



## On prospective cooperation

(7 February) Potential areas of bilateral cooperation to be deepened in the field of Defence, multilateral themes related to the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union, and the security developments in Europe were high on the agenda of the talks between Slovak Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš and the new Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to Slovakia, HE Mrs Marie Louisa Marinakis, which took place on Tue at the Ministry of Defence.

Head of the SVK MOD updated the new Greek Ambassador on the strategic documents being developed by the MOD, which are instrumental to the process of delivering a targeted and long-term sustainable modernisation and replacement of the main armaments and assets in service with the SVK Air Force and SVK Land Forces. He underscored that he can see more space for deepening the Defence engagement between the two countries, especially in mil-to-mil education and training.

Minister Gajdoš offered Greece the option to train its Armed Forces units at TC Lešť and CBRND TTC Zemianske Kostolány, as well as slots available on the International Staff Officers Course (ISOC), provided by the "Gen Milan Rastislav Štefánik" Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš, starting from October 2017.

The partners agreed to organise Greek-Slovak Bilateral Staff Meetings in 2017. "We appreciate that Greece is delivering on its NATO commitment to allocate 2 per cent of GDP for the defence budget. Your level of defence spending is exemplary," highlighted Minister Gajdoš at the meeting. He also welcomed Greece's engagement in Operation EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA and its activity in the Aegean Sea.

On behalf of Greek National Defence Minister Kammenos, Ambassador Maria Louisa Marinakis passed on an invitation to Minister Gajdoš for an official visit to Greece, which would allow the partners to explore specific areas of further cooperation.

## Minister Gajdoš meets with British Ambassador

(9 February) In the Defence engagement between the SVK and UK Ministries of Defence and Armed Forces, the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have traditionally enjoyed very good longstanding relations, which are among the most active in the bilateral domain. Both sides expressed their interest in working together to further develop SVK-UK relations. Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš and the British Ambassador to Slovakia, HE Mr Andrew John Garth, were clearly in agreement on that at today's meeting.

Head of the SVK MOD said: "As a sign of friendship we perceive the fact that despite the UK's announcement of BREXIT your support to our Presidency of the Council of the European Union was significant." He also expressed his appreciation for the regular joint exercise "SLOVAK HAWK" held at Sliac, which is scheduled to take place this year too. Ambassador Garth extended an invitation for the Minister of Defence to participate in an international military tattoo bringing together military bands, which takes place in the United Kingdom.



- Róbert Ondrejcsák, State Secretary of the SVK Ministry of Defence, opened the **Security Forum** on 8 Feb, which is annually organised by the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. This year's Security Forum was held under the auspices of the SVK Minister of Defence and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs.

- **Maj Gen (Rtd) Rudolf Jurica** passed away at the age of 76 on 5 Feb. During his military career, he completed several assignments with the Czechoslovak People's Army and the Army of the Slovak Republic. He was promoted to Major General in 1985. Following the establishment of the SVK REP well until his transfer to the reserve, he held the position of Commander Bratislava Garrison HQ. On conclusion of his military career, he moved to live in Prague. It was also there, on 10 February, that the last farewell ceremony took place as a solemn tribute to him.

- The Mechanised Brigade Prešov hosted an **Advanced Role of S-2** seminar on 6-9 Jan. The aim of the seminar, led by three international partners from the US Army, was to share standard operational procedures (SOP), and to broaden the trainees' expertise in the field of intelligence support in planning and controlling operations.

- At the beginning of his February Military Council, the **Chief of the General Staff of the SVK Armed Forces** awarded two Regular soldiers in recognition of their birthday jubilees. Gen Maxim presented Col Vladimír Stolárik and Col Miroslav Gardlo with the SVK Chief of the General Staff Memorial Cross for their achievements in favour of the SVK Armed Forces.

- The Mechanised Brigade Prešov hosted a two-day working meeting on preparation and certification of the **National Commitment (NC) 2013 Mech Bde**. Attended by 51 soldiers drawn from across the military units contributing to NC 2013 Mech Bde, the meeting updated them on training activities, their overall intent and direction, operational planning and conduct, as well as on preparing the Area of Operations (AO) from the CIMIC and PSYOPS perspective. On Day 2, the participants met in syndicates to discuss setting up the Main and Reserve Command Posts and the arrangements for a joint staff rehearsal in March and a complex staff rehearsal in May.

