

SECURITY POLICY AND ECONOMIC PRIORITY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract: *The article deals with some aspects of the Slovak Republic security policy and its trends in the year 2015. It compares theory and reality of recent days after terrorist attacks in France. The article is also concerned with economic objectives of the Slovak Republic in compliance with security policy. Energy security is of particular interest. The role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European matters are being discussed in the conclusion of the article.*

Key words: *policy, security, strategy, economic, energy, development, diplomacy, territory, cooperation.*

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2014 the Slovak Government adopted an important document "Slovak Foreign and European Policy Agenda in 2015".

The contents of this document deviates significantly from similar documents of recent years. As already indicated in the introduction, there are important changes and changed attitudes toward current situation in different parts of the world.

Unlike those of the past twenty years, the changes in the security environment brought about by the crisis in Crimea and in south-eastern Ukraine, as well as by developments in the Middle East, require that the Slovak Republic's foreign policy face new challenges.

There have been violations, of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our neighbouring country, of the overall geopolitical balance of the European continent as well as of the principles of international law. Looking ahead, Slovakia must be ready to react to developments that may be described as a shift from relatively stable conditions to a period of low predictability, especially in countries east of our border and in the Middle East.

It is possible that the dramatic changes that have occurred in Europe in the context of the crisis in Ukraine, and in the Middle East due to the activities of extremists from the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), will result in a prolonged period of instability (1).

The Ukrainian crisis has also had an adverse impact on the broad, long-existing domestic political consensus as to Slovak foreign policy.

Despite different opinions among some political actors, Slovakia's foreign policy will continue to call for a respect for the fundamental principles of international law, and to promote a peaceful resolution of the crisis and at the same time maintain Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It will primarily assist in the implementation of democratisation and reform processes in the country, which may provide the basis for long-term stabilisation and prosperity. In this respect, the Slovak Republic will seek within the EU to prepare a long-term strategy with concrete steps for implementing the Association Agreement with Ukraine.

On the other hand, we need to recognize, that resolving the Ukrainian crisis will not be possible without Russia, or by taking action against Russia. The work of the new European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) is being set in motion this year.

We have high expectations mainly of the European Commission because energy policy will be coordinated by Slovak Commissioner as a Vice President. Slovakia's efforts to create a stable, secure and favourable international environment must result in favourable economic development, with a positive impact on the quality of life of its citizens.

The activities related to Slovak foreign policy in 2015 will focus on five main priorities:

1. Strengthening the security of the Slovak Republic and the wider Euro-Atlantic area
2. European policy
3. Strong voice in spreading stability and prosperity in the world
4. Promoting Slovak economic interests

5. Ensuring services to citizens via consular assistance and tools for cultural and public diplomacy

We can argue about the above stated intentions especially in the area of security policy and promoting Slovak economic interests.

1. Strengthening the security of the Slovak Republic and the wider Euro-Atlantic area

Membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will remain of paramount importance for the security of Slovakia. The Slovak Republic will fully support the implementation of the decisions taken at the Wales Summit. Particular attention will be paid to strengthening the Allies' security in the Alliance's eastern flank.

We can definitely agree with this measure. But how should we understand the effort of Slovakia to contribute to the strengthening of defence capacity of Ukraine? The involvement of Slovakia in the conflict may give rise to problems in relations with Russia, which is currently deciding on the strategic gas and petroleum supplies to the Member States of European Union. Furthermore, both Donetsk and Lugansk areas are part of Ukraine.

In addition to the security situation in Ukraine, Slovakia will pay particular attention to supporting the fight against terrorism as well as extremist and militant groups in the Middle East and North Africa.

These have become security and humanitarian threats, not only in that region but also in the broader context, including posing risks to the internal security of European Union Member States. Recent Islamists terror attacks in France are a good example.

Slovakia is ready to contribute to the efforts of the international coalition in the fight against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and to assume its share of responsibilities (2). In terms of solution for global crises, challenges and threats the year 2015 will be critical.

