CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION BETWEEN SLOVAKIA AND UKRAINE:
Alexander Duleba (ed.)

Volume II:
Impact of intergovernmental relations
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Introduction

This publication is the second of a series of four publications that present the findings of the research project “Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine and Cross-border Cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine: Implications and Opportunities”. The research project was implemented by the Institute of Political Sciences at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Prešov and supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency over the period of 2016 – 2019 (project no. APVV-15-0369).

This publication includes a set of studies that presents the findings of the research into the impact of intergovernmental relations between Slovakia and Ukraine, including national actors in both countries, on the development of cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors at a common border. The aim of the research was to find out how bilateral intergovernmental relations between Slovakia and Ukraine have been developing in terms of creating opportunities and/or obstacles for the development of cross-border cooperation at regional and local level.

The first chapter maps bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian relations since both countries gained their national sovereignty in the early 1990s. It analyzes the development of the political agenda of bilateral relations with focus on the projection of Slovakia's interests towards Ukraine. Based on the evolving political agenda and the approach of individual Slovak governments towards Ukraine, the chapter offers periodization of bilateral relations from the early 1990s to the current period, which began after Maidan in 2014. Special attention is paid to the impact of Slovakia's accession to the EU on bilateral relations with Ukraine, which was also reflected in the changed nature of the common border, including conditions for cross-border cooperation. The chapter analyzes in detail bilateral relations in the energy sector, in particular the transit of energy resources from Russia to Europe through Ukraine and Slovakia. Both countries share a common transit infrastructure and thus common interests, but, instead of finding common ground on this issue, in the past it has been rather subject to several controversies that have negatively affected their bilateral relations. The chapter also offers an interpretation of mutual perceptions, which is determined by the Slovak and Ukrainian national identities and frames political approaches of the actors to each other at the national level. The perception of Ukraine by the Slovak political elite, as well as the perception of Slovakia by the Ukrainian political elite, is conditioned by historical stereotypes that have influenced the political approach of both countries in bilateral relations since the 1990s and, it should
be stressed, not always positively. Attention is also paid to the position of national minorities in bilateral relations with special regard to the position of the Ruthenian (Rusyn) minority, approaches to which several times in the past also have caused controversies in bilateral relations. Finally, the chapter offers an analytical overview of the legal framework of Slovak-Ukrainian relations, including an analysis of the impact of Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004. Special attention is paid to agreements that regulate the movement of persons across the common border, border management and cross-border cooperation.

The second chapter examines the development of bilateral trade between Slovakia and Ukraine before and after the accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU in 2004 and, in addition, it analyzes the opportunities the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU brings for further development of bilateral trade and economic cooperation. The third chapter analyzes in detail the creation and functioning of the Slovak-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-Border Cooperation, established on the basis of the bilateral Agreement on Cross-border Cooperation as from 2000. The Commission represents the main intergovernmental platform for bilateral dialogue and coordination of governmental approaches towards cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors on both sides of the border. The chapter analyzes the Commission's contribution to the development of cross-border cooperation to date, as well as points to the identified shortcomings of its work. The fourth chapter offers an analysis of the media image of Ukraine in Slovakia and vice versa Slovakia in Ukraine, which forms current perceptions and discourses in both countries on mutual relations at the level of the Slovak and Ukrainian public. Creating an image of a country shared by the majority of the public is always a key prerequisite for shaping governmental policies in democratic regimes. The analysis also notes those aspects of the media image of Ukraine in Slovakia and vice versa that may affect the approach of regional and local actors on both sides of the border to cross-border cooperation.

The fifth chapter presents the findings of the empirical research that we carried out within the project through semi-structured interviews with representatives of the governmental institutions of Ukraine and Slovakia, who, by virtue of their positions, were involved in bilateral cooperation at the time of the interviews. We interviewed 10 representatives of Ukrainian governmental institutions in Kyiv and 10 representatives of Slovak governmental institutions in Bratislava with the aim to identify their views on the intensity and quality of bilateral contacts and communication, their
perception of partners on the other side, their assessment of the importance of the visa-free travel of Ukrainian citizens and the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU for bilateral relations and cross-border cooperation, including main issues and challenges they consider are the most important for further development of bilateral relations. The structure of the interviews conducted in Bratislava and Kyiv, or of the questions asked, was the same, so that we could acquire comparable data on the assessments of the current state of bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian relations, particularly the opportunities and obstacles for their further development, including from the implementation of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU.

This publication offers a comprehensive analysis of the policies, perceptions and practices of national actors in Slovakia and Ukraine who have been forming intergovernmental relations between the two countries since the early 1990s, and at the same time, it offers an interpretation of impact of Slovak-Ukrainian intergovernmental relations on the development of cross-border cooperation at a regional and local level.

Alexander Duleba
This chapter offers an analytical review of Slovak-Ukrainian relations on the intergovernmental level with the aim of identifying their impact on cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors on both sides of the common state border. It looks at exploring opportunities and obstacles for Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation generated by the interactions of governmental actors on the international level. It analyses policies, perception and practices of national actors who have been shaping the agenda of bilateral relations between the two neighbouring countries since their emergence on the map of Europe as independent states after the split of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. In addition, this text tries to explore the impact of the EU as an exogenous supranational actor on the bilateral regime of Slovak-Ukrainian relations and consequently also on cross-border cooperation, especially in the context of Slovakia’s accession to the EU in 2004. It also examines the impact of Slovakia’s EU membership on its national approach towards Ukraine, including how it has been influenced by the legislative framework for the EU’s relations with/and policies towards Ukraine.

In other words, this text offers an analytical reconstruction of Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations through their periodisation since the early 1990s. It marks the distinctive phases of their development, determined by the approaches of national actors as well as the evolving agenda of bilateral relations. Since the appearance of Ukraine and Slovakia on the political map of Europe, both countries have been ruled by several and different political actors that shared different understandings of the national interests of their own country and consequently projected them on relations with the other side. In the end, the interactions of national ruling actors, motivated by their perceptions and policies, led to better mutual understanding and cooperation during certain periods of the development of bilateral relations, but also to conflicts and tension during other periods. At the same time, new actors had to address the cooperation and/or conflict agenda created by their predecessors, carrying and handing over the baton to their successors. All the bilateral interactions on the intergovernmental level in the course of the
last almost three decades shape a specific bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian agenda with its both positive and negative heritage that frames their current, but also future relations. There are definitely some important lessons that should be learned by both sides from the modern history of Slovak-Ukrainian relations.

The Slovak-Ukrainian border regime, including conditions for cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors, has been following the dynamics of a changing intergovernmental framework. The windows of opportunity for regional and local actors on both sides of the border have been opening and/or closing accordingly. In order to understand the state of play and prospects for Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation (hereinafter in the text – CBC), it is imperative to identify both opportunities and obstacles for CBC actors generated by the evolving intergovernmental framework for Slovak-Ukrainian relations.

Finally, it should be noted that this analysis offers predominantly a Slovak perspective on the development of bilateral relations which, definitely, represents its substantive limitation.

1.1  Bilateral relations since the 1990s: political agenda and periodisation


1.1.1 Beginnings in the early 1990s

Both Ukraine and Slovakia are relatively new actors in international relations. They came into existence as independent states following the breakdown of the communist bloc and dissolution of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1990s. Ukraine gained its independence at the end of 1991 and Slovakia at the beginning of 1993. At that time Slovak political leaders were focused on reinforcing Slovak national interests within post-communist Czechoslovakia. Even those who opposed the split of the
common state with the Czechs shared the firm conviction that it should be reformed in such a way as to give Slovakia more autonomy (Hilde 1999). Naturally, the Slovak political class reflected only those external actors who were relevant to pursuing its national agenda within Czechoslovakia. Ukraine, as an independent state since the end of 1991 – not considering all the time it was merely a part of the Soviet Union – did not play any noticeable role in forming the separate interests of Slovak elites within Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s. It had no special political or economic importance for the newly born Slovak political elite struggling for independence against the central power in Prague. This is why Ukraine was absent on the political map of the then Slovak political establishment, despite the fact that it is the largest (in terms of both territorial size and population) immediate neighbour of Slovakia.

Slovakia shares a 98-kilometre-long border with Ukraine. The main reasons for the Slovak political elite’s lax attitude towards Ukraine can be explained in the following way. First of all, the centre of Slovakia’s political life is concentrated geographically in the western part of the country, where the capital city Bratislava is located. The capitals of Slovakia’s neighbours, such as Vienna (Austria), Budapest (Hungary) and Prague (Czech Republic), are located much closer to Bratislava than the relatively distant Kyiv. Even though Moscow is geographically much further from Bratislava, politically it was much closer to Central Europe at the beginning of the 1990s. Despite the fact that the Warsaw Pact and COMECOM (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), the two pillars of the former Eastern bloc, ceased to exist at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, Russia, as a successor to the Soviet Union, was an important partner for the former bloc members in Central Europe at that time, the partner for dealing with the bloc’s heritage, including the withdrawal of the former Soviet troops, the settlement of property claims of former bloc members, etc. Moscow was an actor with the capability of being a player in the political games in Central Europe, while Kyiv, at least at the beginning of the 1990s, was not.

In other words, Moscow politically could be and was used by the then Slovak political class in Czechoslovakia at the beginning of 1990s, while Kyiv could not. Moreover, Ukraine gained its independence from Moscow while Slovakia used Moscow to strive for its independence from Prague. Therefore, despite the fact that both Ukraine and Slovakia were new neighbouring independent states, the different international conditions surrounding their respective process of gaining independence prevented these processes from creating a platform of common interests (Duleba 2000a).
The pre-history of modern Slovak-Ukrainian relations may be narrowed in fact to just one issue coming from the Soviet past, which, however, rather burdened their bilateral agenda for many years after 1993. This regards the construction of a large metallurgical complex in Ukraine (Krivoy Rog – Dolinskaya), which was initiated by the governments of the countries associated in the former COMECON. Czechoslovakia invested 10.8 billion Kčs (Czechoslovak crowns – 360 million USD at current prices of 1990) in this construction. The activities of COMECON finished in 1990 as a result of the economic and political changes in its former member states, although the official end date of COMECON was 26 September 1991. The construction of the complex was stopped, and the Czechoslovak government submitted claims to Moscow with the aim of receiving compensation for the invested resources. Ukraine took over the duties stemming from the common activities of COMECON on its own territory after gaining independence at the end of 1991 (Morozov 1993). On 29 December 1992, one of the then leading Slovak national companies, VSŽ Košice (Eastern Slovak Ironworks), bought the Czechoslovak claims and took over the duty to complete construction in Krivoy Rog. Thus, the construction of the metallurgical complex in Ukraine became a subject of negotiations between VSŽ Košice (privatised in March 1994) and the Ukrainian government. VSŽ conditioned its further participation in the construction on receiving compensation for the Ukrainian debt, at that time estimated at the above-mentioned sum of 360 million USD. The Ukrainian side did not recognise this amount, and almost 15 years of long negotiations brought no results. The issue ceased being a part of the bilateral intergovernmental agenda only in the second half of 2000s, after the new investor, U.S. Steel, took over VSŽ Košice, however, without its non-core activities, which were sold to the Slovak private investment group Penta, including the share of the former VSŽ in Krivoy Rog (Hospodárské noviny, May 25, 2004).

The issue of the Krivoy Rog metallurgical complex is the only specific issue that dated from the countries’ shared communist past, and it was high on the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian agenda in the 1990s. It should be noted that it rather damaged bilateral relations; however, it was far from being crucially important for Slovakia gaining independence in 1993. That is why, in the context of Slovakia’s vital national interests at the beginning of 1990s, as perceived by the then Slovak political elite and first and foremost in the context of its efforts leading towards establishment of independent Slovak state, neighbouring Ukraine played only a peripheral role.

In terms of Slovakia’s economic interests, Russia played a much more important role. The military industrial production of Czechoslovakia
(especially tanks and artillery) – geared mostly towards the Soviet Union and, later, Russia – was concentrated on the territory of Slovakia and played a dominant role in the country’s economy. More than 30% (according to some estimates between 30% and 40%) of Slovak industrial capacity was oriented towards the Soviet Union in terms of both import dependence for the supply of parts and the marketing of the final product exports. Economic circles connected with the military industrial complex in Slovakia rejected the Czechoslovak federal government’s program to convert the military industry as early as in the late 1980s (Stigel 1993). Representatives of this part of the Slovak economy became supporters of the division of Czechoslovakia, as they believed they could manage their economic interests better within an independent state. In this way, the intellectual and political arguments for Slovak separatism were supplemented with an economic impetus, which became one of the decisive factors leading to the division of Czechoslovakia.

The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko) led by Vladimír Mečiár, became the strongest political force in Slovakia in the 1990s thanks also to the fact that it came to be the main representative of the interests of precisely the military branch of Slovak industry. HZDS won the parliamentary elections in 1992 and managed the process of the division of Czechoslovakia with the leading political force in the Czech Republic, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS – Občanská demokratická strana), led by Václav Klaus. Mečiár’s government endeavoured to develop “special economic relations” with Russia in order to sustain the interests of the Slovak military industry. In 1993 – 1995, a strategic vision by Mečiár’s party and its supporters was formulated in Slovakia, which implied that Slovakia should become a geo-economic bridge between the West and the East. According to this vision, the closer relations were between Slovakia and Russia, the more important Slovakia would become for the West. Russia greatly appreciated the Slovak government’s “pragmatic” approach to bilateral cooperation and gave its support to the Mečiár government, reflected in part by lower prices of energy resources, especially oil and natural gas supplied from Russia (Duleba 1996).

It should be pointed out that the Slovak political elite always viewed Slovakia’s relations with Ukraine through the prism of its relations with Russia, which caused a lot of misunderstandings in Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations in the years after 1993. Naturally, relations with the Czech Republic were high on the foreign policy agenda of Slovakia at the beginning of 1990s due to the need to manage the process of division, including the settlement of the assets of the former federal Czechoslovak state, as well as relations with Hungary due
to its concerns, strongly voiced in the international arena, regarding respect for the minority rights of ethnic Hungarians living in the southern parts of Slovakia. Ukraine was certainly far from the focus of Slovakia’s foreign policy radar at the beginning of the 1990s.

1.1.2 Indifferent neighbourhood, 1993 – 1998

The first official meeting of the heads of both states, President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk and President of Slovakia Michal Kováč, took place in Kyiv in June 1993. At the meeting the Presidents signed a basic political treaty on good neighbourhood and cooperation, by which Ukraine and Slovakia accepted the existing state border and declared their good will for future cooperation. The next high-level bilateral diplomatic contact did not take place until February 1994, when Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anatoliy Zlenko visited Bratislava. The first meeting of Prime Ministers (Vladimír Mečiar and Yevhen Marchuk) was held in June 1995 in Kyiv – two years after the conclusion of the basic treaty. Considering the fact that Slovakia and Ukraine are neighbouring countries, such a long diplomatic hiatus in mutual relations seems troubling to say the least. In the same period, Slovak-Russian relations did not experience anything like this.

Between the signing of the basic Slovak-Ukrainian treaty in June 1993 and the first meeting of both Slovak and Ukrainian Prime Ministers (henceforth – PM) in June 1995, Slovak PM Vladimír Mečiar met his Russian counterpart Viktor Chernomyrdin three times (twice in Moscow and once in Bratislava). The second meeting of governmental delegations, headed by PMs Mečiar and Yevhen Marchuk, took place in Štrbské Pleso (High Tatras in Slovakia) in January 1996 and the third one in March 1997 (Mečiar and Pavlo Lazarenko) in Uzhhorod (Ukraine). While between governmental Slovak-Ukrainian meetings there were periods of a “deep diplomatic silence”, at the same time Slovak-Russian contacts were developing in a very intensive way. On average around six-seven high-level delegations were exchanged between Moscow and Bratislava per year during the period 1993 – 1998.

Since gaining independence in January 1993, Slovakia had concluded (as of May 1998) more than 90 new agreements with the Russian Federation. At the same time, it concluded around 40 agreements with Ukraine. In addition, 44 additional agreements with Russia that Slovakia inherited from Czechoslovakia should also be added. Thus, Slovak-Russian relations were regulated at the end of 1998 by more than 120 agreements, while Slovak-
Ukrainian relations by fewer than 40 (Matejovič 1997b). This clearly illustrates the priorities of Slovak foreign policy at that time toward its Eastern neighbours and beyond. Slovakia did not conclude with any other country such a high number of new treaties as it did with Russia from 1993 till 1998, when the Slovak parliamentary elections of September that year ended the Mečiar government’s term in office. Slovak diplomacy under Mečiar’s premiership made no effort to make its relations with the two key post-Soviet countries from Slovakia’s perspective – Russia and Ukraine – more balanced. Quite on the contrary, Mečiar’s government conducted an imbalanced eastern policy, preferring one-sided relations with Moscow.

Another illustration of Slovakia’s attitude towards Ukraine in the given period is the fact that there was no Slovak Ambassador in Kyiv as of June 1996, when then Ambassador Jozef Migaš resigned his office to become party chairman of the Party of the Democratic Left. The absence of a country ambassador is a typical means of expressing protest in diplomatic language, when one country wants to demonstrate its disagreement with another country’s policies. There was no reason for doing something like this in Slovak-Ukrainian relations. It was rather a direct effect of the “poor” agenda of bilateral relations. It must be emphasised that Ukraine was the only neighbouring country in which Slovakia did not have an ambassador for such a long period of time. The next Slovak Ambassador to Ukraine was inducted into office in 1999 under the new government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda which was formed after the September 1998 parliamentary elections.

It was also typical of Slovakia’s attitude towards Ukraine that it was not politically “discovered” until almost 1995. Nevertheless, this took place only in relation to the importance of Ukraine in the development of Slovak-Russian relations. The then Slovak Deputy Prime Minister, Sergej Kozlík, expressed it realistically at the end of the first intergovernmental Slovak-Ukrainian talks held in Kyiv in June 1995, when he said: “Ukraine is a gate to the Russian market for us and its capacities to transit Slovak goods must be increased by ten-fold at least” (Pravda, June 16, 1995). His words might be interpreted as follows: Ukraine is important for Slovakia not in itself, but because of the importance of Russia for Slovakia. Ukrainians were certainly not excited to hear such words from the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister.

The Slovak side, referring to its good relations with Russia at that time, proposed to Ukraine that Slovakia become something like Ukraine’s barrister before Russia for solving Ukrainian energy debts to Russia and Turkmenistan. Slovak PM Mečiar explained this idea in Kyiv as follows: “Between Slovakia, Ukraine and Turkmenistan there are unsettled liabilities,
and after our negotiations with our Ukrainian partners there is a real possibility for a mutually advantageous settlement. This system briefly means that Slovakia will supply Turkmenistan with consumer goods. Turkmenistan will decrease Ukrainian debts by this amount. Ukraine will then build four ships for Slovakia in the first phase, thus closing the transaction. Something like this can be done in relation to gas transit within the Ukraine – Russia – Turkmenistan - Slovakia quadrangle” (*Pravda*, June 16, 1995). However, for many reasons Mečiar’s plans to reinvigorate Slovakia’s economic cooperation with post-Soviet states, voiced in 1995, could not be implemented.

The Mečiar government’s approach towards Ukraine shifted slightly in the course of 1996–1998. This was connected with the coming understanding that Ukraine is not only a “gate to the Russian market” for Slovakia but also a partner worthy of attention itself. This may be also highlighted by the growing understanding that the “gate will remain closed” if the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian political ties did not improve. On the other hand, the then Slovak government was surprised to find out that Slovakia is the only neighbouring country of Ukraine with stagnating bilateral trade. While Ukrainian trade with Hungary, Poland and Russia increased in the course of 1993–1995, Slovak-Ukrainian trade decreased. The volumes of Slovak-Ukrainian trade were, according to Slovak foreign trade statistics during the above years, as follows: 1993 – 286 million USD; 1994 – 240 million USD; and 1995 – 310 million USD (Matejovič 1997a). It was very hard to expect any other results, however, given the Slovak policy of “not-seeing” Ukraine during the period of 1993 – 1995.

At an intergovernmental meeting in Štrbské Pleso (Slovakia) in January 1996, Slovak Prime Minister Mečiar and Ukrainian PM Marchuk declared they would improve bilateral cooperation as well as confront the negative trends in bilateral foreign trade. They agreed in their estimates that the potential for Slovak-Ukrainian trade could achieve an annual volume of up to 2 billion USD. Mečiar pointed out that one of main tasks for both sides was to prepare an agreement on the creation of a bilateral free trade zone between Slovakia and Ukraine (*Pravda*, January 23, 1996). Marchuk proposed establishing a bilateral joint-stock company with the aim of completing construction of the metallurgical complex in Krivoy Rog – Dolinskaya. The main outcome of the meeting was the concluding of an agreement preventing double taxation. The Slovak PM promised his Ukrainian counterpart that Slovakia would use its CEFTA chairmanship in 1996 to bring Ukraine closer to this organisation (*Pravda*, January 23, 1996).

The 1996 talks between the Prime Ministers gave reason for a certain
optimism that a new era in Slovak-Ukrainian relations had begun. But such
expectations soon proved to be mistaken. After the meeting of the PMs in
the High Tatras, Slovak-Ukrainian diplomatic contacts got into another
regular period of “diplomatic silence.” The trade turnover forecast by both
Prime Ministers turned out to not be a reality and only achieved a sum of
418 million USD in 1996 (Zahraničný obchod 1997). The joint company for
construction of the metallurgical complex in Krivoy Rog - Dolinskaya was not
established. Moreover, the Slovak government refused to provide additional
governmental guarantees to VSŽ Kosice for this purpose (Matejovič 1996).
In addition, considering the still vacant post of Slovak ambassador in Kyiv,
Mečiar’s government during its term in office till 1998 was unable to restart
bilateral relations with Ukraine.

Moreover, due to the authoritarian style of domestic rule, the Mečiar
government disqualified Slovakia from the first round of the NATO and
EU enlargement in the 1990s. Being confronted with strained relations with
the U.S. and EU governments, the Mečiar government looked to the East.
After the parliamentary elections in 1994, in particular, the third Mečiar
government considered relations with Russia as an alternative foreign policy
strategy to Euro-Atlantic integration for the country. Through this scenario,
Russia was expected to provide security guarantees to Slovakia’s neutrality as
well as to offer a special economic status and foreign trade regime as a sort
of compensation for Slovakia’s keeping out of NATO and the EU (Duleba
2009a). As already mentioned above, in the eyes of the Mečiar government
Ukraine was viewed as a “gate to Russia” rather than a partner worthy of
attention itself. Even though bilateral official dialogue between Slovakia and
Ukraine became slightly more intense in the mid-1990s, Ukraine remained
in the “shadow of Russia” when it came to the strategic approach of the then
Slovak Eastern policy under Mečiar’s government.

Despite the weak level and short history of modern Slovak-Ukrainian
relations, as well as traditional diplomatic statements from both sides, such as
– “we have no controversial issues (including those from the past) burdening
our mutual relations” (see e.g. Kučma a Schuster 2002) – this was not entirely
true. It is possible to specify at least two problems which had been a source of
tensions in modern Slovak-Ukrainian relations for some time, starting back
in the 1990s. The first one had its roots specifically in the historical past, and
the second one became a product of modern times after both Ukraine and
Slovakia gained their state sovereignty.

The “modern” problem in bilateral relations regards the inability of both
countries to speak one language vis-à-vis Russia in the matter of the transit of
Russian oil and natural gas to European consumers through their territories. Both Ukraine and Slovakia inherited from the communist past a shared transit energy infrastructure connecting Russia with Europe. However, still in the 1990s Slovakia supported Russia’s projects on the construction of natural gas pipelines bypassing Ukraine. Instead of becoming a ground for strategic cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia with the aim of protecting their shared interests as transit countries towards Russia as the energy producer on one hand, and its European consumers on the other, the commonly shared infrastructure in the field of natural gas transit became rather a source of misunderstandings and tensions in Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations (for more, see subchapter 1.2).

The other problematic issue comes from the historical past and relates to the ethnic “Rusyn (or Ruthenian) question”. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Czechoslovakia, including Slovakia, recognised as of 1993 the Rusyns as an autochthonous ethnic minority living in the north-eastern parts of Slovakia, including on the border with Ukraine. Rusyns constituted the majority of the population of the former Subcarpathian Rus’, which was part of the first Czechoslovak Republic in the period between the two World Wars and which the Czechoslovak government ceded to the Soviet Union in 1947. The region then became, after the split-up of the Soviet Union, a part of Ukraine under the name of the Transcarpathian Region, through which Ukraine shares borders with Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. The communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union after WWII did not allow Rusyns to declare their ethnic identity, officially treating them as ethnic Ukrainians. Unlike Slovakia, Ukraine did not recognise the Rusyn nationality. Moreover, Ukraine viewed the renaissance of the Rusyn movement in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Transcarpathian Region after the collapse of communist regimes at the turn of 1980s and 1990s, as a separatist threat to its territorial integrity. Slovakia’s supportive policy towards the ethnic Rusyn minority could thus not be welcome in Kyiv; it is a question which has appeared on the bilateral intergovernmental agenda several times in the modern history of the Slovak-Ukrainian relations (for more see subchapter 1.3).

All the above issues, together with Slovakia’s pro-Russian policy under Mečiar’s government, painted rather negative tones onto the background of Slovak-Ukrainian relations in the 1990s. Despite their shared border, Ukraine and Slovakia did not see the other side as a relevant partner with which cooperation could be helpful in addressing national priority concerns as perceived at that time by political elites in Kyiv and Bratislava. Slovakia and Ukraine were rather indifferent neighbours in the 1990s.
1.1.3 Unavailing attempt at change, 1998 – 2000

The coalition government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda came to power after parliamentary elections in 1998. This changed completely the parameters of both Slovakia's domestic and foreign policy, including its relations with Russia. The Medium-Term Concept of Slovak Foreign Policy, which further developed the foreign policy part of Dzurinda's government program, declared: “Foreign policy towards Russia should be entirely coordinated with the EU approach, while in the security sphere Slovak-Russian mutual cooperation must continue to be determined by the nature of ties between the Russian Federation and NATO” (Priority 2000). Official government materials dealing with Russia from October 1998 contain two basic components: the first one is a declaration of a desire to have “correct”, “balanced”, “partner-like” and “mutually advantageous” relations with Russia, and the second one is a statement that Russia will remain an important economic partner for Slovakia, particularly with regard to imports of strategic energy resources (Programové vyhlášenie 1998).

The new government of Mikuláš Dzurinda proclaimed that it would balance Slovakia's Eastern policy and would “pay constant attention to the development of relations with Ukraine, which is our largest neighbour” (Programové vyhlášenie 1998). However, in spite of this declared ambition, which was in line with a program goal to restore Slovakia’s international position, put it back on the track towards EU and NATO membership and improve relations with neighbours after the Mečiar reign, the Slovak government was not able to achieve any significant improvement in relations with Ukraine during its first two years of rule (1998 – 2000), due to the conflicting nature of the topics that dominated the Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral agenda in those years.

First of all, Slovakia and Ukraine got into a diplomatic conflict by struggling for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council in 1999. They twice experienced a clash of interests at the UN: in 1997 and 1999. In 1997, both countries agreed to exchange rotating posts of the Chairman of the UN General Assembly (1997 – 1998) and the seat of a non-permanent member in the UN Security Council (2000 – 2001). Following the above agreement, Slovakia gave up in favour of Ukraine its candidacy for the chairmanship of the 52nd General Assembly of the UN (1997 – 1998), a post to be occupied by the former Czechoslovak federation, which Slovakia had inherited on the basis of the agreement with the Czech Republic, in order not to complicate the election of Ukrainian candidate, the then foreign minister Hennadiy Udovenko. On its side, Ukraine, which was expected to hold a seat as a non-
permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2000 – 2001 on behalf of the Eastern European regional group, promised to release this post to Slovakia. Slovak Deputy Foreign Minister Jaroslav Chlebo said Slovakia expected Ukraine to do the same for the election of Slovakia as a new non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1999 following a “verbal gentlemen’s agreement” with Ukraine in 1997. Slovakia expected to have a moral claim on the post following its generous behaviour towards Ukraine in 1997 (Pravda, September 20, 1999).

Ukraine, however, did not give up its candidacy for the seat of non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in favour of Slovakia, and during 1999 the two countries fought to win votes among UN members. Before the fourth round of voting in the UN General Assembly, which took place on 14 October 1999, Slovakia withdrew its candidacy because the voting was clearly favouring Ukraine. According to then Ukraine Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk, the victory of Ukraine was decided by the fact that 15 of the 20 members of the Eastern European regional group in the UN supported Ukraine, not Slovakia (The Ukrainian Weekly, October 3, 1999). Asked why an agreement in favour of Slovakia had not been forged in the Eastern European regional group of countries, Jaroslav Chlebo answered bitterly: “It is always possible to find agreement; as long as both parties participate […] it is simply unacceptable for us when a partner thinks that an agreement means concessions from our side only” (Pravda, September 20, 1999). The Slovak-Ukrainian contest in the UN, which climaxed in 1999, created a mentally negative framework for subsequent diplomatic contacts between the two countries.

Another issue that strengthened the feeling of bitterness in bilateral relations was the decision of the Slovak government, taken in 1999, to impose a visa regime on Ukraine. Public discourse in Slovakia on the imposition of visa restrictions on the travel of Ukrainian citizens to Slovakia began in November 1998. The then Czech foreign minister Jan Kavan tabled the issue during his visit to Bratislava, declaring “The Czech Republic will tighten its border policy with Slovakia until Slovakia tightens controls on the Slovak-Ukraine border and thus limits the flow of illegal immigrants across this porous border” (Národná obroda, December 16, 1998). Deputy Foreign Minister Ján Figel was the first Slovak state official to react publicly to the issue. Apart from the necessity of coordinating the Czech and Slovak approach so that a Schengen border did not arise between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, he used the EU integration argument, according to which “Slovakia has to bring its visa policies into line with those of the EU” (Národná obroda, January 19, 1999). According to Figel, if Slovakia were to impose a visa requirement on certain countries in future, this would not imply that the foreign policies
of these countries were unsuccessful or untrustworthy but would serve as a concrete measure to defend Slovakia's national interests. Slovakia had above all to take effective measures against illegal migration and organised crime (*Pravda*, August 2, 1999). Slovak Interior Minister Ladislav Pittner added another argument: “One of the reasons behind the imposition of the visa requirement is also to protect the labour market, as Ukrainian nationals are ready to work (in Slovakia) under far worse conditions than are Slovak citizens” (*SITA*, August 15, 1999).

The question of imposing a visa regime on Ukraine was one of the main points of discussion between the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries during the summit in Slovakia (High Tatras) on 16 – 17 October 1999. It was the only point of the meeting agenda that drew diverging opinions. The Czech and Slovak PMs supported the move, while the Polish and Hungarian PMs opposed it. Slovak PM Dzurinda said after the talks that the V4 countries wanted to coordinate their approach to the issue, which is why no final decision was taken during the summit (*Sme*, October 18, 1999). Although the V4 countries were in fact unable to coordinate their approach, the Czech Republic decided, regardless of its V4 partners, to introduce a visa regime on citizens of the Russian Federation and Belarus, to take effect on 29 May 2000, and on Ukrainian citizens as of 1 January 2000 (*ČTK*, February 3, 2000). This was followed on 15 March 2000 by the decision of the Slovak government to impose a visa regime for Ukrainian citizens as of 29 June 2000 and for Russian, Belarusian and Cuban nationals as of 1 January 2001 (*Pravda*, March 16, 2000). The Ukrainian government responded in kind, imposing visa requirement on Slovak citizens as of 28 June 2000. In addition, on 4 October 2000 the Ukrainian government took the decision to denounce a readmission treaty with Slovakia, which signified a radical step back in the protection of the common border and control of the movement of illegal immigrants from Ukraine to Slovakia (for more, see Duleba 2000b).

Ukraine disagreed with the decision of the Slovak side to impose a visa regime, regarding it as premature. According to then Ukrainian Ambassador to the Slovak Republic, Yuryi Rylach, the imposition of the visa regime by the Slovak side “was not absolutely imperative” (*Pravda*, August 24, 2000). In the evaluations made by Ukrainian representatives regarding the Slovak government’s visa decision, one could see the same bitterness that had marked the reactions of Slovak representatives after their diplomatic loss to Ukraine at the UN General Assembly in October 1999.
Added to the above issues, which definitely did not improve the atmosphere in bilateral relations, in the first half of 2000 the case arose of a new natural gas pipeline which was to go from Russia via Belarus and Poland to Slovakia and thus bypass Ukraine. The Russian gas giant Gazprom approached the governments of Slovakia and Poland at the beginning of March 2000 with the proposal to construct a new pipeline (the so-called Yamal 2), which would connect the Yamal gas pipeline leading from Belarus to Poland with the Slovak gas transit network, thus bypassing Ukraine (Hirman 2000). Poland and Ukraine, unlike Slovakia, took a cautious approach to this project. However, the fact is that the Slovak side supported the project without discussing the issue with Ukraine (for more, see subchapter 1.2).

The accumulation of problems in the course of 1998 – 2000 became a change-making factor in the modern history of Slovak-Ukrainian relations and certainly refuted the perception on both sides in previous years that an “indifferent neighbourhood” could serve as an adequate approach to the bilateral relationship. Both sides clearly learned that the neighbourhood does create a special quality in their interaction and that it would be better to hold regular talks to try to understand each other’s positions than ignore the interests of the other side. Simply put, misunderstandings between neighbours might cost too much. For example, the Slovak Ministry of Interior estimated that Slovakia would need to expend about 400 million Slovak crowns more a year in the case of Ukraine’s departure from the readmission treaty. Slovakia would have to invest in new infrastructure for illegal migrants detained in Slovakia, including securing all necessary services for their accommodation, if Ukraine stopped accepting them back as under the readmission treaty (Marušiak et al. 2001).

All in all, 2001 may be characterised as the year of a significant positive shift in Slovak-Ukrainian relations following the stagnant periods of 1993 – 1998 and especially 1999 – 2000. An overture to a new beginning was the visit of then PM Viktor Yushchenko to Bratislava in December 2000, only the second visit by a Ukrainian PM to Slovakia since January 1993. The main topics of his talks with Slovak PM Dzurinda and President Rudolf Schuster were the effects of the visa regime on their bilateral relationship, Ukraine’s plans to depart from its readmission treaty with Slovakia, the positions of both sides regarding the Russian proposal to construct the Yamal 2 gas pipeline bypassing Ukraine, Slovak participation in the construction of the metallurgical complex in Krivoy Rog – Dolinskaya and, finally, a completely new theme in Slovak-Ukrainian dialogue: bilateral cooperation on getting Caspian oil to European markets through the existing oil pipeline network.
shared by both Ukraine and Slovakia. The PMs made significant progress on two of these topics: the visa regime and working together on transport of Caspian oil (Solodkiy 2000).

As far as the visa issue was concerned, the two PMs reached an important agreement on the creation of a joint expert commission to take a look at the results of Slovakia’s visa requirement for Ukraine nationals and to script a liberalised regime that would interfere as little as possible with business, social, cultural and sporting contacts. Ukraine at the same time was to stop the process of withdrawing from the readmission treaty with Slovakia, which it had launched by government decision on 4 October 2000. In February 2001 the two sides changed the visa regime, effective as of 1 March 2001, to eliminate the need to show a letter of invitation by citizens of both countries when getting a visa; to provide free visas for children under 16; to issue multi-use free visas for some categories of applicants who had to cross the border often, such as air crews, river and sea-going boat crews, railway servicemen, truckers and people living in border areas, and above all those with relatives on the opposite side of the state border, students, WWII veterans, etc., and a 50% savings on visas for people traveling on the basis of a mutual agreement, i.e. in culture, art, sport, church relations and academic exchanges. Thus, the Yushchenko - Dzurinda accord from December 2000 closed one of the most sensitive and problematic chapters in the modern Slovak-Ukrainian relationship (for more, see Duleba 2005a).

Another positive result of talks between the heads of the Slovak and Ukrainian governments held in Bratislava in December 2000 was an agreement on the transport of Caspian oil to Europe through Ukraine and Slovakia. As the Ukrainian PM visited the Slovak oil transiting company Transpetrol, a project was being presented for an oil pipeline link between the Yuzhny sea oil terminal at Odessa and the Brody compressor station located on the Slovak arm of the Druzhba oil pipeline, which had been developed by Ukrainian state companies Ukraeftohaz and Mahistralni naftoprovody Druzhba (Magistral Druzhba Pipelines). It was anticipated that 28 to 67 million tons of oil would be transported annually on the Odessa – Brody arm. As the Slovak arm of the Druzhba pipelines transported only 21 million tons of oil a year, it was being used at less than a half of its capacity. Slovakia’s strategic interest here was not so much the transit fees it might gain, but the fact that the country could finally diversify its sources of oil imports by having access to Caspian resources, thus reducing its reliance on Russian oil and thereby increasing its energy security. The Ukrainian-Slovak agreement was in the strategic interests of both countries, and following the Yushchenko
Dzurinda talks, Slovak officials became more cautious on the subject of constructing a southern arm to the Yamal gas pipeline that would bypass Ukraine (for more, see Marušiak et al. 2001). In the context of the previous practice of Slovak-Ukrainian relations, the most important fact here is that both countries added positive new topic to their bilateral agenda, a unique element at that time.

After the meeting of the heads of government, Slovak-Ukrainian relations improved sharply, as evidenced by the number of official visits by top Ukrainian officials. Foreign minister Anatoliy Zlenko and finally President Leonid Kuchma soon followed Ukrainian PM Yushchenko. Kuchma paid an official visit to Slovakia on 12 – 14 June 2001, the first by a Ukrainian head of state since 1993. The three-day visit of the Ukrainian President gave a boost to bilateral relations and was the culmination of attempts by the two countries to change their relations from the previous periods. However, the visit took place against the background of growing criticism of the Ukrainian President from the EU and NATO countries due to Kuchma’s undemocratic style of rule and his restriction of media freedom in Ukraine. But the Slovak reception was one of the warmest that Kuchma received at that time, with Slovak President Rudolf Schuster saying that he was not aware of any democratic deficit in Ukraine. However, after meeting with the Ukrainian President, Slovak PM Dzurinda invited Slovak NGOs to be more active in helping their Ukrainian counterparts build a democratic society, diplomatically balancing the Slovak President’s words on the subject (Národná obroda, June 15, 2001).

Nevertheless, the diverging assessments of the Kuchma regime by the two top Slovak leaders concerning its democratic character did not affect bilateral relationship between the two countries. On the whole, it might be concluded that Slovak-Ukrainian relations started to experience a new era in the course of 2001 and 2002 thanks to key agreements reached by the heads of governments in December 2000.

1.1.4 Ukraine: Slovakia’s post-accession foreign policy priority, 2001 – 2006

In the course of 2001 and 2002 it became clear that Slovakia would meet the conditions required for achieving membership in the EU and NATO. In other words, the country’s foreign policy priorities, as formulated in 1993 when Slovakia gained its independence, were successfully implemented (Duleba et al. 2005).
The expert debate on the post-accession priority of Slovakia’s foreign policy started in 2002 and came to the conclusion that it should take the form of international responsibility for Slovakia, which a majority of the relevant domestic political actors and Slovak public could identify with. The formulation of these priorities as a “naming of nation-state interests” was rejected as obsolete, because bearing responsibility for international stability and prosperity was defined as an absolutely key characteristic of Slovakia’s foreign policy post-accession. The prevailing opinion was that the key nation-state interests of Slovakia in international relations would be fulfilled by its accession to NATO and the EU. What Slovakia needed to be able to do first after accession to transatlantic structures, however, was to learn how to use them as tools of its foreign policy, and in the case of the EU as a tool for internal policies, too. Although NATO and the EU put obligations on the new member states, at the same time they also created many more opportunities for self-interpretation of how the member states could contribute to common policies (Duleba and Lukáč 2004).

The main mission of NATO and the EU in international relations is being responsible for regional and global stability and prosperity, done by exporting common models and rules of the Union and the Alliance to less stable and less prosperous parts of the world. Therefore, Slovakia stood before a challenge: to formulate its own rate of responsibility within the common policies of NATO and EU and to take on its shoulders a portion of the responsibilities of NATO and the EU in international relations. In other words, from the beginning of the post-accession period it was already obvious that Slovakia would need to find its own place within NATO and the EU. At the same time, Slovakia would have to be able to define its own national responsibilities within NATO and the EU in such a way that it would be able to defend its national interests. The perception of the bounds of this responsibility had to be clear from both context-based and geographical perspectives. It had to be accepted by a majority of domestic actors as well as the public. In other words, its identification was basically to be a formulation of the post-accession conception of Slovakia’s foreign policy (Duleba and Lukáč 2004).

The expert debate came to the conclusion that the Western Balkans and the biggest eastern neighbour of Slovakia, Ukraine, were the areas that meet the identified parameters of post-accession foreign policy priorities. In both the Western Balkans and Ukraine two basic characteristics were obvious: 1) they are areas of priority interest for both NATO and the EU, and 2) Slovakia has its own vital interests in these areas. In both relations with Ukraine and the countries of the Western Balkans, NATO and the EU could become instruments of Slovak foreign policy, and on the other hand, Slovakia could take part of NATO’s and
the EU’s responsibility on its own shoulders. There are not as many foreign policy themes and areas where one and the other characteristics are valid at the same time (Duleba and Lukáč 2004). It should be noted that the government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda accepted the outcomes and policy recommendations that resulted from the national debate among experts. PM Dzurinda defined publicly for the first time the Western Balkans and Ukraine as foreign policy priorities of Slovakia after entering the EU and NATO in March 2003 at his address at a Review Conference of Slovakia’s foreign policy. In his opinion “Slovakia has the ambition to become an advocate of Ukraine and the countries of the Western Balkans within the EU and NATO and to help them in pursuing reforms and the development of civil society” (Vystúpenie predsedu 2004).

Sustaining and developing regional cooperation within the Visegrad Four was also defined as a strategic priority for the interests of Slovakia after acceding to the EU and NATO (Lukáč and Strážay 2004). Together with the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, Slovakia has greater significance within the EU and NATO, and at the same time the interests of the V4 in the region of Eastern Europe and Western Balkans are very similar. The regional format of the V4 strengthens the capacity of each V4 country when they try to advocate for their interests inside the EU and NATO and also when promoting their interests in two key neighbouring regions – Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Slovakia was a strong supporter of the Kroměříž Declaration of the V4 PMs on 12 May 2004, which defined the post-accession priorities of regional cooperation within the V4: strengthening regional identity and cooperation, coordination of policies within the EU and NATO and a common contribution to the policies of the EU and NATO towards the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (Declaration 2004).

Two successive coalition governments led by Mikuláš Dzurinda from 1998 – 2006 were successful in implementing political and economic reforms and improving business conditions in Slovakia. In the 2000s Slovakia was one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. One of the successful economic reforms achieved by Slovakia in the given period had a profound impact on Slovakia’s relations with Russia and, consequently, its relations with Ukraine. By attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to Slovakia’s automotive industry, Dzurinda’s second government managed to solve a structural problem of Slovakia’s economy which it had inherited from the communist past, a problem which had profound impact on Slovakia’s domestic politics, as well as its foreign policy, in the 1990s. The engineering sector of the Slovak economy, which dragged Slovakia into international isolation under Mečiar’s rule in the 1990s, again became the vehicle of the Slovak economy in the 2010s. The successful
conversion of the former military industry into the automotive industry should be viewed as one of the major achievements of Dzurinda’s government. Naturally, leading car-producers came to Slovakia not only because of its good business conditions, but also because of the engineering capacity of Slovakia, including a skilled and relatively cheaper labour force already in place thanks to the tradition of the former military industry (Pavlínek 2014). The successful conversion of Slovakia’s military industry narrowed the country’s policy and economic agenda in its relations with Russia. The structural change of Slovakia’s economy also altered the country’s eastern policy, including its relations with Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries. Russia ceased to be the only arrow pointing north in the compass of Slovakia’s eastern policy.

PM Dzurinda paid his first official visit to Ukraine in June 2004. He informed political leaders of Ukraine that Slovakia considered relations with Ukraine a priority issue of its foreign policy and was ready to intensify bilateral dialogue and cooperation. The negotiation agenda during his meetings in Kyiv concerned the possibilities of Slovakia helping Ukraine in improving its NATO and EU relations; the Slovak side offered to share its experiences with Ukraine from reforms and the association process with the EU. In addition to top state official representatives, PM Dzurinda also received a group of representatives from leading non-governmental organisations in Ukraine at the Slovak Embassy in Kyiv. Their meeting focused on Slovakia’s experiences in the democratisation, issues of constitutional reform in Ukraine and the incoming presidential election in Ukraine. The Slovak PM spoke about a prepared program of official assistance to Ukraine, the goal of which would be to support cooperation between Slovak and Ukrainian non-governmental organisations (Information 2004). During his visit he also met Viktor Yushchenko, the then leader of the largest opposition movement “Our Ukraine”. Yushchenko spoke about the internal situation and expressed fears for democracy and the fairness of the presidential elections. He also requested Dzurinda’s support in securing monitoring by independent election observers from Slovakia (Ukrajinska pravda, June 22, 2004). These meetings between the Slovak Prime Minister and the leader of the then opposition and representatives of NGOs were clear signals from the Slovak side regarding how it saw desirable political development in Ukraine.

Under Dzurinda’s second premiership (2002 – 2006), Slovakia became an active supporter of political change in Ukraine during the so-called Orange Revolution as well as of civil society in Belarus. In 2004 the government launched a special Official Assistance Program aimed at supporting democratisation processes in Ukraine and Belarus via the cooperation of Slovak NGOs with their Ukrainian
and Belarusian partners. Twenty million Slovak crowns were allocated in the budget of Slovakia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to democratisation projects carried out by Slovak NGOs in Ukraine and Belarus in 2004 and 2005 within the Program of Official Assistance to Ukraine. Moreover, in 2005 the Slovak Embassy in Kyiv was, together with the Embassy in Sarajevo, chosen as pivotal for providing micro-grants supporting democratisation and reforms in the country of accreditation (Národný program 2005).

Dzurinda’s government demonstrated its change in approach and political will to build qualitatively new relations with Ukraine through its change regarding the visa regime, which until then had been the most sensitive issue in bilateral relations. Unlike Poland and Hungary, Slovakia during the EU integration process had introduced a visa regime to Ukraine valid as of June 2000. On 20 April 2005 the Slovak government decided to begin issuing visas for Ukrainian citizens without fees. The government thus responded to the Ukrainian decision to abolish the visa obligation for EU members. As of May 2005, a so-called asymmetric visa regime was valid, i.e. Ukrainian citizens required a visa when entering Slovakia, but they did not pay a fee, while Slovak citizens did not need a visa to enter Ukraine (SITA, April 20, 2005).

