

# Slovak Contribution to the Solution of the Cyprus Problem

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## Abstract

*Historical ties as well as current activities of Slovakia on the international scene are the reason that the Cyprus problem has become an important agenda of Slovak foreign policy. Hence, the Slovak approach to the Cyprus problem solution is reflected in the role of the mediator and as command country in Sector 4 with a robust military presence and an active involvement in UNFICYP peacekeeping mission on the island. The result of the study proposes a general overview of Slovakia commitments to Cyprus, pointing out Slovak diplomatic activities in the peace talks concerning the Cyprus problem solution as well as Slovak military contribution to the UNFICYP mission. The activities of Slovakia in Cyprus facilitating the process of reunification of the island and the long-term operation of Slovak military contingent in UNFICYP are constantly recognized and highly praised, not only by many representatives but also by the island's population.*

**Keywords:** Slovakia, Slovak diplomacy, Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, Cyprus, Cyprus Problem, UNFICYP

## Introduction

Slovakia is a young State established on 1 January 1993. This was preceded by significant political changes in the bipolar division of the world and the related regional change in Central Europe. The decisive event that preceded the establishment of Slovakia was the so-called 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia in 1989, which initiated the fall of the communist regime in the country and caused various political changes. Czechoslovakia was thereafter divided into two independent States, namely the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

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Slovakia became a member of the UN almost immediately after its establishment.<sup>2</sup> In the following period, the Slovak political administration managed to join significant world and regional organisations, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU)<sup>3</sup>, which were important for security and the economic development of the country.

Membership in the aforementioned organisations, economic development, political ambitions, and historical connection to Czechoslovak traditions in international politics and diplomacy oblige Slovakia to be an active player on the international scene and not only in the immediate vicinity. Even though Slovakia is young and small country, it must be said that its activities in the environment of diplomacy and international crisis management are on the rise.

The article's aim from a 'macro-level' perspective is to illustrate a general overview of the relations between Slovakia and Cyprus. It covers the historical background from the existence of Czechoslovakia (Slovakia) to the beginnings of Slovakia involvement in Cyprus, and the political cooperation of nowadays. It analyses the main issues of relations between Slovakia (Czechoslovakia) and Cyprus in history, Slovak diplomatic activities in the peace talks for the solution of the Cyprus problem as well as Slovak military contribution to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

The article consists of three parts. The first part is devoted to presenting the background of the Slovak (Czechoslovak) involvement in Cyprus from the historical perspective. The second part deals with the Slovak diplomacy in the talks for the solution of the Cyprus problem. The third part presents the Slovak military contribution to the UNFICYP mission. The article's main contribution is a demonstration of the theoretical knowledge acquired by the authors, and empirical experience from deployments within Slovak military contingent in the UNFICYP mission. The article is based on the results of theoretical research and analysis of the authors. It is also based on knowledge from domestic and foreign scientific and profession-

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<sup>2</sup> Slovakia became a member of the UN on 19 January 1993, as one of the successor States after the division of the former Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia was one of the founding states of the UN in 1945. The Czechoslovak diplomat Ján Papánek of Slovak origin was one of the authors of the basic documents of the UN Charter. For more, see MoFEA SR, Slovak Republic and the United Nations Organization (UN) (Slovenská republika a Organizácia spojených národov (OSN)) (2009–2018), available at [www.mzv.sk/zahranicna\\_politika/slovensko\\_v\\_osn-sr\\_v\\_osn](http://www.mzv.sk/zahranicna_politika/slovensko_v_osn-sr_v_osn) (last accessed 18 February 2021) (in Slovak).

<sup>3</sup> Slovakia became a member of NATO on 29 March 2004 and a member of the EU on 1 May 2004. Slovakia and Cyprus joined the EU in one group together with eight other countries: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, and Slovenia.

al publications, articles, studies, and qualifications, including national materials thematically focused on international crisis management. Last but not least, the article implies the practical experience of the co-author from his deployments in the UNFICYP mission.

## **Historical Background of Slovak Involvement in Cyprus**

The history of Slovakia, a small country in Central Europe, is connected to the existence of Czechoslovakia. So, during the existence of Czechoslovakia it is not possible to speak about separate Slovak (and separate Czech) but about Czechoslovak involvement in Cyprus. Czechoslovakia, created on 28 October 1918 as one of the countries formed after the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was developed as a democratic country. Among other relations connected with the existence of an independent State, it focused on the development of industry, of which the arms industry also became a very important part. The rapid revitalisation of this part of industry played an important role in the Czechoslovak economy, since the Czechoslovak arms industry was offering some modern and reliable weapons, which were highly valued abroad.<sup>4</sup> The existence of Czechoslovakia (as the so-called 'First Republic' in the period 1918–1938) was historically connected with the geopolitics of Central Europe, where it faced various challenges and threats coming from different European power centres. The rise of Nazi Germany caused its temporary demise in 1938–1945. At that time, the German army used some products of Czechoslovak weaponry.<sup>5</sup>

After the Second World War, the existence of an independent country was restored, but after the communist coup in 1948, Czechoslovakia became a satellite of the Soviet Union, which influenced this country's foreign policy for decades. It was only natural that Czechoslovakia followed potentials and traditional resources for its post-WWII development, including the arms industry. The Eastern Bloc in which the communist States were mostly associated in the Warsaw Pact and were led by the Soviet Union and the Western Bloc where the States mostly associated with NATO were led by the USA were clashing in many parts all over the world. We can say Cyprus was the one of them.

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<sup>4</sup> Aleš Skřivan Jr, 'On the Nature and Role of Arms Production in Interwar Czechoslovakia' (2010) 23(4) *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 630.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 637.

