



NATO ministerial

(14 February) NATO Defence Ministers met in Brussels for a meeting to deliberate on the future of NATO missions and operations, the current security situation in Ukraine, and the Defence engagement between NATO and the EU.

Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš said: "The Slovak Republic was one of the first Allies to have contributed to NATO's stabilization efforts in Iraq and we are ready to continue to assist the country as part of the NATO Mission Iraq in a non-combat training role." As he further confirmed, Slovakia will continue to offer its assistance also to Afghanistan, where it is committed to increasing its contribution to the Resolute Support Mission (RSM). In this respect, he made clear that the increase in the SVK deployment to RSM will not exceed the existing Government-approved mandate.

At a separate informal session, NATO Defence Ministers addressed security developments in Ukraine, which is high on the current SVK OSCE Chairmanship agenda. In this respect, Minister Gajdoš appreciated the progress reported by Ukraine on defence and security and reassured his partners that Slovakia will continue to support Ukraine in its roles as the OSCE chairmanship country, as a Lead Nation (LN) in the NATO Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) Trust Fund for Ukraine, and as a provider of military education and military trade-specific training. While building on the latest meeting of EU Defence Ministers in Bucharest, Romania, one ministerial session was also dedicated to discussing how to further deepen the Defence engagement between NATO and the European Union.

'Yes' to modernization

(13 February) The NATO Alliance has expressed its appreciation for real increases in Slovakia's defence spending. This year Slovakia will spend 1.7% of GDP on defence and has set out to meet the 2% NATO benchmark for investment in defence already in 2022, i.e. two years earlier than envisaged in the 2016 NATO Wales Summit commitments. Speaking after today's meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels, SVK Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš said: "NATO Allies appreciate that we want to invest 1.7% of GDP in defence this year and assign over 40% of that for modernization." He underlined that these are not just plans but real steps. "And our ambition is to bring our defence spending up to 1.9% of GDP on defence in 2021 and finally meet the requested benchmark of spending 2% on defence already in 2022," he said. As well as addressing burden sharing, today NATO Defence Ministers dedicated a session to discussing defence capabilities development. They agreed that unity of effort is needed in the field of defence planning and capabilities development, depending on real threats and individual capacities and possibilities of NATO member states.

Military Spa Piešťany undergoes major reconstruction

(12 February) The Piešťany-based Military Spa Institute, also known as the Hotel Granit Piešťany, has undertaken a major reconstruction of its facilities over the past months. As part of the MOD's pledge to improve social welfare and medical care for service personnel, the reconstruction was directed at enhancing the overall quality of services for the military community. Following an uplift in the hotel's spa facilities, active duty soldiers can now benefit from a greater variety of spa treatments and sessions. The major reconstruction project saw spa facilities of the Hotel Granit in Piešťany uplifted and redesigned, especially the natural thermal pool and the mirror pool. Another novelty is a glass-covered and heated corridor between the indoor and outdoor swimming pools. And a greater combination of spa treatments such as bathtub, infrared sauna and Kneipp spa therapy sessions are on offer. Also reconstructed were the hotel's accommodation facilities, kitchen, corridors and rooms. These were furnished with new TV sets, refrigerators, lamps, quality beds, and carpets and now use the electronic room card system. The reconstruction works, launched on the Hotel Granit in December 2018 by HOREZZA, an MOD-owned joint stock company, have been completed and the hotel facilities are now available to service personnel for rest and recuperation.



■ The SVK MOD has received over €6 million from the Quality of Environment Operational Programme (QE OP) for **remediation of environmental pollutants** throughout Martin Barracks, Michalovce Barracks, and Piešťany Barracks. The remediation projects and geological oversight will be fully financed from EU funds. Remediation of almost 12,000m² of contaminated land will be underway in the said locations between 2019 and 2020. Contractors for the remediation works will be selected via the ongoing competitive bidding process.

■ President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska received U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the Presidential Palace on 12 Feb 2019. The solemnity of the reception was heightened by members of the **Presidential Guard of Honour**, led by Sergeant 1st Class Andrej Macášek.

