



Soldiers welcome New Year 2016 with ceremonial gun salutes

(1 January) On the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of the establishment of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Armed Forces, the New Year's Day saw 20 gun salutes fired by soldiers from Tyršovo Embankment, Bratislava. The traditional New Year's gun salutes were staged by members of the Rocket Launcher Unit Rožňava, using six HD-30A 122mm gun howitzers.

"Today's event marks an honourable commemoration of the Slovak Republic's foundation in a manner that befits the occasion, as the SVK Armed Forces have been an important part of Slovakia's statehood," noted the State Secretary of the SVK MOD, Miloš Koterec.

A total of 50 active duty soldiers provided support to the event, of whom 45 were SVK Land Forces members, supplemented by Military Police personnel. As part of the side events organized for the public by the SVK MOD, children could enjoy themselves by participating in competitions, quizzes and creative workshops.



Greetings beyond borders

(22 December) SVK Minister of Defence Martin Giváč and Chief of the General Staff of the SVK Armed Forces Gen Milan Maxim connected via a computer network with the servicemen and women who were deployed on operations abroad during this festive season. They wished everyone to have an enjoyable duty shift and expressed their conviction that the units would execute their tasks in a responsible manner in spite of the end-of-the-year festive period. During the first video call, they linked up with Lt Col Marcel Trojan, Commander of SLOVCON in EUFOR ALTHEA, where a total of 38 SVK troops have been deployed. The Minister of Defence also made a video call to Lt Col Ján Chorvát, Commander of SLOVCON in Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, where a total of 36 SVK Armed Forces members were serving during the festive season. Lt Col Miroslav Belanský then informed the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Defence how the 158-strong SLOVCON was to celebrate Christmas in UNFICYP in Cyprus. This Christmas period saw the servicewoman Maj Eva Révayová participating in an observer mission in Georgia. She was on duty as an observer even on 24 and 26 December. Also during the festive season, two SVK observers remained on duty with UNTSO.

Negotiations on fighter aircraft

(30 December) Talks on leasing Gripen fighter aircraft between Slovak and Swedish authorities continue to be conducted in a productive atmosphere. The latest offer is to be finalized in terms of legislative and financial aspects in the coming months. Speaking on the emerging deal, Minister of Defence Martin Giváč noted: "In view of the contract's significance and financial scope, we have an interest in seeing the MOD's next leadership identifying themselves with our solution to airspace protection. I am pleased to see the contours of Slovak fighter aviation's future clearly emerging." The aim of the involved parties is to bring the negotiations to a successful end and raise regional security and inter-governmental cooperation to a new level. The official negotiations on leasing Gripen fighter aircraft were launched by the MOD's representatives upon the SVK Government's approval in March 2015.

Martin Giváč: Service members meet their 2015 commitments vis-à-vis Slovakia's security

(2 January) The S-300 Air Defence System in live action for the first time, unexpected exercises, the V4 Battle Group's certification, or the largest international military exercise in the contemporary history of the SVK Armed Forces. Even these were the facets of the 2015 training year for SVK Armed Forces servicemen and women.

The military drills in 2015 brought new expertise to soldiers from deployments in the international environment, preparing them for realistic security threats of today's world. Commenting on the military exercises, Minister of Defence Martin Giváč said: "In the past, we made a statement that soldiers would conduct more exercises and we've lived up to it. By doing this, we are fulfilling our pledge and, simultaneously, our commitment vis-à-vis Slovakia's security."

Throughout the entire year, our soldiers were joined by other security enforcement components to

gear up for a potential emergency involving a massive influx of refugees. "The current security situation is not ideal and calls for our increased attention. That's why we decided to initiate an exercise aimed at verifying the coordination and readiness of our security components to respond to a wave of refugees from different regions," said Minister Giváč.

At the end of October, Service and Police personnel moved from a fictitious to near-real environment of the border between Slovakia and Hungary. Mission SOUTH tested the reaction time of combined military and police patrols to position themselves at control checkpoints across 11 districts in southern Slovakia.

This activity further involved military personnel being deployed to Exercise Balaton 2015, international military drills in Hungary. There, SVK Armed Forces personnel aligned their Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) with other V4 Armed Forces,

preparing for the eventuality of a force deployment to resolve a migration crisis.

"Although the performance of this set of tasks is not typically undertaken by armed forces, with regard to the situation on European borders, it is becoming an everyday reality," said Chief of the General Staff of the SVK Armed Forces Gen Milan Maxim.

The training of soldiers for this emergency culminated last autumn, when 4,000 troops exercised complex training tasks in the face of military and non-military threats as part of Exercise Slovak Shield. Lešť Training Area hosted the exercise, bringing together troops from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and the United States.

"The Slovak Shield series was underway throughout the entire year. Troops were exercised, for example, in protecting the territorial integrity of our country, as well as resolving different military and non-military crisis situations," explained Gen Maxim.

