# Slovak Foreign Policy Report 2010

The year 2010 was a challenging but also groundbreaking year for Slovakia, taking into consideration changes within its foreign policy priorities. Qualitative change brought about by the new government was particularly noticable in the promotion of realistic attittudes towards the European Union and the single European currency, the change in atmosphere in bilateral relations with Hungary, and in the pursuit of value-based foreign policy. Slovakia confirmed its commitment to the European and Euro-Atlantic values and principles through its balanced and transparent policy in an ever-changing global context.

From the perspective of global developments within the international community, 2010 was a complicated year in which the decline of the global economy continued and the problems brought about by the global financial and economic crisis were not overcome. In a majority of advanced countries, the crisis translated into a debt crisis, the most serious crisis which the common European currency has had to face so far. In the context of the global economy, large countries with fast-growing economies (such as China, India and Brazil), including those countries that use economy and trade as a foreign policy instrument, are increasingly reinforcing their positions. Europe has continued with the search for its identity through internal reforms, including the establishment of the European External Action Service.

## Regional cooperation and neighbourly relations

**Regional cooperation** and the development of **good neighbourly relations** were the priorities of Slovak foreign policy. In pursuing these priorities, the Slovak Republic is building on the assumption that the countries of the Visegrad Four (V4) group have sufficient capacity to further develop multilateral cooperation and influence European policies. During the preparations for its twelve month Presidency of the V4, handed over from Hungary on 1 July 2010, the Slovak Republic had resolved to intensify regional cooperation and bring forward topics and issues that would strengthen both the EU and NATO, while also benefiting our interests. Priority issues include sectoral cooperation concerning the new financial perspective of the EU, regional and cohesion policies, energy industry, transport infrastructure and the environment. In the second half of 2010, a mechanism of regular meetings of V4 prime ministers that are held prior to European Council meetings was successfully introduced (the September 2010 meeting was attended by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy; the December meeting was attended by President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso). Another successful event was an informal meeting of the V4 foreign affairs ministers and representatives of the Western Balkan region, together with representatives of Belgium's EU Presidency and the European Commission, held in Bratislava in October 2010. The ministers expressed their support of the policy of EU enlargement to the Western Balkan countries and agreed on closer coordination of joint actions to be taken by the V4 countries to support European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic began implementing a specific bilateral assistance programme for the countries of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership - Centre for Transfer of Integration and Reform Experience.

Slovakia actively joined in consultations with the European Commission and countries of the region which should become part of the European Danube Region Strategy. Slovakia's priorities include development of transport infrastructure, energy industries and the environment, along with social and economic development, including enhancement of competitiveness.

As far as bilateral **neighbourly relations** are concerned, those with the **Czech Republic** have preserved their above-standard quality, as proved by bilateral visits of Prime

Ministers and Foreign Affairs Ministers of the two countries following their appointment after respective general elections. The proximity of programmes and ideas of the new coalition governments in the two countries also provided room for close cooperation within such platforms as the EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN. Slovakia and the Czech Republic continued their joint operations in international crisis management missions (Kosovo, Afghanistan), and their armed forces agreed to carry on joint purchases of military equipment. Energy security was also among the priority issues on the agenda of bilateral cooperation. Close cooperation and the ability to effectively provide mutual aid could also be seen during emergency situations caused by floods (May and August 2010). The two countries consulted the extent of damage and the submission of an application to the EU Solidarity Fund.

Cooperation with the **Republic of Poland** was of a similarly dynamic nature, as proved by a December 2010 visit by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikuláš Dzurinda to Warsaw. Both countries tested their operational links and responsively assisted each other during the floods on the Slovak-Polish border. Energy security was the top issue discussed at the July meeting of the Slovak and Polish Prime Ministers, which translated into a declaration expressing their interest in building a gas network interconnection between the two countries. Unresolved bilateral issues include the completion of cross-border road transport infrastructure along the expressway section between Prešov and Rzeszów and modernisation of railway infrastructure.

