

STRATEGIC CONCEPT FOR THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION



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In its program statement for 2023 – 2027, the **Government of the Slovak Republic (SR) set the strengthening of diplomatic and economic activities in the Indo-Pacific region as one of its main foreign policy priorities.** In line with this priority, the **Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic has prepared this Strategic Concept for the Engagement of the Slovak Republic in the Indo-Pacific Region** (hereinafter referred to as the “Strategic Concept”).

The gradual shift of the geopolitical and geo-economic center of gravity of global development to the Indo-Pacific region was predicted at the expert level as early as in the 1990s. In recent years, it has also begun to be reflected in strategic policy documents at the international and national levels. This region is considered to be the new center of geopolitical events, but also an area of competition between regional and global powers, primarily due to its size and economic potential, but also due to the security, climate, environmental, and demographic challenges it faces. **The countries of the Indo-Pacific region are important partners for Slovakia** for several reasons. The Indo-Pacific region is becoming the most important part of the world in terms of innovation and cutting-edge technologies. It is home to **60 % of the world’s population and generates 64 % of global GDP.** Every year, goods worth more than USD 3 trillion pass through the South China Sea, with approximately **40 % of the European Union’s foreign trade** passing through the Taiwan Strait and the Strait of Malacca and continuing towards the Suez Canal. **Since 2015, foreign direct investment from this region has reached approximately EUR 3.5 billion in Slovakia,** investment projects in progress are worth approximately **EUR 7 billion** and have contributed to **the creation of approximately 40,000 jobs to date.**

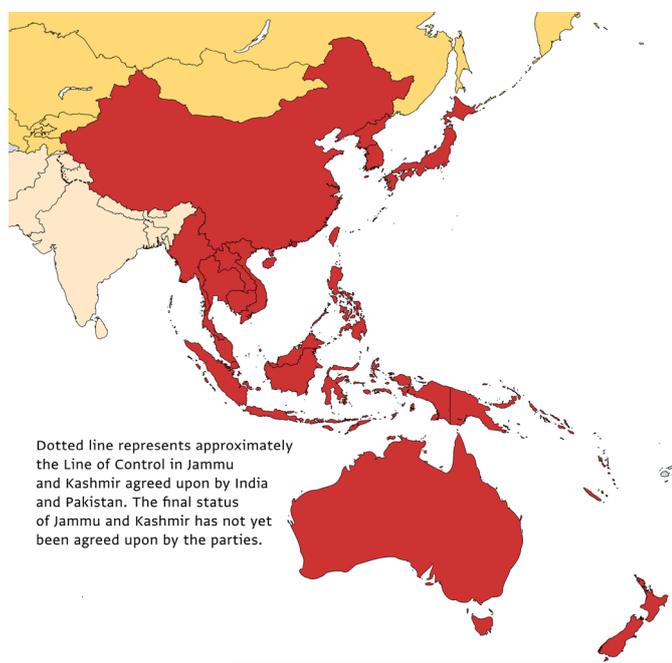
The economic potential of these countries allows Slovakia to expand its export markets, **attract foreign investment, and support Slovak investment abroad.** Diversifying trade relations with Indo-Pacific countries will reduce Slovakia’s dependence on traditional markets in Europe. **Cooperation with technologically innovative countries will bring new technologies and know-how.** Differentiation will enable the exchange of experience in industrial production and

innovation. **Security cooperation will strengthen Slovak resilience and ability to address traditional and cyber security challenges.** Cooperation with these countries will bring **new energy and environmental solutions. Synergies in research, education, culture, and the development of interpersonal contacts will bring mutual enrichment and strengthen the relations between Slovakia and the Indo-Pacific countries.**

The aim of the presented **Concept is to analyze** the global significance of the Indo-Pacific region, assess the current situation, and identify **opportunities for cooperation between Slovakia and countries in this region in the short and medium term.** **The document also emphasizes the identification and prioritization of specific conclusions and recommendations that will serve as a basis for the implementation of the proposed measures.** The main recommendations include the development of bilateral and multi-lateral relations, the promotion of trade and investment opportunities, as well as the strengthening of cooperation in science, research, and technology, and the consolidation of people-to-people contacts, which play a key role in Slovakia’s interaction with the Indo-Pacific region. These recommendations are designed to **support the long-term sustainable development of mutual relations, contribute to the security and economic growth of the Slovak Republic, and promote the Slovak Republic in the Indo-Pacific region.**

GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

The Indo-Pacific region is defined differently in the existing strategic documents of international organizations, the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the “EU”), and individual countries (it includes e.g. the East African coast and even the Pacific coast of the American continent). The Strategic Concept defines this term on the basis of **geographical and geopolitical compactness** and considers it to be identical to **the regions of South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific** as defined by the World Bank (i.e. “from the Hindu Kush to the Hawaiian Islands”).



