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CONFERENCE - TWENTY YEARS OF SLOVAK DIPLOMACY

Peter Rosputinský – Erik Pajtinka*

The Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of establishment of the diplomatic service of the Slovak Republic organised a representative assessment conference „Modern Diplomacy: 20 Years of Service for Slovakia“. The event was held in the premises of Congress Hall of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs on the January 21, 2013, with a number of participants including Slovak diplomats, members of diplomatic corps in the Slovak Republic, practitioners and experts from scientific field as well as third sector representatives. The conference was in scope of media interest and the initial part of the conference was broadcast live by the news television TA3.

The most important guests invited to speak at the conference were outstanding personalities of the Slovak diplomacy who shined not only within our domestic Foreign Service, but also won recognition in a wider frame of multilateral diplomacy and international relations. Here is a list of them in alphabetical order:

- **Miroslav Jenča**, former head of the OSCE Centre in Tashkent, at present Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General and head of United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia,
- **Ján Kubiš**, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, former OSCE General Secretary during two terms, former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, at present Special Representative of the United Nations General

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Secretary for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan,

- **Eduard Kukan**, former long-time Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, former United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy to the Balkans, nowadays Member of the European Parliament
- **Miroslav Lajčák**, former High Representative and EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Managing Director of the European External Action Service in Brussels, at present Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic,
- **Maroš Šefčovič**, ex European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, at present Vice President of the European Commission and European Commissioner for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration
- **Peter Tomka**, President of the International Court of Justice of the UN

An opening speech of the conference was presented by **Miroslav Lajčák**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. He presented his personal perception of the twenty years history of the independent Slovak diplomatic service in a broader context of state creation and its establishment within international community. He considers the Slovak story to be a successful one due to the achieved results and also due to the way they had been achieved. The Minister stated that „*Slovakia is found to be responsible, reliable and legible partner*“, also thanks to the fact that we have managed to build and run the diplomacy department professionally and apolitically. Especially, he emphasized that throughout fifteen years out of twenty there had been a professional diplomat at the head of the Ministry, a fact that helped significantly to defend the state interests continuously and to achieve strategic foreign policy goals. The twenty years period of the independent Slovak Republic existence was characterised by **Miroslav Lajčák** as a process of triple transformation of Slovakia and it's foreign policy. The first transformation was from a candidate state to a member state in relation to the EU; the second transformation was from a consumer to a provider of security in respect to the UN, NATO and EU membership and activities; and, finally, the third transformation was from a recipient to a donor of development aid. Having obtained membership in the important international organisations did not lead to a lack of new strategic tasks for the Slovak

diplomacy. The first and certainly not an easy task will be to perform a significant change in the way how the EU is being perceived in our country. It is crucial to bear in mind that the EU is not a bureaucratic giant somewhere far in Brussels, but that we ourselves are a part of it and as such we shall not be afraid of it and rather put effort to reinforce it. We have to do all of this with respect to our presidency of the Council of the EU in 2013. The second challenge is to keep approximating the standard of living of the more developed EU members and to change our economic structure. It is positive that over the last twenty years we had been able to reduce our economic backwardness in relation to the EU in average by 25%. However, it is necessary to initiate the processes to create a linkage between business and education, and to increase value-added investments or to implement innovations and new technologies in order to narrow the gap between more and less developed countries as fast as possible, which should be the gist of new economic diplomacy. The third area which the Slovak Foreign Service should focus on is the security sphere, where a deeper cooperation with other countries should be expected and an interconnected and integrated defence should be established, for example by the means of common airspace defence of the Central European countries. The fourth task, according to the minister, is to understand our eastern neighbours in every aspect so that we get closer to each other from now on. The last group of live topics for the days to come, as the minister says, are new powers for his ministry concerning the presentation of the Slovak Republic abroad, compatriotic and human rights agenda, coordination of European policies and consular services for citizens abroad. If the Slovak diplomacy succeeds in completing the aforementioned tasks, the successful Slovak story will surely carry on.

Later on, the conference continued as a moderated discussion under a professional supervision of **Peter Stano**, spokesperson at the European Commission in charge of Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. First of all, the above mentioned invited guests commemorated the very first moments of the state establishment and share the stories that happened to them in their posts around the turn of the year 1992. They mentioned moving to the new premises, common state property partition or the beginnings of the Slovak diplomatic missions and the permanent missions to international organisations. Further, they reflected on definition of the current Slovak diplomacy and on the greatest challenge it is facing. **Maroš Šefčovič** expressed his opinion that the Slovak diplomacy is going to take a maturity

exam as for taking new responsibilities not only in the EU and Europe, but also globally, and that our diplomacy should get more europeanized and focused on economy. **Ján Kubiš** emphasized several times that foreign policy reflects internal politics and, therefore, we should first improve our state functioning in the field of domestic politics. All invited guests unanimously alleged that according to them the Slovak diplomacy had not made any strategic mistake so far. However, more of them admitted complications caused by internal political development in certain periods between 1993 and 2012 (for instance the first years after the independent Slovak Republic establishment and the period before early election in 2012). Thereafter the discussants expressed their opinions on comparative advantages of the Slovak diplomatic service, on current issues of energy policy and its position within the state foreign policy and external EU policy, on the V4 cooperation or on the reasons for which the Slovak Republic succeeded in catching up a two years' delay in the process of accession to the EU.

Seeking an internal political consent as a starting point for Slovak foreign policy execution, connection between classic diplomacy, economic diplomacy and parliamentary diplomacy, future of the Hydroelectric Dam at Gabčíkovo in the context of negotiations with Hungary, independent diplomacy academy establishment or a free trade agreement between the EU and the USA – these were the topics for further discussion which was joined also by visitors from the auditorium including some foreign ambassadors accredited to the Slovak Republic. Perhaps the liveliest discussion was raised by the Ecuador Ambassador's questions about the relation between the Slovak diplomatic service and the European External Action Service, and about the status of women in Slovak diplomacy. Since the conference was organised by a faculty preparing students inter alia also for occupations in the field of international relations and diplomacy, the invited guests defined their recommendations for students and persons interested in jobs in Slovak diplomacy concerning what they shall focus on and what they shall pay attention to. The minister **Miroslav Lajčák** defined the fundamental recommendation – to be better than the others.

The conference concluded with the speech given by Prof. PhDr. **Ján Koper**, PhD., the dean of the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. He summed up the contents of the conference, expressed thanks to the speakers and wished Slovak diplomacy a lot of successful years.