After a fruitless period of confrontation, 2010 witnessed a change in the approach to bilateral relations with the **Republic of Hungary**. The adoption by Hungary of an amendment to the Citizenship Act and the Act on National Solidarity (so-called Act on Trianon) just on the eve of Slovakia's general election had increased tensions in bilateral relations and resulted in a temporary suspension of dialogue between the two countries. It was not before the July 2010 meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary that an agreement to resolve problematic issues was achieved and bilateral dialogue resumed, along with the functioning of joint committees established in order to implement the Treaty on Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary. In the course of September and October, the committees launched their activities aimed at development of multifaceted cooperation. The atmosphere in bilateral relations improved and new possibilities opened up for more effective communication between the top state officials, as proved by the visit of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to Slovakia in December 2010 and the visit of the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs to Hungary in September of that year. The Foreign Affairs Ministers agreed on cooperation in the area of infrastructure development, energy, consular cooperation and joint action in the region (V4), the EU and NATO. New transport infrastructure projects between the two countries were discussed (the north-south gas network interconnection Veľký Krtíš–Vecsés, completion of the Košice-Miskolc expressway, construction of bridges over the Ipeľ River), as well as projects in the area of culture and science.

Intensive bilateral discussions with **Austria** were held during the September visit by the Slovak Prime Minister to this neighbouring country, as well as during the visits by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs to Austria in August and October. Nuclear energy was a closely watched issue in bilateral relations; in May 2010, Slovakia managed to close, without any principal objections raised by Austria, an environmental impact assessment procedure concerning the construction of blocks 3 and 4 of the Mochovce nuclear power plant. Another positive achievement in the area of energy security was the launching of the gas network interconnection in Baumgarten (Austria) enabling reverse gas flow from Austria to Slovakia. Austria has thus become the second country, after the Czech Republic, which can supply Slovakia with natural gas in case of an emergency. A strategic dimension of this arrangement is that it will enable connection to the planned Nabucco gas pipeline, which should end right

at the Baumgarten terminal. Once the Nabucco project is launched, Slovakia will have both the transport route and sources of its gas supplies diversified. A solution to connect oil transport systems of the two countries is also being sought.

As for relations with **Ukraine,** Slovak diplomacy focused on good neighbourly relations, economic cooperation, energy security, minority and expatriate issues, and cross-border cooperation. The delivery of energy supplies to Slovakia through Ukrainian territory was reliable and uninterrupted in 2010. Bilateral dialogue also intensified. The Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Ukraine in April and August. The most prominent events in bilateral contacts last year included a visit by the President of the Slovak Republic to Ukraine in October and a Slovak-Ukrainian business forum. During the visit, an agreement on cancellation of consular fees for national visas was signed. Slovak activities contributed to a broader engagement of the Ukrainian academic community and civil society in shaping the country's European attittudes. Funds from the Slovak development assistance programme were used to finance the launch of the National Convention project (in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association) in December 2010.

For the fourth year in a row, the Slovak Embassy in Kiev served as a NATO Contact Point Embassy in Ukraine. Despite Ukraine's changed policy towards NATO, the Embassy will continue providing information to the Ukrainian public on NATO-related issues and participate in the implementation of Ukraine's reform plans in the area of defence.

**European Union**

The main topic on the **European agenda** in 2010 was the **financial crisis** and the acknowledgement of the very deep mutual economic and financial interdependence among EU Member States. This led to the commencement of a process of reinforcing economic cooperation among EU countries. Slovakia actively pursued its opinions on the continuation of the EU enlargement process, overcoming the consequences of the global economic crisis and consolidation of the Eurozone. It primarily focused on those areas and policies where it can provide higher added value and tangible results to partners (such as fiscal policy, structural reforms, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, etc.). With the aim of improving the effective functioning of European institutions, Slovakia was actively engaged in the implementation process of the Treaty of Lisbon, while also paying appropriate attention to the building of the European External Action Service.