Map 1: South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific*

The global significance of the Indo-Pacific region is based on dynamic population and economic growth and innovative potential, which currently confirms **the irreversible shift of the world’s geopolitical center of gravity** to this region. The seven most important factors enabling the Indo-Pacific region to compete successfully with Europe and North America are considered to be: free market economy, science and technology, meritocracy, pragmatism, culture of peace, rule of law, and education. At the same time, it is becoming **one of the most vulnerable regions**, where even slight destabilization or escalation of tensions can have dramatic economic and political consequences for the whole world. This is evidenced by the increasing militarization in the region. In addition, it faces climate

challenges, rapid urbanization, demographic changes, and environmental pressures that threaten food resources. The growing economic performance of the Indo-Pacific region confirms that this is a long-term trend that is not only sustainable but also has sufficient strength and potential to change the distribution of economic and political power at the global level. Neither the Asian financial crisis (1997), the global financial crisis (2008), nor the COVID-19 pandemic have reversed this trend, and they have had less impact on the region than on Europe, North America and other parts of the world. While economies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and China are experiencing a slow-down in growth, countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam will continue to drive growth in the region.

Population growth in the Indo-Pacific region is expected to continue at least during the first half of the 21st century, although it has slowed significantly since the end of the 20th century. Unlike Europe and North America, its share of the world’s population will not decline. **The main driver of development is continued productivity growth, linked to the rising standard of living.** This dynamic is expected to continue for the next 40 years. Since 2000, most of the countries considered newly industrialized are in the Indo-Pacific region. According to the Human Development Index (HDI) forecast, the region will approach the HDI of EU Member States and the US in the near future. **By 2030, up to 88 % of the global middle class will come from the Indo-Pacific region.** Any destabilization of this region could **threaten Slovakia’s trade turnover (6 % of our foreign trade passes through the South China Sea) and its most important sector – the automotive industry (representing 13 % of Slovakia’s GDP and 47 % of Slovak exports).** In addition to the opportunities offered by the Indo-Pacific region, it is also **a region with a number of long-standing disputes and tensions** (e.g., tensions in the East China Sea and South China Sea, the Taiwan issue*, the situation on the Korean Peninsula, territorial disputes between individual countries), often involving potential conflicts in which at least one actor has nuclear capabilities and several of the potential conflicts could have a wider than regional impact if they escalate. The long-running

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civil war in Myanmar is also destabilizing the Indo-Pacific region.