The proposal of Slovakia’s Assistance to Ukraine in Implementation of the Objectives of the EU-Ukraine Action Plan should be considered a key step towards fulfilment of Slovakia’s new foreign policy priorities vis-à-vis Ukraine under the Dzurinda government. Prime Minister Dzurinda submitted the proposal, which was approved by the Slovak government on 26 October 2005, to Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov during his official visit to Slovakia on 24 November 2005. The document consisted of more than 40 activities through which Slovak governmental and non-governmental organisations would provide expert assistance to their Ukrainian partners in implementing the EU-Ukraine Action Plan. The Ukrainian government, eager to become an EU member, considered the fulfilment of the Action Plan goals a foreign policy priority. Taking the “best practices” principle of the Slovak Republic in legislation and institutional reform during the EU integration process into account, Slovak institutions shared their know-how with their Ukrainian counterparts. The goal was to fulfil the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, resulting in a new EU-Ukraine basic agreement to replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (SITA, October 26, 2005). At a meeting with the ambassadors to Ukraine of EU Member States, then Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov showed appreciation for Slovakia’s proposal, remarking that “Several countries offered assistance to Ukraine in implementing the Action Plan. The proposal of Slovakia is the best, though” (Tretetskiy 2006).
In addition, the Slovak embassy in Kyiv became the NATO Contact Point Embassy (CPE) in Ukraine for 2007 – 2008. For the first time in the history of Slovak diplomacy under NATO membership, the Slovak Republic was assigned to represent the CPE in a NATO partner country. The Embassy was tasked with supporting the dialogue between Ukraine and the Alliance and presenting NATO in Ukraine, e.g. activities aimed at raising the awareness of the Ukrainian public. As already mentioned, the Slovak embassy in Kyiv began to administer a special grant scheme that allowed it to award small grants to Ukrainian organisations devoted to the public debate on NATO and Ukraine’s security policy. In addition, the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported four projects of Slovak NGOs in 2007 and 2008 aimed at raising Ukrainian public awareness of NATO (Pôsobenie 2007).

It may be concluded that under Dzurinda’s premiership, especially from 2001 – 2006, Slovakia fundamentally reshaped its eastern policy. First, thanks to economic reforms, Dzurinda’s government managed the successful conversion of the military industry, which in the 1990s, formed a strategic dependence of Mečiar’s Slovakia on Russia. Second, it put the country back on the track towards NATO and EU membership and managed to complete the accession process in 2004. Finally, it developed a new strategy in relation to Ukraine, one which made support for reforms and the European integration of neighbouring Ukraine, a post-accession foreign policy priority of Slovakia. Thus, PMs Mečiar in the 1990s and Dzurinda in the first half of 2000s represented two completely different, and in the end, quite opposite forms of Slovakia’s eastern policy following 1993, including the perception of the national interests of Slovakia vis-à-vis Ukraine.

However, Dzurinda’s version of Slovakia’s eastern policy was not the last one. His successor to the post of Slovak PM, Robert Fico, the leader of the Social Democratic Party – Smer (Sociálnodemokratická strana – Smer), which won the parliamentary elections in June 2006, came up with a new design for Slovakia’s relations with both Russia and Ukraine, which placed them somewhere in between those of Mečiar and Dzurinda.

1.1.5 Neo-pragmatism and a double-track policy, 2006 – 2013

The new left-oriented government of Slovakia, elected in 2006 and led by Robert Fico, declared that it would pursue continuity in the area of foreign policy. Nevertheless, Fico’s government approached relations with its Eastern neighbours by emphasising aspects of foreign policy that its predecessor had
not. First of all, it committed itself to intensifying the economic dimension of Slovak foreign policy (Programové vyhlásenie 2006). Prime Minister Fico specified that this would mainly concern the further development of Slovakia’s relations with Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, and believed relations with Russia would be stimulated because the new cabinet would provide significantly more support to the economic side of foreign policy, including countries such as Russia, Ukraine and China (Duleba 2008). Based on an analysis of this attitude towards the development of relations with Russia, the European Council for Foreign Relations think-tank included Slovakia in the group of EU member states designated as “Friendly Pragmatists” in their relations with Russia (Leonard and Popescu 2007).

Fico’s emphasis on a pragmatic economic approach towards its Eastern neighbours did not prevent the gas crisis in January 2009, however, as the delivery of Russian natural gas to Slovakia via Ukraine was fully stopped for the first time since the transit pipeline was put into operation in 1972. In January 2009, about 1,000 Slovak companies had to halt production for nearly two weeks. According to an official estimate by the Slovak Ministry of Economy, total economic losses amounted to more than 1 billion EUR (Duleba 2009b). The gas crisis of January 2009 compelled Fico’s government to approach the issue of energy security much more seriously, including looking for alternative ways to secure the supply of natural gas to Slovakia. At the same time, the crisis strongly affected Fico’s perception of Ukraine, as he believed that the Ukrainian government led by Yulia Tymoshenko could help Slovakia to minimise the economic damage resulting from the gas crisis, although in the end it did not (Pravda, January 14, 2009; for analysis, see subchapter 1.2).

There are two principal similarities between the approaches to Russia pursued by Mečiar and Fico. Both emphasised developing pragmatic economic relations with Russia, and both exhibited certain sympathy for Russia’s positions on a number of issues on the European and international security agenda. Fico paid his first official visit to Russia on 4 May 2007. Before and during talks with Putin, he indicated his understanding of Russia’s concerns with regard to the then anticipated deployment of elements of the US National Missile Defence (NMD) in the Czech Republic and Poland and stressed that he personally would never have agreed to such deployments on the territory of the Slovak Republic. The president of Russia greatly appreciated the Slovak PM’s position on the issue of NMD. Both sides also agreed on the resolution of Kosovo’s final status. Fico informed Putin of the resolution passed by
the National Council of the Slovak Republic (the parliament) rejecting the option of a unilateral solution for Kosovo’s status. He added, however, that “the Slovak Republic will not be more Serbian than the Serbs themselves” (Informácia 2007).

It is important to note that the NMD position articulated by Fico in Moscow did not enjoy sufficient support back home, including within the Slovak government. The gap between his statements and the policy of the Slovak Foreign Ministry and then Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič was obvious, since Slovakia, as a NATO member state, had endorsed the Bucharest Summit Declaration of April 2007 – before the prime minister’s visit to Moscow. Article 37 of that Declaration approved the deployment of American NMD in Europe as a contribution to the security of all members of the alliance. Fico’s statements also provoked critical reactions from the Czech and Polish governments (TASR, November 18, 2007). In addition, unlike most Western leaders, Fico considered Russia’s military aggression against Georgia in 2008 as having been provoked by irresponsible policies on the part of the then Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. In short, when it came to certain key issues on the international security agenda which caused tensions between the majority of NATO and EU countries on one hand and Russia on the other, Fico articulated a position closer to or identical with that of Russia.

Despite Fico’s growing personal cold-hearted approach towards Ukraine, especially after the gas crisis of 2009; his government still followed the policy lines on Ukraine established by the Dzurinda government. Moreover, if one compares the intensity of bilateral contacts and Slovakia’s support for Ukraine’s European integration, including the activities of the Slovak Embassy in Kyiv as the NATO Contact Point Embassy for 2007 – 2008, one could conclude that Slovakia’s political approach towards Ukraine under the Fico government, i.e. assisting it in drawing closer to the EU, was even more active than that of its predecessor (Správa o priebehu 2007). This is what justifies the characterisation of Slovakia’s Eastern policy under the Fico government as a double-track approach.

Slovakia welcomed the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative launched in 2009 as a logical outcome of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) developments since 2004, which supported Slovakia’s constant argument that the EU should make a distinction between its eastern and southern neighbours. Its eastern neighbours should, Slovakia argued, be offered both special treatment and the prospect of EU membership. Slovak foreign policy supported the EU’s signing of Association Agreements, including the DCFTA, with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on one hand, while calling for good relations with Russia on the other.
The Annual Report of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2009, the year in which the EaP was launched, reflected Slovakia’s participation in the preparation and start-up of the EaP and stated that “Slovakia was one of the spiritual fathers of the initiative as long ago as the period when it was being formed within the V4”. According to the report, during the preparation stage Slovakia “advocated achieving a collective commitment of EU members which would be as strong as possible, a project as robust as possible and the launch of its practical steps as soon as possible in relation to this important area”. As the report states, Slovakia used the first year of the EaP to offer specific projects to the six countries, and once the areas of common interests were identified, the projects’ implementation phases would began (Annual report 2009, 42).

Indeed, in 2010 the Slovak government offered an extensive list of projects for the EaP program with the participation of 15 central state institutions and authorities (Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, Ministry of Health, the Regulatory Office for Network Industries, the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Antimonopoly Office and the National Bank of Slovakia). The projects were aimed at supporting reforms in the EaP countries and sharing experiences in the following three main areas: the use of the pre-accession assistance of the EU, harmonisation and approximation with the EU acquis, and digitalisation of public administration (Návrhy projektov 2010). Representatives of the above Slovak national authorities participate in the meetings of the multilateral platforms and panels of the EaP. The Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs serves as the coordinating body for the involvement of Slovak state institutions in the EaP program and activities. In partnership with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs initiated in 2012 the creation of the Platform of a governmental and non-governmental sector for cooperation and activities of the Slovak Republic in the EaP, with the aim of coordinating the activities of both kinds of organisations (Benč and Duleba 2014).

Among the projects proposed by the Slovak government that were implemented and/or are being implemented with the support of EaP financial tools or the Slovak Official and Development Assistance Program (SlovakAid), special reference should be made to the twinning project carried out by the Slovak Regulatory Office for Network Industries (2016 – 2018) which helped to establish the National Energy Regulatory Authority of Ukraine as well as prepare the legislative framework for regulatory policies and reform of
the energy market in Ukraine (Úspech ÚRSO 2016). Since 2009 the Slovak Ministry of Finance has been running its own program: “Public finances for development – strengthening capacities in the field of public finances of the countries of the Western Balkans and CIS”. Together with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Slovak MoF established the Fund for Technical Cooperation, which allows for regular interaction and the sharing of experiences between experts from the MoFs of EaP countries with the MoF of Slovakia (Program odovzdávania 2019).1

Ukraine and Belarus became immediate beneficiaries of the SlovakAid program at its very launch in 2003. The program facilitates Slovakia’s provision of bilateral assistance to third countries. Moldova and Georgia were then also included in the list of SlovakAid program countries following the start of the EaP in 2009. It should be stressed that programming of Slovakia’s bilateral assistance to Eastern European countries through the SlovakAid program operated by the Slovak Agency for International Development Assistance was fully adjusted to the goals of the EaP. Most of the bilateral projects of SlovakAid in EaP countries have been implemented by Slovak NGOs. Starting from 3 million EUR in 2003, the total annual financial volume of the bilateral SlovakAid program has gradually grown, reaching 12 million EUR in 2017, of which about one-third was directed to EaP countries (Vývoj slovenskej 2019). The current SlovakAid program supports projects aimed at helping with reforms in the associated EaP countries (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) in the following three priority areas: good governance and building the capacities of a civil society, infrastructure and the sustainable use of natural resources, and support for the development of a market environment (Podpora krajín 2019).

In terms of supporting reforms and the European integration of the current associated EaP countries, including Ukraine, Slovakia has been demonstrating a clear and continual policy approach towards the EU’s ENP since its very beginning in the early 2000s. The EaP has been approached as a foreign policy priority, and the government has acted accordingly by mobilising the respective country’s capacities, including financial assistance. At the international level Slovakia has consistently used its chairmanships

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1 It should be noted that some former Slovak governmental officials played an important role in the EaP framework. Katarína Mathernová has been serving as the Deputy Director General of NEAR at the European Commission, where she was in charge of EU relations with the EaP countries (since 2015); she represented the Commission in the Association Councils established by the EU’s Association Agreements with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Ivan Mikloš, former Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of the SR, has served as the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Ukraine (2016 – 2019).
in the V4 and the Council of the EU (2016), including the current OSCE chairmanship (2019), to maintain the momentum and ensure support for the EaP. In 2013, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák initiated two meetings of the Friends of Ukraine Group created by the foreign ministers of certain EU member states in order to promote the signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine at the Vilnius summit in November of that year (Na podnet 2013). Throughout the events that have taken place in Ukraine since then, Slovakia has expressed its support for the new Maidan government, the territorial integrity of Ukraine and its course towards European integration. Slovak diplomats have emphasised that Slovakia is ready to share with Ukraine its experience of transformation through building stable democratic institutions, implementing economic and social reforms, and harmonisation with European legislation, as required under the Association Agreement. At the same time, Slovak foreign policy under PM Fico has begun to place greater emphasis on the Russian aspect of EU policy towards Eastern European countries. It points out that the EaP should not become an anti-Russian project; rather, it should be viewed as “very good preparation for the future unification of all parts of Europe in one European project” (Vystúpenie ministra 2008).

In summary, Fico’s policy towards Eastern Europe has been striving to combine the two previous different tracks of Slovakia’s Eastern policy. Whereas Mečiar’s governments (1992 – 1994 and 1994 – 1998) preferred a pragmatic approach that prioritised economic ties with Russia, even at the cost of exclusion of Slovakia from the EU and NATO integration processes, the centre-right governments led by Mikuláš Dzurinda (2002 – 2006) and Iveta Radičová (2010 – 2012) preferred the EU’s value-based approach to the region, supporting reforms in post-Soviet states, including their Euro-Atlantic integration, even at the cost of potential conflict with Russia.

On the other hand, the governments led by Fico (2006 – 2010, 2012 – 2016 and 2016 – 2018) have been trying to combine support for democratic change in the Eastern Partnership countries, including their European integration, and pragmatic cooperation with Russia, including “zero conflict relations” between the EU/NATO and Russia. The Fico governments have supported the Eastern Partnership initiative but stressed that it should not become an anti-Russian project. This new version of Slovak Eastern pragmatism advocates the EU policy towards Eastern Europe inasmuch as it aims to achieve trade liberalisation with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It welcomed the conclusion of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and also supported any move of the EU towards
achieving free-trade agreements with Russia and Belarus. However, it did not consider political conditionality, which is a part of any comprehensive EU trade deal with third countries, a factor that should prevent the EU from doing business with Russia or Belarus. The pragmatist line in Slovak policy acknowledged that the country's main trading partner in the region is Russia (bilateral trade reached 8.7 billion EUR in 2013), followed by Ukraine (1.1 billion EUR) and Belarus (100 million EUR), while other Eastern neighbours hardly figure (Zahraničný obchod 2014).²

However, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, which started in 2014, has shown that this policy mix of having good relations with both Russia and Ukraine at a critical juncture of war between the two is very hard to manage.

1.1.6 Impact of Maidan and the Ukrainian-Russian crisis since 2014

The events in Ukraine starting from November 2013, including Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, which began in February 2014, did not change the Fico government’s pragmatic approach towards Russia and Ukraine. It continued to advance an ambivalent double-track policy of trying to maintain good relations with both countries. Slovak Prime Minister Fico became one of the most outspoken EU leaders in opposing economic sanctions against Russia as a result of the Ukrainian crisis. Commenting on the conclusion of the EU summit in May 2014 acknowledging the ongoing preparatory work of the Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) on targeted measures against Russia, he said that tougher sanctions would be “suicidal” and “nonsensical” (The Slovak Spectator, May 29, 2014).

At the same time, Slovak diplomacy under Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák followed a course of providing support for Ukraine's European integration, whereas Prime Minister Fico cast doubt on it. The Slovak government signed off on all measures adopted by the EU and NATO, including economic sanctions on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine, while Prime Minister Fico deprecated them. On one hand, Slovak diplomats managed to achieve an important agreement on the division of roles among the V4 countries in supporting reforms in Ukraine during Slovakia’s V4 Presidency (July 2014 – June 2015).³ On the other hand, the then Ambassador of Ukraine to Slovakia,

² Slovakia’s bilateral trade turnover with other Eastern Partnership countries in 2013 was rather negligible: Moldova – 70 million EUR, Azerbaijan – 70 million EUR, Georgia – 6 million EUR, Armenia – 5 million EUR.
³ Following the agreement initiated by the then Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group
Oleh Havashi, had to respond to Prime Minister Fico’s statements on Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict pointing out that “a good neighbour cannot speak like this” (Sme, September 5, 2014).

As mentioned above, despite the anti-sanctions rhetoric of Prime Minister Fico, his government approved all the restrictive measures against Russia adopted by the EU. What is more, it concluded a natural gas supply agreement with Ukraine in April 2014, when Gazprom raised its prices to levels that Ukraine refused to pay. When Russia stopped the supply of gas to Ukraine in June 2014, it was only thanks to an agreement between the governments of Ukraine and Slovakia on reverse gas flow (with the participation of the national gas transit system operators, Ukrtransagaz, which is a subsidiary of Naftogaz of Ukraine, Slovak TSO Eustream, a.s., and the European Commission) that Ukraine gained access to an alternative route and source of a supply of natural gas. Reverse flow via Slovakia helped Ukraine to manage its basic energy needs and to survive the winter of 2014 – 2015. Even though Russia responded by reducing its gas deliveries to Slovakia, Minister Lajčák rejected claims to stop the flow of gas to Ukraine, saying that “(our) reverse flow has already saved approximately a half billion EUR to Ukraine [...]. We will continue with practical help for Ukraine through reverse flow despite the 50 percent gas supply reduction for Slovakia. This is our concrete contribution to the discussion on how to help Ukraine to survive this winter” (Sme, February 21, 2015).

However, during wartime, doing something good for one party of the conflict (Ukraine) automatically inflicts something bad on the other one (Russia). After the launch of the reverse flow of gas to Ukraine, Prime Minister Fico also tried to offer something “good” to Russia. The logic of his double-track Eastern policy can help explain why he accepted the invitation by Russian President Vladimir Putin to participate in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Soviet Union’s victory in the Second World War in Moscow on 9 May 2015. Slovak Prime Minister Fico and the Czech President Miloš Zeman were the only two top officials from EU Member States who participated in the ceremony (Účasť predsedu 2015).

Shortly after, in June 2015, Robert Fico paid an official visit to Moscow. During his talks with Russian Prime Minister Dmitriy Medvedev and Russian
President Vladimir Putin he presented the “Eastring” gas pipeline project (the interconnection of the Slovak gas transit system with Turkey through Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) as a complementary addition to the Russian “Turkish Stream” gas pipeline project (the interconnection of Russia with Turkey through the bottom of the Black Sea), which could be used by Russia to bypass Ukraine in transiting its gas to Europe. The above interpretation of the “Eastring” project pushed President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine to make an immediate phone call to Fico still during his stay in Moscow in order to clarify whether his statements meant that Slovakia planned to stop reverse flow of gas to Ukraine. Fico assured him that Slovakia would not stop the reverse flow to Ukraine (Aktuality.sk, June 2, 2015). However, Fico’s effort to balance relations with Russia and Ukraine in the field of gas transit failed in September 2015 when Gazprom announced construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project (for more, see subchapter 1.2).

The anti-sanctions rhetoric typified by Prime Minister Fico was not the only strand in Slovakia’s governmental view of the Ukrainian crisis, however. Ivan Gašparovič, who was the country’s president until June 2014 and was elected with the support of Fico’s ruling SMER party, was the first Slovak official to publicly declare that the EU should respond to Russia’s aggression by offering Ukraine a clear prospect of EU membership (Speech 2014b). Foreign Minister Lajčák, in his speech at the October 2014 “Eastern European crisis: scenarios and EU response” conference, stressed the need to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis, although when elaborating on a further upgrade to the Eastern Partnership he pointed out that the EU should open discussions on the prospect of EU membership for partner countries (Speech 2014a). The strongest criticism of Fico’s anti-sanctions rhetoric, however, came from newly elected President Andrej Kiska, who defeated Prime Minister Fico in the presidential elections in March 2014. Kiska was elected on the back of a campaign that clearly stressed condemnation of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, support for democratic change in Ukraine and the need for EU/NATO solidarity vis-à-vis Russia’s aggression. In his inaugural speech, President Kiska said: “I will continue in the tradition of previous presidents, who were always strong supporters of Euro-Atlantic cooperation” (Slovakia 2014).

Thus, Slovak official representatives did not share in their understanding of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, including the projection of Slovakia’s national interests in this regard. President Kiska and Prime Minister Fico presented two conflicting lines of the post-Maidan Slovak Eastern policy. This line also divided the then coalition government formed after the parliamentary elections in March 2016 by the leftist Social Democratic Party SMER led
by Robert Fico, the right-wing conservative Slovak National Party (SNS – Slovenská národná strana) led by Andrej Danko and the liberal Most-Híd Party (Bridge Party) led by Béla Bugár. Slovakia’s foreign policy fell within the governmental responsibility of SMER, which repeatedly nominated career diplomat Miroslav Lajčák for the post of Minister of Foreign and European Affairs (in service since 2008, except for 2010 – 2012). The SNS and Most-Híd respected the division of governmental responsibilities and preferred to stay silent in the matter of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis after the March 2016 elections. Nevertheless, before the parliamentary elections, SNS representatives, including its leader Andrej Danko, presented positions close to that of Prime Minister Fico, e.g. accusing the EU of provoking the crisis with its expansion policy in Eastern Europe (TASR, April 25, 2014). On the other hand, Bugár’s Most-Híd, as a parliamentary opposition party during the previous electoral period (2012 – 2016), was at that time one of the most vocal critics of the then Fico government for its unclear position on the crisis and on Russian occupation of Crimea (SITA, March 18, 2014). No other foreign policy stumbling block since 2014 has brought more disunity to the current Slovak ruling elite than the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

In response to the annexation of Crimea by Russia on 18 March 2014, leaders of the then parliamentary opposition parties – the centre-right Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ – Slovenská demokratická a krestanská únia), the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH – Krestanskodemokratické hnutie), the liberal Most-Híd, the Freedom and Solidarity (SAS – Sloboda a solidarita) party and the political movement Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLANO – Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti) – initiated a parliamentary debate on the situation in Ukraine with the aim of adopting a declaration of the National Council of the SR condemning the annexation of Crimea and demanding a clear European future for Ukraine. The parliamentary debate took almost six months, during which the ruling SMER faction requested changes in the text. Finally, at the eighth attempt the declaration was adopted on 24 September 2014. It condemned Russia’s annexation of Crimea but included vaguer wording regarding the European future for Ukraine than the original draft of the declaration initiated by the Foreign Affairs Committee chaired by František Šebej (Most-Híd) (Návrh Zahraničného výboru 2014).

The traditional parties the SDKÚ and KHD which promoted Slovakia’s pro-European Ukraine policy failed to win at least 5 % of the votes in the March 2016 elections, which is a condition for entering parliament. Instead, for the first time in the modern political history of Slovakia, an extreme right-wing
party, the People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko) led by Marián Kotleba, entered parliament with an election outcome of 8.04% of votes (14 seats out of the total 150 in the National Council of the SR). Kotleba’s party represents the extreme version of Slovak nationalism, avowing empathy for the wartime Slovak fascist state. It demands the withdrawal of Slovakia from NATO and the EU, and in the Russian-Ukrainian crisis it takes an openly pro-Russian position. At the end of January 2014 Slovak media published Kotleba’s open letter to the then President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych, in which he labelled Slobodan Milošević a “Serbian hero” and called on Yanukovych “to hold firm” against the terrorists on Maidan (Sme, January 31, 2014). Together with the LSNS another populist and anti-system party with the name “We are family” (“Sme Rodina”), led by Slovak playboy Boris Kollár, was elected to the Slovak Parliament (6.62% of votes; 11 seats). This party did not present any foreign policy program during the election campaign; however, following statements of its leaders after the elections, even if they did not openly demand Slovakia’s withdrawal from the EU and NATO, they did present themselves as a strongly Eurosceptical party. In addition, Boris Kollár shares at least part of the Russian narrative about the Ukrainian crisis, including an assertion that fascists came to rule in Ukraine after Maidan (Parlamentné listy, October 19, 2016).

Following the programs of the leading opposition parties, Freedom and Solidarity (SAS: 12.10%; 21 seats) and Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLANO: 11.02%; 19 seats), it is in the national interest of Slovakia to have as a neighbour a stable, democratic and prosperous Ukraine. They clearly condemn Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, support Ukraine’s territorial integrity and respect the right of Ukraine and its citizens to freely decide on their country’s European future. Even though SAS party leader Richard Sulík is also known in Slovakia for his scepticism concerning the capacity of the Ukrainian political elite to implement reforms and eliminate corruption, the basic parameters of SAS’s reading of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and national interests of Slovakia markedly differ from Fico’s version of Slovakia’s Eastern policy.

A new phenomenon in the domestic foreign policy debate on the Russian-Ukrainian crisis has become the strong activation of “alternative” social and Internet media, including new NGOs that promote the Russian narrative of the crisis. Upon analysing Russian propaganda in Slovakia, analyst D. Fischer (2016, 300) rightly concluded that its influence on policymaking in Slovakia is very limited, as there has not been a single case in which occasional criticism of the EU, NATO or the U.S. has led to a significant change in Slovak
foreign and security policy legislation or has caused Slovakia to abandon its international duties and commitments. Nevertheless, it is also true that it does have an impact on public opinion in Slovakia. In this context, it is worth noting that Prime Minister Fico himself has publicly agreed with some key points of the Russian narrative, including that the Ukrainian crisis is a geopolitical clash between the United States and Russia (Trend, September 6, 2014).

As a result, in common with its political scene, public opinion in Slovakia has also shown a diffuse picture. In a June 2014 poll, 83 % of Slovak citizens agreed with the statement that Ukrainians have the right to democratically decide about their own future, and Russia does not have the right to interfere in this process (19 % shared the opinion that Ukraine belongs within the zone of Russia’s influence and that Russia has the right to intervene in Ukrainian domestic affairs). In addition, 66 % of respondents agreed that the Ukrainian President and the government have the right to implement reforms that will bring Ukraine closer to the EU (15 % disagreed), and 71 % agreed that Slovakia must eliminate its energy dependence on Russia (17 % disagreed). Further, 59 % agreed that if Russia were to attack any NATO member state, Slovakia is committed, together with other NATO members, to defend that state (25 % disagreed) (Duleba 2014a).

In a follow-up poll conducted in October 2014, 45 % of Slovak citizens expressed support for the European integration of Ukraine, while 33 % disagreed with it and 22 % were unsure. However, only 27 % backed EU sanctions against Russia if they might hurt Slovakia economically, a position that 49 % rejected. Only 25 % wanted Slovakia to be more critical and to act more vigorously towards Russia than it did before the Ukrainian crisis (54 % disagreed). Finally, 49 % agreed that Slovakia should maintain active relations with Russia regardless of whether it interfered in Ukraine’s internal affairs (22 % disagreed). Among voters of the ruling SMER party, opposition to sanctions against Russia and a desire to maintain active ties with Russia were particularly pronounced, suggesting that the main addressee of the Fico government’s anti-sanction rhetoric was its own electorate rather than the governments of EU and NATO allies (Duleba 2014a; Mesežnikov and Gyarfášová 2015).

In summary, the above data show rather the schizophrenic nature of the Slovak public’s approach towards the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. An overwhelming majority of Slovak citizens consider Ukraine an independent state and think that Russia has no right to interfere in its domestic affairs; however, at the same time, half of them do not think that Russia’s unfair actions against
Ukraine should lead to a change of Slovakia’s “business as usual” style policy towards Russia, including the adoption of sanctions, if they would harm the Slovak economy.

1.1.7 Summary and outlook

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has since 2014 become a foreign-policy issue that disunites both the Slovak political class and society at large. The diving line goes across both the government coalition and parliamentary opposition. A clear majority of Slovak citizens consider Ukraine to be an independent state and thinks that Russia has no right to interfere in its domestic affairs; however, at the same time, half of them do not think that Russia’s unfair actions against Ukraine should lead to a change of Slovakia’s “business as usual” style policy towards Russia, including the adoption of sanctions should they harm Slovak economy. This public schizophrenia has been well embodied by Prime Minister Fico’s line of post-Maidan Slovak Eastern policy.

Even if former Prime Minister Fico has shared at least in part the Russian narrative of the crisis, the fact is that his government and he personally agreed with all restrictive measures against Russia adopted by the EU. The contradiction between his public statements at home and his endorsement of EU decisions in Brussels, including when it comes to the reverse gas flow for Ukraine and fighting against the Russian Gazprom-led pipeline project Nord Stream 2, can be explained primarily by domestic political factors.

First, having lost the presidential election in March 2014 to Andrej Kiska, including a debate on Slovakia’s policy on the crisis, Fico needed to mobilise his SMER party voters ahead of the March 2016 parliamentary elections. He was pressed to present his political agenda, including his positions on the Ukraine crisis, in clear distinction from both President Kiska (who was elected as an independent) and the parliamentary opposition. Regardless of what he may think about the crisis, domestic political logic pushed him to tell SMER voters what they wanted to hear. The fundamental question of Slovakia’s Eastern policy has been not what Fico was saying about the crisis, but why SMER voters wanted him to say what he did. When it comes to explaining what SMER voters want to hear from their leaders, one has to seriously consider the factor of the politico-historical foreign policy identity of Slovaks, who in the past invented in their minds their own Russia, a Russia which never existed in reality (for more, see subchapter 1.3).
Second, as a left-of-centre pragmatist, Fico and/or new Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini\textsuperscript{4} would never favour trade with Russia (3.2\% of Slovak foreign trade in 2018) at the expense of trade with EU Member States, which accounts for 85\% of the country’s foreign trade. In addition, the lesson learned by the Fico government from the gas crisis of 2009 says that in critical situations better solutions for Slovakia come from the West, not from the East. Moreover, the Nord Stream 2 project initiated by Russia proves that it will pursue its interests regardless of, and if necessary against, Slovakia’s. Slovak neo-pragmatists understand well the fact that the bilateral agenda of relations with Russia has narrowed over the last two decades. And this is what makes them different from the pragmatists of the Mečiar period in the 1990s. In other words, whatever leaders of the ruling SMER party say about the crisis and/or relations with Russia, it is very unlikely that under their governments Slovakia will defy common EU policy.

To sum up, the Janus-faced policy of Slovakia towards the Russian–Ukrainian crisis since 2014 might be summarised as follows. Its first face is represented by former President Andrej Kiska (2014 – 2019), who clearly condemns Russian aggression against Ukraine, views Maidan as the Revolution of the Dignity of Ukrainian citizens who have a sovereign right to live in a democratic and free country, boosts the European aspirations of Ukraine, supports the anti-Russian sanctions adopted by the West, and finally calls for increased defence spending and the developing of Slovakia’s resilience capacity to protect itself from security threats posed by Russia, including from its disinformation campaign, which is aimed at undermining the unity of the Euro-Atlantic structures and democratic institutions of Western countries.

Prime Minister Robert Fico, until his resignation in March 2018, represented the second face of Slovakia’s Eastern policy in recent years. On one hand, he shared the view that the annexation of Crimea by Russia amounts to a violation of international law; however, on the other hand, he believed Russia should not be sanctioned by the West for what happened in Ukraine. He viewed the domestic developments in Ukraine over the last two decades – above all, the incapacity of the Ukrainian elite to rule the country – as the primary cause

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{4} Robert Fico was forced to resign from the post of Prime Minister due to a political crisis which was an outcome of massive public protests that started after the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in February 2018. Ján Kuciak was an investigative journalist who identified contacts between organized crime and government office representatives. The political crisis was resolved only thanks to the resignation of PM Fico, the Interior Minister and some other top officials. Peter Pellegrini (representing Fico’s SMER party) took over the post of Prime Minister on 15 March 2018 (for more, see Rok po vražde 2019).}
of the crisis, with Russia’s engagement in Ukraine’s affairs after Maidan being a secondary effect, one provoked by domestic developments in Ukraine. He does not view Maidan as a Revolution of the Dignity of Ukrainian citizens – he rather he sees it as a coup d'état inspired by the U.S., part of the geopolitical confrontation between the U.S. and Russia on a global scale, by which Slovakia should not be fooled. Fico did not see Russia as a threat to Slovakia; rather he viewed it as an important business partner, regardless of its conflict with neighbouring Ukraine. In his public statements in recent years, he never called for the need to confront the spreading of Russia’s narrative of the crisis by the so-called alternative media in Slovakia.

Finally, the third face of Slovakia’s Eastern policy is represented by Foreign and European Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajčák, who was forced into an in-between position, trying to bring these two conflicting lines of Slovakia’s Eastern policy – as represented by the President and the Prime Minister – closer together. Along with practicing Slovak diplomacy in relation to Russia and Ukraine, he insisted that Slovakia should strictly follow the common policies of the EU and NATO in regard to the crisis.

The Pellegrini government, appointed in March 2018, has continued to follow a double-track Eastern policy in line with Fico’s approach, even if the two parts of the policy seem incompatible. First, it aims to minimise the conflict between the West and Russia by supporting any step towards a diplomatic solution, the cancellation of sanctions and the reopening of prospects for trade liberalisation between the EU and Russia. Second, it provides support to Ukraine in implementing post-Maidan reforms and its Association Agreement with the EU. If the EU and NATO are drawn into further confrontation with Russia, and if a clear majority of EU Member States decide to toughen policy towards Russia, the government of Slovakia led by a SMER representative will be accommodating. In short, Slovakia under a Premier Minister nominated by the SMER party will be neither a key driver nor a spoiler of EU and NATO policy regarding Ukraine and Russia in the years to come.
1.2  Relations in energy policy: lessons learned

This part of the chapter summarises the main lessons learned from bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian relations in the field of energy over the last three decades. Special attention is paid to the energy sector due to the fact that instead of becoming a pivotal area for cooperation, it has become more a source of controversies and misunderstandings in bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian relations since the early 1990s. Analysis of bilateral interactions on matters of energy policy helps to grasp the nature of Slovak-Ukrainian relations in general, including their untapped potential in particular. This text aims, first of all, to identify the importance of energy cooperation between the two countries; second, to analyse omissions from the past; and third, to explore the potential for bilateral cooperation in the future.

The energy sector became the priority area for bilateral cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine in the course of the post-Maidan developments in Ukraine. Dramatic events in Ukraine – massive political and social protests in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities from November 2013 to February 2014 – followed by Russia’s military invasion and occupation of Crimea at the end of February 2014, including Russia’s decision to fully stop the supply of natural gas to Ukraine in June 2014 (BBC News, June 16, 2016), highlighted the strategic role of Slovakia in Ukraine’s energy security.

In addition, the announcement of Russian Gazprom that it will fully stop the transit of gas to Europe via Ukraine after expiration of its transit contract with Naftogaz of Ukraine after 2019 (Pirani and Yafimava 2016), together with the notice as of 4 September 2015 that Gazprom is creating a consortium with five European gas companies in order to implement the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project (Gazprom 2015), finally brought Slovakia and Ukraine to the clear determination that they have common interests in the field of gas supply security as well as the transit of Russian natural gas. However, the crucial question remains: why did it take almost three decades for both countries to understand the importance of cooperation in the field of energy in terms of their vital national interests?

1.2.1  Security of gas supply: discovering strategic partnership (after Maidan)

When Russia stopped the supply of gas to Ukraine in June 2014, it was only

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5 In June 2014 Russia stopped supplying natural gas to Ukraine for its domestic consumption; however, Ukraine continued to transit Russian gas to Europe through its national transmission system.
thanks to an agreement between the governments of Ukraine and Slovakia on reverse gas flow (with the participation of the national gas transit system operators, Ukrtransagaz, which is a subsidiary of Naftogaz of Ukraine, Slovak TSO (Transmission System Operator) Eustream, a.s., and the European Commission) that Ukraine gained access to an alternative route and source of supply of natural gas. Reverse flow via Slovakia helped Ukraine to manage its basic energy needs and to survive the winter of 2014 – 2015. Notwithstanding the fact that reverse flow itself is a business transaction and thus beneficial to both parties, this demonstrated Slovakia’s strategic importance for the energy security of Ukraine.

In April 2014 the Slovak government reached a deal with its Ukrainian counterpart, which was hoping to secure alternative gas supplies after Gazprom raised its prices to levels Ukraine refused to pay. The Slovak government did not, however, go so far as acceding to Ukraine’s push for the use of Slovakia’s main transit pipelines – with a free capacity exceeding 50 bcm a year, which would have given Ukraine access to larger volumes of gas – arguing that this would violate Slovakia’s transit contract with Gazprom (Reuters, April 22, 2014). SPP (Slovenský plynárenský priemysel, a.s., which is the major gas distribution company in Slovakia) and Eustream, a.s., signed long-term (20 years) contracts with Gazprom and its subsidiary Gazprom Export in 2008, according to which SPP will purchase 130 bcm of gas and Eustream will transit at least 50 bcm/year of Russian gas to Gazprom’s European clients, until 2028 (Predstavitelia spoločností 2008).

Nevertheless, an alternative technical solution for the reverse flow of gas from Europe to Ukraine via Slovakia was found by upgrading a previously unused pipeline running from Slovakia’s Vojany power station near the Slovak-Ukrainian border to Uzhhorod. This technical solution was necessary to avoid violating the long-term contract between Eustream and Gazprom Export, which stipulates that the only company that can issue shipper codes at the Uzhhorod–Velké Kapušany dispatching centre on the main transit pipelines at the Slovak–Ukrainian border is Gazprom. At the same time the contract includes a “shift or pay” provision by which Gazprom incurs liability to pay for booked transit capacity of Eustream in the amount of 50 bcm/year till 2028 even if Gazprom does not physically use it. In the light of statements of Russian leaders that Gazprom would fully stop the transit of Russian gas via Ukraine to European markets after expiration of its transit contract with Naftogaz in 2019 (Ukraine Today, June 9, 2015), the Ukrainian side had to accept the legitimate interest of their Slovak counterpart to avoid violating its long-term contract with Gazprom, which serves its business interests till 2028. Thus, on 2 September 2014, a new interconnector running from Vojany
to the Ukrainian border, with a newly installed metering station, was launched into operation with an annual capacity of 10 bcm. Two months later its capacity was increased to 11.4 bcm/year, and finally, starting from March 2015, to more than 14.5 bcm/year (Eustream 2016).

Even though Russia repeatedly warned that it considers reverse flows illegal (Through Slovakia 2015) and, moreover, has responded to the Slovak–Ukrainian reverse flow deal by reducing its delivery of gas to Slovakia, Foreign Minister M. Lajčák has absolutely denied that the Slovak government would stop the reverse flow of gas to Ukraine. As already quoted above at the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU held in Luxembourg in October 2014, Lajčák pointed out: “Our reverse flow has already saved Ukraine approximately a half billion USD, as confirmed by a high representative of the Ukrainian government. We are thus continuing to give practical help to Ukraine through reverse flow despite the 50 % gas supply reduction for Slovakia. This is our concrete contribution to the discussion on how to help Ukraine survive this winter” (Lajčák 2014).

According to a statement by Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk on 30 December 2014, Ukraine saved almost 1 billion US dollars in 2014 thanks to the reverse flow from Slovakia, due to the difference between Russian and European gas prices. “The gas supply to Ukraine has been diversified – Ukraine has switched its gas supply from Russia to the European Union by 60 %” (Arseniy Yatseniuk 2014). The Vojany interconnector was launched in September 2014 and since then has played an important role in the energy security of Ukraine.

As for now, the transmission systems of Slovakia, Hungary and Poland together can ensure an alternative supply for Ukraine’s natural gas import needs, which according to the New Energy Strategy of Ukraine projection will be 20 bcm of gas/year until 2020 (Nova enerhetychna 2015). This allowed Naftogaz to fully stop gas imports from Russia starting from 25 November 2015. In 2015, 63 % of imported gas was supplied to Ukraine from Europe, and 37 % came from Russia. In 2016 the proportion was 100 % from Europe and 0 % from Russia. In its press release on the occasion of one year of working without gas imports from Russia, Naftogaz pointed out: “Without alternative gas supplies from Europe, we would have had to buy gas from Russia at non-market prices, with billions of dollars additionally paid to Gazprom for gas which was not used in previous years (the take-or-pay principle), as well as to pay for supplies to occupied Donbas, which is beyond our control. Breaking the gas supply monopoly of Russia enables us to now fight for Ukraine’s gas independence in arbitration” (Vidkrytyy lyst 2016).

The share of Slovakia in the transit of natural gas from Europe to Ukraine was around 70 % in the years 2015 – 2018. At the same time 100 % of natural gas imports of Slovakia that come from Russia on the basis of the long-term contract
between SPP and Gazprom (in force until 2028) flow through the transit system of Ukraine. The above figures illustrate well the correlative strategic importance of both countries to each other in the field of gas supply security. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis, which started in 2014, opened a new chapter in Slovak-Ukrainian energy policy cooperation. However, from the perspective of Slovak-Ukrainian relations in energy since the 1990s, the question arises: if and for how long will both sides be able to sustain their strategic rapprochement on energy policy?

1.2.2 Controversies in the past (before Maidan)

Ukraine and Slovakia, along with gaining their independence and state sovereignty in the early 1990s, inherited from the former Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia the most robust transit route connecting natural gas fields in Russia with European markets. The Urengoy–Pomary–Uzhhorod pipeline (“Bratstvo” – “Brotherhood”) is the largest transport route for Russian gas to Europe carrying up to 110 bcm of gas/year, transiting Ukraine and running to Slovakia. In Slovakia, the pipeline divides, one branch continuing to the Czech Republic and the other to Austria. Gas deliveries through the Brotherhood pipeline began in 1967 (Rok 1967, 2018). However, it should be noted that the first gas supplied from the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia and Austria in 1967 came from the gas fields in Western Ukraine. The supply of gas from Russian fields located in Western Siberia to Europe via the Brotherhood pipeline started in the second half of the 1970s.

Naturally, one could assume that the sharing of the same gas transit infrastructure by Ukraine and Slovakia, which, firstly, is of critical importance for gas supply security of Europe, and secondly, brings important financial benefits to their state-controlled gas companies and consequently to their national budgets, should also mean that both countries share a common interest vis-à-vis Russia and its European consumers. Consequently, one would expect that they are able to coordinate their policies in the field in order to defend their interests as the largest gas transit countries in Europe. However, for more than the last two decades they have not been able to speak with “one voice” on the matter. Quite the contrary: instead of becoming common ground for a strategic partnership and cooperation, the transit of Russian gas to Europe became rather a source of controversies in Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations.
The first Russian gas pipeline project bypassing the Ukrainian-Slovak Brotherhood transit system was initiated by Gazprom under the name of Yamal-Europe pipeline via the territory of Belarus and Poland to Germany in the early 1990s. The construction of the Yamal pipeline was finalised in 1999. After completion of all the envisaged compressor stations, it achieved its existing transit capacity of 32.9 bcm/year in 2006 (Yamal 2018). Kyiv classified the construction of the Yamal project as an anti-Ukrainian move of Russia, because it limits Ukraine’s bargaining position vis-à-vis Moscow (Akino and Smith Albion 1993). Slovakia did not coordinate its position on Yamal with Ukraine, but in the bargain with Russia it demanded the construction of an extra pipeline connecting the Yamal pipeline from the territory of Poland to Southern Europe via Slovakia. In June 1995 the then Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, during an official visit to Kyiv expressed his opinion that “the fact that the Yamal-Europe system is going to be constructed not through the territory of Ukraine and Slovakia but through Belarus and Poland is a cardinal mistake of recent Ukrainian policy” (Kiyevskiy Vedomosti, June 14, 1995).

On the other hand, during bilateral intergovernmental talks in the High Tatras in 1996 the then Ukrainian Prime Minister, Yevheniy Marchuk, outlined some possibilities for both countries to coordinate their policies on the transit of Russian natural gas and oil. The next Ukrainian Prime Minister, Pavlo Lazarenko, repeated the same in March 1997 during Slovak-Ukrainian intergovernmental talks in Uzhhorod (Matejovič 1997a). But no real results emerged.
On the contrary, misunderstandings over the Yamal project were then repeated some years later under the new Slovak cabinet led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, this time in respect of the planned construction of the second pipeline of the Yamal – Europe project (the so-called Yamal 2 pipeline). At the beginning of March 2000 Russian Gazprom addressed the governments of Slovakia and Poland with a proposal to construct a new pipeline that would connect the planned Yamal 2 pipeline on the territory of Poland with the Slovak gas transit network, thus bypassing Ukrainian territory (Hirman 2000).

Unlike Slovakia, Poland, together with Ukraine, took a cautious approach to this initiative. Russian diplomacy worked extraordinarily hard to coax Slovakia in adopting a positive and obliging position. At official meetings of top representatives from both sides the common position of Russia and Slovakia on this issue was stressed, providing a diplomatic opportunity to demonstrate the good condition of their bilateral relationship. For instance, Russian President Vladimir Putin during a visit of Slovak President Rudolf Schuster to Moscow in November 2001 underlined the importance of bilateral cooperation on the transit of Russian gas and called Slovakia “the most accommodating and natural partner” for Russia on this issue (Vystupleniye 2001).

However, in February 2002 Gazprom announced that it was postponing the implementation of the Yamal 2 project. Ultimately, in November 2007, the then Russian Minister of Industry and Energy, Viktor Khristenko, said that Russia had dropped the idea of building the second leg of the Yamal pipeline, preferring instead the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline connecting Russia directly with Germany under the Baltic Sea (Sputnik International, November 1, 2007). Thus, Slovakia, without discussing the issue with Ukraine, supported the Russian project, which Kyiv understood to be an anti-Ukrainian one and which, in the end, was never implemented. The Slovak position on the Yamal 2 being closer to the Russian one than to that of its direct neighbours Poland and Ukraine proved to be one of the biggest miscalculations of Slovak foreign policy under the Dzurinda government.

The eventual implementation of the Yamal 2 project would mean a reduction of Russian gas quantity transported via Ukraine and consequently a slump of its revenues from transit fees. The planned capacity of the Yamal 2 pipeline was 30 billion cubic metres of gas/year, which would bypass the territory of Ukraine and thus decrease the amount of gas transported through Ukraine from a level of 120 billion cubic metres to about 90 billion. Thus, the decline of revenues from transit fees would automatically drop by about a quarter. In
the early 2000s Ukraine needed about 75 bcm of gas annually for domestic consumption, 30 bcm of which it was receiving from Russia as payment in kind equal to the price for the transit of Russian gas. If Yamal 2 had become a reality, it would have meant that Ukraine would have had to buy an additional 7-8 bcm/year of gas, costing about 300 – 400 million USD annually according to year 2000 prices. Given the above figures, it is clear that the Ukrainian government could not welcome the positive approach of the Slovak side towards the Russian Yamal 2 project. Moreover, the position of the first government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998 – 2002) regarding the Yamal 2 project contradicted its proclaimed will to change the attitudes and practices of the previous Mečiar regime in regard to Russia and Ukraine. Whereas Mečiar’s governments (1992 – 1994 and 1994 – 1998) prioritised relations with Russia, Dzurinda’s government declared that it wanted to develop balanced relations with its Eastern neighbours giving priority to support for democratic change in Ukraine, including its European integration process (Duleba 2009a).

In the context of the period 1999 – 2000, the year 2001 might be characterised as the year of a positive shift in Slovak-Ukrainian relations. The crucial momentum for it gathered at the end of 2000, when the then Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko visited Slovakia. The main topics of his talks with Slovak Prime Minister Dzurinda and President Rudolf Schuster were, among others, the effects of the visa regime on their bilateral relationship, the danger of Ukraine’s reneging on its readmission treaty with Slovakia (see the subchapter 1.1), the positions of both sides on the Yamal 2 gas pipeline, and finally a completely new theme in Slovak-Ukrainian talks: bilateral cooperation on getting Caspian oil to European markets through the existing transit oil pipeline network shared by both Slovakia and Ukraine. According to official statements after the bilateral talks, Prime Ministers Yushchenko and Dzurinda achieved progress on at least two of these issues: the visa regime and working together on transport of Caspian oil (Solodkiy 2000).

During his December 2000 visit to Slovakia, Prime Minister Yushchenko visited the Slovak oil transiting company Transpetrol, where he presented a project on an oil pipeline link between the Yuzhny sea oil terminal at Odessa and the Brody compressor station on Ukrainian territory, located on the arm of the Druzhba (Friendship) oil pipeline leading to Slovakia. The project on the interconnection of the Ukrainian and Slovak oil transit systems for transiting Caspian oil from the Black Sea to European markets had been developed by the Ukrainian state company Mahistral’ni naftoprovody Druzhba (Druzhba Trunk Oil Pipelines). It was expected that that from 28 to about 67 million
tons of oil would be transported annually through the Odessa – Brody arm. Although the Slovak arm of the Druzhba pipeline transport capacity was 21 million tons of oil a year, it was being used at less than a half its capacity (Duleba 2001).

