

Between Two Pillars: Slovak Security in the Light of NATO–EU Cooperation

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Introduction

Slovakia's stand towards the EU and NATO oscillates between two pillars – one is pro-Atlantic, strongly seeking EU/NATO membership and active participation in their activities, and the other one is more reserved, relaying on a sceptical domestic audience still full of uncertainty and suspicion towards both organisations and nostalgia for the Soviet times. Given its size and political power in the international arena, Slovakia's role in European security and defence has been minimal. Regardless of the leader, the country's policy was to wait for the allies and repeat what was suitable. The following article will introduce the beginnings of Slovakia's debate on international security, its positions, first aspirations as a candidate country and transformation of its security sector. The article will then conclude by addressing the most crucial issues of today's security environment from the point of view of both organisations and attempt to sketch the future relations and identify milestones of Slovakia's perception of the EU as a security actor.

From independence to partnership

When the communist regime collapsed in Europe, the question of the future of the Slovak security came in place. Although the domestic reforms were a priority, there was an attempt to define Slovakia's foreign policy and set the goal at least on the declaratory level. From the declaration of independence, Slovakia publicly sought Euro-Atlantic integration. Nevertheless, it is important to say that it was not the only option discussed. Among others, a less likely trajectory was also neutrality. The integration into the EU was not a problem. The European Union was viewed positively. But NATO integration for its military nature was a hard-hitting issue for the public. Switzerland and the Nordic countries such as Sweden and Finland, also members of the EU were used as an example of successfully avoiding NATO integration. It would be naïve to think that a country between the Russian Federation and the countries of now Western Europe could stay neutral for a long time. Slovakia did not have the resources and means to maintain its neutrality. It was necessary for the country to choose its path and start a regional cooperation to achieve its goals of security.

After decades under the communist leadership that was acting in a way to satisfy the counterparts in Moscow in almost all areas of life, Slovakia emerged as an independent



country, yearning to be free in its decisions. It was for the first time that the freely elected parliament led to the composition of a government, which set the course for the republic in both domestic and foreign policy. Together with the foreign policy, also questions of security and defence policy came along. Slovakia's security was no longer guaranteed by a questionable partner, the Soviet Union, but it could choose the path for a common defence provider. From the beginning of the republic, Slovakia's government declared its focus on the European Union and NATO. They saw the two organisations as guarantees of economic and social development in terms of the EU and security guarantees that would ensure this development protected under the umbrella of common defence within NATO.

Before even thinking about joining the EU and NATO, the Slovak authorities had to build military and political structures. The first Slovak Government established shortly after the Velvet Revolution in December 1989 did not have a post of minister of defence or foreign affairs. The government lasted until 26 June 1990, the Prime Minister was Milan Čič. The frequency of short-term governments was not an anomaly during the first years of Slovakia.

This revisit of historical events is important to illustrate the transition, which brought along some political instability as the governments did not last very long. It is an example of a young country trying to find its rhythm. Given the peacefulness of the Czechoslovak divorce, there was no need for a strong political, let alone military involvement from foreign countries or institutions. However, the process was closely watched by many actors who wondered about next steps of Slovak governments.

The first government elected by the Slovak people and lasting full four years came into power on 13 December 1994. During that period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had altogether four ministers. The high number of ministers responsible for foreign affairs reflected the inconsistency of the ministry. The Ministry of Defence was not yet established. In its declaration, the government stated its interest in maintaining continuity and "to build upon the current policy of convergence of the Slovak Republic with the European and transatlantic political, security, and economic structures, to intensify it and to emphasize our preference to become a full member of these groups" (Vláda SR 1994). This rather vague statement was put in place to make a case in front of the allies about Slovakia's future foreign and security policy positions and prepare them for future conversations.

The two most important factors in this declaration were continuity and integration. Continuity of the governments was one of the crucial pre-conditions of a successful path to a membership of both NATO and the EU. The second declaratory statement contained integration. The new government declared that it was ready to join the transatlantic groups as an equal partner and was willing to undergo necessary reforms in order to achieve required results. The process that started in 1993 and concluded during 2004 had not always been smooth. Nevertheless, the declaration of continuity and progress assured that the new country is on the right path to achieve a transatlantic integration and it was also a strong signal to the nations neighbouring Slovakia that it was calling for help in the process as the importance of regional cooperation saw a new revival.

Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar signed the Partnership for Peace Framework Document at NATO Headquarters on 9 February 1994. For some, the period between independence, Partnership for Peace and NATO membership could seem like a short time.

It is true that it took one year for Slovakia to be in the PfP, and then another ten to join NATO. However, it is important to note that the real transatlantic push on the trajectory was done between the years 1998 and 2006. It would be ignorant to claim that the whole integration process with transformation of institutions took place between those years, but it was the key period for the future of the Euro-Atlantic integration.

During the 1990s, both NATO and EU membership became a *res publica* – a public matter. In 1997, there was an attempt to conduct a referendum regarding NATO membership. The questions were focused on membership, nuclear and military installations. This referendum was later considered “thwarted” because of a controversy that did not arise from the questions regarding NATO, although they were misleading. The last of four questions was concerned about the publicly elected office of the president. The turnout was eventually below 10%, so the results of the referendum were not valid. Mečiar admitted in 2001 that the 1997 referendum was poorly performed, but came “from a good idea”. He also granted himself with raising the support for NATO integration among the general population (NICHOLSON 2001). For Mečiar, it was already clear that Slovakia would not be invited to join NATO regardless of the referendum results. Later in the year, the North Atlantic Council confirmed that Slovakia will stay out of the round of enlargement and the European Commission achieved a similar decision regarding Slovakia’s EU membership.

From security and defence perspective, the first step of Slovakia was to create an army that would be independent from the burden of the previous regime and be able to be shaped in a way to fulfil future potential requirements for Euro-Atlantic integration. The national parliament passed Law No. 3/1993, which defined the role of the Slovak Army as to “defend freedom, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity of the Slovak republic, and help eliminate consequences of natural disasters and disasters endangering human lives or property on a larger scale” (Slov-Lex 2018). The law maintained the conscription. In 1994, the National Council also passed the Defence doctrine replaced after seven years in 2001 by the Defence strategy. The armed forces commanded 53,000 soldiers. In 1995, the new limits were set at 46,667 soldiers. Eventually, by 2015 the number of soldiers decreased to 16,000.

With great power comes great responsibility, as they say. After the creation of the Slovak Army, the initial ideas about their employment abroad started to appear. Slovakia decided against sending troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a part of the Implementation Force (IFOR) under NATO’s leadership between 1995 and 1996. This added to the fact that Slovakia started to gradually fall behind other partner countries seeking NATO membership. Eventually, Slovakia did contribute to the Stabilisation Force (SFOR), a successor mission to IFOR with one helicopter unit to the South-West of Bosnia. It was the first deployment of the Slovak air force to a peace operation (MoD 2018a).

The immediate post-transition period of Slovakia was characterised by declaratory statements and steps suggesting positive development towards Euro-Atlantic integration, but the period was also full of confusion, international dispatches criticising the government of Vladimír Mečiar for his domestic policies of close connection to organised crime, political intimidation of the president’s office and for his foreign policies and his government’s close relations to Russia. Slovakia that required NATO and EU membership needed a new change of domestic politics situation.

Pre-accession cooperation

From the early 1990s, the integration into EU and NATO was more focused on domestic politics than on foreign policy. For illustration, on declaratory level there was no difference between the governments. It was the concrete actions on the domestic scene that drove Slovakia away from the opened door. At times, it seemed more difficult to prove Slovakia's intent towards the public than to assure future allies of its capabilities. Therefore, to understand the Euro-Atlantic integration of Slovakia, we need to understand domestic policy and politics. The parliamentary election in 1998 caused a second revolution after the period from the Velvet Revolution in 1989 to independence in 1993. The election not only led to the change of government, but it turned the whole country's foreign policy, security and defence structure towards a different direction.

One of the main contributions to the Euro-Atlantic aspiration coming from the new government was its consistency towards a common goal. At high political levels, including the prime minister's office, ministries of foreign affairs and defence and most importantly, the leadership of the National Council were all behind the Slovak aspirations to join the EU and NATO. This confirmed two key assumptions. First, it clearly meant that the Euro-Atlantic integration is as much an internal as external process for a country. The complexity of reforms and issues a candidate country must undergo is challenging and the bar is set high enough for the country to level with the rest of the EU and NATO. This process was achieved, but not fully finished by formal joining to the Euro-Atlantic structures.

