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# Slovakia and the Asia-Pacific amidst the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Over the years, Slovakia's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region has been shaped by a combination of international (structural) and domestic (political) factors. As highlighted in previous *Yearbooks*,<sup>1</sup> Slovakia's position in global value chains, along with the political preferences of various domestic stakeholders, have significantly influenced the geographical and thematic dimensions of its Asia-Pacific policy.

The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the political changes resulting from the February 2020 general election marked the beginning of a transition away from a traditionally pragmatic, economy-centric approach to East Asia, particularly China. This shift was aimed at striking a balance between economic interests, national security, democratic values and human rights. The new approach follows on from the growing realization that the geopolitical and geo-economic focal points were gradually shifting away from the transatlantic to the Indo-Pacific region.

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Given that Slovakia is one of the countries in NATO's and EU's eastern flank that borders Ukraine, it was inevitable that Putin's aggression would profoundly affect all dimensions of Slovak foreign and security policy. Slovakia's interactions with the Asia-Pacific states have also been directly and indirectly influenced by these developments.

In general, two main trends have emerged in Slovakia's relations with the Asia-Pacific region, both of which are connected to the repercussions of the Russian aggression:

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. M. Šimalčík, "Slovakia in East Asia: No longer naive, still not committed," in P. Brezáni, ed., *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2020*. Bratislava: Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 2021, pp. 172–88.

- a redirection of Slovak diplomatic efforts toward Ukraine, resulting in less of a focus on the Asia–Pacific region;
- the emergence of new cooperation opportunities, particularly in the defense and humanitarian aid sectors.

## ■ Decline in attention

Despite several years of progressively acknowledging the significance of the Asia–Pacific region in international affairs,<sup>2</sup> 2022 saw a notable decline in attention paid to the area.

Slovakia currently lacks a formalized Asia–Pacific strategy or a plan for building relations with individual states in the region. This shortcoming persists despite the creation of a strategic document for the region being identified as a priority in the 2021 foreign-policy plan.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Slovakia’s approach to the region has been marked by improvisation and a lack of coherence.

Three main developments illustrate this decline in attention: the closure of the Slovak embassy in Australia, a lack of engagement under the V4+ format and a minimal number of visits to the region by high-ranking Slovak officials.

In 2022 Slovakia decided to close its embassy in Canberra, which had managed diplomatic relations with Australia, New Zealand and several other Pacific countries. In its place, a new General Consulate was established in Sydney to handle consular relations, while the Tokyo embassy, located nearly 8,000 kilometers away (over 9,000 kilometers from New Zealand), assumed responsibility for the remainder of the diplomatic agenda and relations with other Southern Hemisphere countries.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. “Strategic foresight for the foreign and European policy of the Slovak Republic: Risks and opportunities for Slovakia in a transforming world,” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/sk/diplomacia/zahranicna-politika> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> “Zahraničná a európska politika Slovenskej republiky v roku 2021: Slovensko a svet v čase pandémie,” [Foreign and European policy of the Slovak Republic in 2021: Slovakia and the world at the time of the pandemic] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/4238286/2021-Zahrani%C4%8Dna-a-%20europska-politika-SR-v-roku-2021.pdf/063025ca-14fa-4298-b240-4ee01c50339b> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

At a December 2022 meeting between State Secretary of the foreign ministry Ingrid Brocková and Australian Ambassador Richard Sadleir, the increase in trade exchanges between Slovakia and Australia was acknowledged. Slovak representatives expressed a desire to attract Australian investments and diversify exports beyond the automotive industry.<sup>4</sup> However, the closure of the Slovak embassy undermines these aspirations for improved economic relations.

Australia’s growing role as a global security actor should also be considered, particularly given the escalating strategic rivalry between the West and China. At the 2022 NATO Madrid Summit, Australia was elevated to a key Indo-Pacific partner. Additionally, Australia is one of the most active of the non-NATO countries supporting Ukraine’s defense against Russian aggression. The decision to close the Slovak embassy seems short-sighted in light of these developments.