Map 2 Oil pipelines in Europe and North-Western Asia


In the case of transporting Caspian oil, Slovakia’s strategic interest here was not so much the transit fees it might gain, but the fact that the country, with access to Caspian resources via the territory of Ukraine, could finally diversify its sources of oil imports and thus reduce its reliance on Russian oil, thereby increasing its energy security. The Ukrainian-Slovak accord was in the strategic interests of both countries, and following Yushchenko – Dzurinda’s talks, Slovak officials became more cautious on the subject of building a southern arm to the Yamal 2 gas pipeline that would bypass Ukraine (Javurková 2001). Given the previous nature of Slovak-Ukrainian relations, the most important fact here is that the countries managed to find a common point of interest in their bilateral agenda. This was a new element in their relationship, especially in the field of transiting energy resources.

However, cooperation on the transit of Caspian oil, which seemed to be a new page in Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation after the Yushchenko – Dzurinda talks in Bratislava at the end of 2000, never came into fruition. In December 2001 the Russian oil concern Yukos won a tender for a 49 % percent stake
in the Slovak state company Transpetrol, which operates transmission oil pipelines on the territory of Slovakia, together with control of the company’s management, with an offer of 74 million USD (Yukos Novosti, December 10, 2001). Yukos, as an oil producing company, had no interest in transiting the oil of competing oil producers, including from the Caspian Basin, via Slovakia. After Yukos’s entry into Transpetrol at the end of 2001, Slovak-Ukrainian intergovernmental talks on the transit of Caspian oil via the shared Druzhba oil pipeline were brought to a halt.

However, the “Yukos investment story” is thus far the most negative experience with a foreign investor in Slovakia since 1993. After Yukos entered into the bankruptcy process in Russia in 2004, albeit for political reasons, Slovak governments led by Dzurinda and Robert Fico (in office as of 2006) were aimed at regaining control over the Yukos share in Transpetrol. During talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov in May 2007, Slovak PM Robert Fico expressed interest in a “timely solution to the situation in Transpetrol, a.s., and Putin pledged help to the Slovak government in this issue” (Informácia 2007). Finally, the Slovak government managed to regain control of 49% of stocks by buying them back from Yukos Finance in 2009 for 240 million USD (Sme, March 26, 2009). Due to this repurchase of the investor’s share, the Slovak government lost about 180 million USD in the privatisation deal with Yukos. Even though Fico government regained full control over Transpetrol in 2009, the transit of Caspian crude oil to European markets via the Yuzhniy – Brody terminal and the Slovak segment of the Druzhba oil pipeline has not become a more serious issue for the Slovak government, although the Ukrainian side has tried repeatedly to raise it.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko invited Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico to participate in an energy summit that took place in Kyiv in May 2008. The objective of the summit was to focus on the interest of transit countries in increasing Europe’s energy security and the development of the EU’s common energy policy. The Slovak response to the Ukrainian invitation was unclear, and at the Kyiv energy summit, Slovakia, unlike the other seven countries (Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine) there, was represented by its Foreign Minister, not its Prime Minister or President. Slovakia also decided not to sign the Kyiv Energy Summit declaration On the Principles of Global Energy Security, which emphasises the position, significance and interests of transit countries for Europe’s energy security (Socor 2007; Interfax Ukrajina, May 23, 2008). In 2008 the Slovak government under Robert Fico believed that Russia should be part of any talks on natural
gas supply to Europe, as it, according to the then Slovak Foreign Minister Ján Kubiš, “has proved to be reliable partner when it comes to the supply of oil and natural gas to the EU” (SITA, September 4, 2008). However, the gas crisis of January 2009 significantly disrupted the previous stereotypes, when it came to both the perceptions and policies of Slovakia in the field of energy security.

Slovakia was challenged by a full cut-off of natural gas delivery from Russia via the territory of Ukraine for almost two weeks as of 7 – 18 January 2009. For the first time since 1967, when the “Brotherhood” transit gas pipelines on the territory of Slovakia came into operation, there was “zero” pressure recorded in the Veľké Kapušany compressor gas station on the border with Ukraine. The Slovak government had to introduce an emergency regulation for the intake of natural gas by companies in order to ensure the supply to households during that winter. The regulation concerned all companies with an annual intake exceeding 60 thousand cubic meters of gas. Nearly 800 companies had to stop their economic activity as a result. Based on estimates of the Slovak Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economy, Slovakia lost about 100 million EUR per day during the crisis. The total loss from the two-week gas crisis for the Slovak economy was estimated to be around one billion euros (for a detailed analysis, see Duleba 2009b).

On 14 January 2009 a Slovak governmental delegation led by Prime Minister Fico paid an extraordinary visit to Kyiv and Moscow with the aim of resolving the crisis. In Kyiv Fico met then Prime Minister of Ukraine Yulia Tymoshenko. Following official information about the talks provided by the Slovak Government Office, “despite the agreed time for the start of the meeting, the Ukrainian delayed it several times. The feel of the meeting was affected by the effort of the Ukrainian side to delay the start of talks, which created time pressure issues for the Slovak delegation, which was scheduled to travel to Moscow on the same day. In the end, the talks in Kyiv lasted for about 20 minutes, including the time needed for simultaneous translation. The given time was just enough to present the Slovak request for help, including some Slovak positions which were de facto refused by the Ukrainian side (Informácia 2009).

Among other scenarios for resolving the crisis, Slovakia asked Ukraine to supply at least some volume of gas to the Slovak grid from its underground storage sites located in Western Ukraine. In January 2009 compressor capacities on the Slovak gas grid did not allow for distributing gas from underground storage sites located in the Western part of the country near the borders with Austria and Czech Republic (with a capacity of around 3 bcm) to the Eastern
part of Slovakia. The solution was thus to get at least a minimal volume of gas from Ukraine at the level of “something above zero” pressure at the dispatching centre at Veľké Kapušany – Uzhhorod, on the border with Ukraine. In technical terms, it would be enough to use the stored gas on the territory of Slovakia and thereby ensure supplies to the whole country in the months ahead. However, for technical reasons, including the need to use existing pressure within its own gas grid, as well as in order to be able to manage the reverse flow of gas from its own storage tanks in Western Ukraine to its Eastern regions, Ukraine had to have a zero pressure in the dispatching centre on its border with Slovakia. Therefore, PM Yulia Tymoshenko refused the Slovak request at the talks in Kiev on 14 January 2009, arguing that Ukraine did not have enough gas to share with Slovakia (Duleba 2009b).

On the same day in Moscow, PM Fico, during his talks to the then Russian PM Vladimir Putin, aimed at agreeing to a sort of swap operation between Russia, Ukraine and Slovakia. This would mean that Russia would supply some minimal volume of gas to Ukraine and consequently Ukraine would supply the same volume of gas from its underground storage tanks to Slovakia. Even though, following official information from the Slovak Government Office about Fico’s talks in Moscow, Russian PM Putin supported the idea of a swap operation (Informácia 2009), the truth is that it never became a reality. In the end Fico failed to find a fast-acting solution to the gas crisis for Slovakia during his talks in Kyiv and Moscow on 14 January 2009.

From today’s perspective it is difficult to imagine what could have been the outcome of Fico’s talks with Tymoshenko on 14 January 2009 had he as well as his forerunners in the post of Slovak Prime Minister, Mečiar and Dzurinda, taken a more engaged approach regarding the interests of Ukraine in its relations with Russia, including the transit of natural gas and oil. At the same time, it is logical to assume that the lack of understanding over energy transit issues between Slovakia and Ukraine in the 1990s and 2000s did not help to create a positive environment for talks between Fico and Tymoshenko in January 2009.

The 2009 gas crisis thus brought rather heavy clouds over Slovak-Ukrainian relations. After his unsuccessful negotiations in Kyiv and Moscow, Fico alleged that Ukrainian authorities were responsible for the gas crisis, adding that both Russia and Ukraine proved to be unreliable energy partners. In his words, Slovakia might reconsider its support for Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations (Vystúpenie predsedu 2009). Even though Fico’s hard words were aimed at the Ukrainian government led by Tymoshenko, however, the fact is that Slovakia did nothing in the post-gas crisis period that could demonstrate Fico’s embittered statement above. On the contrary, in the post-gas crisis
period Slovak diplomacy, under Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák and
together with the V4 partners, became one of the leading supporters of the
Eastern Partnership initiative launched at the Prague summit in May 2009,
whose aim was to achieve the political association and economic integration
of Ukraine with the EU (Duleba and Bilčík 2011).

Despite the fact that a solution to the gas crisis for Slovakia in January 2009
did not come from governmental talks in the East, it did come from the
corporate sector of the West. Thanks to the agreement between SPP, a.s., and
its then shareholders E.ON Ruhr gas and Gaz de France Suez (both controlled
49% of the stocks in SPP, a.s., at the time of crisis) and RWE Transgas,
which operated the gas transit pipelines in the Czech Republic, Slovakia
got gas from Germany. For the first time in the history of gas supply, on
18 January 2009, Slovakia received gas from the West, not from the East. After
Russia and Ukraine settled their dispute and finally signed an agreement on
19 January 2009, the delivery of natural gas from Russia via Ukraine was
restored (Duleba 2009b). One way or another, since the 2009 gas crisis, the
reverse flow of gas from the West, initially a forced solution adapted for the
first time in the case of Slovakia to help it to face a complete cut-off of natural
gas from the east in January 2009, has become a pillar of a gas supply security
for Slovakia as well as other countries of Central Europe, including Ukraine
since 2014.

In January 2009 Slovakia, as a third party, suffered from a dispute between
Russia and Ukraine, learning that it had no leverage to force both or either of
them to respect Slovakia’s interests. Thus, the gas crisis of January 2009 had
three main implications in terms of Slovakia’s Eastern policy. First, the Fico
government changed its previously rather reluctant position vis-à-vis a need
to diversify sources of natural gas supply; second, it started getting rid of the
“old” illusion of a Slovak Eastern policy, believing “if we manage to achieve
agreement with Russia, we manage to agree everything in Eastern Europe”
(Duleba 2009a); and third, challenges coming from the East could be faced
in a much more efficient way together with the partners from the West and/
or as one could also express it in other words: the best Slovak Eastern policy
is the EU policy. Regardless, Slovakia’s Eastern policy acquired a much more
realistic shape in the aftermath of the 2009 gas crisis.
1.2.3 Shared transit interests: a belated lesson learned

In addition to Eastern policy lessons, Slovakia also learned a key energy security one from the 2009 gas crisis. The country’s gas supply security has been substantially strengthened over the last decade in comparison with the pre-crisis period. Nowadays, the installed capacity of reverse flows of natural gas from Austria (put into operation in October 2010 with a capacity of 16.8 mcm/day), the Czech Republic (first launched in January 2009, as mentioned above, as part of the effort to find a solution to the gas crisis, and finally, in November 2011 achieving the current transit capacity of 35.3 mcm/day) and Hungary (starting from July 2015 with a capacity 1.8 bcm/year) far exceed the historical maximum of daily gas consumption in Slovakia, which is 46.9 mcm, as measured on 14 December 2001. Together with the construction of new compressor capacities, which for now allow the transit of gas on the whole territory of Slovakia from the West to the Eastern border with Ukraine, including from the underground gas storage facilities located in the Western part of Slovakia (with a current storage capacity of 3.6 bcm), the cross-border interconnectors with Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary are the main pillars of Slovakia’s gas supply security. The construction of a Polish-Slovak connector, which is expected to be put into operation in 2021, will complete the process of infrastructural connection of Slovakia with all its neighbouring countries (Poland – Slovakia 2018).

The above security measures adopted by Slovakia after the 2009 gas crisis prepared the Slovak gas grid to serve as the main transit route for the reverse flow of gas from Europe to Ukraine starting from September 2014, with its current capacity of 14.5 bcm/year. In addition, over the last five years Slovakia and Ukraine have come to an understanding about their common interests when it comes to the transit of Russian gas to Europe.

The most challenging issue for Slovakia and Ukraine in the field of natural gas and regarding its supply and transit via their territories is the plan of Gazprom to construct the so-called Nord Stream 2 (NS 2) project, which would allow Gazprom to fulfil the statements of its leaders that Russia will fully stop the transit of its gas to Europe via Ukraine, which also means via Slovakia. The plan to construct the NS 2 pipeline by the end of 2019 coincides with the termination of the Russian-Ukrainian agreement on gas transit (Pirani and Yafimava 2016).

Finally, Slovak authorities understood that the Slovak and Ukrainian gas transmission systems represent a kind of “communication vessel” united
by the rule of full proportionality: the smaller the volume of Russian gas entering the Ukrainian transmission system, the smaller the volume that will be transited via Slovakia. Just days after Gazprom announced the creation of the NS 2 consortia on 4 September 2015 (Gazprom 2015) the Prime Ministers of Slovakia and Ukraine, Robert Fico and Arseniy Yatseniuk, met for bilateral talks in Bratislava on 10 September 2015. The main topic of their discussions was the coordination of activities of both countries aimed at preventing the construction of NS 2 and thus defending their positions as the largest gas transit countries in Europe. At their joint press conference after the talks, both Robert Fico and Arseniy Yatsenyuk stated that in economic terms, should the NS 2 project be implemented, it will mean a considerable decrease in revenues for the Slovak budget from gas transit fees, i.e. of about 400 million EUR/year. Ukraine will also lose a considerable amount of finances (about 2.5 billion USD/year), which will make its economic situation even more difficult. About the EU-based companies that declared their interest in joining the NS 2 consortia with Gazprom, PM Fico said: “They are making idiots out of us. They have betrayed an EU Member State, Slovakia. They are acting in sharp violation of the political talks we have been holding with Ukraine at the European Council” (Pravda, September 10, 2015).

At a meeting of the Council of Europe in Brussels on 18 December 2015, Slovakia, supported by another 9 Member States (the other Visegrad Four countries plus Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania and Italy) signed a respective joint letter protesting against the implementation of NS 2 project and calling for solidarity among all EU Member States. At the Council’s meeting Slovak PM Robert Fico pointed out that the NS 2 project has no economic purpose, as the already existing pipeline (NS 1) is being used at only up to 50% of its transit capacity. He added that the EU cannot cut Ukraine out of transiting Russian gas to Europe, as it would bring it financial losses of more than two billion US dollars. At the summit, leaders of the EU Member States agreed to authorise the European Commission to assess the NS 2’s conformity with EU legislation as well as the rules and principles of the Energy Union (Pravda, November 28, 2015; TASR, December 18, 2015).

It should be specified here that the potential financial loss of Slovakia in case of the implementation of NS 2 and consequently full stoppage of the transit of Russian gas via the Brotherhood pipeline system would be circa 800 million EUR/year. At the press conference with PM Yatsenyuk PM Fico spoke about 400 million EUR/year as the potential loss to the state budget of the Slovak Republic, as the government owns 49% of stocks in the Slovak gas TSO Eustream, a.s. However, the total estimated financial loss of Eustream would be about 800 million EUR, an additional 400 million of which would be a loss for the EPH company, a privately owned corporate entity that owns 51% of stocks in Eustream, a.s.
Thanks to the support of EU Member States from Central Europe and Italy the Slovak-Ukrainian opposition to the NS 2 gained wider international support. The main arguments against implementation of the NS 2 project can be summarised as follows:

1. The NS 2 project, if implemented, will undermine the security of the gas supply to the whole of Central Europe;
2. It could stop not only the transit of Russian gas via Ukraine and Slovakia (the Brotherhood pipeline) but also via Belarus and Poland (the Yamal pipeline);
3. The NS 2 project will decrease competitiveness on Central European gas markets as it will strengthen the monopoly position of Russian Gazprom as the external gas supplier;
4. Transferring the whole transit capacity of Russian gas to one spot in Germany might have serious consequences not only for Central and Eastern Europe, but also for Germany;
5. If the whole amount of Russian gas exported to European consumers is to be transferred to one spot in Germany, it should subsequently be distributed to Central, Southern and Eastern Europe. However, the infrastructure for such distribution is not ready and in place at all, as many South-Eastern European countries are not connected to Western European pipelines and infrastructure; and finally,
6. The NS 2 will hit Ukraine’s economy, which clearly contradicts the political goals of the EU, including the commitments the EU made in its Association Agreement with Ukraine.7

The three post-Maidan years brought dramatic changes to Slovak-Ukrainian relations in the field of energy. First of all, the reverse flow of gas via Slovakia put into operation in 2014 proved to be of critical importance for Ukraine’s energy security, including its energy independence on Russia. In addition, in 2015 both countries not only understood that they share integral interests when it comes to the transit of Russian gas to Europe, but also, finally, they started to act in a coordinated manner vis-à-vis Russia and its European consumers with the aim of defending their interest as gas-transit countries. Slovak-Ukrainian rapprochement in the field of energy in the course of recent years, which clearly serves the national interests of both countries, provides

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7 The main arguments against the implementation of the NS 2 project were prepared by the author on the basis of several sources, including proceedings of the Central European Day of Energy conference organised by the Central European Energy Partners together with the European Commission, which took place in Brussels on 9 December 2016 (CEDE 2016).
new momentum to their bilateral relationship. From today’s perspective it is
difficult to understand why both countries were not able to speak with one
voice on the matter for more than two decades prior to Maidan.

1.2.4 Energy sector reform and energy efficiency: a new field for
bilateral cooperation

The above strategic rapprochement significantly changed the position of
Ukraine in Slovak political discourse, although it should be noted that Slovakia
under Fico’s government has sent rather ambivalent signals regarding the
Russia-Ukraine conflict started by the Russian occupation of Crimea at the
end of February 2014. Slovakia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Minister
Miroslav Lajčák has shown itself to be one of the strongest promoters among
EU Member States of Ukraine’s European integration, while at the same time
then Prime Minister Fico was one of the strongest opponents among EU leaders
of EU sanctions against Russia. Even though Fico condemned the Russian
annexation of Crimea, classifying it as an act violating international law, he
continued to back the argument that EU sanctions against Russia are useless
and are not helping to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Duleba 2015).

Nevertheless, one of the main achievements of Slovakia’s Presidency in the
Visegrad Group (from July 2014 – June 2015) was an agreement among the V4
countries coordinating the Group’s assistance to Ukraine. The agreement was
achieved at a meeting of Deputy Foreign Ministers in Lviv in October 2014 and
reconfirmed by the V4 Foreign Ministers at a meeting with their Ukrainian
counterpart, Pavlo Klimkin in Kyiv in December 2014. The V4 countries
agreed on their specific roles with respect to the sectorial focus of their
assistance to Ukraine in its reform process, as related to the implementation
of the Association Agreement with the EU. Slovakia took on a leadership role
in the fields of energy security and security sector reform, the Czech Republic
in the field of education and civil society, Hungary in the field of support for
SME and implementation of the DCFTA, and Poland, in the field of public
administration reform, including fiscal decentralisation (P. Burian 2014).
Slovakia’s bilateral assistance to Ukraine in the form of development projects,
technical assistance and humanitarian aid funded from both governmental
sources and public collections organised by Slovak NGOs in 2014 amounted
to circa EUR 900,000.8

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8 Information provided by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak
Republic upon the author’s request.
The above agreement on the V4 level has had a significant impact on policy planning for Slovak Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Ukraine for the period to come. With its newly formulated political commitments, statements and strategic documents on the table, the Slovak Agency for International Development Assistance announced in February 2015 its call for proposals for bilateral development projects, with a special focus on Ukraine (including a more significant financial allocation of 700,000 EUR), with energy security and efficiency one of the three priority areas (along with good governance and security sector reforms) (Grantové výzvy 2015).

Starting from 2015 Slovakia became an active agent in assisting Ukraine in reforming its energy sector. The Regulatory Office for Network Industries of the Slovak Republic (ÚRSO) is implementing a twinning project funded by the EU, its goal being to provide assistance to the National Energy and Utilities Regulatory Commission of Ukraine (NEURC) in the field of the natural gas sector and electricity market reforms. The two-year project started in the autumn of 2015 with the aim of harmonising Ukraine’s national legislation and institutional setup in the field of gas and electricity markets, so that Ukraine is able to meet the conditions for its integration into the EU energy market. The task for the ÚRSO is to share its experience in forming the relevant legislation with the NEURC and to supervise the drafting of new Ukrainian laws in this area with the following goals: first, to achieve the progressive liberalisation of the Ukrainian energy market; second, to introduce standard practices and methods of regulatory policy in Ukraine; and third, to create both legislative and regulatory conditions for Ukraine’s integration into the EU energy market (ÚRSO 2015). Cooperation between the national energy regulatory authorities of Slovakia and Ukraine is an important complementary element of bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.

Since October 2015 the Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association has been implementing a project focused on the building of capacities for energy sector reform in Ukraine. The project facilitates the sharing of Slovakia’s experience with its Ukrainian partners in the field of energy sector reform, with focus on improving energy efficiency and the use of renewables on the municipal level, including the experience of implementing relevant EU legislation and programs, their transposition into national legislation and policies, and learning from the best practices and successfully implemented projects in the field (Building capacities 2015).

9 Before 2015, Ukraine was part of the Eastern Partnership package of countries, with an overall amount of 300,000 – 500,000 EUR on average for all the countries.
There is enormous potential for bilateral Slovak–Ukrainian cooperation in the field of improving energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources. A total of 405 projects (with a total investment of 167 million EUR) were implemented in Slovakia at the municipal level during the years 2007 – 2013. Approximately one-third of these projects concerned the installation of boilers based on biomass fuels for the district heating systems of towns and villages. Apart from the installation of green boilers, most projects concerned the installation of modern public lighting in municipalities (including some based on LED technologies), or improving the energy efficiency of buildings, including their heat cladding. Thanks to the harmonisation of the relevant national legislation with that of the EU, as well as to adopted measures and implemented projects, the share of renewables in the total energy consumption of Slovakia grew from 6 % in 2005 to 9.5 % in 2009 and 12 % in 2014 (Ročná správa 2015).

Slovakia is able and willing to share with Ukraine its experience in adapting national legislation to the EU's energy and climate policy (including when it comes to the regulatory framework for providing energy services), energy auditing, strategies for the renovation of buildings, financial mechanisms for implementing projects, and raising public awareness in the field of energy savings. In addition, an added value for Ukraine in Slovakia’s acquired know-how in the field of energy efficiency is that it has already adapted green technologies to centralised district heating systems, a task that should also be undertaken by Ukraine, with its huge potential in the field. Slovak and Ukrainian municipalities share similar centralised district heating systems at the municipal level, which is their common infrastructural heritage from the former communist period (Duleba and Brezáni 2015).

On 10 September 2015, the State Agency on Energy Efficiency of Ukraine (SAEE) and the Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA) signed a Memorandum on Cooperation on Energy Efficiency, Energy Saving and Renewable Energy, which should frame further bilateral cooperation in the field, including relevant assistance of Slovakia to Ukraine (Interfax-Ukraine, 11 September 2015). The head of SAEE, Serhiy Savchuk, identified Ukraine’s interest in the Slovak experience as follows: “The Memo signed is an important document for Ukraine in the areas of energy efficiency, energy saving and renewable energy, as Slovakia has already gone the way Ukraine is going now. According to the national strategy for home renewal in Slovakia, in 2013 the heating efficiency of 50.38 % of the country’s apartment blocks and 33 % of its private houses was upgraded. By 2020, these indicators are to grow to 72.15 % and 47.61 %, respectively. It is important for us to use the experience
of Slovakia, as 80% of housing in Ukraine requires modernisation”. He added that in Slovakia, from 2005 to 2013, 599 projects in residential buildings, worth a total of 91.5 million EUR, were completed. According to Savchuk, the Ukrainian energy efficiency program was drawn up on the basis of European experience, including the experience of Slovakia, and since the moment it was put in place it has proven its effectiveness (Interfax-Ukraine, September 11, 2015). Under the Memo, the SAEE and SIEA are to exchange experiences on the introduction of effective financial schemes for supporting the implementation of projects in energy efficiency, renewable energy and the use of alternative fuel.

According to a report by the International Energy Agency (2012), Ukraine’s ratio of total primary energy supply (TPES) to GDP in 2010 was 10 times more than the OECD average. Calculated in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), Ukraine used about 3.2 times more energy per unit of GDP than the average for OECD countries. The IEA estimated Ukraine’s energy efficiency potential at 20 – 30% of its energy supply in 2012. This potential should be tapped mainly by power- and heating-sector retrofitting, industry modernisation, and streamlining the energy usage of domestic consumers. If Ukraine were to increase energy efficiency to the EU average level, its annual energy savings would be about 27 million tons of oil equivalent (Mtoe), or about 34 bcm of natural gas a year (Ukraine 2012).

Considering the enormous potential of Ukraine when it comes to improving its energy efficiency, as well as the respective positive experiences acquired by Slovakia in the course of the last decade, the bilateral cooperation of both countries in the field of energy efficiency and the use of renewables have become additional important components of their strategic partnership in energy.
1.2.5 How to sustain momentum

Following the above analysis, one could conclude that Slovakia and Ukraine have finally come to the understanding that they share common interests in the field of energy with strategic value for both of them. Slovakia has become a strategic partner for Ukraine ensuring an alternative supply of natural gas from the EU under the situation of full stoppage of its supply from Russia. Both countries are interested in maintaining their positions as the largest transit countries for supplying Russian gas to Europe. Furthermore, they are ready to work together to defend their integral transit interests vis-à-vis Russia and European consumers of Russian gas, which is a dramatic change from what they showed in the course of the two decades before Maidan. In addition to the gas sector, they have managed to expand their bilateral energy cooperation in reform of the energy sector, improving energy efficiency and the use of renewables with focus on the municipal level. They appear to have learned that working together in the field of energy better serves their national interests. This definitely provides new momentum to Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations, especially in counteracting misunderstandings and disputes they had in the field of energy in the years before Maidan. However, it would be naive to conclude that these recent positive changes have set the tone for all future relations between the countries. There are risks that might undermine the existing partnership and take Slovak-Ukrainian energy relations back to the 1990s or 2000s.

Considering that the Slovak-Ukrainian energy partnership is a relatively new development, it will take some time for it to take root in the ground of their bilateral relationship. If one learns carefully the lessons from the previous controversies between Slovakia and Ukraine when it comes to the transit of energy sources from Russia to Europe, one can find that their main cause was a different reading of each country’s interests in their relations with Russia and/or, in other words, different projections of their national interests towards Russia. Whereas Slovak political elites – under Prime Ministers Vladimír Mečiar, Robert Fico, but also Mikuláš Dzurinda if one refers to the stance of his government towards the Yamal 2 project – believed they should prioritise relations with Russia in order to ensure Slovakia’s energy interests in Eastern Europe, Ukrainian political elites – under Presidents Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma, Viktor Yushchenko, including Viktor Yanukovych in the end – gradually learned over the course of the 1990s and 2000s that the way Russia pursues its interests in the post-Soviet area does not serve the national interests of Ukraine. The failure of Russian political elites
– under Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin – to develop and pursue a constructive agenda with its post-Soviet neighbours, an integrative type of relation based on full respect for the equality and sovereignty of post-Soviet states, brought to existence a growing numbers of conflicts in their relations with Russia, especially during the 2000s. Let us mention here the gas disputes between Russia and Belarus (2004), Ukraine (2006, 2008 and finally 2009), Russia’s military intervention in Georgia (2008) and finally its occupation of Ukrainian Crimea as well as its engagement in Donbas (since 2014).

From the very beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014, Slovak foreign policy under Fico’s government tried to pursue a double-track policy: to have good relations with both Ukraine and Russia. This is the only way to explain Fico’s policy and the (in) coherence between his decision to facilitate the reverse flow of gas to Ukraine via Slovakia, which provided a strategic backing for Ukraine by clearing down the gas supply as a tool of Russian aggression against Ukraine on one hand, and his anti-sanction rhetoric on the other (Duleba 2015). Of course, from a Ukrainian perspective there is no coherence in such positions; rather there is a clear contradiction between the two.

Nevertheless, each party should at least try to understand the logic of the other’s policy approach. For the Slovak government under Fico it became clear in the meantime that having good relations with both Ukraine and Russia when they are in conflict with each other is mission impossible. However, the real turning point in Fico’s recent Eastern policy was an announcement by Gazprom on the creation of international consortia for the construction of the NS 2 project at the beginning of September 2015. It should be noted here that this was a renewed lesson for Fico’s government after the gas crisis in January 2009. He finally learned that Russia simply ignores the interests of Slovakia and that the only way to defend them is to also defend the transit interests of Ukraine. This does not mean a change of Fico’s stance over the EU sanctions on Russia, however, but it does mean that he has now understood the common interests of Slovakia and Ukraine in the field of the transit of Russian gas to Europe. And this is that the political momentum should be fixed and built on bilateral relations, and the energy partnership between Slovakia and Ukraine should become a long-term deal, not just a short post-Maidan episode.

Analysis of the political context of the Slovak-Ukrainian energy partnership is a must in order to understand that it is a new phenomenon with very fresh and fragile roots. Its sustainability fully depends on political will as well as the capacity of each side to reflect upon the national interests of the other. Here,
on the side of Slovakia, risks are connected with the duplicitous shape of its Eastern policy. The post-Maidan developments changed a lot in the Slovak perception of Eastern Europe, including Russia and Ukraine; however, there are long-term political and historical factors that shape Slovakia’s foreign policy identity and they will definitely not disappear over the few years (see part 1.3).

On the Ukraine side the main political risks when it comes to sustaining the momentum of the energy partnership with Slovakia concern the sense of Slovakia still being viewed in Kyiv as a “smaller neighbour”. Many in Kyiv still believe that “if we manage to agree with Brussels, Berlin or Warsaw, Bratislava will follow.” This is similar mistake as Slovakia's former belief (under Mečiar’s foreign policy in the 1990s) that “if we manage to agree with Moscow, Kyiv will follow.” Unlike the Ukrainian political class, Slovak politicians rid themselves of the above illusion at the beginning of the 2000s. However, in Kyiv, underestimating Slovakia as a political actor continues to be a part of Ukrainian foreign policy thinking. This approach of Ukraine towards Slovakia as a “smaller neighbour” creates serious difficulties in bilateral relations.

Let’s illustrate the above approach by referring to a cancelled event within the V4 Road Show under the auspices of Slovakia, which was supposed to take place in Ivano-Frankivsk in June 2015. The V4 Road Show series of events in regional centres of Ukraine is part of the agreement between the V4 and Ukraine on the specific sectorial focus of the assistance of V4 countries to Ukraine, as managed by the Slovak presidency of the V4 at the end of 2014. Under the agreement, each V4 country undertook the obligation to co-organise a thematic and reform-oriented event in Ukraine at least once a year. Slovakia was preparing the event in Ivano-Frankivsk to be held on 23 June 2015 with a thematic focus on energy efficiency, a sectorial priority it identified for its assistance to Ukraine. While the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, together with other Slovak organisations and respective agencies as well as their Ukrainian partners, prepared the event for several months, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, which was informed about the agenda of the event from the very start of its preparation, shortly before the actual event came up with a request to include the reverse flow of gas as a topic of the event’s agenda. Moreover, it added the requirement that the Slovak side should ensure the participation of representatives of respective V4 ministries with a gas portfolio. Given the fact that the Ukrainian side raised its requests a week before the date of the event, it was simply impossible to satisfy them. In the end, the event in Ivano-Frankivsk was cancelled (Duleba 2016). Moreover, on 24 June 2015 – a day after the cancelled event – the Ukrainian
government submitted a claim to the European Commission concerning Slovakia's would-be violation of EU legislation due to the Eustream transit contract with the Gazprom-Export, which does not allow fully-fledged access of Naftogaz to the main gas pipelines on the Slovak border and/or the so-called “big reverse flow” from Slovakia (Tóda 2017).

In Slovakia, the way the Ukrainian side approached the energy efficiency event in Ivano-Frankivsk, followed by a claim addressed to the European Commission, was seen as a gesture of Ukraine's diplomatic arrogance. First of all, the reverse flow of gas to Ukraine had been brought in line with both European legislation and the transit contract of Eustream with Gazprom-Export back in 2014. Everything in this context had been agreed upon, and Slovakia delivered gas to Ukraine during the critical winter period of 2014 – 2015. Surprisingly for the Slovak side, the Ukrainian side decided that it could use Brussels and the European Commission as a tool for exerting its influence over Slovakia. Second, the so-called “small reverse flow” via the Vojany – Uzhhorod pipeline was increased to a capacity of 14.5 bcm/year starting as from March 2015, which together with the reverse flows available from Poland and Hungary exceeded the expected amount and the declared import needs of Ukraine, e.g. by 20 bcm/year. In addition, in 2016 Ukraine imported just 11.78 bcm of gas, which is less than the existing transit capacity of the so-called “small reverse flow” from Slovakia alone without Polish and Hungarian reverse flows. In other words, the Slovak “small reverse flow” is not actually so small for Ukraine. And finally, the thematic focus of the Ivano-Frankivsk was V4 support for energy efficiency in Ukraine on a local level, not the reverse flow of gas. Many in Slovakia who were engaged in preparation of the Ivano-Frankivsk event raised the question: should we invest our time and energy in providing assistance to Ukraine if it does not want it? (Tóda 2017).

The bad tone in Slovak-Ukrainian relations due to the arrogant approach of Ukraine which resulted in cancelling of the “Slovak” energy efficiency event in Ivano-Frankivsk, lasted till the meeting of Prime Ministers Fico and Yatseniuk in Bratislava on 10 September 2015, which as we pointed out above was a turning point for Fico’s eastern policy. Regardless of this, the way the Ukrainian side approached the event in Ivano-Frankivsk shows exactly how it should not work with Slovakia.

In order to sustain critical momentum in their bilateral relations as well as to maintain a newly open page of their strategic partnership in the field of energy, both Slovakia and Ukraine first have to carefully learn lessons from the mistakes they have made in the past; second, to show more empathy towards each other in the projection of national interests; and third, to
improve understanding of each other’s national foreign policy identity. As the recent developments prove, if they work together, they are more much more successful in serving their own national interests.

1.3 National identities, ethnic minorities and perceptions

The historical perception of Ukraine in Slovakia has created a mental framework for the formation of Slovakia’s national policies towards Ukraine since the 1990s, including in the field of cross-border cooperation. This chapter aims to explore the historical perception of Ukraine and Ukrainians in Slovakia and by Slovaks with the aim of deepening the explanation of their modern relations. This text argues that the historical perception of Ukraine by Slovaks cannot be understood separately or without the context of Slovakia’s historical perception of Russia.

Slovaks can understand historically what Russia is due to the existence of a Russian state, which has been a visible actor in European modern history and politics since the 18th century. However, they can only barely understand what Ukraine is, since Ukraine did not really exist as a separate country back then. Historically, Ukraine has been viewed in Slovakia as the “land behind the Carpathian Mountains” that does not have a direct impact on important events on “our side” of the Carpathian Mountains. The historical development of Slovakia was not connected with Ukrainian lands around Kyiv to such an extent as it was, for example, in the case of Poland. Cossack movement on both banks of the Dnipro River, which laid foundations for the formation of the modern Ukrainian nation in the 16th and 17th centuries, did affect the history of the peoples and territories on the “other” (southern) slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. Even though the present territories of Western Ukraine (Eastern Galicia with its centre in Lviv) and Bukovina (Chernivtsi) became part of the Habsburg monarchy after the “first partition” of Poland in 1772 (Lukowski 1999), the Carpathian Mountains as a natural geographical border did not help to bring developments in Slovakia, which belonged to the Hungarian part of the monarchy, closer to Lviv’s Galicia (“Halych”), which was an administrative unit of the Austrian part of the empire (Duleba 2000). Unlike Ukraine, Russia was historically an active and well-known actor in the Habsburg territories of Central Europe, regardless of its relative geographical distance.

Russia plays a special role in the political-historical identity of the Slovak national elite. There are of course differences between current political
groupings with their specific ideological preferences, but the image of the Soviet Union and/or imperial tsarist Russia is not so directly linked to the image of “post-Communist Russia” in Slovak political discourse as it is in the case of neighbouring Poland or the Baltic states. Slovaks’ negative experiences with Russian imperialism are neither particularly dramatic nor particularly numerous, especially from the perspective of the history of their national emancipation. For this reason, the historical image of Russia in Slovakia is connected more with the so-called “Slavic idea” and/or the idea of “Slavic Brotherhood” than with “Russian imperialism”. In fact, pan-Slavism was born in Slovakia and the Czech lands of the former Habsburg monarchy, and formed the basic mental framework for the political thinking of the Slovak “revival elite” in the 19th century. Russia was viewed by the first generation of the Slovak national elite as a Slavic nation that could only support Slavs and/or its “ethnic brethren” in Central and South-Eastern Europe (Duleba 1999).

1.3.1 Historical roots of traditional views and stereotypes

Pan-Slavism was born in the 19th century in Central and South-Eastern Europe as an ideology arising from fear stemming of the dismissal and assimilation of Slavic nations in the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. The first intellectual and political elites of the Slavic nations in the region, including Slovaks, originated in this time. The European “Spring of Nations” in the mid-19th century also attracted the newly born elites of Slavic nations, who tried to bring into effect the principle of national self-determination. However, the “Spring of Nations” turned into a “War of Nations”, and pan-Slavism was established and developed as a platform against pan-Germanism and pan-Hungarianism in the Habsburg monarchy. The “historical treason” of the Imperial Court in Vienna after 1848, when it did not accept the demands of Slavic nations in the monarchy, despite their alliance and the military support they offered to Austria against the Hungarian revolution, brought disappointment among the Slavic revival elites and buried the concept of Austro-Slavism (a reform of the monarchy that would guarantee national rights to Slavic nations), as well as the hopes of the Habsburg Slavs of achieving a position equal to the Austrians and Hungarians in the multinational monarchy. Russia was viewed by the first generation of Slovak national elites as a Slavic nation that alone would support the Slavs in Central Europe and the Balkans (Popovič 1973).

Following the above belief, Russia should have become the core of a “whole-Slavic state” and the protector of Central and South-Eastern European
Slavs from their inevitable national death in Germanic-Hungarian-Turkish entanglements. Ľudovít Štúr, the leader of the Slovak revival generation, published his book "Slavism and the Future World" in 1853, which in Slovakia is considered as his political testament, addressed to future generations of the Slovak political elite. He wrote: "If the Slavs are not allowed to organise themselves and to develop in the federal states or under Austria, there is only one possibility left which has a future. Tell me frankly, brothers, was it not Russia lighting up our sad past like a lighthouse in the dark night of our life?" (Štúr 1995, 150).

Štúr's testament became the political program of the Slovak National Party (SNS), the first political party established by Slovaks after 1867, when Austria and Hungary achieved an agreement on the creation of a dual monarchy. One year after the agreement, the Nationalities Act established Hungarian as the exclusive official language. Slovak was relegated to private use and was regarded by the authorities as a peasant dialect. Slovak secondary schools were closed in 1874. In 1875 the Hungarian government dissolved the Slovak Matica, a private cultural foundation which fostered education and encouraged literature and the arts, and confiscated its assets. In 1879 a law made Hungarian mandatory even in church-sponsored village schools. Nevertheless, the Slovak National Party remained the centre of Slovak national aspirations until World War I (Podrimavský 1996). It was a conservative party supported by both Catholics and Protestants, the primary religious groups in Slovakia, and was pan-Slavic in its foreign policy orientation, looking to autocratic Russia for national liberation.

Despite the oppressive nature of Hungarian policy, the Slovak national movement managed to survive. By the eve of WWI about 20 percent of the population of Slovakia had immigrated into other lands. This emigration aided the national movement, which received both moral and financial support from Slovaks living abroad, particularly in the United States. The Slovak national movement was also aided by the example of other nationalities struggling against the Hungarians (particularly the Romanians) and by contact with the Czechs (Čaplovič et al. 2000). As a result of the national oppression that followed the revolutionary period of the 1840s, Slovaks showed little enthusiasm to fight for the interests of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy during WWI. Many Czechs and Slovaks recruited into the Austro-Hungarian Army defected on the front and were incorporated into Czechoslovak Legions in Russia, Italy and France, the largest of which (numbering some 39,000 soldiers) was formed in Russia (Veber 2001). The story of the Czechoslovak Legion in Russia at the end of World War I deserves particular attention, as
the Czechs and Slovaks for the first time in their history were forced to fight against the Russians for their national freedom.

Following the agreement between the Czechoslovak National Council in exile (Masaryk, Beneš, Štefánik)\textsuperscript{10} and the Russian provisional government formed after the February 1917 revolution in Russia, the Czechoslovak Legion became part of the Russian Army. After the Bolshevik coup in November 1917, followed by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers, the Czechoslovak Legion was supposed to travel across Siberia to Vladivostok and then by ship to France and Italy, where it would be sent into combat. The Bolshevik government approved the evacuation through Siberia with the stipulation that the Czechoslovak units give up their weapons. Refusing the order to disarm, however, the legionnaires clashed with the Red Army. Because Czechoslovak troops then constituted the strongest and best-organised force between European Russia and the Pacific coast, they were able to take control of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, a move necessary to safeguard their departure. Due to their presence along this strategic railroad, the legionnaires became an important element in the Russian Civil War and frequently clashed with Soviet troops. When the war in Europe ended, Czechoslovakia gained independence, and the Allied armies intervened in Russia before the last unit of the Czechoslovak Legion was repatriated (Masaryk 1925).

The experience of the legionnaires did not remove pan-Slavic sentiments from traditional Czech and Slovak thinking, however. In fact, they had deserted the Austro-Hungarian Army with the intent to join the Russian Army and to continue fighting against the Central Powers. They unwillingly took part in the Russian Civil War fighting against the Red Army, but at the same time they fought together with the White Army. Inter-war Czechoslovakia accepted a lot of white émigrés, and Prague became one of the world centres of white emigration from tsarist Russia, including Ukrainians who had struggled for an independent Ukraine in 1918–1919 (Tejchmanová 1993).

The Slovaks were never as satisfied as the Czechs with the Czechoslovak state created in 1918, because they felt dominated by the numerically

\textsuperscript{10} In 1916, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk together with Eduard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik (of Slovak origin) created the Czechoslovak National Council in exile. Masaryk in the U.S. and Russia, Beneš in the U.K. and Štefánik in France, Italy, and later also in Russia, worked tirelessly to gain the recognition of the allied powers. When secret talks between the Allies and Austrian emperor in 1916-1918 collapsed, the Allies recognised, in the summer of 1918, the Czechoslovak National Council as the supreme organ of a future Czechoslovak government. The Czechoslovak Legions, formed in France, Italy and Russia, served as a strong argument in favour of recognizing Czechoslovakia as an independent state after WWI.
superior Czech nationals. Slovak nationalists struggled diligently throughout
the 1920s for greater Slovak autonomy, and in the following decade they
succeeded in obtaining constitutional changes granting more autonomy to
Slovakia (Sidor 1943). Unlike tsarist Russia, Soviet Russia – being isolated
from European affairs – focused on its own problems and could not become
a viable ally in the Slovaks’ efforts to secure greater autonomy. This is why the
external orientation of Slovak nationalism was directed towards Germany,
which made efforts to achieve a revision of the status quo of post-war Europe.
The Slovak National Party – the main political force in Slovakia until the
end of the WWI, which had placed great stock in Russia – was replaced
in this role by the Slovak People’s Party established in 1918 by a Catholic
faction led by priest Andrej Hlinka (Bartlová 1997). The backing of Slovak
political separatism by Nazi Germany was among the main reasons for the
disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the creation of the satellite Slovak state
in 1939.

The story of the fascist clerical Slovak state during World War II (1939 –
1945) was more the expression of anti-Czech sentiment in Slovakia, caused
by Prague centralism within the First Czechoslovak Republic, as well as
extraordinary international circumstances, than the culmination of a broad
national consensus in Slovakia. This became clear when Slovak troops
again refused to fight against the Soviets; a large number of Slovak soldiers
followed the example of their forebears in WWI and deserted to the Soviet
Army. Due to mass desertions, Slovak troops were thus not able to fight and
the Wehrmacht decided to pull them out of the Eastern front. Moreover,
in 1944 – 1945 the Slovak National Uprising broke out against the fascist
regime at home and against Nazi Germany (Lettrich 1993). Many Czechs
and Slovaks, both civilian and military, were openly Russophile in attitude –
certainly pro-Soviet if not pro-communist. Such attitudes were strengthened
when Czechoslovakia was betrayed by France and the United Kingdom
at Munich in 1938 and again when the Soviet Army liberated most of the
country in 1945. The Slovak people generally did not welcome the Red Army
as communist occupiers, but rather as their Slavic Brothers coming to liberate
Slovakia. The reality after WWII, however, did not correspond fully to Slovak
national aspirations.

The communist takeover in 1948 did not lead to equitable treatment of
Czechs and Slovaks in a restored Czechoslovak state, which became a Soviet
satellite. The Stalinist purges of the early 1950s were particularly harsh on
Slovaks; indeed, the definition of “bourgeois nationalism” corresponded
very closely with the aspirations of Slovak nationalism. Among the Slovak
leaders arrested and jailed in the early 1950s were a lot of communists who had steered the Slovak National Uprising (Lipták 1998). In fact, this was the first negative experience of Slovak nationalism with Moscow, if we consider the history of the last two centuries. This was to change, however, in 1968.

The Soviet Union used Slovak national aspirations in suppressing the Prague Spring and reforms in Czechoslovakia in 1968. After the invasion of the Warsaw Pact allies, the prisons were opened, and the same Slovak “bourgeois nationalists” arrested in the early 1950s were appointed to hold important state posts in Czechoslovakia. The best example is Gustáv Husák, a Slovak communist in the 1930s and a leading figure in the Slovak National Uprising in 1944–1945. He was then arrested in the 1950s, and after rehabilitation in 1968, became Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Two months after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, on 28 October 1968, Slovakia received autonomous status within Czechoslovakia, which was later transformed into the Federal State of the Czech and Slovak Republics. From the point of view of Slovak nationalism, which measures historical events by what they give to or take from national institutions, federalisation of Czechoslovakia was viewed as progress, despite the fact that it was achieved through the presence of Soviet troops (Brown 2008). Slovak nationalists therefore do not share a fully negative interpretation of the outcome of the military invasion by Warsaw Pact troops of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Furthermore, the communist regime significantly contributed to the modernisation of the Slovak economy. Slovakia in economic terms was an underdeveloped part of interwar Czechoslovakia, since the industrial capacities of the state were concentrated in the Czech lands. However, in the 1960s and 1970s Slovakia experienced robust industrialisation, a result of political decisions made by the communist leaders. In fact, such decisions were partly motivated by Soviet generals who were planning for a possible WWIIII with NATO on the Western border of the Warsaw Pact (Czech Republic and the German Democratic Republic). They decided to develop military production capacities in the second echelon countries, including Slovakia, with the aim of supplying the eventual front line of WWIIII. The Western part of Slovakia in particular experienced robust development of new engineering enterprises producing heavy military equipment (tanks, artillery, etc.) (Smith 1994). Industrialisation of Slovakia, even though it was forced by political decisions, created new jobs, brought a new dynamism to urban development, improved transport infrastructure, public services, and the education system. In the end, it improved the social and economic
conditions and living standards of the Slovak population and this is one of the reasons why many Slovaks don’t perceive the period of communism, associated with rule from Moscow, in a purely negative light.

