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DOCUMENT

C-M(2020)0026 (SK-OVERVIEW)

NATO DEFENCE PLANNING CAPABILITY REVIEW 2019/2020

THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

OVERVIEW

1. In October 2017, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved a series of national strategic-level documents, including security, defence and military strategies that together directed and guided the transformation of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AFSR). At the same time, the Long-Term Capability Development Plan (LTCDP) was approved, with an outlook to 2030. The LTCDP is revised every four years. The next revision is expected to be synchronised with NATO Capability Targets 2021. The overall aim has been to enhance the AFSR's readiness and combat potential; to increase regular contributions to NATO and EU high-readiness forces; and to improve the national defence management system, including defence planning.

2. In 2018, the Government agreed to increase defence spending from 2019, with an expectation to achieve 2% of GDP by 2022, two years earlier than previously reported. More recently, this has been revised with the ambition now to reach 2% by 2024.

3. The Slovak Republic reports that its key capability development priorities include: the modular delivery of a heavy infantry brigade, including the incremental development of its combat, combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) capabilities over time; the acquisition of a deployable passive sensor by 2022 to deliver the NATO-requested deployable electronic surveillance measures (DESM) capability; and, the ongoing programme for the delivery of 14 F-16 combat aircraft, the contract for which was signed in 2018, and which more than meets the NATO requirement for two quick reaction alert (QRA) aircraft.

4. At the end of 2019, the AFSR consisted of 12,518 regular military personnel, an increase of 3% since 2017, supported by 3,899 civilians. In May 2019, the Government approved the MOD's personnel concept document, which is focused on the improvement of recruiting and retention of military personnel by increasing the attractiveness of military service through a series of incentives, social prestige and a more competitive approach in the labour market. Nonetheless, areas of acute manpower shortages persist and include logistics drivers, information technology specialists and doctors.

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5. In 2016, the Voluntary Military Training Act came into effect. Volunteers undertake 11 weeks of basic and specialised military training in order to populate a pool of reservists and promote military service within the general population. Once trained, all reservists can become an Active Reserve on a voluntary basis. Active reservists can conduct up to 30 days of training in the first year, followed by up to 15 days annually. At the end of 2019, there were only 93 trained Active Reserves.

6. Gender and equal opportunities' issues form a regular part of education and training across all ranks and services. At the end of 2019, women constituted 12.1% of the armed forces, 18.1% of officers and 10.2% of other ranks. In 2018 and 2019, 5.3% and 7.5% of personnel deployed on operations respectively were female.

7. The Slovak Republic's GDP growth in real terms increased from 3.05% in 2017 to 3.90% in 2018, and in 2019 it was estimated to have decreased to 2.40%. In 2020, GDP growth is projected to fall by 9.28%. The proportion of GDP devoted to defence increased from 1.52% in 2009 to an estimated 1.71% in 2019, and is projected to be 1.86% in 2020, 1.90% in 2021, and 2.05% in 2022, above the NATO guideline of 2%. In 2018, expenditure on major equipment and associated research and development was 22.27% of total defence expenditure and was estimated to have been 40.07% in 2019. It is forecast to be 28.91% in 2020, 29.74% in 2021, and 30.41% in 2022, thereby exceeding the NATO guideline of 20%.

8. Across the land and air domains, the Slovak Republic makes contributions to operations, missions and engagements abroad, more than commensurate in the land domain with the size of its armed forces. In addition to contributing to the NATO Response Force, it provides forces to the Canadian-led enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Latvia. The Slovak Republic has offered land and air forces to the NATO Readiness Initiative.

9. In June 2017, Allied Defence Ministers agreed that the Slovak Republic should give priority to the development of a heavy infantry brigade, including the associated CS and CSS elements, as well as the development of a DESM. Notwithstanding its capability development plans, current plans and funding will only deliver a heavy infantry brigade by 2025 still lacking in appropriate, firepower, protection and mobility and still carrying a substantial set of CS and CSS-related qualitative shortfalls in areas such as intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance, ground-based air defence, interoperability and overall readiness. Moreover, many of the key capability development plans to modernise and deliver capabilities to meet the qualitative shortfalls, and finally deliver the requested fully-capable brigade by 2032, after over 14 years since it was first requested, are currently neither programmed nor funded. This is a very serious concern. On a positive note, the DESM capability is planned to be delivered on time by 2022.

10. There have been a limited number of changes to the structure of the Slovak Republic's land forces since the last review cycle, including the establishment of a heavy armoured battalion based on T-72 main battle tanks (MBT). The NATO-requested heavy infantry brigade has numerous capability shortfalls in combat, CS and CSS capabilities. The

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Slovak Republic's land-related capability development plans are expected to gradually address these shortfalls, albeit over a decade or so.

11. In the first phase of a phased modernisation plan, by about 2025, a heavy armoured battalion, is planned to be equipped with upgraded T-72 MBT, two heavy infantry battalions are planned to be equipped with new 8x8 infantry fighting vehicles (IFV), one heavy infantry battalion is planned to be fitted with BMP-2 IFVs, one heavy infantry battalion is planned to be equipped with new tracked IFVs and three new batteries of self-propelled 155 mm howitzers are planned to be procured. In the second phase of the modernisation plan, out to 2030, the Slovak Republic plans to procure new MBTs and tracked IFVs, as well as further develop the command and control (C2) and communication and information systems (CIS) capabilities of the heavy infantry brigade. It is assessed that until new MBTs and IFVs are procured and fielded for the combat battalions, capability shortfalls will remain in the heavy infantry brigade to at least 2032, if not longer, particularly in effective firepower, protection and cross-country mobility. In the interim, the heavy infantry brigade offered by the Slovak Republic will continue to suffer from quantitative and qualitative capability shortfalls that affect readiness, deployability and interoperability.

