armed Forces of Slovak Republic have only a limited range of capabilities” (White Paper 2013, 38), and Slovakia “is lagging behind in implementing its own plans as well as commitments within the framework of collective defence” (White Paper 2013, 42). Accordingly, several new acquisitions are planned or already in the works:

- JAS 39 Gripen or F-16 Block 70/72 (approximately 7 to 14 units)
- Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk (9 units – awaiting delivery)
- C-27 J Spartan (2 units – delivered)
- Sojka III drones, Radar units (around 3–4 of them, planned since 2015)
- BVP M2 Šakal (485 units until 2029) (Kováč 2017)

Intelligence and secret services reforms

The Slovak intelligence and secret service structure consist of the following institutions: Slovak Information Service (SIS), Military Intelligence (MI) and National Security Authority (NBÚ). The following section will provide a brief summary of these organisations.

Slovak Information Service (Slovenská informačná služba – SIS)

The relatively short but fascinating story of the SIS started in 1993, as the Slovak Republic declared its independence and the new institutions became functional in the country. During the Mečiar era, when the most important judiciary, executive and political institutions were occupied by the governing coalition and in many cases exploited by them, unfortunately, the SIS was no exception. The leadership of the authority gladly circumvented the lustration act that allowed them to employ former agents of the old communist secret service. They were given room to actively influence the domestic and international political development of Slovakia. They also had access to top-secret documents about important political and social figures as the SIS observed many opposition politicians and journalists, and often threatened them (LESNÁ s. a. 791–796). The biggest scandal was the abduction of the President’s son and the death of a police agent (Robert Remiáš, who tried to investigate the case), where SIS played key roles to complete the operations (LESNÁ s. a. 791–796).

In reaction, an alternative network came alive by those, who openly criticised and opposed the incumbent coalition, and it provided help and cover for those, who were threatened and exploited by the state authorities. The fact of this “parallel Secret Service” (1995–1998)

was first time mentioned at an annual conference of the ABSD¹⁰ in 2011. A few years later Peter Tóth¹¹ explained and presented his findings about these whistleblowers. The informal service was based on the network of former secret intelligence agents and employees, who worked to reveal the illegal operations of the SIS, which threatened the young and weak democracy of Slovakia. They informed the public about the regular illegal surveillance of opposition politicians, journalists and civic activists by the SIS. According to Peter Tóth, this network played a key role and provided valuable help to the democratic opposition in defeating the Mečiar Administration during the parliamentary elections in 1998 (TÓTH 2013, 29–32).

Then, in 2011 a huge political scandal broke out, which heavily involved the SIS, too. A transcript document (called Gorilla) was leaked by an employee of the SIS. Its content was about bribes paid to high profile politicians from all the parliamentary parties by the businessmen of PENTA financial services (Euractiv 2012). The leaked document caused massive outrage and protests. It also revealed the deficiency of the SIS in many aspects; their processes received public attention and criticism, too (Sme 2012b).

Since 2011, SIS publishes annual reports about its activities and its analysis of current domestic and international trends, which affect Slovakia. In case of foreign politics, the reports focus much on the current situation in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, the Western Balkans, China, hybrid threats, crisis and conflict regions (Middle East and North Africa). SIS mostly monitors the general political, social and economic developments in these countries and regions (SIS Annual Reports 2011–2018).

Military Intelligence

While the SIS was since 1990 an autonomous and separated entity in the information service structure, the Ministry of Defence oversaw between 1993 and 2012 the Military Defence Intelligence (prevention and counterintelligence) and the Military Intelligence Service (collecting information abroad) (Legal Status of Military Intelligence s. a.). There are few open source documents available from this period, but one thing is sure: the directors of the MI were always from a military background and they were members of the Slovak Army. Since 2013, (Legal Status of Military Intelligence s. a.) the two services were joined and are since functioning as one. According to the law in force, the joint MI focuses on the collecting and the analysis of security and defence related information of Slovakia (internal and external), targeting specifically:

- Threat to the country's sovereignty, constitutional system, territorial integrity
- Activities of foreign intelligence services, terrorism, cyberattacks, sabotage, treason
- Extremism (political or religious), harmful groups endangering the defence of the country
- Organised criminal activities, illegal trade, weapons of mass destruction
- Illegal international human trafficking, exposing or leak of classified information (Legal Status of Military Intelligence s. a.)

¹⁰ ABSD is the Association of Former Intelligence Officers of Slovakia established in 2006. Source: www.absd.sk/o_asociacii (Accessed: 20.03.2018.)

¹¹ Peter Tóth worked as a journalist and political analyst between 1993 and 2003 and focused mostly on the activities and problems of information service authorities. Between 1995 and 1998, he provided information for the SME newspaper about the abduction of the President's son by the SIS.

International trends, such as the growing threat of terrorism, EU and NATO integration, clearly affected the organisational development, as well as certain changes in the domestic political landscape (GOFJÁR 2013, 51–57). The MI had to adapt especially to the NATO and EU related military intelligence structure. It released so far only two public reports about its activities, in 2015 and 2016, which provides a detailed glance how the MI SR sees and ranks the domestic and international threats. Here are some key findings worth mentioning:

- Currently the most important security threats are the ongoing crises in Ukraine and Syria, which intensify illegal migration and cross border criminal activities
- The reports expect the growth of negative propaganda, activities of foreign services and potential jihadist groups in Slovakia
- It also highlights the regular observation of informal, paramilitary organisations and other subjects, by monitoring their potential of destabilising society or exploiting the Slovak Armed Forces (SIS Annual Reports 2015–2017)

National Security Authority of the Slovak Republic (NSA SR)

NSA SR was established to meet the need for an independent institution for various information and cyber security tasks in 2001, during the EU and NATO integration processes. The NSA SR is currently responsible for protecting classified information, cryptographic protection and management of electronic signatures (since 2002), vetting processes for judicial eligibility (since 2015), cyber security (since 2016) and trust services (since 2018) (NBU SR s. a.). These activities affect the public and private sectors (natural persons and legal entities). Since its establishment, the NSA SR was involved in 36 bilateral agreements for mutual exchange of classified information and security clearance (15 rokov NBÚ 2016, 3). Another notable achievement was the creation of a government communication network for classified national and foreign information in 2004. The NSA SR has currently more than 200 employees. The director of the Authority is named and recalled by the National Council, who serves a 7-year term. All of the directors were independent experts; however, it is always the reigning government that nominates them. Since 2001, all of the directors (except the incumbent one) resigned before the end of their mandate or were recalled after scandals. NSA SR has both English and Slovak websites with general information about its activities, responsibilities and annual reports from the last 5 years.