As already noted (see part 1.1), military industrial production in Czechoslovakia – geared mostly towards the Soviet Union and, later, Russia – was concentrated in the territory of Slovakia and played a dominant role in the country’s economy. More than 30% (according to various sources between 30% and 40%) of Slovak industry was oriented towards the Soviet Union in terms of both import dependence on the supply of parts and the marketing of the final products for export. Economic circles connected with the state-controlled military industrial complex of Slovakia rejected the Czechoslovak federal government’s program to convert the Slovak military industrial base in the late 1980s. Representatives of this part of the Slovak economy became supporters of the division of Czechoslovakia, as they believed they could manage their economic interests better within an independent state (Stigel 1993). In this way, the intellectual and political arguments for Slovak separatism were reinforced by economic argument, which later became one of the decisive factors leading to the division of Czechoslovakia at the end of 1992.

After the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, Slovak national political forces, and first and foremost the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Vladimír Mečiar, which ruled the country in the 1990s, were confronted with the strategic dilemma of choosing between the need to carry through the messages of the Velvet Revolution, i.e. push forward democratisation processes, implement market economy reforms and achieve integration into the Western international structures, first of all NATO and the EU, on the one hand, and the heritage of both older and modern Slovak history, including the need to maintain close economic cooperation with Russia due to the inherited structure of the economy, on the other. Meeting both needs at the same time and in a complementary way would have been possible only with the proviso that Russia undertook a successful post-Soviet transition and had zero-conflict relations with the West. However, soon after 1993 it became clear that Russia’s relations with the West were gradually getting worse and that Russia would model its own post-Soviet transition process to its former communist satellites in Central Europe. In the second half of the 1990s Mečiar’s power ambitions at home thus brought him closer to Russia than to the West.

Ideologists of a Slovak “special way of transformation” (Duleba 1997) derived their political legitimacy from the political message of the first generation...
of the national “revival” elite in the 19th century. The Czechs had lost their “Russian illusion” dating back to the Slavic Revival of the 19th century, many of them after the events of 1968, but Slovak nationalists did not, as the Czechoslovak state was not “their own”. Moreover, the former unitary state of communist Czechoslovakia had become a federal state with Slovakia as a federal republic only after 1968. In addition, Moscow supported the industrialisation of Slovakia, no matter what the motives were behind this. From the standpoint of the “nationalist scheme” of Slovak history, one could hardly find a negative Slovak experience with Russia from the past. This is something that makes the Slovak “post-communist” perception of Russia unique in Central Europe, especially compared with modern Polish or Baltic historical views of Russia.

Modern Slovak nationalism draws directly on the message of Ľudovít Štúr’s “revivalist generation” seeking a new national identity for the newly independent Slovak state. Due to the fascist character of the wartime Slovak state (1939 – 1945), which was rejected by the majority of the Slovak population, there is no other acceptable historical or ideological background for modern Slovak nationalism. The policy process and security debates in Slovakia since 1993 have partly been determined by the fact that Slovak-Hungarian relations have direct domestic political implications. Slovakia’s nationally oriented political forces (especially the Slovak National Party, formally re-established in 1990, albeit fundamentally different ideologically from the historical SNS) perceive Russia as a “desired” power in Central Europe, a Russia which is able and willing to counterbalance the German-Hungarian influence in the region, if referring to “historical concepts” (Tesař 1995). This is the background for their efforts to revive the pan-Slavic idea, “Slavic solidarity” and/or “special relations with Russia”, which was one of the key arguments used by opponents of Slovakia’s NATO membership during the so-called “NATO versus neutrality” debate in Slovakia in the 1990s (Bútora – Šebej 1998) and has been revived in the Slovak public discourse in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis since 2014. Bearing in mind the fact that pan-Slavism was born as an ideology based on a sense of being threatened, the instability evoking the feeling of threat can today provide momentum, for its ideological and political revival. This applies especially to new Slavic states created after the split of federal states in the former Eastern bloc (Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia), including Slovakia.

To sum up, the main current of Slovak nationalism has traditionally been pro-Russian. By contrast, Ukrainian nationalism has quite different historical features, being traditionally anti-Russian, which makes it similar to Polish
nationalism. This is another reason for Slovakia’s historical “coolness” towards Ukraine and Ukrainians. It follows the logic of historical events that Slovaks view Ukraine mainly from the Russian perspective. It took more than a decade after the collapse of communism for both the Slovak political establishment and the general public to cease perceiving the entire post-Soviet space and/or “lands beyond the Carpathian mountains” as predominantly “Russian”. In other words, Russia is conceptually much closer to Slovaks than their immediate neighbour Ukraine. This traditional stereotype provided a negative mental framework for Slovak-Ukrainian relations after both nations became independent in the early 1990s (see part 1.1).

Moreover, the modern perception of Ukraine by Slovaks has been affected by myths from the past portraying Ukrainians as Banderovtsi, which became synonymous with “bandits”. This historical image, which was supported by Soviet historiography, textbooks on history and communist propaganda, strongly influenced Slovaks’ perception of Ukraine and Ukrainians after WWII. The myth relates to the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska Povstanska Armiya - UPA) on the territory of Slovakia towards the end of WWII and thereafter. The UPA, founded in 1942, fought against both the armies of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in hopes of establishing an independent Ukraine. Ukrainian partisans controlled most of Western Ukraine until the 1950s and were also active in south-eastern Poland and north-eastern Slovakia. In accordance with Soviet and official Czechoslovak communist propaganda, Slovaks viewed Ukrainian partisans as bandits instead of fighters for an independent Ukraine (Bajcura 1967; Potichnyj 1987).

Taking the history of Slovak and Ukrainian nationalism together, it is hard to find examples of common interests and cooperation in the past. On the other hand, unlike Polish-Ukrainian relations, there are also no historical conflicts which could be a source of national animosity or conflict in the future. Rather, Slovaks and Ukrainians are historically indifferent to each other. However, there is one historical example of cooperation from the 19th century, albeit one which from the point of historical memory of the Slovaks has nothing to do with Ukrainians, but concerns Rusyns and/or Ruthenians.

11 Stepan Bandera (1909-1959) was founder and leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, which played a leading role in UPA.
1.3.2 The Rusyn minority in the context of Slovak-Ukrainian relations

The “Rusyn question” frames the Slovak-Ukrainian minority agenda, since both Slovakia and Ukraine became independent states after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1990s. Moreover, it is a question that structures the identity discourse in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderland, including perceptions of a historically evolving border between Slovakia and Ukraine.

In Slovakia it is widely recognised and accepted that people living mostly in the north-eastern part of the country on the borders with Ukraine and Poland identify themselves as Rusyns, with some of them also sharing the Ukrainian national identity. All Slovak citizens have a constitutional right to free expression of religious and national identity. This is why the Slovak government and respective minority legislation treat Rusyns and Ukrainians living in Slovakia as members of two different national minorities with all minority rights granted by Slovak legislation.

In Ukraine, Rusyns are still not yet officially recognised as a national minority. The Ukrainian law “On the National Minorities of Ukraine”, adopted by the Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada) in June 1992 (Solonenko 2017), does not list Rusyns among the national minorities of Ukraine. However, the 2012 Ukrainian law “On the Principles of the State Language Policy” did include the Rusyn language in the list of regional languages in Ukraine (Kulyk 2013). Rusyn activists welcome the positive move regarding the recognition of the Rusyn language; however, they say that the Ukrainian government should take the second step by recognising Rusyns as a distinct nationality in Ukraine (The Carpatho-Rusyn 2014). Rusyns continue to be treated in Ukraine as a Ukrainian ethnic group with some distinctive regional, cultural and linguistic characteristics. The different official treatment and legal status of Rusyns in Slovakia and Ukraine became a point of certain misunderstandings in Slovak-Ukrainian relations, especially in the 1990s.

Ukrainian official policy concerning Rusyns has been influenced by fears of Rusyn political separatism in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine (the former Subcarpathian Rus’ within inter-war Czechoslovakia). The Association of Subcarpathian Rusyns in Ukraine was established in 1990 and has formulated two main demands to the Ukrainian government: first, to recognise Rusyns as an original national minority, and second, to provide territorial autonomy to the Transcarpathian Region under its historical name.
– Subcarpathian Rus’. The Ukrainian government has rejected these claims. However, as mentioned above, there have been some changes in the Ukrainian approach towards Rusyns living in Ukraine in recent years. Nevertheless, the kind of “non-recognition” approach of Ukraine towards Rusyns helps us understand the sensitivity of the Rusyn question in Slovak-Ukrainian relations caused by disparate official treatment and the legal minority status of Rusyns living on both sides of the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

In political and diplomatic terms, when it comes to Slovak-Ukrainian relations it may be possible to deal with the status of the Slovak minority in Ukraine without taking into account the Rusyn question. However, it is impossible to neglect it, if one takes into consideration the fact that the Rusyn question has the potential to influence the political status of the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine, which borders Slovakia. In addition, 94% of the total number of ethnic Slovaks in Ukraine (7,900 persons according to the last Soviet census in 1989) live in the Transcarpathian Region. However, it is certainly impossible to deal with the status of the Ukrainian minority in Slovakia without taking into account the Rusyn question.

The partition of the former Ukrainian minority in Slovakia into two groups with different national identifications (Rusyn and Ukrainian) – even if there is a general understanding in Slovakia that those who identify themselves as Rusyns or Ukrainians are of the same ethnic origin and represent historically an autochthonous minority on the territory of Slovakia – became after the breakdown of the communist regime a new phenomenon, a process which had begun after WWII, but which became an unambiguous reality in the 1990s. Trying to understand what has happened in this respect over the last three decades, we need to go back to the historical conditions and developments of Rusyns in Slovakia and Ukraine both before and after WWII.

This part of the text aims to explore the most important historical aspects of the Rusyn question in the context of Slovak-Ukrainian relations, with the aim of identifying its political dimension in the given relations. In this analysis, we argue that the different approach of Slovakia towards the Rusyn minority, in contrast to that of Ukraine, after the regime change at the start of the 1990s could be explained by the specific and mostly positive historical experience of Slovaks sharing with Rusyns a common past in the same state until 1947, when Subcarpathian Rus’, a part of interwar Czechoslovakia, was ceded to the Soviet Union under the name of the Transcarpathian Region.
1.3.2.1 Before the 1990s

As noted above, historical development of the Ukrainian lands around Kyiv and the Dnipro River was perceived by Slovaks as something “beyond the Carpathian mountains”, which had no direct consequence on their own history. Quite the opposite is true for the present Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine, which was historically seen by Slovaks as Subcarpathian Rus’ or “Rusinsko” (Ruthenia) on “our side of the Carpathian mountains”. Slovaks have shared a common fate with the Rusyns (Rusnaks) living on the southern side of the Carpathians for more than a thousand years, living together in the same the Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburg monarchy, Austro-Hungary and the first Czechoslovak Republic. The “Upper lands” (“Felvidek” in Hungarian) was a common designation used in Hungary for the territories of Slovakia and Ruthenia (Magocsi and Pop 2002).

Originally, the terms Rusyns and/or Rusnaks were used to designate adherents of Eastern Christianity (Orthodox or later also Greek Catholic), since Rus’ was the name of the inhabitants and territory of a large medieval state with its centre in Kyiv. Later, all Eastern Slavs, including Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians, used the terms for their religious self-identification until the 19th century. The formation of separate Eastern Slavic nations with separate original ethnic identities started after the disintegration of Kyiv Rus’ in the 13th century and was completed in the case of Ukraine in the second half of the 19th century. Rusyns living on the southern side of the Carpathian mountains (who were also Eastern Slavs) were excluded from the mainstream of Ukrainian history and nation building (Pop and Halas 1993). They retained an old Slavic “Rusyn” identity. Most of them were Orthodox until the year 1646, when the Uzhhorod Union was accepted by part of the Orthodox clergy. At this point, the Uniate church, i.e. the Eastern Christian Church united with Rome, was created. The Uniates were allowed to retain the Eastern rite and traditions, but they had to recognise the Pope instead of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as the ultimate head of their church. Hence, from the 17th century, Rusyns were either Orthodox or Uniates. In 1772, the Uniates were renamed Greek-Catholics (known also as Byzantine Catholics) (Pop 2011).

Rusyn leaders have been arguing about their national identity since the 19th century. Some have felt the Rusyns to be a branch of Russians, others a branch of Ukrainians, while a third group believe that they form a distinct Slavic nationality. Each orientation has used a different language, whether Russian, Ukrainian or Rusyn, as a means to identify themselves. The leaders of the first revival elite of Rusyns living in the Hungarian part of Austro-Hungary felt that
Rusyns were a branch of Russians (Adolf Dobriansky) and that their literary language should be Russian (Alexander Dukhnovych). Many representatives of the Greek-Catholic clergy supported a Rusynophile orientation. Later on, Ukrainophile and Russophile tendencies were strengthened by the large influx of white Russian and Ukrainian emigrants to Czechoslovakia after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 and the end of WWI (Magocsi 1978; Magocsi 1999).

The attitude of the communist parties in Eastern Europe after WWII towards the Rusyn question was determined in 1924, when the Fifth congress of the Comintern in Moscow passed a resolution on the “Ukrainian question,” according to which Rusyns were declared to be Ukrainians and the Communist parties of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania had to support their unification with the Ukrainian Soviet Republic within the Soviet Union (Bajcura, 1967, 55-58). In the 1950s, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia started a process of Ukrainization of the Rusyn minority in education and culture and prohibited the Greek-Catholic Church. Similar processes also took place in Poland and Romania. Only after the collapse of communism in 1989 was the Rusyn movement revived. But the process of ethnic self-identification of Rusyns has still not been completed. To this day, there are two main national orientations among Rusyns in Slovakia, but also in Ukraine, Poland etc. – Rusyn and Ukrainian (Gajdoš et al. 1999).

Leaders of the Rusyn revival elite of the 19th century shared the same goals of other Slavic nations in the monarchy in terms of national rights and political autonomy. There are many examples of coordinated activities between the Rusyn and Slovak revival elite in the protection of common interests, including military actions against the Hungarian revolution in the 1840s. Rusyn and Slovak members of the Hungarian parliament backed each other’s interests in their proclamations and speeches. A Slovak delegation presented the political program of Rusyns at the Slavic congress held in Prague in June 1848. On the other hand, Rusyn leader Alexander Dobriansky was one of the founders of the Slovak Matica (Z dejín 1957).12 The alliance between the Slovak and Rusyn national elites was strong until the end of WWI. This changed, however, under the new political conditions following the founding of the first Czechoslovak Republic in 1918.

12 Matica Slovenská (Slovak Matica) – an all-nation cultural institution of Slovaks established in 1863 with the aim of developing Slovak national awareness, culture and science, it was the key institution of the Slovak national movement in the 19th and 20th century. After Slovakia became an independent state, it was re-established as a public entity in 1997 by the “Act on Matica slovenská” adopted by the National Council of the Slovak Republic.
Following the end of WWI, the territory of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ became part of the new Czechoslovak Republic. In May 1919, the Central National Rusyn Council in Uzhhorod voted for union with Czechoslovakia. In the Treaty of Saint-Germain, the Paris Peace Conference recognised the union with Czechoslovakia on the understanding that Rusyns would be given autonomy. Instead, however, the issue of Rusyn autonomy became a source of discontent, as the Czechoslovak constitution of 1920 limited the autonomy provisions, referring to the unity of the new state (Kadlec 1920; Krofta 1935).

Other complaints included the definition of the border between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ within Czechoslovakia. The territorial commission at the Paris conference put a preliminary demarcation line between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ along the river Uh, with the recommendation that Slovak and Rusyn representatives would have to agree to a potential secession of north-eastern Slovakia inhabited by Rusyns to Subcarpathian Rus’. But it didn’t occur and some 150,000 Rusyns were left in Slovakia. The first governor of Subcarpathian Rus’ and leader of American Rusyns, Gregory Zhatkovich, resigned from his post in 1921. The reason was the failure of the Czechoslovak government to fully accord to Subcarpathian Rus’ autonomy rights and to settle the boundary problem with Slovakia (Zatkovic 1921). According to the constitutional law passed by the Czechoslovak parliament in July 1927, the country was divided into four provinces: the Czech lands, Moravia, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ (Krofta 1935). Thus, the original demarcation line between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ became a fixed administrative boundary between the two Czechoslovak provinces.
In the 1930s, another source of conflict between Slovak and Rusyn politicians emerged. This was linked to different strategies for finding external support for their autonomy aspirations against Prague. While the clerical Slovak People's Party was trying to obtain support from Germany, the main autonomous forces in what was then Subcarpathian Rus' orientated themselves towards Hungary (the Autonomous Agricultural Union led by Andrey Brody) and Poland (the fascist Rusyn National and Autonomous Party led by Stepan Fencik) (Kozminski 1970). For its part, the Slovak pro-autonomy elite perceived the growing Hungarian influence in Subcarpathian Rus' as dangerous for Slovak national interests (Švorc 1995, 2007). Thus, contrary to the revival period of the 19th century, Slovak and Rusyn elites were no longer able to find points of common interest after WWI within Czechoslovakia.

When Czechoslovakia was transformed into a federal state after the Munich treaty in October 1938, both Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus' received full self-governing status. Before Hitler's Germany started the war against Poland in 1939, it decided to eliminate Czechoslovakia. Before the German invasion of the Czech lands on 15 March 1939, Hitler therefore negotiated with the Slovak People's Party (led by Jozef Tiso) and Hungary (Miklos Horthy) in order to prepare the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. On 14 March, the Slovak Diet convened and unanimously declared Slovak independence (Lipták 1998). On 15 March, under President Augustin Voloshyn (the then PM of Subcarpathian Rus’), who was an Ukrainophile in his orientation, Subcarpathian Rus’ declared independence in the name of the Carpathian Ukraine. When Nazi Germany took Prague, Hungarian troops then invaded and occupied Carpatho-Ukraine. The invasion encountered resistance, which the Hungarian army crushed (Vehesh and Zadorozhny 1993). As Hungarian troops crossed the border between the former Subcarpathian Rus’ and Slovakia, military conflicts broke out between Slovakia and Hungary, although both the Tiso and Horthy regimes were allied with Nazi Germany. The conflict only ended after pressure from the German side and Hitler's personal intervention (Deák 1991).

Some 30,000 Rusyns fled to the Soviet Union from Subcarpathian Rus’ to escape Hungarian occupation. Soviet authorities, eager to maintain good relations with Germany at the time of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, promptly arrested them and sent them to labour camps. Later, the majority of soldiers in the Czechoslovak Legion formed in the Soviet Union after the agreement between the Czechoslovak exile government in London and Moscow in 1943 were Rusyns from Subcarpathian Rus’. Of 15,000 soldiers in the brigade led by General Ludvik Svoboda in 1943, 11,000 were Rusyns (Potichnyj 1986).
In October 1944, the Soviet army took control of Subcarpathian Rus'. Despite an agreement signed in May 1944 between the Czechoslovak and Soviet governments stipulating that all Czechoslovak territory liberated by the Soviet army would be placed under Czechoslovak civilian control; Soviet activities led much of the local population to believe that Soviet annexation was imminent. The Czechoslovak government was pressed to cede Subcarpathian Rus' and the treaty ceding the territory to the Soviet Union was signed in June 1945. Subcarpathian Rus' lost its self-governing status in 1946 and became a region of Soviet Ukraine with the new official name of the Transcarpathian Region (Shandor 1993).

There had been no state border dividing the Slovaks and Subcarpathian Rusyns for the centuries before 1927, when it became an administrative boundary between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ in inter-war Czechoslovakia. After WWII, the same line became a very tightly controlled state border between the Soviet Union and post-war Czechoslovakia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s, this boundary became the state border between Ukraine and Slovakia, and finally, after Slovakia’s accession to the European Union in 2004, it became an external Schengen border of the EU.

1.3.2.2 After 1989: revival and a new political dimension

The breakdown of the communist system in Czechoslovakia allowed the free ethnic identification of people living there and Rusyns had chance for the first time since the 1930s to freely declare their ethnic identity. In the time of socialist Czechoslovakia they could be registered as Ukrainians only. According to the 1991 census, 16,937 people (living mainly in north-eastern Slovakia) identified their ethnicity as Rusyn, and 13,847 people as Ukrainian, while around 50,000 people claimed their mother tongue to be Rusyn (Paukovič 1994). A new organisation named the “Rusyn Renaissance” (Rusínska obroda) representing the minority interests of Rusyns in Slovakia was established. Thus, the former Ukrainian minority was divided into two groups: one with “Ukrainian identity” and the second one with “Rusyn identity” (i.e., emphasising a separate Slavic nation that is not a part of the Ukrainian nation).

Newly born Rusyn organisations emerged not only in Slovakia, but also in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Hungary, as well (previously, they had existed only in the former Yugoslavia, Canada
and the U.S.). They all rejected the so-called “Ukrainian national identity”, which they believed had been imposed by communist parties and Ukrainian nationalists during the 1950s, a fact they emphasised (Rusini 1997). In the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine the Association of Subcarpathian Rusyns (henceforth ASR) was established and formulated its demands to the Ukrainian government as follows: first, to recognise the Rusyns as an original national minority, and second, to provide territorial autonomy for the Transcarpathian Region under its historical name, Subcarpathian Rus’ (Programme Statement 1993).

The ASR was established on 17 February 1990. On 29 March 1990, it issued a “Declaration on the Return of Autonomous Status to the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine”, in which they questioned all legal acts passed by Supreme Councils both of the Soviet Union and Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1945–1946. They considered the Czechoslovak Act of October 1938, which established the autonomy of Subcarpathian Rus’ within the framework of Czechoslovakia, as the only binding legal act. Subcarpathian Rus’ was annexed by the Soviet Union on the basis of a treaty signed between the governments of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union on 29 June 1945 (Programme Statement 1993).

The first article of the above treaty states: “Transcarpathian Ukraine (whose name according to the Czechoslovak constitution is Subcarpathian Rus’), which became a part of Czechoslovakia on the basis of a treaty concluded in Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 10 September 1919, taking the wishes of the people living there and in line with the friendly agreement of negotiating sides, is uniting [...] with Soviet Ukraine” (Belousov 1953, 147). ASR’s representatives pointed out that Subcarpathian Rus’ was attached to the Soviet Union as a former entire component part of Czechoslovakia, including its autonomous status, and therefore Soviet organs had no legal right to abolish it. Furthermore, ASR justified its claims using the outcome of the referendum that took place in the Transcarpathian Region in December 1991. In that referendum, 78 percent of participants voted for autonomy of the region within the framework of Ukraine (Programme Statement 1993).

Because the government, president and parliament of Ukraine ignored the results of the December 1991 referendum, on 15 May 1993, the ASR re-established a “provisional government that had been abolished by Stalin with the aim of renewing the statehood of Subcarpathian Rus’”. The Prime Minister of this transitional government, Professor Ivan Turianytsia, said: “The independence of the Subcarpathian Rus’ will be declared by the Regional Council (the parliament of the region – author). This new
state power will ask the Commonwealth of Independent States for regular membership”.¹³

The Ukrainian government rejected these claims, accusing the Rusyn movement of political separatism supported by Moscow (Panchuk 1995). It needs to be underlined that Russian political representatives did not try very hard to appease Ukraine’s concerns about the Rusyn question. Moreover, the former Chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, Konstantin Zatulin, announced in January 1995 that “Russia has some scenarios concerning Ukraine, whereby it will not be able to exist as an independent state. One of them supposes the existence of an independent state on a Rusyn ethnic basis within the borders of the contemporary Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine, with full Russian support for such a state.”¹⁴

The Ukrainian government addressed its Slovak counterpart in 1994 with a proposal to establish a common committee on minority issues. Its main interest was to convince the Slovak government to reduce its support to the Rusyn minority in Slovakia because of its indirect effects on increasing Rusyn separatism in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine. During his first visit to Bratislava in February 1994, Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anatoliy Zlenko commented that: “[…] separatism is a fear. I know that similar problems exist in Slovakia, too. Therefore, my opinion is that cooperation and coordination between our countries in this field aimed at neutralising those processes would help us create the basis for fruitful relations between Ukraine and Slovakia, and at the same time would strengthen the stability of the whole region (Pravda, February 22, 1994).”

The so-called “Rusyn question” was a serious issue in Slovak-Ukrainian relations in particular in the 1990s. Nevertheless, no Slovak government changed its position towards the Rusyns as a separate national minority, referring to the constitutional right of Slovak citizens to freely name their ethnic identity.

According to the Czechoslovak census of 1991, the number of ethnic Rusyns and Ukrainians living in Slovakia was 30,784 (0.6 % of the total population

¹³ Cited from the article by Slovak journalist Robert Matejovič published in the Pravda daily (Matejovič 1993). See also the essay by Timothy Garton Ash entitled “Long Live Ruthenia!” about the Rusyn question, including his personal impression from talking to Prof. Turianytsia (Ash 1999).

¹⁴ A statement made by Konstantin Zatulin during the proceedings of the international conference “Russia and Central-Eastern Europe” held in Moscow in January 1995. For materials on the conference, see (Russia 1995).
of Slovakia) 56% of whom are registered as Rusyns and 44% as Ukrainians (Vývoj národnostného 1997). The division of the former Ukrainian minority into two groups with different national self-identification became a matter of fact in the early 1990s. While Rusyn leaders always had different national orientations (Russophile, Ukrainophile and Rusynophile) in the historical past, their disputes hardly attracted the interest of ordinary people, who identified themselves as Rusyns, Rusnaks, Carpathian Rusyns, Subcarpathian Rusyns, Uhro-Rusyns etc. In Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovak censuses before WWII, they were registered as Rusyns with different adjectives as mentioned above. Czechoslovak statistics after WWII refer to them as Ukrainians.\textsuperscript{15} Even today, nobody questions the fact that Rusyns and Ukrainians in Slovakia are people of the same ethnic origin despite their different national self-identification (Gajdoš and Konečný 1997; Bačová and Kusá 1997).

Official data from Czechoslovak censuses from the period after WWI until 1989 reveal a remarkable process of assimilation among the Rusyn (Ukrainian) minority in Slovakia. In 1921, 88,970 people registered themselves as Rusyns.\textsuperscript{16} This number reached 97,783 (Rusyns) in 1930 and then gradually decreased to 35,435 in 1950 (Ukrainians), 42,238 (Ukrainians) in 1961, 39,260 (Ukrainians) in 1970 and to 30,784 (Rusyns and Ukrainians) in 1991. In the 1991 census, around 50,000 people in Slovakia still indicated that their mother tongue was Rusyn (Gajdoš and Konečný 1997, 83). According to research carried out by the Institute of Social Sciences in Košice in 1990, Rusyns themselves think that there are two main factors that supported their assimilation after WWII: the migration of the rural Rusyn population to Slovak cities and the official imposition of Ukrainian national orientation in the 1950s (Vzťahy Slovákov 1990, 27).

The last two decades demonstrate a certain renaissance of the Rusyn minority in Slovakia. In the 2001 census, 24,201 residents of Slovakia gave their national identity as Rusyn, and 54,907 claimed Rusyn as their mother tongue. In the 2011 census the number of Slovak residents who identified themselves as Rusyns was 33,482, and the number of those who declared Rusyn as their mother tongue was 55,469.

\textsuperscript{15} For Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovak statistics before WWII, see (Magocsi 1978); for Czechoslovak statistics after WWII see (Gajdoš and Konečný 1997).

\textsuperscript{16} It should be noted that Czechoslovak statistics from the interwar period also included in the Rusyn column people who registered themselves as Russians and Ukrainians – those who migrated to Czechoslovakia after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917.
Table 1  Number of residents of the Slovak Republic who declared Rusyn nationality, Rusyn language as their mother tongue and Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confessions according to the censuses of the Slovak population in 1991, 2001 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of residents of the Slovak Republic</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rusyn nationality</td>
<td>17,197</td>
<td>24,201</td>
<td>33,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusyn as mother tongue</td>
<td>49,099</td>
<td>54,907</td>
<td>55,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox believers</td>
<td>34,376</td>
<td>50,363</td>
<td>49,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek-Catholic believers</td>
<td>178,733</td>
<td>219,831</td>
<td>206,871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, author’s own elaboration.

According to the last population census in 2011, Rusyns became the third largest national minority in Slovakia after the Hungarian (458,467) and Roma populations (105,738). For the first time since 1993 the number of Rusyns in Slovakia was higher than the number of Czechs (30.367). Rusyns in the 2011 census recorded the largest percentage growth among all national minorities living in Slovakia versus the 2001 census – one of 38 % (or 96 % when compared with the data from the 1991 census). Together with the Rusyns, percentage growth has been evidenced only in the Russian (25 %), Roma and Polish (identically by 18 %) and Serbian (16 %) populations. All other national minorities in Slovakia showed a decline – Ukrainians (31 %), Germans (13 %) and Bulgarians (11 %) (Rundesová 2012).

This kind of renaissance of the Rusyn minority in Slovakia during the last two decades can be explained by the following two main factors: first, democratic conditions in Slovakia that allow for free identification of national and confessional identities of Slovak citizens; and second, the successful activities of the Rusyn organisations established at the beginning of the 1990s (Duleba 2013). Nevertheless, the data on the number of believers of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confessions in Slovakia indicates a strong process of historical assimilation of the Rusyns.

While Slovaks were historically Catholic or Protestant, Rusyns were mainly Orthodox and, from the 17th century, also Greek-Catholic. According to the 1991 census, 178,733 persons gave their religion as Greek-Catholic and 34,376 as Orthodox (Statistical Yearbook 1998, 526). Moreover, as the above table shows, the number of Orthodox and Greek-Catholic believers following the last 2011 census was 49,133 and 206,871, respectively. These figures are much higher than the number of people identifying themselves as having Rusyn or Ukrainian national identity.
The communist regime in Czechoslovakia followed the longstanding Russian and Soviet practice of opposing the Uniate Church (linked to Catholic Rome) in favour of the Orthodox. In the 1950s, the Greek-Catholic Church was banned, while the Orthodox Church took over its property and parishes. Uniate clergymen were forced to convert, imprisoned or sent into exile. Uniate believers responded with various forms of resistance, ranging from leaving churches whenever an Orthodox priest arrived to holding services among themselves. In the late 1960s, following the seizures of churches by Uniates, the government promised a solution. The Greek-Catholic church was officially recognised again in 1968, but the property disputes between the Uniate and Orthodox churches were left unsettled (Coranič 2009).

The problem flared up again after the 1989 revolution, when Greek-Catholics began seizing by force church buildings that historically belonged to their church, resulting in a series of violent acts throughout north-eastern Slovakia. Many Rusyn villages were divided into two hostile groups based on different religious orientations. The Slovak government addressed the problem by arranging negotiations between representatives of both churches, which resulted in a series of administrative measures. The first were the Act on the Settlement of Property Injustices Caused to Churches and Religious Societies (the so-called “Restitution Act”) and a legal measure passed by the Presidium of the Slovak National Council on Defining Financial Relations Between the Greek-Catholic and the Orthodox Churches (Act No. 211/1990 Coll.) (Legal Status 1997).

As a result, the property seized by the Orthodox Church in the 1950s was given back to the Greek-Catholics, while both churches agreed on a list of churches for common use until new Orthodox churches were built. The Slovak government also passed a financial program to support the construction of new Orthodox churches. Thus, the problem was resolved quite successfully by the mid-1990s, and since then many Rusyn villages and cities in Slovakia have both Greek-Catholic and Orthodox churches. Nevertheless, the memory of acts of violence remains a part of the common memory and mentally still divides Rusyns living in communities where both confessions are practiced.

It should be underlined that the religious division of Rusyns and Ukrainians does not correspond to their differences in national self-identification. Thus, many Rusyns who feel they are Rusyns are of both Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confession. The same is true for those who feel themselves to be Ukrainians. This is a positive factor, which helps to pacify tensions and conflicts among the Rusyn/Ukrainian minority in Slovakia.
The main institution allowed by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to represent the minority interests of Ukrainians in Slovakia after WWII was the Cultural Association of Ukrainian Workers (Kultúrný zväz ukrajínských pracujúcich – KZUP) set up in the early 1950s. After its last congress in 1990, the KZUP was dissolved, and two separate new organisations were established: the Union of Rusyns-Ukrainians in Slovakia (Zväz Rusínov-Ukrajincov Slovenska – ZRUS) and the Rusyn Renaissance (Rusínska obroda – RO). In terms of national self-identification, the ZRUS supports a Ukrainian and the RO a Rusyn orientation. The ZRUS continues to publish periodicals issued by the former KZUP (the bi-weekly “Nove Zhytta” and the bi-monthly journal “Druzhno vpered”), while the RO has started to publish two new periodicals (the bi-weekly “Narodny novynky” and the bi-monthly journal “Rusyn”).

Both organisations compete with each other in persuading Rusyns/Ukrainians about their national identity and in attempting to win government support. Because some important minority institutions set up after WWII (i.e. the Museum of Rusyn-Ukrainian Culture in Svidník, the Theatre of Alexander Duchnovič in Prešov, the Ukrainian Branch of Slovak Radio in Prešov, the Department of Ukrainian Language and Literature at Prešov University, etc.) are in the hands of former KZUP representatives who have joined the ZRUS, the RO requires its own share of the former KZUP property or the establishment of parallel Rusyn institutions. These demands have been a constant source of conflict between the two organisations since the dissolution of the KZUP. For its part, the Slovak government has recognised the right of Rusyns to identify themselves as ethnic Rusyns, but on the redistribution of KZUP property it has taken a different position, arguing that the two new organisations must find agreement between themselves (Gajdoš and Konečný 1997, 85).

In 1995, the Rusyn Renaissance codified a Rusyn language, since this was the main prerequisite for introducing Rusyn at primary schools as well as in state TV and radio minority broadcasting. The ZRUS protested the move, claiming that Rusyn is only a dialect of the Ukrainian language and that the Rusyn nation does not exist. Leaders of the Rusyns argue that the Slovak government is subject to pressure from Kyiv, which views efforts to recognise a separate Rusyn nationality as anti-Ukrainian, allegations which the Slovak government has refuted (Rusyns 1998). With the start of the 1998-1999 academic year, Rusyn parents could for the first time decide if they wished their children to be taught in Rusyn at primary schools, at least for some hours every week. In 2007, the Museum of Rusyn Culture in Slovakia, with its seat in Prešov, was established as a branch of the Slovak National Museum. In 2008 the University of Prešov created the Institute of Rusyn Language and
Culture with the aim of doing research into Rusyn language and culture and educating teachers of the Rusyn language. Finally, in 2013, a majority of Rusyn non-governmental organisations established a Roundtable of Rusyns in Slovakia, which became a recognised partner of the Slovak government in discussing issues as well as legislation relevant to the development of the Rusyn minority in Slovakia (Program rozvoja 2015).

In summary, it must be emphasised that the process of democratisation after the Velvet Revolution of 1989 has revived the old historical “Rusyn question”, which was frozen under the communist regime. Formerly one Rusyn/Ukrainian minority living in north-eastern Slovakia is now divided into two groups in terms of national self-identification (Rusyn and Ukrainian) as well as religious orientation (Orthodox and Greek Catholic). The organisations representing parts of the divided minority have been competing with each other in the fields of national orientation, culture, education and politics. At the same time, the censuses of 2001 and 2011 have shown that the Rusyn identity is on the rise in Slovakia.

1.3.2.3 Government attitudes and cooperation

In 1994, a year after the signing of the basic treaty between Slovakia and Ukraine, the Ukrainian government proposed to set up a bilateral committee on ethnic minority issues. As mentioned earlier, according to the then Ukrainian foreign minister Anatolij Zlenko, the task of such a committee would be to prevent ethnic separatism; generally, Ukrainian-Slovak cooperation would strengthen stability in the whole region (Pravda, 22 February 1994). Behind this proposition, however, were fears on the Ukrainian side concerning possible “Rusyn separatism” in the Transcarpathian Region. The Slovak government accepted the proposition of its Ukrainian counterpart, first of all in viewing the committee as a tool which would help it improve both support and assistance to Slovaks living in Ukraine.

According to the Soviet census of 1989, the number of ethnic Slovaks living in Ukraine was 7,329 (0.02 % of the total Ukrainian population), 94 % of whom lived in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine (Jevtuch, Isyp, and Suhlobin 1993, 30). According to the first Ukrainian census of December 2001, the number of ethnic Slovak living in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine was 5,600 (0.5 % of the total inhabitants of this region) (Pro kilkist 2001). While Rusyns/Ukrainians are original inhabitants of north-eastern Slovakia, the Slovak population in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine
stems mainly from economic migration, beginning in the 18th century. Slovak settlers were invited to move to Subcarpathia to work at the emerging new smelting works, sawmills and water supply systems, but also as woodcutters (Haraksim 1998, 13).

According to the last Austro-Hungarian census (1900), the number of Slovaks living in the Subcarpathian region was around 7,300. After the creation of the Czechoslovak state in 1918, the number increased significantly to 19,930 in 1921 and 37,900 in 1930. After WWII the censuses show a reverse trend, from 13,400 Slovaks in 1946 to 7,329 in 1989 (Hajniš 1998, 126), and finally to 5,600 in 2001. Many Slovaks moved back to Slovakia after the Hungarian occupation of Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, and others assimilated into post-war Soviet Ukraine. It must be noted that according the 1989 census, only 2,555 of the 7,329 persons registered as ethnic Slovaks indicated that their mother tongue was Slovak, while 2,433 indicated Ukrainian, 1,890 Hungarian and the remaining group Russian (Makara and Myhovych 1997, 62).

At the same time, the national culture and consciousness of Transcarpathian Slovaks have become more active since the early 1990s. While there was no primary school teaching in Slovak during the post-war period, the first such school was set up in Storozhnitsa in 1993, while Slovak (as optional subject) began being taught at primary schools in Velyky Berezny, Seredne and Uzhhorod. Slovak language and literature have been introduced as a new department at Uzhhorod University with the aim of preparing primary and secondary school teachers. In 1992, a branch of the cultural organisation Slovak Matica was established in Uzhhorod, while the Štúr Association of Slovaks in Transcarpathia was set up in Storozhnitsa. These organisations, which have become centres of national life for Slovaks in Transcarpathia, are supported by Slovak non-governmental organisations, such as the Slovak Matica and the House of Foreign Slovaks, as well as by the Slovak government. An official framework for these cultural links is provided by agreements between the Slovak and Ukrainian governments (Hajniš 1998).

The bilateral Ukrainian-Slovak Committee for National Minorities, Education and Cultural Affairs held its first session in Kyiv in February 1995. Both sides agreed that the committee would meet regularly, at least once a year, alternately in Ukraine and Slovakia. The Slovak side is chaired by the Director General of the Department for Cooperation with Foreign Slovaks, Press and Humanitarian Relations of the Slovak Foreign Ministry, while Ukraine is represented by the first deputy Head of the State Committee for Minorities and Migration. At the second meeting, in Bratislava in 1996, both sides stressed that any demand for territorial, administrative or other forms
of autonomy based on ethnic principles is unacceptable and refused any ethnic separatism which could destabilise the Central and Eastern Europe region. They also demanded that representatives of the two minorities profess loyalty to the respective states in which they live (Protokol 1996).

In other words, the Slovak side accepted Ukrainian fears concerning so-called “Rusyn separatism” in Transcarpathia, while Ukraine accepted Slovak fears of so-called “Hungarian separatism” in Slovakia. According to the Protocol of the Fourth Committee Session held in 1998, both sides agreed to include representatives of two minority organisations – the Association of Rusyns-Ukrainians in Slovakia (ZRUS) and the Slovak Matica in Uzhhorod – as permanent members of the committee. As a result, the majority of members of the former Ukrainian minority in Slovakia who feel they are Rusyns are excluded from official Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation on ethnic minority issues (Šutaj and Olejník 1998).

However, it should be underlined that the Slovak government does not question the recognition of the Rusyns as a national minority different from the Ukrainian one in Slovakia with full rights and privileges in accordance with the Slovak legislation on ethnic minorities. Despite varying academic interpretations, the partition of the former Ukrainian minority in Slovakia into two groups with different national identities after the breakdown of communist regime is now a matter of fact. National or religious identity cannot be imposed politically in democratic societies. Ukrainian official policy concerning the Rusyn question is informed by fears of Rusyn political separatism in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine. Nevertheless, there are some positive new developments in Ukraine in this respect.

In March 2007, the Regional Parliament of the Transcarpathian Region declared that Rusyns do represent a separate ethnic minority in Ukraine and should be given respective rights (Korduban 2008). However, as mentioned above, only in 2012 did the Rusyn language gain official regional status on the basis of the 2012 Law of Ukraine “On the principles of the state language policy”, which included the Rusyn language in the list of regional languages in Ukraine (Kulyk 2013). The move was appreciated by the Rusyn movement; however, its leaders claim the Ukrainian government should also recognise the Rusyns as a distinct nationality. In 2014, after the Maidan, the Carpatho-Rusyn Consortium of North America initiated a worldwide appeal for official recognition of the Rusyns by Ukraine: “The Ukrainian central government has recognised Rusyn as a distinct language, with the right to be used in educational and civic institutions. We welcome that initiative, signed into law in August 2012, and call on Ukraine to take the next step: recognition of
Carpatho-Rusyns as a distinct nationality. This would be another indication of Ukraine’s orientation toward Europe, where Carpatho-Rusyns have official status as a distinct nationality in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Croatia” (The Carpatho-Rusyn 2014).

Slovak-Ukrainian governmental cooperation in the field of ethnic minorities has become regular since 1995, when the bilateral Intergovernmental Ukrainian-Slovak Committee for National Minorities was established. However, both governments agreed to exclude Rusyn organisations and institutions from this cooperation. Thus, Rusyns became a “stateless minority”, which is a new phenomenon in the Carpathian mountains area after WWII. The Slovak government respects the Ukrainian official attitude towards the Rusyn question in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine but cannot adopt such an approach at home. This is a crucial point differentiating Slovak and Ukrainian policies in this field. Definitively ignoring and neglecting the Rusyn question in Slovak-Ukrainian governmental communication is far from the best way to address the issue.

The Rusyn question cannot be viewed only in the Slovak-Ukrainian context. Rusyn organisations were not only established in Ukraine and Slovakia, but also in Poland, Hungary and Romania. While the ridges of the Carpathian Mountains have become natural historical borders between Central European states, people who identify themselves as Rusyns live on both sides of the Carpathian slopes in five separate countries. This is a truly unique region in Europe, where the borders of five post-communist countries come together. Moreover, regions of south-eastern Poland, north-eastern Hungary, north-western Romania, south-western Ukraine and north-eastern Slovakia are the poorest in their home countries and far from their respective capitals, which have more developed economic and social infrastructures. Taking these facts into account, we can understand why the minority question in this border area is so important and why it should be viewed in an international, or at least Central European, context. Cross-border cooperation at the borders of these five countries, including the Slovak-Ukrainian one, should help to overcome the Soviet and communist heritage which divided the ethnic community with state borders that never existed before WWI. Rusyns living on all sides of the existing state borders in these countries represent historical evidence of the natural integrity of the cross-border region in question.
1.4 Legal and institutional framework, visa regime, border management and cross-border cooperation

This part of the text offers an overview of the development and an analysis of the current status of the legal and institutional framework for Slovak-Ukrainian relations in the area of movement of goods, capital and services (economic and trade relations), movement of people (visa regime), border management and cross-border cooperation. The aim of the text is to examine the impact of the legal and institutional framework established on the level of intergovernmental relations for cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine.

1.4.1 Legal and institutional framework

As of the end of 2015 Slovak-Ukrainian relations are regulated by 123 bilateral legal documents (treaties, agreements and protocols) concluded on the intergovernmental level, including documents agreed on an inter-ministerial and inter-state agency level. Eighty-six of the above-mentioned bilateral documents were concluded in the period 1993 – 2016. In September 1999 Slovakia and Ukraine signed an intergovernmental Protocol on bilateral legal relations, which they assigned to 37 legal documents concluded between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in the period 1934 – 1991 (Zmluvná báza 2016).

The basic bilateral framework treaty on good neighbourhood and cooperation, which laid the foundation for the legal regime of the present relations between the two countries, and by which they recognised the existing border, was signed by Presidents Leonid Kuchma and Michal Kováč in Kyiv in June 1993. Most of the follow-up bilateral agreements signed on the intergovernmental level regulate cooperation in the field of the economy: for instance, an agreement on trade and economic, scientific and technical cooperation (signed on 26 August 1993; amended in 2005); on support and reciprocal protection of investment (22 June 1994); on principles of cooperation and conditions of mutual relations in the field of transport (15 June 1995; amended in 2007); on cooperation and mutual aid in the field of customs issues (15 June 1995); on preventing double taxation and tax evasion in the field of income tax and property tax (23 January 1996); on reciprocal employment of citizens (7 March 1997); on cooperation in the field of tourism (12 June 2001); on fighting tax evasion, illegal financial transactions and economic criminality
(21 November 2001); on social insurance (21 June 2004); on support and mutual protection of investments (26 February 2007); and on measures for cooperation in approaching EU standards in 2008 (30 May 2008) etc. The second field of the present Slovak-Ukrainian legal framework in terms of the number of concluded agreements relates to the management of the common border and cross-border cooperation (see the next part of this subchapter), followed by agreements in the field of diplomatic relations and foreign policy, military and police cooperation, education, science, and academic exchanges, sport, and social policy (Zmluvná báza 2016).

It may thus be concluded that Slovakia and Ukraine have built up a solid legal framework for cooperation over the last three decades, covering all the respective areas of their bilateral relationship, including economic and trade cooperation. EU enlargement became an external factor that has significantly interfered with the legal framework of Slovak-Ukrainian relations, however, especially since 2000, when Slovakia started its EU accession talks following the invitation it received at the EU summit in Helsinki in December 1999. The Slovak – Ukrainian legal documents that have been signed since 2001 correspond to the EU *acquis*, which Slovakia has obligated itself to follow in its relations with third countries, while the bilateral legal documents signed before 2000 had to be revised and consequently adjusted to the EU *acquis*. Even if there was no need to change all the bilateral documents signed before 2000, there has been a need to revise the entire bilateral legal framework with the aim of bringing it in line with the EU *acquis*.

The key institutional tool of Slovakia-Ukraine relations in the field of the economy and foreign trade (including with Russia and Belarus) were the Intergovernmental Commissions for Economic and Trade Cooperation, which were established by the basic bilateral treaties of Slovakia with Ukraine, Russia and Belarus signed in the course of 1993 – 1994. During regular meetings of the intergovernmental commissions, key bilateral issues of economic cooperation, including the conditions of mutual trade, were negotiated in the period 1993 – 2002. During the accession process of Slovakia and its entry to the EU in 2004 this became a thing of the past, however, and an example of the narrowing of the bilateral tools of Slovak foreign policy in relations with Eastern European countries in the field of foreign trade.

The realisation of Slovak trade interests in its relations with post-Soviet countries was transferred from the national level to the supranational EU level due to Slovakia’s integration into the EU single market. According to the EU Treaty, the only eligible body that can negotiate conditions of foreign trade
with goods\textsuperscript{17} on behalf of all Member States in relation to third countries is the European Commission. The Commission is also authorised to represent the trade interests of all EU Member States in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In order to comply with the EU acquis, the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998 – 2002) departed from all parts of the former legal regime governing Slovakia’s economic relations with Eastern European countries, including Ukraine. It also decided to conclude the activities of the bilateral Intergovernmental Commissions with Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus in 2002 (Duleba 2005b).

