

## **An opening address delivered by the Minister of Defence, Jaroslav Baška, at the conference “New Challenges – Better Capabilities”**

Dear Minister of Foreign Affairs,  
Dear President of Slovak Atlantic Commission,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests,

It is my greatest honour to welcome you in Bratislava on my personal behalf and on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. I am really glad we are gathering here in the eve of the very first informal meeting of NATO defence ministers taking place in Slovakia. I am especially happy we have been given the opportunity to organize such a distinguished event during a significant year marking an anniversary both for NATO and Slovakia.

Today, 60 years after original twelve Allies came to the decision to establish what later appeared to be the most effective collective defence organization in the world history and 5 years after the Slovak Republic joined it, we again seek answers to basic questions: What is the current purpose of NATO?; What are its core tasks and priorities? What is the role of Article 5? The preparation of the new Strategic concept offers a genuine chance to answer them. Thanks to Slovak Atlantic Commission the program of this conference raises also these problematic issues.

Although we can differ on some specific aspects of functioning of NATO, I am confident we share the crucial points: as 60 years ago, NATO is still the same unique value-driven organisation based on principles of democracy and liberty. We all agree it remains the principal security instrument of the transatlantic community. We all are also confident its success today, depends on the strong political commitment of its members and support of the public.

But the environment for promoting peace and security has changed significantly. New and emerging threats coming predominantly out of NATO territory create new needs and requirements not only for military, but also for civilian capabilities of NATO Member States. Threats such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and failing states remain. Moreover, there are other phenomena, such as cyber attacks, climate and demographic changes, energy security that became the inherent part of this new environment. They were not taken into account adequately before and we should work together to cope with them.

To be effective while facing up these threats we must not ease up in our transformation efforts. Increasing of Armed Forces` capabilities of every individual Ally is the essential prerequisite for rising defence potential of the whole NATO. Therefore the discussion on usability of forces should remain at the core of NATO`s internal talks. It is not just coincidence it will be one of the main topics we will discuss tomorrow with my counterparts. We already know, and not only because of Afghanistan and ISAF, that well trained and equipped expeditionary forces are the best tool for fulfilling a wide spectrum of tasks. The logic is easy – deployable and sustainable forces are suitable for territorial defence as well as for operations far from our territory.

Building of such armed forces is currently determined by high operational tempo and limited availability of financial, material and human resources. Especially current financial and economical crisis considerably hamper resource policy. We all are facing severe cuts in our defence budgets and are pushed to search for new – and in some way unconventional - methods of dealing with our resources. The only possible solution in these hard times is a reprioritisation of goals and tasks. This brings real savings and wise exploiting of resources of every kind. But as one saying puts it, “Every day may not be good, but there's something good in every day”. In other way, the negative effects of economic climate offer the opportunities for setting up better and more flexible resource management system able to meet long-term requirements.

For Slovakia it is not a new situation. We have already adopted this approach even before the crisis began. It just makes these processes much quicker. Therefore we are already undertaking decisive, although probably unpopular measures: reducing the number of civilian and military personnel of the Ministry by 25%, within the Armed Forces rationalizing command and control structures [but not reducing deployable elements of the Armed Forces] and reprioritising of acquisition projects. We are also adjusting the Long Term Development Plan of the Ministry of Defence [Model 2015] focused on a planning horizon of 2020 to the new situation.

I mentioned ISAF a few minutes ago. Let me elaborate a little bit more about current role of Slovak Armed Forces in Afghanistan. ISAF is, undoubtedly, a focal point of the Allied endeavours. As several times emphasized by the former and also the current Secretary General, this operation remains NATO's top priority and this will probably not change for the foreseeable future. The Slovak Republic has a strong commitment to success in Afghanistan and we consider this operation to be one of the main priorities. We therefore increased our contribution by new guard unit of 11 soldiers deployed to Kandahar and by medical team of 3 people to Uruzgan province this summer. Hence our total deployment in ISAF is currently 245 troops.

To conclude, let me thank again Slovak Atlantic Commission for bringing together so many experts from a broad spectrum of institutions. As the Secretary General has stated at the beginning of the New Strategic Concept preparation, transparency of security and defence issues is necessary. This conference is another example of this valid approach.

Thank you very much for your attention. I wish you a fruitful discussion, nice stay in Bratislava and all the best in your professional carrier and personal lives.