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## SLOVAKIA: OUR FOREIGN POLICY IN A NEW WAY?

Dominika Kosárová\*

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**BÁTORA J., HIRMAN K., JARÁBIK B., KOBZOVÁ J., NIČ M., VALÁŠEK T.:**  
*Bruselenie valašiek*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2010, 192 pp., ISBN 978-80-8101-348-5

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The book with a rather unusual title, *Bruselenie valašiek*, is a very good summary and explanation of the present and past happenings referring to the performance of the Slovak Republic on the international scene. The title refers to the city of Brusel, a place where *that Slovak meets with European diversity, sometimes it twinkles, sometimes it fits and sinks and otherwhile the hatchet stays blunt*. The breakneck title as well as subtitle – “Our Foreign Policy in a New Way” – proves it is a revolutionary book. It is a collective work of six authors with extensive experience in the international sphere of science, journalism, politics as well as pedagogy.

**Jozef Bátora** has obtained quality education at the universities in Oslo and Bergen and been active on the international scene ever since. For a period of time he worked at the Institute for European Integration Research, Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna and at the Centre for European Studies ARENA in Oslo. He also worked at the SCANCOR centre of Stanford University as a visiting researcher. He regularly publishes articles in prestigious internationally recognized scholarly journals; he also published the monograph *Foreign Ministries and the Information Revolution: Going Virtual?* His research focuses mainly on changes in diplomacy tied to the process of European integration; foreign policy of the European Union, as well as on the role of institutions in political life. Nowadays he is an advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic and a Lecturer at the Institute of European Studies and International Relations of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences,

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\* Dominika Kosárová is a second-year student of the field International Relations at the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, MatejBel University in Banská Bystrica, e-mail: kosarova.dominika@gmail.com.

Comenius University in Bratislava.

Second co-author **Karel Hirman** studied at the Gubkin State University of Oil and Gas in Moscow and after his studies gained extensive expertise in the field, working, i.e. for the Heating Plant Košice and the Slovak Gas Industry. He also collaborated with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. Building on his expertise, his contribution examines the issue of energy security in the international politics.

**Balázs Jarábik** is director of the regional office of Kiev-based Pact, Inc. and currently associate fellow of the Madrid-based European think-tank FRIDE. He held positions as consultant, designing manager and analyst also in Tashkent, Minsk and Belgrade. In addition, he worked for Slovak institutions such as Parliament and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as for international organisations Freedom House and OBSE. Furthermore, he was the head of the Belarusian Pontis foundation programme in Bratislava. He studied History at Comenius University, Bratislava; Political Science at ELTE University, Budapest and Human Rights at Columbia University, New York.

**Jana Kobzová**, the only woman in the team, was a coordinator of the Belarusian Pontis foundation programme in Bratislava. She studied Political Science at Comenius University, Bratislava, and currently she studies Russia and Central Asia studies at the University College of London. She also works in the European Council on Foreign Relations in London as Wider Europe Programme co-ordinator and Policy Fellow. In her research she focuses mostly on Eastern Europe and Russia. In her chapter of the reviewed book she examines the subject of the Eastern Partnership.

**Milan Nič's** contribution to the book focuses on the problematic situation in the Balkans. He holds degrees in Modern History and Political Science from Charles University in Prague, the Central European University in Budapest and one-year diploma from SAIS Johns Hopkins University Bologna Center. He worked as the foreign policy broadcaster for the Radio Free Europe and later as the advisor to the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. **Lajčák**. In 2004 he was awarded Karol Rybárik's Award for the best young professional in Slovak foreign policy. At present he is the external advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic and the analyst of the European Stability Initiative Policy Institute in Vienna.

Last contributor to the reviewed volume is **Tomáš Valášek**. He started his career as a journalist and at currently works as a director of foreign policy and defence at the Centre for European Reform in London. He continues to publish

in prestigious journals and newspapers and he appears occasionally at the channels like BBC or CNN. He is also a member of the supervisory board of the Slovak Atlantic Commission and the external advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic. He also worked at the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. **Valášek** is the founder of Brussels office of World Security Institute, a US-based research and media organisation.

The final text of the monograph presents authors' point of view on specific subjects, using their own experiences, observations and opinions, gained through their activity in different areas and countries. This wide spectrum of knowledge enabled them to treat issues such as foreign relations of the European Union, including the Slovak Republic, energy policy, development aid, as well as the development of foreign relations and diplomacy in the young Slovak Republic. It provides us with a concrete picture of our performance in the European and global context. At the same time, the book allows us to create our own opinions concerning the treated subjects.