Somebody would say that Cyprus was politically included in the Western bloc, but rather than the NATO membership Archbishop Makarios chose to follow a path of non-alignment instead.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Cypriot communities had established and maintained pleasant relations with the communist States during the Cold War. Paradoxically, the President of the Republic of Cyprus was the archbishop, the highest representative of the church on the island, while, in the communist countries, the church was severely persecuted with the aim to suppress its influence in society.<sup>7</sup>

The Eastern Bloc tried to advance its interests in the oil-rich Middle East through regimes in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria using their nationalist and anti-American elements, which came to power in these countries. The first wave of Soviet penetration into the Middle East was indirectly realised by Czechoslovakia. In 1955, Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser signed an agreement on the delivery of Czechoslovak weapons. With this agreement, the region turned into a battleground of the Cold War, and the Soviet Union was inside the US sphere of interest. In this context, Cyprus also became part of the arena in the Cold War competition.<sup>8</sup> Czechoslovakia played a very important role in the Soviet Union's policy. Since the interwar period, Czechoslovakia had had a very well-developed net of diplomatic and business connections in the so-called 'Third World', and it was very firm and active in its use as also a member of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of Cyprus as a part of the British colonial empire, the AKEL's<sup>10</sup> attempts to gain support from Czechoslovakia (and other socialist countries) were warily received in the beginning. However, the good relationship between the Communist party of Czechoslovakia and AKEL was open. Many members of AKEL, who gradually gained important positions in the party and administration of Cyprus, had studied in Czechoslovakia (and other socialist countries), and this fact helped

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<sup>6</sup> James Ker-Lindsay, 'Shifting Alignments: The External Orientations of Cyprus since Independence' (2010) 22(2) *The Cyprus Review* 67.

<sup>7</sup> For more, see: Martina Fiamová, Pavol Jakubčín, *Persecution of Churches in the Communist Countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Prenasledovanie cirkví v komunistických štátoch strednej a východnej Európy)* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2010) (in Slovak).

<sup>8</sup> Ilksoy Aslim, 'The Soviet Union and Cyprus in 1974 Events' (2016) 2(4) *Athens Journal of History* 249.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Koura, *Divided island (Rozdělený ostrov)* (Praha: Epoque, 2019) (in Czech).

<sup>10</sup> The Progressive Party of Working People (Greek: Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού / Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú - AKEL) is left-wing party, successor to the Communist Party of Cyprus established in 1926. Although AKEL does not mention its communist identity in the name of the party, the stated position on the political scene is clear. Thus, it was an immediate party partner for Communist party of Czechoslovakia.

them advance their political contacts.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Czechoslovak communists had already acquired experience in cooperating with the Greek communists, as they had established a connection with Greek refugees who took shelter in Czechoslovakia after the Greek Civil War.<sup>12</sup> This fact was very likely to have also contributed to the good relations between Cypriot and Czechoslovak communists and, thus, between the two countries in general.

Countries of the Eastern Bloc supported the original concept of the Republic of Cyprus, which involved the Zurich–London agreements and the constitution of 1960. They also preferred a non-aligned and weak Cyprus that could be exploited for gaining influence and undermining Western interests. Usually, they urged the protection of territorial integrity and national independence, supported elected leaders, condemned external interventions, and denounced attempts to expand NATO's influence on the island.<sup>13</sup> This concept was also followed in the following decades, and Czechoslovakia harmonised its activities with it.

Czechoslovakia played a significant role in the events connected with Cyprus.<sup>14</sup> During the crises of 1963–1964, Czechoslovakia was a non-permanent member of the Security Council and was directly involved in the deliberations over Cyprus in the Council in February and March 1964.<sup>15</sup> Of course, the attitude of Czechoslovakia was in accordance with the intentions of the Soviet Union to influence the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The disagreement between Greek Cypriots and the Greek leadership contributed to this intention and became more apparent after the Greek military coup in 1967.

Makarios, as a president of an independent country, had no reason to support pro-Enosis<sup>16</sup> policy. However, this trend was contrary to the interest of the Greek

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<sup>11</sup> Koura (no 10) 70–129.

<sup>12</sup> Konstantinos Tsivos, 'The Greek Emigres in Czechoslovakia and their Life in the 1960s' (2019) 67(3) *Glasnik Etnografskog Instituta SANU* 545.

<sup>13</sup> John Sakkas, Nataliya Zhukova, 'The Soviet Union, Turkey and the Cyprus Problem 1967-1974' (2013) 1(10) *Les cahiers Irice* 123.

<sup>14</sup> Czechoslovakia established diplomatic relations with Cyprus immediately after the declaration of its independence. In the beginning, the ambassador in Athens was also accredited for Cyprus. An embassy was established in Cyprus in 1964, but until March 1973 it was administered only by the *Chargé d'affaires* (Ladislav Hladký et al., *Relations between Czechs and the Nations and Countries of South-eastern Europe (Vztahy Čechů s národy a zeměmi jihovýchodní Evropy)* (Praha: Historický ústav, 2010) (in Czech).

<sup>15</sup> Andreas Stergiou, 'Soviet Policy Toward Cyprus' (2007) 19(2) *The Cyprus Review* 93.

