



Weekly Briefing

**Slovakia External Relations briefing:
External Relations in 2017
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European affairs

In second half of 2016, Slovakia assumed the role of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Presidency influenced Slovakia's European policy throughout the 2017 as well as Slovakia still participated on the Presidency Trio (with the Netherlands and Malta) during the first half of 2017.

Slovakia was contributing to the discussions on the future of the European Union. This was largely based on the so-called Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap, which were the outcome documents of the Summit of the EU heads of government organized in Bratislava in September 2016. The road map has set several objectives regarding migration, external border protection, internal and external security, as well as economic and social development.

With regards to the migration issue, Slovakia belonged to the group of the more skeptical EU member states and was actively opposing the relocation scheme for the refugees as was adopted by the EU Council. Slovakia proposed, as an alternative to relocation, a mechanism based on the principle of "effective solidarity". Moreover, after passing of the EU Council decision on relocation of refugees, Slovakia has filed together with Hungary a lawsuit to the Court of Justice of the EU, petitioning the court to vacate the Council decision. The lawsuits were unsuccessful as the Court of Justice of the EU upheld the Council decision in September 2017.

With regards to the Brexit (i.e. UK's leaving of the EU), Slovakia has launched a bid to host the European Medicines Agency, which was originally located in London. However, this bid was unsuccessful, and Slovakia ended up on the fourth place among the bidders despite being one of the favorites according to some sources. One of the main reasons for Slovakia not winning the EMA relocation vote was related to the unwillingness of the standing EMA employees to move to Bratislava. Bratislava received one of the lowest ranks in the internal EMA polling. EMA's LGBT employees even wrote an open letter to the EMA director, in which they stated outright their fear of not having their

legal rights observed, since Slovakia doesn't recognize gay marriages or gay partnerships.

Double standards of food were also among the more important topics Slovakia focused on in its European policy. Based on the allegations that international food suppliers supplied different quality of food to old and new EU member states, Slovakia pushed for recognition of this problem at an EU level. According to Slovakia, such a double standard goes against the principles of the EU single market.

It is also necessary to mention the repeated calls of the Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico for Slovakia becoming a member of the core of the European Union. According to the Prime Minister this means that Slovakia should participate on further integration of the EU within the Eurozone or common security and defense policy.

Multilateral politics

In 2017, Slovakia assumed several important positions within the international multilateral mechanisms, such as the UN or the OSCE.

On 31 May 2017, the Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajcak was elected the new President of the United Nations General Assembly, and assumed the office on 12 September 2017. For his presidency of the 72nd session of the UNGA, Miroslav Lacak has set three priorities: migration, UN reform, and sustainable development. On the floor of the UN, Slovakia achieved another success, when it was elected to become a member of the UN Council for Human Rights for the period of 2018-2020. During its mandate as the Council member, Slovakia plans to focus mostly on conflict prevention, supporting freedom of religion, fight against extremism, and protecting the rights of the children.

At the end of 2016, Slovakia was elected to become the president country of the OSCE. Slovakia will assume this role in 2019. This means that since the

beginning of 2017, Slovakia is preparing its presidency. This will be the first time Slovakia will assume the Presidency of the OSCE.

Besides the UN and the OSCE, Slovakia was active in numerous other multilateral fora throughout the year 2017. For example, in the field of disarmament this has included active participation at the Conference on disarmament, Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or Meeting of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention.

Security policy

In the realm of security policy, Slovakia spent the year 2017 with updating its major strategic documents. Most importantly, the Government of Slovakia approved an updated Security Strategy in October 2017. In preparing the new Security Strategy, Slovakia aimed at reflecting the major security related developments and changing security environment. The Security Strategy was updated after 12 years, as the previous edition of the document was passed already back in the year 2005. As the previous edition was largely outdated, the new version of the Security Strategy recognizes several new threats to Slovak security. These include hybrid threats, cyberattacks, terrorism, and others. However, some experts criticized the document for lacking a hierarchy of threats as well as prioritization of the outlined policies. Moreover, the document lacks any view of the EU Common Security and Defense Policy, which was viewed as another flaw of the document. The principles set forth in the Security Strategy will be further developed in the Defense Strategy and Warfare Strategy, which have not been passed yet.

Having mentioned the EU Common Security and Defense Policy, it needs to be mentioned that towards the end of 2017, Slovakia signed up for the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Through PESCO, EU member states increase their effectiveness in addressing security challenges and advancing towards further integrating and strengthening defense cooperation

within the EU framework. Besides Slovakia, 25 other member states joined the PESCO.

Regarding Slovak interests, the PESCO is important mostly for its program of developing European defense industry, and engaging of the Slovak small and medium enterprises in development and improvement of defense capabilities. To this end, Slovakia has proposed the EuroArtillery project aimed at indirect fire support.

China in Slovak foreign policy

Developing the Slovak relations with China was certainly one of the priorities of the Slovak government. The government's wishes to deepen the economic ties with China were formalized in April 2017, when the government has passed the Conception of Developing the Economic Relations between Slovak Republic and People's Republic of China for 2017-2020. This is Slovakia's only strategic document relating to a single country only. Moreover, Slovakia is the only V4 country to have a specific China strategy. The Conception is further developed in an Action plan, however it has not been approved by the government yet as it is still a subject to negotiation between various ministries and stakeholder groups. As provided in the Conception, Slovakia wishes to benefit from the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Shall the Slovak government's ambitions set out in the Conception bear fruits, we can expect intensification of Sino-Slovak relations. In short, the documents suggest that Slovakia needs to utilize (while still strengthening) its relatively good political relations with China for economic purposes. The documents then move on to mention various measures to achieve this goal, including increasing the number of diplomatic personnel in China, opening "Slovak houses" in various parts of China to attract Chinese investors and tourists, attempting to prepare schemes how to use Chinese funds to build infrastructure at home, and many others. Unlike most foreign policy documents, the Conception was prepared under the auspice of the Ministry of Economy.

One concrete development stemming from Slovakia's engagement with China and the Belt and Road Initiative was the establishing of rail connection between the Chinese port of Dalian and Slovakia. The first cargo train from Dalian arrived to Bratislava on 13 November 2017. Trains from Dalian are supposed to be traveling to Bratislava on a weekly basis.

To deepen the relations, Slovakia is participating in the 16+1 Platform, a framework of interaction between China and 16 Central and Eastern European Countries. Even though Prime Minister Fico was absent from the Suzhou meeting of the 16+1 Format in 2016, he did attend the 2017 round held in Budapest.

Following the 16+1 main event in Budapest, the second ministerial conference of the 16+1 states on science and investments was held in Bratislava in November 2017. Slovakia initiated the setting up of the Virtual Center for Transfer of Technologies in Bratislava. In the view of the Slovak Foreign Ministry this represents a substantial input on the Slovak part to the development of a knowledge-based society within the 16+1 Framework.