The economic diplomacy of Slovakia under the next Slovak government led by Robert Fico (2006 – 2010) had several highlights. The first was the decision of the Fico government to resume the work of the former Intergovernmental Commission with Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, excluding from its agenda however issues that might be at odds with the EU acquis in the area of foreign trade. The Social-Democratic Party – SMER and its leader Robert Fico believed that Slovakia should maintain its “traditional” economic ties with post-Soviet countries, while also relying on respective “traditional” institutional tools. The Fico government decided in 2007 to resume the activities of the Commission with Ukraine under the name of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Industrial and Scientific-Technical Cooperation. However, the Commission no longer dealt with the legal regime of bilateral trade, since that became a prerogative of the European Commission (Duleba 2008).

In May 2007, the first session of the restored bilateral Intergovernmental Commission took place in Kyiv. The Commission was presided over by the economy ministers of both countries, Lubomír Jahnátek from Slovakia and Anatoliy Kinakh from Ukraine. The first session approved the Charter of the Intergovernmental Commission and formed 10 working groups dedicated to specific areas of economic cooperation. Alongside the issue of electric energy imports, the Commission dealt with other prospective areas of bilateral cooperation: bio-fuels production in Ukraine, storage of natural gas, crude oil transit through the Druzhba oil pipeline, transportation, engineering, chemical industry, agriculture, tourism, and the like (Informácia z 1. zasadnutia 2007). It was expected that the Commission would hold regular annual meetings alternatively in each country. However, it met only four times in the course of 2007 – 2013, with no meetings following in the

\textsuperscript{17} This does not concern trade with services which are not regulated by the EU acquis where EU Member States may apply a bilateral approach towards EU non-member countries, i.e. may have specific bilateral agreements (e.g. tourism) and are authorised to act individually, albeit, under the supervision of the European Commission and on condition that there is no risk to the functioning of the EU single market.
years 2014 – 2019. In 2019, the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs announced a plan to revitalise the work of the Commission and to hold its next meeting in 2019 (Ekonomická informácia 2019).

It is evident that the Commission has not become as effective an institutional tool for boosting bilateral cooperation in the field of economy as was originally expected by the Fico government in 2007. One of the factors that may help to explain this is the “Europeanisation” of Slovak-Ukrainian economic relations since 2008, when Ukraine started talks with the EU on its Association Agreement. Governments can negotiate on a bilateral level; primarily “grand projects” as in the field of energy and network industries, sectors in which state monopolies play a dominant role, can ensure that the respective businesses in their home countries are under governmental control and/or negotiate framework conditions for economic cooperation, which means trade and investment rules. However, as already mentioned above, after EU accession the Slovak government lost the competence to negotiate trade conditions with third countries on a national level, and due to its rather controversial relations with Ukraine in the field of energy transit during the given years, there have been no “grand projects” to be negotiated on the bilateral intergovernmental level. The rather enthusiastic approach of Fico’s government towards the intergovernmental commissions on economic cooperation with post-Soviet countries demonstrated more its political mentality, typical for Social-Democrats and leftist parties in post-communist Central Europe, who believed that intergovernmental structures are important for recovering economic cooperation between the former COMECON countries. Slovak diplomacy soon learned, however, that a more effective way to pursue national interest towards Ukraine in the field of economy and foreign trade is active participation in forming EU negotiating positions on provisions of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, including on the DCFTA, as of 2009.

The Europeanisation of economic relations between Slovakia and Ukraine has weakened the role of national governments in shaping their agenda and at the same time it has strengthened the role of corporate actors in the field. The Slovak Trade and Industrial Chamber (Slovenská obchodná a priemyselná komora – SOPK), the leading organisation of Slovak businesses, established legal contacts with its Ukrainian counter-partner, the Trade and Industrial Chamber of Ukraine, in 1995, when both national chambers signed a bilateral cooperation agreement as of 22 January. In 2000 an initiative came into being to create a joint institute aiming at better coordination of bilateral activities and advancing cooperation between Slovak and Ukraine businesses.
On 30 August 2000 both chambers signed an agreement establishing a Joint Working Council, which held its first session in Bratislava on 9 April 2001. From 1995 to the end of 2002 the SOPK and its regional branches in Slovakia, in cooperation with the Trade and Industrial Chamber of Ukraine, organised 22 missions of Slovak businessmen to Ukraine and, vice versa, 17 missions of Ukrainian businessmen to Slovakia. The number of trade missions with Ukraine organised by the SOPK and its regional branches during 2002–2017 was more than 40 (Výročné správy 2019).

Most of the bilateral activities of the SOPK with Ukraine were initiated by the SOPK Regional Chamber in Košice, the second largest city in Slovakia, located in Eastern Slovakia and the centre of the Košice Region, which borders Ukraine (Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine). In 1998 the Košice Regional Chamber, in cooperation with the Transcarpathian Trade and Industrial Chamber in Uzhhorod, initiated the creation of the Slovak – Ukrainian Trade and Industrial Chamber (SUTIC). The SUTIC common project got support from the EU’s PHARE – CREDO program. However, its activities were slowed when the project was completed in 2000. The PHARE – CBC program that replaced the PHARE – CREDO program in 2000 aimed at supporting projects on common borders of EU Member States and association countries and did not anticipate the financing of cross-border projects with Ukraine (Homza 2000). The situation changed in 2007 though after the launch of the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Program aimed at financing cross-border cooperation projects between the three countries, including Slovakia and Ukraine (Hungary-Slovakia 2019); however, this didn’t help restore the activities of the SUTIC originally initiated by the regional trade chambers in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderland.

The idea of the SUTIC was revived on the national level by the Slovak Agency for Development of Investments and Trade (Slovenská agentúra pre rozvoj investícií a obchodu – SARIO), established in 2002 by the Ministry of the Economy of Slovakia with the aim of attracting foreign investments to Slovakia as well as supporting the foreign trade activities of Slovak companies. In 2014 SARIO initiated the creation of the Slovak-Ukrainian Trade Chamber (Slovensko-ukrajinská obchodná komora – SUOK) as a civic association registered under Slovak legislation. In addition, in the same year, SARIO created a Help Desk for Ukraine with the aim of providing consultancy services to Slovak companies interested in doing business in Ukraine or with Ukrainian partners and vice versa (Pracovné rokovanie 2014).

Comparative analysis of the SUTIC regional initiative with SUOK, which was launched with support of the Slovak state agency, is a good example of the
limitation of regional actors in developing cross-border cooperation. Access to funding is a matter that shows the clear difference between regional and national actors in regard to the capacity to act. Whereas the regional SUTIC was able to perform its activities only thanks to the support of EU funds, SUOK continues to act thanks to national funding. At the same time, the story also shows the limits of a national approach to cross-border cooperation. Instead of providing support to a regional initiative by compensating them for a break in EU funding, central authorities prefer to support new initiatives formed on the national level and under their control.

1.4.2 Visa regime

In the area of movement of people across the common border, border management and cross-border cooperation, the following are the most important bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian agreements concluded since 1993: an agreement on a common state border, which was signed in one package together with the readmission treaty and the treaty on the border regime, cooperation and mutual aid in border-related issues (14 October 1993; amended on 20 December 2005); on border crossings at common state borders (1995, amended in 2015); on construction of the new road border crossing the point Čierna – Solomonovo (11 October 2007); on new documentation of the Slovak-Ukrainian state border (18 December 2007); on local border traffic (30 May 2008, amended in 2011); on the exchange of information between border guard services (16 April 2010); on common border patrols (30 October 2013); on railway transport on the common border (6 February 2015); and finally, an agreement on cross-border cooperation as of 5 December 2000 (Zmluvná báza 2016). However, it has to be pointed out that visa policy, which regulates conditions for reciprocal travel of citizens of both countries, has been an area in which Slovakia made unilateral decisions in the early 2000s which inevitably provoked disputes in bilateral relations.

The accession process of the Slovak Republic to the EU was a key factor that essentially changed the bilateral Slovak – Ukrainian regime on the common border. The adoption of EU legislation, as well as bringing the administrative capacities and border infrastructure on the side of Slovakia in line with EU standards, considerably interfered with the bilateral border regime between Slovakia and Ukraine as established at the beginning of the 1990s. In fact the “Europeanisation” of the border regime was the second substantial change of the Slovak – Ukrainian border regime since 1993, when both countries gained their state independence.
The first shift resulted from the dramatic geopolitical changes in the former communist bloc in the early 1990s, when the countries that Ukraine and Slovakia were formerly parts of – the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, respectively – disappeared from the political map of Europe. In October 1993 Slovakia and Ukraine signed a package of three “border treaties” that followed the basic treaty recognising the common state border as inherited from the preceding states. The above-mentioned treaties in fact left unchanged the technical provisions for crossing the common border by citizens of Ukraine (formerly citizens of USSR) and Slovakia (Czechoslovakia), as determined by the agreement between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia on conditions for reciprocal travel of citizens of both countries from 1981 (Dohoda 1981).

There was no visa requirement; however, the new regime imposed a new set of regulatory measures, e.g. citizens of both countries needed to legitimise crossing the border with an official invitation from the other country authorised by the police authorities or by a tourist voucher, for which they paid a nominal charge. In the case of business trips, a special stamp in the passport authorised the passport bearer to cross the border without any fees and limits for number of crossings within a year. The border police authorities had the authority to issue a stamp into a personal foreign passport of an employee of a corporate body following an application of the body, provided that it was able to document its cooperation with the partner in Ukraine and vice versa. Taking into consideration the communist past, when the access of citizens of communist countries to travel documents allowing them to travel abroad was under strict political and police control, the new travel regime imposed in 1993 on the Slovak – Ukrainian border was broadly understood in Ukraine and Slovakia as an imminent part of the individual freedoms granted in the new post-communist period (Ukrayina ta Slovachchyna 2000). The new regime was not very different from the former communist one in terms of procedures at the border crossing, but it was dramatically different in terms of the access of citizens to travel documents and their right as well as opportunities to travel abroad.

Moreover, in the mid-1990s there was originally an intention on both sides to deepen the process of liberalisation of the border regime, even beyond the horizon set by the 1993 border treaties between Ukraine and Slovakia. Thus, in February 1995 the Slovak government led by Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar signed the “Agreement on the conditions for non-visa travel of citizens of both states” with the Russian Federation, a treaty which abolished any regulation measures such as a tourist voucher, official invitation etc. at the border crossing for the travel of citizens of Slovakia and Russia, provided
that their stay in the other respective country did not exceed 30 days. An identical agreement was also concluded with Belarus in September 1995. Mečiar’s government, which ruled the country from 1994 – 1998 was also planning to sign a similar non-visa agreement with Ukraine. But this did not become a reality because in March 1995 the Implementation Convention of the Schengen Treaty entered into force, and in June 1995 Slovakia submitted its official application for EU membership. In September 1997 the Dublin Convention from 1990 entered into force, which through the Common Consular Instruction authorised a so-called EU “negative list” of visa countries, citizens of which must have a visa when crossing the border of an EU Member State. Russia, Belarus and Ukraine were put on the list of such EU visa countries (Duleba 2005a).

The 1997 Luxembourg European Council invited the first candidate countries, including the Visegrad neighbours of Slovakia, to start accession talks, asking them, among other requirements, to adjust their domestic legislation and treaties with third parties to EU standards, including those in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). Slovakia under the government led by Vladimír Mečiar (1994 – 1998) was excluded from the first runner countries to join the EU. The reason for excluding Slovakia was not reluctance on the part of Slovakia to follow EU standards as far as harmonisation of the Schengen acquis is concerned, but first of all because of the undemocratic style of government of the Mečiar administration (Duleba 1997). The truth is that the Mečiar government did not withdraw from the non-visa agreement with Russia and Belarus as of 1994 and 1995 before the expiration of its election term in 1998, but nor did it sign such an agreement with Ukraine or any other country from the EU visa list.

The next Slovak government that came into power after the September 1998 national elections, led by Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, made it clear that it considered NATO and EU membership as the priority of Slovakia’s foreign policy and would subordinate both domestic policies and external relations to that priority (see the part 1.1 of this chapter). And indeed, it succeeded in bringing Slovakia back on the track of European integration. The EU invited Slovakia to start EU accession talks at the Helsinki summit in December 1999 (Helsinki 1999).

The Amsterdam Treaty, which entered into force in 1999, incorporated the Schengen Protocol into the EU legislative framework. Thus, the Schengen acquis became a part of the accession talks between the EU and the candidate countries included in Chapter 24 and dealing with co-operation in the field of JHA. The Slovak Republic submitted to the EU its negotiating position
on Chapter 24 on 8 December 2000 (Negotiating 2000). On its side, the EU adopted a common negotiating position towards Slovakia on the above chapter on 22 June 2001 and agreed to open the chapter for the accession talks on 27 June 2001. Unlike its neighbours Poland and Hungary, in case of visa policy towards Ukraine, Slovakia did not request any derogation or transitional period for the implementation of legislation or administrative capacity building under this chapter, declaring that it would complete it before the reference day for the Slovakia’s accession to the EU (Negotiating 2000).

The European Commission, in its 1999 Regular Report on Slovakia’s progress towards EU accession, stressed that “there was no progress concerning alignment of the Slovak visa legislation to EU requirements, particularly with regard to Belarus, Russia and Ukraine” (1999 Regular 1999, 50). This critical Commission evaluation became a challenging factor for the Slovak government that advanced the process of gradual aligning of Slovakia’s visa policy with that of the EU Member States. On 15 March 2000 the Slovak government approved the document “Concept of alignment of the visa policy of the Slovak Republic with the European Union” (Koncepcia 2000), in which it presented the calendar for renouncing the agreements on the visa free regime with countries from the EU negative visa list. On the same date, the Slovak government decided to renounce the Czechoslovak – Soviet agreement of 1981 on reciprocal travel of citizens and the protocol to this agreement relating to Ukraine and to impose visa requirements on Ukrainian citizens as of 28 June 2000. Further, it renounced the non-visa agreements with Russia and Belarus, which terminated the non-visa regime with those countries as of 1 January 2001 (Negotiating 2000).

The issuing of a visa in Slovakia is defined by Act No. 48/2002 on the “Stay of aliens on the territory of the Slovak Republic” (Zákon č. 48/2002), which brought its procedure, conditions for applicants and also types of Slovak visas in compliance with EU standards. On 6 December 2001 the Slovak government decided to establish the Central Visa Office (CVO), which reviews the visa applications of foreign citizens and gives approval for issuing visas. The CVO has been operating since 1 February 2002 as part of the Office of Border and Alien Police, which was the main coordinating institution responsible for the implementation of EU standards in the JHA. As of 1 April 2002, the CVO has had a direct data online connection with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This online data transmission system, which connects the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with all Slovak Embassies abroad, was completed and put into operation in 2003 (Schengenský Akčný Plán 2002).
As analysed above (see part 1.1), the imposition of a visa regime on Ukraine was one of the conflicting points that arose in bilateral relations in the course of 1999 – 2000. Ukraine disagreed with the decision of the Slovaks to impose a visa regime, regarding it as premature and referring to Poland and Hungary, which applied to the EU for a derogation until the reference date of their accession to the EU. One of the most important outcomes of the talks held in Bratislava in December 2000 between Prime Ministers Yushchenko and Dzurinda was an agreement on the creation of a joint expert commission to take a look at the results of Slovakia’s visa requirement for Ukraine nationals and to design a liberalised regime that would interfere as little as possible with business, social, cultural and sporting contacts. In February 2001 the two sides changed the visa regime, effective as of 1 March 2001, to eliminate the need to show a letter of invitation by citizens of both countries when applying for a visa and to provide free visas for children under 16; the issuing of multi-entry free visas for some categories of applicants who crossed the border often, such as air crews, river and sea-going boat crews, railway servicemen, truckers, people living in border areas, and above all those with relatives on the opposite side of the common state border, students, WWII veterans, etc. as well as a 50 % discount on visas for people travelling on the basis of mutual agreement, i.e. in culture, art, sport, church relations. Thanks to the above rapprochement on the visa regime, Ukraine did not withdraw from the bilateral readmission agreement with Slovakia (Duleba 2001).

The second Dzurinda government (2002 – 2006) showed a change in approach and a political will to build qualitatively new relations with Ukraine in the context of defining the post-accession priorities of Slovakia’s foreign policy (see part 1.1), including a change in approach towards the visa regime. On 20 April 2005 the Slovak government decided to issue visas for Ukrainian citizens without fees. The government thus responded to the Ukrainian decision to abolish the visa requirement for citizens of the EU Member States for travel to Ukraine. The so-called asymmetric visa regime entered into force in May 2005, i.e. Ukrainian citizens required a visa to enter Slovakia, but they did not pay a fee, and Slovak citizens did not need a visa to enter Ukraine (SITA, 20 April 2005).

The next change relating to the visa regime took place in 2007, when Slovakia, together with Poland and Hungary, entered the Schengen zone. Ukraine was interested in signing an agreement on small border traffic with its Western neighbours, including Slovakia, which would enable the inhabitants of the border municipalities to cross the border more easily. The Schengen rules allow for a special visa regime for the inhabitants of the municipalities on the
Schengen space’s outer border, located a maximum of 50 km from the border. The Slovak side proposed that signing of the respective agreement with Ukraine should be coordinated with Poland and Hungary (Viktor Yanukovych 2007). The agreement on small border traffic between Slovakia and Ukraine was signed on 30 May 2008 (Ukrayintsy uzhe 2008). By concluding this agreement, Slovakia and Ukraine maximised what they could within the ambit of the Schengen acquis in order to ease the visa regime for reciprocal travel of their citizens. Any further move in the matter would depend on an institutional deal at the level of the EU-Ukraine relations.

Talks on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement were launched in 2007. After Ukraine joined the WTO in February 2008, they also included talks on trade liberalisation. In parallel, in 2009 the EU started a visa dialogue with Ukraine with the aim of lifting the visa regime for the travel of Ukrainian citizens to the Schengen zone. The dialogue, led by DG Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission on behalf of the EU, was built on the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP), which included four blocks of benchmarks related to document security; biometrics; border management, migration and asylum; public order and security; and external relations and fundamental rights. The benchmarks concerned both the policy and institutional framework (legislation and planning) and the effective and sustainable implementation of this framework. By the end of 2015 Ukraine had met all the EU requirements by implementing necessary reforms and EU standards. The decision of EU institutions to transfer Ukraine to the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from visa requirement came into effect on 11 June 2017. From this date, the visa obligation for citizens of Ukraine who hold a biometric passport and want to travel to the Schengen zone for a short stay was abolished (Visa liberalisation 2017).

A major event in Slovak–Ukrainian relations in 2017 took place on 11 June. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Slovak President Andrej Kiska met at the Vyšné Nemecké – Uzhhorod border-crossing point to celebrate together the launch of visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens to the EU. In his speech, President Kiska stressed that the day was a great occasion for the citizens of Ukraine, as well as for the citizens of the EU and Slovakia (Kapusta 2017).

The fact that President Poroshenko decided to celebrate the launch of the visa-free regime with the EU on the border with Slovakia – and not on the border with Poland, which has been traditionally viewed as the key advocate of Ukraine within the EU – echoed the growing misunderstandings in Polish-Ukrainian relations that arose in the course of 2017. In February 2017, the
leader of the Polish ruling Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PIS), Jaroslaw Kaczynski, addressed Kyiv with an antagonistic message: you will never get into the EU with Bandera (Latta 2017). The Polish government decided to open and securitise sensitive historical questions in its relations with Ukraine, questions related to the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the Western part of Ukraine during WWII, accusing it of war crimes committed against the local Polish population. In January 2018 this process resulted in the adoption of a new Polish law providing for changes to the law on the National Memory Institute, including among other things the banning of the “Bandera ideology” in Poland (Interfax-Ukraine, 27 January 2018).

The bilateral relations between Hungary and Ukraine were also not immune to significant deterioration in 2017. In September, Hungarian diplomacy protested against the adoption of a new education law in Ukraine which introduced compulsory teaching in the Ukrainian language at both primary and high schools. Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó characterised the law as “disgraceful and degrading,” since it bars ethnic minorities in Ukraine – including 150,000 Hungarians – from teaching and learning at primary schools in their native languages. He noted that Hungary would block any efforts of Ukraine towards NATO and EU integration if Ukraine was to put the new education law into practice (Maďarská vláda 2017).

Thus, it happened that Slovakia remained the only direct Western neighbour of Ukraine that was also a member of the EU and NATO with relations that were not overshadowed by dark clouds in 2017. As noted by Polish expert Tomasz Pechal – when commenting on the border meeting of the Slovak and Ukrainian Presidents on the occasion of launching the visa-free EU travel regime for Ukrainian citizens on 11 June – it was now Slovakia instead of Poland that had become Ukraine’s gate to Europe (Pechal 2017).

It is a sort of irony in the modern political history of Slovak-Ukrainian relations that Slovakia, which in the 1990s looked at Ukraine as a “gate to Russia”, and at the beginning of the 2000s was viewed by Ukraine as a problem-making neighbour, became in 2017 Ukraine’s “gate to the EU” as well as its most friendly Western neighbour. The growing tensions in relations with Hungary and Poland in recent years changed the optics of Ukrainian foreign policy in looking at Slovakia. According to Mykola Kapitonenko, a prominent Ukrainian expert in the field of international relations, Slovakia should be approached by Ukraine as a strategic partner. The way Ukraine has developed its relations with Slovakia can serve as a model for developing relations with its other Western neighbours (Kapitonenko 2018). The visa policy, which brought controversies to Slovak-Ukrainian relations on
intergovernmental level at the beginning of 2000s, has strengthened in the end the political dimension of Slovakia’s relations with Ukraine thanks to the EU-Ukraine rapprochement in the mid-2010s.

1.4.3 Border management

As far as the management of the border with Ukraine, Slovakia developed its existing shape at the beginning of the 2000s during the EU accession process. From the very beginning of the accession talks on Chapter 24, the Slovak government stressed the fact that the Slovak border with Ukraine will become a future external border of the European Union. Thus, in its negotiating position on the given chapter the Slovak government insisted that “the Slovak Republic gives great importance to an effective protection of the state borders and specially emphasises the protection of its state border with Ukraine, i.e. a future external border of the European Union” (Negotiating 2000). The very fact that Ukraine is Slovakia’s only non-EU neighbour put the focus of the Slovak government on adapting its border management policy to the needs of protecting the future external border of the Schengen Area. Strategic planning and consequent reforms that have been undertaken in Slovakia since 1999 – including allocation of financial sources, improving maintenance and supply of the border service and building new administrative capacities in the JHA field – have followed a strategic priority resulting from the very fact that the Slovak – Ukrainian border had to become an external border of the EU, whereas the Slovak borders with Poland, Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary have become internal borders within the EU territory.

The key planning documents aiming at the aligning of Slovakia’s border protection policy with Schengen standards were adopted in 1999 as follows: “A comprehensive strategy for ensuring administration of the state borders of the Slovak Republic” and consequently in November 1999 the “Concept of the Border and Alien Police Service with regard to the accession of the Slovak Republic to the Schengen Agreement – Protection of the external border of the European Union” (Komplexná stratégia 1999; Koncepcia služby 1999). The principal policies in this regard were unfolded in the Schengen Action Plan adopted in 2001 as well as in the “Strategy for completion of building up the protection of the Schengen-type state border” approved by the government in August 2002 (Stratégia dobudovania 2002). The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic ratified the document under the name “Project on advancing professional protection of the state border” (Projekt
professionalizácie 2001) in March 2001, a policy aimed at gradual substitution of soldiers from military service by a professionally trained border police force. And finally, with special focus on ensuring the capacities of the border police at the border with Ukraine, the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic also adopted the “Project of the conception on further material – technical support for the executive bodies of the Border and Alien Police” as of 2002 (Projekt koncepcie 2002).

As already mentioned, the new organisational structure of the Police Corps of the Slovak Republic, namely the Office of the Border and Alien Police (Úrad hraničnej a cudzineckej policie – ÚHCP), started to operate as a unified, specially trained and nationwide border police responsible for protection of the state border of the Slovak Republic as of April 2001. As a result of this institutional reform, the former regional departments of the border and alien police have been exempted from the institutional framework of regional police directorates (Slovakia is divided into 8 regions in terms of the public administration system). All former regional departments have been united into a new organisational structure with its own funding from the state budget, separate from other police structures. The ÚHCP director is subordinated directly to the President of the Police Corps of the Slovak Republic, an official who under his/her competence is the principal mandatary of the government of Slovak Republic for state borders, and the ÚHCP director under his/her competence serves as the Deputy to the President of the Police Corps. From the point of vertical organisation, the ÚHCP operates on three levels: the central level – a central directorate based in Bratislava; the regional level – regional directorates of the ÚHCP established in the Slovak regional administrative units; and finally on the local level – executive units (departments of the border control of the Police Corps at both the “green border” as well as border crossings). As to the horizontal level of its organisation, the ÚHCP central directorate consists of the following nine departments: 1. Administrative department; 2. Economic department; 3. Department of the protection of the state border; 4. National unit for combating illegal migration (responsible for operative protection of the state border); 5. Department of information systems and evidence; 6. Department of the alien police; 7. Passport department; 8. Department of cooperation with neighbouring countries; 8. Department of the border police units (training department). In addition, there are two special departments responsible for managing camps for detained illegal migrants from the third countries, located in Medveďov (in Western Slovakia near the border with Hungary) and Sečovce (in Eastern Slovakia near the border with Ukraine).
The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic through its directive No. 42 issued on 8 June 2002 changed the organisation of the former border guard service. The former system of executive border units (the total number of which was 161), consisting of separate border guard and alien police units, was transformed into a new unified organisational system of border patrol units that combine the functions of both the former border guard and alien police units. Following this reorganisation, the number of the new unified executive border patrol units is 101, 9 of which are based on the border with Ukraine (before the reorganisation there were 12 units on the Ukrainian border, 9 of which were border guard and 3 alien police units). Since 1 January 2003, only professionally trained policemen have served in the border patrol units on the border with Ukraine. The total number of staff serving in the 9 border patrol units on the border with Ukraine is 447 specially trained policemen (unit location and number of staff: Beňatina – 50, Čierna nad Tisou – 50, Maťovské Vojkovce – 45, Petrovce – 47, Uľa – 47, Ulič – 50, Veľké Slemence – 45, Vyšné Nemecké – 66, and Zboj - 47) (Stratégia dobudovania 2002, Annex No. 4).

By 2005 Slovakia was finally integrated into the Schengen system. In 2002 the Slovak government adopted a “Proposal on a project concerning creation and development of the National Schengen Information System” submitted by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic to the government on 20 November 2002 (Návrh projektu 2002). The National Schengen Information System in Slovakia (N.SIS) was put into operation in the following three phases: 1) 2002 – 2004: till accession to the EU; 2) 2004 – 2005: till joining the Central Schengen System (C.SIS), and 3) 2005 – after joining the C.SIS. Since 2005 the border management of Slovakia has been fully integrated into the Schengen system, including protection of the external border of the EU. Slovakia has had the Schengen Border Codex, which regulates crossing of the external Schengen border, implemented since 13 October 2006. The Slovak-Ukrainian border became an external border of the Schengen Area on 21 December 2007, whereas the borders with Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became internal land borders within the Schengen Area. Slovak international airports located in Bratislava, Košice and Poprad became external air borders of the EU on 30 March 2008 (Ako funguje schengenská 2019).

In 2013 Slovakia and Ukraine achieved an important milestone in cooperation in the field of border protection by concluding a bilateral agreement on common border patrols, which was signed by the governmental envoys of Slovakia and Ukraine on the common border (Bezpečnost’ 2013). Common patrolling allows for joint management of the border and creates conditions for improved implementation of all border-related bilateral agreements, including
the readmission treaty and statistical evidence of matters related to the common border, including joint planning in the field of the border protection. It might be concluded that in the field of border management, Slovakia and Ukraine have achieved more than just satisfying required levels of institutional cooperation.

Given the history of Slovak-Ukrainian relations in the field of visa policy and border management, the factor which significantly contributed to the improvement of bilateral relations was the political will of Ukraine to get closer to the EU, especially since 2007 when Ukraine started talks on its Association Agreement. It might be concluded that since then the EU-Ukraine relations have been generating positive impacts on bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian relations on the national level. The visa-free regime, together with the collaborative management of the common border achieved during the 2010s, creates positive conditions for regional and local actors to engage in cross-border cooperation. However, even cross-border cooperation is an area of bilateral relations that has been a source of past misunderstandings.

1.4.4 Cross-border cooperation

The region of Eastern Slovakia and the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine as well as adjacent territories of western Ukraine, south-eastern Poland, north-eastern Hungary and north-western Romania, represent a unique region in Europe where the borders of five post-communist countries come together. These border regions have a very heterogeneous ethnic, cultural and religious structure and are among the poorest parts of their home countries. They are distant from the national capitals with their more developed economic and social infrastructure. Nevertheless, they share a common, difficult history, geographical proximity, similarities in economic development and first of all common aspirations for economic prosperity and European integration, a fact that created a sense of community and willingness to develop cross-border cooperation at the beginning of the 1990s. The main CBC initiative on the Slovak-Ukrainian border since the early 1990s involves the Carpathian Euroregion, which was the first “Euroregion” to be established in post-communist East-Central Europe in 1993 in accordance with rules and principles of the Western European Euroregional CBC being successfully developed in the post-WWII period.

The representatives of Slovak local authorities and self-governments in Eastern Slovakia were first active in launching interregional cooperation with neighbouring partners from Poland, Ukraine and Hungary in the early 1990s.
and expected successful cross-border cooperation to promote revitalisation and development of Eastern Slovakia. They also thought that a lack of governmental investment in the transport and communication infrastructure of the region and support for private business and educational and cultural programs in Eastern Slovakia could be at least partly compensated for by the activities of the Carpathian Euroregion. These expectations were increased due to the fact that some Western financial institutions showed a readiness to support the Carpathian Euroregion, e.g. the EU within its programs on regional development and cross-border cooperation (PHARE CREDO), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and some U.S. private funds (Duleba 1993).

Furthermore, their vision was that Eastern Slovakia would occupy not only the central geographic position in the Carpathian Euroregion, but also had the most developed economic capacity of the five neighbouring border regions. Eastern Slovakia could thus serve as a building block in developing programs within the Carpathian Euroregion, a role which would be profitable for the region of Eastern Slovakia and for Slovakia as a whole, strengthening the Slovak Republic’s international position in the Central and Eastern European sub-regions, enhancing its reputation as a serious and constructive actor in regional and also European affairs. They hoped that the central government would understand this and would support their cross-border activities. But they were wrong, at least up to the end of 1998, when a new Slovak government came to power after the parliamentary elections in September of that year (Duleba 2014b).

The legal and organisational framework for cross-border co-operation within the Carpathian Euroregion was established on 14 February 1993 in Debrecen (Hungary), when ministers of foreign affairs, governmental, regional and local representatives of Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Romania signed the foundation documents of the Carpathian Euroregion. However, cross-border cooperation within the Carpathian Euroregion did not meet the expectations of Eastern Slovak from the beginning of 1990s. In 1998, during the ceremony commemorating the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Carpathian Euroregion, many distinguished speakers and founders of the Carpathian Euroregion expressed their concern about the future attractiveness of cross-border cooperation in the area. As they pointed out, the initial expectations from member regions were too great, and the Carpathian Euroregion could not raise sufficient resources for its programs in order to be able to meet such expectations (Ludvig 2004).
The Slovak government under Vladimír Mečiar adopted a negative attitude towards the participation of representatives of Slovak local governments in the CBC in the period 1993-1998, arguing at first that a legislative framework should be created in terms of appropriate competencies of local governments to develop CBC with foreign partners. Even though Slovakia signed the European CBC framework convention of the Council of Europe in 1994, it came into force only in 2000. Furthermore, Slovakia finished concluding bilateral treaties on CBC with respective neighbouring countries only in 2001, whereas before 2000 it signed its only CBC treaty with Poland in 1994 (treaties with the Czech Republic and Ukraine followed in 2000 and Hungary in 2001) (Duleba 2014b).

It should be noted that it was not only the then Slovak government that approached the initiative in a negative manner. The central governments of other participating countries also originally approached the Carpathian Euroregion with big apprehensions. First of all, the very fact that representatives of local authorities were developing relations with foreign partners became a new phenomenon challenging the traditional centralist understanding of
who is authorised to do such things and how they may participate in making foreign contacts. Secondly, nationalist political forces strongly influenced the national debate on the Carpathian Euroregion in respective member countries in the middle of 1990s. Their typical argument was that the Carpathian Euroregion is a tool of the other participating country used to further their own national interests etc. (Duleba 1993). Thus, the Carpathian Euroregion became a victim of the undemocratic political culture in the region. The politicisation of the Carpathian Euroregion led to the fact that Ministries of Foreign Affairs and central agencies were more engaged in developing cross-border activities within the Euroregion than the relevant local and regional authorities. Paradoxically, one of the natural effects of this approach was the unnatural extension of the area of the Carpathian Euroregion. Today, the area of the Euroregion exceeds 140,000 km², and the total population living in the area is almost 16 million. Due to the “policy of balancing” enforced by central governments, the Carpathian Euroregion became the biggest Euroregion in all of Europe. However, this outcome in fact paralyzed its functioning and the original purpose of its founders – to create common platform encouraging cross-border cooperation in the border area of five post-communist countries (Tanaka 2006).

Before EU enlargement at the beginning of the 2000s, a debate started in Slovakia and Ukraine on how to revive the Carpathian Euroregion and its activities so that it could be a helpful tool in getting EU support resources for cross-border cooperation in the area. One of the solutions that has been discussed since then is structural reform of its activities within the limited areas, e.g. bilateral Ukrainian-Slovak programs, Ukrainian-Polish etc., or trilateral Ukrainian-Polish-Slovak programs, etc. (Medzinárodná konferencia 2002). In any case, the Slovak government of Mikuláš Dzurinda that came to power after the September 1998 parliamentary elections changed Slovakia’s policy towards the CBC with the participation of Slovak regional and local authorities. As a result, the eastern Slovak regions of Prešov and Košice were allowed to sign accession agreements and became members of the Carpathian Euroregion in November 1999.

Dzurinda’s government succeeded in completing the legislative framework for participation of Slovak local and regional governments in the CBC. In years 1998 – 2001 the necessary legislation was processed (self-administration of higher regional units, competence law, amendments to the law on public administration, property of municipalities, property of higher regional units, state budget etc.) in order to establish regional self-governance on the level of the 8 Higher Territorial Units (self-governing regions). By the Act on the
Transfer of Certain Powers from State Organs to Municipalities and Higher Territorial Units from 2001, the process was implemented in five stages ending in January 2004. By this time, state administration on the regional level had ceased to exist in Slovakia. The completion of the process led to the transfer of a broad scale of competencies as well as state budget financing from the central to regional and local self-governmental authorities. Thanks to the principal reform of public administration in Slovakia, self-governing regions also acquired broad competencies in the area of CBC. With the aim of meeting EU standards concerning regional development, four statistical regions were created in Slovakia (NUTS II level) – Eastern Slovakia (Košice and Prešov Regions), Central Slovakia (Banská Bystrica, Žilina), Western Slovakia (Nitra, Trenčín, Trnava), and the capital city Bratislava. All the Slovak self-governing regions participate in the 12 Euroregion projects established at Slovak borders with the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Austria. As already noted, the Prešov and Košice regions participate in the Carpathian Euroregion (Duleba 2014b).

In addition to multilateral CBC activities, the regional and local authorities of the two eastern Slovak regions (Prešov and Košice) that share the Slovak-Ukrainian border with the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine established a bilateral network of contacts with their Ukrainian counterparts. The Prešov Region concluded bilateral agreements on cooperation with the following Ukrainian regions: Transcarpathian Region, Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv. The Košice Region signed a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Transcarpathian Region. In addition, the following agreements have been made on the level of administrative districts of Slovakia and Ukraine: Michalovce – Uzhhorod, Prešov – Uzhhorod, Košice-Uzhhorod and Snina – Velyky Berezny (Medzinárodná spolupráca 2002). In total fifteen Ukrainian and Slovak cities concluded partnership agreements, including the capital cities of Kyiv and Bratislava (Rozvoj medziregionálnej 2019). The above agreements are aimed at helping to improve people-to-people as well as business-to-business contacts in the Slovak-Ukrainian borderland.

These bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian inter-regional and local arrangements became possible thanks to the intergovernmental agreement on cross-border cooperation which was signed on 5 December 2000 and entered into force on 29 January 2001 (Dohoda 2001). Thus, it took almost 8 years from the time local and regional authorities on both sides of the state border demonstrated their will to develop cross-border activities (the Carpathian Euroregion was formally established in February 1993) for both Slovak and Ukrainian governments to finally “legalise” their cross-border cooperation over the
common border. According to the intergovernmental agreement on CBC, its provisions apply in three regions or *oblast'* of Ukraine (Transcarpathian Region, Lviv Region and Ivano-Frankivsk Region) and two self-governing regions of Slovakia (Prešov and Košice). In territorial terms, the regions on both sides correspond to the geography of the Slovak and Ukrainian parts of the Carpathian Euroregion.

Under the agreement the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine committed themselves to consult each other on any legal, administrative or technical problems that could hinder the development and smooth running of CBC, support activities of local and regional authorities to initiate and develop CBC, and provide financial resources to local and regional authorities, within the limits of their capabilities, for initiating and developing CBC (Art. 4). The agreement includes an exact list of sectorial areas, in which regional and local actors are authorised to establish and develop CBC as follows: a) regional development and spatial planning; b) transport and communications (passenger transport, roads and motorways, airports, waterways, etc.); c) cross-border trade; d) energy; e) nature protection (protected areas, recreation centres, parks, etc.); f) protection and rational use of water resources (elimination of pollution, construction of waste water management plants); g) protection of the environment (air pollution, noise reduction, etc.); h) education, training, research and science; i) health care (use of healthcare facilities by residents of the neighbouring territory); j) culture, leisure, sport (theatres, music festivals, sport centres, youth centres, etc.); k) mutual assistance in case of natural disasters and other disasters (fires, floods, epidemics, earthquakes, etc.); l) tourism (tourism support projects); m) problem of workers in the border regions (transport, housing, social insurance, taxation, employment, etc.); n) economic cooperation (joint ventures); o) other cooperation projects (waste management, communal economy, etc.); p) agricultural development, and q) social care (Art. 9).

With the aim of promoting and coordinating cross-border cooperation, the agreement (Art. 7) established the Slovak-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation, with the right to set up working groups to address specific issues. The Statute of the Commission that specified the scope of its activities, organisational structure, budget and procedures was adopted at the first meeting of the Commission on 6 May 2004, in Zemplínska Šírava (Slovakia). The Commission is co-chaired by the Deputy Interior Minister of the Slovak Republic and the Deputy Minister of Ukraine on Regional Development, Construction, Housing and Communal Services. Since its establishment in 2004, the Commission has
met 14 times, with the last meeting held in November 2018 in Uzhhorod (Ukraine) (Slovensko-ukrajinská 2019). The Commission has become the main institutional intergovernmental platform for the coordination and development of CBC on the Slovak-Ukrainian border (for the analysis see Chapter 3). It might thus be concluded that by 2004, Slovakia and Ukraine had established a full-fledged bilateral legal and institutional framework for the development of CBC along their common border by regional and local actors.

Although, the existence of the legal and institutional mechanisms for CBC on the intergovernmental level generates opportunities for regional and local actors, it does not ensure the effectiveness of CBC on the regional and local level, however. The practice of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC on the regional and local level shows that mechanisms on this level are much less effective than mechanisms established on the national level. The main obstacles for bilateral CBC, including trade on regional and local level, could be identified as follows: insufficient cross-border governance; scarce financial resources; historical legacies of the Slovak-Ukrainian borderland, including the complex structure of its identities; insufficient legislation dealing with legal protection of business; inadequate institutional setup (different competencies of regional and local authorities, inefficiency of custom offices that paralyze small businesses, practices at the local public administration offices, police and courts); insufficient infrastructure (number of border crossings, transport); corruption (at the local level it is often a more hampering obstacle for trade cooperation than on the national one); undercapitalisation of enterprises in the region and a lack of coordination in the use of the EU funds (Medzinárodná konferencia 2002; Ludvig 2004; Tanaka 2006).

The evolution of supranational and national frameworks for CBC at the Slovak-Ukrainian border has been positive in the course of the last three decades in terms of creating a positive political, legal and institutional set up for the CBC activities of regional and local actors. The EU-Ukraine and bilateral Slovakia-Ukraine relations have developed in a progressive way, as they have gradually eliminated obstacles and generated more opportunities for CBC on the common border. However, the practice of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC shows the rather limited capacities of regional and local CBC actors to fully use the opportunities available.
2 BILATERAL TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND SLOVAKIA

Martin Lačný

The Slovak-Ukrainian border has been changing in the course of the following periods: a) 1993 – 2004: the bilateral intergovernmental regime of the border; b) 2004–2017 the “communitary” regime of the border between the EU and Ukraine, and c) the expected new border regime after the signing and subsequent full implementation of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA) as well as an agreement on a visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine. Recently, we can identify two key exogenous factors determining political opportunity structure for cross-border cooperation (further in the text - CBC) and trans-border regional development on the Slovak-Ukrainian border as a part of the external border of the EU: 1) EU CBC programmes, including the programmes of the European Neighbourhood Policy; and 2) the national policies of the Slovak Republic as an EU-member country and Ukraine as a neighbouring country sharing an EU external border. As documented by results of the research projects EXLINEA (Scott and Matzeit 2006), EUDIMENSIONS (Büchner and Scott 2009) and EUBORDERREGIONS (Final Report 2015), understanding of the particular political opportunity structure may contribute to building capacities of CBC actors to make the best use of opportunities brought by AA/DCFTA and thus consequently to boost economic development of the Slovak-Ukrainian borderland regions.

2.1 Economic relations before 2004

The transition economies of Central and Eastern Europe faced a difficult task at the beginning of their transition process. The springboard for economic processes often based on the trade-off (or “quid pro quo”) type of relationships requires a number of compromises. This included the shift of international

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18 The DCFTA entered into force in 2017. Since then Ukraine has had to fully implement the Association Agreement - if we take into account the transitional periods, this will happen in 10 – 15 years, which means by the horizon of 2027 – 2032.
trade from east to west, resulting in the loss of some positions in the markets of the former Soviet Union countries. The total export data for all transition countries without the former USSR show that while in 1989 40.4% of their exports went to other countries of the Eastern Bloc (24.4% to the USSR) and 41.0% to the West in 1999 it was just 18.8% to the former Eastern Bloc (4.7% to the former USSR) and 75.5% to the West (Deák et al. 2016). In the early 1990s, the Czechoslovak political elites made a concentrated effort to shift foreign trade away from the former Soviet Union and former Eastern Bloc countries mainly to the European Union.

The split of Czechoslovakia into two independent states further shaped the economic policy in Slovakia. The first revisions of the former federal transition strategy started to be implemented in 1993 and besides economic objectives, the strategy declared the intention for integration into the EU and NATO. Although European integration was one of the most important declared priorities of the Slovak government, however, the actual outcome was in the beginning quite the opposite. For the first time, the European Commission published an opinion on applications of Central and Eastern European countries for membership in 1997, assessing the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria and the overall situation in the country in the light of future developments. The report stated that in the medium term Slovakia had been successful in meeting the economic criteria as well as the level of adoption of *acquis*. However, due to the non-fulfilment of the political criteria defined by the Copenhagen summit in 1993, the European Commission did not recommend opening negotiations on accession immediately, but only after a certain time once Slovakia had made significant progress in this direction. For this reason, Slovakia was not invited to the 1998 accession negotiations and its relations with the EU were regulated by a specific Accession Partnership which focused in particular on those parts of the Copenhagen criteria which proved to be the most difficult for a particular country (Šíbl and Čiderová 2002). Nevertheless, the trade preferences included in the Association Agreement, signed by the former Czech and Slovak Federative Republic in 1992 and which Slovakia subsequently entered into after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993, naturally redirected trade to the EU regardless of political issues.

As one of the results of this shift, trade with Ukraine should have been in decline during the Slovakia’s pre-accession period. Thus the history of mutual trade between Slovakia and Ukraine has its own story. While Ukrainian trade with Hungary, Poland and Russia has been increasing in the course of 1993 – 1995, Slovak-Ukrainian trade has been stagnating. The values of Slovak-
Ukrainian trade according to the Slovak statistics were, as follows: 273 million USD in 1993; 240 million USD in 1994; and 310 million USD in 1995. The announced massive increase in trade dynamics forecasted by both then prime ministers of Ukraine and Slovakia after the governmental meeting in Štrbské Pleso (High Tatras in Slovakia) came not to be a reality and reached the sum of 418 million USD in 1996. Another meeting of governmental delegations took place in Uzhgorod in March 1997. Both sides focused first of all on problems associated with a mode of payment, which they identified as the biggest obstacle for developing bilateral trade. Almost 25 % of Slovak exports to Ukraine and 33 % of Ukrainian exports to Slovakia at that time has been realized via barter exchange. In Uzhgorod both sides concluded seven bilateral intergovernmental and inter-ministerial agreements, e.g. agreement on mode of payments in bilateral trade, reciprocal employment of citizens, transport cooperation, etc. Among others both sides signed also “Memorandum on steps leading toward liberalization of bilateral trade”, in which Slovakia declared its support for Ukraine what concerns Ukraine’s accession to WTO and CEFTA (Duleba et al. 2017a).

Table 2  Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral trade in 1993 – 2003 (USD million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>142.4</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>188.7</td>
<td>241.3</td>
<td>250.7</td>
<td>181.2</td>
<td>144.8</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>194.1</td>
<td>186.9</td>
<td>233.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export</td>
<td>130.9</td>
<td>119.1</td>
<td>121.7</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>229.2</td>
<td>136.2</td>
<td>147.1</td>
<td>145.5</td>
<td>155.8</td>
<td>221.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td>273.3</td>
<td>240.1</td>
<td>310.4</td>
<td>418.3</td>
<td>520.7</td>
<td>410.4</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>336.1</td>
<td>339.6</td>
<td>342.7</td>
<td>455.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>-11.5</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>-67</td>
<td>-64.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-8.6</td>
<td>-41.9</td>
<td>-48.6</td>
<td>-31.1</td>
<td>-11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic.

The Slovak-Ukrainian trade turnover topped at the level of 520,7 million USD in 1997, while in next two years a significant decline in mutual trade dynamics has been caused by the impact of the Russian financial crisis. Starting from 2000 the Slovak-Ukrainian trade exchange shows a slight growth, corresponding to the slow recovery of Ukrainian economy and the changing character of legal and institutional framework for mutual trade. The Slovak-Ukrainian treaties including the bilateral legal arrangements in field of trade and economic cooperation signed in the course of 2000 – 2003 corresponded to the EU acquis which Slovakia was obliged to follow in its relations with the third countries, while the bilateral legal documents signed before 2000 had to be revised and consequently adjusted to the EU acquis (Benč et al. 2006).
It should be noted that the Slovak and Ukrainian statistical data on bilateral trade differ significantly in this period, especially when it comes to the Ukrainian exports to Slovakia. As to the Ukrainian statistics the bilateral trade turnover for 9 months of the year of 2002 in comparison with the equal period of 2001 grew out in 9.1 % and presented the sum of 316.6 million USD, exports to Slovakia went up in 16.2 % (219.6 million USD) and imports from Slovakia declined in 4.2 % (97.1 million USD). On the other side the following are Slovak data for the same period: the total turnover dropped in 3.2 % presenting the sum of 245 million USD, Slovak imports from Ukraine declined in 12.0 % (133.9 million USD) and exports to Ukraine grew out in 7.3 % and reached the sum of 111.6 million USD. As to the Ukrainian statistics, the passive trade balance of Slovakia in bilateral trade was 122.5 million USD while as to the Slovak evidence – 22,0 million USD for the same period. As to the representatives of the Slovak Ministry of Economy statistical evidence on bilateral trade differs not much in case of Ukrainian imports from Slovakia but quite significantly in respect of Ukrainian exports following the fact that Ukrainian statistics does register some exports to the Czech Republic as exports to Slovakia, because the customs union between Slovakia and the Czech Republic, however in fact those exports only transit the Slovak territory (Duleba 2005c).

