



Ministers hold talks in Brussels

(6 March) Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš attended talks in Brussels at the EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) meeting in the format of EU Defence Ministers. The Heads of the European Ministries of Defence devoted their attention to addressing the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in light of the EU's engagement in its neighbourhood and also talked about the progress achieved in the process of implementing the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) in the area of security and defence.

The main theme of the discussions was protecting the EU's strategic interests, in particular in Libya and in the Sahel and Horn of Africa regions. Still open to further solutions are the issues of migration crisis and fight against the threats of terrorism. Yet the EU is interested to contribute to the formation of a "zone of stability" in the region stretching from Mauretania to Somalia so as to disrupt, as part of its preventive measures, mass migration flows towards the north, and hence the potential spread of global terrorism across the European continent.

Ministers paid attention to the EU's engagement in the area of maritime security in the Central Mediterranean and in the Indian Ocean. Ten Slovak Military Police personnel, whom the Slovak Republic will contribute to the European Union's Naval Force – Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia), will be deploying to the EU's southern borders as early as August 2017.

"These days our military policemen are already undergoing intense training for this mission at the Eckenförde Training Facility in Germany. Their specialised training will last well until the end of March," said Minister Peter Gajdoš. He went on to remind that Slovakia, too, has contributed to the training activities of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia in the amount of €50,000. The meeting was important especially with regard to the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the European External Action Service on the EU's new strategy for Africa, which is being prepared and set for release in April this year, partly due to the upcoming 5th EU-Africa Summit. This will be held in November 2017 in Abidjan on the Ivory Coast and the security of the Mediterranean is expected to be one of the key issues at the forefront of the EU's agenda.

Anton Muržic passes away

(10 March) Lt Gen (Rtd) Anton Muržic, the founder of the military college-level education in Liptovský Mikuláš, passed away at the age of 90 on Friday, 10 March. He played a role in the coming into existence of the Military Technical College in Liptovský Mikuláš and assumed the appointment of its first Commandant – Rector. He made a major impact on today's quality of military education and sciences at the General M. R. Štefánik Armed Forces Academy (AOS). Anton Muržic was born on 3 June 1926 in Vrbové in the district of Piešťany. He began training for his service career immediately after the end of the Second World War. Despite his successes in command postings, he devoted maximum efforts to organising the training and education of young soldiers. He was a recipient of several MOD-issued and state decorations.



Minister of Defence P. Gajdoš receives Israeli Ambassador Z. A. Vapni

(9 March) SVK Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš welcomed the Ambassador of the State of Israel to the Slovak Republic, His Excellency Mr Zvi Aviner Vapni, to the Ministry of Defence on Thursday. Discussion of the current areas of bilateral cooperation between both countries was at the top of the meeting's agenda.

"Our mutual relations have been at a very good level in the long run and we consider Israel as a prominent partner in the area of defence," said Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš during the meeting.

Under its current military-to-military cooperation options, the Slovak Ministry of Defence is ready to offer the State of Israel its training facilities within the authority of the SVK Armed Forces for use, and to share its lessons learned from training the Special Operations Forces.



- 12th Mech Bn Nitra hosted an away-day meeting of the Military Council of the Chief of the SVK Armed Forces General Staff on 9 Mar. To mark the birthday jubilee of Brig Gen Vladimír Šimko, Gen Milan Maxim presented him with a military decoration, as well as recognising Sgt 1st Class Michal Ščepka as the Best 2016 NCO.

- In the presence of CHOD Gen Milan Maxim, a homecoming ceremony was held for the Slovak service personnel returning from Afghanistan on the parade square at the CIS Mobile Base Ružomberok on 3 Mar. In Afghanistan, the DCM unit was embedded within the 3rd NATO Signals Battalion and provided communications to the deployed coalition forces. The SVK Field Surgical Team worked with the CZE Military Medical Service personnel. The members of both units received military decorations for service in the Resolute Support Mission.

- On 8 Mar, DCHOD Lt Gen Pavel Macko received the outgoing Defence Attaché of the Republic of Poland to the Slovak Republic, Col Zbigniew Komański. He gave an assessment of his performance in Slovakia over what was a very significant period of building the relations between the Armed Forces of both countries, and presented him, on behalf of the Chief of Defence, with the CHOD Memorial Cross, 1st Class, for his exceptional contribution to promoting and furthering cooperation between the two countries in the area of security. At the same time, Lt Gen Macko welcomed the incoming Defence Attaché of the Republic of Poland, Col Andrzej Kapica.

- Czech military diplomats paid a visit to the SVK Land Force HQ on 8 Mar. The Defence Attaché of the CZE REP to the SVK REP, Brig Gen Zdeněk Jakubek, and the Defence Attaché of the CZE REP to the SVK REP under training, Maj Gen Ján Gurník, were received by Maj Gen Ondřej Novosad. This has been the first visit of the current CZE DA to the SVK LF HQ since his appointment as DA. Maj Gen Gurník visited the SVK LF HQ several times before in the role of Land Forces Commander.