In July 2022 Slovakia assumed the rotating year-long presidency of the Visegrad Four. The presidency program indicated the intention was to “continue cooperation with third partners such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Israel and will seek the possibility of establishing parallel cooperation with other interested countries (e.g., Singapore, India).”<sup>5</sup>

However, despite this declaration, no high-level meetings with Japan or South Korea were arranged under Slovakia’s V4 presidency. This is in contrast to Slovakia’s last V4 presidency (2018/2019), during which several high-level meetings were held under the V4+Japan and V4+South Korea frameworks. The V4+ format has been an important instrument for Slovakia to foster relations with East Asia, enabling engagement with high-level officials from Japan and South Korea, which would prove more challenging if conducted on a strictly bilateral basis. Given the economic importance of both Japan and South Korea to Slovakia, the lack of engagement under the V4+ framework represents a missed opportunity. With the government of Eduard Heger now

<sup>4</sup> “Ingrid Brocková prijala veľvyslancov Dánska a Austrálie,” [Ingrid Brocková received the ambassadors of Denmark and Australia] *Press release*, Consulate General of the Slovak Republic in Sydney, January 31, 2023. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/web/gksydney/pressreleasedetail?p\\_p\\_id=sk\\_mzv\\_portal\\_pressrelease\\_detail\\_portlet\\_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=15782429](https://www.mzv.sk/web/gksydney/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=15782429) (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> “Programme of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2022–June 2023),” Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic, 2022. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=493> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

a caretaker government following a parliamentary vote of no-confidence in December 2022, the chances of rectifying this during the second half of the Slovak V4 presidency seem limited.

Moreover, Slovakia has been relatively passive in developing bilateral relations with Asia-Pacific countries. The few high-profile visits to the region by Slovak officials further underscores the dwindling attention paid to this part of the world. In 2022 the only high-level visits to the Asia-Pacific region were made by State Secretary of the foreign ministry Martin Klus (to Indonesia and Malaysia),<sup>6</sup> State Secretary of the defense ministry Marian Majer (to Malaysia for the Defense Services Asia expo in Kuala Lumpur)<sup>7</sup> and Minister of Defense Jaroslav Nad' (to South Korea in September 2022).<sup>8</sup>

## ■ China, a security threat?

Prior to the war in Ukraine, there was a growing awareness within Slovak foreign and security policy circles of the escalating security risks posed by China and its presence in Slovakia.

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<sup>6</sup> "Martin Klus v Indonézii: Slovensko ponúka unikátne príležitosti aj štvrtej najľudnatejšej krajine sveta," [Martin Klus in Indonesia: Slovakia offers unique opportunities to the fourth most populous country in the world] Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Jakarta, April 22, 2022. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/sk/web/jakarta/pressreleasedetail?p\\_p\\_id=sk\\_mzv\\_portal\\_pressrelease\\_detail\\_portlet\\_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4858955](https://www.mzv.sk/sk/web/jakarta/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4858955) (accessed on March 20, 2023). "Martin Klus v Malajzii: Vďaka obojstrannému záujmu vidím veľký potenciál na posilnenie slovensko-malajzijskej spolupráce a prehĺbenie vzťahov v prospech občanov oboch krajín," [Martin Klus in Malaysia: Thanks to mutual interest, I see great potential for strengthening Slovak-Malaysian cooperation and deepening relations for the benefit of the citizens of both countries] Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Jakarta, April 20, 2022. Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/sk/web/jakarta/pressreleasedetail?p\\_p\\_id=sk\\_mzv\\_portal\\_pressrelease\\_detail\\_portlet\\_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4856436](https://www.mzv.sk/sk/web/jakarta/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=4856436) (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> "MO SR chce s Malajziou rozvíjať užšie vzťahy v oblasti obrany" [Slovak Ministry of Defense wants to develop closer defense relations with Malaysia] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, March 30, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51287-sk/mo-sr-chce-s-malajziou-rozviat-uzsie-vztahy-v-oblasti-obrany/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> "Slovensko podpísalo s Južnou Kóreou memorandum o porozumení," [Slovakia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with South Korea] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, September 21, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51992-sk/slovensko-podpisalo-s-juznou-koreou-memorandum-o-porozumeni/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

