



Integrated Country Strategy

Slovak Republic

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Slovakia marked its 25th anniversary of independence in 2018 as a prosperous, free, stable and secure European democracy. It has proven a reliable partner and ally for the United States, contributing to global security operations and NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. Its export-oriented manufacturing economy, aided by membership in the Eurozone, has allowed Slovakia to maintain high economic growth and sharply lower unemployment, although regional disparities in both are stark. A strong civil society and high-quality, free news media – both a legacy of resistance to the authoritarian government in power during Slovakia's first five years of independence – fortify Slovak democracy to this day.

Many admirable attributes of Slovak society contributed to Slovakia's achievements over the past 20 years. One factor, though, was decisive: the choice of the Slovak people to cast their destiny where their values lie – in the West, and notably within NATO and the European Union. Despite Slovakia's remarkable success as a full member of the Trans-Atlantic family of democracies that share its values, many Slovaks are uneasy today about too strongly identifying with the West and its model of governance. More than half wish to see Slovakia as somewhere between East and West, with many favoring outright neutrality. A plurality of first-time voters in 2016 cast ballots for a neo-Nazi party that now holds nearly 10% of the seats in parliament. As in other Western democracies, public faith in government and national institutions is shaky. Widely held perceptions of government corruption and inadequate delivery of public services such as health care, education, and infrastructure exacerbate public distrust. This distrust, combined with the disinformation that distorts public debate, gives oxygen to extremists and others who would undermine the Western democratic order.

Against this complex background, our Mission strives to support, in every possible way, Slovakia's trajectory as an increasingly stronger partner and ally for the United States in confronting global challenges. A focus on Slovak capabilities alone, however, is insufficient. The fuel for Slovakia's positive trajectory is its Western values. Sustaining that trajectory requires Slovak society to recognize the link between its values and its success, the responsibilities its values imply, and the threat of malign influence that seeks to weaken Slovak bonds to its natural community of values. Our Mission thus summarizes the following goals under the broad strategy of helping Slovakia strengthen its capabilities, commitment, and resilience as a friend, partner, and ally of the United States.

Our first goal – **Slovakia expands bilateral and multilateral cooperation to strengthen regional and global security and stability and confront hybrid threats** – seeks to help Slovakia become a more active and capable partner in confronting the challenges facing the West. We will help our Ally strengthen its military capabilities so that it can fulfill its NATO responsibility to protect a free and peaceful Europe. As hybrid threats open new, non-military avenues of strategic competition, our shared security depends on Slovakia marshaling a whole-of-government response to the full range of its hybrid vulnerabilities. We will help our Ally meet this challenge by sharing U.S. expertise on strategic communications, cyber defense, and screening of foreign direct investment (FDI). To safeguard broader regional and global stability, we will partner with Slovakia in promoting Western interests in Europe and around the world, including by expanding the benefits of membership in the Western community of nations to emerging partners and allies.

Democratic governance is the foundation of Slovakia's committed membership in the West. Corruption and struggles to deliver key services like healthcare and education lower public trust in government and

undermine faith in democracy. The persistent popularity of neo-Nazi politicians shows that many Slovaks feel democracy is not working. Our second goal – **Slovakia strengthens the resilience and responsiveness of its democratic institutions** – will focus our efforts on increasing capacity and political will to combat corruption, strengthen the rule of law, and rebuild public trust in the judiciary, prosecution service, and other key institutions. We will do this by continuing to highlight these issues in public and private, but also by sharing U.S. expertise to assist the Slovak government in implementing meaningful institutional reforms. We will encourage results-oriented cooperation and dialogue on rule of law, good governance, and transparency issues with the business community and the American Chamber of Commerce, civil society, the media, and the government. An informed public is necessary to sustain a modern, resilient, and responsive democracy, and we will support the capacity and freedom of the Slovak press and civil society to give citizens the tools and information to participate fully and responsibly in political life.