The following are the main treaties signed on the intergovernmental level that regulated Slovak-Ukrainian economic and trade cooperation in the years 1993 – 1998 were: Agreement on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation (signed on 26th August 1993), Agreement on support and

There were two major issues inherited from the Soviet period that have troubled mutual Slovak-Ukrainian trade and economic relations. The construction of a metallurgic complex in Ukraine (Kriviy Rih – Dolinskaya, thereafter KTUK) was initiated by the governments of countries associated in the former COMECON. Czechoslovak participation included construction of a magnetic separation shed, 1500 apartments, kindergarten, school and other public facilities. Czechoslovak investments covered 13.7% of total costs of construction – so the expected return was also 13.7% of plant production in the period of 10 years after the end of project construction. The actual activity of COMECON ended in 1990 as a result of the economic and political changes in its former member states. The construction of the complex was stopped and Prague submitted its claims to Moscow hoping to receive compensation for its invested resources. Ukraine took over the duties stemming from common activities of COMECON on its own territory after gaining independence at the end of 1991. However, the liabilities arising from contractual relations have not been met since 1992, when construction was interrupted by all parties involved, resulting in a long lasting and complicated series of negotiations regarding the method of settlement of mutual rights and obligations of unfinished KTUK construction (for more see chapter 1.1). Particularly because of the disorganized contractual situation, which originated as early as the beginning of the project, and despite repeated negotiations in 1995 and 2001, the state of affairs around the former joint project in Dolinskaya remains unclear (Lomíček 2014).

There has been also another, much more important problem in Slovak-Ukrainian relations, which is not just a legacy of the Eastern bloc past in terms of its political importance, but is rather a product of the last few decades, affecting the “living interests” of both actors. This conflict has stemmed from the different positions of Ukraine and Slovakia on the issue of the transit of Russian raw energy materials through Ukrainian and Slovak territories to Europe (for more see Chapter 1.1).
2.2 Bilateral economic relations after Slovakia’s accession to the EU

In the wake of Slovakia’s EU accession in May 2004 and the rapid growth of both the Ukrainian and Slovak economies, we can see a dynamic upward trend in mutual trade in the years 2004-2008, especially when it comes to the volume of Slovak exports to Ukraine, which has almost tripled within this short period. This scenario did not fully repeat itself after the crisis; we can see higher volumes of imports from Ukraine than ever before, but the Slovakia’s exports have not reached the levels of 2007 – 2008. The significant impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on foreign trade has been apparent since 2014 and is reflected in Ukraine’s bilateral trade with Slovakia (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

Ukraine has been a member of the WTO since May 2008. Prior to the DCFTA introduction, more than 70 % of Ukrainian exports to the EU (engineering products, vegetable products, oils, metals, chemical industry products, textiles) benefited from reference tariffs within the Generalised Scheme of Preferences as of 1993 (European Commission 2019; Benč and Mytryaeva 2011). The AA/DCFTA aims to boost trade in goods and services between the EU and Ukraine by gradually cutting tariffs and bringing Ukraine’s rules in line with the EU’s in certain industrial sectors and agricultural products. Ukraine has committed to adapt norms and standards relating to market competition, government procurement, trade facilitation, intellectual property protection, investment and transport. Due to the production potential of Ukraine the DCFTA constitutes a great opportunity to enhance the competitiveness and modernization of the Ukrainian economy and the diversification of Ukrainian exports (Deep and Comprehensive 2015). Small and medium sized enterprises (SME) in Ukraine can receive support from the EU’s SME Flagship Initiative, which allows SMEs in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova to access approximately 200 million EUR of EU grants (European Commission 2014). This funding adds to the new trading opportunities with the EU, including with the Slovak market, which have been created by DCFTA.

After the DCFTA provisional implementation of January 1st 2016, the data has shown an upward trend in mutual Slovak-Ukrainian trade volumes but only since 2017. The reasons include the fact that the DCFTA implementation

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19 The Association Agreement became fully and formally effective only after completion of the ratification process by all EU Members as of 1st September 2017.
found Ukraine underprepared when it came to necessary changes in legislation and the institutional framework. On the other hand, the current lower performance of the Ukrainian economy still results from the economic downturn caused by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Ukrainian GDP dropped by -17% within 2014–2015). Since 2016, when Ukraine lost also part of its industrial enterprises, the real GDP has grown only moderately. Ukraine has also faced several restrictive trade measures imposed by the Russian Federation which have affected its overall trade. Thanks to the DCFTA, however, Ukrainian and EU businesses have received stable preferential market access. The EU has reinforced its position as Ukraine’s main trade partner and Ukraine’s overall trade with the EU increased by 28.4% in the period January – July 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. Ukraine has slowly reoriented its exports towards the EU and economic stabilisation has been supported by prudent macroeconomic policies and significant international financial and technical assistance, including the Macro-Financial Assistance programme provided by the EU. Further EU autonomous concessionary trade measures (ATMs) included in the DCFTA for certain industrial goods and agricultural products (wheat, maize, barley, barley groats and pellets, natural honey, processed tomatoes, grape juice, oats) were adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in September and entered into force on October 1st 2017 (Association Implementation 2017).

At the same time, it is very likely that the current macroeconomic stabilization will change to stagnation. After the presidential elections in 2019, politicians are already preparing for the upcoming parliamentary elections, which may also “freeze” the implementation of unpopular reforms. In this situation, the implementation of the IMF assistance program may be jeopardized, and this may mean a risk of a further default. The implementation of further deeper reforms is currently stagnating (especially the agenda regarding transport, social welfare, labour law and customs regulations), although the Verkhovna Rada, for the remaining period, has adopted several important laws in the economic field (related to the energy sector, public procurement and environmental protection). However, some time will be needed to bring the progressive changes into practice as well. It should be also noted that many progressive laws and measures are accepted by the Verkhovna Rada only up to the “threat” of stopping or postponing financial and other assistance from the main donors of Ukraine (Ekonomická informácia 2018).

In the light of the data presented in Table 2 and Figure 2 we can conclude that the volumes of Ukrainian exports to Slovakia have been increasing since 2017, though the dynamics of Slovak exports to Ukraine are much lower so
far, not even reaching the volumes from 2007 – 2008. In the long run, the share of Slovak mutual trade with Ukraine in the country’s total foreign trade turnover is around 1 % and more or less the same with regard to Ukrainian foreign trade statistics. In general, the abovementioned figures show that the current state of affairs in bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian trade reflects neither their foreign trade potential nor their geographical proximity. Nor do the projected trends of Slovak foreign trade until 2020 mention Ukraine among the top ten trading partners of Slovakia, though Czech Republic, Poland, Austria and Hungary rank in the top ten both in the case of expected imports and exports from Slovakia (Projekcia vývoja 2019). Slovakia does rank within the top ten foreign trade partners when it comes to Ukrainian foreign trade statistics either, unlike the two neighbouring countries in the region – Poland and Hungary, which have long been among the most important trading partners of Ukraine. The share of Slovakia at present represents 3.7 % of Ukraine’s foreign trade with the EU countries, 10.9 % of Ukraine’s foreign trade with the V4 countries and 11.2 % of Ukraine’s foreign trade with the countries participating in the Carpathian Euroregion.20

Table 3  Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral trade in 2004 – 2018 (EUR million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Import</td>
<td>340,3</td>
<td>417,6</td>
<td>500,2</td>
<td>448,4</td>
<td>524,2</td>
<td>250,7</td>
<td>445,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export</td>
<td>245,4</td>
<td>317,3</td>
<td>464,7</td>
<td>571,8</td>
<td>691,7</td>
<td>291,8</td>
<td>368,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td>585,7</td>
<td>734,9</td>
<td>964,9</td>
<td>1020,2</td>
<td>1215,9</td>
<td>542,5</td>
<td>814,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>-94,9</td>
<td>-100,3</td>
<td>-35,5</td>
<td>123,4</td>
<td>167,5</td>
<td>41,1</td>
<td>-76,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

One of the important characteristics of the trade between Slovakia and Ukraine is the long lasting commodity concentration of Ukrainian exports to Slovakia, where the vast majority of is represented by supplies of raw

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20 The Carpathian Euroregion is one of the largest Euroregions and the oldest one in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. It associates the border territories of the Eastern Carpathians in five countries: Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Ukraine.
materials for further processing in the Slovak Republic (figures of 2017: metal ores – 51.8%; electrical machinery and equipment, sound recorders and TV picture equipment – 13.7%; iron and steel – 8.4%; mineral fuels, mineral oils – 6.7%). Ukraine has traditionally exported to Slovakia mainly raw materials, mineral fuels and lubricants, industrial products, machinery and transport equipment. We can conclude that the export from Ukraine to Slovakia is in its sectoral cross-section representative of overall structure of exports of Ukraine to the EU.

When it comes to the ratio of the gross value added, there is a different situation regarding the commodity structure of Slovakia’s exports to Ukraine, recently dominated by machinery and transport equipment, industrial products, chemicals and raw materials (the most important export items in 2017 were as follows: vehicles other than railway, and parts thereof – 17.2%; mineral fuels, mineral oils – 12.3%; nuclear reactors, boilers, machines, apparatuses – 10.9%; iron and steel – 10.2%; plastics and articles thereof - 7.4%; salt, sulphur and soils – 6.2%; uncoated paper and paperboard – 5.3%; electrical machinery and equipment, sound recorders and TV picture equipment – 3%). The increase in the export of technological components occurred in 2007–2008 in connection with the launch of production in several industrial branches after the FDI arrival (Deák et al. 2016). During this period, we can especially observe a significant increase of the share of machinery and transport vehicles in Slovak exports to Ukraine. The dynamic growth in exports of engineering production to Ukraine was later slowed by the economic crisis, which in 2009 caused a fall in incomes and demand in the Ukrainian market and a decline in Slovak industrial production. All things considered, the impact of the economic crisis on the development of Slovak-Ukrainian trade was mainly of a financial and not of a structural nature, which has been confirmed by the lack of dramatic changes in the commodity structure of bilateral trade in recent years.

Ukraine’s export of services to Slovakia is dominated by transport services, business services, services for processing material resources and construction services. The imports of services from Slovakia are also driven by transport services. Among the most significant services imported to Ukraine from Slovakia also services in the field of telecommunications, computer and information, business services and travel related services. When it comes to tourism, since 1990s Ukrainians have represented a significant part of the clientele at Slovak spa facilities as well as for winter holidays in Slovak ski resorts, though apart from minor changes, there was no great shift in tourist numbers between Ukraine and Slovakia until 2017. According to the tourism
statistics published by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic there was a significant increase in the number of Ukrainian visitors in 2018 (26 % year-to-year change, 66,791 Ukrainian visitors in total) as well as in the number of their overnight stays (34.4 % year-to-year change, 240,509 overnight stays of Ukrainian visitors in total), which was a continuing trend in 2019 (Štatistiky a analýzy 2019).

Penetration of Slovak companies into the Ukrainian market is at present important not only due to the size of the market, its relative unsaturation and geographical and cultural proximity, but also with respect to the expected future consolidation of this market, the prospect of Ukraine’s European integration, and the gradual penetration of the Ukrainian market by domestic and foreign companies. The Ukrainian market offers considerable potential for Slovak companies, taking full advantage of it depending on the implementation of economic reforms by the Ukrainian government, the pace of standardization of business and investment environment, as well as the progress of European integration. The prospective areas of bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation include the energy sector (reconstruction of power supply systems, improvement of energy efficiency, and use of alternative and renewable energy sources), infrastructure, agro-food sector (processing of agricultural products), environmental protection, the machine industry, metallurgy, the chemical industry and tourism.

As stated in the official analysis (Ekonomická informácia 2018), the most serious obstacles to doing business in Ukraine are the persisting large gaps
in Ukrainian legislation, as well as the fact that it is difficult to adapt the legislation there to standard international conditions. The specifics of the Ukrainian market are also associated with supply mostly exceeding demand, low purchasing power of the population, as well as with an underdeveloped and weak middle-class population.

Entrepreneurs going to Ukraine complain about problems with VAT refunds from the state, the persistent high level of corruption and the frequent violation of negotiated contracts (Ekonomická informácia 2018). The Association Implementation Report on Ukraine of November 14 2017 points out that considerable legislative reforms have taken place in the fight against corruption (Association Implementation 2017). However, ensuring sustainable and tangible changes in the governance system to eliminate corruption opportunities and ensure proper prosecution and punishment for corruption-related crimes remains one of the key challenges Ukraine faces in its reform process and is a key barrier to improvement of the business and investment climate there.

The total amount of foreign direct investment in Ukraine in 2017 reached 1.817 billion USD, a record low volume during the past eight years. Compared to 2016 it was a decline of 57.5 %, FDI having bee 4.405 billion USD the previous year. The largest part (35 % of the total amount) of FDI was directed to the financial sector of the Ukrainian economy while another 28 % of FDI went to Ukrainian industry. According to the State Statistical Service of Ukraine, the largest amount of investment came to Ukraine from Cyprus (506 million USD, a share of 27 %). The second largest investor in Ukraine was the Russian Federation, which invested 396 million USD (a share of 21.2 %) into the Ukrainian economy. These countries were followed by the Netherlands (262.5 million USD, a share of 14 %), the United Kingdom (211.7 million USD, 11.3 %) and Germany (119.3 million USD, 6.4 %) (it should be added here that the management companies of most Ukrainian metallurgical and woodworking factories are registered in offshore countries such as Cyprus and the Netherlands). Ukraine has the potential to attract

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21 It is important to mention that there have been several positive changes regarding VAT refunds. Since January 10, 2017, the Single Tax Return Register has been located on the State Tax Office of Ukraine website. The register is publicly accessible, but it is not yet possible to ascertain how much money was not returned or how many applications were rejected etc. Due to this relatively short time it is too early to evaluate the functionality of this system. Another positive change consists in the fact that mandatory decisions of the State Tax Office of Ukraine (as of April 1, 2017) have been abolished. Before, the company requesting VAT refund also had to receive a positive decision of the State Tax Office of Ukraine. Only after this decision was the funds for VAT refund sent to the State Treasury after which the company was able to obtain them.
more foreign investments. International rankings, however, point to legal and judicial unpredictability and an inadequate institutional framework as the main obstacles to improving the business and investment climate.

According to the State Statistical Service of Ukraine, Slovak companies had invested in Ukraine by 31st December 2013 a cumulative total amount of 99.7 million USD, while by 31st December 2017 it was 75.4 million USD, which is surely not one of the highest FDI inflows to the Ukrainian economy. At present the share of Slovak FDI in Ukraine represents 0.2% of the total FDI in Ukrainian economy, 0.3% of the FDI coming to Ukraine from the EU countries and 5.7% of the FDI coming to Ukraine from the V4 countries. Nevertheless, the amount of Slovak investment is higher than, or similar to the FDI coming e.g. from Spain, Belgium, Ireland and the Czech Republic. Despite hindrances, Ukraine is nowadays becoming an interesting investment destination for Slovak entities for various reasons including the devaluation of the Ukrainian hryvnia against the euro, the relatively high cost of domestic capital, significant investment demand in Ukraine, the efforts of the Ukrainian government to improve the investment and business climate, as well as Ukraine’s cooperation with international financial institutions. As of 1 May 2018, EXPRO Consulting listed on its website the Slovak-based NAFTA a.s. (part of the EPH holding), which will act as technical operator under a production sharing agreement on the Yuzivska gas field in eastern Ukraine and together with the Slovenský plynárenský priemysel, a.s. (SPP) invest $200 million within five years (EXPRO 2018). In December 2018, the Ukrainian government approved a gas distribution agreement between the State and Yuzgaz B.V., which gained the opportunity to extract gas under the so-called Yuzivska License (Slováci 2018). So far this will be the largest Slovak foreign direct investment ever.

A different story is the Ukrainian direct investment in Slovakia. As the vast majority of the Ukrainian FDI (about 97% of the total volume of direct investments into EU countries) has been directed to Cyprus, with the main intention to avoid taxation, there has been no significant Ukrainian investment in the Slovak economy so far. According to the Slovak National Bank the Ukrainian FDI in Slovakia amounted to minus 5,638 million EUR (represented by the debt instruments) as of 31st December 2014, while as published in the final data for the FDI inward position of Slovak Republic it was minus 2,430 million EUR by the end of 2016, (the data for 2017 mentions minus 2,053 EUR) – thus the figures do not reflect the reality perfectly, since Ukrainian companies can invest in Slovakia through their subsidiaries located abroad or in the Slovak Republic. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning
that recently the dynamics of Ukrainian investments in Slovakia may have changed. An analysis by the consulting company Bisnode shows that in Slovakia from 2016 to 2018 up to 342 new companies with Ukrainian owners were established. More companies in the same period were established only by Czechs and Hungarians (Ukrajinci 2018).

### 2.3 Conclusions

The DCFTA in general offers Ukraine a framework for modernising its trade relations and for economic development by the opening of markets via the progressive removal of customs tariffs and quotas, and by an extensive harmonisation of laws, norms and regulations in various trade-related sectors, creating the conditions for aligning key sectors of the Ukrainian economy to EU standards. When it comes to Ukrainian foreign trade, we may conclude that its intensification is nowadays dynamic especially with Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, and the Baltic countries, while the increase of exports and imports with the neighbouring countries, including Slovakia is moderate.

The statistics on foreign trade show that Ukrainian exports to Slovakia increased faster than Slovak exports to Ukraine (which have not even returned to levels of 2007 - 2008 so far). In the case of industrial goods, there is already a visible impact of the tariffs removal on most products, with exceptions for a few, for which a transition period exists, in particular for the automotive sector in the case of Ukraine. For agricultural goods, duty-free tariff rate quotas have been granted to Ukraine for cereals, pork, beef, poultry and a handful of additional products, while for others the progressive elimination by the EU of the custom duties will occur over a longer transition period. This also means a relatively slower increase so far of Ukrainian-Slovak cross-border trade in terms of small and medium sized enterprises in the agro-food sector. To stimulate opportunity for bilateral trade, the DCFTA’s Chapter 4 aims to facilitate trade in sanitary and phytosanitary related goods including animals, animal products, plants and plant products. Along with harmonisation and/or mutual recognition of technical standards, it should markedly cut existing non-tariff barriers especially in the case of the agro-food sector.

Ukraine will, over the next few years, adopt current and future EU legislation on public procurement. This means that, with the exception of defence procurement, Ukrainian suppliers and service providers will have full access to Slovak public procurement market, and Slovak suppliers and service
providers will have equal access to the Ukrainian public procurement market. The respective DCFTA chapter on public procurement can be seen as an unprecedented example of the integration of Ukraine as a non-EEA-Member into the EU Single Market.

Labour migration is de facto beyond the DCFTA, as the free movement of persons is restricted to short-term visa-free visits – free movement of labour is exclusive to EU countries. The DCFTA represents a lower degree of macroeconomic integration than the EU single market, where all four economic freedoms are ensured: free movement of goods, services, capital and labour. Nevertheless, in the wake of the visa-free regime introduced in 2017, statistics of the Slovak Central Office on Labour, Social Affairs and Family show that there has been a significant increase of Ukrainians working in Slovakia. While there were only 1,388 Ukrainians working in Slovakia in December 2016, one year later their number had increased to 2,879. In December 2018 there were already 8,473 Ukrainians working in Slovakia and the increase continued exponentially in 2019 as well (12,870 as of June 2019) (Zamestnávanie cudzincov 2019). At present, the majority of the incoming Ukrainian workforce is employed in more developed regions of Western and Central Slovakia (only a maximum of 20 % of them work in the Prešov and Košice regions), mostly on short- and medium-term contracts up to 24 months as operators and installers of machinery and equipment, or as skilled workers and craftsmen.
From the perspective of cross-border cooperation (hereinafter referred as to “CBC”) multileveled interactions and several groups of stakeholders can be identified, including on an intergovernmental level. With the aim to develop Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation, the Slovak-Ukrainian (Ukrainian-Slovak) Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation (hereinafter referred as to “the Commission”) was established. This study examines the formation and institutional genesis of the Commission, its declared official objectives and its contribution to the development of the Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation. In this text we analyse the technical and departmental structure of the Commission’s members representing both countries. The aim of the study is to analyse the problems and areas of the main activities of the Commission and also to evaluate the success of these activities and the tools the Commission employs in its work.

The main source of information for the presented analysis is the Statute of the Slovak-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation (Štatút 2004) and the Commission’s Protocols. We work here with two kinds of protocols. The first kind involves protocols of the Slovak-Ukrainian (Ukrainian-Slovak) Working Group on CBC (hereinafter referred as to “the Group”). The other includes protocols of the Commission itself. However, it should be noted that the two kinds of protocols are not elaborated in a uniform manner which would strictly follow the structure of their texts and annexes. The way the protocols were drafted will be examined in several partial questions that this analysis deals with. Also photographs supplemented by commentaries that are attached to protocols since the eighth meeting of the Commission in 2010 serve as an additional source of information about its activities.22

22 The inconsistent and incomplete way of processing documents from the meetings makes...
3.1 From the Working Group towards the Commission

The establishment of the Commission is a result of the previous preparatory activity of the Group that first met on March 7, 2003, in Michalovce (Slovakia). The Group was established following the initiative of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine pursuant to the Agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on Cross-Border Cooperation (hereinafter referred to as to “the Agreement”) (Dohoda 2001). Article 7 of the Agreement provides for the following: “With the aim to promote and coordinate cross-border cooperation, when necessary, the parties shall form a Commission whose composition, venues of meetings and financial arrangements shall be laid down by its Statute. In order to address specific issues, the Commission may establish working groups.” Consequently, Article 8 of the Agreement says: “Any costs of delegations in the Commission shall be borne by each party. Any costs associated with activities of the working groups shall be borne by entities appointed to participate in their work”. These are the basic articles of the Agreement that frame the Commission’s activities.

At the second meeting of the Group (Uzhhorod, December 11, 2003), the Ukrainian delegation came up with a proposal on the creation of a bilateral Commission on CBC which was accepted by the Slovak side. Consequently, both parties negotiated the Statute of the Commission (Štatút 2004), which was finally approved at the third meeting of the Working Group (Zemplínska Šírava, May 4 ‒ 6, 2004), which simultaneously became the first meeting of the Commission.

3.2 Structure, members and participants

The Statute reveals that the Commission consists of the two national parts, Slovak and Ukrainian. The composition of national parts of the Commission is difficult to identify all presented participants. When it comes to documents of the Group’s meetings, the lists of participants from both sides are fully available. However, in the case of Commission protocols no 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11, only lists of participants from Slovakia are available. In some cases, information can be obtained from the aforementioned photo-documentation of the meeting, which, however, does not include the names of all the institutions represented by participants. With this critical comment we would like to point out that our goal was not to get an exact list of the meetings’ participants, but to identify institutions and/or organisations from both sides, which are engaged in the work of the Commission.
lies within the competence of the parties in accordance with their national laws.

The Commission is co-chaired by the heads of its national parts. The head of the Slovak part is the State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. The co-chair of the Commission and the head of its Ukrainian part is the First Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Construction, Housing and Communal Services (Zloženie 2018). The co-chairs of the Commission and the heads of national delegations represent the Commission within its competences laid down by the Statute. In accordance with the national laws of their countries they appoint their deputies, Executive Secretaries and members of the Commission. The deputy co-chair of the Slovak side of the Commission is the Director General of the Public Administration Section at the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. On the Ukrainian side, the deputy co-chair is the Head of the Regional State Administration of the Transcarpathian Region (Zloženie 2018).

Each national delegation appoints an Executive Secretary of the Commission whose task is to provide organisational support for the respective national part of the Commission, including preparation of the meetings, and communication with the other national part between the Commission’s meetings. In the case of the Slovak Republic this post has been occupied by Commission members who had the following positions in the national public administration: Director of the Department on International and Cross-Border Cooperation at the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, Director of the Department on Local State Administration, Self-Governmental Authorities and Foreign Relations at the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (represented in the current composition of the Commission). On the Ukrainian side as a rule the post of the Commission’s Executive Secretary is taken by an official from the Department on Regional Development at the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine (represented also in the current composition of the Commission). In order to address problems in specific fields of cross-border cooperation the Commission has the competence to form Working Groups which should report on their activities to the co-chairs of the Commission.

Neither the Agreement nor the Statute regulates the number of Commission members, nor do the above documents stipulate rules for the appointment of heads of the Commission’s national parts and/or their members. The

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23 In addition to the publicly available information on the website of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, this information was verified also by the Department on Local State Administration, Self-Governmental Authorities and Foreign Relations at the Slovak Interior Ministry through email correspondence dated January 10, 2019.
documents leave the sole responsibility for the composition of the Commission to the partners. Currently the Commission consists of, apart from the aforementioned Executive Secretaries, representatives of the following institutions – the Slovak part: representative of the Department on Spatial Planning at the Ministry of Environment of the SR, Director of the Department on Eastern European countries at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the SR, Deputy Director General of the Customs Directorate of the SR, Head of the Customs Department at the Financial Administration of the SR, Chairman of the Prešov Self-Governing Region, Head of the Office of the Chairman of the Košice Self-Governing Region, Director of the Department on Road Management at the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the SR; the Ukrainian part: Head of the Environment Section at the Regional State Administration of the Transcarpathian Region, Ambassador-et-large on special tasks at the Fourth Territorial Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Head of the Customs Infrastructure of the Department of Border Crossings at the Customs Directorate of Ukraine (Zloženie 2018). The Commission may invite national experts and advisers to its sessions following its agenda.

As a rule, the Commission meets twice a year, alternately in the Slovak Republic and Ukraine. The agenda, venue and date of the Commission’s meeting are approved in advance by the co-chairs of the Commission and heads of its national parts. The working languages of the proceedings are Slovak and Ukrainian with simultaneous translation. Protocols from the meetings are also drawn up in both languages.

It can be clearly seen from the protocols that the Commission has established specific Working Groups; however, the proceedings and outcomes of their activities are not fully covered by the Commission’s protocols. The proceedings of the Working Groups, outcomes of their activities, including their personal composition, can be only partly reconstructed following the analysis of the protocols.

Apart from the aforementioned structure of the Commission, it is possible to identify the following institutions that regularly participate in its meetings as follows – Slovak part: Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Financial Administration, Customs Office in Čierna nad Tisou, Office of Border and Alien Police of the Presidium of Police Corps, Administration of the Prešov Self-Governing Region, Administration of the Košice Self-Governing Region, Consulate General of the Slovak Republic in Uzhhorod, Fire Protection and Rescue Service Corps, Ministry of Environment, and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association.
In the case of the Ukrainian part, the following institutions can be identified as permanent members of the Commission: the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Regional State Administration of the Transcarpathian Region, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Customs Administration, Transcarpathian Regional Customs Office, Ministry of Interior, National Institute for Strategic Studies at the Administration of President of Ukraine, State Committee on State Border Protection, and the Ministry on Emergency Situations and Protection of Population from Consequences of the Chernobyl Catastrophe.

Ad hoc participants in the Commission’s activities on the Slovak side include representatives of the business sector (for example, SESO, spol. s r.o., Vranov nad Topľou), or institutions such as the Slovak-Ukrainian Institute for Humanitarian Initiatives, Civic Activities Support Foundation and so on. Ad hoc members also include representatives of municipalities – most frequently mayors of municipalities located in the border regions as well as non-governmental organizations that are active in Slovak-Ukrainian CBC.

On the Ukrainian side the following institutions attend meetings on an ad hoc, but not regular, basis: the Centre for Promotion of Business Activities in Lviv, Dipromisto Institute, State Committee of Ukraine on Construction and Architecture, Transcarpathian Region Land Improvement Management, Fire and Rescue Corps of the Transcarpathian Regional State Administration, Agency for Regional Development “Zakarpattia”, Chop Border Corps, and some others. Representatives of the media are also present, most frequently journalists from the Slovak governmental journal “Verejná správa” (Public Administration).

24 For instance, the mayor of Kaluža village Ján Čuchran attended the thirteenth session of the Commission held in Zemplínska Šírava on November, 21 – 22, 2017 (Protokol z 13. zasadnutia 2017).

25 Part 6 of the Protocol of the Fifth Session of the Commission entitled “Presentation of the Publication on ‘Ukraine’s Neighbours Before Entering the Schengen: a Call for Ukraine’ says: “The Commission agrees that NGO experts, Svitlana Mytrayeva (Ukraine) and Vladimír Benč (Slovak Republic) should be invited to the Commission’s meeting” (Protokol 2007a).

26 The journal “Verejná správa” (Public Administration) was published by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic between 1990 – 2010 (Verejná správa 2010).
3.3 Objectives and tasks

After scrutiny of the primary sources of the Commission we can conclude that its remit is divided into two main sets of goals and planned activities. The main purpose of its activities is defined by the Statute. Following the Statute both sides recognize that the territory of their common borderland represents peripheral areas within their countries. The Statute imposes on the Commission a task to develop CBC policy, including modalities for its implementation. In particular, the Statute identifies as the main task of the Commission the elaboration of proposals aimed at creating favourable legal, economic, financial and business conditions for the development of mutually beneficial cooperation in economic, social, scientific, engineering, cultural, educational, environmental and other areas of cross-border cooperation. Point 4 of part II of the Statute says: “The Commission shall promote initiatives of local and regional authorities towards starting and developing cross-border cooperation” (Štatút 2004).

Starting from Protocol 1, i.e. the second type of primary documents, the Commission has been seeking to contribute to the preparation of the “Project on Territorial Development of the Slovak-Ukrainian borderland areas”. The aforementioned document adopted at the first session of the Commission, which was held in Zemplínska Šírava on 6 and 7 May 2004, aims to gain better insight into the structure of intended activities and goals of the Commission (Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2004). The Commission is authorized to elaborate policy recommendations for organizations and institutions eligible to establish contacts and develop CBC with partners on the other side of the border. It should be stressed that both objectives and tasks identified by the Commission are presented in the Protocols in the form of policy recommendations rather than binding commitments and/or directives that have to be implemented by exactly identified institutions on both sides once they are agreed and identified by the Commission.

At the same time, our research into the Commission’s Protocols shows that the formulation of tasks in the form of policy recommendations is done very often in a vague and inconsistent manner. The Protocols of the Group do not include clear and exact formulations of tasks nor is there any special section that would identify a list of jointly agreed tasks as binding commitments. In Protocol 1 of the Group, particularly in its Annex 2, it is possible to find a formulation of tasks in some key areas of CBC (Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2003) which are listed in an overview table. However, as underlined above, they are not formulated as binding commitments that should be implemented.
by clearly identified institutions on both sides, but rather they have a form of policy recommendations to be taken into consideration in general. Each “task” listed in the table is supplemented by a description of the problem issue and brief reasoning why it should be addressed, however, it does not say who and/or what institutions should take responsibility to ensure its implementation. Conclusions of the Group listed in its Protocols are formulated in the same manner of policy recommendations, which, however, do not include specific information about how to address the identified tasks (Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2003; Protokol z 2. zasadnutia 2003). Protocols of the Commission may include a specific section on “tasks” that are attached to their texts sometimes in the form of an overview table with their list; however, this is not a rule as many Protocols of the Commission do not include any annexes, except for the list of participants in the given session of the Commission.

As an example, we can refer to the above noted Protocol 1 of the Group, which identified tasks especially in the field of protection of the common state border. In this context, the Protocol stressed the importance of cooperation of both sides on the project “Flood Risks Management in Slovakia and Ukraine”, implementation of which started in March 2001 and completion of which was expected in June 2004 (Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2003). However, in the respective Protocols of the Commission that have been adopted since 2004 there is no reference to whether the project was implemented, and if so, when it was implemented and who completed the task.27 One of the findings of our analysis says that, in addition to a vague formulation of tasks identified by the Commission, an essential problem of the Commission’s performance is the absence of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure the implementation of agreed activities.

Following the Statute and Protocol 1 of the Group it is possible to identify three main objectives of the Commission. The first one is to elaborate a conceptual document with the participation of experts from both sides that would serve as the strategy on CBC development addressing the main challenges faced by border areas that are often recognized as lagging behind

27 We have approached the Department on Local State Administration, Self-Governmental Authorities and Foreign Relations at the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, a representative of which currently holds the position of the Executive Secretary of the Slovak national part of the Commission, with a special request in order to learn how the monitoring and evaluation of system of the Commission’s activities works. However, the information we obtained refers on Protocols of the Commission, which as to the abovementioned Department, include assessment of the implemented activities. Thus, we did not get information that would refute our findings.
by the centres of both countries. The second one includes coordination of national policies and legislation and is aimed to create favourable conditions for CBC between regional and local actors. The third objective is to address the specific sectorial agenda of the borderland regions and to encourage CBC cooperation at the level of state administration and local self-governments, especially in the following sectorial fields: preservation of natural resources and environment, development of human resources, preservation of cultural heritage, development of transport infrastructure, and support for business-to-business contacts and cooperation with focus on SMEs (Štatút 2004; Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2003).

As to Protocol 3 of the Group, which is simultaneously Protocol 1 of the Commission, the priority areas for CBC cooperation also include education and raising public awareness in the borderland areas about Slovak-Ukrainian CBC (Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2004). Protocol 2 of the Commission notes that the Slovak-Ukrainian CBC should be adjusted to the priorities of the EU-Ukraine Neighbourhood Action Plan (Action plan 2005), which aims to support reforms in Ukraine as well as to develop and promote political and economic contacts between Ukraine and the EU Member States. The Protocol underlines that at the EU-Ukraine summit held in Kyiv on 1 December 2005, Ukraine achieved the status of a market economy country (Protokol z 2. zasadnutia 2005).

Looking at the main objectives of the Commission as they are identified in the Protocols from its first meetings, it is possible to highlight the following priority areas for Slovak-Ukrainian CBC: elaboration of a coordinated plan on territorial development of the borderland areas; a feasibility study on creation of industrial parks; improving conditions for CBC between municipalities and their associations – at the level of micro-regions; completion of the infrastructure of border-crossing passes with the aim of expanding their permeability; developing transport links in the borderland areas; improving transport capacities of railway and combined transport at the border transport centres located in Dobrá, Čierna nad Tisou, Chop, Záhony; cooperation in the field of flood prevention; adoption of measures aimed at improving the quality of water and water supply in the borderland areas; harmonisation of legal regimes relevant for the development of CBC; and preservation and protection of natural resources and cultural heritage of the CBC area. The abovementioned initial goals for the development of the sectorial focus of CBC have been determining the Commission’s activities to the present. The following part of the text offers a more in-depth view into the structure of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC.
The two main areas of CBC activity are as follows: the first may be called a “Neighbourhood Programme” and the second a “State Border Programme”. In terms of the first area, we put its name in quotation marks because it does not solely apply to the Programme of Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine Neighbourhood (Hungary-Slovakia 2004), which was implemented in the years of 2004–2006. On the Slovak side, INTERREG A Management Department within the scope of the Agency for the Regional Development Support at the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic took over responsibility for administering programmes and CBC projects in different sectorial fields that have been implemented by various governmental and NGO actors. In Hungary, the National Agency for Regional Development and, in Ukraine, the Ministry of Economy and European Integration of Ukraine were entrusted with that. The managing body responsible for the above Neighbourhood Programme in its dealings with the European Commission is the Joint Technical Secretariat based in Budapest. This level does not apply to a number of associated issues of the public administration, local government and foreign policy questions that are identifiable within the existing activities of the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian Commission on CBC. Nevertheless, by a “Neighbourhood Programme” of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC in a wider sense we mean here CBC projects implemented by various governmental and NGO actors in different sectorial fields.

The second main area of the Slovak-Ukrainian CBC cooperation, which we label a “State Border Programme” involves a number of bilateral initiatives related to the management of the common state border, including its protection, development of respective infrastructure as well as its legislative regime. This area includes also visa regulations, local border traffic and other aspects of legal cross-border migration. Bilateral cooperation in dealing with illegal migration at the Slovak-Ukrainian state border is a natural part of bilateral CBC cooperation. Analysing Protocols of the Commission we learned that both sides have been discussing for many years the need to increase the number of existing road border crossing points, adding to the existing two road border crossings (Ubľa-Malyj Bereznyj, Vyšné Nemecké-Uzhhorod) and two railway border crossing (Maťovské Vojkovce – Pavlovo, Čierna nad Tisou – Chop). Issues related to the development of border crossing infrastructure have been the most frequently discussed at the meetings of the Commission. However, the outcomes of the bilateral talks have been rather poor so far, especially when talking about the construction of the new road border crossing point Čierna - Solomonovo, which has been a subject of negotiation for many years at the Commission’s meetings, but is still far from becoming a reality.
Another area of CBC cooperation that is often on the agenda of the Commission’s meetings is interaction in the field of CBC economy and trade. In this regard it is possible to see many declarations in the form of the Commission’s conclusions, such as one included in point 4 of the Protocol from the first Commission’s meeting: “[...] Slovak-Ukrainian relations are in a new phase of their historic development being built on the basis of mutual benefits, transparency and standard relations” (Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2004).

In a similar vein, conclusions from the second meeting of the Commission, in the preamble of the respective Protocol say: “Presidents of national parts have stated that application of the principle of quality of bilateral cooperation between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine shall be developed at all levels. In this context they highlighted that regional and cross-border cooperation is of paramount importance in the ongoing processes of social and economic reforms in both countries, which should contribute to further development of bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation and promote good neighbourly relations” (Protokol z 2. zasadnutia 2005).

Management of water resources, including environmental protection of CBC regions, represents another frequently discussed field of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC. In this regard, the ninth meeting of the Commission should be noted since both sides achieved an agreement on supporting the conclusion of the trilateral agreement between the Ministry of Environment of Poland, Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic and Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Ukraine on cooperation on the protection of the cross-border biosphere reservation “Eastern Carpathians”. In the Protocol the Commission expressed its satisfaction with the status of cooperation within the international biosphere reservation “Eastern Carpathians” (MBR Východné Karpaty 2018) and the jointly initiated inclusion of Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians on the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites (UNESCO 2018). It should be noted that the field of protection of the environment and natural resources of the Slovak-Ukrainian borderlands is one of the areas in which bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation, thanks in part to the activities of the Commission, has been making good progress.

Education and rising public awareness of bilateral CBC is another frequently discussed area of bilateral interaction at the Commission’s meetings. In the Protocols there are many statements that the Commission acknowledges with information about CBC activities in the field of education and promotion of neighbourhood relations as can be illustrated by the following Commission’s opinion (point 4 of the Protocol of its fourth meeting): “The Commission welcomes the initiative taken by the Prešov Self-Governing Region, Košice

The cooperation between the municipalities of Snina and Velykyj Bereznyj, and/or Michalovce and Uzhhorod are often appreciated and taken as models for the development of CBC partnerships between other municipalities. For example, point 7 of Protocol 1 says: “The Commission takes note of the information about the positive experience of Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation in educational activities and appreciates the active cooperation between Snina and Velykyj Bereznyj in the field” (Protokol z 1. zasadnutia 2004).

In the conclusions of the Commission there are frequently repeated policy recommendations to the Košice Self-Governing Region and the Prešov Self-Governing Region to intensify cooperation with partners on the Ukrainian side of the border in various fields, especially in the field of education. In the Protocol of the second meeting of the Commission, held on 1 and 2 December 2005 in the municipality of Huta located in the Ivano-Frankivsk Region of Ukraine, the Commission concludes: “The Slovak side expressed an interest in providing technical and material support for Primary School no. 21 in Uzhhorod in teaching Slovak and other foreign languages” (Protokol z 2. zasadnutia 2005).

### 3.4 Funding of cross-border cooperation

Activities of the Commission are funded by the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine. The mission of the Commission is to coordinate, initiate and support CBC between Slovakia and Ukraine; however, the Commission itself does not have financial resources to fund the CBC projects. In its conclusions included in the Protocols from its meetings the Commission refers to other sources of funding, which it recommends use of with the aim to develop CBC in the above areas.

The first of the grant schemes, with respect to the chronology of the Commission’s Protocols with recommendations on sources of funding of CBC activities, is the DANCEE Programme (Danish Cooperation for Environment in Eastern Europe) managed by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency (DEPA). The Commission mentions this grant scheme in relation to the implementation of the Danish-Slovak-Ukrainian environmental and water protection project (Danish Cooperation 2018). The Commission’s
Protocols often refer to the Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine Neighbourhood Programme 2004 – 2006 (Hungary-Slovakia 2004). Further, there are many references of the Commission in its policy recommendations addressed to the Prešov and Košice Self-Governing Regions, including other actors of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC on the financial opportunities offered by the ENPI CBC Programme Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine-Romania, 2007 – 2013, which might serve as a source of funding bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian CBC projects. The same concerns references to the ENPI CBC Programme Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine-Romania for the period of 2014 – 2020 (ENPI 2019).

In the Commission’s recommendations to the Government of the Slovak Republic and the President of the Slovak part of the Commission (Protokol 2006b) there is an emphasis on the need to hold workshops for mayors of Slovak municipalities located in the Slovak-Ukrainian CBC area with participation of experts of the Foundation on Civic Activities Support in order to help the mayors prepare project applications. The Foundation on Support for Civic Activities served as the National Contact Point for the administration of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism in Slovakia in the period of 2004 – 2009. In 2009 together with the launch of the special sub-programme of the NFM aimed at supporting CBC of Slovak actors, NFM became one of the most important sources for funding of the Slovak-Ukrainian CBC. In parallel, the role of the National Contact Point for NFM was transferred from the Foundation to the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic (Granty EHP 2019).

3.5 Evaluation of outcomes

It can be concluded that the very nature of the Commission is to serve as a communication platform for intergovernmental consultations on a higher level and involving senior officials. Its main goal is to coordinate and promote CBC between Slovakia and Ukraine. Clearly, the very fact of the establishment of the Commission and its contribution to better coordination of Slovak-Ukrainian CBC is a long-term asset for bilateral relations on an intergovernmental level and, indeed, might be valued as a successful “project”, too.

The Commission is not an active participant in any concrete project activities; its support for CBC development stems from the fact that it allows competent authorities to discuss challenges and opportunities that have a potential to start cross-border cooperation beneficial for both parties. As a platform it
is particularly active in initiating and providing room for addressing issues related to the national border and visa policy. This is an area in which the most significant contribution of the Commission can be seen, but its activities also show substantial differences between the positions of both sides, including their failures in achieving agreed goals.

Undoubtedly we have to refer to the long-debated problem of the construction of the border crossing point Čierna – Solomonovo. The originally very promising plan to develop a necessary road infrastructure has been beset by a number of problems for a long time, in particular, on the Ukrainian side. Both sides stress the importance of building jointly planned road infrastructure that should be connected to the main transport routes in both countries. The construction of the Čierna – Solomonovo border crossing point has been on the agenda of bilateral talks since the second Commission’s meeting in 2005, where in point 7 of the respective Protocol, the Commission presented the following conclusion: “The Commission took note of the information on preparation of a working draft of the agreement between the governments of the Slovak Republic and Ukraine on construction and opening of the road connection and border crossing point Čierna – Solomonovo” (Protokol z 2. zasadnutia 2005).

From that moment all the following Protocols have dealt with the issue but without more clearly formulated positions or more developed arguments. The status quo in the matter in question may be best illustrated by the Commission’s Protocol from the 13th meeting; in point 2 of the respective Protocol it is stated that: “The Ukrainian side expressed concerns over the lack of progress in achieving the agreement between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on the construction of the new border crossing point Čierna -Solomonovo dated as of 11 October 2007. The Slovak side will seek opportunities for ensuring further preparation and implementation of the project as well as funding, including the opportunity to obtain European funds” (Protokol z 13. zasadnutia 2017).

There is a similar situation at the border crossing point Ulič - Zabriď whose launch was proposed by the Ukrainian side but which has long been considered as ineffective from the Slovak side. The above position was indicated by the Slovaks after inter-ministerial discussions at the Commission’s meeting held on 11 – 12 May 2006, and subsequently at the meeting held in Michalovce on 8 – 9 June 2011. The Commission’s conclusions include the following statement (point 4 of the respective Protocol): “The Commission takes note of the opinion of the Slovak side on opening of the border crossing point of Ulič-Zabrođ and the Commission does not foresee its construction for the
time being. The Ukrainian side informed of its readiness to approach the construction of the border crossing point Ulič-Zabroď once the Slovak side makes a positive decision” (Protokol 2011a). The similarity with the case of the Čierna - Solomonovo crossing point is reflected in this statement: “The Slovak side informed the Ukrainian side that it is ready to review the issue of opening the border crossing point of Ulič - Zabroď at a national level. It was agreed that the Prešov Self-Governing Region will prepare and submit project proposals for construction of roads between Ulič and state border, including ensuring its funding and determining the date for starting its construction” (Protokol z 13. zasadnutia 2017).

Another problem which burdens bilateral talks within the Commission, is the failure of Ukraine to modernize the infrastructure of the main crossing point at Vyšné Nemecké-Uzhhorod. In the Protocol of the 13th meeting of the Commission held in Zemplínska Šírava on 21 - 22 December 2017 it is stated that: “Both sides pledged that they were ready to approve amendments proposed by the Slovak side, a draft protocol between the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on amendment of the Agreement between the Governments of the Slovak Republic and Ukraine on border crossing points at the common state borders in relation to starting operation of the border crossing point for pedestrians and cyclists at the Slovak-Ukrainian border of Vyšné Nemecké-Uzhhorod. The Slovak side also calls the Ukrainian side to complete the infrastructure required for the implementation of the protocol before it is put into effect” (Protokol z 13. zasadnutia 2017). Outdated infrastructure on the Ukrainian side of the border crossing prolongs waiting times for crossing the state border in both directions.

Nonetheless, the Commission seems to be a very important intergovernmental platform for achieving bilateral agreements in addressing issues of common concerns; however, its capacity to deliver the implementation of agreed solutions, is rather limited. The Commission often underlines and recommends CBC actors to make use of consultancy services and assistance of the Joint Technical Secretariat in Budapest for ENPI CBC projects. In addition, it often refers to consultative support provided by Interreg, including its internet site, which offers useful information for the preparation, application, implementation and monitoring of CBC projects (Interreg 2018). The Commission for itself does not provide technical assistance to regional and local actors of CBC.

The role of the Commission and its very nature is to serve as an intergovernmental communication platform that brings together senior
officials of the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine together with regional and local administrations in the CBC area. It facilitates regular negotiations and creates opportunities for achieving common positions on issues relevant to CBC and the management of the common border. Policy recommendations that are presented in the form of conclusions and/or presentation of both sides’ positions are the main working tools the Commission can apply. However, as we have already pointed out, formulation of policy recommendations is often too vague. These recommendations are addressed to competent authorities of either state administration or regional and/or local governments, but, in many cases, without more exact specification.

The Commission is the platform for talks on principal issues in bilateral relations such as border management, border traffic in CBC area, environmental protection, including integration of Ukraine into the EU. It should be also noted that the Commission has proved to be effective and operational in addressing ad hoc challenges of common interests. For example, during the 2012 UEFA European Championship jointly held by Poland and Ukraine, agreements achieved by the Commission helped to manage the magnified flow of foreign visitors to Ukraine thanks to the strengthened transport rail connections between Slovakia and Ukraine (Protokol 2011b).
This chapter analyses the perception of Slovakia in Ukraine (the analysed media image of Slovakia in Ukraine is based on an analysis of information about Slovakia published in three selected opinion making media in Ukraine – Dzerkalo tyzhnya, UNIAN, and UA: Pershyi - in the period of 2004 – 2017) and the perception of Ukraine in Slovakia (the analysed media image of Ukraine in Slovakia is based on an analysis of information about Ukraine published in the same period in three selected opinion making media in Slovakia – RTVS, týždeň, and SME).