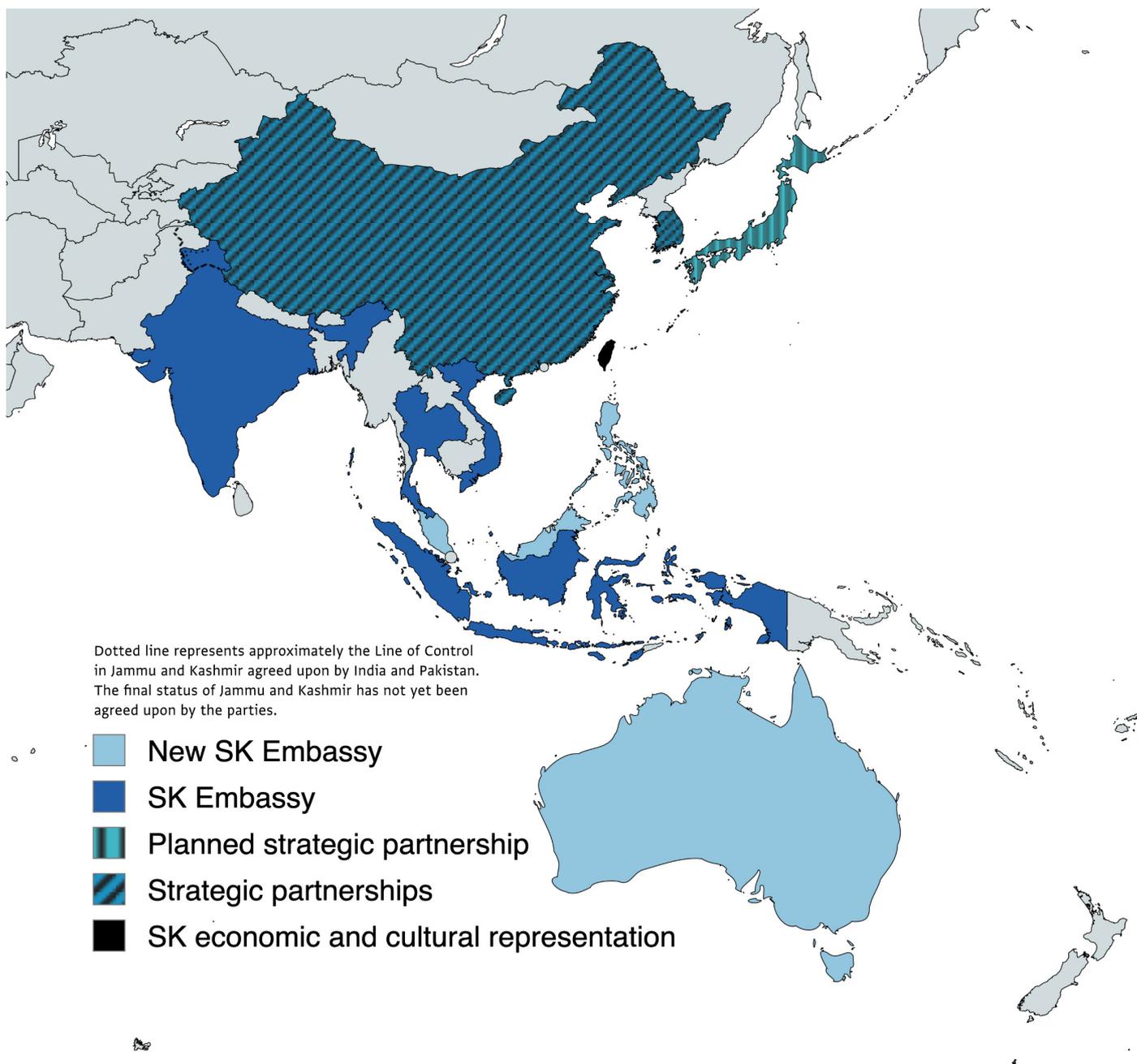
The countries of **the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, together with China and India, will play a central role in the Indo-Pacific region. Unlike Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, these are developing economies. Economic growth in the region will be driven by ASEAN which can see the most dynamic development. ASEAN is the second most successful regional integration project after the EU. In 2023, it was **the 5th largest economy in the world and the 3rd most populous grouping in the world** (676.6 million) – after India which was ranked first (1.438 billion), China which was ranked second (1.427 billion) and before EU ranked fourth (449.2 million) and USA ranked fifth (343.5 million).

The ongoing change in the global context will in the upcoming decade be determined by tensions and global rivalry between the US and China, the consequences of their mutual competition **in the field of artificial intelligence, in the development and production of next-generation semiconductors and other innovations, and access to rare earths** (China refines 60 % of the world's lithium and 80 % of its cobalt and mines 68 % of its graphite; all three are key components of high-capacity batteries which are increasingly important in the transition to renewable energy and green economy). Regional stability could be significantly affected by China's massive military and naval build-up and the strategic ambiguity of the US, particularly in relation to Taiwan*. Internal diversity and the varying weight of relations with these global powers may limit ASEAN's ability to address regional challenges in a unified manner, but this will not affect its position in the Indo-Pacific region; in fact, thanks to irreversible macroeconomic trends and growing resilience, it may even benefit from it. Efforts to maintain a multipolar world order and the clear link between prosperity and security between Europe and the Indo-Pacific region create **space for a more active role for the EU in the Indo-Pacific region**. The principles of international law, open markets and partnerships between regions have much in common with the goals and values promoted by the countries of the Indo-Pacific region. In the rivalry between the US and China, ASEAN countries prefer a multipolar world that respects international law in which they do not have to choose sides.