The NSA recently published two important documents in the field of cyber security: the Cyber Security Concept of the Slovak Republic for 2015–2020 (Concept) and the related Action Plan. These papers outline the importance and threats of contemporary cyber security trends highlighted by NATO, EU, UN and OECD (CSC SR 2016; API CSC SR 2016). Both are among the very first documents of Slovakia focusing on cyber security, with the aim to set up a specific legal, organisational, action orientated and terminological (theoretical) framework. The Concept identifies several strategic goals (protection of national cyber space, security awareness of the society, strengthening the cooperation between the public-academic-private sectors) and solutions (creating of legal, institutional and methodical frameworks; developing of internal cyber security products; enhancing national and international partnerships).

The first big step to implement theoretical plans in practice was made by the creation and adoption of the Cyber Security Act, which came to power on 1 April 2018. The Act defines key terminology, the structure of institutions and their responsibilities, incident management and countermeasures. While the NSA SR highlighted the adoption of this Act as a great success, there were some critical voices several months before the final voting, namely coming from the Comenius University of Bratislava (Stanovisko UK 2017) and the world famous Slovak IT company, ESET (Stanovisko ESET 2017). Both criticised the process of the creation of the draft namely: the exclusion of relevant academic experts and the private sector; imprecise or incorrect terminologies; conflicts of interest (NBU is a controlling and executive institution at the same time); technical solutions (due to the single point of failure), and several controversies of the draft's overall content. While the adoption of the Cyber Security Act is clearly a huge step forward in Slovakia, it also raises questions and further fields of improvements for the future.

Trends in spending/budgetary trends: MFA, defence, intelligence

Unfortunately, not all the budgetary spending is available starting from 1993 in the case of foreign policy, defence and intelligence. However, there are some identical trends, which influenced the financial aspects: long-lasting effects of system change (overall restructuring and cost savings), the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (establishing the independent institutions), integration into EU and NATO structures (meeting the requirements and implementing the necessary changes) and adapting to the new European or international trends of the foreign, defence and intelligence fields.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomacy

- The public data shows, that between 1992 and 2016 the overall expenditure was between roughly 0.8% and 1.2% of the state budget.
- During the dissolution (1992–1993) and the following year (1994) the expenditure grew from 0.8% up to 1.1%, meeting the demands of launching Slovakia's independent diplomacy worldwide, but later on it decreased around 1.0% (until 1997) (Výročná správa 2008, 46).
- Another increase came in 1998 up to 1.2%, which was the peak period and was followed by a long-term decrease until the Slovak EU presidency in 2016, when the spending reached again 1.2% (Výročná správa 2008, 46).
- A significant decrease happened between 2000–2002 from 1.1% to 0.98% that was later even lower presumably due to the global and European financial crisis, which resulted in the lowest of budget spending 0.7% in 2010, at around 110 million EUR (OVÁDEK 2017).

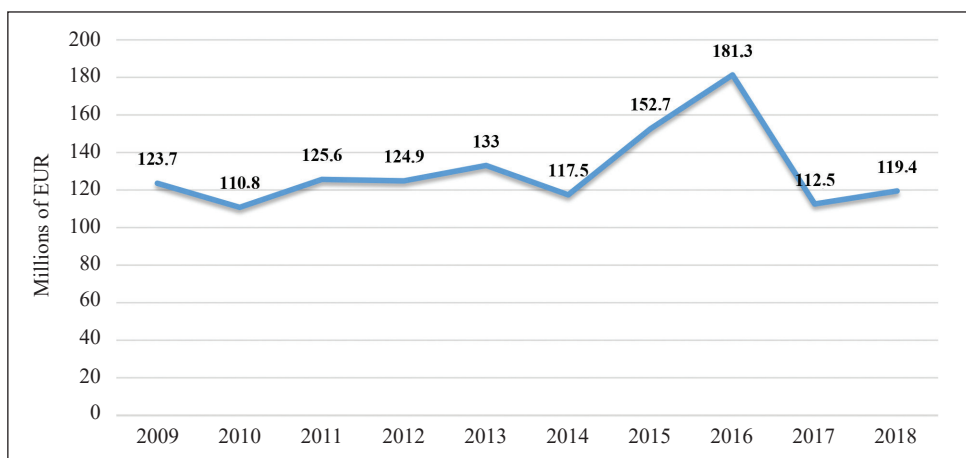


Figure 1.
Annual Budget of the MFA SR (2009–2018)

Source: Výročné správy MZV SR, www.mzv.sk

- The most interesting period was the Slovak EU presidency in 2016, when the expenditure exceeded prior estimates significantly: instead of 100 million EUR, the Ministry spent 180 million EUR. At the end of the Slovak EU presidency, a financial scandal broke out, which showed that the Agency EVKA won marketing and event organisation bids with overpriced expenses (Šípoš–HLAVÁKOVÁ 2017).

Defence expenses

- There are plenty data available about the recent military and defence spending via NATO and the World Bank. Despite these sources, not all these statistics are accurate; therefore, the study uses the latest statistics published on the SME website (KOVÁČ 2017).
- Figure 2 clearly shows the declining trend of military and defence expenses of Slovakia since achieving its independence (blue line) compared to NATO requirements (orange line).
- The first big decreases happened between 1997 and 1999, when the domestic political landscape shifted, resulting in huge state budget cuts. It was also the period of the failed first military and defence transformation attempt.
- Another major budget cut can be seen between 2009 and 2014. This was again a hectic period: the end of the first Fico Government, the Global Financial Crisis, the short-lived Radičová Administration and the return of the second Fico Government. One of the main reasons for declining expenditure is the direction set by PM Robert Fico in 2008 (KERN 2008), who openly refused to increase the military and defence spending despite the NATO requirements (HNonline 2017).
- Since 2014, there is a trend of slow increase of expenditure that can be sustainable due to the ongoing modernisation activities and plans.

