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Slovakia Report

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1 | Introduction

Slovakia is edging rather than racing towards embracing a whole-of-government approach (WGA). Several forces are driving this (slow) progress. The 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) has been influential in general terms, and the 2017 provisional update of the Slovak Security Strategy (Government of the Slovak Republic 2017) specifically names the EUGS as one of its guiding lights. However, Slovakia's participation in EU missions has been even more instrumental. Since the EU calls for all kinds of contributions (i.e. not just military), and since Slovakia generally strives to please when the EU calls for assistance, the country has found itself pulled towards a more comprehensive kind of engagement.

The influence of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has historically been important, and Slovakia initially lagged behind other EU member states in bringing non-military resources to crisis-management contributions. The MoD has found itself frequently asked to contribute forces to EU (and NATO) missions in order to uphold Slovakia's reputation and credibility in those institutions, but without ever receiving additional resources. The MoD came to see these requests as basically foreign policy through other means and implemented at the expense of other defence priorities. In response, beginning in the early 1990s, it began to pressure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to do its fair share by sending non-military experts abroad. Eventually, it took until December 2011 for the country to pass the necessary legislation (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2011) and build a list of reserves capable and willing to deploy abroad, but at least the option now exists. However, it has been used very sparingly

to date, and only a handful of civilian experts from the MoD have been posted to Ukraine and Georgia since the law's passage.

These days, the MFA is the key driver of Slovakia's WGA, although it has enjoyed only limited success. Inter-party rivalry impedes cooperation with the MoD, which is in the midst of an arms-modernisation drive and is therefore reluctant to dilute its focus and resources – of civilian or military forces – by expanding existing deployments or committing to new missions. The MFA controls development aid and, in principle, should be well positioned to ensure that this aid is used in a manner that is aligned with the overall goals of the country's foreign and security policies. But this happens too little in practice. Moreover, the MFA does a poor job of narrowing the list of priorities down to a meaningful (i.e. manageable) number. For example, the 2019 statement of foreign policy priorities (MFEA 2019) lists everything from energy security to cultural diplomacy as a priority. The net effect is that such documents give poor guidance to the departments managing security policy and development aid, respectively, in addition to giving them few reasons to actually collaborate. To complicate matters further, the upper echelons of the MFA leadership are not involved in pushing for a comprehensive approach to crisis management abroad, as the issue is not a priority and development aid is often spent with little reference to Slovakia's participation in crisis-management missions abroad.

One should note, however, that things have not always been this way. For example, Slovakia has tried to match its contribution to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan through small development projects with NGOs, and it applied the same logic to its participation in the EU's Operation Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But budgetary pressures have caused the MFA to primarily refocus foreign aid on meeting UN priorities to bolster the country's role as chair of the UN General Assembly (in 2018).

2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

There are no explicitly formulated WGA policy documents in Slovakia. The closest the country comes to this is in the form of the National Security Strategy of 2005 (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2005b), but even its guidance is cursory and somewhat incongruous. The strategy lists the armed forces and foreign service as the main security tools, adding that police, fire-brigade and other forces are also very important. However, it is clear from the context that the 'security' in question here is internal security rather than crisis management abroad. Elsewhere, the document states that in managing "failing states", Slovakia will also deploy development aid and will seek to mobilise civil society, as well. Although this is admittedly more in line with mainstream WGA thinking, the reference is cursory and the strategy does not establish any mechanism for implementation.

The 2017 provisional update of the 2005 Security Strategy (Government of the Slovak Republic 2017) provides fresh details on which fields of action for EU crisis management missions Slovakia prioritises (e.g. building resilience in the European neighbourhood, preventing state failure and upholding responsibility to protect), but without specifying the means for accomplishing these goals or calling for a WGA in deploying those means. Incidentally, the 2017 update of the strategy received cabinet approval but stalled in the parliament, although it is technically binding on the current government. Furthermore, the

2005 Defence Strategy (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2005a) mentions the need for a comprehensive approach to crisis management in general, but without explaining whether and how this applies to Slovakia's contributions to such missions.

