Despite their rhetoric in the media, all of the relevant political parties surveyed (except for the Kotleba´s LSNS) agree on Slovakia’s clear pro-Atlantic orientation. Building a common European army outside of NATO has the greatest support in the nationalist circles of SNS. In this respect the most sceptical stance is held by the libertarian and Eurosceptic SaS and the right-wing populist Sme rodina.

Almost all major parties and movements, with the exception of LSNS and the governing Smer-SD, have introduced more or less concrete solutions in their security and defence programs. However, the priorities are different. A common denominator of the majority of party manifestos (SaS, Sme rodina, Za lidi, OLaNO, PS/Spolu and KDH) is to increase transparency in acquisitions, but also the need to agree and adopt national strategies on security and defence.

STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS TO COME AT FIRST

Most major political parties in Slovakia want to modernize and Slovak defence and improve the planning only after the adoption of the key national strategic documents, including the security and defence strategy. The professional defence community, as well as the politicians themselves have agreed that the fifteen-year-old strategies, which were passed through the top-level legislative process and are therefore binding for the armed forces, do not reflect the current conditions and needs of the security environment.

In particular, the current opposition parties would base the new strategy on the version prepared by the Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministries in 2017, which was then passed through the government in 2018. The explicit naming of Russia’s ‘aggressive policy’ as a threat, which was a particular issue for the nationalists (SNS) in the government then forced their coalition partners to keep the proposals away from the Parliament’s vote.

Some parties (SaS, Sme Rodina, Za lidi, OLaNO, PS/Spolu, KDH) have promised to involve experts in the development of new strategies. For example, SaS intends to approve essential defence planning documents ‘after an open discussion involving a wide range of political parties and experts’ takes place.

The important role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the Slovak defence strategy is confirmed by all the examined parties. Some add that Slovakia currently has no other alternative. Even the nationalist SNS, a member of the incumbent government, where a more reserved attitude would be expected, writes in the program that ‘by joining the NATO (…) the Slovak Republic has become one of the modern states of Europe’.

The analysis of the security chapters in the programs of the seven strongest political parties in Slovakia (with the exception of LSNS and Smer-SD, which did not publish their programs, nor did their representatives answer the forwarded questions) contains views supporting the adoption of strategic documents, plans for equipment acquisition, cyber security, as well as outlooks on the future of European defence and NATO cooperation.

Sme rodina even sees an opportunity in an active involvement of the citizens. ‘I think there is no problem for anyone to comment on such strategic intentions’, Milan Krajniak, head of the Security Working of the Sme rodina movement said to EURACTIV.

The long-term agreement going across many parties to ensure that plans for procurement of costly military equipment will not change with every new government, as had been the case in past, is directly mentioned only in the coalition program of PS/Spolu. Interviews with the representatives of other parties show that OLaNO and Za lidi would be strongly interested in this discussion. The three above-mentioned parties are considering the anchoring of defence plans in the legislation, thus ensuring their validity for up to ten years ahead.

‘I would like to agree on a defence treaty, which shall be the result of an agreement between all parliamentary parties on the how, the what and the way the money will be spent on the modernization of the military and defence sector,’ said Jaroslav Nad, shadow Defence Minister from the opposition movement OLaNO.

‘The minimum that can be done is an agreement that goes across the whole society. It will be necessary to approach the opposition, the sensible people and say: this...
is not only in the interest of the Za ľudí party, nor of any particular coalition, but it is the national interest to have the Slovak armed forces built so that they can fulfil our national defence plans and plans of the Alliance, ‘Tomáš Valašek from Za ľudí.

According to the retired general and the leader of the security agenda in the PS/Spolu coalition, Pavel Macko, having the strategic documents will be the key. However, they should result in the military development plan, not a purchase plan. ‘A long-term plan would define what capabilities, what capacities, with what priorities and in what sequence we get them. Along with that, there would be an acquisition plan, which is just a subset of it all,’ explains Macko. The Progressives would like to have it endorsed in the National Council (the Slovak parliament).

**HOW TO DELIVER FOR NATO?**

The most detailed position on the future military procurement was presented by SaS (focus on small firearms and missing ammunition, 4 × 4 tactical vehicles, 8 × 8 combat armoured vehicles, tracked vehicles, 3D radars, helicopters, anti-tank forces and a new generation of air defence) and OĽaNO (building of a heavy mechanized brigade by 2026, 8 × 8 combat armoured vehicles and 4 × 4 tactical vehicles, nine helicopters, subsonic training fighter jets, 3D radars, and later also investments in unmanned technology or air defence systems).

SNS, which appointed the current Minister of Defence, became also much more specific in its agenda compared to other agenda. The party foresees the future of defence procurement similar to OĽaNO and SaS: within the completion of mechanized brigade, weapon systems type 8 × 8 and 4 × 4, air defence system, and the integration of military equipment without human service into the armed forces.

Others talk mainly about fulfilling the strategic interests of Slovakia with regard to the future strategy, but also about the ambitions to meet the country's obligations towards its allies in the Alliance.

In the area of the plan of further defence development, the agenda of OĽaNO and SaS parties are the closest to the recommendations of the Alliance. Discussions with party leaders suggest that on an imaginary scale measuring effort to follow NATO's recommendations, the two mentioned parties would be followed by KDH, PS/Spolu, Za ľudí, Sme Rodina and SNS.

KDH wants to ‘ensure the best possible interoperability with forces of the NATO allies’. PS/Spolu wants to focus on three basic tasks: ‘conducting of operations, conducting of mobilization, and providing host country support to the allied forces. Sme rodina would focus on modernization especially because, according to the movement's opinion ‘In the defence and protection of its own borders and critical infrastructure, Slovakia cannot depend on the allies' current willingness to provide support’.