Certainly, one may agree with this statement due to the fact that Slovakia has appeared on the blacklist of Islamic terrorist organisations for the first time. Furthermore, based on evaluation that Slovakia has not been threatened by any terrorist attack we belong to the countries with a low probability of such attacks. However, it cannot be excluded. If it really is the case, some concrete steps to strengthen national security shall be specified in the measures, but they are absent.

All Member States take appropriate measures according to the level of threat – Germany promotes peaceful activities and cooperation with Islam and officially tries to combat nationalistic tendencies particularly in the eastern part of the country.

The proposal of France is surprising – one of its measures is the establishment of compulsory six-month military service as a tool for strengthening the defence against terrorism and criminality and for promotion traditional values of France among youngsters – democracy, freedom of expression, love, and national pride. Similar proposal will be needed in Slovakia as well. The growing interest of the USA and Canada in Central and Eastern European regions due to the situation in Ukraine is a strong signal for more active security policy in Slovakia. We would like to maintain an active political dialogue and cooperation - at bilateral level within the Visegrad Group (V4) countries, European Union and as a NATO Member. Cooperation with the association of national economies BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) brings very promising prospects. In this area it is required to mobilise our contacts as soon as possible not only from security aspects but also from economic ones.

Another very interesting area is a relation of Slovakia to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Slovakia will continue its bilateral activities and economic cooperation, particularly with the Republic of South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria and will participate in proposing and implementing EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

While it is easy to understand in relation to first two countries, the development of other two countries is unpredictable. Kenya has no longer been a stable and democratic state. In relation to Kenya it has been said that the country faces economic collapse, corruption and conflicts.

The situation in Nigeria is even worse – Islamic Terrorist Movement Boko Haram, which is even worse as ISIL due to its brutality and aggressiveness, governs almost half of the country and systematically destroys Christian community. These two areas certainly need to be revisited. Particular attention will also be paid to the dynamically developing area of cyberspace and its security. In compliance with the strategic documents of the EU and NATO, Slovakia will strengthen the security of its critical infrastructure, including that of its national information and communication systems. This area might be considered to be the most important and most difficult in the near future.

Recent attacks on various state institutions and organisations in the USA, the country with the highest level of information technologies development in the world, prove that each country is vulnerable in the case of a targeted attack including the world's powerful countries.

2. Slovak economic interests

Development of the Slovak economy is connected with foreign policy and our participation in the global market. Economic diplomacy actively promotes the economic interests of the state abroad. Its main instrument is support for the trade and investment activities of enterprises in their entry into foreign markets, and promotion of their interests in given territories, as well as strengthening the interest of foreign investors in doing business in Slovakia.

Trade and investment relations mainly within the European Union and with the countries in its neighbourhood will always be at the forefront of the Slovak Republic concerns. Slovakia will also strengthen cooperation with traditional markets such as Japan, South Korea, India and China.

Furthermore, Slovakia will strengthen the territorial diversification of exports via greater involvement in the areas of the Arabian Peninsula, Latin America and Africa (3). All three areas were important markets for Slovakia in the past (in distant history for Czechoslovakia as well). The Latin America countries such as Argentina, Chile, Brazil have been our important trading partners. Similarly, Arab countries in Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia), or countries in Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, UAE) can be added.

In the past, traditional trading partners of the Slovak Republic were Angola, Ethiopia and the Republic of South Africa. It is true that our traditional trading commodities were mostly weapons, weapon systems and ammunition. However, due to the recession in arms manufacturing and the current security situation in the world, the above mentioned is no longer relevant.

Within international economic organizations, and multilateral economic and financial groupings Slovakia permanently focuses on overcoming the impacts of the current global Slovakia supports creating preferential conditions for Slovak industries and sectors of the national economy, as well as using the infrastructure and outcomes of such organisations and groups in favour of Slovak economic interests, including the interests of businesses.

Within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) the priority of the Slovak Republic is seeking effective solutions to overcome the impact of the crisis, particularly in the areas of unemployment (long-term and young people), education, and public administration reform. A short-term internship for government experts at the OECD, based on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Slovak Republic and the OECD will be a new tool. 70,000 € will be allocated for the implementation of joint Slovak-OECD projects in 2015.

