Slovakia's perspective on NATO

Jaroslav Ušiak

Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T 1

Security, as expressed by the security policy of a state, is one of the most fundamental aspects of a foreign and defense policies of a state. Together, they create a foreign orientation of the state which may alter with time, space and under the influence of political decision-making. This paper presents the sources of the strategic orientation of Slovakia that emerged in reaction to historical events that the faced country Slovakia gradually integrated into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures with the emphasis on coalition changes in the governance of the state. This paper, through analysis and comparison, shows the dominant changes in the Slovakian security environment. In any case, it has been the destiny of small countries to maintain their security through cooperation and integration.

1. Introduction

Within the framework of the analysis of the Slovak Republic (SR), we could say that the country is positioned in an area that has no steady geographic boundaries. The Slovak Republic located in Central Europe is a relatively small democratic state, with a market economy. This region was quite unstable in the past and it was not easy to delimit its boundaries. Only after World War II (WWII) was the territory of this region arranged in the form as we know it today. Multi-nationality, multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionality represented the main problems of this region, which significantly aroused mutual disagreements. According to Slovak philosopher and political scientist Jana Lasicová, disagreements and conflicts themselves arose "rather through language and identity than by means of mutual conflicts. The conflicts in this area were always related to the ambitions of bigger actors and not to the risk factors resulting from a specific regional origin" (Lasicová, 2006: 26).

The independent Slovak Republic[1] was established as a successor state of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic on January 1, 1993. Previously, it existed primarily as a part of the Soviet Bloc, which determined its political direction, international orientation and economic dependence. After the breakdown of the Soviet Bloc, the country started to search its new orientation. The Slovak Republic has become an independent small country with limited natural and human resources, depending on neighboring states economically. The main factor, which influenced the future direction of Slovakia, was the orientation in cooperation with neighboring countries and countries of the European space (Kmec et al., 2005). Slovakia, together with other Central European states, perceived the North Atlantic Treaty

---

E-mail address: jaroslav.usiak@umb.sk.

[1] From this perspective, the security environment of the Slovakian territory, were state units: the first Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1938, the second Czechoslovak Republic 1938–1939, Czechoslovak government-in-exile during WWII, Third Czechoslovak Republic 1945–1948, the Czechoslovak Republic 1948–1960, Czechoslovak Socialist Republic 1960–1990 and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic 1990–1993.

Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) as a reflection of values peculiar to the Western civilization which they sought to be part of, values similar to the non-implemented, but offered, Marshall Plan in the past. From an economic perspective, Slovakia focused on the European Union (EU), where it expected to achieve economic stability and prosperity; NATO was perceived from the security and military perspective as the key organization that might ensure Slovak independence in the future. On the other hand, in terms of raw materials and energy resources, it has been bound to cooperate with the Russian Federation. Slovakia was well aware of its linkage to a partner outside NATO and the EU. After its establishment, the Slovak Republic has also become an independent player in the field of security and an integral part of the security environment in Central Europe. From the beginning, the orientation of the country in the sphere of security focused on entrenching itself in the transatlantic security structures.[2] Today, the Slovak Republic is a full member of NATO and the EU. These two organizations significantly determine the direction of Slovakia inter alia in security issues.

In the following text we will attempt to point out fundamental tasks that the state has had to solve within the scope of its obligations for survival of the nation and its territory and explain why the security task/function of the state is inevitable in the preservation of the state's existence. Particular emphasis will be placed on internal political changes in coalitions and thus in the governance of the state since 1993. By means of analysis and comparison, the key aspects are defined that determine the development of the Slovak territory which influenced the changes in the state's foreign policy orientation within the surveyed period. The article consists of three parts. The first outlines a brief historical overview with the emphasis on the key historical events that have influenced the contemporary European value orientation, as well as on the changes after the end of the Cold War. The second part deals with the problems related to the changes in governments and their value implications on the development of the security policy and to the Slovak membership in the EU and NATO. The final part focuses on the contemporary changes in the security policy that are influenced by diverse challenges as well as the crisis in Ukraine.

2. Slovakia's perspective on European security – historical background

The establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) after World War II depended on the Soviet Union (also USSR) from the very beginning and the sentiments of the population were strongly pro-Soviet. The exiled government did not markedly interfere with prepared changes that were worked out and implemented by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia according to the results of the election. The following text is divided into two parts. The first explains the development of the Slovak strategic orientation in the contemporary era through the prism of historical events. The second part is focused on the period after the Cold War and the return of Slovakia to the European security traditions.

2.1. Period of the Warsaw Pact membership

Czechoslovakia had tried at first to pursue the European value tradition, but the seizure of power by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia inhibited this trend. In 1948, the communist constitution was adopted, without changing the name of the state, and the state was renamed after an amendment to the constitution in 1960 becoming Czechoslovak Socialist Tepublic; this period of 1945–1989 was a period of the Soviet Union influence (Michálek, 1997: 28), which brought in many radical changes to the development of Slovak security. The most important change was represented by the role of the army in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic that was no longer focused on national defense, but on its belonging to the Eastern Bloc and the defense of the Soviet Bloc's territory and ideology. The primary responsibility for the defense of the Socialist Fatherland was carried out by the Communist Party (Vojensko Politický Zápisník, 1989). All fundamental issues were solved in accordance with the political direction of the party line, and the armed forces of the state also operated on the basis of the party's resolutions.

In the sphere of international activities, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was a member of the security organization of the Warsaw Pact[3] and the economic grouping of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).[4] During this period, the Soviet Union realized the fragility of a newly established security grouping of socialist countries, and therefore it was trying to build a common doctrine for the protection of socialism in all member states. The Warsaw Pact had a clear predominance in the number of conventional forces at the beginning of the conflict. Western Allies and, in particular, the US had nuclear capabilities. NATO itself did not have the capabilities for conventional war until the 1980s. If there had been a conflict or war, it would have been within the territory of Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic.

---

[2] The first milestone was represented by its accession to the United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – formerly the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), and the next orientation was determined by the Partnership for Peace program (P4P), and later the accession of the Slovak Republic to NATO and EU.

[3] Warsaw Pact was established 14.05.1955, the members states were Soviet Union, Albania (withdrew in 1968), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany (acceded in 1956), Poland and Romania.

[4] Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was established 5–8.1.1949.