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## SLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY; COSTS AND BENEFITS OF INDEPENDENCE

Marek Lenč\*

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**VLČEK, D. – KAŠČÁKOVÁ, D.:** *Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic. Cornerstones, Aims and Implementation.* Praha : Professional Publishing, 2012. 128 p. ISBN 978-80-7431-096-6

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This year, 2013, we commemorate a significant anniversary related to the establishment of the Slovak Republic – 20 years of its independence. Immediately after its establishment Slovakia decided to take active part in regional, European as well international political structures. During the transition period, however, Slovakia had to face severe post-Communist challenges (the restoration of its sovereignty, building of democracy and freedom, modern legal state and market economy) more visibly than our regional partners. This is also one of the reasons why Slovakia is likely referred to be a „hard case“ to categorise in one of the known ideal types of transitions (Kitschelt, 1995) or a „region specific country“ (Heinrich, 1999), while other comparative political theorists considered Slovakia as puzzling if compared with the situation in broader region.

However, after crucial struggles and integration successes of following governments Slovakia could earn moral credits for its missionary zeal in the region of Central Europe. Testifying with the words of our current minister of foreign affairs **M. Lajčák** Slovakia is in relations to the EU likely to remain „an Euro-realist - Euro-positive rather than Euro-enthusiastic - country recognising the benefits of membership but also accepting the responsibilities stemming from it.“

After two decades of independent foreign policy it is therefore more than welcomed to look back at some of the key issues forming our foreign political identity. Of course, to analyse and compress almost 20 years of foreign policy

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into one volume is not an easy task to do. The authors of the reviewed publication "*Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic. Cornerstones, Aims and Implementation*" - **D. Viček** and **D. Kaščáková** deserve therefore our sympathy for concluding a well written political analysis presented in this book. Both authors **D. Viček**, docent in International Relations, and **D. Kaščáková**, PhD. in International Relations, based at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, used their knowledge and experience from the field of international relations in order to accomplish fundamental overview of the last two decades of Slovakia's foreign policy.

Of course, to expect a complex and comprehensive account of the Slovak republic foreign relations would be rather challenging task. The authors instead provide readers with well-founded, chronologically structured, but sectoral political analyses based on analytical approach of partial spheres of political science (foreign policy, security policy). The agenda of the Slovak foreign policy making is mainly captured in regards to institutional frameworks rather than geographical areas. The main aim of the publication - „*to inform readers about development and basic characteristics of Slovak foreign and security policies*” (p. 7) is being accomplished through combination of political analyses of not only main documents dealing with foreign policy of a state (Programme Declarations of governments, foreign policy strategies and security strategies), but also of practical executions of declared foreign political priorities. This aspect certainly increases added value of this book. Bilateral relations are being elaborated in aspect to the key foreign political partners (identified as the United States and the Russian Federation). Multilateral aspect of the research focuses primary on three international organisations (European Union, NATO and Visegrad group).

The whole book consists of five chapters. The outline of the first two chapters offers rather historical and organisational-institutional framework necessary for conduct of Slovak foreign policy. The next three chapters are structured chronologically focusing primary within three main intervals (1993 – 1998, 1998 – 2004, 2004 – 2010) on five key spheres (internal political situation, relations with EU, NATO, key foreign partners and the Visegrad Four group).

In the first chapter authors very briefly introduce the readers with crucial historical events and experience of Slovaks in modern history (establishment of the Czechoslovak republic, Munich Agreement, formation of the Slovak State

during the World War Two, sovietisation of Czechoslovakia, Velvet revolution). This chapter is understandably crucial, providing the readers with professional entry into the issue. Taking into consideration the broader geopolitical situation in Europe after the breakup of the Soviet Union and dissolution of Czechoslovakia authors identify the main institutional and geopolitical challenges of newly born Slovak foreign policy in the second chapter of the book. The second chapter also reflects existing diversity of various conceptual frameworks of early Slovak foreign policy regarding the approaches towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, security policy and regional cooperation.

The content widest (third) chapter is devoted to the conduct of foreign policy during the cabinets of **V. Mečiar** (1993 - 98). The book finds significant intersections between domestic and foreign political situation. Some of the crucial foreign political failures of 3<sup>rd</sup> Mečiar's cabinet combined with worsened bilateral relations with the United States and economic situation are being perceived as a reasons leading to his later electoral defeat. Having chance to read these lines one may ask himself again how successful HZDS (as a „rally” party and political phenomenon) was at the time of change when it came to abstracting powerful feelings of national well-being and patriotic morality. The story is, however, fiendishly complex and present also nowadays at the times of Euro-crisis.

The fourth chapter starts with arrival of the well-known reformer – **Mikuláš Dzurinda** at the stage, who allied in his cabinets (1998-2006) ex-dissidents, economic liberals and veterans of the struggle against **V. Mečiar**. The authors very carefully analyse the changed panorama of Slovakia's foreign policy stemming from „*The Programme of National Restoration*.” In order to overcome „*the international isolation where Slovakia found itself during the last years*” (p. 77) Slovakia launched essential reforms in important sectors of society (e.g. the democratic consolidation, constitutional system, armed forces, the banking and tax systems) after 1998 and expressed its willingness to enter Euro-Atlantic structures and to comply with the requirements of the EU in order to gain the EU membership. Authors reflect also results in regional cooperation (revitalisation) and bilateral relations with the key foreign partners (increase of importance of the United States as a strategic partner and the decrease of the significance of Russia).

The story is of course only complete if we take in the consideration the foreign policy of Slovak republic during the 1<sup>st</sup> cabinet of **R. Fico** (2006-2010).

The fact that the principle of continuity prevails in the authors approach is indicated with the start of this volume in the year 2004 as a turning point. Authors very carefully analyse first occasional discrepancies and dissimilarities stemming from the electoral program of **R. Fico** party SMER-SD and later on from the Programme Declaration, both in 2006, when compared with the previous cabinets of **M. Dzurinda**. Even though Slovakia kept key foreign political foundations of Slovak foreign policy, most of the criticisms headed towards the actions of **R. Fico** as a Prime Minister. Pragmatic style of politics as a result of the Prime Minister visit at the Embassy of Cuba in Slovak Republic on the occasion of anniversary of Castro's revolution, visits of Qaddafi and Hu Jintao, endless spats with Hungary and support of Russia following the 2008 war with Georgia led to criticism abroad which does not escapes authors' attention.

The authors analyse Slovakia's foreign policy until the year 2010 which gave us a full picture of the key issues influencing our foreign policy in the last 18 years. In spite of initial problematic developments in 1993-1998 Slovakia managed to pursue its main foreign political priorities as well as to modernise Slovak foreign policymaking and create a „*Slovakia brand*“. Regarding this aspect the authors formulate on the last two pages future foreign policy priorities which should be based on „*the careful, systematic and periodically updated analysis of current developmental trends in the international system and on the present political and security environment of the Slovak republic*“ (p. 109).