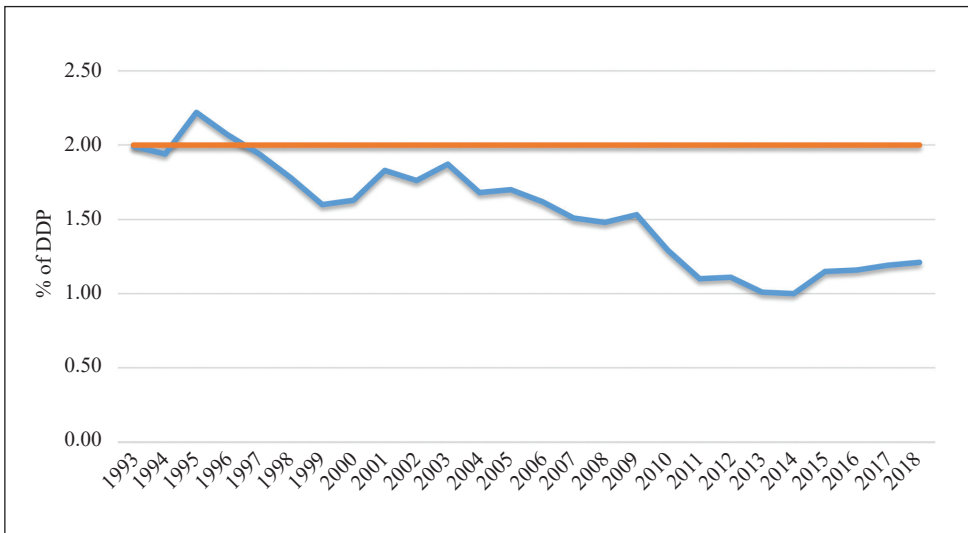


Figure 2.

Percentage of Slovakia's military expenditure in GDP compared to the NATO target (1993–2018)

Source: sme.sk

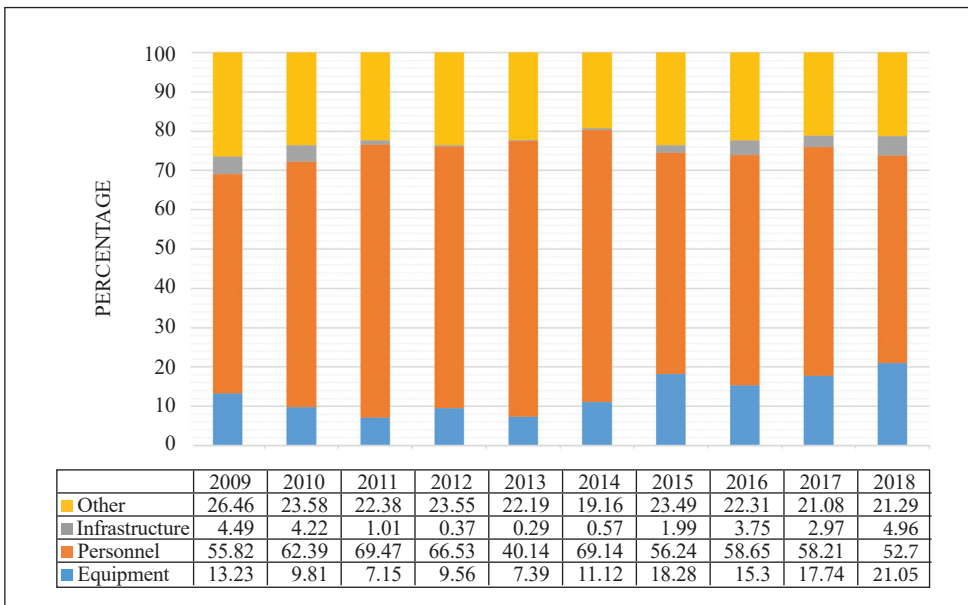


Figure 3.

Distribution of Slovakia's total defence expenditure

Source: NATO Com PR/CP 2017.

- Other interesting aspects are the distribution of expenses (Figure 3) by different categories (infrastructure, personnel, equipment and other – operation, maintenance, R&D, etc.). Slovakia is no different from most of the NATO member countries that have similar spending trends (NATO Com PR/CP 2017, 12–13).

Intelligence (Military, National Security and the Information Service)

- Unfortunately, only the Slovak Intelligence Service and the National Security Authority published their budgets publicly (since 2009), while the Military Intelligence did not provide any data before 2016.

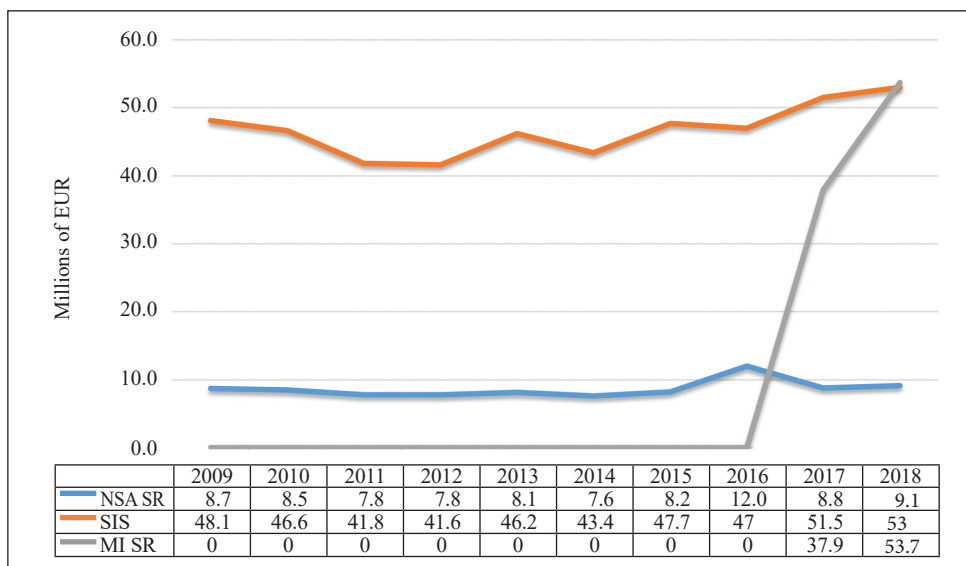


Figure 4.
Annual budgets of NSA SR, SIS and MI SR (million EUR 2009–2018)