Our third goal is to **strengthen and grow the foundation of Slovakia's economy to support global economic health, advance commercial opportunities, and increase Slovakia's capability and resilience as a U.S. global partner**. We will prioritize increasing U.S. exports to Slovakia and mutual investment activities to further develop the deep commercial bonds between our countries. We will use the momentum of Slovakia's own successful export economy to secure broad support among European partners for a productive trade dialogue with the United States. Increasing trade and investment requires a better business climate, including reforms to the legislative process, labor market, and education system, so that businesses have the predictability, transparency, and human resources to grow. Entrepreneurship and improved, sustainable development and investment in innovation, clean technology, and energy efficiency will also help diversify and strengthen Slovakia's economic base. At the same time, we will work with Slovakia to protect the inputs of its economy and its energy security by encouraging further diversification of supplies, routes, and sources to reduce vulnerability to Russian energy blackmail.

Finally, we will **engage the Slovak public to build support for shared values**, thereby reinforcing Slovakia's commitment to the West and our common Trans-Atlantic identity. Significant segments of Slovak society do not identify their country as fully embedded in the West, increasing Slovakia's vulnerability to the Russian government's efforts to erode support for Slovakia's Western orientation and democratic institutions. We will highlight Slovakia's place in the West and longstanding Trans-Atlantic ties through increased official and people-to-people engagement with vulnerable populations and by encouraging greater participation in exchange programs among Slovak youth. We will also support efforts to practice our shared values and advance the rights of minorities and vulnerable communities, helping Slovakia unlock the full potential of all of its citizens, and preventing extremists from abusing these issues to promote their hate-based ideologies and anti-Western, pro-Russian messages.

While we help build a stronger future for the U.S.-Slovak partnership outside the Embassy's walls, we must also undertake a significant re-investment in our management platform in Bratislava by successfully securing a site for our relocation to a New Embassy Compound (NEC). Relocating our Embassy will renew the proverbial lease on our visible, influential presence here for the coming century.

As a country team we will continue to review progress on our strategy semi-annually. We will use these discussions to adjust our approach in light of new challenges and opportunities, and to respond to the continually evolving efforts of our adversaries.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: With encouragement from U.S. programming and engagement, Slovakia expands bilateral and multilateral cooperation to strengthen regional and global security and stability and confront hybrid threats.

Mission Objective 1.1: With help from U.S. programming and engagement, Slovakia strengthens its military capability and demonstrates its commitment to a free and peaceful Europe by channeling increased defense spending into modernizing its military, expanding its defense capacity, and increasing military readiness and interoperability with U.S./NATO forces.

Mission Objective 1.2: Slovakia supports the EU, NATO, and other U.S. allies in our shared non-military efforts to confront threats to regional and global security and stability while aiding the development of aspiring alliance partners.

Mission Objective 1.3: U.S. programming and engagement helps Slovakia adopt a whole-of-government approach to addressing its vulnerability to hybrid threats, including disinformation, cyber attacks, and malign economic activities.

Mission Goal 2: The United States supports Slovakia's efforts to strengthen the resilience and responsiveness of its democratic institutions.

Mission Objective 2.1: U.S. programming and engagement help Slovakia strengthen the rule of law and develop its political culture to fight corruption and increase public trust in democratic institutions.

Mission Objective 2.2: U.S. programming and engagement sustain a free and vibrant press and strengthen the ability of Slovak media and civil society institutions to improve transparency and promote good governance.

Mission Goal 3: Strengthen and grow the foundation of Slovakia's economy to support global economic health, advance commercial opportunities, and increase Slovakia's capability and resilience as a U.S. global partner.

Mission Objective 3.1: U.S. exports to Slovakia continue to grow and Slovak investment activities into the United States increase.

Mission Objective 3.2: U.S. efforts help Slovakia improve its business climate and education system to support a diversified, entrepreneurial, and sustainable economy across the whole country.

Mission Objective 3.3: U.S. efforts help Slovakia improve its energy security and sustainability through diversification of suppliers, routes, and sources.

Mission Goal 4: Engage the Slovak public to build support for shared values.

Mission Objective 4.1: U.S. programming and engagement encourages the Slovak public to identify as part of the Trans-Atlantic community, internalize democratic values, and reject hate-based extremist ideologies.

Mission Objective 4.2: U.S. programming and advocacy support Slovak government and civil society efforts to advance the rights of minorities and vulnerable communities; promote gender equality; fight discrimination and prejudice; and encourage the full integration of minorities into Slovak society.