With respect to measures aimed at stabilising and consolidating public finances of the Eurozone countries, Slovakia actively promoted the strengthening of the Stability and Growth Pact and responsible economic governance, including through more stringent fiscal discipline, extending economic oversight and, above all, application of a permanent crisis mechanism.

Slovakia's position in the discussion on a loan to Greece and the establishment of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) was driven by its efforts to promote measures that provide a more permanent solution to the problem. One such measure involved debt restructuring with a managed default as an option. We consider it important that views on resolving debt problems of Eurozone countries have changed and partners have realised that a loan will not help if the essence of the problem remains unresolved. Slovakia contributed to this change in attitude by taking a position which had first been subject to criticism but turned out later as well-founded, value-consistent and prospective. As regards the preparation of the new Strategy for Growth and Employment - Europe 2020, it is one of Slovakia's achievements that the cohesion policy is considered among the most important instruments for its implementation. In 2010, Slovakia managed to speed up the drawing of cohesion policy funds for the 2007-2013 period, which allowed to close operational programmes of the 2004-2006 programming period. Slovakia actively participated in the drafting of a future cohesion

policy beyond 2013. A strong cohesion policy for all EU regions with focus on the most underdeveloped regions remains among Slovakia's top priorities.

Slovakia was actively engaged in negotiations on the 2011 EU budget, pursuing balanced approach and taking into account not only the need for budgetary stringency, but also availability of sufficient resources to finance EU policies. Within the debate on the EU budget review, Slovakia opened up the issue of updating national positions on the budget review in October 2010. Concerning the intensification of EU Member States' cooperation under the common agricultural policy (CAP), agricultural ministers of Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania signed a joint declaration at their meeting in Bratislava in November 2010, in which they agreed that real CAP reform was necessary. It should primarily be aimed at preserving a two-pillar policy model and extending the application of the Single Area Payment Scheme.

With respect to further **EU enlargement**, Slovakia was primarily engaged in supporting **European prospects of the Western Balkans.** Visits by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs to Serbia (October) and Montenegro (November) emphasised Slovakia's commitment to assist the two countries in their EU integration efforts and capacity building to meet these objectives. Slovakia expressed its political support to accession talks between Croatia and the EU. In particular, it shared with Croatia its experience from the accession process and harmonisation of national legislation with EU law. Slovakia observes with regret that it was impossible to begin actual accession talks with Macedonia last year. Slovakia acknowledged the positive *avis* of the European Commission on the EU membership application submitted by Montenegro and, together with partners, succeeded in pushing through a European Council decision of December 2010 to grant Montenegro the status of a candidate country. Slovakia also contributed to the progress in Serbia's EU integration process. In February, the interim trade agreement between the EU and Serbia was unblocked; in June, the Council of the EU decided to proceed with the ratification process of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The President of the Slovak Republic ratified the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Serbia, of the other part, in October 2010. It was also due to the activities of Slovak diplomacy that a joint EU-Serbia resolution was adopted at the UN General Assembly in September 2010 concerning the request for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legitimacy of the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo and its compliance with international law. With an active endorsement by Slovakia, the Council of the EU requested the European Commission in October 2010 to provide an opinion on Serbia's application for EU membership. Slovakia was supportive of EU integration of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina and approved the decision of the Council of the EU to liberalise visa regimes for the citizens of the two countries. A joint statement was adopted at the ministerial meeting of the V4 countries with the Western Balkan countries that was held in Bratislava in October, outlining the steps to be taken during the upcoming period.

Slovakia appreciated the commencement of accession talks with Iceland and supported the continuation of EU accession negotiations with Turkey.

Under the overall revision and improvements in the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Slovakia sought to enhance the effective functioning of the **Eastern Partnership** project. Strengthening political dialogue with Eastern Partnership countries was the main objective pursued by MFA top officials during meetings in Ukraine (August) and Moldova (November). Slovakia paid special attention to negotiations on association agreements with partner countries, implementation of a visa-free regime, and increasing the effective utilisation of EU financial instruments available to partners. Both

countries were offered bilateral action plans which focused on sharing Slovakia's experience from transformation, approximation of EU law, administrative capacity building and anti-corruption activities. A particular accent was put on cooperation with civil society; National Conventions were also opened during the visits. Their purpose is to facilitate communication between the government, the non-governmental sector, academia and the business community and raise public awareness about the European Union.

