



Guidelines for Foreign, Security and Defence Policy – Slovak Experience

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The fundamental transformation of the security sector in Slovakia began after the break-up of Czechoslovakia, when the Slovak institutions started to deal with basic issues of their functioning. This has led to the necessary structural changes, including a substantial reduction of staff and infrastructure. This process, however, also entailed a number of unsystematic measures that required subsequent corrections. Even though it was as early as in the 1990s, when the foundations of the systemic errors in the security sector have been laid, Slovakia deals with some of them until today.

Institution building was accompanied by creating the new lines in the country's foreign policy priorities, led by the ambition for the accession to the European Union and NATO. After initial political problems, when government of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar was in power (1994-1998), the Slovak political elite succeeded in formation of a broad consensus on the basic objectives of foreign policy after 1998. It contributed to Slovakia's not easy, but relatively straightforward road to the EU and NATO.

Key objectives and priorities for the Slovak Republic

However, it turns out nowadays that this consensus has gradually disappeared, and Slovakia is thus challenged by discrepancies between the political declarations on one hand and the real steps of some of its key political leaders on the other hand. Erosion of the European political discourse over the past five years partially contributed to this inconsistency, in particular in the context of the events in Ukraine and Russia, as well as due to the migration crisis and the turbulent situation in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the following objectives and priorities remain key for Slovakia in terms of its foreign and security policy:

In the long-term, the European Union is considered to be a fundamental political, economic, social and value platform. In the same time, economic prosperity, financial stability, high level of security, and participation in adopting common solutions on global issues - such as climate change, migration, digitalisation or the technological revolution - belong to the indisputable benefits of the Slovak membership in the EU. Implementing a positive, active and globally committed European policy in 2020 by the new European Commission, including a credible enlargement strategy and a modernized Eastern Partnership program, is in interest of Slovakia. It is of utmost importance to back up future EU policies by an ambitious budget, covering both traditional and the new EU policies.

For Slovakia, NATO is a multilateral pillar of security, with the ambition to improve and supplement the capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and thus to increase their interoperability with the rest of NATO. This creates an opportunity to share more burden of efficiency of the Alliance, but also to be a credible partner, when discussing the strategic autonomy within the EU and in strengthening European defence capabilities.

Although Slovakia is interested in maintaining a strong transatlantic link, both within NATO and in the EU-US relationship, Bratislava also supports strengthening of the European Union's defence capabilities and increasing the effectiveness of the European performance, especially in combating new threats to the current security environment. The EU and its Member States must bear their responsibilities to combat the consequences of climate change, but also of hybrid and cyber threats as well as challenges related to the use of disruptive technologies. In this regard, further development of dialogue with the Eastern Partnership countries, as well as with partners from other regions, is crucially needed.

Slovakia belongs to the group of countries, which are interested in preserving and further strengthening the existing global order based on effective multilateralism and respect for international law. It refuses assertive manifestations of some countries' interests in modifying the current arrangements, including tendencies towards new multi-polarity, or vice versa, elements of unilateralism and protectionism accompanied by increasing tensions, polarization and politicization of economic relations. In this context, Slovakia supports a stronger voice of the European Union on global issues.

Moreover, Slovakia supports activities of regional cooperation formats with the prominent position of the Visegrad Group among them. Its primary focus is to improve V4's perception and to support constructive and pragmatic cooperation in areas of the common interests and

harmonization of positions of all V4 partners. V4 should be, according to Bratislava, useful consultation platform not only to promote common regional interests, but also to contribute to pan-European solutions for challenges the EU faces today.

In order to build democratic institutions, security, stability and prosperity of the European neighbourhood, supporting the Eastern Partnership, is very important. This format can be seen as the successful EU policy. When discussing its future direction, the emphasis must be placed on strengthening differentiation of partners, building the rule of law and democracy, deepening partners' sectoral integration, increasing mobility and people-to-people contacts and developing dialogue on partners' security and resilience.

Lessons learned

Nevertheless, the Slovak Republic faces many challenges and unresolved problems when increasing the effectiveness of its foreign, security and defence policy goals. These issues are not unique to Slovakia only – they can be observed in many countries of today's Europe and they can provide a useful lesson for other countries, including countries of the EaP, drawing on the Slovak experience. These are as follows, to name just a few.

After years of transformation, Slovakia has been experiencing acute symptoms of neglecting the security sector institutions. Poorly developed strategic thinking, inability to define the place and role of the state on the international scene and to effectively invest resources to achieve national interests, belong to the most visible challenges. Since joining the EU and NATO, communication between the public and political elites has been neglected in this area. As a result, security challenges are not treated in a complex way, various governmental institutions compete for competences and confusion arises due to various interpretation of the foreign and security priorities by state officials.

Lack of high-quality and professionally capable personnel, which would be able to effectively implement approved state policies, is a significant problem, too. Public administration is paying its price for the wrong initial setting of its functions after the establishment of Slovakia as an independent state in 1993. This led, among other things, to a significant politicization of state institutions and omitting expertise as the main factor for their management. All of this, combined with poorly set remuneration system and poor mechanisms of the career growth, caused that public administration, including the armed forces, police and other security forces, has moved far from European standards for quality.

The long-term financial austerity has led to the moral and technical obsolescence of military equipment and infrastructure of the armed forces. Although defence spending has increased over the past few years, mainly because of the development and pressure from NATO, this has not yet significantly reduced the gap between needs and shortfalls. At the same time, modernization projects and procurement in the armed forces and the police have raised concerns for the lack of transparency and potential for corruption, decreasing the public's appetite for further defence spending.

Following the events in Ukraine in 2014, Slovakia has become one of the geopolitical playgrounds of rivalry with Russia, China and some non-state actors using hybrid tools for achieving their goals. In Slovakia, there is no institution which systematically and comprehensively deals with the monitoring, prevention and responding to the hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns. Currently, disinformation is the most significant form of hybrid threats in the Slovak political environment. In particular, taking the advantage of the internet and social networks is evident, whether to spread hoaxes or conspiracy theories. All of that have become an important mean for foreign propaganda. In addition, the internet has also become a source of radicalization of various individuals, leading to the rise of political popularity of extremist parties and movements. Reversing these negative trends requires, first of all, a complex change in the education of the young generation with regard to the current trends, with an emphasis on critical thinking and evaluation of the information. Yet, in the same it requires also more robust, coherent and responsible public communication of political leaders and other public figures.

The rapid development of new security trends requires adequate investment in innovation and new technologies. Nevertheless, even though Slovakia belongs to a wider group of the economically most advanced countries in the world, it underestimates the need to invest in technologies with greater added value. Building of Special Forces with specific tasks in the armed forces is only in the initial phase and it will require significant financial and personnel funds. Enhancing country's resilience to the new threats, however, requires also modifications of the intelligence services, whose activities are not sufficiently politically controlled and raise a number of questions both from the professionals and the public.

Notwithstanding, the younger EU (and NATO) member states face a number of partial problems in individual areas, as a whole they remain a good example for the Eastern Partnership countries in transition. The experiences of states like Slovakia can serve not only

as a suitable inspiration for structural and content modifications in policy-making, but also as a lesson learned in order to avoid a number of mistakes in the transformation process. In this respect, they remain the most appropriate partner for the EaP countries to develop both strategic and practical dialogue.