In a united voice, all the parties also argue for intensified defence cooperation with Slovakia's neighbours in Central Europe.

**SLOWER WITH THE EUROPEAN ARMY**

Plans for a Common European Defence came to life after the EU Global Strategy was created. Major ‘credit’ also goes to the American protectionist and isolationist policy under the Trump administration after 2016. Due to such set-up, allies in NATO have been much more concerned whether Article Five of the Washington Treaty is as applicable as it was before.

In addition, with the gathering storm of the migration crisis, the Union has realized that its citizens are increasingly aware of the unrest beyond its borders. However, flexing muscles and spreading protective wings is hardly possible. Europe's ambition to have a stronger voice in NATO had no foundation either in a strong and prepared army, nor is it reflected in military investments. Finally, the plan to build a strong European pillar within
Slovak Parties Want to Develop the Army Only After the Approval of National Strategies

Analysis of the Defence Plans of the Slovak Political Parties

Edited by Lucia Yar

NATO has sparked a debate among politicians and experts about how autonomous European defence cooperation actually is or possibly may be.

Slovak politicians were also involved in this debate. Currently, there are many more talks about the European defence than ever before. Slovak National Party (SNS) is most open to the concept of building a common European army – in the form of armed forces outside NATO leadership. However, it insists on the form of a defensive alliance, not as a supranational army, which, according to SNS, would mean the loss of sovereignty.

According to Jaroslav Paška (SNS), the European wing within NATO ´should take on greater competences in the defence of Europe and (we should) rely less on US decision-making´.

The coalition of PS/Spolu would follow on the imaginary scale of promoting a closer defence cooperation within the EU. However, they put it under the ´Transatlantic umbrella´ as ´the gradual establishment of a common European defence pillar within NATO´. ´Any artificial construction for the creation of a European army is premature, because neither political nor socioeconomic conditions have been created, ´ Pavel Macko adds.

Za ľudí supports strengthening of the cooperation, however, it points out that autonomous European defence cannot substitute NATO. ´In the next few decades, security can only be ensured with the help of the Alliance,´ said former Slovak Ambassador to NATO Tomáš Valášek.

The statement by Igor Matovič, OĽaNO’s ex-candidate for the European Parliament from one year ago, that the EU ´should stand on its own feet within NATO, in order to make Europe a great power´ was not reflected in the movement’s latest program. The movement now stresses that the creation of a common European defence will in fact be a long process.

KDH also draws attention to the threat of duplicity of defensive Euro-structures and the Alliance. However, it expresses its support for the concept of a European Defence Union.

SaS is rather sceptical. It wants Slovak soldiers to engage in European operations only within humanitarian and training missions, or in conflicts that pose a threat to the EU.

The distrust was also confirmed by Milan Krajniak, deputy chair of Sme rodina, who claims that the debate on the European army opens up almost every decade. He claims to be more likely to imagine a closer cooperation especially among the V4 partners. However, in its program, the movement declares support for the joint development of defence capabilities within the EU.

GREATER ROLE FOR THE NSA IN CYBERSECURITY

In recent years, the concept of cyber security has become a new element in the overall sphere of security, not only in Europe but worldwide. Although the Slovak Republic and the current government (including the Defence Ministry, which lists it as one of the top three of its priorities) have seen cyber security as a key component of national security, none of the parties of the political spectrum regards the present legislation in this area to be sufficient.

However, the proposals of the parties most likely to reach parliament, are diverse. This also suggests that the ways to counter cyber threats are still not fully established and agreed upon at the European, nor the Transatlantic level.

Sme rodina considers cyber-attacks to be the most serious of the new security threats. It also sees the solution in establishing of ´an independent office that will merge the cyber security activities of the National Security Office (NSA) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Investment and Informatization so that the management of cyber security would be performed by a single agency´. Nevertheless, Milan Krajniak, in an interview with EURACTIV, stated that ´we currently have a well-established core state infrastructure to combat cyber threats´.

Za ľudí wants to subordinate a separate section of cyberspace threats under the Prime Minister’s Office, within the Security Council. In general, Tomáš Valášek would support ´a fundamentally new role for the Security Council´.

Jaroslav Nad stresses the cross-sectoral character that an institution covering cyber threats should have: ´Ideally, a separate institution would be created, such as those in
the Czech Republic or Hungary. And if not, then it should be covered under the NSA for example ‘, he said. OĽaNO also plans to create a separate headquarters for special forces and cyber defence. Likewise, in completing the heavy armoured brigade, the movement would like to include ‘supportive elements of cyber defence’.

**PS/Spolu** proposes establishing of a Coordination Centre for Hybrid Threats and Disinformation, modelled according to similar institutions in other European countries. **Pavel Macko** explains that the centre should ‘capture and evaluate hybrid threats in a timely manner’ but they would ‘hand them over to the primary capability carriers’. ‘The centre is not a ‘super-ministry’, nor is it an office of any department. However, it is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of the potential threat’, he adds. Like the parties mentioned above, the two-party coalition wants to strengthen the responsibilities of the Security Council.

**KDH** also talks about cooperation between the state, as well as non-governmental and civil sectors. It would also support ‘greater involvement of the Slovak Republic in the fight against these new challenges, both within NATO and the EU’.

Neither the program of **SaS** (which focuses only on ‘making transparent procurement in the framework of cyber defence”) nor that of **SNS**, present any new proposals in this area.

*This article was edited and translated by Lucia Yar.*