<sup>16</sup> Enosis (Greek: Ένωσις, in translation to English: union) is the movement of various Greek communities that live outside Greece for incorporation of the regions that they inhabit into the Greek state.

junta (a far-right authoritarian military regime that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974), which supported EOKA-B (a paramilitary organisation led by right-wing extremists) and managed to control the Cypriot National Guard. This situation forced Makarios to find diplomatic and operational support in the Eastern Bloc.<sup>17</sup>

Czechoslovakia played an important part in these processes because Czechoslovak weapons helped to enforce the bargaining leverage of AKEL in Cypriot political life. From the perspective of Czechoslovakia, we can see this business from two points of view. On the one hand, it was in line with the policy of the Eastern Bloc; on the other, it meant there was a significant economic profit for it. The first delivery of the contract (infantry weapons) took place on 30 November 1966.<sup>18</sup>

Both sides tried to keep the contract as secret as possible, but this failed and the event triggered a chain of diplomatic activities on the part of the USA, Greece, Turkey, and the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> The next delivery of the contract (not only infantry weapons but also armoured personnel carriers) was cancelled on the intervention of the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1967. Weapons from the first delivery were under the pressure of the UN stored in the deposit of UNFICYP troops. A similar scenario was repeated after the contract was realised in 1972.<sup>20</sup>

All indications show that Makarios' efforts to create a military counterforce to the Cypriot National Guard failed. A significant part of the agreed deliveries did not reach the island, and the delivered part had to be handed over to the UN for keeping. It is questionable whether Makarios' supporters actually handed over all the weapons. It is possible that some of them were retained from the delivery in 1966 and in 1972. However, it seems clear that the contracts themselves and their potential, although not fully executed, significantly affected the power struggle on the island.

In 1973, AKEL received 140,000 dollars from the Soviet Union through the international fund of help for left-wing working organisations. Moreover, at the beginning of July 1974, on the request from AKEL, the Soviet Union sent to Cyprus 100 guns and 2,500 cartridges secretly to protect the party leaders from the provocations and terror by the nationalist organisation EOKA-B.<sup>21</sup> AKEL also negotiated similar activities with Czechoslovakia. Less than a week before the coup (15 July

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<sup>17</sup> Sakkas, Zhukova (no 14) 126.

<sup>18</sup> Koura (no 10) 187.

<sup>19</sup> Aslim (no 9) 253.

<sup>20</sup> Koura (no 10) 190-191, 218.

<sup>21</sup> Sakkas, Zhukova (no 14) 126.

1974), 1,000 submachine guns were secretly delivered from Czechoslovakia to Cyprus. They were hidden in the presidential palace, and only a small part of them was distributed to Makarios' supporters due to lack of time.<sup>22</sup> The Czechoslovak participation in the events on the island did not remain only at the level of secret arms supplies. The coup, the Turkish military operation, and the island's division caused many casualties, and led to many persons being missing and displaced. Many countries from all over the world helped to solve the resulting humanitarian crisis, including Czechoslovakia, whose financial contribution amounted to 1.5 Million of Czechoslovak crowns.<sup>23</sup>

The Eastern Bloc countries, including Czechoslovakia, continued to maintain intensive diplomatic relations with the Republic of Cyprus even after the division of the island, as evidenced by political representatives' numerous reciprocal visits. There vival of Soviet interest in the Cyprus problem was maintained at large until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.<sup>24</sup>

The so-called 'Velvet Revolution' started on 17 November 1989, caused the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia and, together with similar situations in neighbouring countries, ultimately led to the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the region of Central Europe. This fact also ended the status of Czechoslovakia as a satellite State. Internal political relations in Czechoslovakia caused its division in 1993 into two independent States, fortunately in a peaceful way. The way toward an independent foreign policy for Slovakia was open.

The very beginning of Slovakia's existence was marked by an effort to join the international arena. It marked the beginning of the processes needed to meet the conditions for the country's integration into the EU<sup>25</sup> and NATO. The membership in the UN, the EU, and NATO have affected the activities of Slovakia in international crisis management. Cyprus is geographically far from Central Europe, so having a relatively significant geographical distance, but, at the same time, maintaining historical ties, as well as current activities of Slovakia on the international scene, are the reasons that the Cyprus problem has become an important agenda of Slovak foreign policy within the UN.

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<sup>22</sup> Koura (no 10) 234.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 270.

<sup>24</sup> Stergiou (no 16) 100.

<sup>25</sup> The European Union was created in 1993. Its predecessor was the European Community or the European Economic Community. Regardless of the historical context, we will use the term EU in this paper.

## Slovak diplomacy in the Cyprus problem solution

The history of the involvement of Slovak diplomats in Cyprus dates to the 1980s. The first concrete act in this process was the initiative of Emil Keblůšek<sup>26</sup> in spring 1989, who presented the idea to bring political representatives of both communities to discuss possible outcomes of the long-lasting Cyprus problem. The main idea of these meetings was to get the leaders of the political parties from both communities together. It was not intended to organise the meeting of the country's leaders for what de facto no one confirmed or refused to recognise the so-called 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC').

The leaders of both communities' most important political parties attended the first meeting in Prague from 11 May to 16 May 1989. The Greek-Cypriot community was represented by five leaders (Glafkos Klerides – Democratic Rally, Tassos Papadopoulos – Democratic Party, Demetris Christofias – AKEL, Vassos Lyssarides – Socialist Party, Nikos Rolandis – Liberal Party), and the Turkish-Cypriot community was represented by three leaders (Özker Özgür – Republican Turkish Party, Mustafa Akinçi – Communal Liberation Party, Ismet Kotak – Democratic People's Party).<sup>27</sup> Some of them at that time or later had already held important positions in both parts of the island as president, speaker of parliament or minister.