In order to continue with the story we need to get back to the late 1990s. The country was speeding towards integration. The first step was to gain confidence of the international institutions and create a plan for military transformation to achieve interoperability with the rest of the allies in NATO. After the election of 1998, six parties reached the threshold to join the parliament. The government also created a new post for deputy prime minister for European integration. It is interesting that the Defence Ministry was under the leadership of a political party with sceptical views on NATO and its activities. The first significant problem after the decision to include a left-leaning party in the government came with the decision of the cabinet to allow allied forces to transfer its equipment through the sovereign airspace of Slovakia in April 1999 to support an ongoing operation in Kosovo. It was decided on a governmental level with the minister of defence abstaining from voting. Later at a press conference, the chair of the party responsible for the MoD said that the decision against military movement did not change the party's pro-Atlantic position.

Slovakia had to prove its intentions to be a reliable ally in NATO by supporting its activities. The support was not always met with support from the general public. NATO's 1999 activity in Kosovo had an impact on the public opinion in Slovakia. The intention of the government was to cooperate with NATO; the public was against intervening into the affairs between Serbia and Kosovo. 64% of the respondents disagreed with the decision to provide assistance to the Alliance in a form of opening Slovakia's air space for NATO forces, only one third saw it as a good step. The government eventually contributed by allowing the free movement of allied forces. The Kosovo crisis occurred two years after the Madrid Summit where Slovakia's efforts to join NATO were blocked. Slovakia also contributed to another NATO activity which was initiated after the 9/11 attacks. The United States began its military operation in Afghanistan. In 2003, NATO took over the International Assistance Force in

Afghanistan (ISAF). The government agreed to support the allies. During the pre-accession period, after receiving an official invitation, it was understandable that the incoming ally will provide assistance.

Despite minor setbacks, the government continued working towards its goal. The defence section of the governmental declaration for the years 1998–2002 declared its interest to achieve full membership in NATO to ensure the security of Slovakia. The foreign policy section focused also on the EU membership, which the declaration considered “a strategic target” and “one of the most important political and economic priorities of the Slovak Republic” (Vláda SR 1998). It particularly mentioned Slovakia’s efforts to the effective use of the PHARE program and ensured the creation of mechanisms to apply the EU’s *acquis communautaire*. The government took things with NATO membership seriously, particularly in the light of the 1997 Madrid Summit decision. In the declaration it was stated that Slovakia would utilise all possibilities to move closer to NATO membership, among them cooperation on the level of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Partnership for Peace program, a waiting room for NATO future members. It is important to note that the sections focused on the EU membership did not mention common security or defence as a reason for achieving membership. It would be safe to presume that NATO remained the sole institution for a collective defence and security for Slovakia.

The continuation of the Slovak foreign and security policy served as a paramount condition for entering the EU and NATO. This was also true after the parliamentary elections in 2002. The pro-Atlantic parties formed the government following the elections, preparing the country for its last lap on joining NATO. Slovakia was on the path to join the EU and NATO. However, the path was rocky and Slovakia was entering NATO not fully ready. As the Garret Report from 2000 concluded, there were still some gaps in capabilities and military service:

1. Slovakia is currently reviewing its basic documents, which even now no longer correspond to current defence requirements and concepts. The revised documents (the constitutional Security Law, the National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy) should provide the basis for the launching of military reform.
2. A deficit exists in the planning and distribution of military resources.
3. In order for Slovakia to be capable of integrating into Western military structures, it needs to build smaller, more professional and combat-ready forces. A shortcoming in this area has been created by ‘empty’ forces with little or no combat-readiness.
4. Most formations are currently staffed at less than 70% of their calculated wartime levels, and thus are dependent on a national mobilisation to reach combat-readiness.
5. No unified or national standard for planning the use of funds exists, despite the fact that the country is expecting an annual GDP growth of between 2% and 3%.
6. The national defence system is seriously disturbed by the coexistence of military and quasi-military elements, as well as the problem of control of armed forces under the jurisdiction of three ministries (Defence Ministry, Interior Ministry, Ministry of Transport, Post and Telecommunications). The situation in Slovakia is far more transparent than in neighbouring Ukraine – but then again the latter country is not a candidate for NATO entry.
7. The Army, in its personnel policies, still operates according to principles inherited from the communist regime.