As explained in the Introduction, this is actually one of the purposes of the book. According to the authors it is necessary to increase the interest in the Slovak foreign policy, because it reflects social and political events on the Slovak political scene. The authors strongly feel and disapprove current disinterest in international politics, because according to them *„It is as if we all accepted the proposition that the foreign policy is not important or that our small Slovakia cannot change anything. To a great extent we are creating our own smallness.”* (p. 188) The book *Bruselienie valašiek* can become one of the instruments how to bring the foreign policy near to the Slovak public and apprise us of important questions discussed at the international level. This book should become a kind of a guide to the Slovak foreign policy.

This ambition is quite real as the book is written in a readable and intelligible style. It sufficiently treats basic but important themes. The authors do not only analyse presented problems, but in summing up the respective chapters they also try to provide solutions and explain steps to achieve the given target. The entire volume is enriched with numerous cartoons related to the problems treated in the text, previously published in the newspaper SME. Readers are also approached through commentaries or blog excerpts of the authors, published in the same newspaper. *Bruselienie valašiek* is one of those books that capture your attention right from the beginning and already after having read the preface you are tempted to continue.

The book consists of nine chapters organised in two parts. In the Introduction **Jozef Bátora** and **Tomáš Valášek** are acquainting us with the new Lisbon system which attempts to make the international communication among the EU Members States and their foreign policy more effective. It should be coordinated by the High Representative and the European Public Service. Thanks to these initiatives the Slovak Republic has gained new contacts and places of influence. The explanation of these developments represents the subject of following chapters, concentrating on the issues such as the position of the Slovak Republic and the entire EU towards the third European countries aspiring at the EU membership, as well as on the relations with the USA. After all, the first chapter is entitled „Our Post-Integration Interests.”

The United States and the threat of her decline in the world became the first issue of the post-integration policy. **Tomáš Valášek** focuses on the currently weakened “Pax Americana” system. US economic decline is responsible for the fact that the dominant country in the international system is less concerned with the foreign policy issues and is becoming increasingly politically isolated as a consequence of her dealing with internal problems. The US loses her ambitions and understands that “the world is simply tired of her”. On the other hand China, India, Brasil and Russia increase their ambitions. The growing power of Russia represents the threat of hegemony in Europe, which would have disastrous consequences mostly for the Central European countries such as the Slovak Republic. As a solution **Valášek** proposes to build “*Pax Americana with a new management*” (p. 44), a system under which countries would resolve their problems in cooperation with the USA and would not wait until the US does it instead of them. With this approach the USA would achieve status of “*the country that does not dominate, but is considered to be a model; does not intrude, but inspires.*” (p.45)

In the following chapter **Balázs Jarábik** and **Jana Kobzová** turn to the East, to the countries beyond the EU frontiers. The region consisting of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan is called a gray zone or a buffer zone between increasingly dominant Russia on one side and increasingly unified Europe the other side. The European Union and Russia are struggling for power in that zone and Eastern Europe republics are trying to gain as much as possible from both partnerships. European interests are to ensure secure and stable neighbourhood consisting of countries with effective democratic system. However, it requires a long journey and Brussels needs to answer the “Partnership or Membership?” question. On the other hand Russia is trying to

control the gray zone directly. Initially, the authors pay attention to the so-called "Ukrainian standard", denoting "*democratic republic without effective government*" (p.59) On the contrary, Belarus, another state balancing between the East and the West, is a non-democratic state with effective government. Moldova, the third oscillating country, is on the best way to approach the Western Europe thanks to successful approachment attempts of her leaders. The EU gets involved in the frozen conflicts in the Caucasus republics, mostly the region of the Nagorno-Karabakh. Slovakia is actively involved in the EU attempts to approach countries from the post-Soviet zone to Europe through different projects. However, these could become even more effective through the cooperation with other countries of the Visegrad Group. To conclude the chapter, **Valášek** suggests how to make our Eastern partnerships more favourable.

**Milan Nič** in his contribution focuses on the Balkans, the zone of permanent tension and ethnic conflict disabling the countries to join the EU. Croatia is on the best way to join the Union, while the other countries may probably feel consequences of "*the enlargement fatigue.*" (p.78) The process of integration of the Balkan countries is indeed very slow. Macedonia, which obtained the status of a candidate country, is on a good way to succeed. Montenegro and Albania are still waiting for the decision of the European Commission, while Bosnia and Herzegovina have not applied yet. Serbia has officially applied only recently, in 2009, but despite this fact seems to be the EU priority at the expense of smaller Balkan republics. Some European countries are inclined to negotiate rather with Ukraine and Turkey, given the unceasing ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, mostly Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Slovakia plays a meaningful role here, as we have still not recognised Kosovo as a sovereign state. Slovak diplomacy has achieved great success in this conflict-prone area and should continue to cooperate with other European countries to ensure the stabilisation and prosperity of the Balkans region.