The participants of the meeting talked about alternatives to resolving the Cyprus problem and took the opportunity to discuss legal and constitutional issues of Cyprus. In general, it can be said that all party leaders presented the common view that the meeting proved to be very useful and constructive and created a better understanding between political party leaders and amongst the people the political parties represented. Finally, they all signed a joint communiqué emphasizing their unanimous view that 'their meetings are in no way an alternative, nor should be viewed as such, to the intercommunal talks carried out at present under the auspices of the United Nations Organisation'. In the same document, they committed to continuing these meetings in the future.<sup>28</sup> At present, it can be said that those leaders established the framework of the bi-communal dialogue, and their commit-

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<sup>26</sup> Emil Keblůšek – a Czechoslovak diplomat of Slovak origin. In some resources we can also find his name version Emil Keblusek. He was ambassador of Czechoslovakia in Nicosia from November 1988 to December 1992. He was diplomatically active in attempts to reunify the island. For more, see: Jindřich Dejmek, *Diplomacy of Czechoslovakia. Part II. (Diplomacie Československa. II. svazek)* (Praha: Academia, 2013) (in Czech).

<sup>27</sup> MoFA SR, *20 Years of Peace Dialogue* (Bratislava: MoFA SR, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

ment is being fulfilled under the auspices of the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Nicosia until today.

After the meeting in Prague, several meetings of the leaders of Cypriot political parties took place at irregular intervals on neutral ground in the former Ledra Palace Hotel in Nicosia located in the buffer zone administrated by the UNFICYP contingents. The intensity of the bi-communal meetings was significantly influenced by the political situation in Czechoslovakia related to the change of regime and later to its division.

Slovakia established The Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Nicosia immediately after its creation on 1 January 1993, while the Czech Republic established its embassy in Cyprus two years later. Slovakia, shortly after its establishment, took the initiative and, after consultations with the leaders of the political parties of both communities, organised the first meetings through its embassy. They practically continued the previous meetings.<sup>29</sup>

The bi-communal activities in this format were intensified in early 1997. Gustave Feissel –appointed Deputy Special Representative and Resident Representative of Secretary-General in Cyprus - was a guest of the meeting, and he informed participants about planning steps directed by the UN in the talks of the solution of the Cyprus problem. The only major political party that never participated in the bi-communal meetings was the National Unity Party. It was headed by Derviş Eroğlu, the Prime Minister of the so-called ‘TRNC’ at the time, and the President of the ‘TRNC’ later.<sup>30</sup>

During this activity, The Slovak Embassy acted as an organiser and technical supporter. Its contribution also consisted in the fact that it drafted the text of the communiqué and, after the leaders of the political parties had signed it, presented it to the media of both communities. The communiqué was the first since 1989, and leaders of the political parties committed themselves to further mutual approachment and other joint events. The afore mentioned meetings, held in a positive spirit, were the only forum for direct contacts between politicians from both communities, and they created opportunities for continuing discussions and presenting points of view. It became an unwritten rule to sign the communiqué af-

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<sup>29</sup> Dušan Rozbora, ‘Cyprus Question – Activities of International Society and Slovak Diplomacy (‘Cyperská otázka – activity medzinárodného spoločenstva a slovenskej diplomacie’) (2017) 9(1) Scientific horizon 12 (in Slovak).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 18.

ter each meeting. The leaders agreed to create the coordination committee, which would prepare and submit proposals for specific events to the planned meetings.<sup>31</sup>

The hopeful process was influenced by the EU's decision to open accession negotiations with Cyprus (the Republic of Cyprus) in 1998.<sup>32</sup> The leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, Rauf Denktaş, had banned the participation of Turkish Cypriot parties in bi-communal meetings in response to the EU decision. In the following period, the Slovak Ambassador met with the leaders of the political parties of both communities separately and organised social events within their communities.<sup>33</sup>

The meetings of leaders of the political parties were temporarily annulled and so in 1999 The Embassy of the Slovak Republic came up with the initiative to organise bi-communal meetings of organisations for the protection of human rights in Cyprus in cooperation with the International Association for the Protection of Human Rights. The aim was to implement the bi-communal program Confidence Building Measures in Cyprus under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The Slovak Embassy soon organized several meetings of activists from both communities in the village of Pyla, located in the UN Buffer zone.<sup>34</sup>

Subsequently, the afore mentioned participants were invited to Bratislava, where a bi-communal colloquium on human rights in Cyprus took place on 2–5 March 2000 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Participants of the forum accessed the international aspects of resolving the problem in Cyprus within the framework set by the Council of Europe project. After ensuing meetings in Rome and Strasbourg, the final talks took place in Nicosia. There, all stakeholders highly appreciated the involvement of the Slovak Republic and its Embassy in Nicosia.<sup>35</sup>

The EU's decision at the Helsinki summit in December 1999 to accept Turkey as a candidate country marked a turning point in Rauf Denktaş's approach to holding bi-communal meetings of the leaders of the political parties. It helped to restart meetings in the coming years after a nearly two-year forced break.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> For more, see George Vassiliou, *Cyprus Accession to the EU and the Solution of the Cyprus Problem* (2004), available at [https://www.interactioncouncil.org/sites/default/files/pvassiliou\\_world.pdf](https://www.interactioncouncil.org/sites/default/files/pvassiliou_world.pdf) (last accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>33</sup> Rozbora (no 29) 18.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

During the meetings in 2000 the leaders agreed on concrete proposals for bi-communal events. Probably the most important event of those discussed was the Festival of Mutual Understanding coordinated by the Slovak Embassy, which took place on 10 September 2000 in the garden of the Ledra Palace Hotel and which was attended by more than five thousand Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.<sup>36</sup>

In the following years, the Slovak Embassy maintained the intensity of leaders' meetings and organised bi-communal activities. Those included important events, such as the Bilateral Youth Festival in March 2001 or the bi-communal New Year's meeting on 5 January 2002 with the participation of prominent politicians, journalists, and representatives from the cultural, scientific, educational, and diplomatic sphere.<sup>37</sup>

