



Weekly Briefing

**Slovakia External Relations briefing:
Slovakia at the two summits
Institute of Asian Studies, Bratislava**

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Slovakia at the two summits

Introduction

From the regional and international perspective, Slovakia experienced and attended several important events in recent weeks. Firstly, the presidential summit of the Visegrad group organised by Slovakia, which is currently holding the reins of the regional platform. There, many themes were on the agenda. The leaders' emphasis had been on the attitude towards the EU and migration, but also other issues gained the summit's attention. For instance, the presidents talked about the economy, energy sector, and technological development. The summit of the Visegrad group did not bring any surprising or radical breakthrough. Rather it was a manifestation of continuity.

Then, it is worth mentioning that Slovak Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini paid a visit to the summit of the European Council in Brussels, followed by the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Regarding the summit of the European Council, the states' representatives focused on migration and internal security. Additionally, relations with Britain and Brexit were on the summit's platter. Not surprisingly, the meeting did not conclude with any breakthrough or significant progress on the discussed issues.

Besides events, the Slovak military intelligence exposed a cyber-attack on the computers of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Even though the authorities have not been able to point to any certain perpetrators, it is said the attack had come somewhere from abroad.¹ Thus, it can be expected that cyber security will play an increasingly important role.

Four presidents in the High Tatras

¹ --, "Cyber-attack hits Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs", *ReMix*, 19 October 2018, <<http://rmx.news/content/cyber-attack-hits-slovak-ministry-foreign-affairs>>.

The High Tatra Mountains in Slovakia served as a ground for the summit of heads of the states of the Visegrad group. The summit was organised by Slovak President Andrej Kiska, and Milos Zeman from the Czech Republic, Andrzej Duda from Poland and Janos Ader from Hungary joined the event.² The presidents discussed many issues.

One of the most important debates covered the EU and its current affairs. The four presidents agreed that the EU was a wonderful project worth supporting and defending. The Slovak President added that the countries of the EU needed to be united and there was a clear need to speak in one language towards the European citizens. According to him, it was important for the EU not to be afraid to name the problems it witnessed.³ Then, the leaders moved to the topic of the so-called two-speed EU. The two-speed EU is a concept in which the countries of the EU would integrate and cooperate on certain issues on different speed and intensity. Thus, countries willing to integrate faster than some of the others would be able to do so without being limited by countries not willing to join.⁴ The leaders said they disagreed with any form of a divided or two-speed EU. They argued that a divided EU was a very worrying idea, as many forms of extremism, nationalism and xenophobia had been on a rise in contemporary Europe.⁵

Nowadays, several matters divide the EU. One of them is the topic of migration. The representatives of the summit declared the EU should have helped the migrants in their home countries and emphasised the role of security at the external borders of the EU. It is known that Andrej Kiska has had different opinions on certain matters regarding migration. Kiska stated the countries of

² --, "Visegrad Group Summit in Strbske Pleso", *European Pressphoto Agency*, 11 October 2018, <<http://www.epa.eu/politics-photos/diplomacy-photos/visegrad-group-summit-in-strbske-pleso-photos-54692362>>.

³ --, "Prezident Kiska na samite V4: O EÚ musíme hovoriť jasne", *Andrej Kiska – president SR*, 11 October 2018, <<https://www.prezident.sk/article/prezident-kiska-na-samite-v4-o-eu-musime-hovorit-jasne/>>.

⁴ --, "Arguments for and against a multi-speed Europe", *Debating Europe*, 2018, <<https://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-for-and-against-a-multi-speed-europe/#.W9BIM6d0BQI>>.

⁵ TASR, "Kiska: Prezidenti krajín V4 odmietajú delenie EÚ na dvojrýchlostnú", *Teraz*, 12 October 2018, <<https://www.teraz.sk/import/kiska-prezidenti-krajin-v4-odmietaju/354235-clanok.html>>.

the Visegrad group as well as the whole EU, needed to show their empathy and pointed out how dangerous the current rise of nationalism, extremism and xenophobia in Europe was. The leaders of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic appeared to be much more critical. Czech President Milos Zeman mentioned it was wiser to help the immigrants in their home countries. According to him, a high extent of investment was required. He was supported by Polish President Andrzej Duda, who added that Europe had not fought sufficiently against smugglers and other criminals profiting from the crisis. Speaking of the EU's external borders, Hungarian President Janos Ader supported the idea in which it was the countries' national armies that should be responsible for the security of the EU's external borders.⁶

