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## DESIGNING SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY AND CURRENT UKRAINIAN ISSUES

**Jozef Hrdlička**

*Museum in Hlohovec*

*Franciscan Square 1, 920 01 Hlohovec, Slovakia*

The work presents a brief genesis of the formation of the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic after its establishment in January 1993. After the fall of the communist regime in November 1989, the Slovak Republic continued the efforts of the common Czechoslovak state to integrate into Euro-Atlantic international organizations. Slovakia's orientation towards the "West" was clear. However, there were several specifics in the conception of Slovak foreign policy after 1993. These specifics of Slovak foreign policy were determined by the economic conditions of the state, as well as the approach of the ruling political elites. In the years 1993-1998, the Slovak government considered relations with the Russian Federation to be a priority. In the years 1998-2006, the foreign policy of the governments was oriented towards the integration of Slovakia into the European Union and NATO. The social democrat governments in 2006-2010 and 2012-2020 respected the "Western" foreign policy orientation of Slovakia, but supplemented it with the dimension of cooperation with all sides of the world (including Russia). With the development of Slovak foreign policy, relations with Ukraine also developed. All governmental political representations strove for positive development of relations with Ukraine. After the start of the war in Ukraine, the Slovak Republic took its side. All parliamentary political parties rejected Russian aggression against Ukraine. Based on the results of the parliamentary elections in September 2023, there was a change of governing political parties. The government that comprehensively supported Ukraine in the military conflict with Russia was replaced by the government of social democrats and conservative political currents. The current government coalition continues to support Ukraine, but has refused further military support and prefers a peaceful-diplomatic solution to the conflict. The work brings the nature of the policy of the current Slovak government closer to current Ukrainian issues.

*Key words:* foreign policy, Ukraine, war, peace, relations, cooperation, aid.

**Problem formulation.** After its establishment in January 1993, the Slovak Republic formulated its foreign policy. The political elites unanimously strove for Slovakia's transatlantic orientation. In 2004, the Slovak Republic became a member state of the European Union (EU) and NATO. This foreign-political orientation of Slovakia has not been questioned by any government so far. However, there were specifics in Slovakia's foreign policy that were primarily related to the programmatic orientation of the political parties forming the government of the Slovak Republic. These are primarily the Social Democracy (SMER – SSD) and the Slovak National Party (SNS). The political party SMER – SSD (currently SNS) has always respected and promoted Slovakia's Euro-Atlantic orientation. In foreign policy, however, she also promoted a specific approach – the cooperation of Slovakia in all countries of the world. After the parliamentary elections held on September 30, 2023, there was a change of government political elites. The new government was formed by two social-democratic entities (SMER – SSD and HLAS – SD) together with SNS. In matters of foreign policy, the current government of the Slovak Republic proclaims a sovereign policy and the defense of the national-state interests of the Slovak Republic. At the same time, he is a supporter of the current "Western" orientation of Slovakia. With the change of government

in Slovakia (2023), there were also certain changes in Slovakia's policy towards Ukraine. The Slovak government continues to support Ukraine in the conflict with Russia. However, it rejects military support in the form of state supplies of arms and ammunition. The current government of the Slovak Republic promotes a peaceful solution to the conflict and rejects war escalation in Europe. The presented work tries to define the main elements of the current policy of Slovakia towards Ukraine.

**Research material, methodology and formulation of goals.** The work is based on the analysis of strategic documents related to Slovak foreign policy after 1993. After the creation of an independent state, Slovakia joined the European Union and NATO. Despite the undisputed foreign policy orientation of Slovakia, there are certain specificities in the field of foreign policy of individual governments, which we have generalized. The work analyzes all Program Statements of governments in the years 1994 – 2023. Based on them, it defines the specifics of individual governmental political elites in the field of foreign policy. The war in Ukraine, which has been going on since February 2022, has come to the center of attention in international relations. In this context, Slovak diplomacy and the entire foreign policy of Slovakia had to react to the tragic events of the war. The work analyzes and generalizes the publicly available approaches of the Slovak governments in 2022 and 2024 to the Ukrainian crisis. The aim of the thesis is to give a brief description of the foreign policy of Slovakia. Its understanding is also important in view of the formulation of Slovakia's policy in relation to the current problems of Ukraine. The subject of the analysis was also the bilateral meetings at the level of the Prime Ministers of Slovakia and Ukraine held in the first half of 2024. The work tries to prove that despite the change of government political outfits in Slovakia in September 2023, the essence of the policy of the Slovak Republic towards Ukraine remains unchanged. In this sense, the aim of the work is to characterize the basic orientations of the current Slovak government in foreign policy and specifically towards Ukraine.

