



In contact with Alliance

(14 April) The current situation on the COVID-19 pandemic in the world, the measures in place to mitigate the spread of the virus and its impact on NATO's activities were the topics of discussion by Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď and NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană in a phone conversation. Since taking to office, this was the first official contact between the Head of the MOD and the NATO Deputy Secretary General.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď stated: "Slovakia is ready to reaffirm its pro-Atlantic orientation and credibility towards its Allies. Even in this crisis situation, the Alliance represents a truly effective platform for sharing experience and providing help and assistance among Allies. Not only do we have an opportunity to demonstrate the power of a common approach, but we can also use a number of Alliance's options as a response to the pandemic." He further noted that Slovakia has made use of NATO's Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS) programme to bring in 54.8 tonnes of medical material from China's Tianjin.

On NATO operations, he provided an update on the review of the planned rotations of SVK troops over the coming period. Accordingly, adjustments will affect NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia, Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan and, probably, NATO Mission Iraq (NMI).

Burden sharing was a topic of discussion, too. "My ambition is to meet the promised 2% of GDP on defence as well as all the commitments towards our Allies," he stated. He added that the fight against the new coronavirus remains the MOD's current No. 1 priority and acknowledged the assistance of the SVK Armed Forces in efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Allied Defence Ministers on pandemic

(15 April) Allied Defence Ministers convened an extraordinary meeting via video conference to discuss the Alliance's response to the COVID-19 crisis. In discussions, they reviewed NATO's activity in support of Allies in battling coronavirus and took further collaborative assistance and coordination measures to curb the coronavirus spread.

Slovakia was represented in the meeting by State Secretary of the SVK Ministry of Defence Marian Majer. The Defence Ministers of Sweden and Finland took part in the video conference too, and so did HR/VP Josep Borrell and the Madam Minister of Defence of North Macedonia as a representative of the new NATO member.

State Secretary of the SVK MOD Marian Majer said: "We must together prevent the current medical crisis from turning into a security crisis." On humanitarian aid, Secretary Majer informed Allies of the SVK Government's decision to deliver humanitarian assistance to Italy.

On the coronavirus pandemic, NATO Defence Ministers discussed countering disinformation, which is being misused for propaganda, the steps to maintain the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture, and the specific aspects of Allied deployments on international crisis management missions and operations over the course of the pandemic.

New Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministers to cooperate more closely

(17 April) Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď and Foreign and European Affairs Minister Ivan Korčok confirmed that under their leadership both ministries commit to cooperating more closely than ever before. They want to overcome the previous practice of insufficient communication at the political level and an absence of strategic communication. They made this announcement after they met at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

Minister Korčok said: "There are hardly any other ministries of the SVK Government where there are so many overlaps, common points of reference and, literally, an inevitability to cooperate. We are, therefore, doing what is completely normal and natural." He added that both ministers are interested in meeting regularly to talk not only at the level of political representatives, but also at that of working teams. Heads of both departments also agreed on the need to update the existing and formulate new strategic documents. "The Security Strategy was prepared primarily by the Foreign and European Affairs Ministry. In my opinion, in my very sincere opinion, considering the demands of the Slovak National Party, this was a smaller compromise than as with the Defence Strategy. For this reason, I am convinced we need to prepare a new document," explained Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď. At the same time, the two leaders agreed that work on the strategic documents will commence as soon as the COVID-19 situation allows. Finally, Minister Ivan Korčok acknowledged the work the SVK Armed Forces personnel are doing in the fight against coronavirus as part of domestic crisis management, as well as commending the SVK military's deployments abroad.



■ **Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď and State Secretary of the SVK Ministry of Defence Marian Majer** met with representatives of the SVK Security and Defence Industry Association at the Ministry of Defence on 17 Apr 2020, to discuss support for SVK defence industry and economy. Minister Naď also met with Chief of the Unit for Value of Money Štefan Kišš, Director of SIAF Hubert Štoksa, and representatives of the SVK Military Renaissance Association.

■ Working in conjunction with members of the Logistics Battalion Hlohovec, on 16 Apr 2020, service personnel from Bratislava Garrison delivered a second consignment of medical material to the State Material Reserves. They offloaded and transported **another 20 tonnes of medical supplies**. They have transported 1,518.28 tonnes of material so far.

■ On 16 Apr 2020, **Col Jozef Zekucia** became an advisor to the Minister of Defence on military affairs and Armed Forces modernisation. Earlier, before transferring into the reserves, his previous appointment was Commander of the NATO Force Integration Team Slovakia (NFIU SVK).

■ A Bambi Bucket-equipped UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter, crewed by SVK Air Force airmen, flew a mission to assist firefighters in putting out a **forest fire** within the cadastral area of Čremošné, a village in the Žilina region, on 11 Apr 2020.

■ A **Military Deed of the Year Awards** gala evening, which acknowledges the extraordinary deeds of soldiers, has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic until further notice.