Slovakia and Ukraine are relatively new states that originated following the geopolitical transformation in Europe after the end of the Cold War. Both countries were focused during their first years of independence on building effective state institutions, carrying out economic and political reforms and defining the primary vectors of their foreign policy. The priorities and directions of the development of both countries differed from the very beginning of their existence as independent nations.

For Slovakia, the political processes related to its integration into the Western international structures were at the centre of its politics. The geographical and historical proximity of Europe did not mean that Slovaks had no room to choose their own path of development, nevertheless the foreign policy orientation of Slovakia was the subject of political speculations for many years, especially during the first years of its existence as independent nation. Slovakia has always paid strong attention to its relations with Russia, which is the main supplier of oil and natural gas to Slovakia, has a large business market and is an important factor of regional (in) stability.

Relations between Ukraine and Slovakia can perhaps be described as “pragmatic” and “balanced”. They bear no historical burdens, ideological problems or geopolitical speculations. Partnership is based on common interests, especially in the areas of security and energy. Slovakia is considered to be one of Ukraine’s best friends in the EU, and Ukraine for Slovakia means an opportunity to play a more active role in the region of Eastern Europe. However, we cannot ignore a Russian factor in Slovakia-Ukraine relations.
since Ukraine and Slovakia perceive Russia differently. For Ukraine, Russia is the primary threat to their national security, while for Slovakia it is an important long-term partner.

In bilateral relations, elements of conflict as well as disagreements and uncertainties exist, as they are always present in relations between neighbouring countries. However, relations between Slovakia and Ukraine are at the same time free of pointless scandals and historical mistrust. In terms of content their relationship might be labelled a “strategic partnership”. Their geography, history, cultural proximity – all of this creates great potential for cooperation. However, many myths that affect mutual perceptions, particularly those produced by the media, exist in both Ukrainian and Slovak society, and these myths often disrupt mutual perceptions. In today’s world, the creation of a country’s image is an outcome of exceptionally complex and mutually interconnected processes in the areas of domestic politics and foreign policy of the given country.

It is generally accepted that the image of a country on the international scene is formed through information about it obtained through official and unofficial channels, the media, the Internet etc. In this context it is necessary to note that a state’s information policy plays an important role in forming the image of the state on the international scene and in the international media, through which elements of manipulation, propaganda (marketing?), stereotypes and the like are created and disseminated. The information policy of a given country is especially important for the creation of its image and is made up of quantitative and qualitative elements. The first is associated with the frequency of mentioning a country and its place in information flows. The second is characterised by saturation of the information flows, the subject of reports, their tone and ordering of information. Information provided in one form or another can change the attitude of an information receiving person regarding certain matters and shape public opinion on affairs relating to social, economic and political spheres.

For an analysis of the image of Slovakia in Ukraine and vice versa, we selected three mass media that are among the most popular media in Ukraine and have a major influence on shaping public opinion. It is worth mentioning that an overwhelming majority of Ukrainian media is unprofitable and sponsored by financial and/or industrial groups with political interests. Only few media attempt to survive solely on advertising revenues; one of these is UA:Перший (in Ukrainian UA: Перший or UA: First in English), which is the main public television channel. That is why Ukrainian mass media are rather unsuccessful in maintaining their political impartiality.
1. *Dzerkalo tyzhnya* (Mirror of the Week) is a Ukrainian social-political weekly and one of the most influential analytical media in Ukraine. The newspaper was founded in Kyiv in 1994 and was first published in a Russian language edition under the name *Zerkalo nedeli*, but since 2002 has been published in both Russian and Ukrainian. Since the start of 2001 leading articles have also been published in English on the weekly’s Web page, where all three language versions are available along with a complete archive (*Zerkalo nedeli* 2019). In 2011 the newspaper was taken over by new owners and began to be published under the name “Informational and analytical weekly Dzerkal Tyzhnya. Ukraine”. Its owner and editor-in-chief is Yulia Mostovaya, a spouse of the political leader of the “Civic Position” party and former Minister of Defence, Anatoliy Hrytsenko. The weekly has its own correspondent in Slovakia, Jakub Loginov.

2. *UNIAN* (Ukrainian Independent Information and News Agency) is a news agency operating on the Ukrainian market since 1993 and producing materials in three languages (Ukrainian, Russian and English). In 2012 the management of UNIAN was changed, and the number of publications in Russian was increased on the Ukrainian page of the agency (UNIAN 2019). UNIAN is part of those media that are under the influence of oligarch Igor Kolomoyskyi. UNIAN became the first news agency in Ukraine to translate internet press conferences live. These are broadcast directly from the press centre of the agency to the whole world in various modes, including via online video.

3. *UA: Pershyj* (UA: the First) is the first nationwide Ukrainian public television channel established within the National Public Television of Ukraine; it has been operating since 7 April 2015. TeleKanal was replaced by a television broadcast under the logos of UT (1951 – 1991), UT-1 (1991 – 1998) and the First National (1998 – 2015). The founder and owner of the TV channel is the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (Ukrainian government).

Almost all main media in Slovakia are privately owned. Some belong to foreign media companies, while others belong to local entrepreneurs. There is also *Rozhlas a televízia Slovenska* (Radio and Television of Slovakia - RTVS), a public broadcaster which is often subject to the palpable influence of politicians. But, despite the financial dependence of RTVS on the state budget, unlike in Ukraine, it is capable of maintaining a kind of political impartiality, and the same usually applies to private media in Slovakia, too.
1. *Rozhlas a televízia Slovenska* (RTVS) is a Slovak public, national, informational, cultural and educational institution which offers a service to the public in the area of radio and television broadcasting (Rozhlas a televízia 2019). RTVS in its current shape originated on 1 January 2011 by the merging of Slovak Television and the Slovak Radio, which today represents one centralised institution, however, with distinct management of its two branches. The director of RTVS is elected by the Slovak parliament, which strengthens its status as an independent public service institution. Within a scope of mandatory national broadcasting for minorities, a regular Ukrainian magazine is produced – a journalist program which covers the life of the Ukrainian national minority in Slovakia (Ukrajinský magazín 2019).

2. *SME* is a daily Slovak newspaper which originated in 1993 on the basis of a protest of a group of journalists of the former daily paper *Smena* against the interference of government into their professional activities. The founding editor-in-chief of the *SME* daily was Karol Ježík. The daily focuses mainly on covering current affairs in Slovakia and abroad. It is published by the media company Petit Press and at present ranks among the most popular media in the country. *SME* also operates its online portal www.sme.sk. Mirek Tóda was the editor covering Ukrainian affairs until 2014 when he moved to the daily *Denník N*. In 2014 the financial group Penta took over the ownership rights of the *SME* publisher. Many core staff members left the *SME* daily in protested against the move; they have since established a new daily newspaper entitled *Denník N* (Diary N).

3. The magazine *týždeň*, established in December 2004, is a Slovak conservative weekly covering current political, economic and social affairs. It offers a critical examination of Slovakia’s politics and international developments while also focusing on economy, history culture and identity issues. Its editor-in-chief is Štefan Hrib, who is also the weekly’s founder. The magazine is published by the media company W PRESS a. s., in which Štefan Hrib is deputy chairman of the managing board.

The image of Slovakia in Ukraine and of Ukraine in Slovakia, including their mutual perception, can be identified through the following specific dimensions (Vorotnyuk 2016b, 7):

1. Political dimension – this mainly includes lessons learned from reforms and the democratic transformation of Slovakia as well as the support it provides to Ukraine in the field of European and Euro-Atlantic integration;
2. Security dimension – this concerns the experience of Slovakia during its
accession to NATO, especially when it comes to achieving interoperability with NATO standards. This might be utilized by Ukraine and may include participation of Slovakia and Ukraine in regional security initiatives;

3. Economic dimension – this includes trade and economic cooperation between the two countries, economic ties between the cross-border regions, and attempts to explore potential for further bilateral economic interaction;

4. Energy dimension – this involves issues related mainly to the transit of natural gas from Ukraine to Slovakia (from Russia) and the reverse flow of gas from Slovakia to Ukraine which started to operate in 2014. It also involves implementation of projects in the field of energy efficiency and the use of renewable sources of energy, including sharing the best practices in the field;

5. Humanitarian dimension – this is associated with humanitarian aid which Ukraine receives from Slovakia, but also with other aspects of Slovak-Ukrainian relations, e.g. issues related to the Ukrainian minority in Slovakia, cross-border cooperation, etc.

4.1 Political dimension

In terms of political development Ukrainian-Slovak relations have gone through various stages: the “indifferent neighbourhood” era of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar (1993 – 1998), the more active pro-Ukrainian policy of Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998 – 2006) and the policy of “balancing” or “dodging” between Ukraine and Russia under the government of Robert Fico (2006 – 2010, 2012 – 2018). Balancing is probably the key characteristic of the policy of both states in relation to each other. In the modern history of Ukraine, Slovakia has been viewed as a partner relations with which might help to achieve a balance between the desire to minimise the influence of Russia, alleviate conflicts with its Western neighbours – some of them are partners of Slovakia in the Visegrad Four – and also improve its relations with the EU. Slovakia for its part has been trying to find a balanced approach towards the region of Eastern Europe that would include Russia as an important economic and security partner, but at the same time assist Ukraine in its post-Soviet transformation, support its European aspirations, preserve the regional security system and, of course, pursue its own interests vis-à-vis Ukraine and the region of a post-Soviet Eastern Europe.
Slovak experience in the field of post-communism transition and democratization is well accepted in Ukraine. A good illustration of this is a series of television programs on the channel UA: Pershyi “Made in Europe: Slovakia”. The series presented successful reforms in Slovakia, including the way it managed to get back onto the track of integration into the EU and NATO after it was excluded from the first round of expansion due to the authoritative style of rule of the government led by Vladimír Mečiar in the second half of the 1990s. Mikuláš Dzurinda, former Slovak Prime Minister who managed to change the path of Slovakia at the beginning of 2000s and was serving as an adviser to Ukrainian President Peter Porošenko after elections in 2014, took part in person in the TV series presenting reforms in Slovakia and offering his advice on how Ukraine might achieve accession to the EU and NATO. In his opinion, the histories of Slovakia and Ukraine have much in common, including many parallels. Both nations have been gaining fresh experience with their own state institutions, both are confronted with the imperialistic ambitions of their neighbours, including in the field of ethnic minorities. He pointed out that the challenges Slovakia and Ukraine were confronted with, especially during the first years of their national independence, was almost identical.

The Slovak economy like that of Ukraine was closely linked with the economy of the former USSR. At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the then flagship companies of Slovakia in the fields of steel industry, military machinery and refining sectors suffered a lot due to interruption of economic ties within the former Eastern bloc. All of them were to a large extent dependent on the supply of raw materials and components from Russia and Ukraine. In the period of 1992 – 1998, which is labelled the period of so-called mečiarism, Slovakia was a country suffering from corruption and an authoritarian style of ruling. Independent press and political opposition groups, including civil society organizations, were monitored by state intelligence service. The Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS) was used by the government with the aim to eliminate any opposition and maintain political power. The developments culminated in the political murder of a former member of the SIS, Robert Remiáš (Habrmanová 2006), a case which is almost identical to the case of the murder of Ukrainian journalist Georgiy Gongadze, as well as other scandals Ukraine was confronted with during the rule of President Leonid Kuchma (Ukrajina 2011).

In the 1990s Mečiar’s Slovakia was compared with Belarus under the leadership of Alexander Lukašenko and Serbia under Slobodan Milošević. The then Secretary of State of the U.S. Madeleine Albright, labelled Slovakia
under Vladimír Mečiar a “black hole of Europe”. The country became internationally isolated and was excluded from the list of countries that could join NATO and the EU. However, what is important to be learned by Ukraine, are reforms launched by the new Slovak government formed after the parliamentary elections in Slovakia in 1998. The new government led by Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda initiated deep liberal reforms, including reforms of the banking and pension systems, privatization of state monopolies in network industries, introduction of a flat tax, etc., which greatly changed Slovakia in the shortest time possible. In 2002 it became a European leader in reforms and the “economic tiger of Eastern Europe”. In 1993 – 1999 Slovakia attracted 2.4 billion US dollars in direct foreign investments; however in 2000 – 2007 it attracted ten-times more: 23 billion. Slovakia never had such a strong automotive industry; however, at the present it is one of the world leaders in the automotive sector, and since 2007 it has become the world’s leading country when it comes to production of number of cars per capita. World manufacturers of electronics and household appliances also came to Slovakia. The key element of the reforms was a simplification of the tax system, including introduction of a flat tax. In 2004 the government cancelled 21 different types of income taxes and replaced them by introducing one flat tax for all types of income – at 19% – which was, however, later cancelled by the leftist government led by the Social Democracy – SMER party, which came to power in 2006 (Mikloš 2012).

At the same time it should be noted that the role of Slovakia as a Western neighbour is underestimated in Ukraine. Ukrainians often perceive Slovakia as a small neighbouring country of minimal importance to Ukraine’s interests. Unfortunately, the understanding of the importance of partnership with Slovakia in Ukraine is limited to a narrow circle of political officials and experts. Nevertheless, in the context of European integration of the Visegrad Four countries and their EU membership, Slovakia is often labelled as a model for Ukraine. Moreover, due to recent deteriorations in Ukraine’s relations with Hungary and Poland, there are a growing number of voices in Ukraine calling for treating Slovakia as its most important V4 partner (Vorotnyuk 2016b, 11).

Slovakia always declares its support for the European integration of Ukraine. Perhaps it is difficult to compare Slovak and Ukrainian cases of European integration, however, because these two countries moved in different modes of Europeanisation. Slovakia was moving towards its “Europeanisation through EU enlargement” whereas Ukraine has been moving towards the EU through “Europeanisation of the EU neighbourhood”. Nevertheless, Ukraine
faces those same challenges that slowed the progress of Slovakia’s accession to the EU in the past: a high level of corruption, lack of transparency in activities of state institutions, an ineffective justice system etc.

4.2 Security dimension

The Slovak Republic supports democratic changes and the development of a civil society in Ukraine. It is also, within the range of its own capacities, ready to assist Ukraine in its Euro-Atlantic ambitions, assuming that Ukraine itself is interested in moving towards integration with the Western structures. In this regard Slovakia tries not only to raise awareness in Ukrainian society of NATO and strengthen the trust of Ukrainians in the Trans-Atlantic Alliance, but also to assist Ukraine in implementing reforms that are necessary for Ukraine’s accession to NATO (Slovensko podporuje 2019). This is also formulated in an official document of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs from February 2019 “An Assessment of Priorities of the Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2018 and their Focus for 2019” The document declares support for the continuation of the dialogue taking place in the NATO – Ukraine Commission. Slovakia will continue to play a leading role in the NATO Trust Fund for Ukraine in the area of liquidation of unexploded munitions and the fight against improvised explosive devices (Hodnotenie priorití 2019).

In military and political spheres, the Slovak Republic began cooperating with Ukraine in 1993 on the basis of international treaties, agreements and protocols (Zmluvná báza 2016). From the beginning their cooperation was focused on the field of military education and contacts between representatives of the armed forces; later it became more intensive and was expanded into other areas. Relations built on the growing trust between armed forces allowed for launching cooperation between military units on both sides. The common (with Hungary and Romania) “TISA” battalion was created, the task of which is to manage the consequences of emergency situations, especially flooding, in the cross-border regions of the participating countries.28

Another priority of bilateral cooperation in the field is the support for reforms

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28 The multinational engineering battalion “TISA” was established on the basis of an inter-governmental agreement signed on 18 January 2002 in Budapest between the governments of Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. Its basic mission is to provide assistance to local people in the borderland and to eliminate damage caused by natural disasters in the basin of the Tisa River (M. Glváč 2015).
in the defence and security sector of Ukraine, mainly through technical cooperation. In 2005 and 2007 a NATO trust fund, established as part of the Partnership for Peace Program, provided resources for the liquidation of weapons and ammunition, as well as training in line with the professional development program for personnel at the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence. The Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Ukraine, from the beginning of 2007, served as the Contact Embassy for NATO in Ukraine and fulfilled this mission till the end of 2010 (Správa o plnení 2007). The NATO Contact Point in the country of its mission offers information about the nature of the Alliance, its primary objectives and activities, so that state institutions and citizens of the given country have direct access to relevant information. This is an important precondition for a national debate on security policy, including the question of strategic allies in the international environment.

Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 became a serious challenge and a genuine test for Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations. Since both countries share concerns regarding the future of regional security, this issue has become exceptionally important. Slovakia is a member of both NATO and the EU whereas Ukraine is not, but both sides perceive Russian aggression towards Ukraine as a security threat. The Slovak government offered Ukraine its political and diplomatic support. Slovakia voted for resolution no. 68/262 of the UN General Assembly on 27 March 2014, which has reconfirmed the territorial integrity of Ukraine and did not recognize the so-called “Crimean referendum” (Statement 2018). In general, the position of Slovakia in the UN remains supportive of Ukraine. In addition, Slovakia actively promoted the conclusion of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU as well as consistently backed the pro-Western orientation of Ukraine (MZVaEZ SR 2013).

It needs to be noted, however, that different perceptions of Slovakia and Ukraine and Ukraine-Slovak relations exist in the Ukrainian and Slovak mass media. The image of Slovakia as an ally of Russia is often promoted in Slovak conspiratorial media. This perception comes from the historical conception of Slovak nationalism. Slovak nationalism evolved as pro-Russian thanks to the historical experience of Slovaks under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy who perceived Russia as the only powerful ally of the Slovak national movement and aspirations. Slovak nationalism laid the foundation for an idealistic sentiment of Slovaks in their perception of Russia. Therefore, Slovaks tend to believe that everything beyond the “Carpathians” is Russia. Unlike in Poland, the logic chain “totalitarian communism – USSR – Russia” does not work in the case of Slovakia (for more, see Martinkovič 2011; Vorotnyuk 2016a).
Slovakia’s current foreign policy towards Ukraine and Russia is controversial. Former long-term Prime Minister Robert Fico has been considered to be perhaps one of the most pro-Russian politicians in Central Europe. The Chairman of the Slovak parliament Andrej Danko (since 2016) and the leader of the Slovak National Party (the party which represents a historical version of Slovak nationalist ideology) significantly backed Fico in this regard and has even surpassed him, taking repeated trips to Russia and meeting Russian politicians from the sanctioned lists of the EU and the like. In addition, Danko supported the initiative of a group of parliament members of Slovakia who paid a visit to the occupied Crimea and did not respond to the appeal of the Ukrainian ambassador in Slovakia, who declared the visit of Slovak parliamentarians illegal. Therefore, Danko gained the public image in Ukraine, but also in Slovakia, of being an “adversary” of Ukraine. Both Fico and Danko have repeatedly criticised publicly the EU sanctions against Moscow, declared friendship with Russia and expressed reservations when it comes to the prospects of Ukraine achieving membership in the EU and NATO. When, however, the time came for a concrete decision, Bratislava has always voted the way Brussels wanted or behaved towards Ukraine in a friendly and supportive way (e.g. the launch of the reverse flow of natural gas in 2014) (for more, see Majchrák and Čobejová 2015; Danko 2019).

According to part of the Slovak media, the former “pro-Western” cabinets led by Dzurinda and Radičová (and new political parties, which have been in opposition towards the ruling coalition led the SMER Party) were “guided” by Washington, Brussels and Berlin with the aim of undermining the friendship of Slovaks with their big Slavic brother – Russia. This is the narrative disseminated by a large portion of popular media, including nationalist newspapers and Russian internet propaganda in Slovakia. Among the most influential media supporting the above narrative are the internet portals Hlavné správy (Main News) and the Czech Aeronet, both of which pretend to be news portals; the monthly Zem a vek (Earth and the Age) published in printed form, and the radio broadcaster Slobodný vysielač (Free Broadcaster) (for analysis, see Šnídl 2016).

Anti-Western narratives in Slovakia are backed by the radical anti-establishment parties, such as the above-mentioned Slovak National Party led by Andrej Danko, or the right-wing extremist party Kotleba – Ludová strana Naše Slovensko (Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia). The ruling Social-Democratic SMER Party led by former Prime Minister Fico presents a mixture of pro-Western and pro-Russian narratives. The two faces of the SMER party include the pro-Western positions it presents in Brussels and the
pro-Russian approaches it presents to the Slovak public at home. According to some observers, the real strategy of Robert Fico as the leader of the SMER Party is to create a public impression that his party is the only real anti-Western force, which is in favour of the acceptance of radical pro-Russian (and at the same time anti-Ukrainian) rhetoric (Ondrejcsák 2016). When it comes to the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic under the leadership of Miroslav Lajčák, it continues to follow a pro-Ukrainian and pro-Western policy course that began in the time of Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan (head of the diplomatic service during Dzurinda’s government of 1998 - 2006). Unlike Robert Fico, Slovak President Andrej Kiska (2014 - 2019), a friend of former President of Ukraine Peter Porošenko, declared his clear support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and its Euro-Atlantic ambitions (Kiska v Kyjeve 2018).

The image of Slovakia in Ukraine has been affected by the fact reported widely in both the Slovak and Ukrainian press regarding involvement of Slovak citizens in the military conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine on the side of pro-Russia separatists (Benčík 2017). Consequently, in August 2015, the Slovak parliament amended the criminal code by adding a paragraph on the criminal responsibility of Slovak citizens participating in illegal military formations on the territories of other states (Kern 2017).

### 4.3 Economic dimension

It should be noted that bilateral economic relations are affected by the current different dynamics and development phases of the economies of Slovakia and Ukraine. According to experts, the Slovak economy in recent years has shown the highest level of growth among the EU countries, including a radical reduction of unemployment and a significant increase of FDI. On its side Ukraine has been confronted with financial and economic crisis, which led to a drop in the volume of foreign trade, including with Slovakia. Recently, the economy of Ukraine has started to recover slowly thanks to the EU Association Agreement and the launch of the reform process in Ukraine after Maydan in 2014.

The Slovak-Ukraine Forum, which met for the fifth time in Košice in 2019 during the “Days of Ukraine”, might become a potentially important instrument in improving bilateral economic cooperation. The aim of the “Days of Ukraine” project is to present Ukraine in Slovakia as well as to identify opportunities for cross-border cooperation between both countries.
in the area of culture, tourism etc. (Dni Ukrajiny 2019). At the beginning of 2015 a Slovak-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce was established to represent the interests of Ukrainian businesses in Slovakia (Slovensko Ukrajinská 2019).

Ukraine is testing the possibility of operation of common border controls at the border crossings with all neighbouring countries that are members of the Schengen Area: Slovakia, Poland, Romania and Hungary. The latest progress has been achieved in negotiations with Slovakia (several common control points are already operating on the border with Poland). If the European Commission approves the proposed agreement between Slovakia and Ukraine regarding common border controls, it will become a model for concluding similar agreements with other neighbouring countries of the Schengen Area which share a border with Ukraine (Ukraïnsko-slovatski 2016).

4.4 Energy dimension

In Ukrainian-Slovak relations, energy represents a core theme of the bilateral agenda. The project of the reverse flow of natural gas from Slovakia to Ukraine is of great importance to Ukraine and makes the two countries strategic partners in the field of energy security. Ukraine has ceased importing gas from the Russian Federation and replaced it with imports from Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. The reverse flow became not only a gesture of good will from the Slovak government but also an exceptionally cost-effective project for Slovakia (Slovenský Eustream 2018). The continuation of the transit of Russian gas to Western Europe, which forces both countries to act together against Gazprom strategy to re-orient the transit of natural gas along Nord Stream 2 (and/or, the Turkish Stream through the Black Sea), is a point of common interest for Ukraine and Slovakia. They also have another common interest: to create an Eastern European gas hub for the markets of Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania. Ukraine and Slovakia may also cooperate on the Slovak gas company Eustream project for the construction of the Eastring gas pipeline, which anticipates the development of a North-South gas transit corridor (Szalai 2019).

Russian aggression towards Ukraine in 2014 became a serious challenge and genuine test of bilateral relations, but a balanced approach was found even in these difficult situations. An example of such a policy could be the way the supply of natural gas to Ukraine from Slovakia was implemented, a step
considered by most observers to be the best illustration and expression of Slovak-Ukrainian friendship. In 2014 Slovakia began to supply natural gas to Ukraine via the Voyany – Uzhhorod pipeline, which can store up to 44 million cubic metres of gas per day, representing approximately 20% of Ukraine’s needs. These supplies played an exceptionally important role and were a significant part of Ukraine’s energy security in the winter period of 2014 – 2015 (Vo Velkých Kapušanoch 2014).

But this issue did not pass without discussion. In 2014 – 2015 Ukraine insisted on the reversal, which would allow a great volume of gas to be supplied from Europe to Ukraine via main pipelines on Slovak territory. Eustream, according to Alexander Duleba, concluded an agreement with Gazprom in 2008 up to 2028, which includes provision that Eustream on the border with Ukraine can accept only shifting codes issued by Gazprom, and therefore Eustream could not ensure the large reverse flow of gas through its main pipelines. For this reason a detour was made through Vojany. At the same time, it was shown that the volumes of gas supplied via the Voyany – Uzhhorod pipeline are sufficient to meet the gas needs of Ukraine. Slovakia and Ukraine spent a lot of time pointing the finger at one another, which in the end had a negative impact on the level of mutual trust (Duleba 2017b). Therefore, all of these events created a negative image of Ukraine in the Slovak media. In contrast, the Ukrainian media narrative tells about the assistance Slovaks have provided to Ukrainians in the field of natural gas supply (Vorotnyuk 2016a).

4.5 Humanitarian dimension

Cross-border cooperation is an important niche of bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian relations. It is implemented on a regional and local level with the aim to minimize the divisive nature of the Schengen border between the two countries and their border regions. Cooperation between eastern Slovakia and the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine is to a significant extent based on issues of common concerns: social and economic development of border regions, infrastructure, people-to-people contacts etc. This cooperation has been initiated also on the basis of the Carpathian Euroregion that was established in 1993. Cross-border cooperation between the two countries would be more effective, but the movement of persons, services, goods and capital through the border depends to a great extent on the state of relations between Ukraine and the EU. As a result, the customs regime at the Slovak-Ukrainian border is one of the most serious barriers to cooperation. Naturally,
this is also due to the problems of illegal migration, smuggling, and border criminality as well as differences in the countries’ administrative systems and poor infrastructure (Program vlády 2016).

Smuggling has always been among the traditional problem issues at the border. Its portrayal in the media comes in the form of reports on tunnels serving for the supply of goods across the Ukrainian and Slovak border, mainly for cigarettes from Ukraine to Slovakia (Hlavnými hrozbami 2018). In addition, the use of small airplane drones or helicopters serving for such purposes have been recorded widely by the media. Furthermore, human traffickers smuggling people illegally over the border have also been extensively covered by the media. One of the most successful Slovak films of 2017, with Ukrainian co-production, was “Čiara” (The Line), about a cross-border criminal group of smugglers working at the Slovak-Ukraine border (Čiara 2019).

Ethnic minorities traditionally represent another important issue for bilateral relations. A Ukrainian diaspora lives in Slovakia which, according to the last population census in Slovakia of 2011, has 7,430 members. In addition to Ukrainians, there are also Ruthenians, who speak their own language, which is similar to Ukrainian but differs from it. The makeup of the Ukrainian nationality in Slovakia is constantly changing: some take on a Slovak identity, and the ratio of Ruthenians is also variable. In 2011 a total of 33,482 inhabitants declared they are Ruthenian, which represents 0.67 % of the population; they thus comprised the third largest minority in Slovakia. A total of 55,469 residents listed Ruthenian as their native language, which represents 1.0 % of the population. According to the 2011 census, 0.15 % of the population, thus 7,430 persons, declared themselves as Ukrainian, and 5,689 citizens gave Ukraine as their native language (Sčítanie 2011). The next Slovak population census should take place in 2021.

An important aspect of humanitarian cooperation is the provision of humanitarian aid by Slovakia to Ukraine, which according to official data is 2.8 million euro since 2014 (as to February 2016). The Slovak Republic has for a long time supported and cooperated in humanitarian activities in Ukraine, with the aim of ensuring assistance to persons affected by conflicts, including the internally displaced persons. This includes material humanitarian aid for hospitals or orphanages. A part of the assistance provided is made up of medical materials and clothing. Material humanitarian aid consists in, for example, tents, collapsible beds, mats, sleeping bags, blankets, generators, lighting equipment, electric heaters, clothing for children and adults and children's building blocks (Materiálna 2019). Further these were and still are sleeping bags, stretchers, military boots, disinfectant splints and special
military first aid kits. Humanitarian aid serves for the protection of lives and those wounded during the conflicts in eastern Ukraine (Poskytnutie 2014).

It is in this area, but in other contexts, where the main negative information about Ukraine predominates in Slovak media. In 2010 and 2011 negative information relating to Ukraine had a completely different meaning than it does today, because it is currently associated in particular with events after 2014. Years ago, dating back to the start of the 1990s, the stereotypes of Ukrainian smugglers, illegal migrant workers and the Ukrainian mafia were dominant in Slovak media (Vávrová 2016), but images of the “banderas” (a form of Ukrainian insurgent army during WW II) or “Ukrofascists” were absent. Before 2014, part of the Slovak media wrote that Ukraine should not be supported, because it is an unconsolidated and corrupt country; however, the terms “banderas” and “fascists” were never seen then. Many Slovaks, according to the Ukrainian media, do not understand Ukraine and its history. The above lack of understanding and awareness in combination with the general negative stereotypes about Ukraine as a poor, corrupt country, and, at the same time the generally positive image of Russia in Slovakia (great culture, Pushkin, opera etc.), is a good starting point for Russian propaganda.

Contemporary Russian propaganda may develop in Slovakia thanks to the strong structural foundation of a pro-Russian environment. This means in particular an influential and unified Russian immigrant community, a Russian cultural centre in Bratislava, a Ruthenian movement and nationalistic environment in Slovakia, including a nationalistic press which is traditionally Russophile. The Russian myth of Slovak-Russian friendship in Slovakia is influential, but this in no way means that all Slovaks are pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian. Public opinion is divided into approximately two halves. As Majchrák and Čobejová (2015) write in their article, according to a survey from 2014 conducted by the Focus Agency for the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, a large majority of Slovak society (83 %) does not agree with Russian interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine, but it does not perceive this as a reason to change Slovakia’s approach towards Russia. Approximately 54 % of respondents think that Russian interference in Ukraine should not lead to a stronger and more critical stance of Slovak politicians towards Russia. Nearly half of Slovaks (49 %) are convinced that despite the aggression of Russia towards Ukraine, Slovakia should continue in developing active cooperation with Russia.

29 The best example is the status of the member of the Slovak parliament from the ruling party SMER-SD and the chairman of its European Committee, Ľuboš Blaha, which all the conspirator and pro-Russia media in Slovakia have been citing, e.g. magazine Zem a vek in the article “Ukrofašisti Šmatana a Marec?” (Ukro-fascists Šmatana and Marec?) (Blaha 2018).
A study conducted in 2014 by the Institute of Sociology at the Slovak Academy of Sciences together with the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at Comenius University shows that nearly 60% of Slovaks are inclined to think that Slovakia should try to maintain a balanced position between Russia and the West. Approximately 30% think that Slovakia should stand on the side of the West, and only 10% feel that Slovakia should stand on the side of Russia (Gyarfášová 2014). People in Slovakia who, for example, have visited Ukraine, not only don’t believe Russian propaganda, but also support the idea of Maidan and the Ukrainian struggle against the occupiers.

4.6 Conclusion

The Ukrainian media pay only a little attention to Slovakia and Slovak mass media cover Ukraine mainly through a prism of war, conflicts, corruption and so on. An analysis of Slovak media shows that even though the mainstream media only marginally present the Russian meta-narratives regarding events in Ukraine (such as, for example, “Ukraine is a failed state”, “discrimination against Russian speakers at Donbas” etc.), they do so markedly. Russian propaganda at the same time is spread through the so called alternative conspiratorial mass media, which use the sentimentality of the Slovak public for Pan-Slavic ideas, nostalgia for the Communist regime, Russia and Putin’s personality.

Ukrainian-Slovak relations can be explained only with difficulty in a black-and-white perception of the world. In the long run, no expert or even a common Ukrainian or Slovak citizen is able to put mutual perception of Slovakia and Ukraine into a simplistic contradictory line – friendship versus hostility. Therefore, we conclude that an information gap exists in both countries regarding the other that needs to be addressed.

Ukraine has a problem with shaping its own image in the world. The primary disadvantage of the existing image of politics in Ukraine is the inadequacy of its development and implementation. The main reason for the lack of effectiveness of media campaigns is a lack of media policy strategy. There is no national media strategy to create a positive image of Ukraine abroad that has been implemented as yet; no priorities have been set for a PR campaign; no coordination centre exists and a strong ideological foundation is lacking. In other words, there is no systematic PR project focused on improving the external image of Ukraine. Moreover, it is difficult to create a positive image of the country and its foreign policy abroad when the process of searching
for a national idea still goes on. Reforms undertaken by the government of Ukraine prior to 2014 did not have for the most part of society any specific positive results. The fact is that Ukrainians are not in the best position in the world in terms of their wages, social security or access to high quality education and medical care. Another of the problems related to building a positive image of Ukraine is its high level of corruption as well as the connection between the business sector and politicians.

There are elements with the potential to help improve the image of Ukraine abroad and these are its cultural and historical heritage and achievements in the field of culture and science. The coordination of an image campaign with concrete projects is an essential prerequisite for achieving the desired results. The creation of a positive image of the country – Ukraine or Slovakia – requires a structured management of their media image, a group of experts able to coordinate and monitor the implementation of an image policy. The media image management should be responsible for information and communication resources on the international level, should develop media projects, monitor results and be responsible for their full implementation. It should take advantage of media, business structures, scientific and educational centres, the community diaspora, cultural institutions and sports organisations in order to favourably influence opinions of Slovak and Ukrainian societies.

States should make the effort to build their own positive images, which is a natural part of their external relations and foreign policy. This should include a complex and consolidated strategy on presenting national institutions, economy, history, culture, but also investment and tourist attractiveness. The national image strategies of Ukraine and Slovakia towards the external environment should be based on national interests and the foreign policy priorities of both countries. They should consider creation of a coordination centre at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs or specialised state agencies that should also conduct research and generate policy recommendations for other governmental institutions in the field.

Furthermore, politicians and state institutions should take consolidated positions regarding questions relevant to the image of Ukraine that are covered by the foreign media. Ukraine also has to have an active, even very proactive, information policy. It must actively present both the successes of Ukraine and the opportunities it offers, support Ukrainian information centres in capitals of foreign countries, support Ukrainian mass media in Slovakia, and ensure broadcasting in various languages.

Information specialists at the Ukrainian Embassy in Bratislava should be experts who know and understand the specifics of Slovakia. It is necessary
not only to reduce the practice of “manual managing” of current questions relevant to a bilateral agenda, but also to synchronize work between agencies to prevent the duplication of functions or the lack of coordination between them. It is important to intensify cooperation between the Slovak-Ukrainian intergovernmental commissions and to present their work to the public of both countries. A complex informational campaign presenting Ukraine in the world should be developed and should be adjusted to the specific conditions of each target country, including Slovakia. Ukraine could take advantage of existing activities in bilateral relations, such as the traditional annual “Days of Ukraine” in Slovakia (in Košice), Neighbourhood Days in the border regions, Slovak-Ukraine business fora and others.

It can be concluded that stereotypes springing from a lack of information and knowledge about Ukraine still influence perceptions of Ukraine in Slovakia. Ukraine is perceived to be a poor country with many problems, including an unstable political situation and enduring corruption. Ordinary Slovaks may be aware of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine and the outflow of Ukrainians looking for a better life, work and education in countries of the European Union. Russian propaganda, in particular, does have an impact on part of the Slovak public regarding the military conflict; therefore, some people in Slovakia have begun to use the terms “Ukrofascist” and “Banderas” in relation to Ukrainians, but, definitely, this is not the predominant narrative in Slovakia. Certainly the image of Ukrainians as a cheap labour force or the criminal activities of Ukrainians as smugglers and the like remains the strong narrative in Slovakia. However, a more informed part of the Slovak public certainly sees the support Slovakia provides to Ukraine in the process of reforms and getting closer to the European Union and NATO. It likewise perceives Slovakia’s humanitarian aid and other assistance provided to Ukraine as well.

The same is true for the image of Slovakia in Ukraine. Except for inhabitants of the border areas (the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine), Ukrainians do not know Slovakia and the Slovaks very well (and the same applies to Slovaks and their knowledge of Ukraine). For many Ukrainians, including part of the political establishment, Slovakia is only a small country and a small neighbour about which many know only that it is part of Euro-Atlantic structures. More solvent Ukrainians know the High Tatra Mountains or other tourist resorts in Slovakia. This lack of knowledge partly comes from the fact that Ukrainians are mostly focused on domestic politics, and in terms of international relations they perceive only the big players, such as the Russian Federation, the United States or the European Union as a whole. The visibility of Slovakia in Ukraine
was improved in 2014, however, thanks to the launch of the reverse flow of
gas from Europe to Ukraine, which illustrates to the wider public the strategic
importance of Slovakia for the energy security of Ukraine.

Ukrainians are not opposed to the development of cross-border cooperation
with Slovakia. They perceive Slovakia through the prism of the European
Union and the opportunities that are offered by a country which is more
economically developed and integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures.
Therefore, poor knowledge about Slovakia on a national level in Ukraine
does not prevent regional and local actors who live in the bordering regions
with Slovakia and know Slovak realities much better from cross-border
cooperation with Slovak partners; on the contrary, due to the absence of
national stereotypes, no psychological or social barriers on the side of
Ukrainian regional and local actors exist to hamper cross-border cooperation
with Slovak partners.

However, from the perspective of regional and local actors on the Slovak
side of the border, enduring stereotypes do present a potential barrier to
developing cross-border cooperation with Ukraine. A dysfunctional state and
institutions in Ukraine, political instability often inclined towards corruption
and the criminal activities of Ukrainians – all of this can scare away anyone
with potential interest in cross-border cooperation. At the same time,
there is a military conflict in the Eastern Ukraine and exceptionally active
and sophisticated pro-Russian propaganda, neither of which contributes
to a positive perception of Ukraine and Ukrainians in Slovakia. Another
deterrent to cross-border cooperation is the Schengen border and the fact that
Ukraine is not part of the EU, which certainly complicates such cooperation.
OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVAKIA’S RELATIONS WITH UKRAINE: PERCEPTIONS OF ACTORS

Alexander Duleba

With the aim to identify perceptions of actors involved in the implementation of Slovak-Ukrainian relations regarding opportunities and obstacles in their further development, members of the project’s research team collected empirical data by conducting semi-structured interviews with representatives of governmental institutions from the Slovak Republic (hereinafter – SR) and Ukraine, who at the time of the interviews were involved in cooperation or who had experience of bilateral cooperation on the intergovernmental or inter-ministerial level. The interviews were conducted in parallel in Bratislava and Kyiv in October 2017 with 10 representatives of governmental institutions of Slovakia and 10 representatives of governmental institutions of Ukraine, including a representative of the state-owned company Ukrenergo.30

Respondents from Slovakia represented the following institutions: Office of the President of the SR, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, National Council of SR (parliament), Ministry of Interior and the Police Corps of the SR. Respondents from Ukraine represented the following institutions: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Ministry of Energy and Coal Industry, Verchovna Rada (parliament), Strategic Group of Advisers to the Ukrainian government, National Institute of Strategic Studies with the President of Ukraine, and the already mentioned state enterprise Ukrenergo, which operates the electricity transmission system of Ukraine as this company cooperates with Slovak partners on the business level (Slovenská elektrizačná a prenosová sústava, a.s., OKTE, a.s.), including reform of electricity market in Ukraine, which the Regulatory Office for Network Industries of the Slovak Republic (ÚRSO) took part in, along with the National Energy Regulatory Authority of Ukraine in the scope of a twinning project financed by the EU.

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30 A list of questions that were raised to respondents in Bratislava and Kyiv are attached to this publication. Interviews with representatives of governmental institutions in the SR were conducted by Vladimír Dančišin and Lukáš Januv. The interviews in Kyiv were conducted by Michal Cirner and Natália Maradyk.
We added to the list of Ukrainian respondents a representative of the state enterprise Ukrenergo, which operates the electricity transmission system of Ukraine as this company cooperates with Slovak partners on the business level (Slovenská elektrizačná a prenosová sústava, a.s., OKTE, a.s.), including reform of electricity market in Ukraine, which the Regulatory Office for Network Industries of the Slovak Republic (ÚRSO) took part in, along with the National Energy Regulatory Authority of Ukraine in the scope of a twinning project financed by the EU.
company Ukrenergo, which operates the electricity transmission system in Ukraine. As in the case of the governmental institutions of SR, in selecting respondents from Ukrainian institutions the same criterion was applied, i.e. respondents were involved in bilateral cooperation on the inter-governmental or inter-ministerial level from the title of their position at the time of data collection, or in the past they had personal experience of cooperating with Slovak partners.

The structure of the interviews conducted in Bratislava and Kyiv, and of the questions asked, was the same, so that we could acquire comparable data on the assessments of the current state of bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian relations, particularly the opportunities and obstacles in their further development, including implementation of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU. Respondents replied to the same questions, and they were left free to formulate their responses and justify their opinions. All the interviews in Bratislava and Kyiv were conducted in the form of personal meetings, during which the respondents’ replies were recorded (with their personal consent) on condition that their anonymity was kept.

5.1 Intensity and quality of contacts

In assessing the intensity of their contacts and quality of communication, the Ukrainian and Slovak respondents agreed that existing inter-governmental and inter-ministerial communication mechanisms are sufficient for the development of bilateral relations, and they emphasised that no problems exist formally or institutionally in addressing the other side whenever questions or problems emerging from their bilateral agenda need to be resolved. Several respondents from both sides pointed out that a meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission for Cross-border Cooperation occurs regularly once a year and enables a regular exchange of opinions and discussions on current bilateral relations. Likewise, several respondents pointed out that the most intensive communication runs between the border services responsible for managing the common border; they communicate regularly on a daily basis. Several Ukrainian respondents stated that they are involved in implementing common projects with their Slovak partners and that they took part in expert events and professional internships in Bratislava. In assessing the quality of mutual communication, Ukrainian experts took a neutral position, i.e. in their opinion, communication is sufficient, but from the viewpoint of understanding and the approach of the Slovak side, it is neither fully excellent nor completely bad.
Slovak respondents also expressed similar attitudes. However, some of them also gave a critical assessment of the quality of communication with their Ukrainian partners, or the approach of representatives of Ukrainian governmental institutions to Slovakia. According to these Slovak respondents, Ukraine does not perceive Slovakia as a priority or as an important partner. The Ukrainian side prefers communication with the big EU Member States, such as Germany and France, and it does not show real interest in developing either formal or informal communication with Slovakia. Ukraine does not appreciate enough Slovakia’s initiatives for supporting Ukraine’s relations with the EU or the V4. As an argument supporting the above-mentioned opinion, Slovak respondents mentioned Ukraine’s non-constructive approach to the Visegrad 4 Road Show initiative, which was launched by the Slovak V4 Presidency in 2015 to present the reform experiences of the V4 countries in the Ukrainian regions.\footnote{Regarding the negative experience of the Slovak side with the approach of Ukrainian partners towards organizing an event devoted to reform of the energy sector within the Visegrad 4 Road Show initiative in Ivano-Frankovsk in 2015, see Chapter 1.2. and the part on “How to sustain momentum”.
} Some of the Slovak respondents stated that the Embassy of Ukraine in Bratislava is not active enough, does not inform the Slovak public to a necessary extent about events in Ukraine and does not offer sufficient support to Slovak businesses and NGOs in establishing contacts and cooperation with Ukrainian partners.

5.2 Basic frameworks for mutual perceptions

When asked whether they consider Ukraine to be a European country, all Slovak respondents answered yes, and many of them added that from the point of geography and culture, there is no doubt that Ukraine is part of Europe. Some Slovak respondents considered the term “European country” in the sense of Ukraine’s political membership in the EU and said that Ukraine could become a member of the Union in 10 – 15 years. At the same time, they added that Slovakia and its political leaders should unambiguously support Ukraine’s EU membership, which unfortunately is not the reality at present. The differing opinions of the President and the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs on the one hand and the positions of the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament\footnote{At the time of the interviews, Andrej Kiska was the President of the Slovak Republic (elected President of the Slovak Republic in 2014 as an independent candidate without party affiliation), Miroslav Lajčák was the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs (nominated by SMER – Social Democracy), Robert Fico was Slovakia’s Prime Minister} on the other reduce the credibility of
Slovakia in the eyes of Ukraine but also in the eyes of the EU partners. On the other hand, Ukraine should eliminate nationalism and corruption at home and implement the reforms needed to meet the economic, political and institutional criteria for EU membership. Several Slovak respondents noted that Ukraine is a victim of its own geopolitical standing and its position between Russia and the EU. It has to face Russian aggression on its territory as well as Russian propaganda, which hinders the process of its European integration and the implementation of reforms.

Ukrainian respondents showed greater scepticism in assessing the time horizon in which Ukraine could become an EU Member State. Most of them said that Ukraine will be ready to join the EU in 15 – 20 years. As the main causes of Ukraine's lagging behind EU Member States and factors that reduce Ukraine's credibility in the eyes of Slovakia and other EU Member States, Ukrainian respondents mentioned its undeveloped infrastructure, the weak competitiveness of the Ukrainian economy, the dominance of monopolies in its key sectors and its energy dependence on Russia. Some of them have expressed fears that Russia will use its close relations with some EU Member States to block the process of Ukraine's European integration.

To the question of whether they consider Slovakia to be a reliable partner, all the Ukrainian respondents answered yes. Some of them brought up the fact that Slovakia had greatly helped Ukraine to face Russian blackmail in relation to the supply of natural gas by putting into operation the reverse flow of natural gas from the EU through Slovak territory to Ukraine in 2014. The help and support of Slovakia was critical in solving the energy crisis in Ukraine, which was an urgent issue particularly during the winter at the turn of 2014 and 2015, after Russia's decision to completely cut off gas supplies for domestic consumption of Ukraine in June 2014. Other Ukrainian respondents appreciated the assistance Slovakia has been providing to Ukraine through sharing its experience of reforms and the EU integration process.

Most Slovak respondents responded positively to the question of whether they consider Ukraine to be a reliable partner, arguing that Ukraine has in recent years shown clear political will regarding where it wants to belong, and that it is ready to do a lot to move closer to the EU. Some Slovak respondents stated that Ukraine's credibility is being undermined by a reform process that is too slow due to the enormous influence of oligarchic groups on governmental decisions and legislative processes. They also mentioned corruption, low

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(at the same time the chairman of the ruling SMER Party), and Andrej Danko (chairman of the Slovak National Party) was the chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.
salaries, and a lack of professional and administrative capacity in several sectors as additional problems that reduce Ukraine’s credibility.

Upon being asked to list the first three associations that come to their minds with the words “Ukraine” and/or “Ukrainian”, Slovak respondents mentioned the following associations (we present them in the order of the most frequent answers): border, Maidan, Russia, Ukrainian flag, conflict with Russia, OSCE Chairmanship of Slovakia in the OSCE in 2019, Taras Bulba, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Chernobyl, people, nature, neighbours, untapped potential, corruption, disorder. One interesting finding is that in the Slovak respondents’ perception of Ukraine compared with representatives of EU institutions, associations with Russia and negative associations occur more frequently (see 5.6 Concluding commentary).