8. Training problems are regarded as absolutely the gravest issue facing the Slovak Army. The report criticises the fact that since 1993 (with certain exceptions) the Army has not undergone a single joint exercise involving all its different formations, and no joint training exists for ground and air forces (STRÁŇAVA 2000).

Post-accession relaxation

It was up to Slovakia's leaders to persuade the key stakeholders in NATO. The first stop was the NATO Summit in Prague, the most important NATO Summit in Slovakia's story of integration that took place in 2002. "Today, we have decided to invite Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia to begin accession talks to join our Alliance", read the Prague Summit Declaration issued by the heads of state and government. This concluded an initial task of Slovakia's achievement. Joining any organisation is based on an expression of the country's free will. There is, of course, pressure from the organisations' key stakeholders who wish to achieve unity, stability and security of the Euro-Atlantic region but the decision always comes down to the political leadership on the national level. Slovakia joined the EU and NATO based on the decision of a country and its political representatives. The Prague Summit Declaration confirmed the decision.

The acceptance of Slovakia being a member of NATO arrived quickly. There was a euphoria ease after two years. The new government coming to power in 2006 took a different approach towards NATO than the previous government. The new established government was based on a populist message. The governmental declaration issued for the period 2006–2010 started its defence section by declaring that "from a political and security standpoint an inseparable part of the Euro-Atlantic space" (Vláda SR 2006). This statement was followed by other pro-Atlantic declarations suggesting that there could be continuity from the previous government.

The declaration was also a good example of the perception of NATO and the EU as security and defence actors. The document argued that by accession into NATO, Slovakia became a part of collective defence and by entering the EU gained more assurance of political and economic stability. This practice to label NATO as a military and defence organisation, and the EU as representing a more political and economic integration was later dismissed when the government declared to add to the military capabilities of collective defence of NATO and military capabilities of the EU. Overall, the declaratory document declared its support for a closer cooperation between the EU and NATO, and implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

When the debate on the deployment of the U.S. missile system in Central Europe started, Prime Minister Fico criticised the U.S. for not debating the issue on NATO level (Reuters 2007). This was mostly discussed during the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. In 2010, NATO introduced the new Strategic Concept at the Lisbon Summit. Slovakia was represented by President Ivan Gašparovič at the Summit. In his article, Gašparovič argued that the Summit was alongside Slovakia's priorities within NATO – territorial defence, cooperation with Russia and a new era of cooperation with the EU (GAŠPAROVIČ 2011). The 2010 Strategic Concept marked an important step in closer cooperation between the EU and NATO.

One of the most crucial and influential examples of a post-accession relaxation was the lack of strategic communication. Slovakia's political representation did not use its full potential and communication capacities to continue to persuade people of the importance of EU and NATO memberships. By successfully joining the EU and NATO, it seemed like the fight was won. However, the public remained almost equally divided. Problems with strategic communication and presenting Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO is closely connected to the involvement of the civil society, including think tanks and independent analysts with a focus on foreign and security affairs. The civil society was a key player during the pre-accession period and was also important shortly after the accession. However, the change of government in 2006 represented a break from sometimes complicated, but close cooperation between the governmental bodies and the NGO and think tank sector. One example where the strategic communication failed the most was talking about Slovakia and EU/NATO as two separate entities. There was often a debate on Slovakia v. NATO, Slovakia v. EU without articulating enough that Slovakia is a crucial and inseparable part of both organisations and that the decisions made on the EU level have impacts on the Slovak legislative body as well.

The ambivalent support of Slovaks for NATO can be ascribed to Róbert Fico's inconsistency. In 2012, he declared his high hopes for further enlargement of the Alliance in the next years. Slovakia has been active in the process of enlargement by supporting the Open Door Policy and sharing the country's experience with Ukraine, Georgia and the Western Balkans. The Russian invasion of 2014 changed his view. He publicly stated that he could not imagine Ukraine in NATO and blamed international actors for "dragging Slovakia into geopolitical games" (SARVAŠ 2014). Fico later compared the Allied forces to the occupational unit of the Warsaw Pact. This approach illustrates the division between statements and responsibilities. When declaring Slovakia's position towards NATO abroad or at international forums, Fico was more pro-Atlantic in comparison to talking to the domestic press. The ambivalence continued until the end of his term in 2018.

