



## V4 Defence Ministerial

(15 November) The Visegrad Group European Union Battlegroup (V4 EU BG) will be on stand-by for deployment in the second half of 2019. Meeting at the V4 Defence Ministerial in the High Tatras, the V4 defence ministers also decided that the V4 EU BG concept will continue even beyond. This strategic decision may be regarded as a key achievement of the quadrilateral defence cooperation under the SVK V4 Presidency.

On the V4 flagship project, Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš said: "Our joint decision to stand up another V4 Battlegroup is the outcome of truly close and effective cooperation among the Visegrad Group countries and at the same time it is a signal that we are ready to participate in building a strong, secure and responsive Europe. Personally speaking, I welcome this step because the priorities of the Slovak Presidency are becoming a reality."

The other V4 EU BG should be on stand-by in support of the EU in the first half of 2023. The V4 countries are now weighing up the option of doubling the stand-by period and thus keeping the BG on stand-by for the whole duration of 2023. However, this will be subject to analysis.

At today's working sessions, the partners focused on coordinating national positions ahead of the next week's meeting of the EU defence ministers in Brussels, which should be dominated by the EU's new defence and security initiatives with focus on the development of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), European Defence Fund (EDF) in support of EU defence industry, emerging instruments in support of international crisis management activities, and defence capability building in partner countries with the aim of handling security challenges where they arise.

Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš further noted: "In the context of current discussions on matters of European defence and security, this meeting has provided us with an excellent opportunity to share our views on the initiatives which should strengthen them and in the creation of which we have actively and collectively participated with other EU Member States. Today we know that the four of us will be going to the EU Defence Ministerial with a clear and, above all, common vision for their development. The Visegrad Group thus continues to confirm its relevance and feeling for constructive proposals and solutions."

Naturally, the initiatives create potential even for the V4 format, especially when it comes to projects aimed at defence capabilities development or infrastructure development linked to military mobility. According to the ministers, this broad theme will require a nation-wide approach, one involving several central state administration bodies. The V4 MODs will continue to discuss the issue at the expert level, with the aim of presenting specific cooperation proposals at a meeting next spring.

The defence ministers also addressed current initiatives of the North Atlantic Alliance, especially in the context of the July NATO Summit in Brussels and the commitments NATO Allies declared during the meeting of Heads of State and Government, mainly on increased defence spending, defence capabilities development, and greater NATO engagement in projecting stability in its immediate neighbourhood.

## Best Dukla performers receive 2018 Sports Awards

(15 November) Best performers of the Military Sports Centre Dukla Banská Bystrica (VŠC Dukla) received awards in 8 categories for their 2018 sporting successes during an awards ceremony in Banská Bystrica. Also in attendance at the gala evening were Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš and General Secretary of the MOD Service Office Ján Holko. Biathlete Anastasiya Kuzmina was recognised with the Sportsperson of the Year Award. In his speech at the gala evening, Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš said: "I am very pleased that this evening we can award all those who thanks to their efforts and endurance have achieved international sporting successes at the highest level." He went on to stress that the MOD will continue to support sportspeople at the Centre, which he finds of exceptional importance. "It is our duty to create conditions for sportspeople so that they can fully devote themselves to training and competitions," he added. In his speech, Director of the VŠC Dukla Lt Col Roman Benčík spoke of 2018 as a successful year for the Centre, summarised the greatest successes of the year, and thanked all those who contributed to them. "I am proud to announce that we are really good! I also want to say a big thank you to the Ministry of Defence for its support. This year we have managed to fulfil our main goal – to win 27 medals, whereas today we have 29 medals, and I wish you would win at least 30 medals next year," he said.



## Rotations on operations



(16 November) Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš and Chief of Defence Lt Gen Daniel Zmeko welcomed 25 soldiers returning from the NATO Training and Capacity Building Initiative in Iraq (NTCB-I) during a homecoming ceremony at the Repair Battalion in Martin. That same day, he also bid farewell to 34 personnel deploying to Afghanistan in support of NATO's Resolute Support Mission (RSM). As of today, 474 personnel (26 servicewomen) are currently deployed on international crisis missions and operations abroad. In the history of the SVK Armed Forces, 18,500 personnel (521 servicewomen) have rotated in and out of missions and operations abroad to date.