At the 20th anniversary of The Slovak Embassy Bi-communal Forum, Slovakia organised a gala meeting in Bratislava on 14–17 May 2009. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Miroslav Lajčák<sup>38</sup> invited the leaders of all important political parties of both Cypriot communities. Representatives of eight Greek Cypriot, six Turkish Cypriot political parties, and honourable guests from the UN and the EU accepted the invitation.<sup>39</sup>

At that event, Miroslav Lajčák expressed that Slovak Ambassadors make an effort to serve as the facilitators and organisers of the Peace Dialogue and stated that, 'In this way, Slovakia wishes to contribute to a process, which will bring a mutual satisfying outcome and will lead to a future in which all Cypriots may live in peace and harmony'.<sup>40</sup> All participating leaders expressed their positive attitude towards the activities of Slovakia and especially the Slovak Embassy in Cyprus in the or-

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<sup>36</sup> Peace-Cyprus, 'Festival of Mutual Understanding' (2000), available at <http://www.peace-cyprus.org/Ledra/> (last accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Rozbora (no 29) 18.

<sup>38</sup> Miroslav Lajčák is a Slovak diplomat and politician representing both the Slovak Republic and the international community. In some resources we can also find his name in the version Miroslav Lajcak. Between September 2017 and September 2018, he served as the President of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly. He was also serving his four terms as the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. For more, see: GLOBSEC, Miroslav Lajčák (2008–2020), available at [www.globsec.org/speakers/miroslav-lajcak/](http://www.globsec.org/speakers/miroslav-lajcak/) (last accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>39</sup> Financial Mirror, 'Cypriot Parties in Slovakia to Mark 20 years of Bi-Communal Cyprus Dialogue' (2009), available at [www.financialmirror.com/2009/05/15/cypriot-parties-in-slovakia-to-mark-20-years-of-bi-communal-cyprus-dialogue/](http://www.financialmirror.com/2009/05/15/cypriot-parties-in-slovakia-to-mark-20-years-of-bi-communal-cyprus-dialogue/) (last accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>40</sup> MoFA SR (no 27) 6.

ganisation of bi-communal dialogue, and also displayed deep appreciation for this mission.<sup>41</sup>

Meetings of the leaders of the political parties from both Cypriot communities have been established as a regular political event. The communiqués from each meeting are the messages to community leaders as well as the UN, the EU, and other international actors to intensify actions to resolve the Cyprus problem. An important factor was creating a working group composed of representatives of political parties delegated by their leaders. The task of this group is to propose and prepare concrete bi-communal social activities, such as festivals, discussions, roundtables, concerts, or visits to historical and religious monuments in the territory of both communities. It is possible to mention a tour of the buffer zone in Ledra Street to demonstrate the support for its opening, common social events hosted by both communities, a Bi-communal cultural event for the young generation in the Ledra Palace, a bi-communal painting exhibition, a visit to a bi-communal school, visits to hospitals and so on. All these activities are organised by the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Cyprus (many of them in cooperation with the mission UNFICYP).<sup>42</sup>

Diplomatic relations between Slovakia and the Republic of Cyprus reached an even higher level in the following period. For example, good relations were developed by the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Cyprus on 10 November 2010 in Bratislava.<sup>43</sup> On 12 January 2016, European Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič<sup>44</sup> officially visited Cyprus as part of his work agenda, which also contributed to the good relationship between Slovakia and Cyprus.<sup>45</sup> Another sign of the cultivation of good relations on the island is, among other things, the opening of the Slovak Republic Honorary Consular Office for the consular region of Limas-

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 14-40.

<sup>42</sup> MoFEA SR, 'Bi-Communal Dialog' (2009-2018), available at [www.mzv.sk/web/en/foreign\\_policy/bicommunal\\_dialog](http://www.mzv.sk/web/en/foreign_policy/bicommunal_dialog) (last accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>43</sup> The Slovak Spectator, 'Cyprus Opens Embassy in Bratislava' (2010), available at <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20038009/cyprus-opens-embassy-inbratislava.html> (last accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>44</sup> Maroš Šefčovič – Vice President for the Energy Union, European Commission (Brussels) is a Slovak diplomat and politician. In some resources, we can also find his name in the version Maros Sefcovic. European affairs have been at the centre of his career. In 2004, he was appointed Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the EU. Since November 2014, he has served as the Commission's Vice President in charge of the Energy Union, one of the ten main priorities of the European Commission. For more, see: GLOBSEC, 'Maroš Šefčovič' (2008-2020), available at [www.globsec.org/speakers/maros-sefcovic/](http://www.globsec.org/speakers/maros-sefcovic/) (last accessed 18 February 2021).

<sup>45</sup> The Diplomat, 'Vice-President of the European Commission, Maroš Šefčovič, Visited Cyprus' (2016), available at [thediplomat.gr/kypros-maros-sefcovic/](http://thediplomat.gr/kypros-maros-sefcovic/) (last accessed: 18 February 2021).

sol, Larnaca, and Paphos on 28 June 2017.<sup>46</sup> Diplomatic relations between Slovakia and the so-called 'TRNC' in the form of institutional representations are not established; Slovakia has not proceeded to do so due to the fact it does not recognise the 'TRNC' as a State, although some European countries, such as Hungary, have done so.<sup>47</sup>

On the 30th anniversary of The Slovak Embassy Bi-communal Forum, Slovakia organised a meeting at Ledra Palace hotel in Nicosia in June 2019 in the presence of many important guests, and a photo exhibit titled '30 Years of Peace Dialogue in Picture' was on display. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic Miroslav Lajčák, who paid Cyprus a visit, said, 'Slovakia will continue to support the bi-communal meetings between political parties on the island, as long as Cypriots find them useful'. Despite the existing impasse in reaching an agreement, the parties reaffirmed their will to enrich the dialogue and expressed their support for ongoing efforts by the UN Secretary-General for the resumption of the talks under the aegis of the UN. In the joint statement, participants said, 'We still believe in the dialogue based on the spirit of friendship, cooperation, respect and mutual understanding to all Cypriots'.<sup>48</sup>