The "2021 Security Strategy" acknowledged that China was a partner, competitor and a systemic rival, in line with EU policy. It also recognized that at the time Slovakia lacked economic security defense mechanisms, such as inbound investment screening.<sup>9</sup>

The economic security risks associated with China were increasingly highlighted in public communications by Slovak intelligence services. For instance, the 2021 Annual Report of the Slovak Information Service (SIS), published in June 2022, highlighted attempts by Chinese actors to infiltrate and gain influence in the academic and business sectors.<sup>10</sup> Notably, at least 28 academic institutions (universities or Slovak Academy of Sciences research institutes) maintain 136 relationships with Chinese partners, primarily in STEM fields. Nearly 60 per cent of Slovak academic institutions cooperating with China have ties with at least one Chinese university linked to the People's Liberation Army, amounting to 28 per cent of all connections.<sup>11</sup>

In response to these concerns, Slovakia adopted the "Action Plan for the Coordinated Fight against Hybrid Threats 2022–2024" on March 31, 2022. This cabinet-level security policy planning document was approved just one week after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, with the war significantly accelerating the adoption process.<sup>12</sup> Although the primary motivation was to address subversive Russian activity, the action plan also tackled hybrid threats posed by China, including establishing a due diligence and risk assessment mechanism for universities' international cooperation and enhancing financial transparency. The action plan also reiterates the need for a comprehensive

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<sup>9</sup> "Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky," [Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, 2021. Available online: [https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/4263\\_210128-bezpecnostna-strategia-sr-2021.pdf](https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/4263_210128-bezpecnostna-strategia-sr-2021.pdf) (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> "Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2021," [Slovak Information Service Report 2021], Slovak Information Service, 2022. Available online: <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> M. Šimalčík, A. Kalivoda, "Slovakia: Tech-focused cooperation with hints of thought work," *China Europe Academic Engagement Tracker*, 2022. Available online: <https://academytracker.ceias.eu/articles/5d7SPSPnC72O4D98wKAmjk> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> "Akčný plán koordinácie boja proti hybridným hrozbám posilní odolnosť štátu a spoločnosti voči hybridnému pôsobeniu" [The action plan for coordinating the fight against hybrid threats will strengthen the resistance of the state and society to hybrid action] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, March 31, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51291-sk/akcny-plan-koordinacie-boja-proti-hybridnym-hrozbam-posilni-odolnost-statu-a-spolocnosti-voci-hybridnemu-posobeniu/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

inbound investment screening regime and links it to corporate beneficial ownership transparency.<sup>13</sup>

Although implementation of the risk assessment mechanism for academic international cooperation has been slow, Slovakia did adopt a new FDI screening regime toward the end of the year, which took effect on March 1, 2023. The new law promises a more diligent and fairer system for reviewing inbound investment in Slovakia compared to the previous legal framework.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the more nuanced conceptual understanding of the economic hybrid threats linked to China, there have been moves that increase Slovakia's economic dependence on China. Considering Slovakia's position in global value chains, China is a significant source of final demand for intermediary products, even though these products are not directly exported to China. Slovakia's final demand exposure to China accounts for 5.3 per cent of Slovak exports, 83 per cent higher than bilateral exports.<sup>15</sup>

This indicates that Slovakia's relations with China are heavily influenced by decisions made in Berlin. Therefore, Slovakia has to maintain an open dialogue with Germany so economic policy on China is more closely aligned with Slovakia's interests.<sup>16</sup> This factor has been largely absent from the domestic debate on China policy.

While the 2021 National Security Strategy acknowledges that economic dependencies on certain states can be exploited as a form of hybrid warfare,<sup>17</sup> Slovakia's dependence on China in fact increased in 2022. A significant factor in the increased exposure to China is the planned investment by Volvo, a subsidiary of Chinese automaker Zhejiang Geely, in the e-mobility sector.