Additionally, the economic sphere was discussed too. Firstly, the Slovak President voiced concerns at the decrease of work opportunities among the Visegrad group's countries. He added that already a high amount of the work opportunities are threatened by automation. The leaders agreed that attention has to be placed on education, science and research in order to adapt to future trends. Finally, the four presidents also reacted on issues concerning the energy sector. According to Andrej Kiska, the sector could not be considered a business matter only, as it could be also used as a powerful political tool. In this context, the President expressed his negative attitude towards the Nord Stream II project, which remains Slovakia's big energy concern.⁷ The states of the Visegrad group are traditionally economic partners that cooperate on several economic projects. In the beginning of October, they announced the project of the high-speed rail connecting Budapest, Bratislava, Brno and Warsaw.⁸

Slovakia at the summit of the EU

⁶ TASR, "Prezidenti V4: Migrantom treba pomáhať v krajinách ich pôvodu", *Teraz*, 12 October 2018, <<http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/prezidenti-krajin-v4-migrantom-treba-p/354190-clanok.html>>.

⁷ --, "Prezident na samite: EÚ treba obhajovať", *Andrej Kiska – prezident SR*, 12 October 2018, <<https://www.prezident.sk/article/prezident-na-samite-eu-treba-obhajovat/>>.

⁸ Gotev, Georgi, "Budapešť, Bratislavu, Brno a Varšavu by mala spojiť vysokorýchlostná železnica", *Euractiv*, 2 October 2018, <<https://euractiv.sk/section/ekonomika-a-euro/news/budapest-bratislavu-brno-a-varsavu-by-mala-spojiti-vysokorychlostna-zeleznica/>>.

Members of the EU had an opportunity to meet at the summit of the European Council in Brussels. Slovakia was there represented by its Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini. They discussed migration, internal security and Brexit. After the summit, the Slovak Prime Minister stated the debate on migration had been very difficult and long, however, the states finally started to focus on the security of the external borders. He defended the plans for creating so-called hotspots. The hotspots are aimed at moving migrants coming to Europe to third countries, where it would be decided whether they are eligible for asylum. According to the Slovak Prime Minister, this procedure would be very quick.⁹ In this context, the role of the African states was being discussed. Thus the African region needed to be considered a source of future development, broad cooperation and considerable potential. The summit proposed more concrete actions towards the security of borders and called for a serious fight against migrant smugglers.¹⁰

Then, the relations between the EU and the United Kingdom came to be discussed. Firstly, it was expected the October summit would bring clearer plans and actions regarding Brexit. However, the situation has remained unclear even after the meetings. Peter Pellegrini said that the comments of British Prime Minister Theresa May had not brought any sensible progress. He added the expected Brexit summit in November would not be happening if there was no considerable progress on the British side. After the summit, the authorities informed there was no relevant progress in terms of Brexit and the negotiations were still entangled in the theme of the border with Ireland. However, as the Slovak Prime Minister stated, the EU had already managed to bring solutions to many issues of Brexit, and thus it was still determined to successfully resolve

⁹ --, "P. Pellegrini: Summit EU sa rozhodol, že vzniknú centrá rýchlej selekcie migrantov", *HN Online*, <<https://pustito.hnonline.sk/b216a2ad-baa8-48c0-8807-ea2db4a3e9e8/pellegrini-o-vysledkoch-summitu-o-migracii>>.

¹⁰ --, "European Council, 18/10/2018", *European Council – Council of the European Union*, 18 October 2018, <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2018/10/18/>>.

future relations between the EU and Britain.¹¹ For Slovakia, the relations with post-Brexit Britain play an important role. Many Slovak citizens are currently working or studying on the British soil. Furthermore, several companies and businesspeople have trade activities there. For Slovakia, it is important to reduce any potential negative impacts on its citizens after Britain leaves the EU. Simultaneously, the EU's authorities need to maintain good trade and political relations with the UK while respecting the EU's trade laws.

Conclusion

Pointing out the most significant external activities of Slovakia abroad in October, the state experienced two regional summits. Firstly, it was the presidential summit of the Visegrad group. The meeting in Slovakia's High Tatras addressed several important issues. What remained clear is the regional group's traditional nature and opinions on specific matters, mostly on migration. President Andrej Kiska uses less critical remarks in comparison to his counterparts. Peter Pellegrini attended the summit of the EU in Brussels. There, Slovakia supported and expressed its positions Brexit and migration, emphasising the need for unconditional security of the EU's external borders. The summits did not bring Slovakia a significant opportunity to shape the regional and international affairs nor any breakthrough. However, Slovakia got a chance to show it is a country, which has a say even in the most challenging issues of Europe.

¹¹ TASR, "Pellegrini: Summit o brexite nebude, ak sa nedozvieme o pokroku", *HN Online*, 18 October 2018, <<https://hnonline.sk/svet/1827527-pellegrini-summit-o-brexite-nebude-ak-sa-nedozvieme-o-pokroku>>.