The parties expressed their gratitude to the Slovak Republic, the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and the Embassy in Nicosia for their persistence in facilitating the bi-communal dialogue for three decades already, as well as their appreciation for the patience, impartiality, and professional approach of all Slovak diplomats involved in the organisation of bi-communal meetings and activities in the context of confidence building measures.<sup>49</sup>

The Covid-19 anti-pandemic measures in 2020 and 2021 influenced organisation and preparation of the meetings, hence the organiser and participants negotiated online, similarly to many others.<sup>50</sup> The Slovak Embassy Bi-communal

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<sup>46</sup> MoFEA SR, 'Cyprus'(online), available at [www.mzv.sk/web/en/consular\\_info/slovak\\_honorary\\_consulates\\_abroad/-/asset\\_publisher/Uazsbsq51b8l/content/konzularny-urad-v-limassol/10182](http://www.mzv.sk/web/en/consular_info/slovak_honorary_consulates_abroad/-/asset_publisher/Uazsbsq51b8l/content/konzularny-urad-v-limassol/10182) (last accessed 18 February 2021)

<sup>47</sup> Péter Kacziba, Zoltan Egeresi, 'The Visegrad Countries and Cyprus: Historical Ties and Contemporary Relations' (2020) Osmanlı'dan Günümüze: Kıbrıs: Dün, Bugün, Yarın 479.

<sup>48</sup> In-cyprus, 'Slovak FM attends meeting with Greek and Turkish Cypriot political parties' (2019), available at [in-cyprus.philenews.com/slovak-fm-attends-meeting-with-greek-and-turkish-cypriot-political-parties/](http://in-cyprus.philenews.com/slovak-fm-attends-meeting-with-greek-and-turkish-cypriot-political-parties/) (last accessed 25 February 2021).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> MoFEA SR, 'The Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Nicosia', available at [www.mzv.sk/web/nicosia-en](http://www.mzv.sk/web/nicosia-en) (last accessed 25 February 2021).

Forum is the only communication channel of this kind between the leaders and representatives of the political parties from both communities. It offers a unique opportunity for the participants to express their opinions on specific issues, as well as learn the reactions and positions of the other parties first-hand. The Bi-communal Forum under the auspices of the Embassy of Slovakia in Nicosia is important for the relationship of both Cypriot communities and for the position of Slovakia in foreign policy on a global scale. A group of members of the European Parliament (High-Level contact group for relations with the Turkish-Cypriot community) joins the meeting of the leaders and representatives of the political parties twice a year.<sup>51</sup> The recent attendance of the members of 'The Elders' (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, ex-president Jimmy Carter, and ex-minister of foreign affairs Lakhtar Brahimi) at the meeting of the leaders of the political parties demonstrates their support to the ongoing peace negotiations.<sup>52</sup> This activity is also respected, for example, by the UN and the meeting of leaders and representatives of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot political parties, while their joint communiqués are mentioned in the UN documents.<sup>53</sup>

At each meeting, the parties delegate two or three members. The hosting party (appointed through a rotation system) suggests the topic, the Slovak Ambassador opens the discussion and delegates present their party's position on the determined topic. The Ledra Palace Hotel in the UN buffer zone in Nicosia has become a traditional place for regular (almost) monthly meetings. After each meeting, a Joint Communiqué is issued. The bi-communal dialogue meetings regularly attract considerable media attention.<sup>54</sup>

The ambition of the leaders and representatives of the political parties in these meetings is not to solve the Cyprus problem. They rather focus on maintaining the dialogue, on keeping and strengthening contacts and good relations between the two communities, on providing the right example as the leaders of the communities

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<sup>51</sup> For more, see: CYTR, 'High-Level Contact Group for Relations with the Turkish Cypriot Community in the Northern Part of the Island' (2005-2012), available at [www.europarl.europa.eu/cytr/cms/lang/en/CYTR\\_home/about.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cytr/cms/lang/en/CYTR_home/about.html) (last accessed 25 February 2021).

<sup>52</sup> Phivos Nicolaides, 'Cyprus Bi-communal Dialogue - Bratislava Meeting. Cypriot Parties in Slovakia to Mark 20 years of Bi-Communal Cyprus Dialogue'(2009), available at [phivosnicolaides.blogspot.com/2009/06/cyprus-bi-communal-dilalogue-bratislava.html](http://phivosnicolaides.blogspot.com/2009/06/cyprus-bi-communal-dilalogue-bratislava.html) (last accessed 8 March 2021).

<sup>53</sup> For more, see for example: UN Digital Library, S/2019/883, 'Report of the Secretary-General on his Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus' (2019), available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3835915?ln=en> (last accessed: 8 March 2021), at 3.

<sup>54</sup> MoFA SR (no 27) 44-86.

for the rest of the society, and thus on supporting the efforts of the highest leaders to negotiate and find a lasting, viable, and just solution for the situation in the divided country.

Positive attitudes of UN representatives, the interest of EU representatives, and especially the gratitude and positive reception of all these activities by the Cypriot leaders and communities prove the legitimacy and usefulness of the effort of Slovak Ambassadors. Slovakia wishes to contribute to help Cypriots live in peace and harmony and the Slovak Embassy can still serve as the facilitator and organiser of the dialogue to contribute to mutual satisfaction.