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<sup>13</sup> "Akčný plán koordinácie boja proti hybridným hrozbám 2022 – 2024," [Action plan for coordinating the fight against hybrid threats 2022–2024] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, 2022 Available online: <https://www.nbu.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/AKCNYPPLAN-KOORDINACIE-BOJA-PROTI-HYBRIDNYM-HROZBAM.pdf> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> M. Šimalčík, "Toward a robust screening regime," *Chasing Corrosive Capital*, January 16, 2023. Available online: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/toward-robust-screening-regime-matej-%25C5%25A1imal%25C4%258D%25C3%25ADk/?trackingId=mqZD%2FFI5SXyl%2FusTqplRUw%3D%3D> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>15</sup> M. Šebeňa, T. Chan, M. Šimalčík, "The China factor: Economic exposures and security implications in an interdependent world," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, March 2023. Available online: [https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEIAS\\_Exposures-paper\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEIAS_Exposures-paper_FINAL.pdf) (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> "Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky," op. cit.

Interestingly, despite Volvo being owned by a Chinese shareholder, the investment was publicly seen as Swedish rather than Chinese. This suggests a degree of strategic ignorance persists in Slovakia on economic policy and the potential geo-economic implications.

The investment will further increase Slovakia's automotive sector's dependence on China, particularly in the critical e-mobility sector. Even before this investment, automaker Volkswagen Bratislava had already been disproportionately reliant on the Chinese market, generating 25 per cent of its revenue there (as of 2021), more than in Germany or the USA.<sup>18</sup>

## ■ Defense cooperation with Asia-Pacific

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had repercussions beyond Eastern Europe. As the Russian defense industry is primarily fueling the country's war efforts in Ukraine, there has been a decline in Russian military exports, including to Southeast Asia.

Between 2020 and 2021 Russia was the leading arms exporter to Southeast Asia, particularly to Vietnam, and to a lesser extent, Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia.<sup>19</sup> However, due to a combination of factors such as domestic demand in Russia, international sanctions, poor battlefield performance and increasing Chinese influence over Russia, demand for Russian weapons in Southeast Asia is expected to decline.<sup>20</sup>

With the increasingly tense security environment in Southeast Asia, a growing demand for weapons supplies to countries in the region is anticipated. Given Russia's incapacity to meet this demand, opportunities may arise for other suppliers, including Slovakia.

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<sup>18</sup> "Pohľad do spätného zrkadla: Výročná správa 2021," [A look in the rearview mirror: Annual Report 2021] Volkswagen Slovakia, 2022. Available online: [https://sk.volkswagen.sk/content/dam/companies/sk\\_vw\\_slovakia/podnik/vyrocnna\\_sprava\\_2021\\_v2.pdf](https://sk.volkswagen.sk/content/dam/companies/sk_vw_slovakia/podnik/vyrocnna_sprava_2021_v2.pdf) (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>19</sup> I. Storey, "The Russia-Ukraine war and its potential impact on Russia's arms sales to Southeast Asia," ISEAS, May 5, 2022, Available online: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-47-the-russia-ukraine-war-and-its-potential-impact-on-russias-arms-sales-to-southeast-asia-by-ian-storey/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

In this context, it is worth noting that the defense ministry has emerged as a significant driver of interactions with Asian states, demonstrating a growing interest in entering the Asian defense market.

Following the Defense Services Asia expo in Kuala Lumpur attended by state secretary Marian Majer and Slovak companies, reports indicate that Malaysia is considering purchasing 16 to 18 EVA self-propelled howitzers. Further details on the licensing, off-sets and involvement of Malaysian contractors are not yet available. Similar opportunities may arise with Indonesia, which has been expressing interest in defense cooperation with Slovakia for some time.<sup>21</sup>