- The Medical Centre at Camp M. R. Štefánika, located in Famagusta, organised a Sector-wide blood donation activity at the hospital in the village of Deryneia on 1 Mar. A total of 40 Slovak, Hungarian and Serbian Contingent members serving with UNFICYP – Sector 4 in Cyprus donated blood.

- The Combat Support Brigade Command staff underwent training on 6-8 Mar on Turecký Vrch Training Area to hone up their basic combat skills by practising the F1 hand grenade throws and firing the Model 58V submachine gun at disappearing, moving and fixed targets. The assignment culminated with a speed march across rugged terrain, during which the exercising troops searched for improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rendered first aid to the injured and evacuated them, crossed a contaminated area, and reacted to enemy contact.

- The SVK Land Forces HQ was visited on 7 Mar by the Czech Army PSYOPS Video Team to introduce their line-up of video products as a PSYOPS capability tool. Their aim is to provide information support to military operations. Among other things, the Czech Army PSYOPS Video Team can assist in developing the setup of military exercises. The visit ensured continuity of the developing bilateral cooperation between the SVK and CZE Land Forces in the field of PSYOPS.

Mortars roar at Lešť

(7 March) The members of the Combat Support Company (CSC) from the Mechanised Battalion Nitra conducted a combat live fire training exercise at Lešť, using the 98mm Model 97 mortar and the 81mm Model 98 mortar. The aim of the exercise was for the commanders of the lowest echelon mortar units, ranging from mortar team commanders to the Fire Support Platoon and Mortar Platoon commanders, to practise executing mortar fire control. Each mortar system was operated by a three-member mortar crew. This deployment to Lešť was preceded by a specialised preparatory training for mortar crews at their home garrison and a theory phase for preparing firing and fire control by crew and platoon commanders. The results of the firings at Lešť confirmed that the preparations for the exercise were of high quality. Also exercising at Lešť were Artillery Reconnaissance Team members. Still to gain experience are the Fire Support Platoon commanders from the Mechanised Companies.



Preparations for Latvia

(9 March) The preparations for the Slovak troop contribution under the V4 countries which are deploying their training units to the Baltics on a rotational basis this year culminated on Mechanised Battalion Levice Garrison's training grounds. Troops from the Czech Republic have been deployed in Lithuania for the first three months of this year. This will be followed by the deployment of Slovak troops to Latvia and by the deployments of Hungarian troops in the third and Polish troops in the fourth quarter of the year. The core of the formation is made up of members of the Mechanised Battalion Levice, most of whom come from the 1st Mechanised Company, supplemented by soldiers from the Mechanised Brigade Topoľčany. In January, they focused on individual training at Levice Garrison, while some soldiers attended courses. In February, they used the Simulation Centre at the Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš to align the activities of their combat vehicle crews. The intense training then continued on the garrison training grounds, covering especially tactical, topographic, signals, medical and engineering training. As part of the contingent's final preparations last week, they made the best of the MILES 2000 Simulation System. The "Štefánik" Task Force Group (which numbers 152 service personnel, of whom 6 are servicewomen) will be supported by the members of the Repairs and Transport Platoon drawn from the Repairs Battalion Martin and the Logistics Battalion Hlohovec.

Slovak soldiers are leaving for Cyprus and to Afghanistan

(10 March) Slovak Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš and Chief of the SVK Armed Forces General Staff Gen Milan Maxim participated in a pre-deployment ceremony at the Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade Nitra to bid their farewell to the soldiers who are departing for tours of duty with UNFICYP in Cyprus and with the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. In Cyprus, Slovak troops have been operating on the ground for the past almost 16 years now, with the SVK REP being the Lead Nation in Sector 4. A total of 82 Regular soldiers, of whom 6 are women, are departing to serve in the 33rd SLOVCON rotation. Two servicemen who are bound for Afghanistan will be on an Air Advisory Team (AAT). Their task will be to train Afghan National Army technical staff on the Mi-17/171 helicopter. Speaking at the ceremony, the Head of the MOD said: "The Slovak Republic is a reliable partner who is delivering on its international commitments, and when it comes security, it applies that we not only take but also give. In view of maintaining peace in the world, I am convinced that the UN Peace Support Operations are as important as the combat ones." He went on to emphasise that Slovak soldiers have done a great deal of good work in Cyprus and Afghanistan. He also thanked their families and close ones for their support. On the troop rotation, Gen Maxim underscored that the departing



unit has been trained and logistically supported in a responsible manner. "We have been operationally committed to Cyprus since 2001. Over this period, we have accumulated enough lessons learned," he said.

A total of 3,000 SVK Armed Forces personnel, of whom 120 were servicewomen, have rotated in and out of Cyprus. After the current rotation, 169 Slovak soldiers will serve with UNFICYP. The SVK REP has been involved in Resolute Support Mission since its inception in 2015.