The year 2010 was characterised by the **implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon,** and yielded the first experience with a reformed EU institutional framework. Slovakia pursued its positions, including, for example, a balanced involvement of the rotating presidency in the preparation and organisation of respective meetings of the Council of the EU and the European Council. Slovakia endorsed the introduction of a European Citizens' Initiative mechanism, which enables one million EU citizens to call directly on the European Commission to prepare a legal act in any area falling within the framework of its powers.

An important aspect in the practical implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon was the establishment of the **European External Action Service** (EEAS), designed to improve coordination of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Slovakia successfully established itself in a group to promote and coordinate positions on the building of the EEAS. The fundamental principles of the joint position included a shared ownership of the EEAS (by Member States and EU institutions), application of the geographical balance principle, and meaningful participation of all EU Member States. Slovakia sees added value in its possibility to effectively contribute to the scope of the EEAS, namely in Slovakia's priority areas which include the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership. In this respect, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic appreciated the appointment of the former Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miroslav Lajčák, as a Managing Director for Russia, the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans.

**Security policy and new challenges**

The **security policy** in 2010 was affected by complicated developments in Afghanistan operations, an unpredictable policy pursued by Iran, the signing of a nuclear disarmament treaty between the US and Russia, and escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula. NATO November summit in Lisbon adopted its new Strategic Concept, preparation of which historically for the first time also involved Slovakia. The document is in line with the positions Slovakia presented during the preparation process and reflects Slovakia's requirement that the tasks and goals of the Alliance be realistic, feasible and open for cooperation with partners. It is also closely linked with the need to cope with the pressure for more effective spending of financial resources. The summit confirmed that the Alliance was resolved to address security risks even outside NATO territory and cooperate with partners that share similar values in a global context. An important issue on the summit agenda was the decision on the building of a NATO missile defence system. The Lisbon summit also announced the beginning of the transition of responsibilities to the Afghan administration (the so-called transition process) to be carried out in the 2011-2014 period.

The GLOBSEC 2010 international conference organised by the Slovak Atlantic Commission in September, the Slovak Security Forum conference organised by the Euro-Atlantic Centre and the NATO Depository Library in October, along with other similar expert events, contributed to a full-scale debate on the new NATO Strategic Concept and security policy.

The priority was the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. The number of Slovak troops deployed under ISAF increased to 314 in 2010, with the prospect of a further increase by 30

troops in the course of 2011. The character of Slovak armed forces activities in Afghanistan began to be better aligned with the requirement to strengthen NATO training capacities to support the transition of responsibilities for the country's security, scheduled to start in 2011. Slovak development assistance in Afghanistan was also adjusted to match this objective.

Slovakia is interested in having adequate participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Slovak troops continued their tasks under the UNFICYP mission in Cyprus and UNTSO in the Middle East. Activities of the Slovak contingent in Cyprus were supportive of Slovak diplomacy in its role as mediator, thus contributing to the excellent performance by the Slovak Republic of complex and (including by the UN) widely appreciated tasks of a provider of good services within bicommunal dialogue. Slovak troops continued their presence within the ALTHEA mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, at NATO Headquarters in Sarajevo, the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, the EULEX mission in Kosovo, and the EUBAM mission on the Moldova-Ukraine borders. Two police experts participated in the EUPOL operation in Afghanistan.

Slovakia systematically advocated close institutional cooperation between NATO and the EU, and cooperation of NATO with the UN, the OSCE and the African Union. In addition, Slovakia actively joined the OSCE discussion on the future of European security within the Corfu Process and pushed through a proposal in the area of energy security.

Together with its partners and allies, Slovakia actively sought answers within international organisations to such **global challenges** as counter-terrorism, climate change, cyber defence, terrorism, global economic crisis, disarmament, illegal migration, food and energy security, education, science, and the search for optimal ways towards advanced technologies.