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THE STARTING POSITION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

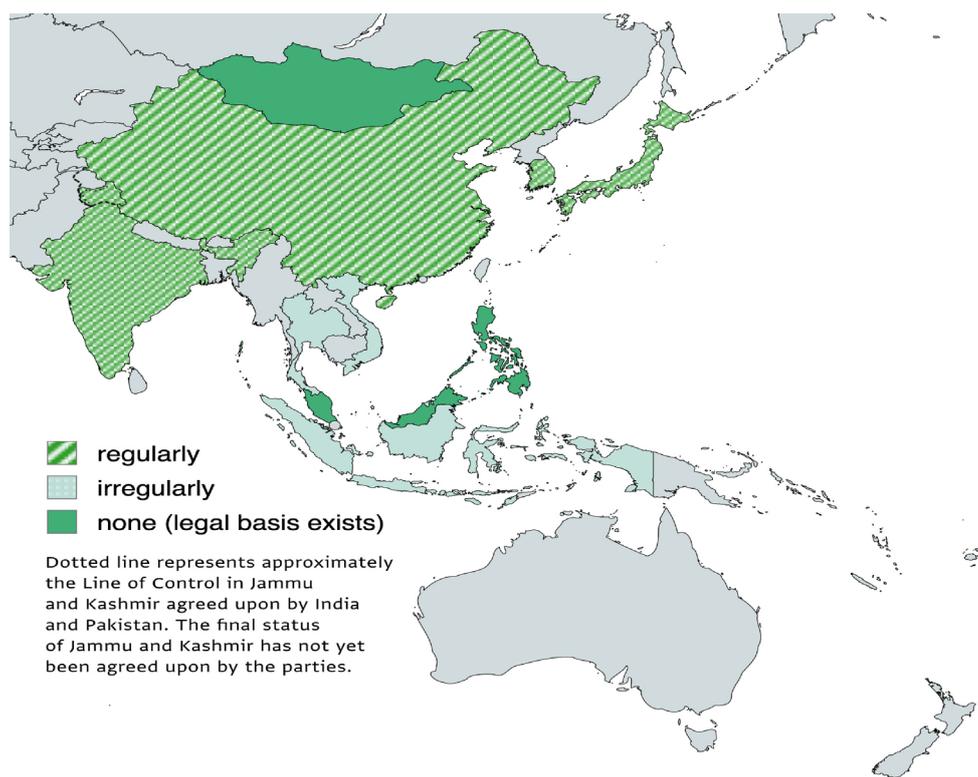
Slovak foreign policy has not yet had a more comprehensive concept for developing relations with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The importance of the Indo-Pacific region was first systematically highlighted in the Strategic Outlook for the Foreign and European Policy of the Slovak Republic (2022).



Map 2: Slovak diplomatic missions and strategic partnerships

The main determinants of the development of bilateral relations between the Slovak Republic and individual countries in the Indo-Pacific region are primarily:

- **geographical distance, absence of traditional ties, and cultural differences** affecting mutual interaction at the level of interpersonal contacts;
- **the geopolitical position** of partner countries (China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia) and **their influence at the multilateral level**;
- already concluded (China, Republic of Korea) and planned **strategic partnerships** with Indo-Pacific countries (Japan) reflecting the new direction and economic and political needs and interests of the Slovak Republic in relation to China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan;
- **a source of significant and long-term investment** in the Slovak economy **with strong innovation and technological potential** for the Slovak Republic and the creation of jobs on the Slovak labor market (foreign direct investment from this region has reached approximately EUR 3.5 billion since 2015, investment projects in progress are worth approximately EUR 7 billion and have so far contributed to the creation of approximately 40,000 jobs);
- source of employment for third-country nationals from the Indo-Pacific region with the aim of **reducing labor shortages in the Slovak Republic**;
- efforts to **intensify trade and economic cooperation and support of the Slovak exports** in order to reduce the long-term passive balance of trade (Slovakia's trade with the Indo-Pacific region exceeds EUR 26 billion);
- cooperation with **like-minded democratic countries** in the region on issues of global security and economic cooperation (Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, i.e. the IP4 platform, membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (hereinafter referred to as "OECD"));
- **participation in the formation of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy**, including its Common Security and Defense Policy, among other things in the areas of cyber security, hybrid threats and the fight against illegal migration;
- **historical reminiscences** resulting from the cooperation with China, Vietnam, Mongolia, Cambodia and Laos in the recent past, stripped of their original ideological narratives or resulting from the former Czechoslovakia's activities in the region, or a certain affinity resulting from the fact that Slovakia, as part of Western civilization, was not among the colonial states;
- **Slovak diaspora** in Australia, Thailand, Vietnam and New Zealand.



