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## **SLOVAK-SERBIAN DEBATE ON NATO: STRENGTHENING DEBATING SKILLS AND PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC VALUES AMONG YOUTH**

**Tomáš Rakonczay\***

This year the Slovak Republic celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its existence as a sovereign democratic state governed by the rule of law. Last two decades brought both hurdles and achievements in the field of international relations and IGOs integration. Speaking of the latter, Slovakia has been successfully admitted as a member state of OECD on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2000, become NATO member on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2004 and EU member state on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013, with regards to NATO membership, Slovak embassy in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, acts as NATO CPE (Contact Point Embassy) with 2 years mandate. Among the main tasks included in the CPE responsibilities supporting NATO's public diplomacy is: *„Supporting and co-organizing the NATO-related events (seminars, conferences, debates, etc.) in close cooperation with local partners”*.

M.E.S.A.10, the Slovak think-tank that is focused on economic and social analyses, in cooperation with Belgrade-based CEAS (Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies) has launched a project named *“Strengthening Debating Skills and Promoting Democratic Values among Youth”* facilitating and organising debate tournament which aims to promote discussion and critical thinking between university students from the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Serbia regarding NATO values, membership, security provided by the organisation and the relationship with the Alliance. Participating academic institutions from the Slovak Republic are: Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, and Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University in Bratislava. Serbian partners and debate opponents are Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, and Faculty

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of Philosophy of the University of Novi Sad. The debate tournament consists of two rounds. First round took place during spring semester 2013. Students from Bratislava and Belgrade had met each other in a clash of arguments on 14<sup>th</sup> of May and their peers from Banská Bystrica and Novi Sad followed discussion on 16<sup>th</sup> of May. The second round should take place during fall semester 2013, although specific dates are yet unknown.

The debate tournament was preceded by a lecture of **Peter Bator**, the Chief Political Advisor to the Permanent Representative of Slovakia to NATO. In his approximately one hour long remarks he stressed out the importance of regional security cooperation, the perspectives of NATO's engagement in the region and usefulness of the cooperation between Serbia and NATO. Moderating of the debate tournament was executed from Belgrade, by **Milan Ježovica**, M.E.S.A.10's foreign policy analyst and former State Secretary of the Slovak Republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Technical assistance on the Slovak side was carried out by **Martin Valentovič**, M.E.S.A.10's economic reforms and regional development specialist.

Four gender mixed debate teams from both Serbia and Slovakia consisted of five university students each. Representatives from the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, in alphabetical order, were: **Martin Balco**, **Simona Fejová**, **Martin Patúš**, **Hana Vermešová** and **Tomáš Rakonczay**. They argued and expressed their opinions towards six key questions of the tournament, these were as follows: *What is NATO to You? What values is NATO based on? What are the Security guarantees provided by NATO? Is NATO connected with Prosperity? Is NATO too costly? What is the relationship between NATO and Serbia?* Each member was tasked with providing the response to one of key questions and both sides alternated in lead order. After both teams had addressed the actual issue, cross-questioning from audiences in Slovakia and Serbia followed. Evaluation data of the debate tournament was provided through questionnaire filled by the audience and feedback reports from debate teams.

Technical part of the debate tournament, e. g. the broadcast itself and discussion between respective university teams was executed in an innovative way via live stream powered by a dedicated web page and M.E.S.A.10's website ([www.mesa10.sk](http://www.mesa10.sk)). Records from both streams are available via the above-mentioned web.