The afore mentioned mission of the Slovak Embassy in Nicosia was successful mainly because the Slovak Republic, as an intermediary and organising country, is not burdened with direct or strategic interests in Cyprus and acts as a neutral player in this dispute. Slovak diplomats play the role of impartial moderators without interfering in the discussion, avoiding comments that could be perceived as an inclination toward one of the parties; in any case, they do not suggest possible solutions. The only ambition of Slovak diplomacy is to contribute to the rapprochement of both communities, maintain good relations between them, and facilitate their mutual dialogue and clarification of positions.

Slovak diplomacy is governed, in particular, by the applicable international treaties, resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council, as well as the UN Charter. This mission aimed to assist in the rapprochement process of both Cypriot communities in one of the longest unresolved problems in the world. As we can see, this concept is generally beneficial, and there is a high probability that it will continue to be so in the future, as long as the participants of the bi-communal meetings themselves want it.

### **Slovak Military Contribution to the Cyprus Problem Solution**

The contribution of the Slovak Republic to the solution of the Cyprus problem is, in addition to the efforts of Slovak diplomacy, undeniably visible in the deployment of a military contingent in the UNFICYP mission, which is one of the UN-led peace-keeping operations in the context of international crisis management operations.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Radoslav Ivančík, Vojtech Jurčák, *Peace Operations of International Crisis Management (Mierové operácie medzinárodného krízového manažmentu)*. (Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski: Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu i Przedsiębiorczości w Ostrowcu Św., 2013) (in Slovak).

Several historical events and transformations determined the actual deployment of the Slovak military contribution. First, it was the collapse of the Eastern Bloc as a result of the Cold War that generated a new security environment.<sup>56</sup> In this security environment, liberated Central European States launched efforts to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. This process required, among other activities, active involvement in multinational peace operations.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, UNFICYP itself has undergone internal changes. These were forced by a series of failed negotiations between the UN and the governments of the countries contributing militarily to UNFICYP, which related to the financing of military contributions. The result was a partial, in some cases even complete withdrawal of contingents and the subsequent forced reorganisation and relocation changes in the organisational structure of the operation itself. At the end of the 1980s and in the first half of the 1990s, the Swedish, later Canadian and Danish contingents were withdrawn, and the number of British and Austrian military contributions deployed was reduced. As a result of the events in question there was a reduction in the overall number of UNFICYP staff, restructuring of the sectors and, finally, the required reform of the operation's financing system.<sup>58</sup>

The historical continuity, the operating environment, and the changed financing system of UNFICYP foreshadowed the ability of the Slovak Republic to actively engage in the operation militarily. In March 2001, the Slovak Republic accepted an offer for military participation in UNFICYP. Consent to deploy a 280-member military unit was expressed by the Slovak Government Resolution no. 353 of 19 April 2001 and subsequently by the resolution of the National Council of the Slovak Republic no. 1372 of 10 May 2001. Based on these resolutions, the first unit of the Army of the Slovak Republic was sent to UNFICYP in May and June 2001.<sup>59</sup>

A mandate set out operational tasks to the Slovak contingent to prevent a recurrence of fighting, contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order, and help return to normal conditions.<sup>60</sup> Those tasks were performed in the eastern

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<sup>56</sup> Jaroslav Varecha, 'Conflict Elements in the International Systems' ('Konfliktné prvky v medzinárodných systémoch') (2019) *Interpolis* 18, 295 (in Slovak).

<sup>57</sup> Péter Kacziba, Zoltan Egeresi, (no 47).

<sup>58</sup> UN, 'UNFICYP', available at <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/> (last accessed 29 Jun 2021).

<sup>59</sup> GO SR, 'Proposal on Deployment of the Army of the Slovak Republic in to the UN Peace Mission UNFICYP Cyprus' ('Návrh na vyslanie jednotky Armády Slovenskej republiky do mierovej misie Organizácie Spojených národov UNFICYP na Cypre') (2001), available at <https://hsr.rokovania.sk/1236/21-/> (last accessed 12 July 2021) (in Slovak).

<sup>60</sup> UN (no 58).

part of the island, in Sector 4, thus replacing the Austrian and Slovenian contingents in this sector. The special position of the Slovak Republic in UNFICYP was highlighted by the takeover of Sector 4 on 18 June 2001 at 6 p.m. The official act of handover of the command of Sector 4 took place at the headquarters of Sector 4 in Famagusta in the presence of Force Commander UNFICYP (Major General Victory Rana) and other distinguished guests. Lieutenant-Colonel Milan Kováč, as the first Slovak commander, took over the command of Sector 4, thereby Slovak Republic became the so-called 'Lead Nation'.<sup>61</sup> Camp General Štefánik, located in the strategically and sensitively important city of Famagusta, not only serves as the headquarters of Sector 4 but also represents one of the most important UN bases stationed in the north of the island. The Slovak contingent deployment caused the transfer of responsibility for command and control in Sector 4 and also multiple changes in the composition, organisation and dislocation of the forces in Sector 4 over the years. Except for Slovak soldiers, other military contingents perform operational tasks, especially the large Hungarian contingent, but also the Croatian, Ukrainian, and Serbian contingents in 2018 in Sector 4.

At the end of 2017, a key milestone in the Slovak Republic's involvement in UNFICYP was the strategic evaluation of the operation and a subsequent study of military capabilities performed by the UN and the Permanent Mission in New York. The aim was to make recommendations for reconfiguring and optimising the structures of UNFICYP within the existing mandate. The evaluation concluded with a proposal for changes to improve the synchronisation of the implementation of the newly adopted concept of Operation 'Concept 802' in line with the existing mandate and the strategic direction and operational development of the operation. An important part of the recommendation of the UN Evaluation Commission was to offer Sector 4 under the sole responsibility of the Slovak Republic and thus create a single-nation sector, which was meant to have a positive effect on command and control in this sector. This recommendation accelerated extraordinary political and diplomatic activity at several levels of Slovak diplomacy. The Slovak Republic, as the leading country in Sector 4, expressed a keen interest and ambition to accept the UN recommendation, thus clearly proclaiming its efforts to continue to be active in this operating environment and to continue to participate in resolving the

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<sup>61</sup> Pavel Bučka, Andrea Rišianová, Participation of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic in Military Operations (Účasť Ozbrojených síl Slovenskej republiky v mierových operáciách) (Liptovský Mikuláš: Armed Forces Academy of general M. R. Štefánik, 2010) (in Slovak).

