

## 25 YEARS OF THE SLOVAK SECURITY POLICY: SUCCESSSES AND FAILTURES

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**In the last 25 years, security policy and defense were the most dynamically developing and at the same time the most neglected spheres of public life. Defense and security are the basic attributes of statehood and their correct understanding and implementation should guarantee economic, social and civilisational progress of communities. Slovakia went through three basic phases in the field of defense and security after the end of the Cold war and obtaining the independence.**

The first one, starting in year 1993, was characterized by individual approach to defense, isolation of foreign policy and erroneous strategic calculations. The beginning of the second phase can be set somewhere in a transitional period between fundamental inner political changes in year 1998 and receiving a membership in NATO and the EU in 2004 and its ending can be set in January 2014. The second phase was characterized by integration of Slovakia into structures of collective defense (NATO), which itself was changing dramatically at that time, and deep transformation of armed forces and strategic thinking. The third phase started a few months ago when Russia decided to rewrite strategic rules valid from the end of the Cold War.

During the first period, the principle of individual territorial defense, with no allies, was applied, orientated geographically and strategically towards the region of Slovakia, while the security policy was dominated only by narrowly defined defense without broader context. In addition to the fact, that the „self isolation“ of Slovakia led to economic and political problems, intellectual isolation of elites, delay of civilisational development, it was also based on erroneous analysis of the security environment and incorrect estimation of the trends in international relations. The basic insight from this phase was discovering the narrow interconnection between domestic, foreign and security policy.

The strategic goal of the security policy at the beginning of the second phase was receiving the membership in NATO and obtaining the guarantees of collective defense. The membership in NATO brought deep intellectual, political and technical transformation of Slovakia and of Slovak armed forces and at the same time NATO itself went through fundamen-

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tal changes. As a result of these changes, the Alliance, into which Slovakia entered in 2004, was totally different from what we had supposed at the beginning of the nineties. It meant two parallel processes in Slovak conditions: the transition from individual to collective defense and at the same time shifting of emphasis from territorial defense onto expeditionary operations in regions outside of Europe. The armed forces reduced their numerous personnel from more than 50 000 to approximately 20 000 with civilians. Instead of large unions, which are in theory capable of defending the territory, we are able to send abroad and keep in full rotation the amount approximately corresponding to one battalion (circa 800 soldiers). It is a political-military ambition, although the current number of soldiers is few hundred lower.

Paradoxically, the negative consequence of positive trends in our security environment- the lack of a greater military conflict and threat, as well as guarantees of collective defense – was the loss of survival instinct in Slovak society. The security was, and still is, viewed as some kind of automatically given state, and not as a fragile situation that can be changed anytime. These changes meant for armed forces concentrating on capabilities necessary for foreign operations and – mainly because of the lack of finances – gradual loss of a larger part of other skills.

The consequences of these factors are far-reaching and strategic. In fact all of the defense plans were, and still are, irrelevant because of other priorities of the society, which were demonstrated in dramatic decline in defense spending. The budget of Ministry of Defense became a reserve fund for social programs. Internally accumulated deficit between the plans and the reality is 1,5 Billion Euro – that is a biennial budget of Ministry of Defense. That is about as many Armed Forces received less than

it was planned. That is one of the reasons why more than 70 percent of the weapon systems are beyond the border of their life limit, the air force is in similarly critical state and if the programs of modernization do not start right away, in few years we will lose the remaining capacities as well (helicopters, transport aviation, not to mention the supersonic aircrafts).

Our most important commitment towards NATO – building, training and arming a brigade capable of fighting side by side with allied troops, is a long way off. The fulfillment of this commitment was postponed to year 2018 and not later only because it was not possible. If we are so naïve to think that the participation on foreign missions can “redeem” our sins – the army, which is not capable of larger engagement and cooperation as a whole with its allies, the loss of key abilities – it is a fundamental error. Let’s not get mistaken- it is good to hear that Alliance’s representatives, allied politicians or ambassadors praise the activities of our troops in Afghanistan, but, on the other hand, they know very well the that our Armed forces are in a lamentable state and they tend to point it out. Security is only a marginal topic in social and political discussions and we lack the basic strategic culture that would be their foundation. We do not have, with rare exceptions, within the political parties, strong politicians, that would have security as the main agenda. The parties lack experts and ministers of defense were always politically weaker than ministers of interior, finance or foreign affairs. There were no big political struggles to get this post when the governments were formed and the posts were being distributed.

Under such circumstances, the third phase started few months ago by Russian military invasion to Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. It is the deepest strategic change in last 25 years,

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which will shape not only the Eastern Europe but also the basic security borders of the whole Europe, Slovakia including. We should understand that what is happening now is not the result of misunderstanding or bad communication with Russia. It is already a systemic element of Russian foreign policy, the conscious hacking of a status quo at the strategic level, which has existed in Europe since the end of the Cold war. It is a huge challenge for Slovakia. Crucial is, that change of strategies, the armed forces re-

form, modernization, that will take place are in accordance with current trends and are not delayed. We cannot adapt the contemporary reforms to conditions that were before the January 2014. The worst is, when reforms are adjusted to past conditions and because of them the Armed forces will fall in the first test. To accomplish this, it is, of course, important to understand that there is change that has a strategic depth going on around us.

## **CENAA Policy Papers**

No. 12/2014, Vol. 3

Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs

Tolstého 9, 811 06 Bratislava

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