Management Objective 1: Successfully secure a site for a relocation to a New Embassy Compound (NEC).

Management Objective 2: Mission planning and programming improves our level of preparation for a crisis and possible evacuation of Mission members or U.S. Citizen public.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: With encouragement from U.S. programming and engagement, Slovakia expands bilateral and multilateral cooperation to strengthen regional and global security and stability and confront hybrid threats.

Description and Linkages: We seek an active partnership with our Slovak allies in defending the West while expanding the benefits of membership in our community of nations to new partners. Mission Goal 1 supports Pillars I and III of the National Security Strategy, State-USAID Joint Strategic Goal 1 and Objectives 3.1 and 3.2, and EUR Joint Regional Strategy Goals 1 and 3.

Mission Objective 1.1: With help from U.S. programming and engagement, Slovakia strengthens its military capability and demonstrates its commitment to a free and peaceful Europe by channeling increased defense spending into modernizing its military, expanding its defense capacity, and increasing military readiness and interoperability with U.S./NATO forces.

Justification: Slovakia is a reliable NATO Ally that contributes to out-of-area security operations as well as efforts to strengthen regional security. However, its ability to contribute more to the achievement of shared security goals is limited by a lack of capacity in its Armed Forces, persistent difficulties in maintaining military readiness, and a continued reliance on obsolete Soviet-era equipment. Slovakia is taking steps to address these limiting factors through increased defense spending and a major military modernization program. We will leverage these efforts as well as the evolving security situation in Europe to enable Slovakia to become a more capable and active Ally. To that end, we will focus our engagement on building Slovakia's military capacity through available security cooperation and security assistance programs, facilitating increased interaction between Slovak forces and U.S. and NATO counterparts, and promoting U.S. solutions to Slovak modernization needs.

Mission Objective 1.2: Slovakia supports the EU, NATO, and other U.S. allies in our shared non-military efforts to confront threats to regional and global security and stability while aiding the development of aspiring alliance partners.

Justification: Slovakia is a key partner and ally in confronting shared challenges to security and stability around the globe. As a NATO Ally and EU Member State, Slovakia's voice is influential in shaping the West's response to increasing strategic competition. Slovakia can use its unique experience as a relatively newly independent country and its relatively recent accession to NATO and the EU to assist aspiring partners in joining the Western alliance.

Mission Objective 1.3: U.S. programming and engagement helps Slovakia adopt a whole-of-government approach to addressing its vulnerability to hybrid threats, including disinformation, cyber attacks, and malign economic activities.

Justification: Although Slovak civil society has been actively engaged in identifying and countering Russian disinformation, the Slovak government has not been as actively involved. The establishment of a Strategic Communication Unit in the Ministry of Foreign and European (MFEA) Affairs in 2017 was a promising start, though it remains understaffed, and has limited participation from other government agencies. Additionally, there is no consensus across the Slovak political spectrum nor among the Slovak electorate on the hybrid threats posed by Russia, China, and other potential rivals. To increase Slovak resilience to hybrid threats, we will engage our Slovak counterparts and assist in coordinating a holistic response to the full range of Slovakia's vulnerabilities.

Mission Goal 2: The United States supports Slovakia's efforts to strengthen the resilience and responsiveness of its democratic institutions.

Description and Linkages: Resilient, responsive democratic institutions are the foundation of Western political civilization, and our shared democratic traditions join the United States and Slovakia as committed friends, partners, and allies. Mission Goal 2 supports Pillar IV of the National Security Strategy, State-USAID Joint Strategic Objectives 1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 3.1, and 3.3, and EUR Joint Regional Strategy Goal 4.

Mission Objective 2.1: U.S. programming and engagement help Slovakia strengthen the rule of law and develop its political culture to fight corruption and increase public trust in democratic institutions.