Within the **UN**, the Slovak Republic participated in the building of a system of international relations based on the principle of effective multilateralism. Under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Slovakia was supportive of EU priorities in the UN and engaged in resolving the issue of pursuing uniform voting of EU Member States at the global level within activities of the UN General Assembly and Security Council in line with the changes brought forth by the Treaty of Lisbon. Slovakia endorsed a UN reform process with the aim of increasing coordination and mutual cooperation among the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council in particular. The Slovak Republic supported the unification of UN structures in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women into a single entity entitled *UN Women*. It presented its positions on the UN Security Council reform based on increasing its effectiveness and responsibility, including through increased representation of the Eastern European Regional Group.

As a chair of the UN Group of Friends of **Security Sector Reform** (SSR) in New York, the Slovak Republic carried on with the activities it had launched as a non-permanent UN Security Council member in the 2004-2007 period. The Security Sector Reform was one of the key issues on the agenda of the Slovak chairmanship that received a broad positive response in the UN. In cooperation with Indonesia, Slovakia organised a workshop on multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peace building for ASEAN countries, held in Jakarta in March 2010. It supported a workshop organised by Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa in New York on African prospects in the SSR area, focusing on cooperation between the UN and the African Union.

**Bilateral relations**

The economic crisis, new global challenges, international co-responsibility and a positive experience of solidarity have strengthened relations between Slovakia and other **EU** and **NATO** countries.

The Slovak Government has confirmed its interest in continuing and further intensification of bilateral cooperation with the **US.** It has emphasised its strong interest in a substantive dialogue, seeking answers to foreign policy and security challenges. It was important to take advantage of the positive momentum, complete a number of major bilateral cooperation projects, and bring the bilateral strategic dialogue to a higher political level. Successful projects for the transfer of persons detained at the US Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility to Slovakia, reinforcing the number of Slovak troops deployed under the ISAF operation and, last but not least, the completion of several years of efforts to establish a Congressional Caucus on Slovakia in the US Congress moved to the forefront. The top events in the bilateral dialogue included the visit by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikuláš Dzurinda to the US in October 2010, followed by the visit by the Slovak Prime Minister Iveta Radičová in November of that year. At a meeting with Minister Dzurinda, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised Slovakia for being a pillar of regional stability and cooperation.

Attention also concentrated on enhancing bilateral economic cooperation, as proved by an address delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs at a global investment symposium at the Harvard Club in New York, and the agenda of his official visit to the US that focused on economic and scientific cooperation. Preparation of "Road Show" events continued, so as to encourage technology transfers between the US and Slovakia.

Enhancing cooperation with **Germany** was also among Slovak foreign policy priorities, where Slovakia managed to retain the intensity and high quality of mutual dialogue. A number of important bilateral activities took place, primarily focused on the deepening of economic cooperation. Discussions between the Slovak Prime Minister Iveta Radičová and the German Minister of Foreign Affairs contributed to the intensification of economic cooperation with an emphasis on utilisation of Germany's capacities as one of the world's leaders in innovation, new advanced technologies and renewable energy. An important moment was the search for common positions on the EU agenda, especially in the context of crisis measures adopted within the Eurozone.

Bilateral dialogue between the Slovak Republic and the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** concentrated on seeking responses to EU policy challenges (building and staffing the European External Action Service, preparation of the EU budget review) and global political developments. Slovakia was interested in balancing bilateral dialogue through reciprocal visits of UK officials to the Slovak Republic.

The underlying element in bilateral relations with **France** in 2010 was the strengthening of mutual dialogue at all levels, with the focus on identifying concrete programmes and projects for bilateral cooperation. Attention primarily concentrated on the economy, nuclear energy, investments and industry, as also proved by the September visit by the Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda to Paris. Regional cooperation between Slovak and French regions and municipalities continued to develop.

EU-related issues prevailed in bilateral relations with **Spain,** which held the EU Presidency in the first half of 2010.