■ The Operations Centre, of the Command, Control and Surveillance (C2S) Wing Zvolen, carried out its first simulation exercise from the **TATRA FREEDOM exercise series** on 13-14 Feb 2019. The aim of the exercise was to train and improve the ability of a declared unit to conduct combat operations in different crisis situations.

■ State Secretary of the SVK Ministry of Defence Róbert Ondrejčák received the **Ambassador of Ukraine to Slovakia**, His Excellency Mr Yurii Mushka at SVK MOD Main Building on 15 Feb 2019. The partners discussed practical cooperation on EOD. In this respect, Slovakia is the Lead Nation (LN) in the NATO EOD/C-IED Trust Fund for Ukraine. They also addressed regional cooperation and Ukraine's involvement in PESCO projects.

■ On 13 Feb 2019, the Sliach Town Cultural Centre hosted a blood drive called **Sliach Drop of Blood**, with the motto: "What is a blood drop for one means life for another." Among the blood donors were service personnel and civilian employees from the Sliach Tactical Wing.

■ On 10 Feb 2019, Ordinary of the SVK Armed Forces and Armed Corps **Mons František Rábek** paid a visit to the Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade Nitra. The purpose of his visit was to consecrate the newly reconstructed chapel and the main altar picture of St Cyril and St Methodius, to whom the chapel is dedicated.

■ Drivers are asked by the MOD to be alert and drive with care as there will be 16 **Allied road movements** and 1 railway movement across Slovakia, scheduled from 18 to 24 Feb 2019. They will mostly involve U.S. and POL troops.

SVK World Champion



(14 February) Petra Vlhová, skier of the Slovak National Team and the VŠC Dukla Banská Bystrica, won the giant slalom and claimed Gold for Slovakia at the FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in

Are, Sweden. "Petra has made it! We are proud of her," said Defence Minister Peter Gajdoš and so did all fans of Slovak sports in response to the greatest triumph of Slovak alpine skiing. Petra Vlhová clinched Silver in Alpine combined on 9 February and Bronze in slalom on 12 February.

SVK defence industry at IDEX



(17 February) Defence Minister Gajdoš took part in the International Defence Exhibition & Conference (IDEX) 2019 in Abu Dhabi, where he highlighted the potential of the SVK defence

industry. Speaking at IDEX 2019, Minister Gajdoš said: "We have definitely something to be proud of. Right from the outset, I have always said that we wish to revive the domestic armaments industry, because it means more work for Slovak citizens and economic growth."

COM MNC NE visits NFIU



(11 February) Lt Gen Slawomir Wojciechowski, Commander of the Multinational Corps North-East (COM MNC NE) Szczecin (POL), which is an integral part of the NATO Command

Structure with responsibility for overseeing 8 NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) on the Alliance's eastern flank, arrived in Slovakia for a two-day visit. In his meeting with CHOD Lt Gen Daniel Zmeko, he underlined the cooperation between the SVK General Staff and the NFIU SVK, especially its active role in planning international military exercises.

Logisticians learn how to protect convoys at TC Lešť

(16 February) A three-week logistics convoy security course has been underway at the Training Centre (TC) Lešť, aimed at members of the Transport Company, Hlohovec-based Logistics Battalion, and components of the Trenčín-based Combat Service Support (CSS) Brigade, including the Repair Battalion Martin, Logistics Battalion Topoľčany, and CSS Battalion Prešov.

Capt Andrej Hazák, Commander of the Transport Company, Hlohovec-based Logistics Battalion, said: "We have focused our efforts on meeting a capability target – the stand-up of the V-4 UBG Transport Company.



Our main goal is to gain, sustain and develop capabilities for protecting logistics convoys. We want our new soldiers to learn more about different incidents they may encounter on operations. Our MP instructor, Sgt 1st Class Peter Toscano, provides us with the latest expertise on convoy security platforms and arrangements."

Logisticians are now practising tasks in winter conditions at Lešť. According to Sgt 1st Class Peter Toscano, they have progressed from handling easier tasks to more difficult ones. Troops must learn to respond to convoy ambushes where they may sustain injuries and wounds.