



## A visit to Cyprus

(12 December) As part of its official visit to the Republic of Cyprus, the Slovak delegation, headed by Chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Andrej Danko, visited the SVK Armed Forces servicemen and women currently deployed with UNFICYP. During a ceremony at Camp Taty, the Parliamentary Chairman and SVK Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš gave them a Christmas tree, ingredients for Christmas cabbage soup, a wooden nativity set and other gifts to make the festive season they will be spending away from their homes and families more enjoyable.

Speaking in front of the assembled troops, Parliamentary Chairman Andrej Danko said: "Thanks to you, today we have felt pleasantly at ease at each meeting because there was not a single one where Slovak soldiers would not be praised." He used the opportunity to thank the soldiers for the service duties they have been carrying out in Cyprus. Addressing the troops, the head of the MOD, Peter Gajdoš, reminded that the Slovak Contingent (SLOVCON) has been firmly embedded with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus for 15 years already. Over the period, SLOVCON has been contributing to restoring and maintaining the rule of law and order throughout the island. Then, the Minister, along with the delegation members, listened to the soldiers' ideas on how to make a possible improvement in the local conditions of their service.

Slovak troops have served operationally with UNFICYP since 2001 and today SLOVCON numbers 169 SVK Armed Forces service personnel, with one component operating out of Camp Taty in Nicosia and the other one based at Camp Stefanik in Famagusta.

## Talks in Nicosia

(12 December) In Nicosia, Peter Gajdoš held talks with the head of the Cypriot Ministry of Defence, Mr Christoforos Fokaides, on the deepening of bilateral cooperation and the Slovak troops' engagement in the UNFICYP mission. In doing so, he built on his June visit to Cyprus, which marked the 15th anniversary of the start of the SVK Armed Forces' operations with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

"We have an interest in furthering the bilateral cooperation in the field of security, including on European Union soil," he said. He used the occasion to make an offer to the Cyprus National Guard to come and train at the Training Centre Lešt, which is devoted to training the Special Operations Forces (SOF), and at the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Defence Training and Testing Centre Zemianske Kostolany.

The Cypriot Defence Minister, Mr Christoforos Fokaides, conveyed his appreciation for Slovakia's enduring support in resolving the Cyprus issue, especially for its backing of the bi-communal dialogue. "The Cypriot Government passes on its thanks for SLOVCON's valuable contribution to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus and congratulates Slovakia on its successful completion of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during this difficult period for Europe," he said. According to him, the visit of the Slovak Minister of Defence has reinforced the SVK-CYP relations. "Our meeting is taking place in times of dramatic security challenges. We must face them together," he emphasised.

The Ministers exchanged their views on the prevailing problems such as migration, terrorism and extremism. They discussed the options for advancing defence industry cooperation as well.

## Diver from Sered' named the Best NCO

(15 December) Having reviewed the nominations of 5 candidates at the Combined Mechanised Battalion Club Trebišov, the board of judges chaired by the Command Senior Enlisted Leader (CSEL) of the SVK Armed Forces, Command Sergeant Major Vladimír Beluš, decided to recognise Sgt 1st Class Michal Ščepko, of the Engineer Battalion Sered', as the SVK Armed Forces Best NCO of the Training Year 2016. "Sgt 1st Class Ščepko grabbed the judges' attention thanks to his extensive MOS-specific expertise, which he also uses successfully in performance of his current appointment as Platoon Sergeant. Moreover, he has managed to transit from a highly specialist position to a command one. And he sets a very good example for other NCOs to follow," concluded CSM Vladimír Beluš. Sgt 1st Class Ščepko serves as Platoon Sergeant of an Engineer Reconnaissance Platoon. In military diving operations, he is among the best experts in our Armed Forces. This native of Šala has attended a wide range of specialist courses in Slovakia and abroad. He is the only SVK soldier to have made it through the training programme of the elite U.S. Navy SEALs in Florida and California, and has completed a tour of duty in Afghanistan. He serves as a military diving instructor with the SVK Armed Forces.



- On 15 Dec, Chief of the General Staff of the SVK Armed Forces **General Milan Maxim** received representatives of the Czechoslovak Legionnaire Community, led by Brig Gen (Rtd) Emil Boček. Brig Gen Boček appreciated Gen Maxim's support to veterans and awarded him the Memorial Medal of the Association of Foreign Pilots – West 1939-45.

- An **Improvised Explosive Devices Identification and Search C-IED Train the Trainer Course** was held from 28 Nov to 9 Dec at the Engineer Battalion Sered'. The course covered the basic theoretical knowledge about IED-specific issues, the principles for detecting the indicators of IED presence, and the procedures on IED search operations in the field. A total of 20 SVK Armed Forces members participated in the course.

- The **Military Police** has contributed through its support operations to the success of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Military policemen and women have played a role in coordinating and controlling the movements of ministerial delegations, protecting buildings and facilities, and executing episodic and personal protection duties. 130 members of the Military Police have recorded a total of 9,074 hours and covered approx. 59,000km in support of the event.