The relations between the Slovak Republic and European countries influence also the position of Slovakia in the context of energy security, issue treated in the contribution of **Karel Hirman**. The subject of energy security is very often discussed due to numerous inadequacies we have to confront in this sector, in particular insufficient and non-diversified oil and gas sources, leading to absolute dependency on Russian energy resources. That is why one simple turn of a switch can cause an absolute collapse. One possible solution seems to be the pipeline Adria from Croatia for the transport of oil, whereas gas could be

delivered from the Caspian Sea using the Nabucco Pipeline or Southstream. Another solution might be liquid gas from Croatia. **Hirman** explains potential solutions in detail and expresses his belief in an acute necessity of our government to start to deal seriously with what was neglected before and assure reliability in the question of energy security.

In the last chapter of the first part of the book **Milan Nič** focuses on the current state of Slovak-Hungarian relations from the position of Hungarian minority in Southern Slovakia. This question, not sufficiently resolved since the Treaty of Trianon, evolved through different stages: from “good neighbourhood” condition required to join the EU, acts passed by the **Mečiar**’s government, **Dzurinda**’s government with the participation of Hungarian Coalition Party SMK, to **Fico**’s government with the participation of the radical Slovak Nationalist Party SNS. Domestic politics conditions Slovak-Hungarian relations, in which both parties do not avoid provocations and extremism from the supposed bad treatment of the Hungarian minority. According to **Nič**, Slovakia represents something between “black hole” and a “target” for Hungary. He adds that “*if we did not exist, Hungary would have to make us up.*” (p. 132) However, for our international position and status it is very important to maintain good relations with the neighbouring countries, and the partnership with Hungary is especially important in several aspects. Therefore, our domestic diplomacy should focus on the solution of that “overblown bubble.”

In the second part of the volume authors focus on “*the origins of the Slovak foreign policy*”. At first **Milan Nič** explains the formation of the Slovak Republic from the first national revivalist ideas to the first Czechoslovakia. He proceeds through revolutions in 1848/49, the break-up of the Austrian Empire in 1867, the Vienna Award, and the creation of the State of the Slovaks and the Czechs. He refers to important historic figures such as **Hodža**, **Štefánik**, **Masaryk** and the others to whom he dedicates special attention at the end of the chapter. He defines Slovakia as a state with young tradition. Until the creation of the sovereign Slovak Republic we went through a dynamic progress, which has reinforced our ability to overcome restrictions on one hand, but on the other hand it slowed down the process of identification of the political identity and vision, which is to the detriment of our foreign policy.

In the eighth chapter, **Jozef Bátora** analyses the organisation and performance of the Slovak foreign policy from the institutional point of view, i.e. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At first, he approaches the development of the Ministry and formation of Slovak diplomacy, which was, according to **Bátora**,

turbulent. The position and the goals of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs changed with every alternation of the government, but diplomacy stayed still without any reform. **Bátora** expresses the necessity to launch new Slovak diplomacy and create a type of effective professional diplomat. He describes several conditions necessary to achieve this aim. To begin with, it is cooperation with non-governmental organisations, which could contribute to promote Slovak interests abroad, as well as need to create a new foreign policy agenda and related political education. He accentuates the necessity to change the indifferent attitude of the Slovak public towards foreign policy and thus achieve higher engagement, public control and legitimacy. He considers public diplomacy to be another important factor influencing how other countries would regard Slovakia.

Our successful integration to the European Union raised questions regarding our involvement in the international development projects as we became a donor to countries in crisis. **Jana Kobzová** and **Milan Nič** analysed this subject. Even if the delivery of the development aid has been institutionalised by the means of the Slovak International Development and Cooperation Agency, the effects of the development aid provision are insufficient. Our priorities and aims have not been set and that represents the biggest obstacle to higher effectiveness.

To conclude the entire volume, authors underscore what essentially amounts to the main theme and an idea hidden behind all the previous chapters: *“We are not in the EU and NATO; we are the EU and NATO.”* (p. 186) We became part of greater entities, which ensure our democracy, human dignity and freedom. But we cannot forget that it is up to us, too, to maintain these values. We cannot fall asleep with the idea that “they will solve it instead of us”.

*Bruselenie valašiek* is the ideal guide for those who want to gain a detailed picture of Slovak foreign policy and understand mutual connections. Finally, I should add, that it would be a pleasure to find some continuation of this book at the market, because there are still numerous themes relevant for the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic this volume does not address.