

## **SECTION 4. UKRAINIAN-SLOVAK RELATIONS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS**

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### **MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN UKRAINIAN ISSUES**

### **ОСНОВНІ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ ПОЛІТИКИ УРЯДУ СЛОВАЦЬКОЇ РЕСПУБЛІКИ В УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ПИТАННЯХ**

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The Slovak Republic (SR) was created after the division of the Czechoslovak Federation (Czechoslovakian Federation) in 1993. After its establishment, it had to reconceptualize its foreign policy. 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. These relations changed depending on which political elites made up the Slovak government. In this context, in the history of Slovakia's modern relations with Ukraine (1993–2024) and with the whole of Eastern Europe, we can talk about three fundamental concepts – orientations. From the creation of the Slovak Republic until 1998, Vladimír Mečiar was the main Slovak leader. His governments were mainly composed of national and conservative political entities. As part of the "Eastern" foreign policy, they preferred building positive relations with Russia. 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 not considered a priority. In the years 1998–2006, Slovakia had governments that focused on the integration of Slovakia into the structures of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO). The president of these governments was Mikuláš Dzurinda. The integration of Slovakia into Western international structures was the main goal of Slovak foreign policy during this period. The development of foreign relations with Ukraine or the Russian Federation was marginal. In this period, internal and foreign policy reforms 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 to automobile production. This gradually led to the overcoming of Slovakia's economic dependence on Russia and a gradual change in 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 became a priority.

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. After the parliamentary elections in 2020, the government was formed by political parties that focused their foreign policy exclusively on the West. They fully respected and copied the policy of the European Union as well as NATO. In the war in Ukraine, they 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. During this period, the Slovak Republic provided Ukraine with aid in the amount of 671 million euros. [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."*

[6] After the parliamentary elections, 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. [5] After the change of government in Slovakia, 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 50 billion euros 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."* [4, p. 1] By signing the treaty, the government of Slovakia confirmed the need to *"continue to apply 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."* [4, 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. Ukrainian Prime Minister Shmyhal' also confirmed this by saying: *"We have made significant progress in achieving mutually beneficial cooperation"*. [7] 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. Slovakia's relationship with Ukraine was clearly defined by Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Juraj Blanár on the occasion of the second anniversary of the start of the war in 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."* [8]

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