12. The Slovak Republic is expected to meet most of its 2017 NATO aerospace Capability Targets, albeit with some delays and limitations. The modernisation of the Slovak Republic's air force relies on a range of capability development plans, most of which aim at replacing ageing Soviet-era assets with new and modern Western equipment. In the short-term (2020 to 2023), the air force plans to continue the introduction of the UH-60M helicopters; to acquire 14 F-16 C/D Block 70 combat aircraft from the United States, which more than meets the NATO Capability Target requirement of two QRA aircraft; to procure a deployable air surveillance capability; to equip its air defence structure with new 3D radars; and to develop air C2 capabilities interoperable with NATO, including with the necessary connectivity and mode 5 identification friend or foe (IFF). In the medium term (2024 to 2036), there are plans to upgrade and/or replace the existing air defence batteries, to procure new training aircraft, and to finalise the development of a fully integrated and interconnected air defence and C2 network, including mode 5 IFF. The DESM capability, a defence planning priority identified by Allied Defence Ministers for the Slovak Republic, is planned to be provided on time, which is most welcome.

13. The Slovak Republic meets all quantitative SOF-related NATO Capability Targets, albeit with some qualitative limitations. The Slovak Republic plans to develop a special operations air task unit capability with the introduction of two new UH-60 SOF-capable Black Hawk helicopters, which is not requested by NATO. Moreover, the ambition to expand the SOF structure, which is not requested by NATO, will increase the demand for manpower in an already challenging area. Together, potentially, they further divert resources from the development of the NATO prioritised capabilities.

14. The Slovak Republic is able to provide some of the enabling forces sought by the NATO Capability Targets with some limitations. The Slovak Republic's arrangements for strategic lift do not fulfil the requirements in the applicable NATO Capability Target. The Slovak Republic is unable to meet many of its medical Capability Targets. However, the

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country is in the process of enhancing its medical capabilities as well as of improving its ability to train and retain military medical personnel. These plans are highly dependent on the availability of sufficient funding.

15. The deployable and non-deployable CIS within the Slovak Republic's Armed Forces are still mostly not interoperable with NATO due to obsolete equipment and the lack of funding. This shortfall has persisted for several years and, despite some limited achievements, progress appears to be extremely slow with no resolution before 2025, at the earliest. Consequently, this capability shortfall will result in serious difficulty in integrating the Slovak Republic's forces in any Allied C2 architecture, thereby significantly reducing their value. This is a critical concern in light of the Slovak Republic's position as a potential front-line state and it needs to be addressed expeditiously.

16. The Slovak Republic, as a member of the Visegrad 4 (V4), is cooperating with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to provide one joint logistic support group headquarters (JLSG HQ) in equal parts. In 2018, the V4 Allies signed the respective MOU and determined the division of responsibilities amongst themselves to deliver the V4 JLSG-related 2017 NATO Capability Target in time.

17. The Slovak Republic is fully implementing its stabilisation and reconstruction (S&R)-related NATO Capability Targets in quantitative terms. However, due to limited personnel and training opportunities, it does not have the full range of expertise required. The Slovak Republic has adequate arrangements in place to deploy civilian experts. To further improve its S&R-related capabilities, the Slovak Republic would benefit from more training opportunities for its own personnel.

18. The Slovak Republic's level of civil preparedness has improved significantly since the previous planning cycle. The approval in January 2019 of the National System for Response on Crisis Situation; the definition of plans for de-conflicting civil and military movements in crisis; and the strengthened exchange of information between the food and water public and private sector are positive developments that reinforce the Slovak Republic's resilience. Further civil-military coordination of national defence plans to reconcile civil and military requirements and peacetime testing of priority access to communications networks, continue to be resilience shortfalls that should be addressed.

19. The Slovak Republic's stated commitment to increase defence expenditure to 2% by 2024, as well as to maintain or exceed 20% of defence expenditure on major equipment and associated research and development are most welcome. Moreover, in addition to an ambitious three-phase incremental plan in place to deliver a fully-capable heavy infantry brigade, it reports that it will meet the NATO-requested target of a DESM capability by 2022. This is welcome progress since the last Capability Review.

20. However, notwithstanding its capability development plans, current plans and funding will only deliver a heavy infantry brigade by 2025 still lacking in appropriate, firepower, protection and mobility and still carrying a substantial set of CS and CSS-related qualitative shortfalls. Moreover, the key capability development plans to deliver finally the requested brigade by 2032, after over 14 years since it was first requested, are currently not

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fully programmed nor funded. Additionally, given the fact that the Slovak Republic is a potential front-line state, the continued level of non-interoperable capabilities remains a major concern for the Alliance.

21. At the same time, the Slovak Republic is implementing national plans to purchase expensive modern combat aircraft and SOF-capable helicopters, as well as having plans to expand some of its land forces' structure, little of which is requested by NATO. It is clear that the Slovak Republic and the NATO defence planning priorities are, in practice, not particularly well aligned. Furthermore, until the Slovak Republic has delivered a fully-capable heavy infantry brigade, other Allies may potentially have to shoulder part of the Slovak burden. The Slovak Republic needs to devote greater priority, effort and resources to meet the full set of 2017 NATO Capability Targets it adopted in quantity, in quality, and in time, with particular focus on the fully-capable heavy infantry brigade.

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