



Minister meets Allied soldiers

(22 April) A new Allied battlegroup is being formed under Czech command in Slovakia. So far, CZE, NLD, DEU and U.S. troops along with their equipment have deployed to our country as part of NATO's eFP. This task force is being stood up in response to the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, with the view to bolstering Slovakia's eastern border, and hence NATO.

While on a visit to 81st Wing Sliac, Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad, Deputy Defence Minister Marian Majer and Chief of Defence Gen Daniel Zmeko were delighted to meet Allied service members stationed there.

Mr Nad said: "144 German and 126 Dutch soldiers, tasked with operating the Patriot system, a NATO eFP GBAD component, are currently deployed to Sliac. This is an important proof of NATO's unity and solidarity in delivering collective defence." As Minister Nad mentioned, NATO's eFP troops are also stationed at TC Lešt. After having a conversation with the commanders of the German and Dutch contingents, the MOD leaders received a tour of the 81st Wing grounds and premises used by Allied soldiers, including the tent camp, the logistics and operations centre, the Patriot operational site, the accommodation facilities, as well as inspecting the progress of refurbishment works to a local building.



Further investment in infrastructure

(24 April) The MOD is continuing to improve Service conditions for soldiers. Spending more on infrastructure and better working conditions also concerns the barracks and units based in Zvolen, where the MOD is planning to invest over €1.7m over the next five years. A new Operations Centre is being built at 2nd Slovak Air Force Brigade Zvolen from where military professionals will control and protect SVK airspace on a 24/7 basis. For this project, the MOD has also received funding from the NATO Security Investment Programme (NSIP), thereby securing €1.4m of savings from the state budget. "Last year alone, repairs were conducted to roofs, ceilings, air tech systems, electrical fittings, air conditioning systems, heating devices, as well as replacing windows. This year we are continuing with the repairs and modernisation of infrastructure. We have made giving our soldiers what they need for their service to the country our priority," said Minister Nad, who joined Deputy Minister Majer in inspecting the progress of construction works on the Zvolen base and at Sliac AB. Compared to 2021, this year the MOD is planning to invest 730,000 euros, a tenfold increase, in infrastructure at Sliac AB. Over the next seven years, an additional €100m is expected to be invested in infrastructure to support the arrival and operations of F-16 fighter jets. The work will include constructing new taxiways, entrance gates and substations and replacing the PSR, SSR and PAR radars.

On defence planning priorities

(21 April) Deputy Defence Minister Marian Majer spoke with Mr Paul Savereux, the Director of Defence Planning, Defence Policy and Planning (DPP) Division at NATO HQ, to discuss defence planning priorities. In the context of scrutinising Allies' defence plans, the main subjects of the meeting were Slovakia's defence capabilities development, defence expenditure, and ongoing and future equipment plans. Mr Majer said: "The Slovak Government has made delivering the NATO Capability Targets its high priority. We have been working very intensely towards reaching 2% of GDP on defence spending at the earliest possible opportunity and investing a minimum of 20% of that into the modernisation of our Armed Forces." Mr Majer went on to say: "In the coming period, we are going to make significant investments into our Army. Most recently, on 30 March 2022, the Slovak Government gave the MOD the mandate to sign a contract to procure 76 Patria 8x8 wheeled AFVs. In addition, the bids for the Tracked AFV Programme are in the process of being evaluated." The meeting with the Director of NATO Defence Planning in Bratislava has taken place in the context of a series of bilateral meetings between Slovakia and NATO, the outcomes of which will be incorporated into the upcoming NATO DPCR, conducted on a 2-year assessment cycle as part of the NDPP.



- Up to 11 members of the SVK Military Police are due to operate out of a German Navy frigate as part of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1. Their six-month deployment will start from this May. This comes as the Alliance responds to the war in Ukraine. The MOD's proposal has been greenlighted by the government and still needs the approval of Parliament.

- The training and exercises programme features a specialist training for eleven members of the SVK Military Police ahead of their operational deployment to a German Navy vessel. Up to 50 Qatari soldiers are expected to come to Slovakia for training this May. This follows on from the document that the MOD has submitted for accelerated interdepartmental consultations.

- The ECAV Bishopric Office hosted a meeting of chaplains and employees of the Central Office of Ecumenical Pastoral Service in the SVK Armed Forces and Armed Corps on 21 Apr. To mark 15 years of the Office, Chaplain in Chief Col Viktor Sabo presented the Crystal Cross to selected chaplains and employees for their dedicated service. Bishop General Ivan Elko congratulated the recipients.

- As part of the concert series *Through the Eyes of the Heart*, the Large Concert Hall of Slovak Radio hosted a fundraising concert organised by the Central Office of Ecumenical Pastoral Service in cooperation with the Military Support Agency and the Ars ante portas Civic Association. Defence Minister Nad took patronage over the event. The concert was dedicated to Ukrainian children in need.

- Under the command of Chief of Staff 11 Mech Bn Maj Jozef Varchol, 11 Mech Bn Martin hosted a complex command staff rehearsal at a forward deployed command post (CP). The aim was to process the Commander's operational order for Op Slovak Shield 2022. During the planning process, they worked with a C2 system for designing operational orders. At the same time, drivers of the Battalion drove combat vehicles in daytime and nighttime conditions.