**Research results.** The Slovak Republic (SR) was created after the division of the Czechoslovak Federation (ČSFR) in 1993. After its establishment, it had to reconceptualize its foreign policy. After the socio-political changes brought about by the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989, society began to orient itself towards Euro-Atlantic, international structures. This orientation was also developed by the newly formed Slovak Republic. From the creation of the Slovak Republic until 1998, Vladimír Mečiar was the main Slovak leader. His governments were composed mainly of national and conservative political entities. The foreign policy orientation of Slovakia was already very clearly defined in the program statement of the government of the Slovak Republic from December 1994: *"In the field of foreign policy, the government of the Slovak Republic will clearly maintain the continuity of its direction. We want to continue the current policy of bringing the Slovak Republic closer to European and transatlantic political, security and economic structures, intensify it and emphasize our determination to become a full-fledged part of these groupings. This effort of ours means heading into the economic space, to which we are bound by historical traditions and natural relations, which creates conditions for the closeness of the views of the parliamentary parties on the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic. ... The basic direction of the security orientation of the Slovak Republic is the effort to obtain membership in the North Atlantic Alliance and the Western European Union. We consider the North Atlantic Alliance to be the most effective existing security organization and membership in it at the same time as the possibility of obtaining effective security guarantees."* [8] Since 1993, mutual relations between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine have undergone a specific qualitative development. In this context, the entire strategic vision of Slovakia's policy, not only towards Ukraine, but towards the whole of Eastern Europe, was undergoing a specific development. The

politics and relations of the Slovak Republic with Ukraine have always developed together with the development of relations with the Russian Federation. In the aforementioned statement of the government from 1994, it is stated: *"We will attach great importance to the development of mutually beneficial economic cooperation with the Russian Federation and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States."* [8] The international relations of the Slovak Republic with Ukraine and with other states towards the "East" were changing depending on which political elites made up the Slovak government. In this context, in the history of Slovakia's modern foreign relations and thus also relations with Ukraine (1993-2024) and the whole of Eastern Europe, we can talk about three fundamental concepts – orientations. The first was the orientation of foreign policy towards close relations with the Russian Federation (1993-1998). This policy was implemented considering the economic conditions of Slovakia, despite the fact that Slovakia's orientation towards the "West" was codified in all strategic documents of Slovak foreign policy. The governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998-2006) implemented a gradual transformation of the Slovak economy. They sought the completion of Slovakia's integration efforts into the European Union and NATO. They redirected the Slovak Republic's foreign relations towards the "West". Social democrat governments, respecting the Euro-Atlantic orientation of Slovakia, declared and implemented a specific foreign policy for all countries of the world (2006-2010, 2012-2020, 2024).

As part of the "Eastern" foreign policy, Vladimír Mečiar governments have preferred building positive relations with Russia since the establishment of the Slovak Republic. This fact was primarily determined by the significant interdependence of the Slovak industrial and energy structure with Russia. On the basis of this economic interdependence, close political relations also developed. Relations with Ukraine were friendly, but not considered a priority. Although the Slovak Republic in the years 1993-1998 advocated integration into Euro-Atlantic structures in its strategic documents, this integration was not intensive in practice.