Cyprus problem in this way. The actual fulfilment of the recommendation of the UN Evaluation Commission and the final assumption of responsibility for the entire Sector 4 took place on 1 September 2018.<sup>62</sup>

The Slovak Republic took over 99 positions in Sector 4 from the military contingents of the partner countries of Hungary, Serbia, and Ukraine, and the number of deployed members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic increased to 242.<sup>63</sup> The Slovak Republic thus became the third-largest contributor to UNFICYP after Argentina and the United Kingdom. The Slovak representation in UNFICYP exceeds the area of responsibility of Sector 4. Members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic operate not only in Sector 4 but also in the command structures of UNFICYP, in the engineer platoon, and in the military police unit.<sup>64</sup> The Slovak Republic is also represented in The United Nations Police (UNPOL),<sup>65</sup> where two members of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic are permanently employed.

## Conclusion

The history of direct Slovak involvement in Cyprus dates to the 1980s when its first concrete act was the diplomatic initiative of the Czech-Slovak Ambassador of Slovak origin, Emil Keblúšek. The intensity of the effort of Slovak diplomats in the early 1990s was significantly negatively affected by the domestic political situation, which culminated in the separation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. However, shortly after its establishment, the independent Slovak Republic, through its embassy in Nicosia, took the initiative and, in consultation with the leaders of the political parties of both communities, organised the first meetings, following on from those of previous years. Meetings of political party leaders from both Cypriot communities managed to get into the position of a regular, almost monthly political event. The communiqué adopted from each meeting has called on the leaders of both communities, as well as the UN, the EU, and other actors in the international community, to step up their efforts to address the Cyprus issue. The activity of the Slovak Embassy in Nicosia can be assessed as successful mainly because the Slovak Republic, as an intermediary and organising country, is not burdened by direct

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<sup>62</sup> Ján Marek, *UN Peace Operations (Mierové operácie OSN)* (Liptovský Mikuláš: Armed Forces Academy of general M. R. Štefánik, 2019) (in Slovak).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>64</sup> MoD SR, 'UNFICYP mission, Cyprus' ('Misia UNFICYP, Cyprus'), available at <https://www.mosr.sk/misia-unficy-cyprus/> (last accessed 29 Jun 2021) (in Slovak).

<sup>65</sup> UN (no 58).

or strategic interests in Cyprus. In the Cyprus problem, it acts as a neutral party, particularly governed by the applicable international treaties, and the resolutions of the General Assembly and the UN Security Council, as well as the UN Charter.<sup>66</sup>

The exemplary approach of the Slovak Republic to the solution of the Cyprus problem is reflected not only in the role of Czechoslovakia and later in the independent Slovakia to fulfil the role of the mediator but also as a command country in Sector 4 with a robust military presence and active involvement in UNFICYP. Even though the Slovak Republic never reached the accepted limit of 280 troops in operation by the resolution of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the deployment of a Slovak contingent to UNFICYP, the Slovak military contribution never fell below 150 troops. For the Slovak Republic, UNFICYP in Cyprus is the operation with the largest deployed military contingent. At the same time, it is an international crisis management operation where members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic have been active for the longest time (as of 18 June 2021, it has been 20 years).

The activities of Slovak diplomacy in Cyprus facilitating the process of reunification of the island and the long-term operation of the military contingent of the Slovak Armed Forces in UNFICYP are always acknowledged and highly praised not only by top government officials but also by the island's population and by the UN Secretary-General and representatives of many other international organisations.<sup>67</sup> One of the most recent examples is the statement of the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Cyprus, Charalambos Petrides. When the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Cyprus on Cooperation in the Field of Defence on 29 July 2021 took place, he said, 'I had the opportunity to express our deep appreciation for Slovakia's invaluable contribution to UNFICYP. An important contribution to peace and stability that is nowadays more important than ever'.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Slovakia has signed only a few such Memorandums of Understanding

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<sup>66</sup> Rozbora (no 29) 17-20.

<sup>67</sup> Rozbora (no 29) 20.

<sup>68</sup> MoD SR, 'By signing Memorandum of Understanding, Slovak MOD and Cypriot MOD Acknowledge their Common Interest in Intensifying Defence Engagement'(2021), available at <https://www.mosr.sk/49833-en/podpisom-memoranda-o-porozumeni-potvrdili-rezorty-obrany-slovenskej-republiky-a-cyperskej-republiky-spolocny-zaujem-o-intenzivnejsiu-spolupracu/> (last accessed 1 September 2021).

so far, which points to the significance the Slovak Republic attaches to the bilateral relations with the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>69</sup>

The involvement of the Slovak Republic in the process of maintaining stability in this region represents an important dimension of operation in a multinational environment. It can be understood as a process that is influenced by the ambitions of the Slovak Republic to be a competent, credible, and reliable actor who participates in the activities of the international community,<sup>70</sup> and who, in particular, wishes to contribute to solving problems and maintaining peace on a European and global scale.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Jaroslav Kompan, 'UN peace and security activities as a cornerstone for NATO peace support effort' ('Mierové a bezpečnostné aktivity OSN ako základný kameň úsilia NATO na podporu mieru') (2020) National and International Security 2020, 195 (in Slovak).

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