After the Russian invasion in Ukraine, NATO took several active assurance measures. The first Summit taking place following the military intervention was in Wales. The Warsaw Summit in 2016 confirmed the positions of the 28 NATO nations towards Russia, but most importantly towards the protection of NATO's Eastern border. Slovakia agreed with all the measures. Although it did not join the group of countries allowing the establishment of the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU), the Slovak Government eventually agreed with it. Compared to other countries, for instance Lithuania, the opening of the NFIU was lukewarm from the side of the government as media access was denied due to the security of the location.

In the light of Russia's intervention, the debate about strengthening the readiness and preparedness of the citizens in case of a conflict started among politicians and military experts. The conscription was abolished in 2006, which meant the end of conscription in the armed forces. This step represented the final stage of building a fully professional and combat-ready armed force. In 2015, the National Council passed a law establishing the Volunteer military service in cooperation with the Armed Forces. The government created several incentives, which still did not bring the expected number of volunteers. Each year, the compensation for absolving the program increased. In 2018, the compensation was 1,000 EUR. The government also shortened the length of the training from the initial twelve to eleven weeks. In 2017, 93 volunteers joined the program (MoD 2017a).

Regional cooperation became increasingly important following the 2014 Russian military engagement. One of the examples of a close V4 cooperation was the V4 Battlegroup. However, there are few examples of a successful cooperation beyond the Battlegroup. The most recent Slovak presidency of the V4 was ambitious and far more concrete than the previous two, but it is still difficult to assess its success. On the bilateral level, the Slovak and Czech republics agreed on the “Common Sky” agreement by protecting each other’s airspace. The previous years have shown that contribution rather than collaboration was the way forward for the V4. All countries contributed to NATO’s assurance measures. Based on the results from the 2016 Warsaw Summit, all V4 countries contributed its forces (149 from Slovakia) to a training and exercise mission in Latvia.

Following this commitment, on 21 June 2018 Slovakia joined Albania, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Italy and Canada as a framework nation by contributing to the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group (EFP BG Latvia). Slovakia sent 150 soldiers on a six-month rotation, among them medical team, military police, national support element, mechanised company and maintenance platoon (MoD 2018b).

The Slovak contribution is not only in the form of military forces. After the initial reluctance of the government, it eventually allowed for the establishment of the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU), officially activated on 1 September 2016. NFIU’s tasks are “to support NATO’s collective defence planning process, assistance in training and joint exercises and, if necessary, to coordinate deployment of the Allied forces in the region” (MNCNE 2018).

Slovakia is currently involved in peacekeeping missions under the leadership of UN, NATO, EU and OSCE. The largest contingent was in Afghanistan during ISAF. As the total number of troops deployed in the continuing Resolute Support Mission decreased, Slovakia also reduced the number of troops. However, the deployment in Afghanistan still ranks among the largest contingents. More information is included in the table below.

Table 1.
The number of troops deployed abroad

Mission	Mandate	Real number
Resolute Support Mission (Afghanistan)	66	36
Althea (Bosnia and Hercegovina)	51	38
UNFICYP (Cyprus)	280	159
UNTSO (Syria, Israel)	5	2
OSCE – Moldova	1	0
OSCE – Georgia	2	0
EUMM – Georgia	1	1

Source: MoD 2018c.

As the table shows, Slovakia is fulfilling approximately 50% of its current mandate. Since September 2018, the United Nations gave Slovakia responsibility for Sector 4 of UNFICYP, a peacekeeping force in Cyprus. The sector’s headquarters is located in Famagusta, at Camp General Stefanik, named after the first Czechoslovak Minister of War (UN 2018).

Issues of today

One of the issues that emerged lately is the relationship between the EU and NATO in their roles for protection and guarantee of territorial integrity and support in capacity building measures of their members. As Ivo Samson pointed out in his analysis of Slovakia's security and defence policy of 2012, the EU is fulfilling the political-security role and NATO is presenting itself in the light of military-political affairs (SAMSON 2013). The importance of vocabulary does not necessarily have to come across as important in this regard, but the defenders of NATO often call the Alliance political-military alliance rather than the opposite, which would suggest that NATO is primarily a military organisation, which is not true, given its political leadership and representation. Nevertheless, the European attempts at strategic autonomy were seen in Slovakia as well.