In 1998, there was a change of ruling political elites in Slovakia. Until June 2006, Slovakia had governments that considered Slovakia's integration into the structures of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) as a strategic goal. This goal was clearly defined in the Program Statement of the Government from 1998: *"Membership in the European Union (EU) is a strategic goal and one of the most important political and economic priorities of the Slovak Republic." In order to achieve it, the government will fulfill the political criteria in the shortest possible time and undertakes to fulfill other criteria established by the Copenhagen EU summit and the conclusions of the joint bodies of the Slovak Republic – the EU, so that the Slovak Republic is included among the best prepared candidate countries. ... In the area of foreign security policy, the strategic priority is to achieve the membership of the Slovak Republic in the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) in the shortest possible time. The Government of the Slovak Republic will take the necessary measures in its internal and foreign policy with the aim of integrating the Slovak Republic into the NATO collective defense system."* [9, p. 40] In addition to Slovakia's integration efforts during this period, attention was also paid to the development of relations with neighboring countries. It was primarily about the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Austria and Ukraine as the largest neighbor. Even in 1998, Mikuláš Dzurinda government considered Slovakia's relations with the Russian Federation to be important mainly for economic reasons: *"The government will develop correct relations with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and pay particular attention to balanced relations with the Russian Federation, which is one of the most important economic partners."* [9, p. 41] Despite the above, we can state that in addition to Slovakia's integration efforts into "Western" structures, the development of foreign relations with Ukraine or the Russian Federation was marginal – it was not a priority. Between 1998 and 2006,

several reforms of internal and foreign policy were implemented in Slovakia. There was also a reform of industrial production in the Slovak Republic. This reform consisted in the transition from military engineering (dependent on Russia) to automobile production. This gradually led to the overcoming of Slovakia's economic dependence on Russia and a gradual change in practical foreign policy in relation to Eastern Europe. After the entry of the Slovak Republic into the EU and NATO (1994), the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic was fundamentally reformatted. The governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda implemented foreign policy in full compliance with the policy of Western structures. Relations with Ukraine gradually became more important. This priority of Slovakia's cooperation with Ukraine after its accession to the EU and NATO was formulated for the first time by the head of the Slovak government, Mikuláš Dzurinda, at the Slovak Foreign Policy Evaluation Conference in March 2004.

Social-democratic governments in 2006-2010 and 2012-2020 implemented new foreign policy content. It was the governments of Robert Fico and Peter Pellegrini. Although these governments respected the foreign policy orientation of the Slovak Republic towards the EU and NATO, they also implemented the concept of foreign policy towards all "four corners of the world". On a pragmatic level, this meant an interest in international cooperation not only with the West, but also with, for example, Russia, China and Ukraine. The program statement of the government of the Slovak Republic from 2006 states: *"The government of the Slovak Republic will place emphasis on strengthening peace and stability in Europe and the world and will be a reliable ally and partner respecting its commitments." It will support the deepening of partnership and strategic cooperation within NATO and the EU. It will promote a peaceful, safe and socially responsible Europe, the development of mutually beneficial international cooperation and the creation of a safe world without crises and conflicts. It will participate in the fight against terrorism ... .The Slovak government considers NATO to be the main guarantor of Euro-Atlantic security. It will respect and fulfill the obligations resulting from Slovakia's membership in NATO. It will continue to strengthen the transatlantic link and partnership between the member states of the Alliance and develop its relations with the USA."* [11, p. 51-55]

After the parliamentary elections in 2020, the Slovak government was formed by political parties that focused their foreign policy exclusively on the West. *"The Slovak Republic is part of the Euro-Atlantic area. Therefore, the priority of the Government of the Slovak Republic is responsible membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as the best alternative for further development, security and stability of the state... The Government of the Slovak Republic will actively contribute to the strengthening of collective defense within NATO, including the participation of the armed forces in the forward military presence and increase in contributions to military exercises outside the territory of the Slovak Republic..."* [12, p. 30-31] The Government of the Slovak Republic established after the parliamentary elections in February 2020 fully respected and implemented the policy of the European Union as well as NATO. The Slovak government declared a friendly attitude towards Ukraine and support in its transformation process. It is contained in the document Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2021: *"A stable, democratic and prosperous Ukraine remains a strategic interest of the Slovak Republic. Slovakia will follow up on the visit of President Volodymyr Zelensky to Slovakia (September 2020) and will continue to deepen political dialogue and practical cooperation with Ukraine, assisting its reform and transformation process from all levels of public administration, from national to regional to local. We will engage in the efforts of the international community to resolve the conflict in Donbas peacefully and restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine, including support for the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (SMM). We will continue to support Ukraine's*