Opportunities for defense cooperation also exist on the import side, as well as in broader security policy consultation and coordination. During his September 2022 visit to South Korea, defense minister Naď and his Korean counterpart Lee Jong-sup signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the two countries' security dialogue.<sup>22</sup> South Korea has also expressed interest in contributing to modernizing the Slovak military,<sup>23</sup> with prospects increasing in light of Western military depletion and production reaching full capacity due to support for Ukrainian defense efforts.<sup>24</sup> Potential areas of cooperation include South Korea supplying light training aircraft or drones.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> F. Hardman Lea, "Southeast Asia, the market for Slovak defence exports?," Institute for Central Europe, 2022, Available online: <http://iceoz.eu/en/southeast-asia-the-market-for-slovak-defence-exports/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> "Slovensko podpísalo s Južnou Kóreou memorandum o porozumení," [Slovakia signed a memorandum of understanding with South Korea] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, September 21, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51992-sk/slovensko-podpisalo-s-juznou-koreou-memorandum-o-porozumeni/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> "Rokovanie národného riaditeľa pre vyzbrojovanie a veľvyslanca Južnej Kórey potvrdilo ochotu spolupracovať v oblasti obrany a podpory obranného priemyslu" [Meeting between the National Armaments Director and the Ambassador of South Korea confirmed the willingness to cooperate in defense and defense industry support] Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, May 25, 2022. Available online: <https://www.mosr.sk/51524-sk/rokovanie-narodneho-riaditeľa-pre-vyzbrojovanie-a-velvyslanca-južnej-korey-potvrdilo-ochotu-spolupracovat-v-oblasti-obrany-a-podpory-obranneho-priemyslu/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>24</sup> "Nato's weapons stockpiles need urgent replenishment," *Financial Times*, January 31 2023, Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/55b7ba35-6beb-4775-a97b-4e34d8294438> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> A. Matyšák, "Južná Kórea vyzbrojuje svet. Nakúpi minister Naď v Soule stíhačky?" [South Korea is arming the world. Will Minister Naď buy fighter jets in Seoul?] *Pravda*, September 29, 2022, Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/641169-južna-korea-vyzbrojuje-svet-nakupi-minister-nad-v-soule-stihacky/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

Slovak defense companies were also present at the DefExpo-2022 in India,<sup>26</sup> which could become another market for Slovak defense companies. However, as several countries in the region have not condemned Russian aggression, and some even tacitly support Russia,<sup>27</sup> Slovakia must remain vigilant. It is essential to ensure that no defense-related exports are re-exported to Russia or other countries, where they may be used in the perpetration of mass atrocities (e.g., Myanmar).

## ■ Helping Taiwan to break away from isolation

In addition to the military cooperation, the Russian aggression in Ukraine has led to humanitarian collaboration with East Asian states. This has been particularly evident in the case of Taiwan, which, due to its complex international position, has relied on Ukraine's neighbors to facilitate the delivery of aid to Ukraine and its refugees.

Immediately following the invasion, Slovakia, alongside Poland, helped evacuate 22 Taiwanese nationals and their spouses from Ukraine.<sup>28</sup> Slovakia, Poland, Czechia, Latvia and Romania played crucial roles in managing and distributing aid provided by Taiwan, as evidenced by data collected by the EU-Taiwan Tracker database.<sup>29</sup> In Slovakia, this activity was conducted through governmental, municipal and NGO-level initiatives.

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<sup>26</sup> "Slovenské spoločnosti rokovali na 12. veľtrhu obrannej techniky – DefExpo 2022," [Slovak companies negotiated at the 12<sup>th</sup> defense technology fair – DefExpo 2022] Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, October 24, 2022, Available online: [https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p\\_p\\_id=sk\\_mzv\\_portal\\_pressrelease\\_detail\\_portlet\\_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=14904504](https://www.mzv.sk/pressreleasedetail?p_p_id=sk_mzv_portal_pressrelease_detail_portlet_PressReleaseDetailPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&groupId=10182&articleId=14904504) (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>27</sup> A. Gerstl, M. Šimalčík, eds, "Mixed reactions to the Russian war against Ukraine in the Indo-Pacific: Views of governments and civil society," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2023. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/indopacific-views-of-russian-aggression/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> "22 Taiwanese evacuated from Ukraine arrive in Poland, Slovakia," *Focus Taiwan*, February 27, 2022, Available online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/svet/clanok/641169-južna-korea-vyzbrojuje-svet-nakupi-minister-nad-v-soule-stihacky/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>29</sup> "EU-Taiwan Tracker," Central European Institute of Asian Studies. Available online: <https://eutwtracker.ceias.eu/tracker> (accessed on March 20, 2023).