Bilateral relations with **Italy** concentrated on events designed to improve investment opportunities in Slovakia, such as cooperation between ENEL and the Slovenské elektrárne company. Relations with **Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, Sweden, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands** focused on searching for new opportunities to enhance economic and cultural cooperation.

In 2010, Slovakia continued strengthening its bilateral cooperation with the **Western Balkan** countries, and remained engaged in seeking solutions to the problematic issues of this region. Intensive cooperation with **Croatia** continued both in the context of the final stage of its accession negotiations with the EU and the expansion of bilateral economic cooperation.

During the official visit by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs to Serbia in October 2010, the quality of bilateral relations and Slovakia's contribution to Serbian democratisation processes were acknowledged; the Minister also delivered a speech at a ceremony commemorating the 10th anniversary of the overthrow of Milosevic's regime in Serbia. Bilateral cooperation and European integration were discussed during the visit by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs to **Montenegro** in November 2010. Slovak troops completed their mission within the KFOR operation in line with the long-term operation planning; Slovakia remains present in Kosovo (EULEX mission) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (EU/ALTHEA and EUPM operations).

While retaining its unvarying position on the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo, Slovakia continued in 2010 to advocate a search for a long-term and sustainable solution to the Kosovo issue and dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Slovakia remained engaged in KFOR operations to the extent that its mandate would be in compliance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244(1999). Slovakia made sure that the KFOR troops fulfilled their tasks according to their mandate even during the period of their gradual scale-down and transition of the operation to a deterrent presence level. Slovak troops concluded their involvement in the KFOR operation on 30 September 2010 upon a decision by the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

Slovakia was also actively involved in the formulation of a NATO policy on the Western Balkans. It promoted the "open door policy" and, at a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers held in Tallinn in April 2010, endorsed the decision to invite **Bosnia and Herzegovina** to join the Membership Action Plan and supported intensification of cooperation between NATO and **Macedonia,** Montenegro and Serbia.

Slovakia's relation with **Eastern European** countries developed in compliance with a strategic policy line of the EU. **Moldova** was the priority country of the Slovak official development assistance. Since 1 November 2010, following the signing of an agreement between the Slovak and Hungarian Foreign Affairs Ministries on mutual representation in visa procedures, Moldovan citizens are allowed toapply for Slovak visas at the Hungarian Embassy in Chisinau.

As regards **Belarus,** Slovak actively participated in the EU debate on shaping of its policy towards Belarus. Slovakia promoted a critical and open dialogue with Belarus leaders, continuous communication with the opposition and support to civil society institutions in the country, the use of official development assistance resources and a micro-grant scheme. Slovak diplomacy condemned the December presidential election and accompanying violence, and expressed support to the development of cooperation between the EU and Belarus under the indispensable condition of respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In relations to the **Russian Federation**, Slovakia advocated development of pragmatic and mutually rewarding contacts focused on trade and strengthening the economic dimension of diplomacy. Cooperation in the energy industry is considered strategic. During a visit by the Russian President Dmitri Medvedev to Slovakia in April 2010, emphasis was put on economic cooperation and a search for new strategies and innovative procedures. The visit was subject to criticism by the general public on account that it failed to address unresolved historic issues which the Slovak Republic considers important. The talks indicated that cooperation was necessary on international policy issues in order to address common challenges in the area of security, stability and development, modernisation, economic crisis and climate change. The signing of an implementing protocol between the Slovak and Russian government to the Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on readmission represented a significant milestone towards a visa-free regime between the Russian Federation and the EU.

Slovakia encouraged a more effective functioning of the NATO-Russia Council and the preparation of a joint document to assess security threats of the 21st century. The strategic dialogue between Russia and the US has remained an important factor in international relationsalso with China playing an increasingly more important role.