## AOS and V4 MIL education

(15 November) Thanks to the initiative of the General M. R. Štefánik Armed Forces Academy (AOS) in Liptovský Mikuláš, the V4 areas of cooperation will be extended to include professional military education. This was confirmed by the key V4 military education establishments signing the Declaration of Intent Concerning Professional Military Education Enhancement Initiative on 13 November 2018 in Warsaw. The first outcome of this cooperation is the design and certification of a new international course – Initial NATO Joint Operations Planning Course – to be taught at the Slovak Armed Forces Academy.

## Cooperation with Canada



(18 November) State Secretary of the SVK MOD Róbert Ondrejcsák paid a 5-day visit to Canada, to hold a series of bilateral talks with his partners from the Canadian Department of National Defence (DND) and representatives of the Canadian security establishment, as well as to participate in the Halifax International Security Forum (HSF), which is among the world-leading security conferences.

The talks between State Secretary Róbert Ondrejcsák and Canadian Minister of National Defence Harjit Singh Sajjan echoed the significance of the allied bond between Slovakia and Canada, one which is best evidenced through the joint engagement of SVK and CAN forces in the Canadian-led eFP Battlegroup in Latvia. At the meeting, State Secretary Ondrejcsák appreciated Canada's decision to deploy its troops to Europe, a move which will reinforce the transatlantic relationship. Both partners expressed their interest in further enhancing their defence cooperation through operational deployments, education, training and exercises.

■ On 13 Nov, Defence Minister P. Gajdoš met with the Israeli Ambassador to Slovakia, His Excellency Mr Zvi Aviner Vapni at MOD Main Building for talks on potential areas of bilateral cooperation. At the meeting, Ambassador Vapni introduced Col Itaita Brin as the new Defence Attaché of the State of Israel accredited to Slovakia. On the SVK-ISR defence relationship, Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš said: "We regard the State of Israel as one of our most important partners in the field of defence. I trust we will manage to intensify our cooperation in the future."

■ On 17 Nov, Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš and Parliamentary Chairman Andrej Danko attended a ceremony held in observance of **Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day** at the Monument dedicated to the Victims of Communism at the cemetery in Bratislava's Vrakuňa, paying their respects to all executed and tortured political prisoners during the communist regime. To mark this occasion, a ceremony was held at the MOD three days earlier on 14 Nov.

■ **Announcement of new appointments.** Col Norbert Hrib, DCOM 2nd Mech Bde, has assumed the appointment of Chief of the Training and Exercises Planning Branch, Staff for Strategic Planning, SVK GS. Col Róbert Funtal, COS 2nd Mech Bde, has taken up the appointment of DCOM 2nd Mech Bde. Col Ondrej Vaško, Chief of the Operational Planning Branch, Strategic Planning Staff, SVK GS, has taken over as COS 2nd Mech Bde. Col Miroslav Fázik has been appointed to Commander of the Training and Mobilization Manning Base Martin. The outgoing Base Commander, Col Lubomír Podhorec, has taken up an appointment at the Strategic Crisis Management Centre, SVK GS.

■ Personnel of the Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) Service attended a **GSAR nighttime rehearsal** in the field adjacent to the Helicopter Wing Prešov. The SAR training was based on a scenario simulating a UH-60M helicopter crash shortly after takeoff.

■ On 13-14 Nov 2018, Berlin hosted a meeting of **European military chaplains of protestant churches** in the Armed Forces, with the participation of Capt Dávid Vargaštok, Dean – Director of the Head Office of the Ecumenical Pastoral Service in the SVK Armed Forces and Armed Corps.

■ Drivers are asked by the MOD to be alert and drive with care as there will be **22 Allied military road movements**, mainly involving US, CZE and POL troops, across Slovakia between 19 and 25 Nov 2018.

## CBRN specialists from 11 countries in Slovakia

(18 November) For the past week the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense (CBRN) Training and Testing Centre Zemianske Kostolany has hosted a course for lab experts from 11 countries of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The aim of the course is to fine-tune the methodology for working with toxic chemical substances and to improve the psychological resilience of course attendees. This is the 27th such course for OPCW specialists that has taken place at the specialist facility in Slovakia, which is unique insofar as it offers training with real chemical substances. Experts on the course, which will run until 22



November, are deepening their knowledge of identifying, collecting, transferring and analysing toxic chemicals and compounds. "At the CBRN facility in Zemianske Kostolany, which provides them with truly unique conditions for training, they have an opportunity to exercise with real chemicals," said Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš. He went on to say this has been the 3rd such training this year, whereas the SVK MOD regularly makes its CBRN facility available to OPCW specialists for training. "In this way, too, Slovakia confirms its special place among the member states of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons," he added.