- The tradition of Levice-based Military Unit of the SVK Armed Forces is a **regular blood donation** carried out in cooperation with Levice hospital and the mobile unit of the Blood Collection Centre Nitra. Approximately forty soldiers donate blood each time. The situation was not different at the last year's Christmas blood donation event, in which participated 41 professional soldiers of the 13th Mechanized Battalion.

- On 22 December, the **Military Police Director, Col Milan Hamar** got in touch, via telephone, with members of the Military Police deployed on international missions Resolute Support in Afghanistan and UNFICYP on Cyprus. During the call, the members of the Military Police informed the director on the situation and state in the assigned area. Col Hamar wished them peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year filled with the very best.

- On 18 December, the Chief of the Operations Support Section of Bratislava Garrison Headquarters (BA GAR HQ), **Maj Karol Kubica** ended his career in the SVK Armed Forces. On that occasion, the Chief of Staff, Lt Col František Miklovič thanked him for his exemplary service, wished him every success and awarded him with the Commander of BA GAR HQ Badge 1st Class.

- On 30 December, on the occasion of the end of their service employment and the end of assignment, the Military Police Director, Col Milan Hamar awarded Capt Stanislav Mezeš and MSgt Marcela Zlatovská with the **Military Police Medal 2nd Class** and a **Letter of Thanks** for their work done on behalf of the Military Police.

- Once again, at the end of the year, the Mobile CIS Base Ružomberok organized a **Christmas fund raising event** directed at families in need. The collected money will help children at risk and handicapped children.

- On 18 December, on the occasion of the **71st anniversary of the town's liberation**, members of the 13th Mechanized Battalion laid wreaths at the Fallen Heroes Memorial on the Square of Heroes in the town of Levice.

- The Military Police Director, Col Milan Hamar approved the **2016 Military Police Activities Plan** in the presence of chief officials on 18 December. One of the basic inner regulations of the Military Police defines its goals, main tasks and their further elaboration into basic measures. The most important part is the Military Police Training Plan, which for the first time reflects the development of security situation in our region in connection with migration and the threat of terrorism.

Sportsmen of the Year 2015

(22 December) The representative of Slovakia and the Military Sports Centre Dukla Banská Bystrica (MSC DBB), MSgt Matej Tóth earned second place in the most prestigious sports survey Sportsperson of the Year. After taking seventh and fourth places, the world champion in Men's 50 km Race Walk held in Beijing has significantly improved. "Thank you for your support. My season was great, I took another small step forward. Now it's time to win at the Olympic Games," stated smiling Matej Tóth, among other things the 2015 Best Race Walker, at the ceremonial gala evening held on 22 December in the new building of the Slovak National Theatre. Altogether 114 journalists gave more votes only to the 2015 World Best Cyclist, Peter Sagan. Sagan and Tóth were the only two to appear on all ballots. The award to be presented to Peter Sagan was handed over to his father. The member of the MSC DBB, skier Veronika Velez-Zuzulová ended sixth and it is the sixth time for her to rank among the top 10. The awards were presented by the Chairman of the SVK Parliament, Peter Pellegrini, and the last year's winner of the survey Sportsperson of the Year and member of the MSC DBB, biathlete Anastasia Kuzminová.



Vlhová belongs with elite

(29 December) Petra Vlhová of the Military Sports Centre Dukla Banská Bystrica (MSC DBB) demonstrated to be in perfect shape by earning third place at the Women FIS Alpine Skiing World Cup Slalom in Lienz, Austria. A great success for Slovak skiers and the MSC DBB was also the sixth place of Veronika Velez-Zuzulová. "Petra Vlhová again excellently represented Slovakia and the MSC DBB. Her fantastic performance claimed that her talent predestines her to be in the world's slalom elite. I warmly congratulate her as well as Veronika Velez-Zuzulová on her great sixth place. I truly believe that the two will stay this successful course," stated SVK Minister of Defence Martin Giváč. 20-year-old Petra Vlhová is a member of the MSC DBB since July 2013. Three weeks ago, she won Women's Slalom at the Alpine Skiing World Cup in Åre, Sweden, for the first time in her career.

The exercise also involved massive movements of military vehicles and equipment, such as T-72 main battle tanks, mobile anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence systems, armoured infantry vehicles and trucks, which may have been noticed on roads by local residents throughout the whole of Slovakia. During the exercise, over 600 pieces of vehicles and equipment moved along Slovakia's roads.

Protecting strategically important facilities in the Slovak Republic, such as nuclear power plants, strategic areas, including cities, is among the tasks of the S-300 Air Defence System, with which our soldiers conducted a historically first live fire exercise last year.

"I would like to congratulate our soldiers on their excellent results during this as well as all the other exercises that occurred in 2015. They successfully demonstrated their readiness throughout the entire year," concluded Slovak Minister of Defence Martin Giváč.