Map 3: Political consultations at the level of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

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MAIN PRIORITIES OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Slovakia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region should be based on three fundamental and interrelated factors:

1. Slovakia **supports an international order based on the principles and rules of international law and the Charter of the United Nations**. The UN, its specialized agencies, programs, and institutions play a central role in addressing global issues and resolving international disputes through political consultations and negotiations.
2. **The security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific region are closely linked**. Given the processes of globalization and the dynamic economic and political environment of the Indo-Pacific region, including potential flashpoints such as the Korean Peninsula, the East China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea, as well as other territorial disputes, Slovakia is determined to work closely with its partners to address existing threats and strengthen its own security and economic resilience. For Slovakia, it is **crucial to maintain the fragile but still existing stability in the region and to de-escalate existing disputes and conflicts through the instruments of international law**.
3. **The Slovak economy ranks among the world leaders in terms of trade openness and the share of exports and imports in the gross domestic product**. The security of supply chains and sea lines of communication (SLOC) is **a vital condition for maintaining the market competitiveness of the Slovak economy**. Free, fair, and mutually beneficial global trade based on generally accepted rules remains a priority of the Slovak foreign policy, despite the current turbulence, including in relation to the Indo-Pacific region.

Trade openness			Share of exports in GDP			Share of imports in GDP		
1.	Luxembourg	394.22	1.	Luxembourg	212.53	1.	Luxembourg	181.69
2.	Hong Kong*	352.8	2.	Hong Kong*	176.22	2.	Hong Kong*	175.38
3.	Djibouti	342.7	3.	Singapore	174.3	3.	Djibouti	173.6
4.	Singapore	311.24	4.	Djibouti	169.11	4.	Malta	147.29
5.	Ireland	237.22	5.	Malta	166.71	5.	Singapore	136.94
6.	Malta	227.45	6.	Ireland	134.14	6.	Ireland	100.61
7.	SAE	202.33	7.	Macao	92.68	7.	Seychelles	97.12
8.	Cyprus	192.79	8.	SLOVAKIA	91.43	8.	Kiribati	92.49
9.	Seychelles	183.07	9.	Cyprus	89.35	9.	Cyprus	90.27
10.	SLOVAKIA	182.31	10.	Belgium	86.68	10.	SLOVAKIA	90.1

Table 1: Ranking of countries and territories by trade openness and by share of exports and imports in GDP, 2023, source: World Bank

* Hong Kong, China

CONTEXT OF SLOVAKIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION IN TERMS OF ITS EU MEMBERSHIP

As an EU Member State, Slovakia **based** this Strategic Concept on the EU's **strategies towards China and the Indo-Pacific region**. The Strategic Concept builds on the ongoing efforts of the EU, NATO, and partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region to maintain the Indo-Pacific region as free, open, inclusive, and compliant with international rules. **Slovakia's main interest is to promote peace and security, uphold the principles of the rule of law and democracy, protect human rights and promote the supremacy of international law and effective multilateral cooperation, including in the Indo-Pacific region.**

The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy focuses on **seven key priority areas**:

1. Sustainable and inclusive prosperity
2. Green transition
3. Ocean governance
4. Digital governance and partnerships
5. Connectivity
6. Security and defense
7. Human security

The challenge for the EU will be **to maintain the potential of its predominantly positive image** in countries across almost the entire Indo-Pacific region, despite differing approaches to certain international political issues. It will be crucial to intensify comprehensive cooperation in several areas, particularly in deepening trade relations, sectoral cooperation and maritime security. Slovakia will significantly **increase its participation in various programs and projects** focused on the Indo-Pacific region, financed from the budgets of international organizations of which it is a member. In the case of the EU, this specifically includes platforms such as **Team Europe and Global Gateway**. Taking into account the **EU's strategic connection to the Indo-Pacific region through critical maritime routes**, Slovakia supports the importance of missions such as EU NAVFOR (Atalanta) and projects such as CRIMARIO (Critical Maritime Routes Indo-Pacific) and ESIWA (Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with

Asia, which aim to raise international awareness of the EU as a security provider and strengthen cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, cyber security, maritime security and crisis management. **Slovakia considers it important to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**. In this context, it welcomes the efforts of the countries involved to develop a binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

From the perspective of Slovakia's foreign policy priorities, it is important for the EU to focus on deepening comprehensive cooperation with Japan, the Republic of Korea, and India, raising it to a higher level with Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, and **intensifying EU negotiations on free trade agreements**.

