



## The year of the soldier

(5 February) From the perspective of the SVK Armed Forces, 2018 was the year of real modernization, whereas 2019 ought to be the year of the soldier. This message was conveyed by SVK Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš at the Commanders Convention, which was organised on 5 February at the MOD to take stock on what was achieved throughout the 2018 Training Year (TY).

Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš said: "Despite the criticism being voiced against us, what is of most importance is the outcome. As we deliver on the Long-Term Defence Development Plan, our soldiers have received the first deliveries of new equipment, and more equipment has either been contracted or is being manufactured, and there are modernization programmes ready for the Cabinet to take a decision." As the minister further pointed out, it is positive for him that a balance has been struck in modernising the SVK Army and the SVK Air Force. "And we are doing the same when it comes to keeping a balance between modernization and training," he emphasised. On personnel, Minister Gajdoš underlined that over the past year the MOD has adopted positive measures in favour of personnel, consider, for example, the 13th and 14th salaries or the hazardous duty pay, which was introduced by the MOD as of 1 January 2019. The measures have already borne fruit. "Finally, after years we can state that the total number of Service leavers is lower than the number of those enlisting in the Armed Forces," he said. On security and defence, he re-affirmed that the direction of the MOD remains pro-EU and pro-NATO.

Visiting the Commanders Convention, President of the Slovak Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the SVK Armed Forces Andrej Kiska praised the persistent confidence of the public and politicians in the Armed Forces and the increase in defence spending. "We can have the most advanced equipment, yet without motivated, modern and quality soldiers, our Armed Forces will not function. Therefore, I am very pleased that 2019 will be the year of the soldier, as announced by Minister Gajdoš," he said. He went on to thank all men and women in uniforms for looking on their profession not as a job but as a mission.

According to SVK Chief of Defence Lt Gen Daniel Zmeko, the key discussion of SVK Military Command revolves around the operational readiness of the SVK Armed Forces. "The good news is that we have managed to stop the gradual decline in operational readiness, which was here already a decade ago. We will continue in our efforts to reverse it. At the same time, we will perform the tasks that follow on from our commitments towards the North Atlantic Alliance and international crisis management, as well as the tasks associated with the provision of SVK airspace protection," said Lt Gen Daniel Zmeko.



## V4 medical professionals attend VIMIMED 2019 in Liptov

(6 February) V4 medical professionals met in Slovakia, to take part in the debut Visegrad Military Medicine Conference (VIMIMED 2019) held at the SVK Armed Forces Academy (AOS) in Liptovský Mikuláš on 4-6 February 2019. The Conference was organised under the SVK V4 Presidency by the Office of the SVK Armed Forces Surgeon General (OSG) and was attended by 61 foreign and 19 SVK delegates, including representatives from the NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED COE) in Budapest and the Multinational Medical Coordination Centre (MMCC) in Koblenz. Day 1 of VIMIMED 2019 was attended by DCHOD/COS Brig Gen Miroslav Lorinc, Commandant of AOS Prof Jozef Puttera, Mayor of Liptovský Mikuláš Ján Blcháč, and other guests. According to SVK SG Col Vladimír Lengvanský, the main aim of the 1st international conference was to look into ways how to deepen the V4 defence cooperation on military medicine. At the conference, delegates addressed potential areas of cooperation on mitigating shortages in pinch point medical capabilities such as air medevac, before turning their attention to other topics of relevance.



- Member of the Slovak national team and the Military Sports Club Dukla Banská Bystrica Petra Vlhová **clinched Silver** in the women's Alpine combined at the FIS Alpine World Ski Championships on 9 Feb 2019 in Are, Sweden, which is the greatest success in the history of Slovak Alpine skiing. She was beaten by Wendy Holdener of Switzerland who won the Alpine combined title by 0.03 seconds.

- State Secretary of the SVK Ministry of Defence Róbert Ondrejcsák attended a book launch ceremony for "**Canada and Slovakia: The first 25 years**", which was held in Bratislava on 7 Feb 2019. The book is dedicated to the evolution of SVK-CAN relations since the emergence of the independent Slovak Republic to date. The cooperation between CAN and SVK engineers goes back to 1993 when they started to collaborate in UNPROFOR. Recently, the cooperation between both militaries has gained stronger focus in the Canadian-led NATO eFP sector in the Baltics

- The annual **International Military Chiefs of Chaplains Conference (IMCCC)** was held from 28 Jan to 1 Feb 2019 in Krakow, Poland. The main theme of the 30th IMCCC was "Pastoral Care for Soldiers in the Past and Challenges for the Future". Representing Slovakia at the conference was Chaplain General of the Office of Ecumenical Pastoral Service in the SVK Armed Forces and Armed Corps Col Marian Bodoll.