5.3 Association Agreement, visa-free regime and the prospects of Ukraine’s integration into the EU

Respondents on both sides agreed in their positive evaluation of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU for the development of Slovak-Ukrainian relations. Approximation of Ukrainian legislation with the European acquis improves in a key way the basic conditions for the development of bilateral contacts and cooperation. Several Slovak respondents offered the opinion that acceptance and ratification of the Association Agreement in all EU Member States, even after the problems and delayed ratification in the Netherlands, has had a positive impact on European awareness of Ukrainian citizens and their perception of the EU. Even though all the Slovak respondents agreed in their positive evaluation of the Association Agreement in the development of bilateral relations, several of them added that a lot of work

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33 The Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU (the political part) was signed on 28 March 2014 (the trade part of the agreement – DCFTA) was signed on 27 June 2014. The European Parliament ratified the Association Agreement simultaneously with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on 16 September 2014. During the next two years – up to the beginning of September 2016 – all EU Member States ratified the agreement, with the exception of the Netherlands. The delay of ratification of the agreement in the Netherlands was caused by the results of a referendum which was held in April 2016. Voter turnout at the referendum was 32.28 % of eligible voters, and 61 % of them voted against ratification of the agreement. Despite the fact that the referendum had only an advisory character, the government of the Netherlands decided to stop the ratification of the agreement until the election of a new parliament. Parliamentary elections in the Netherlands were held in March 2017 and the new parliament ratified the Association Agreement with Ukraine in May 2017.
still awaits Ukraine, because it is still far away from fulfilling the agreement’s provisions. The majority of Slovak respondents expressed the belief that the more successful Ukraine is in implementing the Association Agreement, the greater and more transparent a partner it will be for the citizens of Slovakia and other EU Member States.

We received equally positive assessments from Ukrainian and Slovak respondents when we asked them for their assessment of the impact of the visa-free regime between Ukraine and the EU as of June 2017. All respondents appreciated the positive psychological effect of waiving the visa regime for Ukrainian citizens, who received a clear and strong signal that Ukraine is on the right track towards EU integration. Most Slovak respondents appreciated the gradual increase in the number of Ukrainian citizens travelling to Slovakia after cancellation of the visa regime, equally the increase in the number of work and permanent residence permits issued to citizens of Ukraine in Slovakia. In the assessments of the impact of the visa-free regime of Ukraine with the EU on Slovakia, there were no negative views among the replies of Slovak respondents.

To the question on the further approach of the EU towards Ukraine to create new opportunities for Ukraine’s European integration, including, for example, whether further development of the Eastern Partnership policy is needed, whether the EU should allow the associated Eastern Partnership countries access to the European Commission’s Comitology Committees, or whether the EU should open up new sectors for the integration of Ukraine beyond the Association Agreement (accession to the Schengen Agreement, the telecommunications sector, Digital Europe Program, etc.), we received, as expected, positive answers from all Ukrainian respondents. On the other hand, the responses of Slovak respondents were much more varied.

Slovak respondents agreed that the Eastern Partnership must clearly distinguish between the associated countries (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) and countries that were not and are not ready to conclude association agreements with the EU (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus). In the assessments of the Eastern Partnership achievements so far, several Slovak respondents said that with all its constraints, the Eastern Partnership, as a policy framework for relations with the Eastern neighbours, plays a key role in the EU’s external relations; if nothing else, it keeps six former Soviet republics on the EU foreign policy radar. At the

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For more, see project publication no. 1 on EU-Ukraine relations, chapter 2, the part “Inclusion in policy shaping”. Comitology Committees are expert committees set up by the Commission during the agenda-setting stage and before the legislative process within the central EU institutions, e.g. the Council and the Parliament. Their purpose is to assist the Commission as advisory bodies in the drafting of new legislation.
same time, Slovak respondents expressed the opinion that if the EU does not expand the offer for Eastern Partnership countries and does not offer them more support and cooperation, it may lead to frustration amongst the general public of these countries and the resignation of their political elites in their efforts to implement reforms. The majority of Slovak respondents agreed with the opinion that the EU should promise future membership to the associated Eastern Partnership countries, but in a very conditional and indeterminate form, for example, in the sense of “only after you have made all the reforms and fully implemented the association agreements, can we start discussing with you the prospect of your membership in the Union”. According to Slovak respondents, the problem is that several EU Member States are not politically prepared to start a discussion on the membership of Ukraine in the EU.

On the other hand, Slovak respondents replied in a negative way to the question on the involvement of the associated Eastern Partnership countries in the preparatory phase of the EU legislative process through the participation of their experts in the Commission’s Comitology Committees in the observer status. Most Slovak respondents did not answer this question, referring to their lack of relevant information on the work of the Comitology Committees. Those who did reply justified their position by arguing that this would be a premature step and that the participation of experts from associated Eastern Partnership countries could complicate, if not completely destroy, the functioning of the Comitology Committees. Slovak respondents also replied negatively to the question of whether the EU should open up new sectors for Ukraine’s integration, namely, to begin negotiations on its association with the Schengen Agreement, the telecommunications services sector and the Digital Europe Program, which would go beyond the Association Agreement or the sectorial policies that are part of it. Most of them agreed that the requests coming from Ukraine in this regard are primarily political declarations of its political leaders, aimed at addressing the Ukrainian public more than EU institutions. Ukrainian politicians, after achieving introduction of the visa-free regime, want to show further tangible results of the integration process, for example, in the form of cancellation of roaming fees. However, according to most Slovak respondents, such results are not yet on the agenda. Ukraine must first make clear progress in implementing the Association Agreement, and only then can negotiations be opened on other sectorial areas for its integration.

There are certain internal contradictions in the approaches of Slovak respondents. On the one hand, in most cases they think that the EU should give Ukraine a signal that it is ready to start negotiations on its membership sometime in the future and expand the offer and support for the integration
of associated countries in the Eastern Partnership. On the other hand, they reject the idea of Ukraine’s institutional integration into the legislative process within the EU in the form of its experts’ access to the Comitology Committees and the possibility of expanding Ukraine’s integration process in other sectors that go beyond the Association Agreement. Since Slovak respondents did not mention how, or in what other ways Ukraine’s integration into the EU should be deepened, their attitude is inconsistent and contains mutually exclusive and contradictory points.

5.4 Main problems and challenges

Most respondents from Ukraine and Slovakia agreed that the main challenge for carrying out reforms and implementing the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU is the domestic situation in Ukraine, while all the Ukrainian respondents mentioned corruption in their country as the biggest problem. On the other hand, according to Ukrainian respondents, the excessive expectations from EU Member States also represent a problem, because they do not fully understand the specific conditions in Ukraine, as a post-Soviet state, for implementing reforms. Some of them also mentioned a fact that is related also to bilateral relations with Slovakia in providing aid to Ukraine. They doubted the generally prevailing opinion on the part of the EU that the V4’s experience with reforms is the most useful for Ukraine, because they completed the process of post-communist transformation relatively recently, and therefore experts from V4 countries know Ukrainian conditions better than experts from other EU countries. Ukrainian respondents argued that while the V4 countries were part of the Eastern Bloc, which was under the influence of the Soviet Union, they were not part of the Soviet Union per se. While V4 countries were under the influence of the USSR, Ukraine was directly a part of the USSR, and according to some Ukrainian respondents these are two incomparable situations.

According to a majority of the Slovak respondents, the main challenge for further development of bilateral relations is Ukraine’s ability to implement reforms and the Association Agreement with the EU. Several of them emphasized that this is an internal problem of Ukraine that no one can solve for them, and that they need to first handle it themselves. Slovak respondents named the three biggest problems Ukraine has to handle if it wants to stabilize and continue with European integration as corruption, an ineffective legislative process and the lack of professional state officials. Ukraine’s biggest problem,
in the opinion of Slovak respondents, is corruption, which undermines the functioning of the state on all levels of its administration. Another problem is the inefficient legislative process due to the influence of oligarchic groups in the Ukrainian parliament and government, which complicates the approximation of Ukrainian legislation with the European acquis. Ukraine’s third biggest problem, according to Slovak respondents, is a huge fluctuation of governmental officials, which reduces the administrative capacity of the Ukrainian state service. Several Slovak respondents emphasized as a special problem the fact that the Ukrainian government and its institutions are too strongly influenced by oligarchies which they are unable to resist. In their opinion, Ukraine should strengthen the independence of its political institutions, including political parties, to finally achieve the separation of business from politics.

5.5 Aid effectiveness: what needs to be done a different way

Ukrainian respondents very much appreciated the support Ukraine is getting from the EU and its Member States, including Slovakia. Some expressed the opinion that this support should not be reduced to only deploying experts to Ukraine to help with sectoral reforms. Aid should also focus on preparing Ukrainian experts who, after acquiring an appropriate education in the EU or in the Member States, will then work in Ukraine. At the same time, Ukrainian respondents said that they are aware that keeping qualified experts in the state service is a problem due to the low salaries.

Most of the Slovak respondents agreed that a stable and prosperous Ukraine is in Slovakia’s national interest for political, economic and geopolitical reasons, and Slovakia should therefore focus on the provision of its developmental and technical assistance to Ukraine. However, according to Slovak respondents, Ukraine should be much more capable of identifying its own development needs and communicating them to the Slovak side, so that Slovak institutions can better adjust their planning and provision of aid to the needs of Ukraine. The most effective way of providing Ukraine with support is sharing experience with reforms; by means of projects supported by the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SlovakAid), for example. Several Slovak respondents stated that there were shortcomings in the planning of aid provision from Slovakia, but this is also due to insufficient feedback from Ukraine. The existing platform of the Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-border Cooperation, which could serve to streamline
the programming of the development and technical assistance, is not being sufficiently used for this purpose. Some Slovak respondents noted that the most effective SlovakAid instrument for providing technical assistance to Ukraine is the micro-grants program administered by the Slovak Embassy in Kyiv. Some other Slovak respondents pointed out critically that the volume of humanitarian aid from Slovakia to Ukraine was at its highest levels in 2015 – 2016, but since then has decreased significantly, although military operations are still going on in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, and part of the population in the above regions live in a state of emergency. Others said that if Slovakia is not sufficiently active in Ukraine, other countries, such as Germany and Sweden, which are particularly active in the field of providing development aid in Ukraine, will take advantage of the situation and create a better foreground for doing their own business in Ukraine, from which they will benefit more than Slovakia.

At the same time, several Slovak respondents pointed out the need to revitalize the interest of the Slovak public in events in Ukraine. As a problem, from the viewpoint of public communication about Ukraine in Slovakia, they mentioned the inconsistency in approaches of Slovak political leaders, who do not speak with one voice about Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian war and do not speak clearly enough about the need to help Ukraine in implementing reforms, and its European integration process, which is in the long-term interest of Slovakia and its citizens. Some Slovak respondents identified the low permeability of the Slovak-Ukrainian border as a problem and said that the existing border crossings need to be modernized and more crossings need to be built. The existing capacity for passage through the common border does not correspond to the needs and potential of the development of bilateral relations, including cross-border cooperation.35

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35 The opinion that it is necessary to increase the permeability of the common border through the modernization of existing and construction of new border crossings, heard from Slovak respondents, was the only specific recommendation we received from experts involved in implementation of Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation on an intergovernmental level regarding the development of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation.
5.6 Concluding commentary

In terms of intensity, existing mechanisms and opportunities for communication on the inter-governmental and inter-ministerial level of Slovak-Ukrainian relations, we did not find in our empirical research, conducted by semi-structured interviews with representatives of relevant governmental institutions from both sides, any serious problems. The case is a little different in terms of perception of the quality of mutual communication, where both sides have their own critical reservations. Ukrainian respondents did not rate communication with Slovak partners as either excellent or as very bad. More serious in terms of mutual perception is the feeling on the Slovak side that Ukraine does not have a genuine interest in developing relations with Slovakia because it does not consider it an important partner and prefers relations with the “big” EU Member States. On the Slovak side, there is a feeling that Ukraine does not appreciate the efforts that Slovakia has made in the EU or on the V4 level to support its integration efforts. This certain sense of disillusionment and injustice on the Slovak side is understandable as a consequence of the development of existing bilateral relations, which has not been linear and has had its ups and downs (see Chapter 1). However, it should be stressed that this represents a potential problem and risk in mutual relations. In crisis situations, if they are repeated, the feeling of disillusionment and grievance can easily grow into negative attitudes towards the other side.

The strategic assistance that Slovakia provided to Ukraine through the operation of the reserve flow of natural gas, which helped it to face Russia’s energy blackmail in 2014, is the primary factor helping the Ukrainian side perceive Slovakia as an important and credible partner. Due to worsening relations with Hungary (the Education Act) and Poland (interpretation of World War II events in Western Ukraine) in the last two to three years, Slovakia appears to be the only immediate western neighbour of Ukraine and EU Member State with which Ukraine’s relations are free of political or historical controversies. At the time of the interviews (October 2017), however, this new situation was not significantly manifested yet in the perceptions of Ukrainian respondents. Ways of perceiving the mutual Slovak-Ukrainian relationship have undoubtedly changed in recent years on both sides, but it is too short a time to overcome the different and contradictory schemes of the foreign-political identity of Ukrainian and Slovak nationalism as well as experience of bilateral relations in the last three decades.

On the other hand, on the question of the priority of Ukraine’s foreign policy interest since Maidan in 2014, there is rare consensus among the actors of
bilateral relations at intergovernmental and inter-ministerial level. Slovak respondents consider Ukraine to be a European country and believe that sooner or later Ukraine will become an EU Member State. Furthermore, Slovakia is one of those countries that advocate that the EU give Ukraine a clear membership perspective on the assumption that Ukraine passes the necessary reforms and fully implements the provisions of the Association Agreement. Even the representatives of Slovak governmental institutions are more optimistic than their partners from the Ukrainian institutions in anticipating Ukraine's EU membership. While Slovak respondents expect Ukraine to become a EU Member State in a 10 - 15 year horizon, Ukrainian respondents have a more pessimistic attitude and expect that this could happen at the earliest in 15 - 20 years.

The sides share a positive assessment of the meaning of the Association Agreement for the development of bilateral relations. The agreement contributes to the integration of both countries, expands opportunities for bilateral cooperation and changes the dividing nature of the common border, which is gradually losing its function as a barrier. According to most Slovak respondents, the main challenge for the further development of bilateral relations is the ability of Ukraine to implement reforms and the Association Agreement with the EU. Likewise, both sides see the introduction of a visa-free regime in Ukraine's relations with the EU as a positive step. In the answers of Slovak respondents representing governmental institutions, there was no concern expressed about the growth of illegal migration from Ukraine, threats to the labour market in Slovakia etc., which often appear in the Slovak public and media discourse; most of them, in fact, were positive in their expectations that the visa-free regime will increase tourism and people-to-people contacts, which are crucial for the development of bilateral relations with Ukraine. The credibility of Ukraine in the eyes of representatives of the Slovak institutions is diminished by the following factors: a reform process that is too slow due to the huge influence of oligarchic groups on governmental decisions and the legislative process, pervasive corruption and the lack of professional and administrative capacities in several public sectors.

Among the interesting findings of empirical research is the contradictory nature of the positions of Slovak respondents on the issue of European integration of Ukraine. On the one hand, as we have already mentioned, they expressed clear optimism regarding Ukraine's membership in the EU; they think that the EU should give Ukraine any a clear signal of its readiness to start negotiating its membership sometime in the future, and that the EU should increase support for reforms and implementation of the Association
Agreement in Ukraine and expand the offer for Ukraine under the Eastern Partnership. On the other hand, they reject the idea of Ukraine's institutional integration into the legislative process within the EU in the form of access of experts as observers to the European Commission's Comitology Committees, or the possibility of expanding Ukraine's integration process in other sectors which go beyond the framework of the Association Agreement, and which Ukraine is asking for. At the same time, however, they do not state how the EU should support and extend Ukraine's integration process, although they declare such support.

The above-mentioned attitudes do not suggest a consistent and sophisticated approach of the Slovak governmental institutions on the question of continuing their support for Ukraine's European integration. In effect, the Slovak position slips down to the current “Brussels” position on Ukraine - “first do the homework you have under the Association Agreement, and then we will see”. The support for membership of Ukraine in the EU by representatives of the Slovak institutions is therefore of a declarative nature and is more a consequence of the formulating post-accession priorities of Slovak foreign policy from 2002 – 2004 than the result of a sophisticated foreign policy strategy of Slovakia regarding Ukraine after Maidan in 2014. It is also a consequence of the fact that some of the current political leaders of Slovakia who have doubts about the reform process in Ukraine and take pro-Russian positions in interpreting the evolution of the events in Ukraine after Maidan in 2014, unlike Mikuláš Dzurinda's government in the pre-accession period 2002 – 2004, have been unable to provide a comprehensive definition of Slovakia's interest in relation to Ukraine after 2014, not to speak of a comprehensive strategy of Slovak foreign policy. The result is inconsistency in the positions of the representatives of the Slovak governmental institutions, which was reflected in their responses in the interviews. Without a doubt, Slovakia is prepared to help Ukraine “to do its homework” through sharing its experience of reforms and its own integration process, but, in reality, it lacks any vision that goes beyond the current EU policy towards Ukraine, which Slovakia, paradoxically declares verbally. The sharing of reform experiences and helping Ukraine implement the Association Agreement are seen as a routine administrative matter. Of course, it is necessary to note an important finding from empirical research regarding the need to improve Ukraine's feedback, which would help Slovakia to improve its planning and delivery of development and technical assistance.

At the same time, representatives of the Slovak governmental institutions critically pointed out the internal problem of Slovakia's foreign policy towards
Ukraine. This is the already mentioned contradictory view of Slovakia’s interests in connection with the European integration of Ukraine by the present Slovak political leaders. The post-accession priority of Slovakia’s foreign policy – support for the European integration of Ukraine, which will mean an extension of the safe and prosperous neighbourhood of Slovakia – formulated in the pre-accession period during the rule of Mikuláš Dzurinda in 2002 – 2004, became a priority “experience” of all Slovak political forces. The doubting of EU sanctions against Russia in response to Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine by leading SMER – Social Democracy leaders, as well as the unilateral pro-Russian positions of leaders of the Slovak National Party, which together with Most-Híd formed a government coalition in 2016 – 2020, have caused the disintegration of consensus in the perception of Slovakia’s foreign policy priorities precisely because of events in Ukraine after 2014. The result is a “double-track” foreign policy of Slovakia towards Eastern European countries and confusion in the perception of Ukraine and events related to Ukraine by the Slovak public.

Also worthy of attention is comparing initial associations of Slovak respondents when they say “Ukraine” and / or “Ukrainian”, with the perception of respondents from EU institutions in Brussels. Respondents from the EU listed the most frequent associations in the following order (we list them by the most frequent occurrence, with one respondent having the opportunity to list three associations): Maidan, War in Donbas and annexation of Crimea by Russia, civil society, motivated and open people, cultural diversity, Ukrainian cuisine (borsch, black bread, pelmeni), geopolitics, a country with great potential, post-Soviet country, Chernobyl, golden domes, Orthodox Church, Slavs, Black Sea and Tymoshenko’s braids. Slovak respondents cited as initial associations the following, in order: the border, Maidan, Russia, Ukrainian flag, conflict with Russia, presidency of Slovakia in OSCE in 2019, Taras Bulba, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Chernobyl, people, nature, neighbours, untapped potential, corruption, and disorder. Russia is thus much more prevalent in the perception of Ukraine by Slovak respondents together with more negative images of Ukraine in comparison to the associations of respondents from the European institutions. A comparison of the subconscious perception of Ukraine by the actors in charge of the development of the EU and Slovakia’s relations with Ukraine shows a quite interesting difference between perceptions of Ukraine, which, it seems, are more positive in Brussels than in Bratislava.

36 See project publication no. 1 on the impact of the EU-Ukraine relations on cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine, Chapter 6, part 6.2. “Basic frameworks for mutual perceptions”.
Empirical research through semi-structured interviews conducted with actors at the transnational EU-Ukraine level and the national SR-Ukraine level confirmed our assumption about their weaker interest and awareness of cross-border cooperation on the EU/Slovakia border with Ukraine. In the context of cross-border cooperation, respondents from EU institutions pointed out the need for better planning of cross-border projects by regional and local actors, including better reporting to the European Commission on their results. Ukrainian respondents merely drew attention to the problems they perceive in association with Hungary’s interference in Ukrainian matters in the Transcarpathian region, allegedly in order to protect the ethnic rights of the Hungarian minority. Slovak respondents representing governmental institutions expressed the opinion that it is necessary to increase the permeability of the Slovak-Ukrainian border by modernizing the existing border-crossing points and also building new ones. Our research suggests that cross-border cooperation on the transnational and national level is still not perceived as a key area of the EU or Slovakia’s relations with Ukraine.

37 Ibid.
The Slovak-Ukrainian border regime, including conditions for cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors, has been following the dynamics of a changing intergovernmental framework. The windows of opportunity for regional and local actors on both sides of the border have been opening and/or closing accordingly.

The development of the intergovernmental agenda of relations between Slovakia and Ukraine since the early 1990s can be divided into at least five periods (1993 – 1998, 1998 – 2000, 2001 – 2004, 2004 – 2013, since 2014), each reflecting a different the approach of the Slovak governments towards Ukraine, including their varying projections of Slovak interests in relations with Ukraine. Since gaining its independence in 1993, Slovakia has been a parliamentary republic, in which the government plays a key role in executive power. In Ukraine, a presidential system of governance has been formed (since 2006, with the exception of the 2010 – 2014 period, Ukraine has been a presidential-parliamentary republic) in which the President is the head of executive power with powerful competences. Over the past 30 years, governments in Slovakia have changed more often than Presidents in Ukraine, so the dynamics of the development of the bilateral intergovernmental agenda depended more on changing Slovak governments, including their approaches to Ukraine, than on Ukrainian Presidents. Although the development of bilateral relations at intergovernmental level is more complex, in terms of the impact of the intergovernmental agenda on the development of cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors on a common border, the two following main periods can be identified: 1993 – 1999 and since 2000.

in 2001, whereas before 2000 it had signed such an agreement only with Poland in 1994. This was followed by agreements with the Czech Republic and Ukraine in 2000, and Hungary in 2001.

The development of cross-border cooperation in the Slovak-Ukrainian border area in the 1990s was fundamentally influenced by the Carpathian Euroregion project. The idea of the project was excellent; however, it turned out to be premature in conception because it remained misunderstood by the then governments of neighboring post-communist countries. Indeed, the region of Eastern Slovakia and the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine as well as adjacent territories of western Ukraine, south-eastern Poland, north-eastern Hungary and north-western Romania, represent a unique region in Europe, where the borders of five post-communist countries come together. These border regions have a very heterogeneous ethnic, cultural and religious structure and are among the poorest parts of their home countries. They are distant from their national capitals with their more developed economic and social infrastructure. Nevertheless, they share a common, difficult history, geographical proximity, similarities in economic development and above all common aspirations for economic prosperity and European integration, a fact that created a sense of community and willingness to develop cross-border cooperation at the beginning of 1990s. The Carpathian Euroregion was in fact the first “euroregion” established in post-communist Central Eastern Europe in 1993 in accordance with rules and principles of the Western European “euroregional” cross-border cooperation being successfully developed in the post-WWII period.

The representatives of Slovak local authorities and self-governments in Eastern Slovakia have been active in launching interregional cooperation with neighbouring partners from Poland, Ukraine and Hungary since early 1990s. They expected successful cross-border cooperation to promote revitalisation and development of Eastern Slovakia and also thought that a lack of governmental investment in the transport and communication infrastructure of the region, support for private business and educational and cultural programs in Eastern Slovakia could be at least partly compensated for by the activities of the Carpathian Euroregion. Furthermore, their vision was that Eastern Slovakia would occupy not only the central geographic position in the Carpathian Euroregion, but also serve as the most developed economic capacity of the five participating neighbouring border regions. Eastern Slovakia could thus provide a building block in developing programs within the Carpathian Euroregion, which would be profitable for the region of Eastern Slovakia and for Slovakia as a whole. The active role of
Slovakia in developing Carpathian Euroregion activities could strengthen the Slovak Republic’s international position in the Central and Eastern European sub-regions, enhancing its reputation as a serious and constructive actor in regional and also European affairs. But although regional actors hoped that the central government would understand this and support their cross-border activities they were wrong, the government led by Vladimír Mečiar blocking their participation and full involvement in the activities of the Carpathian Euroregion.

It should be noted that it was not only the then Slovak government that approached the initiative in a negative manner. The central governments of all participating countries originally approached the Carpathian Euroregion with apprehension. First of all, the very fact that representatives of local authorities were developing relations with foreign partners became a new phenomenon for fresh post-communist centralist understanding of who should be authorised and how they should participate in making foreign contacts. Secondly, nationalist political forces strongly influenced the national debate on the Carpathian Euroregion in respective member countries in the mid 1990s. Their typical argument was that the Carpathian Euroregion is a tool of the other participating country in enforcing its own national interests, etc. Thus, the Carpathian Euroregion became a victim of the undemocratic political culture in the region. The politicisation of the Carpathian Euroregion led to the fact that Ministries of Foreign Affairs and central agencies were more engaged in developing cross-border activities within the Euroregion than the relevant local and regional authorities. Paradoxically, one of the natural effects of this approach was the unnatural extension of the area of the Carpathian Euroregion.

The Ukrainian government insisted that, in addition to the Transcarpathian Region, three other Ukrainian regions (Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Chernivtsi) should become part of the project, because Ukrainian leaders were afraid of so-called “Transcarpathian separatism”. The result is that as of today, the area of the Carpathian Euroregion exceeds 140,000 km² and the total population living in the area is almost 16 million. Due to the “policy of balancing” enforced by central governments, the Carpathian Euroregion became the largest Euroregion of all in Europe. However, this outcome in fact paralyzed the efficient functioning of the Euroregion, including the original purpose of its founders – to create a common platform encouraging cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors in the border area of five post-communist countries. In the end representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of participating countries played a more important role in the project than regional and local authorities.
The Slovak government of Mikuláš Dzurinda that came to power after the September 1998 parliamentary elections changed Slovakia's policy towards cross-border cooperation with the participation of Slovak regional and local authorities. Finally, the eastern Slovak regions of Prešov and Košice were allowed to sign the accession agreements and became full members of the Carpathian Euroregion in November 1999. On 5 December 2000, Slovakia and Ukraine concluded intergovernmental agreement on cross-border cooperation, which entered into force on 29 January 2001.

Thus, it took almost 8 years from the time local and regional authorities on both sides of the state border demonstrated their will to develop cross-border activities, for both Slovak and Ukrainian governments to finally “legalise” cross-border cooperation over the common border. According to the intergovernmental agreement on cross-border cooperation of December 2000, its provisions apply in three regions or oblast of Ukraine (Transcarpathian Region, Lviv Region and Ivano-Frankivsk Region) and two self-governing regions of Slovakia (Prešov and Košice). In territorial terms, the eligible regions on both sides correspond to the geography of the Slovak and Ukrainian parts of the Carpathian Euroregion. This is with the exception, however, of the Chernivtsi Region of Ukraine, which was not included as an eligible region covered by the bilateral agreement between Slovakia and Ukraine.

Under the agreement the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine committed themselves to consult each other on any legal, administrative or technical problems that could hinder the development and smooth running of cross-border cooperation, support activities of local and regional authorities to initiate and develop cross-border cooperation, and provide financial resources to local and regional authorities, within the limits of their capabilities, for initiating and developing cross-border cooperation. With the aim of promoting and coordinating cross-border cooperation, the agreement established the Slovak-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission on Cross-Border Cooperation, with the right to set up working groups to address specific issues.

However, the research we have carried out within the project on the Commission's activities to date shows a number of shortcomings. In particular, the Commission's agenda is dominated by issues relating to border management by governmental agencies (border infrastructure, border police and customs cooperation). The Commission does not support cross-border cooperation projects between regional and local actors. There is a clear contradiction in the Commission's work between the planning of cross-border cooperation...
cooperation on the one hand, and the lack of financial instruments for its implementation on the other, and in particular, when it comes to promoting cross-border cooperation between non-governmental regional and local actors. So far, the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine have not been able to set up a bilateral fund to support cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors on their common border. In addition, EU funds available for Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation under the ENI CBC HU-SK-RO-UA 2014–2020 multilateral program are not within the direct reach of the Commission. Unlike the bilateral intergovernmental commissions for cross-border cooperation with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Poland, which do have an impact on the financing of jointly agreed projects thanks to the EU INTERREG program aimed at promoting cross-border cooperation at the EU internal borders, the bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian Commission does not have direct access to EU funding. The absence of a financial instrument (intergovernmental or EU funds) that would serve directly and immediately to support cross-border cooperation projects on the Slovak-Ukrainian border constitutes a structural problem both for the Commission's activities, and, primarily, cross-border cooperation on a regional and local level at the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

Through the SlovakAid Program, the Slovak Republic finances projects of Slovak and Ukrainian organizations aimed at helping Ukraine to implement the reforms and implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU, but this does not apply to cross-border cooperation projects at regional and local level. In addition, the Commission could and should also serve to obtain feedback from Ukraine for the planning of Slovak development and technical assistance to Ukraine. Unfortunately, it does not fulfil this task. On the one hand, the legitimate question is why governmental assistance of the Slovak Republic provided to Ukraine does not include cross-border cooperation and, on the other, why the Commission for Cross-border Cooperation, which is essentially the only regular platform for bilateral intergovernmental dialogue (the Commission on Economic and Scientific Cooperation re-established in 2007 held its last meeting in 2013) is not used to assess the effectiveness of development and technical assistance provided to Ukraine by Slovakia. As a result, the Commission's work is narrowed de facto to intergovernmental cooperation in the area of border management while the main objective for which it was set up, i.e. to provide support for cross-border cooperation at regional and local level is not within its capacity to deliver.

The efforts of the governments led by Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998–2006) to create favorable conditions for the involvement of Slovak regional and local
actors in cross-border cooperation on borders with neighboring countries were not effective in the case of Ukraine. Unlike bilateral relations with all other neighbors, Slovakia's accession to the EU brought a negative change in the bilateral regime of relations with Ukraine in the area of movement of persons, goods and services across the common border. In order to meet the legislative and political conditions for EU accession, Slovakia unilaterally introduced a visa regime with Ukraine in 2000 which changed the relatively liberal regime for mutual travel of citizens established by the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement of 1981, which was incorporated into the legal regime of Slovak-Ukrainian relations in the early 1990s. At the same time, the Slovak Government had withdrawn from all trade agreements with Ukraine and Slovakia's accession to the EU meant a reduction in the powers of the Government of the Slovak Republic to conclude bilateral agreements with the Government of Ukraine regulating mutual trade and citizens' travel. Ukraine's relations with the EU have started to limit the capacities of Slovakia to shape its bilateral relations with Ukraine. Although Slovakia abolished visa issuance fees for citizens of Ukraine in 2005 and reached an agreement with Ukraine on small border traffic in 2008, a fundamental change in the movement of persons across the common border occurred only in 2017 after the EU and Ukraine reached an agreement on introducing a visa-free regime. Liberalization of trade relations between Slovakia and Ukraine depends on the full implementation of the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU, including DCFTA, which is expected in the horizon of 2027 – 2030.

The history of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation in terms of the approach of the Slovak governments since the 1990s has seen two paradoxes. Mečiar's government had the opportunity to promote cooperation between regional and local actors, but did not do so for political and ideological reasons. The Dzurinda's government created the legislative conditions for the involvement of regional and local actors in the development of cross-border cooperation; however, the EU accession process objectively limited the opportunities for cross-border cooperation of regional and local actors at the Slovak-Ukrainian border. Slovakia's accession to the EU has had a major impact on the bilateral regime of Slovakia's relations with Ukraine and made it more difficult for regional and local actors to engage in cross-border cooperation.

In the case of the Slovak-Ukrainian border and cross-border cooperation, EU funds have not substantially improved the situation either. The setting-up of the EU programs to support cross-border cooperation at the Slovak-Ukrainian border (ENPI CBC HU-SK-RO-UA 2007 – 2013 and ENI CBC
HU-SK-RO-UA 2014 - 2020) has “rewritten” its natural development since the early 1990s. The above programs did not take into account the existence, development and territorial structure of the Carpathian Euroregion, which was originally created as an initiative of regional and local actors. The project was politicized later on by the governments of the participating countries, not by regional and local actors. The Polish region of Podkarpatskie Voivodeship was not included in the above EU multilateral programs launched in 2007. The result is the marginalization of the Carpathian Euroregion, once a flagship of cross-border cooperation in the Slovak-Ukrainian border area. The question is why EU funds which were supposed to compensate for the legislative restrictions on cross-border cooperation on the border with Ukraine, an EU external border, resulting from the accession of Slovakia, Hungary and Poland to the EU, did not take into account the natural development of cross-border cooperation in the region since the early 1990s. The efforts of regional and local actors were initially ignored by the governments of the participating countries and later also by EU programs.

To summarize the findings of our research, the main problems of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation at national and regional levels relate to financing and planning. The EU’s multilateral program to support cross-border cooperation at the borders of Slovakia, Hungary and Romania with Ukraine does not take into account the specific conditions and needs for the development of cross-border cooperation between regional and local actors on the Slovak-Ukrainian border. The Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-border Cooperation has no direct impact on it. At the same time, the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine have not been able to create an intergovernmental financial instrument to support cross-border cooperation. The Commission allows for coordination and common activities of the two governments, but, without a financial instrument, it has limited opportunities to implement the achieved agreements. It is capable of delivering in some cases related to border management, but hardly at all in the case of cooperation between regional and local actors. At the same time, neither the Intergovernmental Commission, nor the regional authorities on the part of the Slovak Republic and the regional state administrations on the part of Ukraine are in a position to jointly plan the territorial development of border regions. They lack institutional and human capacities, financial resources and often political will. The potential for cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine remains untapped.

Another problem that has been framing Slovak-Ukrainian relations since the early 1990s, including cross-border cooperation, concerns mutual perception.
Taking the history of Slovak and Ukrainian nationalism together, it is hard to find examples of common interests and cooperation in the past. On the other hand, unlike Polish-Ukrainian relations, there are also no historical conflicts which could be a source of national animosity or conflict in the future. Rather, Slovaks and Ukrainians are historically indifferent to each other. However, it should be pointed out that the Slovak political elite always viewed Slovakia’s relations with Ukraine through the prism of Slovakia’s relations with Russia, which caused a lot of misunderstandings in Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations in the years after 1993. It was also typical for Slovakia’s attitude towards Ukraine that it was not politically “discovered” until almost 1995. Nevertheless, this took place only in relation to the importance of Ukraine for the development of Slovak-Russian relations. As already quoted in the text an illustration of such an understanding of Ukraine was a statement by the then Slovak Deputy Prime Minister, Sergej Kozlík, who at the end of the first intergovernmental Slovak-Ukrainian talks held in Kyiv in June 1995, said: “Ukraine is a gate to the Russian market for us and its capacities to transit Slovak goods must be increased by ten-fold at least”. His words might be interpreted as follows: Ukraine is important for Slovakia not for itself, but because of the importance of Russia for Slovakia.

Slovak nationalism has been traditionally pro-Russian. By contrast, Ukrainian nationalism has quite different historical features, being traditionally anti-Russian. This is another reason for Slovakia’s historical “coolness” towards Ukraine and Ukrainians. It took more than a decade after the collapse of communism for both the Slovak political establishment and the general public to cease perceiving the entire post-Soviet space and/or “lands beyond the Carpathian Mountains” as predominantly “Russia”. In other words, Russia ideationally was much closer to Slovaks than their immediate neighbour Ukraine. This traditional stereotype provided a somewhat negative mental framework for Slovak-Ukrainian relations after both nations became independent states at the beginning of 1990s.

It also should be noted that many in Kyiv still believe that “if we manage to agree with Brussels, Berlin or Warsaw, Bratislava will follow.” This is a similar mistake as Slovakia’s former belief (under Mečiar’s foreign policy in the 1990s) that “if we manage to agree with Moscow, Kyiv will follow.” Unlike the Ukrainian political class, Slovak politicians rid themselves of the above illusion at the beginning of the 2000s. However, in Kyiv, underestimating Slovakia as a political actor continues to be a part of Ukrainian foreign policy thinking. The above approach of Ukraine towards Slovakia as a “smaller neighbour” has created serious difficulties in bilateral relations.
Different historical schemes of national identity caused different approaches on some fundamental issues, such as the transit of Russian energy resources to Europe. Both countries have shown an inability for many years to speak one language vis-à-vis Russia in the matter of the transit of Russian oil and natural gas to European consumers through their territories. Ukraine and Slovakia inherited from the communist past a shared transit energy infrastructure connecting Russia with Europe. However, in the 1990s Slovakia still supported Russia’s projects on the construction of natural gas pipelines bypassing Ukraine. Instead of becoming an area for strategic cooperation between Ukraine and Slovakia with the aim of protecting their shared interests as transit countries towards Russia as the energy producer on one hand, and its European consumers on the other, the commonly shared infrastructure in the field of natural gas transit became instead a source of misunderstandings and tensions in Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations.

It may be concluded that under Mikuláš Dzurinda’s governments, especially from 2001-2006, Slovakia fundamentally reshaped its eastern policy. First, thanks to economic reforms, Dzurinda’s government managed the successful conversion of the military industry, which in the 1990s formed a strategic dependence of Mečiar’s Slovakia on Russia. Second, it put the country back on the track towards NATO and EU membership and managed to complete the accession process in 2004. And finally, it developed a new strategy in relation to Ukraine which identified support for reforms and the European integration of neighbouring Ukraine as a post-accession foreign policy priority of Slovakia. Thus, PMs Mečiar in the 1990s and Dzurinda in the first half of 2000s represented two completely different, and in the end, fully contradictory forms of Slovakia’s eastern policy from 1993, including the perception of national interests of Slovakia vis-à-vis Ukraine.

The new left-oriented government which replaced the Dzurinda government after the parliamentary elections in 2006 and was led by Robert Fico, declared that it would pursue continuity in the area of foreign policy. However, there are two principal similarities between the approaches to Russia pursued by Mečiar and Fico. Both emphasised developing pragmatic economic relations with Russia, and both exhibited certain sympathy for Russia’s positions on a number of issues on the European and international security agenda. Despite Fico’s growing personal cold-hearted approach towards Ukraine, especially after the gas crisis of 2009, his government still followed the policy lines on Ukraine drawn up by the Dzurinda government. Moreover, if one compares the intensity of bilateral contacts and Slovakia’s support for Ukraine’s European integration, including the activities of the Slovak Embassy in Kyiv
as the NATO Contact Point Embassy for 2007 – 2008, one could conclude that Slovakia’s political approach towards Ukraine under the Fico government, i.e. assisting it in drawing closer to the EU, was even more active than that of its predecessor. This is what justifies the characterisation of Slovakia’s Eastern policy under the Fico government as a double-track approach. However, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, which started in 2014, has shown that this policy mix of having good relations with both Russia and Ukraine at a critical juncture of war between the two is hardly manageable.

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has since 2014 become a foreign-policy issue that divides both the Slovak political class and society, the dividing line running through both the government coalition and the parliamentary opposition. A clear majority of Slovak citizens consider Ukraine to be an independent state and think that Russia has no right to interfere in its domestic affairs; however, at the same time, half of them do not think that Russia’s unfair actions against Ukraine should lead to a change of Slovakia’s “business as usual” style policy towards Russia, including the adoption of sanctions should they harm the Slovak economy. This public schizophrenia has been well embodied by Prime Minister Fico’s line of the post-Maidan Slovak Eastern policy. To sum up, the Janus-faced policy of Slovakia towards the Russian–Ukrainian crisis since 2014 might be summarised as follows. Its first face is represented by former President Andrej Kiska (2014 – 2019), who clearly condemned Russian aggression against Ukraine, viewed Maidan as the Revolution of Dignity of Ukrainian citizens who have a sovereign right to live in a democratic and free country, boosted the European aspirations of Ukraine, supported the anti-Russian sanctions adopted by the West, and finally called for increased defence spending and the developing of Slovakia’s resilience capacity to protect itself from security threats posed by Russia, including from its disinformation campaign aimed at undermining the unity of the Euro-Atlantic structures and democratic institutions of Western countries.

Slovakia has become a strategic partner for Ukraine ensuring an alternative supply of natural gas from the EU under the situation of full stoppage of its supply from Russia in 2014. Both countries are interested in maintaining their positions as the largest transit countries for Russian gas to Europe. Furthermore, they are ready to work together to defend their integral transit interests vis-à-vis Russia and European consumers of Russian gas, which is a dramatic change from what they showed in the course of two decades before Maidan. In addition to the gas sector, they have managed to expand their bilateral energy cooperation, including in energy sector reform, improving
energy efficiency and the use of renewables with a focus on the municipal level. They appear to have learned that working together in the field of energy better serves their national interests. This definitely provides new momentum to Slovak-Ukrainian bilateral relations, especially in offsetting the misunderstandings or controversies they had in the field of energy in the years before Maidan.

Analysis of the political context of the Slovak-Ukrainian energy partnership is a must in order to understand that it is a new phenomenon with very fresh and fragile roots. Its sustainability fully depends on the political will as well as the capacity of each side to reflect upon the national interests of the other. Here, on the side of Slovakia, risks are connected with the duplicitous shape of its Eastern policy. The post-Maidan developments changed a lot in the Slovak perception of Eastern Europe, including Russia and Ukraine; however, there are long-term political and historical factors that shape Slovakia’s foreign policy identity and they will definitely not disappear over the next few years.

Nevertheless, the evolution of supranational and national frameworks for cross-border cooperation on Slovak-Ukrainian border has been positive in the course of the last two decades (since the beginning of the 2000s) in terms of creating a positive political, legal and institutional set up for the cross-border activities of regional and local actors. The EU-Ukraine and bilateral Slovakia-Ukraine relations have developed in a progressive way, as they have gradually eliminated obstacles and generated more opportunities for cross-border cooperation on the common border. However, the practice of Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation shows rather the limited capacities of regional and local actors to utilise the offered window of opportunities.
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Annex 1  List of questions for research interviews with representatives of the governmental institutions of Slovakia

Initial questions

— What are your personal and/or your department’s involvement/sectorial focus in Slovakia’s relations with Ukraine?

— How often do you visit Kyiv to meet your counterparts from Ukraine and/or communicate with them in order to manage cooperation in the field of your professional activities?

— Are the existing channels for communication with your Ukrainian counterparts in the field satisfactory for your professional activities?

Policies

— What are the most challenging issues/problems you are currently dealing with in relation to Ukraine?

— What needs to be done on the side of Ukraine and/or Slovakia in order to meet/resolve them?

— How would you assess the impact of the Association Agreement on Ukraine’s relations with the Slovakia in the field you deal with? What has it changed?

— How effective are the tools and/or programs the EU offered to Ukraine with the aim to assist it in implementing the Association Agreement in your respective field?

— How do you assess the performance of your Ukrainian counterparts when it comes to implementation of the Association Agreement and accompanying reforms in the field of your professional activities?

— How would you assess the impact of a visa-free regime of Ukraine with the EU on Ukraine’s relations with Slovakia and/or cooperation in the field of your involvement?

— How could or should Slovakia assist Ukraine on a bilateral level in meeting the goals of the Association Agreement in your respective field?

— Is there anything in the area of your responsibility you would bring to the attention of local actors of CBC on Ukraine’s external border with EU/Slovakia to be aware of and/or to consider in planning their cooperation with Ukrainian partners on a regional and local level?
Perceptions and preferences

— Going beyond the limits of your professional activities and experience in working with Ukrainian counterparts in your particular field, do you think that Ukraine, in general, is a reliable partner for Slovakia and the EU? What does Slovakia do well on a governmental level in relations with Ukraine and what does it need to improve and/or change?

— Do you think that Ukraine will become a member of the EU sooner or later? Is the EU strong and committed enough to support Ukraine on its European integration path regardless of Russia’s objections?

— What is your perception of the current situation in Ukraine? Are the political leaders of Ukraine capable of maintaining political stability in their country, implementing reforms and the Association Agreement with the EU?

— What do you think about the existing shape of the Eastern Partnership as a policy framework for the EU relations with six Eastern neighbours? Does it need any new upgrade to serve better the goal of achieving political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the EU?

— Do you think that the European Commission might or could think about opening its Comitology committees for participation of experts from the Eastern Partner countries that concluded Association Agreements with the EU, including Ukraine, in a similar way as it did for experts from EEA countries (Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein) and/or Switzerland? Would it be helpful for managing cooperation in your respective field of involvement in EU relations with Ukraine?

— What are the first three associations beyond your professional activities that come to your mind when you see the word “Ukraine” and/or “Ukrainian”?

Annex 2  List of questions for research interviews with representatives of the governmental institutions of Ukraine

Initial questions

— What are your personal and/or your department’s involvement/sectorial focus in Ukraine’s relations with Slovakia?
— How often do you visit Bratislava to meet your counterparts from Slovakia and/or communicate with them in order to manage cooperation in the field of your professional activities?
— Are the existing channels for communication with your Slovak counterparts in the field satisfactory for your professional activities?

Policies

— What are the most challenging issues/problems you are currently dealing with in relation to Slovakia?
— What needs to be done on the side of Slovakia in order to meet/resolve them?
— How would you assess the impact of the Association Agreement on Ukraine’s relations with Slovakia in the field you deal with? What has it changed?
— How effective is the assistance Slovakia offered to Ukraine with the aim to assist it in implementing the Association Agreement in your respective field?
— How do you assess the performance of your Slovak counterparts when it comes to implementation of the Association Agreement and accompanying reforms in the field of your professional activities?
— How would you assess the impact of a visa-free regime with the EU on relations with Slovakia and/or cooperation in the field of your involvement?
— What would you expect from the EU Member States? How could or should Slovakia assist Ukraine on a bilateral level in meeting the goals of the Association Agreement in your respective field?
— Is there anything in the area of your responsibility you would bring to the attention of local actors of CBC on Ukraine’s external border with the EU/Slovakia to be aware of and/or to consider when planning their cooperation with EU/Slovak partners on a local level?
Perceptions and preferences

— Going beyond the limits of your professional activities and experience in working with the Slovak counterparts in your particular field, do you think that Slovakia, in general, is a reliable partner for Ukraine? What do Slovaks on a governmental level do well in relations with Ukraine and vice versa what do they need to improve and/or change?

— Do you think that Ukraine will become a member of the EU sooner or later? Is the EU/Slovakia strong and committed enough to support Ukraine on its European integration path regardless of Russia’s objections?

— What is your perception of the current situation in the EU? Are the political leaders of the EU capable of maintaining political stability in their countries and finding ways to reform the EU regardless of Brexit and the migration crisis? Do you think the EU will survive as a European integration project?

— What do you think about the existing shape of the Eastern Partnership as a policy framework for the EU relations with six Eastern neighbours? Does it need any new upgrade to serve better the goal of achieving political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the EU?

— Do you think that the European Commission might or could think about opening its Comitology committees for participation of experts from the Eastern Partner countries that concluded Association Agreements with the EU in a similar way as it did for experts from EEA countries (Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein) and/or Switzerland? Would it be helpful for managing cooperation in your respective field of involvement in the EU relations with Ukraine?

— What are the first three associations beyond your professional activities that come to your mind when you see the word “Slovakia” and/or “Slovak”? 
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