*Euro-Atlantic aspirations and promote its priority place in the EU and NATO agenda. We will also be involved in activities within the Crimean Platform."* [18, p. 5]

In the war in Ukraine after February 2022, the government of Slovakia fully opposed the Russian Federation and supported Ukraine. The support of Ukraine by the Slovak Republic was implemented not only on the moral and political side, but also on the humanitarian and military side. The Slovak Republic provided Ukraine with military aid in the amount of 671 million euros from January 2022 to the end of October 2023. [1]

After the parliamentary elections in September 2023, there was a change of government elites and the return to power of social democratic and national political parties. Robert Fico once again became the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic. The foreign policy of the new Slovak government returned to the concept of international cooperation on "all four sides of the world". Shortly before the parliamentary elections in September 2023, Robert Fico stated: *"Nothing will change in Slovakia's foreign policy orientation. But we have the right to name some things very harshly. I am a representative of the line in foreign policy that one must look at all four sides of the world, the world does not only have the West."* [7] The new Government Program Statement for the period 2023-2027 states: *"The foreign policy of the Government of the Slovak Republic will consistently be based on the state interests of the Slovak Republic with the aim of ensuring the necessary international conditions for strengthening the security, economic prosperity of the state and improving the standard of living of Slovak citizens. The government will implement a credible, responsible and balanced foreign policy. It will build on everything positive that has been achieved in this area so far. The Government of the Slovak Republic will emphasize strengthening peace and stability in Europe and the world and will be a reliable ally and partner respecting its obligations. ... "The government will consistently promote a sovereign and active foreign policy and protect Slovak national-state interests, thus responding to challenges associated with global instability and new threats related to terrorism, military conflicts or the influx of illegal migrants. The government will be guided by the slogan "Slovakia first", which means being solidary, responsible and predictable in foreign policy with regard to the national interests of the Slovak Republic."* [13, p. 81] The currently valid Program Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic directly addresses the war in Ukraine: *"The Government is aware of the risks of the continuation of the war conflict in Ukraine for the Slovak Republic. In order to end the military conflict in Ukraine, he will support all meaningful peace plans with proposals for an immediate end to the fighting in Ukraine and for a diplomatic solution to the conflict in accordance with international law. The government will continue to support humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but will not continue military aid to Ukraine at the government level. He advocates the use of European Union funds to support Slovakia's border regions and the involvement of Slovak companies in the reconstruction of Ukraine. The government will evaluate proposals to impose sanctions against any country in the world based on analyzes of the effectiveness of the proposed sanctions in achieving the intended goals and especially on the basis of their economic and social impact on the citizens of Slovakia. The government views with concern the attempts to build a new iron curtain between the West and the East. The Slovak Republic intends sovereignly, in the context of membership in the European Union and NATO, to continue its foreign policy on all four sides of the world."* [13, p. 82-83] Compared to the previous Slovak government (2020-2023), the new government rejects military aid to Ukraine and emphasizes a diplomatic solution to the conflict. *"In accordance with the current Defense Strategy of the Slovak Republic based on the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, the UN Charter and relevant strategic documents of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union, the government will clearly promote the peaceful resolution of disputes. The war in Ukraine, according to available information, has no*



*military solution. Therefore, the government considers the immediate enforcement of a ceasefire and the beginning of peace negotiations to be the only correct solution.*" [13, p. 85]