Justification: Corruption and even the appearance of corruption hollow out democratic institutions, rendering them vulnerable to external political and criminal influences and reducing the public's trust in government, the free market, and democracy itself. Slovakia is last in the EU in public perceptions of judicial independence, and its inefficient justice system is a major source of public distrust. Frequently cited problems include Slovak police susceptibility to political influence, a lack of external control mechanisms in the prosecution service, and nominations to high-level positions are made non-transparently without official competence or ethical criteria. To fight corruption and promote rule of law reforms in Slovakia, our Embassy will continue to prioritize these issues in our diplomatic engagement with Slovak officials, civil society, media, like-minded embassies, and the public. We will support efforts to develop and implement meaningful reforms that shrink the space for corruption and hold corrupt actors accountable to promote democratic resilience. We will encourage the consolidation of a representative, results-oriented political culture that builds the political will to respond to the public's demands for efficient and honest government.

Mission Objective 2.2: U.S. programming and engagement sustain a free and vibrant press and strengthen the ability of Slovak media and civil society institutions to improve transparency and promote good governance.

Justification: An informed public is the foundation of a modern, resilient, and responsive democracy. Media and civil society can play an important role in informing the public by uncovering wrongdoing, calling for greater accountability, and promoting good governance. To support Slovak media and civil society in fulfilling this watchdog role, the Embassy will work to build their capacity through training and professional development opportunities, exchanges, and deepening our ties with media and civil society contacts. Consolidation of the media sector poses a potential challenge to editorial independence, while libel lawsuits, intimidation, physical violence, and allegations of foreign manipulation are used as tools to stifle full journalistic and civil society freedom. Failure to protect the vital role of the media and civil society could degrade democracy, promote public apathy, and empower anti-Western forces.

Mission Goal 3: Strengthen and grow the foundation of Slovakia's economy to support global economic health, advance commercial opportunities, and increase Slovakia's capability and resilience as a U.S. global partner.

Description and Linkages: Promoting American and Allied prosperity is key to our economic engagement overseas. Mission Goal 3 supports Pillar II of the National Security Strategy, State-USAID Joint Strategic Objectives 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, and EUR Joint Regional Strategy Goal 2.

Mission Objective 3.1: U.S. exports to Slovakia continue to grow and Slovak investment activities into the United States increase.

Justification: An economically stable Slovakia provides commercial opportunities for U.S. businesses, and the financial capability to be a strong partner in NATO and other regional organizations. A dynamic and growing Slovak economy creates firms that import U.S. goods and services, partners with U.S. companies, and invests into the U.S. market. Free and fair trade is an important component of the global trading system. Slovakia is a manufacturing-based and export-driven economy that greatly benefits from the EU single market and access to the U.S. market. Trade is managed collectively by the European Union, and Slovakia can have a positive voice in pushing for greater openness in trade. Without the promotion of free trade by some member states of the European Union, greater trade frictions are possible.

Mission Objective 3.2: U.S. efforts help Slovakia improve its business climate and build consensus for needed reforms in the education system to support a diversified, entrepreneurial, and sustainable economy across the whole country.

Justification: An improved business climate creates a more transparent and open domestic market in Slovakia. This will allow the economy to reduce corruption and give greater opportunities for small and medium enterprises and technology companies. Transparency will improve government procurement and increase the possibility that U.S. firms will be able to fairly compete for and win government contracts. As a whole, it will greatly improve market access for U.S. commercial activities. An education system that develops critical thinking skills will improve the quality of the local workforce for knowledge-based sectors of the company, while also reducing the susceptibility of Slovaks to disinformation. Without improvements in the business climate, Slovakia is unlikely to diversify its economy in a way that is complementary to the United States. A better-educated workforce will improve the productivity of local workers employed by U.S. investors. Without greater reform, Slovakia will continue to struggle with corruption and an oversized influence from politically-connected business tycoons.

Mission Objective 3.3: U.S. efforts help Slovakia improve its energy security and sustainability through diversification of suppliers, routes, and sources.

Justification: Dependence on a single supplier, route, or energy source is an economic and security vulnerability. Slovakia is overly reliant on Russia as a single source for nuclear fuel, oil, and gas imports. The promotion of alternative fuel sources can help reduce Slovakia's complete dependence on nuclear fuel imports from Russia. North-South pipelines help to improve flows of gas around the region, and improve price competition. Slovakia needs to increase its climate-friendly energy sources beyond the existing nuclear and hydro, exploring promising potential in other renewables that offer U.S. export opportunities, while avoiding market-distorting high energy prices resulting from over-regulation. If Central and Eastern Europe are unable to build new North-South gas pipelines, they will be stuck with further reliance on East-West infrastructure that creates dependence on single energy suppliers.