In relation to **Georgia**, Slovakia pursued a policy of supporting Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. Relations with **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan** were based on the long-term interest in developing stable, pragmatic and mutually rewarding contacts with the countries of the South Caucasus, with an accent on economic cooperation and in compliance with the EU's Eastern Partnership programme. These aspects were also reflected in talks held by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs with partners in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Standard cooperation continued with countries of **Central Asia,** corresponding with the possibilities and interests of both parties. Further development of trade and economic cooperation and the building of bilateral treaty base remained a priority, as discussed during the visits by the Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič to **Kazakhstan** and **Kyrgyzstan** in April 2010.

**Economic policy abroad**

A large share of activities carried out as part of Slovakia's **economic policy abroad** last year focused on overcoming the consequences of the global financial crisis. Through its active participation in the activities of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Slovakia could draw on well-tried policies and best practices for sustainable economic growth. Last year, an overall economic assessment, environmental performance assessment, in-depth energy audit, plus a number of other significant activities, were also carried out as part of the Slovakia-OECD cooperation. The foreign service sought out possibilities for broader involvement of Slovak business entities in public tenders for the delivery of goods and services to international organisations. The MFA organised a workshop for Slovak business entities, attended by representatives of procurement departments of international organisations of the UN System, the EU and NATO, to inform them about the conditions for participation in international tenders.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, the competences of the Ministry of Economy in the area of foreign trade concerning the management and administration of Slovak commercial and economic sections abroad were transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, effective 1 January 2011, in compliance with the Government Manifesto and an amendment to Act No. 575/2001 Coll. on the organisation of the Government activities and on the organisation of central state administration as amended by Act No. 403/2010 Coll. The aforementioned legislative measure laid down an institutional framework for building of an integrated foreign service and an optimum model of economic diplomacy emphasising Slovakia's economic interests abroad. In cooperation with the Economy Ministry, the SARIO agency and the Slovak Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the MFA focused oninvestment capital from Asia, the Gulf countries, Latin America and Africa, in addition to traditional European partners. Two important business conferences were held in Bratislava in this respect: Prospects of Doing Business in Africa and Prospects of Doing Business in China. In cooperation with SARIO, the MFA also organised business missions for Slovak entrepreneurs to South Caucasian countries and Moldova. In April 2010, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised an international conference on innovative policy and technology transfers, in cooperation with the American Chamber of Commerce in the Slovak Republic and the Office of the Government, which represented a tangible contribution by the MFA to Slovakia's international economic policy.

**Development assistance**

In 2010, the Slovak Republic renewed its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, including through a declaration at the UN Summit held in New York in September 2010. Slovakia confirmed it would endeavour to gradually increase the volume of its development assistance. However, it will primarily concentrate on the quality, effectiveness and tangible impacts on a given country and take into account the needs of partner countries.

In cooperation with several other ministries, the MFA took several particular measures in 2010 in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of bilateral development assistance provided by the Slovak Republic. The Slovak Government approved a new method of budgeting bilateral development assistance. New statute of the Slovak Official Development Assistance Project Committee were adopted to ensure an independent and transparent project selection procedure. Through November and December 2010, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee carried out a so-called Special Peer Review to evaluate Slovak development assistance activities; relevant DAC recommendations will be incorporated in order to further improve the effective functioning of the existing development assistance system.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the MFA and the Non-Governmental Development Organisations Platform in May 2010. The objective of the Memorandum is to intensify cooperation and improve the effective provision of development assistance. A Communication Strategy on Slovak official development assistance, approved in March 2010, is designed to raise general public awareness of official assistance, both at home and abroad.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will gradually extend the existing treaty base with Slovak ODA priority countries. An agreement between the Slovak and Moldovan government on development assistance came into force in September 2010.

Slovak ODA also served as an instrument to support reform and integration processes in Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. In order to ensure a coordinated approach, the MFA prepared an institutional platform - Centre for the Transfer of Integration and Reform Experience. The main objective for Slovak diplomacy was to insert the idea of application of transitional experience into key EU documents on development cooperation.