The countries **of the Indo-Pacific region** are **important partners** for Slovakia for several reasons, also in the context of and in line with EU priorities:

- **Economic potential:** the opportunity to expand its export markets, attract foreign investment and facilitate Slovak investment abroad. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, Slovakia's economic diplomacy in the region will be strengthened.
- **Diversification of trade relations:** Strengthening the relations with Indo-Pacific countries will enable Slovakia to diversify its trade relations and reduce its dependence on traditional markets, particularly in Europe. To this end, it is necessary to establish new trade agreements and partnerships with countries in the region.
- **Technological innovation:** Many Indo-Pacific countries are leaders in technological innovation. Cooperation with them can bring new technologies and know-how to Slovakia, which should focus on supporting research and development and creating platforms for technological cooperation. At the same time, Slovakia can use these partnerships to promote innovative and sustainable technological solutions.

- **Security cooperation:** It can strengthen Slovakia's ability to address security and cyber challenges and contribute to their resolution in the region.
- **Climate and environmental challenges:** Cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries in this area can bring mutually beneficial solutions and technologies to address environmental problems.
- **Mutual exchange of know-how and experience in various fields:** Slovakia can offer its experience

in industrial production, the automotive industry and mechanical engineering, while Indo-Pacific countries can contribute with technological innovation and investments.

- **Cooperation:** in the areas of research and development, education, culture, and the development of interpersonal contacts can deepen and strengthen the relations between Slovakia and the Indo-Pacific countries.

TOOLS FOR INCREASING SLOVAKIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

I. Multilateral cooperation

Slovakia **supports the revitalization of high-level political dialogue between Europe and Asia (ASEM – Asia-Europe Meeting)**, which since 1996 has been strengthening the cooperation between European and Asian countries in three pillars: political, economic and financial, and social, cultural and educational. An **important instrument of this dialogue is the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** which Slovakia contributes voluntarily to.

Another important aspect is **the convergence of Indo-Pacific countries towards OECD standards**, with the OECD considering South-East Asian countries and India as strategic priorities for the exchange of know-how. At the same time, the OECD proposes strengthening the position of the Indo-Pacific region in the global political dialogue and decision-making processes. India has adopted the most OECD basic standards and recommendations (14) among the countries in the region and participates in 12 OECD technical committees.

II. Slovakia's strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region

Slovakia is seeking to further strengthen its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region through **strategic partnerships with key partners** such as the Republic of Korea, China (already concluded) and Japan (in preparation at the expert level). These partnerships will enable the economic and technological potential of the partner countries to be exploited for the growth and development of the Slovak economy.

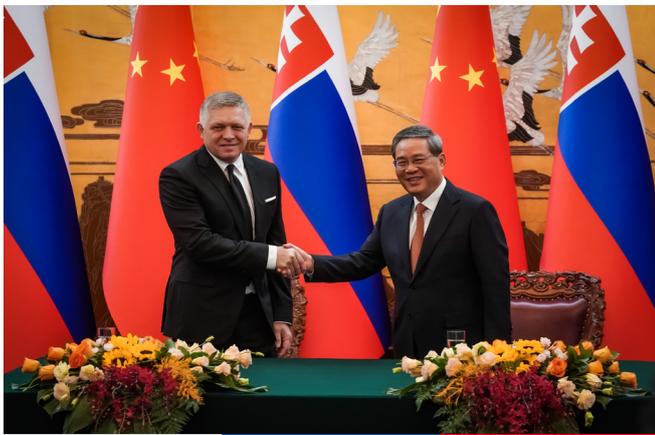
The Republic of Korea (ROK) in particular, with its strong technology sector and innovative industry, offers a wealth of opportunities for cooperation in areas such as electronics, robotics, automotive industry, nuclear energy and renewable energy. Slovakia benefits from ROK investments, joint ventures, research partnerships that support technological innovation and increase industrial competitiveness, as well as exchange study programs.



Minister Juraj Blanár and former South Korean Minister of Unification Kim Yung-ho

China is an integral part of Slovakia's foreign policy in relation to the Indo-Pacific region. The goal of our interaction with China is pragmatic and active economic cooperation, including investment cooperation and public-private partnership (PPP) projects with specific results. We also see China as an important partner of the EU. It is important to prevent trade and customs wars and protectionist tendencies and to prefer the creation of mutually beneficial cooperation. Slovakia offers China access to the EU single market and expects mainly Chinese investment in areas of modern technologies with high added value, as well as easier access to the Chinese market for Slovak businesses. Slovakia

applies the **One China policy**, and at the same time advocates maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and **continuing successful economic and cultural cooperation with Taiwan***.



Prime Minister of Slovakia Robert Fico and Prime Minister of China Li Qiang

Japan, known for its advanced technology, manufacturing expertise and strong emphasis on research and development, **is another key partner for Slovakia**. Even closer cooperation with Japan can provide Slovakia with access to state-of-the-art technologies, strengthen the Slovak innovation ecosystem and facilitate the exchange of knowledge in high-tech sectors.