Source: cenastatu.sk

- As the above figure shows, in the case of the NSA SR, the expenses were quite stable and sustainable between 7.6 and 8.7 million EUR (Figure 4). A significant change happened in 2016 when the Authority received more than 4.6 million EUR from the state budget. Unfortunately, there is no clear explanation available for this major financial boost, but potentially it was connected to the increased responsibilities of the NSA SR during the Slovak EU presidency.
- The SIS highlights in every annual report that they struggle to: cope with ongoing trends in technological development (SIS 2012); manage cost saving, while the in-

formation and communication systems are in a critical status (SIS 2013); upgrade cyber and encrypting services that can affect the Slovak EU Presidency (SIS 2015); and implement new IT, intelligence and communication technologies, to catch up with current international trends (SIS 2017).

- Unfortunately, the publicly available annual reports (from 2015 and 2016) of MI SR provide only brief information about the costs of general functioning and some development categories (infrastructure, communication and information systems, technologies) (VSS 2016; VSS 2017).

Stakeholders in decision-making

The key actors in the field of executive power and the legislative framework

As in every constitutional and democratic country, only specific state representatives and officials are allowed to shape the foreign, security, defence and military developments. This is the same in case of Slovakia, where the most influential are: the President, the National Council (Parliament), the Prime Minister (PM), the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs (MoFaEA), the Minister of Defence (MoD) and the cabinet (to some extent).

The President

The incumbent president, Andrej Kiska, is the 5th head of Slovakia since 1993 and the second non-party member, who holds this role. According to the Constitution of Slovakia, the President in case of foreign policy making, defence and military decisions has the following rights:

- Represents the country internationally and ratifies international agreements (with the consent of the Government and Parliament)
- Handles diplomatic missions (receiving, accrediting and recalling)
- Is the Supreme Commander of the Slovak Armed Forces
- Declares war based on the Parliament's decision
- Can order the mobilisation of the Armed Forces and declare a state of war or martial law
- Can call for referenda
- Appoints and recalls the Prime Minister and other ministers of government (Constitution 1992, Article 103–107)

In Slovakia's history, Michal Kováč was the most active president in the field of foreign policy. As the first president of the independent country, Kováč tried to shape the overall decision-making, influencing the government and the parliament as well, which resulted in frequent clashes of interests between the President, the PM and the governing coalition in case of NATO and EU accession. PM Vladimír Mečiar attempted several times to weaken the President's position through shrinking its responsibilities; however, his plans did not bear fruit. Compared to his predecessors, Andrej Kiska is also a critical thinker, who is

not afraid to criticise the Fico Administration, mostly its governing style and the results of domestic political developments. Having said that since becoming a member of NATO and the EU, the President of Slovakia takes generally only a representative position, while the cabinet and the MoFaEA manage day-to-day tasks of foreign policy.

The National Council

The National Council is the most important legislative body of the country, which has legislative power, power of scrutiny, power to create state bodies, domestic and foreign policy powers (NR SR s. a.). According to the constitution, in case of foreign, defence, security and military policies, the Parliament is responsible for:

- Legislation
- Overseeing different state bodies – mainly the government, but also creating new state bodies (institutions, commissions, committees, etc.)
- Approving various international treaties
- Passing resolutions about declaring war
- Giving consent for sending military troops outside of Slovakia
- Approving the presence of foreign troops in Slovakia
- Debate and decide about referendum calls (NR SR s. a.)

The National Council in most cases follows the direction set by the governing coalition, which has the majority in the parliament, in every policy field, including the foreign, defence, military and security.

The Prime Minister and the cabinet

The Prime Minister and the cabinet (with various ministries):

- International treaties which were passed by the President and requires additional consultation with the Constitutional Court
- Overall foreign policy
- Approving drafts for a state of war, the mobilisation of the Slovak Armed Forces, approving the draft for state of emergency and its termination
- Sending troops abroad for humanitarian help, military trainings or monitoring missions – as well as giving consent for foreign troops to be present in Slovakia for the same reasons as above
- Sending troops abroad up to 60 days in case of fulfilling responsibilities based on international treaties about collective defence (Ústava 1992)

The PM is perhaps the most influential in the field of foreign, security, military and defence policy, even as there is no clear legal framework about the PM's position and responsibilities in this field. However, as head of the government, the PM has access to all necessary information and has, of course, a key position in setting conceptual elements of policy.

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MoFaEA)

The MoFaEA also plays an important role in shaping the foreign policy, representation abroad (individual and governmental) and building the international relations of Slovakia. The Minister, who stands on the top of the MoFaEU leadership, has a dual role: managing the Ministry and representing Slovakia abroad. The Ministry is responsible for:

- Protecting the interests and rights of Slovakia and its citizens
- Managing the representative offices of the country
- Keeping contact with representatives of foreign countries abroad
- Managing state owned properties abroad
- Handling the overall process related aspects of international treaties (negotiation, conclusion, announcement and implementation)
- Cultural representation of Slovakia (MZVEZ SR 2015)

Both Act 575/2001 (Zákon č. 575/2001) and the Ministry's own statute set further tasks, including:

- Coordinating the activities of other Ministries in international organisations
- Setting Slovakia's agenda in NATO and the UN
- Diplomatic and consular services
- Securing independent communication networks as well as cryptographic information services (Štatút MZVEZ SR 2016)

Ministry of Defence (MoD)

MoD has no direct responsibilities in the field of foreign policy making set by legislation. However, in case of policy implementation and foreign military missions, evidently, the MoD makes important contributions.