In addition to the aforementioned strategies, Slovakia has a law on the books that mandates inter-agency coordination when civilian experts are deployed abroad (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2011). The law also establishes a coordination council composed of representatives of the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Interior, Finance and Defence. However, rather than to create a WGA effect, the council's mandate is merely to "exchange information, agree on modalities of the deployment of civilian experts, review their reports and agree on the financing of their deployment". Strangely, there is no formal requirement on the books for inter-agency coordination regarding military deployments which would mirror the one that applies to the deployment of civilian experts.

While Slovakia has no overall strategy/concept document for a 'comprehensive approach' or WGA as such, a potentially similar document (i.e. a security system concept) is currently in the drafting stage. Its purpose is to foster a better WGA mindset on security issues. However, it appears to predominantly focus on crises within the country's borders rather than those abroad. What's more, at the time of writing (October 2019), the concept had not been passed yet and elections for a new government had not been held yet. In any case, the draft's fate in the next government is uncertain.

3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and the Ministry of Interior play the key roles in cooperating in a WGA-like fashion. Here, one should note that Slovakia's development aid is administered by an agency within the MFA, so there is no equivalent to a department for international aid and development. Furthermore, the country's National Security Council plays only a marginal role in crisis intervention abroad in addition to having no right of initiative and no real coordination role. Even when it does debate deployments, instead of genuinely pressing for a WGA effect, it merely serves to clear up any differences among the various ministries involved regarding the modalities of deployment.

In practice, fairly intense but informal consultations – mainly between the MoD and the MFA – usually precede deployments of armed units (as is discussed in more detail below). These consultations serve to discuss whether and how the proposed deployment serves Slovakia's foreign policy priorities and sometimes to inspire other departments to get involved, as well. In theory, the aforementioned coordination council that manages the deployment of civilian experts abroad could serve to bring about a more comprehensive approach to crisis management. However, according to insiders, it does not do so in practice. Instead, the ministries tend to decide on their own who they want to deploy and where, and they merely use to council to gain the pro forma approval of other ministries.

4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?

In the absence of a unifying WGA strategy, coordination mechanisms or top-down pressure, individual initiative and informal cooperation have produced the few limited examples of a comprehensive approach that Slovakia can point to. The country has a small but fairly tight-knit security community made up of roughly two dozen individuals who move relatively freely between the offices of the president and the prime minister, the MoD, the MFA and, to a lesser extent, the parliament. There is some but relatively little turnover within the community by virtue of the low availability of qualified personnel, and there are not very many newcomers into the system. Also, unlike the Baltic states, Romania or Poland, Slovakia does not have any immediate security threats on its borders, meaning that security issues attract relatively little following or 'fresh blood'. Instead, those who focus on the issues tend to stay active in them for a long time and to generally remain unchallenged.

Interactions within this security community often stand in for formal WGA structures and policies. When the policy director in the MoD has good relations with his or her counterpart in the MFA (i.e. the security policy director), they will often meet to debate, among other things, a more comprehensive approach to crisis-management missions abroad. Some of the deployments of civilian MoD experts on EU- or NATO-led missions, such as to complement Slovakia's diplomatic or military efforts in the same theatre, have originated in this way. In other words, these deployments have not happened as a result of top-down pressure, with the prior knowledge of superiors, with EU prodding or with any real reference to any official strategy. Instead, they happened simply because they made sense.

The downsides of such a heavily informal system are as evident as the advantages. First, while the members of the security community do tend to stay put for a long time, when some retire, change posts or are shuffled between departments, they often leave a void that may or may not be filled. Since a WGA is not a top concern, the department that has lost a contact point may not be concerned for years that it no longer enjoys good coordination with its sister departments. What's more, since so much of the inter-agency interaction is dependent on individual initiative rather than on formal coordination mechanisms, the absence of the right counterpart can degrade or halt coordination for long periods of time.

Second, while the informal security community includes individuals in some senior positions (e.g. advisers to the president or prime minister), its members more often than not operate without official sanctioning or even much interest from the top echelons of the government. They are allowed to coordinate rather than encouraged or urged to do so. This works fine in most instances, but not when decisions need to be made that involve cabinet or, even worse, parliamentary approval. The security expertise at the ministerial or parliamentary level is extremely sparse, interest in the issue is low, and efforts by members of the informal security community to forge better interdepartmental coordination often fall apart when they run up against inter-personal politics and polemics in the upper echelons.