■ Members of the EOD and CBRN National Centre have transported over **1,600 litres of disinfectants**. These will be used by SVK Armed Forces personnel on the ground and in communities where there is no access to water and soap.

■ On 16 Apr 2020, volunteers of the **SVK Presidential Guard of Honour** began to visit the blood transfusion station in the Ružinov hospital to help patients in urgent need of blood for treatment.

■ Live on Fri at 21.05 with a rebroadcast at 00.30 on Sat, Regina Radio's **Full Field Kit** will bring coverage of soldiers who remember their friends – orphans even at times like these. We appreciate your comments, suggestions and opinions. Please, write to us at pinaplna@mod.gov.sk.

■ Psychologists of the SVK Armed Forces have published a new presentation for a psychological-educational information campaign, titled **How to Speak with Children about Coronavirus?**, which is available on the following website: www.mil.sk/89372/.

■ The SVK MOD announces that the SVK Armed Forces will conduct **road movements** between 20 and 26 Apr 2020. The round trip convoys will transport oversize cargo on the following routes: Prešov – Trenčín, Trebišov – Prešov, and Nitra – Levice. There will also be military rail movements from Zemianske Kostolany to Vlková and from Zemianske Kostolany to Prešov.

Stop Corruption on transparency



(17 April) The current MOD leadership has made fighting corruption and promoting transparency their priorities. It was particularly on these issues that Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď and State Secretary of the SVK MOD Marian Majer engaged with Zuzana Petková and Marianna Leontiev, representatives of the Stop Corruption Foundation (SCF). At the meeting, they spoke about systemic changes and agreed that transparency is one of the key principles that must be enforced thoroughly, whether it be in making purchases, managing the MOD, or communicating with the public.

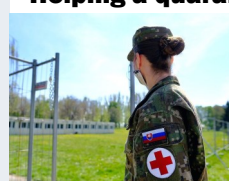
Fight against COVID-19 takes its toll

(16 April) In addition to massive assistance tasks in support of SVK Police, the Armed Forces have been engaged in high risk COVID-19 operations under the guidance of the SVK Central Crisis Staff. Another two SVK servicemen have been diagnosed with COVID-19 after being directly involved in actions to curb the COVID-19 spread. A total of 5 servicemen have been tested positive for coronavirus so far. Of them, two have fully recovered.

Chief of the Defence Staff Gen Daniel Zmeko said: "Hundreds of our service personnel are at the highest risk of contracting COVID-19 on a daily basis. To meet specific requests, they have been on duty at hospitals, border crossings, quarantine locations, and regional capitals to keep order and ensure compliance with the SVK Government-approved epidemiological guidelines. Therefore, my sincere thanks go out to all men and women in uniform who are doing a great job and thus living up to their patriotic duty."

Deputy Spokesperson of the Slovak Armed Forces Cpt Peter Poldruhák said: "Even though we strictly adhere to the principles of health protection at places of work and to the epidemiological precautions in place, the risk of SVK personnel's exposure to the virus cannot be completely prevented."

Helping a quarantine centre



(16 April) Working in cooperation with Bratislava city authorities, the MOD has given a helping hand to homeless people, who are a very vulnerable group of the population, by providing 250 beds with mattresses and sleeping bags included, supplying water and hygiene items, and deploying personnel to support the quarantine centre in Zlaté Piesky, Bratislava. Besides this, military medical professionals, i.e. a doctor and medics, are available in the centre. The area is being guarded by active duty soldiers. The Armed Forces and Bratislava authorities have also made available hygiene stations for people without a roof over their heads.

29 SVK service personnel return from Resolute Support in Afghanistan

(14 April) In the evening hours of Tuesday, a SVK Government Air Service plane touched down at Sliač Air Base with 29 servicemen onboard, returning from Resolute Support in Afghanistan. On the same flight, the MOD also took action to secure the repatriation of a SVK civilian.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď said: "We have withdrawn 29 SVK soldiers from Afghanistan, because their presence was non-essential for the provision of operational tasks. We made this decision following a request from the RSM Commander to minimise the staff levels.

This move had to do with the anti-COVID-19 measures in place." He continued: "I am very pleased that, as well as securing the safe return of our soldiers, despite a complicated process we managed to help a Slovak lady who found herself



stranded in a difficult situation, because there was no way for her to return home." He added that the repatriated SVK national worked in Afghanistan and was subjected to testing for COVID-19 before the flight. The results came back

negative and she was allowed to fly home with the servicemen.

The Armed Forces are here for the security of Slovakia and its citizens on a 24/7 basis and are ready to help in any crisis situation, the head of the MOD emphasised. On their return to Slovakia, the contingent members and the civilian were taken to the quarantine centre at the M. R. Štefánik Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš. 20 SVK Armed Forces members remain deployed with RSM in Afghanistan, engaging in the training of Afghan security forces.