The first shipment of Taiwanese aid to Ukraine delivered via Slovakia arrived on March 15, 2022, and consisted of 100 tons of medical material and \$1.5 million in financial aid, which was transferred to Kyiv the following day. To further support Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, Taiwan donated \$250,000 to the Bratislava municipal government and an additional \$150,000 to the Ukraine–Slovakia Initiative NGO. The largest donation came in the form of a deposit to the Mutual Assistance Fund, a Slovak government-organized initiative, by the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, amounting to nearly € 2 million.<sup>30</sup>

By actively supporting Ukraine’s defense efforts, Taiwan is demonstrating to the Slovak public that it is a democratic partner with shared values, warranting a deepening of relations. This sense of shared values is an important factor motivating parliamentary diplomacy focused on Taiwan. In 2022 parliamentarians were active in supporting Taiwan’s participation in international organizations such as the WHO, ICAO, INTERPOL or UNFCCC.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, at the governmental level, Slovakia and Taiwan signed the Arrangement on Judicial Cooperation in Civil and Commercial Matters. While this has political implications, it is also a vital precursor to improving legal certainty as the foundation for further economic relations. Slovakia was the first EU member state to sign such an agreement with Taiwan.<sup>32</sup>

Thanks to these efforts, Slovakia is currently among the most active EU member states in promoting deeper relations with Taiwan.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, new opportunities for economic cooperation with Taiwan are emerging, such as the establishment of Taiwan Capital’s Central and Eastern Europe Investment Fund worth \$200 million, with approximately 60 per cent to 80 per cent

earmarked for Slovakia, alongside Czechia and Lithuania. The fund’s first investment in Slovakia, closed in early January 2023, provided \$8 million to the robotics company Photoneo.<sup>34</sup>

## ■ Outlook

This chapter has shown that while Slovakia is able to make progress by building relationships with individual countries in the Asia–Pacific region, more significant advancements are being hindered by the absence of a comprehensive strategy to the region as a whole and the efficient allocation of limited resources.

To improve resource allocation and, thereby, enhance diplomacy toward the Asia-Pacific region, Slovakia should employ a strategic approach, beginning with the adoption of a comprehensive strategy for the Asia–Pacific region that clearly defines Slovakia’s interests and strategic objectives. These objectives can then be further operationalized through sector-specific and country-specific action plans.

By establishing a well-structured strategy, Slovakia will be able to prioritize and streamline its diplomatic efforts, facilitating more effective engagement with the region. This strategic approach will enable it to better navigate the complex geopolitical landscape, capitalize on emerging opportunities and address potential challenges. Ultimately, a comprehensive strategy will contribute to Slovakia’s ability to foster stronger and more productive relationships with the Asia–Pacific region, advancing its national interests and promoting regional stability.

Whether Slovakia manages to adopt such a strategy in 2023 will be an important indicator of whether it is able to adapt to the changing geopolitical reality in which the Asia–Pacific region will be at the forefront of global affairs.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> M. Šimalčík, D. Remžová, “Slovakia: A pragmatic enthusiast,” in M. Šimalčík, A. Gerstl, D. Remžová, eds, *Beyond the Dumpling Alliance: Tracking Taiwan’s relations with Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava: Central European Institute of Asian Studies, 2023. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/beyond-the-dumpling-alliance/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>32</sup> “Taiwan, Slovakia ink arrangement on judicial cooperation in civil, commercial matters,” *Taiwan Today* June 9, 2022, Available online: <https://www.taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=2&post=220284&unitname=Politics-Top-News&postname=Taiwan%2C-Slovakia-ink-arrangement-on-judicial-cooperation-in-civil%2C-commercial-matters> (accessed on March 20, 2023); M. Šimalčík, “Extraditions and legal cooperation: next frontier of Taiwan’s outreach to Europe?” Central European Institute of Asian Studies, August 8, 2022. Available online: <https://ceias.eu/taiwan-europe-extradition/> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

<sup>33</sup> M. Šimalčík, A. Gerstl, D. Remžová, eds, op. cit.

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<sup>34</sup> M. Strong, “Taiwan Central and Eastern Europe Investment Fund launches project in Slovakia,” *Taiwan News*, January 1, 2023, Available online: <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4770568> (accessed on March 20, 2023).