The impact on the WGA is that even if the lower-ranking officials, using informal ties and their familiarity with one another, agree and propose a coordinated inter-agency approach to crisis management to their superiors, the latter often demur or let the suggestion die out of disinterest. Here, one should briefly note that this disinterest in security issues at the top levels also explains why the Slovakia's key conceptual documents (e.g. the National Security Strategy

or the security- sector concept under development), which by definition require multi-stakeholder endorsement and implementation, tend to take so long to get approved or updated.

What also often works against a WGA to EU crisis management is the relatively insular mindset of the defence and interior ministries. While the MFA, by virtue of its mandate and the circulation of personnel between Brussels and Bratislava, tends to be rather immersed in EU policies and to follow the latest thinking, the same cannot be said of the other two departments involved. In fact, members of the defence and interior ministries tend to regard EU or NATO missions as something of a luxury as well as something that one only does after urgent domestic priorities have been met. However, one should note that even if this increasingly is the case for the MoD, the Ministry of Interior is gradually becoming less insular and more active abroad. What's more, mindsets are not the only hindrance to EU- and NA- TO-related WGAs. Since human and financial resources are always tight, participation in the missions of these international organisations is often the first to get the axe.

It has not always been this way. In days when WGAs were a relatively new phenomenon, the MoD was the entity egging on the interior and foreign ministries to get involved in crisis management abroad. This championing of a WGA was born of first-hand experience, as the MoD had uniformed personnel in EU- and NATO-led operations even before Slovakia's 2004 accessions, and was long the exclusive provider of personnel for such missions. What's more, it saw that other countries had started to contribute in ways other than by supplying military personnel, and felt that Slovakia should, too, if only to reduce the pressure on the MoD budget (i.e. to spread the pain). But the last several defence ministers have brought a far more domestic mindset to their job, and the MoD has gone from being the driving force behind a WGA to an often-reluctant participant.

5 | Conclusions

Slovakia's successes with WGAs have been few and far between. Conceptually, a WGA is nearly invisible, save a passing and somewhat incongruous reference in the National Security Strategy (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2005b) and a limited application of inter-agency coordination to the act of deploying civilian experts overseas. Institutional coordination does take place (e.g. in the aforementioned case of civilian experts or when decisions on crisis-management participation come up in the National Security Council), but it rarely produces a WGA effect. Top-down pressure from ministers or other senior officials for departments to approach crisis management in a comprehensive fashion is basically nonexistent. Those successes that have been scored (e.g. the shift from contributing armed forces exclusively to deploying policy and civilian defence experts as well, though not necessarily alongside each other in the same missions) have resulted from individual initiative, EU nudging or budgetary pressures (e.g. when the MoD leaned on the MFA to start sending its own experts to missions in order to lighten the load on the defence budget).

One area in which Slovakia performs particularly poorly (and regrettably always has) is in aligning its trade activities with the other tools of a WGA. Indeed, it has managed to deploy all of its other resources – soldiers, police officers, civilian defence experts, diplomats, aid workers – in crisis management abroad (even if not always all on the same missions and admittedly

often only in symbolic amounts), but the trade bit has eluded Slovakia almost completely. There are two main reasons for this: First, the country does not have very many companies or entrepreneurs with the resources and mindset to invest in risky locations – which are, by definition, the places to which the EU tends to deploy crisis-management missions. Diplomats and defence officials struggle to find the right business counterparts, and the government does not have the option of leaning on managers of state-owned companies to participate. The fact is that, with the narrow exception of slices of the defence industry, Slovakia has privatised virtually all other sectors of the economy.

The second reason why business remains impervious to opportunities that may present themselves in the framework of Slovak crisis-management missions abroad is the low level of trust in government. Public procurement, in particular, has seen a number of corruption scandals. As a result, the business community has come to think of the public sector as self-serving and crooked. This mainly concerns tenders within Slovakia's borders, but public-private interaction abroad has not always gone well either. In fact, stories circulate within the business community about diplomats who exact a percentage of the profits in exchange for helping Slovak companies place their products or services on foreign markets – the latter being part of diplomats' job description. As a result, few companies are willing to participate in WGAs out of fear that their reputation will suffer.

6 | Reference list

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