The 2016 was pivotal for European security. It started with the escalation of the Russian intervention in Ukraine, continued with Brexit and concluded with Donald Trump winning the U.S. presidential election. His policies during the presidential campaign suggested some shifts of the transatlantic partnership in trade as well as security. While this has not been fulfilled, the EU decided to create a more robust foreign and defence policy by issuing the EU Global Strategy (EU GS). The document also restarted a debate on a potential autonomous EU army. Neither topic received a lot of attention in Slovakia. The EU GS is available in the Slovak language and the most recent Slovak Security Strategy mentions its implications and implementation. However, the debate on EU GS was replaced by a debate about EU core and the Permanent Structural Cooperation (PESCO).

The years since 2016 onward can be characterised as an evaluation and realisation of the European potential in security and defence capabilities. In the second half of 2016, during Slovakia's first presidency of the Council of the EU, there was a strong call for support and implementation of the EU's Global Strategy. The Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs was renamed as Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs as a signal of first: European affairs are not foreign, and second: the government took the EU affairs seriously. Prime Minister Fico became the first and most vocal supporter of Slovakia's closer integration into the core EU. This approach did not only reinforce Slovakia's pro-European position, it was also meant for the domestic audience where Prime Minister Fico wanted to be understood as one of the only strong pro-European politicians with the abilities to form a government. It is true that despite some vocal opposition towards NATO, the EU enjoys overwhelming support among the population where more than two thirds agree with the European Union. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visited Slovakia to attend the informal meeting on EU's defence ministerial on 27 September 2016 during the historically first Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU. Stoltenberg met Defence Minister Gajdoš and Slovak President Andrej Kiska. On the international level, this was a strong show of commitment to continue the EU–NATO cooperation described in the EU Global Strategy introduced two months before the meeting. Stoltenberg's public press conference was mostly focused on developing NATO capabilities and strengthening European defence. The Slovak presidency was also significant for the Bratislava Declaration, also known as a roadmap. In the Declaration, the EU representatives agreed to strengthen EU cooperation on security and defence and vowed to create an implementation plan in cooperation with NATO (EU Council 2016). In September 2017,

ten initial projects were introduced. Twenty-five EU member states joined PESCO, with Denmark and Malta opting-out and the United Kingdom set to leave the EU.

Slovakia volunteered for PESCO on 13 November 2017 alongside 22 other EU member states at the Council of the EU. Slovakia is participating in a PESCO project called “EuroArtillery” and it is focused on indirect fire support. Considering their active participation, Italy joined Slovakia in the project with Hungary (MoD 2017b). EuroArtillery was a success for Slovakia when it became one of 17 (out of 49) proposals to be implemented in the first period of PESCO. The idea for the project is to develop accurate mobile, artillery platform with long-range munition, command and control systems for coordination in the multinational operational environment.

After the EU Summit in June 2017, Slovakia welcomed the initiative to cooperate closer in security and defence. “We are interested in this. Security and defence are areas that will be the subject of countries getting closer together and creation of closer core” (Fico 2017). In the light of activation of PESCO, in October 2017, Slovakia’s top three political representatives signed a declaration stating that Slovakia’s membership in the EU and NATO is crucial for its existence. This declaration was an important step towards the allies to show that Slovakia supports deeper integration in security and defence, while at the same time urges the EU and NATO to cooperate with each other. By signing the declaration, the Slovak Government acknowledged the EU’s capabilities in defence and security as an outfall of the cooperation between NATO and the EU that emerged in 2016.