Mission Goal 4: Engage the Slovak public to build support for shared values.

Description and Linkages: Slovak public support for shared values increases the long-term resilience of our partnership in the face of adversaries' efforts to divide us.

Mission Goal 4 supports Pillar IV of the National Security Strategy, State-USAID Joint Strategic Objectives 1.4, 2.2, and 3.3, and EUR Joint Regional Strategy Goals 3 and 4.

Mission Objective 4.1: U.S. programming and engagement encourages the Slovak public to identify as part of the Trans-Atlantic community, internalize democratic values, and reject hate-based extremist ideologies.

Justification: Significant segments of Slovak society, particularly outside of Bratislava, do not identify Slovakia as part of the Western, Trans-Atlantic community of nations but rather place Slovakia somewhere between the East and West, threatening its long-term commitment to the West. Support for Slovakia's membership in NATO is markedly lower than in neighboring V4 countries. Vulnerable populations, particularly young people in economically depressed areas, do not fully support democratic values and increasingly accept hate-based extremist ideologies, with the neo-Nazi People's Party-Our Slovakia receiving a plurality of support from first-time voters in the last national parliamentary election. The Russian government exploits these vulnerabilities to erode support for a pro-Western foreign policy and democratic institutions, and some Slovak politicians feel they must publically distance themselves from NATO and the United States to appease these voters. The Embassy will seek to increase official and people-to-people engagement with vulnerable populations, promote increased travel and participation in exchange programs among Slovak youth, and highlight Slovakia's place in the West and longstanding Trans-Atlantic ties. A failure to improve public perceptions of Slovakia's place in the Trans-Atlantic community of democracies could result in decreased Slovak support for Western policy objectives.

Mission Objective 4.2: U.S. programming and advocacy support Slovak government and civil society efforts to advance the rights of minorities and vulnerable communities; promote gender equality; fight discrimination and prejudice; and encourage the full integration of minorities into Slovak society.

Justification: Support for minority rights is relatively low in Slovakia, a largely homogenous and relatively conservative country. Refugees, migrants and Roma face widespread discrimination, and official efforts to integrate these individuals are minimal. LGBTI persons and women also face significant discrimination in Slovakia. Surveys show domestic violence and sexual harassment is widespread, although there is little public discussion of how to address these problems. The Embassy will work to build greater public and political support for minority and women's rights in Slovakia through partnership with civil society organizations working in these areas, as well as through its own public outreach and engagement efforts. A failure to achieve better integration of minorities and women into Slovak society could prevent Slovakia from reaching its full economic potential, increase disaffection with democracy among vulnerable populations, and strengthen the position of extremist groups promoting hate-based ideologies and anti-Western, pro-Russian messages.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: Successfully secure a site for a relocation to a New Embassy Compound (NEC)

Justification: Embassy Bratislava, located on a historic square in the heart of Bratislava's old town, is currently housed in two adjacent buildings – the U.S. government-owned Chancery and the leased Annex building, both of which date back to the mid-19th century and bring with them a host of security and infrastructure challenges. Concrete progress toward the acquisition of a NEC site will help resolve issues raised by the city vis-à-vis removal of our security fence. OBO has identified a primary site that is an assemblage of five different parcels. As negotiations proceed for the purchase of these five parcels, post will continue to work to achieve host country cooperation and approval through the process. Failure to secure a NEC site will lead to increased maintenance expenses and tenuous public relations.

Management Objective 2: Mission planning and programming improves our level of preparation for a crisis and possible evacuation of Mission members or U.S. citizen public.

Justification: Given the emergence in Europe of new terrorist threats by “lone-wolf” actors who could strike at any time, the Embassy will work to increase its crisis-preparedness posture to ensure that we are ready to coordinate quickly within the Mission, with neighboring missions, with the host government, and with Washington in the event of an emergency which requires the evacuation of U.S. Mission members or members of the U.S. citizen public.