President of Slovakia Peter Pellegrini with former Prime Minister of Japan Shigeru Ishiba

III. Important bilateral partners

In addition to strategic partnerships, Slovakia recognizes the importance of expanding its engagement with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. **India plays a key role in Asia**, given its significant economic growth, large consumer market and growing influence on the global stage. India's robust IT sector, growing manufacturing base and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem offer tremendous opportunities for cooperation. By forging strong ties with India, Slovakia can tap into its dynamic market, foster innovative partnerships and increase bilateral trade and investment flows.



Foreign Ministers of Slovakia and India, Juraj Blanár and S. Jaishankar

Slovakia considers Indonesia, a member of the G20, the largest Muslim country and one of the most populous countries in the world, **to be an important partner for strengthening and deepening bilateral cooperation**. By 2030, Indonesia aims to become the world's seventh largest economy and to join the OECD in the coming years. Indonesia is promising for Slovak exports due to its rapidly growing economy with significant demand for engineering products, infrastructure construction, investments in energy, automotive industry, telecommunications, and IT solutions. The area of environmental projects and watercourse management also has considerable potential for the development of cooperation.

Vietnam, which has become one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, is also an important partner for the Slovak Republic.

Supporting the economic interests of Slovak companies, increasing exports (given the high balance of mutual trade), and supporting investment projects in Vietnam will be among the main priorities of the Slovak Republic. In terms of trade, Vietnam is **the third most important partner of the Slovak Republic** in Asia after China and the Republic of Korea, and Slovakia is **the second largest trading partner** of Vietnam in the Central and Eastern European region.

The officially recognized Vietnamese minority in Slovakia also represents potential for even more intensive mutual cooperation. Only two countries within the EU recognize the Vietnamese minority (Slovakia and the Czech Republic). Vietnam, like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, is an important source of labor that contributes to the development of the Slovak economy and mutual interaction.

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Malaysia is a strategically important partner, and one of the Slovak Republic's goals will be to deepen economic ties, particularly in the areas of trade, investment and technology. In addition to traditional areas of cooperation such as the defense industry and engineering, it will also be necessary to focus on new sectors such as IT, smart cities, e-government and the automotive industry.

With **Thailand**, another candidate country for OECD membership, cooperation has not yet reached the desired level, and the goal for the future is to change this situation. In this regard, it will be necessary to use all available tools, including organizing a meeting of the intergovernmental commission for economic cooperation and initiating a process leading to the conclusion of basic economic agreements. The situation is similar in relation to the **Philippines**. In the case of the Philippines, there will be an interest in increasing the trade balance with an emphasis on Slovak exports not only in traditional areas. In the future, greater attention will need to be paid to areas such as information and communication technologies (ICT), smart city solutions, and the Internet of Things (IoT).

IV. Cooperation between the Slovak Republic and ASEAN

Slovakia **recognizes the central role of ASEAN** (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in the Indo-Pacific region and supports its efforts to transform this geographical area into an integrated and closely connected region based on dialogue and cooperation rather than mutual rivalry.

Slovakia **considers cooperation with ASEAN countries to be one of the pillars of its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region**. The expansion of the network of existing embassies in ASEAN countries – **the reopening of the embassy in Malaysia and the establishment of a new embassy in the Philippines** – reflects Slovakia's strategic approach to strengthening bilateral relations with these rapidly growing economies.

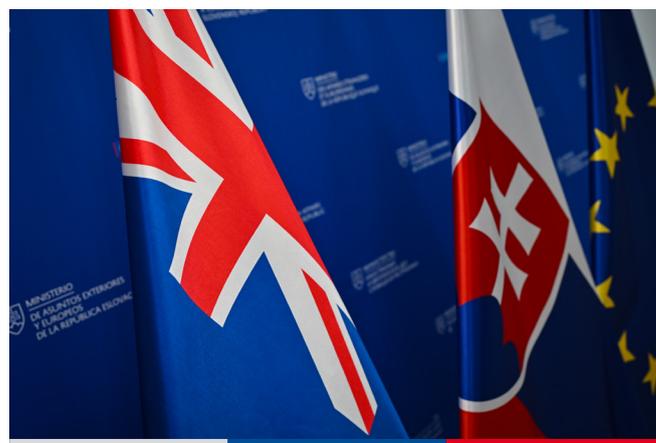
Together with the existing embassies in Jakarta, Hanoi and Bangkok, the Slovak embassies will serve as centers for promoting Slovak interests, facilitating trade, stimulating investment and supporting cultural exchanges.