- On 29-31 Jan 2019, the Tactical Wing Sliač hosted an initial selection of **active duty soldiers for UNFICYP**, with the rotation due in Sept 2019.

- To ensure continuity of the excellent cooperation between members of the **Helicopter Wing Prešov** and members of the CZE Armed Forces who served shoulder-to-shoulder in the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), Afghanistan, a HW Prešov team of ice-hockey players participated in an ice-hockey tournament in Náměšti nad Oslovou, Czechia. The event was held under the auspices of the CZE Air Force 22nd Helicopter Base Commander.

- Drivers are asked by the MOD to be alert and drive with care as there will be 14 **Allied road movements** across Slovakia, scheduled from 11 to 17 Feb 2019. They will mostly involve POL troops. SVK Army convoys will also ferry oversized cargo on the routes: Prešov – Ruská Nová Ves – Trebišov, Ozorovce – Sečovce – Trebišov, Dubnica nad Váhom – Žilina – Prešov – Budimír – Michalovce, Kuchyňa – Bratislava – Tmava – Trenčín, and Prešov – Kamenica nad Cirochou.

## Cooperation with Finland



(5 February) Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš met with the Ambassador of Finland, His Excellency Mr Jukka Pesola, on his appointment as Ambassador of the Republic of Finland to the Slovak

Republic. The meeting was dominated by bilateral Defence engagement and support to the domestic defence industry.

On the SVK-FIN Defence relationship, Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš stated: "Options for cooperation between Slovakia and the Republic of Finland may be found in the field of defence industry as well as SVK and FIN deployments on international crisis management missions and operations." He continued: "There is also room for cooperation on exchange of experience and expertise at our state-of-the-art facilities, be it at the Training Centre Lešť, NATO EOD COE Trenčín, CBRN Training Centre Zemianske Kostofany or the SVK Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš, which hosts the International Staff Officers Course (ISOC)."

Minister Gajdoš and Ambassador Pesola spoke of regional defence cooperation. In this regard, Minister Gajdoš underpinned the importance of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) and appreciated the engagement between the EU Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (FIN), and the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (EST), of which the Slovak Republic is a member country. "Both institutions are an important element of cooperation between the EU and NATO in countering hybrid and cyber threats. Therefore, I am very pleased that the Slovak Republic is an important part of this cooperation," said the minister.

Finally, Minister Gajdoš updated Ambassador Pesola on the progress made in the joint SVK-FIN Vydra (Otter) 8x8 Infantry Fighting Vehicle programme as well as on the next steps to be taken in furtherance of the ongoing systemic and systematic modernization of the SVK Armed Forces, aligned with the 2030 Long-Term Defence Development Plan.

## SVK Army recognised

(7 February) The SVK Army Commanders Convention, chaired by SVK Army Commander Maj Gen Jindřich Joch, was held in Trenčín, with the participation of Chief of Defence Lt Gen Daniel Zmeko, CSEL for the SVK Armed Forces Sgt Maj Vladimír Beluš, Army leaders, and commanders of the formations and units directly subordinate to HQ SVK Army Trenčín. In his speech, Lt Gen Zmeko expressed his recognition of the work done by all SVK Army personnel throughout the 2018 Training Year.

## Trebišov-based troops exercise in Slanské Hills

(8 February) Members of 2nd Mechanised Company, Combined Mechanised Battalion Trebišov, are undertaking tactical training across the eastern slopes of the Slanské Hills on Trebišov Garrison's training ground at Velké Ozorovce for the first two weeks of February 2019.

Commander of 2nd Mech Coy Capt Tomáš Korobanič, the Officer in Command of the exercise, shed more light on the tasks of the intense training. "This is a two-week intense training. It is geared towards training and testing platoon and section 1ICs and 2ICs in exercising command and control of their units in defensive and offensive operations and hence give the other ranks an opportunity to operate their vehicles in the said operational environments. For example, our troops will be exercised in

conducting missions to halt an enemy advance, taking up defensive positions without enemy contact, carrying out



defensive operations at night, as well as mounting offensive operational taskings." According to Capt Korobanič, this training is more strenuous than usual, because recently there was a considerable replacement of command staff personnel, and so is true of members of the other ranks. In training and integrating new commanders and soldiers into 2nd Mech Coy, Capt Korobanič can only rely on a few experienced soldiers who have stayed with the Coy. Taking responsibility for their subordinates is a major challenge for new section 2ICs. Until recently they took responsibility only for themselves, but now they are faced with supervising a small group of soldiers.