Within the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Slovakia would like to continue to support the continuation of multilateral negotiations. The basis for further work will be the outcomes of the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali. Based on these outcomes, Slovakia will continue to prepare multilateral trade agreements in cooperation with other EU Member States. A key outcome of the 9th WTO conference has been the adoption of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, which will contribute to a significant reduction in the administrative burden on domestic producers. Within the EU common trade policy, Slovakia mainly promotes gaining better access to the largest and fastest growing world economies via ambitious free trade agreements with the EU's strategic partners – the United States and Canada.

Slovakia will pay close attention to the course and outcome of negotiations on free trade agreements with India, Japan, and the ASEAN countries as well as to the application of a special trade regime with Ukraine.

Slovakia supports cooperation with the World Bank Group (WBG) in the area of using paid professional technical assistance and counselling in selected areas of Slovak interest (e.g. in the area of climate changes and transition to a low carbon economy, efficiency of public spending or innovation agenda). Slovakia is prepared to coordinate its positions with the other EU Member States during the implementation of the reform of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

3. Energy security

Energy security seems to be the fundamental issue of economic security in the forthcoming period.

On the one hand, Slovakia has every interest in strengthening stabilisation and development in this area because EU energy policy is coordinated by Maroš Šefčovič, the Vice-President of the European Commission.

On the other hand, the main goal in this area will be to ensure the stability and security of energy supplies for Slovakia and their economic sustainability.

This must be based on the strategic platform that is represented in Slovakia by the Druzba Pipeline and the Brotherhood gas transit pipeline, such transit comprising a considerable source of income for the state budget.

It should also be borne in mind that there is not currently a great demand for gas in Europe, so some of the alternative projects being considered do not appear to be sustainable from an economic point of view. At the same time, we should think about both alternative routes and alternative resources.

Therefore, Slovakia will support the Southern Corridor to ensure alternative energy sources, not South Stream project in its present form. This effort has been significantly influenced by the Vladimir Putin statement who announced Russia's withdrawal from the South Stream project.

He announced that Russia would seek new transit lines for secure and stable gas supplies to Central and Western Europe. Russia is currently intensively negotiating with Turkey and other potential transit partners.

The company Eustream, which may be considered as being Slovak and Czech company, sees its chance to succeed in this competition. The proposed route passes through Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and further west.

One of the advantages of this proposal is the use of the routes that have already been built which would substantially decrease the costs for the construction of the gas transit pipeline.

The proposed project also complies with the European Union legislation. Another advantage is a real diversification of resources.

From the economic perspective the proposed project should contribute to the reduction in gas prices (the estimate of Eustream based on current prices in world markets is 325 USD/tis m³). It should also create a possibility of gas reverse flow. The project should be implemented by the consortium or a joint venture – by Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and perhaps also by Turkey.

The consortium of companies from these countries has a great chance to obtain European funding - (EK, EIB – European Investment Bank) for implementation of the project up to 70%. Estimated total costs of the project are between 750 million and 1 billion EUR.

The partners shall assess commercial as well as technical part of the project and the rest will be resolved by political decisions. Technical matters are the least difficult in this case(4).

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) actively pursues the foreign policy and economic interests of the Slovak Republic in the changing international environment of energy security.

In bilateral and multilateral contexts it promotes the diversification of transit lines and resources, and the building of a cross-border energy infrastructure. It will also promote informed discussion on nuclear energy and contribute to the formulation of the EU common energy policy.

CONCLUSION

In 2015 the diplomatic sector will continue its partnership with the non-governmental sector, which in modern diplomacy participates in formulating and implementing foreign policy. The MFEA will use the platform of the 10th GLOBSEC annual international conference, in which preparation it is involved, in order to enhance political dialogue at the highest levels, and to spread awareness of the issue of regional and wider European security. The MFEA will also use the annual Tatra Summit forum in relation to the European and economic agenda in a similar manner (1).

During 2015 it will assess the level of achievement of the objectives included in the Medium Term Strategy of Foreign Policy by 2015 and will prepare the ground for the adoption of the new strategy by 2025, with a forecast by 2030.

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