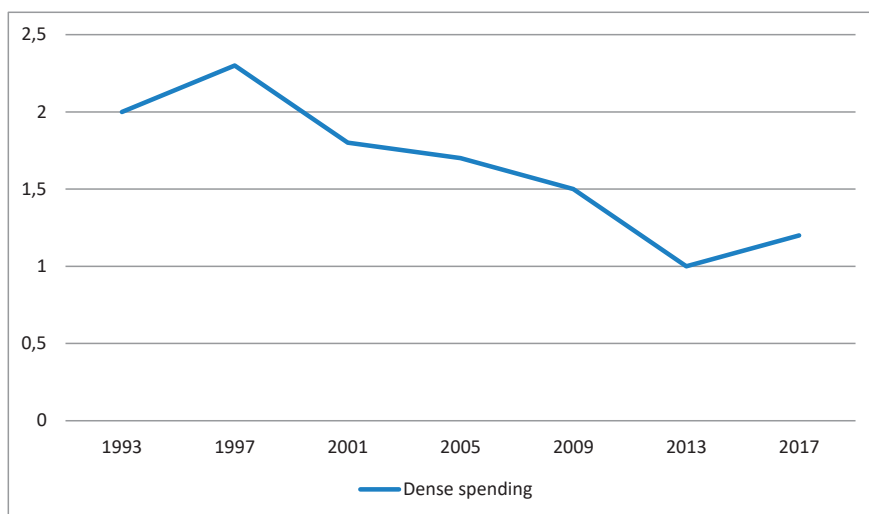


Figure 1.
Slovakia's defence expenditure

Source: SIPRI 2018.

In fall of 2017, the government agreed on the new Security Strategy. The document reflects on the most crucial security challenges and threats for Slovakia, including regional instability, resilience and extremism. The strategy calls the EU the environment of values.

NATO is the defence and security pillar for Slovakia. The document further describes building of solidarity and cohesion between the EU and NATO as one of Slovakia's main security priorities. On the political-military level, Slovakia is acting like a good ally. However, the communication towards its own public can cause troubles with future integration. The country's representatives clearly did not anticipate the use of disinformation specifically tailored to the Slovak audience that could be traced to the outside powers, mostly Russia. The anti-NATO websites are spreading on the internet and drawing large crowds of users. The issue is that it is often the think tanks who replace governmental representatives. They seldom talk positively about NATO and the EU affairs. The reaction to the disinformation campaigns has been slow and reluctant. In 2017, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs created the Department for Strategic Communication (OSKO), directly affiliated with the office of the Minister. Slovakia has also taken part in the communication strategy called #WeAreNATO. At the moment, there is not enough data to conclude success or failure of the campaign.

Conclusion and vision of the future

Slovakia has maintained a balance between being a responsible ally while at the same time tried to satisfy needs from the domestic audience and voters who were more nationalist and neutrally oriented towards NATO or any defence issues. The roaring nineties included several political upsets. The new country was finding its place both domestically and towards foreign partners and allies. Despite the turmoil, the pro-Atlantic and pro-EU declarations were clearly stated in all governmental declarations and manifestos, including those headed by Vladimír Mečiar. Russia has played a key part in this balance.

The Slovak Government has always wanted to maintain a good relationship with Russia, often at odds with the priorities of the transatlantic community. The biggest discrepancy in the Fico Government was between himself and the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs who held a more realistic view on the threats posed on the EU and NATO by Russia. With his statements, Fico was often addressing his domestic audience, which was more pro-Russian than the general population.

Given the disinformation campaigns and spreading of false news online, combined with the inability of people to correctly distinguish between facts and made up stories created a struggle for pro-NATO and pro-EU elements in Slovakia and abroad. Both the EU and NATO reacted slowly to the emergence of groups calling for leaving and abolishing them. Thanks to the new means of communication, the scarce opinionated groups are able to merge into a larger block with political power. Slovakia was not immune to this trend and the current parliament contains parties that are directly promoting Slovakia's path outside of NATO and the EU. So far, their support has not been measured more often than during one parliamentary election in 2016. The mainstream, pro-NATO and pro-European parties are now to be up to a task to calm down the opposite rhetoric, provide sufficient information, develop and maintain a credible platform to communicate important messages about the benefits of membership in both EU and NATO, without leaving room for criticism.

The mainstream parties, however, sometimes add to the negative position when they criticise the EU for problems not caused by the Union, or when their representatives call

the allied forces “foreign”, playing into the hands of neutralists and opponents of NATO. If this trend persists, there is a potential for Slovakia to leave these institutions once the opposition receives enough support to conduct a referendum. So far, it is not clear whether the anti-NATO and anti-EU protest is here to stay, or if it is a short-term frustration based on domestic and socio-economical failures of the national government. If the former is true, Slovakia will return to the battle of 1993, contemplating once again its future within the Euro-Atlantic structures. However, this fight will be conducted with new players, not yet fully known, which will be aided by the technology development.

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