Key domestic interest groups

There are several active think tanks in the foreign and security policy field – most prominently: the Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs (CENAA), the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), the Slovak Security Policy Institute (SSPI), GLOBSEC and Stratpol.

CENAA

CENAA (Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs) is an independent think tank, established in 2003 (Sme 2003). CENAA facilitates discussions and conferences on different levels between the Euro-Atlantic community, NATO members and Slovakia (VICENOVA 2014). The organisation promotes democratic institutionalisation, provides consultancy services in case of foreign policy making, development armed forces (ŠNÍDL 2014)

(in Ukraine) and study programs abroad (for University of Kabul in Afghanistan) (Sme 2012a). The organisation provided one of the current state secretaries of the Ministry of Defence, Róbert Ondrejcsák, who led CENAA for more than 7 years (2007–2010 and 2012–2016). Members of CENAA represent the organisation quite often in domestic as well as Central European media.

SFPA

The SFPA (Slovak Foreign Policy Association) is an independent think tank specialised in foreign policy making since 1993. The organisation was established by the first generation of Slovak politicians, who held important and influential positions in the past as ministers, ambassadors, the PM's or the President's advisors, or MPs of Parliament. In the first years, SFPA mostly focused on organising discussion forums about foreign policy. Later on an analytical centre was created as a research department of the organisation (in 1995), which plays also a key role in publishing the magazine *Foreign Policy* since 2005 (SFPA 1 s. a.). SFPA built long-lasting cooperation and partnership with numerous European and U.S. based institutions (academic sector, universities, think tanks and councils) (SFPA 2 s. a.). The organisation divided its activity into two categories: research and project based works, which are further divided into geographical and sectorial categories (Eastern Europe, Central and Southeastern Europe, European Union, International Security, Economy and Development Policy, Security and Cooperation in Europe). Since 2004, SFPA has been publishing annual reports about the organisations research, publications, media coverage and various projects.

SSPI

The SSPI (Slovak Security Policy Institute) is a non-governmental and non-partisan organisation established in 2014. The Institute focuses on Slovak and international security and defence policy research, as well as on cyber security and myth-busting (SSPI s. a.). Most of the SSPI members were former employees of different ministries (Foreign Affairs or Defence) or came from other similar Slovak NGO-s. The Institute has a wide range of projects: summer schools, cyber security forum, debunking myths (an anti-propaganda programme), security and defence – these are targeting both Slovak, Visegrád and international scales. As all the previously mentioned organisations, the SSPI also built strong cooperation with numerous international institutions and the Slovak public sector and governmental bodies or relevant ministries funded some of its publications.

GLOBSEC

GLOBSEC (Bratislava Summit) is the most famous foreign and security policy focused international forum in Slovakia. It has been set up in 2005 by three institutions: the Slovak Atlantic Commission (still active), the Central European Policy Institute (CEPI) and the

Centre for European Affairs (CESC s. a.). From 2016, all the above-mentioned organisations joined and formed one legal entity, GLOBSEC (GLOBSEC 2016). Following this union, a new structure was created within the organisation: GLOBSEC Policy Institute (based on former CEPI), GLOBSEC World and GLOBSEC Academy Centre. Since 2013, the organisation expanded its events by organising the Tatra Summit, which has a political, financial and economic agenda (GLOBSEC 2018). Also from 2013, another forum was launched and is called the “Château Béla Central European Strategic Forum” focusing on Central European security, political and economic issues. GLOBSEC is currently the most established organisation, with the largest staff (GLOBSEC s. a.) and international network among the Slovak think tanks.

Stratpol

Stratpol is a relative newcomer as a security policy think tank, founded in 2016 by the former CENAA director and current State Secretary Róbert Ondrejcsák (Teraz 2016). As most of the security and defence focused institutions in Slovakia, Stratpol also aims to cover the European (East, West and Central), Transatlantic (NATO) and Caucasus regions. The Institution built its presence in the Black Sea and Caucasus, primarily with officials of Georgia through the annually co-organised South Caucasus Security Forum (SCSF 2019). Stratpol also pays great attention to educating young people through a summer university and in high schools in Slovakia (about critical thinking, EU and NATO, fighting against disinformation, etc.). Stratpol's newest initiation in cooperation with the Institute of Asian Studies monitors the most important security developments in Asia from Slovak and Visegrád perspectives (Stratpol s. a.).

Public opinion: Major characteristics and trends

It is quite challenging to characterise the long-term public opinion in Slovakia in case of different foreign, security, defence and military policy related topics, due to the lack of relevant data. While the support of NATO and EU membership was regularly monitored since 1993, the experts and researchers paid less attention to other aspects of policy-making. Time to time there were several public surveys, but those cannot be considered influential data. Mostly the Focus Research and the Institute of Public Opinion monitored the public attitudes, while GLOBSEC recently started regular surveying, in a more broader way than has hitherto been the practice in Slovakia.

The study collected all of the available and verified data that were related to the NATO or EU membership support in case of Slovakia. There is still a huge difference between the support of these two organisations on the part of the public: while support for NATO membership has recently even deteriorated, EU membership is viewed more positively (see Figure 5).