- Over Easter, members of the Roman Catholic Bishopric of the Forces, led by vicar Col Jozef Paluba, offered their services at Slovakia's eastern border. In addition to helping with humanitarian aid, they supported priests of the local communities and provided sacramental and liturgical services to volunteers, members of the Forces, and Ukrainian refugees crossing into Slovakia inside a mobile chapel at the Vyšné Nemecké border crossing.

- Race walkers of the Dukla Military Sports Club participated in the 41st 50-km Dudince Race Walk Competition on 23 Apr. Miroslav Uradnik claimed his 10th SVK Champion title and Michal Morvaj came in second. Both race walkers thus qualified for the European Championships. The winners of the Dudince Race Walk Competition were Massimo Stano (ITA) and Qieyang Shijie (CHIN), 20-km race walk winners at the Tokyo Olympics.

- The MOD has issued a traffic warning to motorists as 30 Allied road movements are scheduled to take place across Slovakia from 25 Apr to 1 May 2022. Over the same period, the SVK military will conduct road movements from/to: Lešt – Hlohovec, Nitra – Prešov, Martin – Prešov, Michalovce – Prešov, Sliac – Moldava nad Bodvou and back, Prešov – Trebišov and back, Kamenica nad Cirochou – Trebišov, Prešov – Moldava nad Bodvou, Trebišov – Prešov, Moldava nad Bodvou – Michalovce a Michalovce – Martin. Also planned for next week are SVK military rail movements.

Continued support for Ukraine

(20 April) Discussions on repairs to Ukrainian military equipment in Slovakia are in their final phase. Talks are also ongoing to supply Zuzana howitzers to Ukraine, however, the final number of howitzers has not been agreed yet. Slovakia will provide them on a commercial basis, but there are still some legal issues to be resolved. This information was provided by Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad after the government's latest session. On the howitzers, Minister Nad said: "We are trying to establish the legal way forward. Negotiations have been underway between MOD-owned Konštruktúra – Defence and the Ukrainian side." Repairs to Ukrainian equipment are expected to be conducted mainly in Modava nad Bodvou.

Mole Cup shooting competition



(22 April) The Simulation Centre of the General M. R. Štefánik Armed Forces Academy (AOS) Liptovský Mikuláš hosted the Mole Cup shooting competition, organised by the Academy's Physical Training and Sports Department and Simulation Centre. 54 participants, divided into nine six-member teams, battled it out at the virtual STING Indoor Shooting Range, the only shooting simulator of its kind in the SVK Armed Forces, which uses the most advanced projection technology for firearms. In the first and second rounds, participants went through 15m and 25m shoots, firing the CZ P09 pistol and the M4 Carbine, respectively. In the final round, Pte Richard Kollarčík won the individuals category, and the All Rounder Team – Men came first in the teams category.

(19 April) The 26th International Staff Officer Course (ISOC) concluded with the graduation ceremony at the International Courses Department, General M. R. Štefánik Armed Forces Academy. In February, six 1st lieutenants from the CZE Armed Forces and 13 officers from the SVK Armed Forces joined the course. Due to the developments in Ukraine, some SVK officers had to report back to their units. The course participants familiarised themselves with the planning and conduct of military operations at the tactical level of command across the full spectrum of conflicts in line with NATO STANAGs. They acquainted themselves with the different trades required in individual tactical combat units and their organisational structure. They gained basic information and skills necessary for the military decision-making process and are now ready to conduct planning at the tactical level. Practical drills also saw them taking on different roles in a variety of scenarios.

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Success of Slovak and Czech cyber defenders on Ex Locked Shields

(23 April) The joint Slovak-Czech cyber defence team placed 5th on Ex Locked Shields 2022, the world's largest and most complex international cyber defence exercise, staged by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (NATO CCD-COE) in Tallinn, Estonia. The exercise, which had taken 6 months to prepare, engaged a total of 24 teams from 32 participating nations worldwide. Given the enormous interest in the exercise, it was necessary to put the countries into joint teams. The joint SVK-CZE team was put to the test through a series of challenges in different categories. The Slovak Republic was represented on the exercise by national cyber experts from the Armed Forces, the government agencies, and the private sector. Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad said: "Our professionals' cyber domain of operations is getting increasingly important and more extensive to include the constantly evolving hybrid threats. I'm pleased to see that Ex Locked Shields 2022 has once again tested the capabilities to defend civilian and military IT systems and critical infrastructure systems in a quality-assured manner, not to mention the excellent results of the Slovak-Czech team."

Locked Shields 2022 was about a technical exercise where the blue teams (BTs) from the participating countries countered the red teams (RTs) drawn from the ranks of the exercise organisers, repelling cyberattacks on the infrastructure entrusted to them. They defended a power station, a water purification station, a satellite system, 5G networks, banks, and military networks against cyberattacks aimed at causing disruptions to their operation.

The exercise also centred on the non-technical aspects of cyber operations such as the legal, media and analytical dimensions of cyberattacks. To this end, individual teams were challenged with international law issues, strategic communications, media landscape analysis, as well as sorting out the incoming tide of information and disinformation. In addition, the ability to conduct forensic analysis and incident reporting was greatly valued for the success of the teams. Slovakia and Czechia have regularly taken part in Ex Locked Shields. In the long run, both countries have achieved excellent results. The SVK cyber defence team placed 7th in 2021 and even took home the top gong in 2016.