After the parliamentary elections, Slovak Prime Minister Fico declared that he wished that foreign policy was not *"conservative, heavy-handed and unable to present Slovak national interests"*. Fico emphasized that Slovakia's attitude towards membership in the European Union or NATO is not changing. *"This does not mean that we will not express our own sovereign positions."* In this context, he repeated that the Slovak Republic is not interested in supporting Ukraine militarily, but will offer it another, necessary form of assistance. [7] After the change of government in Slovakia, specific relations between Slovakia and Ukraine began to be redefined. Already on January 24, 2024, the first official meeting between Robert Fico and Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal took place in Uzhorod (Ukraine). At this meeting, Fico declared the Slovak government's interest in good relations with Ukraine. He expressed his support for Ukraine's entry into the EU and also stated that Slovakia will not block EU aid to Kyiv in the amount of EUR 50 billion or Ukraine's purchase of weapons and equipment from Slovak companies. [2] On April 11, 2024, a joint meeting of the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine took place in Michalovce. At this meeting, Robert Fico openly declared his support for Ukraine in several areas: *"The Slovak Republic's support for Ukraine and its ambitions to become a member of the EU is not speculative. This is full-fledged support."* Fico emphasized that he wishes to find peaceful solutions to the war in Ukraine, which will respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. [2] In the jointly signed intergovernmental agreement, some important political positions of the current Slovak government are stated: *"Slovakia condemned the violation of international law by the Russian Federation through its illegal, unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine."* [5, p. 1] By signing the treaty, the Government of Slovakia confirmed the need to *"continue to implement the policy of non-recognition of the Russian Federation in the attempt to annex the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as parts of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporozhye regions of Ukraine."* [5, p. 1] We can state that the joint meetings of the prime ministers and ministers of the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine in the first half of 2024 contributed to the harmonization of relations between the two countries. This was also confirmed by Ukrainian Prime Minister Shmyhal', saying: *"We have made significant progress in achieving mutually beneficial cooperation"*. [14]

Despite the fact that after the parliamentary elections in Slovakia (September 2023) there was an exchange of political elites, Slovakia's foreign policy orientation towards Euro-Atlantic structures remains preserved. In addition, Robert Fico government declares cooperation with all sides of the world. In foreign policy, Fico government emphasizes the more vigorous promotion of Slovakia's national and state interests. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as we have documented, Slovakia is on the side of Ukraine. However, he refuses to support Ukraine by supplying weapons from the armament of the Slovak Republic's army. However, it does not prevent the purchase of weapons from arms companies operating in Slovakia. In the current period, Slovakia implements its aid to Ukraine in a humanitarian way. The Slovak government rejects a military solution to the conflict in Ukraine and prefers a diplomatic – peaceful solution. It supports Ukraine's entry into the European Union, but rejects its entry into NATO. Robert Fico expressed his attitude towards Ukraine's accession to NATO in July 2023: *"Ukraine does not belong to NATO. It is very important to give security guarantees to Ukraine, both from the East and from the West. But it is very important that there is some buffer between NATO and the Russian Federation. This buffer should be formed by Ukraine, independent, sovereign, with everything that goes with it,"* declared Fico at a press conference." [16] Slovakia's current relationship with Ukraine was clearly defined by Slovak Foreign Minister Juraj Blanár on the occasion of the

second anniversary of the beginning of the war on Ukraine (February 24, 2024): *"The Slovak Republic supports Ukraine as a peaceful, democratic, territorial entity, within internationally recognized borders, with a perspective in the European Union after meeting all the criteria set for all candidate countries. We want to continue to provide our neighbor with material, humanitarian and development aid, and we will support the involvement of Slovak entities in ... That is why we support peace activities, including the initiative of the President of Ukraine, leading to this goal... It is still important for the Slovak Republic that the future peace for Ukraine is comprehensive, just, and in full accordance with the key principles of the UN Charter. . Only such will contribute to the strengthening of pan-European stability and security."* [17] The current government policy of the Slovak Republic was also strengthened by the election of the candidate of the government coalition, Petr Pellegrini, as the President of the Slovak Republic. The newly elected president supports the policy of the current Slovak government in the field of foreign policy.