- On 7 Dec, the panel of judges made up of command sergeant majors from the units subordinate to the Slovak Air Force selected Pte 1st Class Marek Uramkin, a member of the Major General Otto Smik Tactical Wing Sliac, as the **SVK Air Force Best Soldier** in the Other Ranks category, and SSGT Marek Kovalik, a member of the Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade Nitra, as the **SVK Air Force Best NCO** in the NCO category.

- On 8 Dec, the Colonel General Ján Ambruš Helicopter Wing Prešov hosted a comprehensive rehearsal of the **Land-based Search and Rescue Service (LSARS)** operations in winter conditions and at night. The snap rehearsal of the LSARS took place in the evening hours under demanding weather conditions. Despite this, the training missions to rescue people were conducted at a high standard.

- On 8 Dec, the Commander JFC Brunssum lit up the Christmas tree at the International Conference Centre in the Netherlands during a ceremony to open the **Christmas Market**. The aim of the event was to present countries and their traditional Christmas specialities. In its presentation stand, Slovakia mainly offers cakes, Christmas pastry and drinks.

- Col Michal Migát convened the **Military Council of the Director of the Military Police** at the Mountain Hotel Granit Smrekovica on 13-14 Dec. In attendance were the most senior leaders of the Military Police. The event was aimed at evaluating the 2016 third quarter results of the Military Police. The Chief of the Section for MP Policing Activities and the Chief of the Section for MP Investigations delivered briefings on the security situation and criminal offences committed across Defence. Col Migát also introduced his vision for building and developing the Military Police as well as its key tasks for the upcoming period.

- The **Military Skills Competition**, organised for the first time by UNFICYP in 1967 in Cyprus, took place this year on 7 Dec. The Force Military Police Unit (FMPU) set up an eight-member team, which has, for the first time in the history of the competition, brought victory to the FMPU. This was also thanks to the efforts of Capt Vladimír Telesnický, Sgt 1st Class Peter Kacvinský and Sgt 1st Class Milan Benka.

## Imrich Gablech passes away



(16 December) WWII pilot Imrich Gablech, a native of Hrachovište, who, along with another seven Slovak pilots, deserted on 7 June 1939 to Poland's Deblin to link up with the Czechoslovak resistance movement abroad, has passed away at the age of 101. In Poland, he joined the ranks of Polish military aviation as a pilot. Upon outbreak of WWII he was captured while on the retreat on 18 Sept 1939 by the Soviet Army. Until Sept 1941 he was interned in several labour camps located on the territory of the Soviet Union. Upon his release he departed for the United Kingdom where he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF). Imrich Gablech was a recipient of numerous domestic and international military awards and decorations, including, notably, the Czechoslovak War Cross (1946), Czech Order of the White Lion (2009), Polish Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland (2012), and Slovak Order of the White Double Cross (2014).

## Minister awards winners



(14 December) The winners of the 12th Annual Ministry of Defence Literary Competition for secondary school and college students, with the theme of National Pride and Patriotism in the Period of "Likes" announced by Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš, came to the MOD to pick up their prizes. The head of the MOD himself presented the prizes to Tereza Míkáčová, the winner of the secondary school students' category, and Peter Kromka, the winner of the college students' category. The public selected the best essays in an online vote on the MOD Facebook website. Minister Gajdoš appreciated the students' great interest in the literary completion.

## New veteran recognised



(15 December) After more than 70 years since the end of the Slovak National Uprising (SNU), 90-year old František Predajňa filed a request for award of the war veteran status. He received the War Veteran ID Card and Badge during a ceremony, attended by Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš, at the MOD's Hall of Fame. As an 18-year-old partisan, Predajňa joined the SNU operations in the surroundings of Polomka, the village of his origin, while embedded with the Stalin – Jegorov Partisan Group. "Welcome to the ranks of registered war veterans, to you and your fellow warriors belong honour and fame. I would like to thank you for everything you did for our country and its liberation," said the Minister.

## Race walker Matej Tóth becomes 5-time Athlete of the Year



(14 December) 1st Lt Matej Tóth, a member of the Military Sports Club Dukla Banská Bystrica, has won the Athlete of the Year Award for the fourth year in a row. Overall, this is the fifth time he has been named the Best Slovak Athlete in his sporting career. This year's Olympic winner in the men's 50km race walk at the Rio de Janeiro

Olympics took over the award while wearing the SVK Armed Forces officer's uniform. Reflecting on the award, Matej Tóth emphasised that, apart from his family and coach, it is the Dukla Military Sports Club and the MOD that have provided him with the background without which it would have been extremely difficult to achieve success.

Matej Tóth also expressed his gratitude to his coach, 1st Lt Matej Spišák, who ended up being rated as the Best Athletics Coach of the Year by a panel of judges, including sporting experts, coaches, officials and journalists.

From among the athletes, Marcel Lomnický, hammer thrower, has placed second for the third year in a row. MSgt Martina Hrašnová, hammer thrower, placed fifth along with Jana Veldáková, long jumper. Of the 10 best athletes, just as last year, 6 were from the Dukla Military Sports Club. Dana Veldáková, triple jumper, finished 7th, and Sgt Dušan Majdán, race walker, moved from last year's 16th to 10th place.