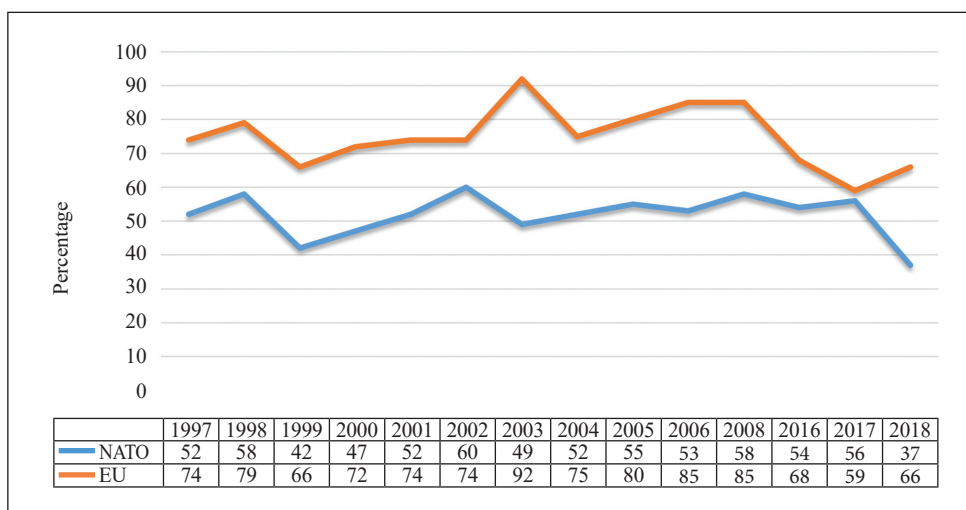


Figure 5.
Changes in EU and NATO support in Slovakia

Source: IVO (1997–2008); GLOBSEC (2016–2018).

Several factors make an important difference between the EU and NATO. First of all, the member states: NATO involves the U.S., a global power, and there is thus more identification with the EU. There are also several partly conspiracy theories and concepts connected in the minds of the public to the U.S., which influence negatively the Slovak public:

- That the U.S. played an important role ending the Eastern bloc and thus also in the change of system in Czechoslovakia
- The U.S. fuels globalism that in turn supposedly fuels terrorism, and so on and so forth
- This is partly the legacy of the 4 to 5 years of Mečiarism that were full of anti-American messages (MARUŠIAK 1999, 280–282), which clearly strengthened the anti-American attitude in the Slovak society or at least spread a negative image about the USA

In contrast, the Slovak society viewed the European Union in a much more positive way, to some extent as a saviour. The expectations were really high after joining the EU in every field, since the society and politics viewed the EU integration as the only possible direction for the country to take, providing comprehensive security, political, economic, cultural, etc. protection in the long run for Slovakia.

The recent GLOBSEC surveys show, for example, that Russian influence, conspiracy theories and fake news are quite influential and their impact is measurable even against the backdrop of the generally strong NATO and EU membership support. GLOBSEC's findings include, among others that:

- NATO and EU support remained above 50%
- More than 50% of the respondents believe in some kind of conspiracy theories and fake news, for example ones involving secret groups seeking world dominance or that the U.S. planned the 9/11 attacks
- While there are still many people who think nostalgically about the Socialist era, it is mostly the older generation (MILO et al. 2018, 30–34)

Case study: From last to first – Slovakia's road to NATO

After the peaceful divorce from the Czech Republic, Slovakia had to compete with the other Central and Eastern European post-socialist countries in a situation, where every state was trying to build a closer relationship with Western countries for achieving various political and economic benefits. The young Slovak Republic received some credit for the bloodless dissolution, for the commitment towards Western values and its institutional reforms. However, the democratic development was not linear. It had certain phases and trends, even setbacks, which made a huge impact on Slovakia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The following case study highlights the key moments of the Slovak foreign policy on the road to NATO accession.

It may be convenient to divide the NATO integration of Slovakia into three periods:

- 1993–1995 (first, early period): gaining independence, establishing and building new institutions and international relations
- 1995–1998 (second, sidetracking): the period under the Mečiar Government that proved to be unsuitable for moving closer to NATO integration due to various controversial decisions and policies
- 1998–2004 (third, catching up): Dzurinda Government that turned Slovakia back in the right direction and built the reputation of the country for NATO membership

During the first period, Slovakia became a member in several key NATO programs and projects, which were the anterooms of full membership. These projects also tested the orientation of the country's institutions and politics towards democratic values. During this the early period:

- Slovakia reached membership in the NACC (North Atlantic Cooperation Council – 1993)
- Joined to the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, and a Security Agreement was signed between Slovakia and NATO in 1994
- Approved the Status of Forces Agreement in 1995 (Slovakia–NATO 2004)

It seemed to be a successful period, since the Slovak Government and Parliament accepted several security related documents, working towards closer cooperation with NATO. However, internally this period was full of political tensions and fight for power between the governing coalition, the opposition and the President in many areas (economic transition, the transformation of the army, ethnic and societal issues and political stability). NATO was mostly following the defence and military related restructuring processes in Slovakia. The

Mečiar Government (1994–1998) officially declared its foreign and security policy aim of achieving NATO membership, since the government considered it a way to gain security guarantees (Program 1994–1998 1994). During these four years, four Ministers of Foreign Affairs were responsible to shape NATO–Slovakia talks. However, it was not very successful due to the frequent changes in the ministry leadership and the lack of a professional approach, mostly PM Mečiar influenced the foreign policy of Slovakia.

The beginning of the second phase was highlighted by the climax of the long-term conflict between the PM and the President, with the kidnapping of the President's son, Michal Kováč Jr, with the direct involvement of the Slovak Intelligence Service. This scandal followed EU and U.S. demarches, emphasising strong concerns about institutional tensions and the future of democracy in Slovakia (Spectator 1995). Meanwhile the members of the governing coalition tried to play down the importance of these demarches, while the President and oppositional parties emphasised the documents as objective criticism of Slovakia's political direction (MESEŽNIKOV 1997, 25–26). The governing coalition played a two-faced game:

- On the one hand, they communicated towards the international community their interest of achieving NATO membership
- On the other hand, they used a populist language in the domestic field criticising NATO and the international community due to what they called an interference in Slovak politics; and what they claimed was an irresponsible way of handling NATO's Central European enlargement without Russia's consent, which – they opined – could lead to an alliance between Russia, China and the Arabic countries; and they also accused the U.S. of “double standards” against applicant countries (MESEŽNIKOV 1997, 25–26)

The problems grew further, when the National Council approved the State Language Law in 1996, which caused an outcry both in the local Hungarian community, in Hungary and internationally (in the framework of the EU and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE) as well, since it terminated the possibility to use minority languages in offices (SIMON 1996, 275). The Mečiar Government thus slowly led the country into international isolation (MARUŠIAK 1999, 275). Moreover, several members of the coalition used an anti-American and populist approach criticising anyone deemed a local representative of the U.S., critics who commented on domestic political developments in Slovakia (MARUŠIAK 1999, 280–282).