**Conclusions.** The presented work characterizes the formation of Slovak foreign policy from the establishment of the Slovak Republic to its current form. Its essence was and still is Slovakia's orientation towards Euro-Atlantic structures. In addition, however, in the development of Slovakia's foreign policy there were specific approaches determined by the political program of the ruling political elites. In this context, the study emphasizes three fundamental approaches in foreign policy. The first approach is Slovakia's significant interest in cooperation with the Russian Federation. This approach in foreign policy was implemented in the years 1994-1998. The second approach is the gradually forming "Western" foreign policy orientation. This dimension of Slovakia's foreign policy was implemented in the years 1998-2006. The third approach (2006-2010, 2012-2020), which is also implemented by the current Slovak government, is respect for Slovakia's foreign policy orientation towards Western international structures and, at the same time, greater orientation towards Slovak national state interests. The current government talks about politics to all four corners of the world. The work also presents the characteristics of the current Slovak government's policy on Ukrainian issues. Its essence is the condemnation of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine as well as the recognition of Ukraine's territorial integrity. In the years 2020-2023, the Government of the Slovak Republic implemented broad-spectrum aid to Ukraine, including the delivery of several weapons and military equipment. It was a government that fully respected EU and NATO policy in matters of Ukraine. As we have presented, the current government of the Slovak Republic supports Ukraine in the conflict with Russia. However, it rejects its military support from state resources and advocates a peaceful-diplomatic solution to the conflict. In conclusion, we can state that despite the specific approach of the current Slovak government to Slovakia's foreign policy and thus also to the war in Ukraine, the Slovak Republic will continue to implement EU and NATO policy. However, it can be assumed that the current government of the Slovak Republic will not support a possible escalation of war tensions in Europe. It is already evident today that, apart from the military support of Ukraine by the Slovak state, the Slovak government is ready to continue supporting and helping Ukraine. In the work, we also documented the positions of the Slovak government towards the integration ambitions of Ukraine. Current Slovakia fully supports Ukraine in its integration process into the European Union. However, it currently rejects NATO membership for security reasons. The aim of the work was not to present a forecast and possible perspectives for the development of Slovak-Ukrainian relations. The goal was not even to estimate the level of Slovakia's support towards Ukraine. The aim was to present the genesis of the Slovak foreign policy (also in relation to Ukraine) and to define the current positions of the Slovak government towards the situation in Ukraine. Since the work deals with currently ongoing processes in international politics, it is characterized by subjectivism.

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## ПРОЕКТУВАННЯ ЗОВНІШНЬОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ СЛОВАЧЧИНИ ТА АКТУАЛЬНІ УКРАЇНСЬКІ ПРОБЛЕМИ

**Йозеф Грдлічка**

*Музей у Глоговіці*

*Францисканська площа 1, 920 01, м. Глоговець, Словаччина*

У роботі представлено короткий генезис формування зовнішньої політики Словацької Республіки після її створення в січні 1993 р. Після падіння комуністичного режиму в листопаді 1989 р. Словацька Республіка продовжила зусилля спільної Чехословацької держави щодо інтеграції в в Євроатлантичні міжнародні організації. Орієнтація Словаччини на «Захід» була чіткою. Проте в концепції зовнішньої політики Словаччини після 1993 року було кілька особливостей. Ця специфіка зовнішньої політики Словаччини визначалася економічними умовами держави, а також підходом правлячих політичних еліт. У 1993–1998 роках уряд Словаччини вважав пріоритетними відносини з Російською Федерацією. У 1998–2006 роках зовнішня політика урядів була орієнтована на інтеграцію Словаччини до Європейського Союзу та НАТО. Уряди соціал-демократів у 2006–2010 та 2012–2020 роках поважали «західну» зовнішньополітичну орієнтацію Словаччини, але доповнювали її виміром співпраці з усіма сторонами світу (включно з Росією). З розвитком зовнішньої політики Словаччини розвивалися й відносини з Україною. Усі урядові політичні представництва прагнули позитивного розвитку відносин з Україною. Після початку війни в Україні на її бік виступила Словацька Республіка. Усі парламентські політичні сили відкинули російську агресію проти України. За результатами парламентських виборів у вересні 2023 року відбулася зміна правлячих політичних партій. На зміну уряду, який всебічно підтримував Україну у військовому конфлікті з Росією, прийшов уряд соціал-демократів і консервативних політичних течій. Нинішня урядова коаліція продовжує підтримувати Україну, але відмовилася від подальшої військової підтримки та віддає перевагу мирно-дипломатичному вирішенню конфлікту. Стаття наближає характер політики нинішнього словацького уряду до актуальної української проблематики.

*Ключові слова:* зовнішня політика, Україна, війна, мир, відносини, співробітництво, допомога.