- 32 Ružomberok-based grammar school attendees visited the Slovak Armed Forces' **Mobile Communications and Information Systems Base (MCISB) Ružomberok**, to familiarise themselves with the SVK Armed Forces and MCISB. After receiving a tour of the base and visiting its chapel, soldiers put on a demonstration of Close Combat (CC) for the students, instructed them in basic CC techniques, and gave them an opportunity to try them out.

## Farewell to Ambassador

(6 February) Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš received the Brazilian Ambassador to Slovakia, HE Mrs Susan Kleebank, who will be concluding her Diplomatic Service appointment in Slovakia. He thanked Ambassador Kleebank for her contribution to developing the Slovak-Brazilian Defence engagement. The Brazilian Ambassador presented a positive assessment of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU. She also informed of Brazil's intention to forge closer collaboration with the V4 Group, with focus on the defence industry. And she extended an invitation to the Minister of Defence to pay an official visit to Brazil. The Minister informed Ambassador Kleebank of the MOD's ongoing work on drafting strategic documents. At the conclusion of the meeting, he wished her much success in her new Diplomatic Service appointment as Consul General of Brazil in Geneva.

## Conference in Vienna

(8 February) Acting on behalf of the Minister of Defence, State Secretary Marián Saloň joined the Slovak Minister of Interior on a working trip to Vienna to participate in a conference entitled "Managing Migration Challenges Together", which saw the attendance of the Interior Ministers of the Salzburg Forum (SF) Member States, the Ministers of Defence of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) Member States, and partners from Southeast Europe. The conference was aimed at agreeing a set of specific proposals by the participating countries, to find a common solution to the migration crisis, especially along the Western Balkans route. At the conclusion of the meeting, the participants adopted a Declaration commissioning work on new measures and a coordination mechanism for the Western Balkans route, should the EU-Turkey refugee deal fail and the situation at the border crossings turn critical.



## Combating snow

(6 February) Combat tracked vehicle drivers, from the Mechanised Battalion Martin, practised driving under challenging field conditions on Sučany Garrison's training grounds. The aim of the exercise was to improve their driving skills to navigate their way through some of the harshest terrain by day and at night. A lot of wet snow placed high demands on the exercising troops who were tackling individual obstacles along an almost four-kilometre cross country circuit. Of them, the most difficult one was wading through deep water, covered by a thick layer of ice. At the water obstacle, drivers practised the vehicles' deep wading and swimming capabilities. Also taking part in the exercise at Sučany and in its preparation phase were the Civilian College Graduate Officers Course members on an internship with the Mechanised Battalion Martin.

## Initial Planning Conference on Exercise TOXIC VALLEY 2017 takes place

(8 February) On 31 Jan – 2 Feb 2017 in Bratislava, the General Staff of the SVK Armed Forces hosted an Initial Planning Conference (IPC) for the 5th edition of the international exercise TOXIC VALLEY 2017, aimed at Sampling and Identification of Chemical Agents (SICA) teams and Mobile Chemical Laboratories (MCL) personnel. The exercise, organised under the auspices of the SVK General Staff, is unique in the CBRN Defence domain in the whole of Europe. This reflects the partner countries' increasingly growing interest in the event.

Taking part in the IPC conference were representatives of the SVK Armed Forces, the SVK Interior Ministry's National Crime Agency, JCBRND COE Vyškov, and of Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Austria, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and United States of America. Day 1 of the IPC saw national level talks with the participation of members of the SVK General Staff, 1st Mech Bde, CBRND Bn/1st Mech Bde, NC EOD and CBRND, and Transport Wing Kuchyňa. Building on them, discussions with the international partners took place on Day 2 and Day 3.



The meeting with the international partners opened with an assessment of the previous exercise – TOXIC VALLEY 2016, focused on sharing expertise and experience from the planning process and the conduct of the exercise itself. This was followed by a presentation of the overall exercise intent of TOXIC VALLEY 2017.

Participation by exercising troops in the 2017 exercise was confirmed by military representatives of Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Austria, Slovenia, the UK and US (Indiana NG), while representatives from the United Kingdom and Germany showed their interest in participating in the role of observers and assessment team members as well.

At the conclusion of the IPC, the participants were briefed on an approved plan with follow-up tasks and activities to the initial exercise planning phase. Its individual points will be used to establish some common ground for organising the Main Planning Conference (MPC) due in April 2017.