Although the country became a founding member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), this did not have any influence on the upcoming referendum about the country's NATO membership in May 1997. The referendum was about two topics: about changing the way the President was elected (to direct election) and Slovakia's NATO membership (MESEŽNIKOV 1997, 19). The governing coalition under Mečiar's leadership was against joining NATO, while the parliamentary opposition, the President and the civic sector was in favour of it at the referendum. Due to some printing and formatting errors, not all the voting sheets contained four questions, which clearly violated the voting, and this procedural error was acknowledged by the Central Referendum Committee. The Committee accused the Minister of the Interior of manipulating the referendum by not securing the voting sheets with the right format (MESEŽNIKOV 1998, 44). The failed

referendum followed many negative reactions from NATO member countries (particularly from the U.S.), from international organisations as well and resulted in exclusion from the invitation to membership during the NATO Madrid Summit in July 1997. While in the political dimension it was clear that Slovakia was far from being an ideal candidate country, at the same time, the Armed Forces met the military requirements through participation in military missions within the NATO framework, according to Joseph Ralston (WLACHOVSKÝ–MARUŠIAK 1998, 237–238).

The mark of the third period began with the parliamentary elections in 1998. The opposition parties desperately tried to change the course of the country, both domestic developments and foreign policy, with the support of various international organisations and the civic sector. Although Mečiar won the parliamentary elections in 1998, he could not form a government while the opposition parties managed to unite and create a coalition. The new Dzurinda Government promised to break the international isolation of the country by “*pursuing a persuasive and trustworthy foreign policy*” and joining NATO (Program 1998–2002 1998, 40). One of the first actions of the new government was to send a letter to the President of the European Commission (Jacques Santer) and to the NATO Secretary General (Javier Solana), about the clear aim and commitment to enhance Slovakia’s integration to Euro-Atlantic structures (MESEŽNIKOV 1999, 38). Eduard Kukan (MoFA) and Mikuláš Dzurinda (PM) lobbied actively various NATO countries’ governments and expected a recognition from NATO during the Washington Summit in 1999, which they achieved (Slovakia–NATO 2004). The decision showed that NATO member states welcomed the efforts of Dzurinda’s government and considered Slovakia as a strong candidate country for the next accession wave (MARUŠIAK 1999, 283–286).

Meanwhile, the Kosovo War broke out, which also affected Slovakia’s progress in NATO, as the Dzurinda Government supported NATO operations and allowed NATO overflights of Slovak air space (MARUŠIAK 1999, 277). The following period saw many official meetings between NATO and representatives (PM, MoFA and President) of Slovakia (Slovakia–NATO 2004). The Dzurinda Government established some new parliamentary committees; one of them was focusing on NATO integration (1999) (BRUNCKO–LUKÁČ 2000, 333). In 1999, a pro-NATO President was elected in Slovakia, Rudolf Schuster who defeated Mečiar’s comeback attempt, and fully supported the NATO accession of Slovakia.

In 2001, the Slovak National Council (parliament) accepted three important documents (the Security Strategy, Defence Strategy and Military Strategy), which emphasised the political elite’s commitment towards NATO accession. These aspirations slowly started to bear fruit, as more and more positive acknowledgements and statements came from NATO and member states officials regarding developments in Slovakia (MESEŽNIKOV 2001, 51–54). One of the key documents was the Annual National Programme of Preparation of the Slovak Republic for NATO Membership, which made the following recommendations:

- The Slovak Government needs to keep up the pace and trend of reforms (economic, social, etc.)
- Increase public support for Slovakia’s NATO membership
- Fight against corruption, keeping up political and economic stability, improving the situation of national minorities and the Roma
- Implementing plans for defence and military reforms
- Increase participation in NATO’s missions (Rokovania 2001)

The year 2002 was one of the key periods due to the upcoming parliamentary elections. These resulted in the victory of the coalition led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, who formed a new government, which remained pro-NATO. The discussions about the integration processes continued with several high-profile visits, reviews and further legal amendments in Slovakia. The latter included: the Constitutional Law on the Security of the State during War, Warfare and Emergency State; Law on Military Service; Law on Defence and Law on Armed Forces (Slovakia–NATO 2004). NATO and the Western countries closely monitored the parliamentary elections in Slovakia. However, only the U.S. took preemptive countermeasures stating: if Vladimír Mečiar's party becomes a part of the governing coalition, they will not support Slovakia's further integration (MESEŽNIKOV 2002, 54–56). Although Mečiar tried to ease tensions, both NATO and the U.S. leadership remembered well his approach to politics. They fully supported Dzurinda Government won the general elections in 2002 and during the NATO Prague Summit, they invited Slovakia to join NATO.

During the course of 2003, the high-profile visits continued between NATO and Slovak officials, as well as the monitoring of progress (MESEŽNIKOV 2003, 28). It seemed that the Dzurinda Government would reach its main goal; however, some interest groups raised their voices in order to organise a referendum about the country's NATO membership. Among the initiators were the Slovak National Party, the Slovak Communist Party, a well-known dissenter in the person of Ján Čarnogursky, the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic, the local Greenpeace group and more. Many supporters just wanted the set a referendum about Slovakia's NATO membership, while others used the initiative to spread anti-NATO views and propaganda (MESEŽNIKOV 2003, 28). However, the organisers failed to collect more than 350 thousand signatures and thus to gain the necessary public support. Eventually, the Slovak Government could thus approve the Letter of Intent, while the National Council approved NATO membership on the 10th of April. Rudolf Schuster as President of Slovakia finally signed the accession protocol, which was followed by the approval of other member states. The process lasted until 2004 and on the 29th of March 2004, Slovakia joined with several other countries NATO along with the Baltic countries, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Case study: How not to obtain armoured vehicles – Scandal of the 8 x 8 vehicles