Slovakia was among the countries which promptly responded to humanitarian situations in Haiti, Ukraine, Pakistan, Moldova, Montenegro and Chile. The MFA provided financial support to rescue teams which voluntarily participated in removing the waste of an industrial accident near Ajka, Hungary. The readiness to help considerably enhanced mutual relations and cooperation between the two countries. The Ministry also offered humanitarian aid to fire-stricken Russia in the form of health recovery stays for children from socially disadvantaged families. In line with its foreign policy priorities, the Ministry participated in providing in-kind humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and the Palestinian Administration. Limited transportation capacities have remained a lingering problem as far as the delivery of Slovak humanitarian aid to remote territories is concerned. Nevertheless, Slovakia cooperated effectively with NATO and France in this respect. Slovakia supports concrete steps to be taken by the EU in order to encourage solidarity among its Member States.

**Value-based policy**

The new Slovak Government undertook in its Manifesto to curtail its contacts with countries that violate human rights. This decision created conditions for the strengthening of Slovakia's position as a respected and recognised partner. One of the first steps indicating this qualitative change was the Government's position concerning the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo and an appeal addressed by the Slovak parliamentary

Committee on Human Rights and National Minorities to the Chinese government, requesting that he be released from prison. Slovakia also became more involved in addressing the issue of human rights in Cuba. The Ladies in White movement was granted the Ján Langoš Award in Havana in December 2010. A prominent Cuban dissident José Luis García Paneque was received at the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss concrete measures that might be taken in order to help Cuban citizens persecuted by the Communist regime. Slovak Prime Minister Iveta Radičová reminded that the Slovak Republic was proud to support defenders of human rights and freedoms in repressive regimes such as Cuba, thereby following its own tradition of civil resistance against totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. The Slovak Republic also applauded the release of Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and called on Burmese authorities to release all political prisoners. The presidential election in Belarus and following development was a topic of special concern at the end of 2010. One of the first tangible results brought by the shift towards value-based diplomacy was the acknowledgment of Slovakia's activities by the US-based Celebrate Freedom Foundation, including its decision to grant Slovakia an Ally of Freedom Award for 2011. The award is granted for significant contributions to the protection and promotion of freedom and democracy in the world, fulfilment of the vision of a free and united Europe, and engagement in joint military missions, including the ISAF operation in Afghanistan.

**Effective foreign service**

The Slovak consular service contributed to the delivery of a strategic foreign policy objective - **assisting and serving Slovak citizens abroad.** Special emphasis was placed on responsibility and high quality in aiding Slovak citizens in emergency situations abroad, as well as on the provision of consular assistance in dealing with the common consular agenda. The MFA's intention to improve the protection of Slovak citizens abroad and to ensure a more operative contact with them led to the establishment of a system for registration of citizens who travel abroad by means of the MFA website.

Activities of the MFA Citizen Assistance and Service Centre were an important component of the Ministry's consular service as it provided information, via phone, to nearly 8,000 citizens.

In 2010, agreements were signed with Hungary and Slovenia on mutual representation in visa application procedures. The agreement with Hungary is already in force; Hungary represents Slovakia in Moldova, Albania and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The agreement signed with Slovenia will come into force following the approval of an implementing protocol. Slovenia will represent Slovakia in Montenegro, while Slovakia will represent Slovenia in Romania, Cyprus and Ukraine (Consul General in Uzhgorod)

The building of a consular network in Asia, including the Asian part of the Russian Federation and former Soviet republics, in Central and Latin America and Sub-Saharan African regions, has remained among the priorities of the consular service. It also involved the development of a network of honorary consulates and their engagement in economic activities.

In 2010, t**he MFA further improved the effectiveness of the performance of the Slovak foreign policy.** Despite financial constraints, the existing network of Slovak diplomatic missions abroad can be considered effective and capable of pursuing Slovakia's foreign policy interests in a professional manner. Last year, a branch office of the Slovak Embassy in Bonn was closed and a new Embassy in Podgorica opened.

The MFA signed two memoranda of cooperation with partner institutions of the diplomatic academy (Serbia and Croatia) in 2010. Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Macedonia, Mexico and Romania have also expressed interest in cooperating in the area of education.