Obtaining new and modern armoured vehicles is a key and long-term goal of the Slovak security and military strategy. The following brief case study focuses on the ongoing procurement scandal related to armoured vehicles (4 x 4 and 8 x 8), in which different interested parties are involved. The case involves several relevant parties, including:

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD), especially the Minister of Defence (Peter Gajdoš from the Slovak National Party – SNS)
- State Secretary of the MoD (Róbert Ondrejcsák, security expert, nominated by Most–Híd)
- Some parliamentary opposition parties (Freedom and Solidarity/Sloboda a Solidarita – SaS and Ordinary People and Independent Personalities/Obyčajní Ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti – OĽaNO)

- A non-parliamentary political party (Progressive Slovakia/Progresívne Slovensko – PS)
- The Security and Defence Industry Association of the Slovak Republic (ZBOP)
- The Finnish military manufacturing company, Patria AMV

The procurement saga started back to 2015, when PM Robert Fico (Sme 2015a) and the Ministry of Defence were building a cooperation between Polish and Slovak manufacturers of armoured vehicles and howitzers (Sme 2015b). However, after 2 years the plan fell apart due to financial difficulties (KOVÁČ 2016). Later on, the third Fico Government presented and accepted a detailed document about a procurement tender on the 17th of May 2017 (Rokovania 2017). The paper highlighted the following points:

- Slovakia plans to buy vehicles that can be used for both defensive and offensive purposes
- The vehicles must be able to carry 4 to 6 crew
- The units should be equipped with a machine gun (up to 12.7 mm), an automated grenade launcher and anti-tank weaponry
- The document recommends 81 units of 8 x 8 and 404 units of 4 x 4
- Obtaining the units through public procurement processes
- The process is open to regional, international and government-to-government co-operation, also plans to channel in Slovak suppliers (Rokovania 2017)

The document set a timeframe between 2018 and 2029, for evaluating bids and producing the first models with logistical support. The draft focused more on the 8 x 8 vehicles (obtaining and arming them until 2024), while it count ends on most of the 4 x 4 units after 2023. The whole procurement framework is estimated to value around 1.2 billion EUR. Based on this document the Ministry of Defence announced a public bidding process (Aktuality 2017).

Table 1.
Procurement of combat armoured vehicles

Unit type	Costs (per unit)	Cost (with logistic support)
8 x 8	Up to 4 million EUR	417 million EUR
4 x 4	Between 1.2 and 3.5 million EUR	782 million EUR

Source: Rokovania 2017.

In August 2017, *Denník N* published an article, which highlighted the possibility of a pre-arranged winner of the bid, even though there were still several companies in competition (ŠNÍDL 2017a). The whole bid was in the hands of the SNS, which had great influence on the MoD through Peter Gajdoš. In October 2017, *Denník N* revealed that the MoD chose the Finnish Patria AMV as a supplier for the 8 x 8 units, and that the procurement will be managed in a government-to-government framework (ŠNÍDL 2017b). The Slovak Government approved the acquisition, which followed critical reactions from experts and the Security and Defence Industry Association of the Slovak Republic (ZBOP 2017).

The scandal grew, when in November the State Secretary of the MoD, Róbert Ondrejcsák revealed his concerns about the procurement process, as he did not have any

access to the contract (ŠNÍDL 2017c). This caused long-term tensions within the MoD, and also between the SNS and Most–Híd coalition parties. It was becoming clearer week by week that the process lacked transparency (ŠNÍDL 2017b); but the public did not get any hard evidence of this until the 24th of November 2017 when a politician, Martin Dubéci,¹² a specialist of foreign policy matters, revealed documents about a contract between Finland and Slovakia, signed by Minister Gajdoš in Brussels on the 18th of May 2017 (ŠNÍDL 2017d). This caused an outcry both among the opposition parties and within the governing coalition, former ministers (Glváč, Fedor and Galko) (Sme 2017) raised their voices and asked for the details to be revealed and the bid to be halted, which the MoD rejected citing state security as main argument. The MoD highlighted that the contract will provide opportunities for Slovak suppliers to develop the mission module (the turret), while Patria AMV will manage the drive module of the armoured vehicles (ŠNÍDL 2017e). However, some military experts doubted the whole concept, as the Finnish supplier had similar concepts in the past with Bulgaria, Croatia and Poland, which means that at the end Slovakia, would have several competitors in the same category, supported by Patria AMV.

As currently planned, the program signed in May 2017 between the Slovak MoD and the Finnish MoD will involve three suppliers: Konštrukta Defence a. s., Patria Land Systems Oy, and EVPÚ a. s. The research and development phase is to last until 2024, with plans to manufacture and put into service 81 armoured vehicle units upon successful tests (ŠNÍDL 2017e).

Conclusion

This study aimed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the major trends and institutional developments in foreign, security and military concepts of Slovakia. The political leadership of the country achieved its primary goal: Slovakia became a member of the Euro-Atlantic community, NATO and the European Union. From a foreign policy perspective, Slovakia continuously developed its stable relations with key EU and NATO member states, as well as in regional cooperation (primarily with the Visegrád Countries). In case of security, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, along with various other state agencies as well as civil/think tank professional organisations shape Slovakia's security perceptions, largely following the international and European trends. Compared to 1993, the international community now recognises the Slovakian foreign and security policy sector through various events (e.g. the GLOBSEC Summit). In the military field, the Slovak Armed Forces underwent several reforms and restructuring since 1993. All previous governments struggled to find the necessary budget for large-scale modernisation; however, Slovakia has constantly under-spent on defence compared to NATO requirements, especially on modernisation. The current armoured vehicle procurement process may represent some positive change in this respect. However, major change would require a consistent commitment to military modernisation and restructuring. At the same time,

¹² Martin Dubéci is a foreign and security policy analyst, who is a member of Progressive Slovakia, a newly formed non-parliament party.

there is some success in how Slovakia is actively participating in various NATO and UN military missions around the globe.

Overall, Slovakia has become a recognised member of the Euro-Atlantic community since 1993, even as there remains much to be done in the fields of foreign and security policy.

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