Increasing the interaction of the Slovak business community with the ASEAN market of more than 600 million people **is a key objective of the current and future efforts in the field of economic diplomacy**.

The economic dynamics and integration of ASEAN offer significant opportunities for Slovak businesses. A strengthened diplomatic presence will facilitate market access and provide better support for trade and investment initiatives.

V. Cooperation with Australia and the South Pacific

The reopening of the Slovak Embassy in Canberra and the transfer of accreditations back from Tokyo to Canberra will contribute **to intensifying the dialogue with Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands Forum**. These countries and organizations are important players in the region, and strengthening diplomatic ties will facilitate greater cooperation in the areas of trade, security, environmental sustainability, and multilateral forums.



Slovak diplomacy is strengthening its presence in Australia

VI. Security cooperation

Recognizing the interconnected security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific region, **Slovakia will cooperate with like-minded partners, including the IP4** (the Indo-Pacific Four: Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand) on the protection against hybrid and cyber threats and strengthening societal resilience. The dynamic economic and political environment of the Indo-Pacific region, including the aforementioned hotspots of potential conflict, is the reason for Slovakia's need for a strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific region in all areas of security, including the responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Relations with NATO partners in the Indo-Pacific are deepening – since 2022, the IP4 has been participating in Alliance summits and ministerial-level meetings. Cooperation focuses primarily on the **support for Ukraine, cyber defense, combating disinformation, and technology**. NATO is also working with IP4 partners to deepen industrial cooperation, protect supply chains, combat hybrid threats, and cooperate on maritime security and the protection of critical subsea infrastructure. In addition, cooperation in tackling cybercrime is essential, as cyber threats are constantly evolving and pose significant risks to national and global security.



NATO Monument in Brussels

VII. Economic cooperation

Slovakia's cooperation with countries in the Indo-Pacific region is based primarily on the need **to ensure inclusive and sustainable economic growth**. By leveraging the unique strengths and capabilities of its partners, Slovakia is poised to achieve its economic and strategic goals. Through its proactive approach to building and expanding strategic partnerships, Slovakia clearly demonstrates its commitment to contributing to a more connected and prosperous future – not only for itself, but for the entire EU – in cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region. **Economic diplomacy is one of the key pillars of Slovakia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region**. Slovakia is systematically strengthening its network of economic diplomats, recognizing the significant potential for deepening economic ties and promoting cooperation. Particular emphasis is placed on expanding economic cooperation and creating new opportunities for Slovak entrepreneurs. **At the same time, it is necessary to complete the contractual and legal basis for strengthening trade and economic relations through agreements on the avoidance of double taxation and agreements on the protection**

of mutual investments, thereby creating a more favorable business environment for investors and entrepreneurs. Slovakia emphasizes inclusiveness in its economic diplomacy efforts, seeking to attract high value-added investments that can support sustainable growth and development. Intensive participation by individual actors in the field of external economic relations and systematic support for Slovak entrepreneurs are essential in order to strengthen their competitiveness and consolidate their position in the dynamically developing markets of the region.

Slovakia seeks to leverage the technological advances and innovative capabilities of partners such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan*, which are leaders in various fields, including digital technologies, green and nuclear energy and advanced manufacturing. By establishing strong partnerships with these innovation centers, Slovakia can gain better access to state-of-the-art technologies, further strengthen its research and development capacities and increase its competitiveness in the global market. **Taiwan is an important investor and a significant economic entity** which the Slovak Republic will continue to communicate intensively with in the commercial, economic, and cultural spheres within the framework of the EU's One China policy.

In accordance with the Concept of External Economic Relations and Economic Diplomacy of the Slovak Republic for 2022 – 2030, **strengthening the export position and internationalization opportunities of Slovak export companies in important foreign markets** is also a priority in relation to the Indo-Pacific region. Achieving sustainable economic growth and increasing the number of jobs requires increasing the intensity, effectiveness, and quality of export support for Slovak producers (especially small and medium-sized ones), where an increase in export production will lead to the creation of new jobs. By supporting the arrival of additional foreign investors who will create new jobs in connection with the export of goods and services, and by supporting the innovative activities of Slovak companies, which will lead to an increase in their competitiveness on a global scale. **Slovakia is interested in stimulating not only the export performance but also the innovation performance of business entities operating on its territory.**

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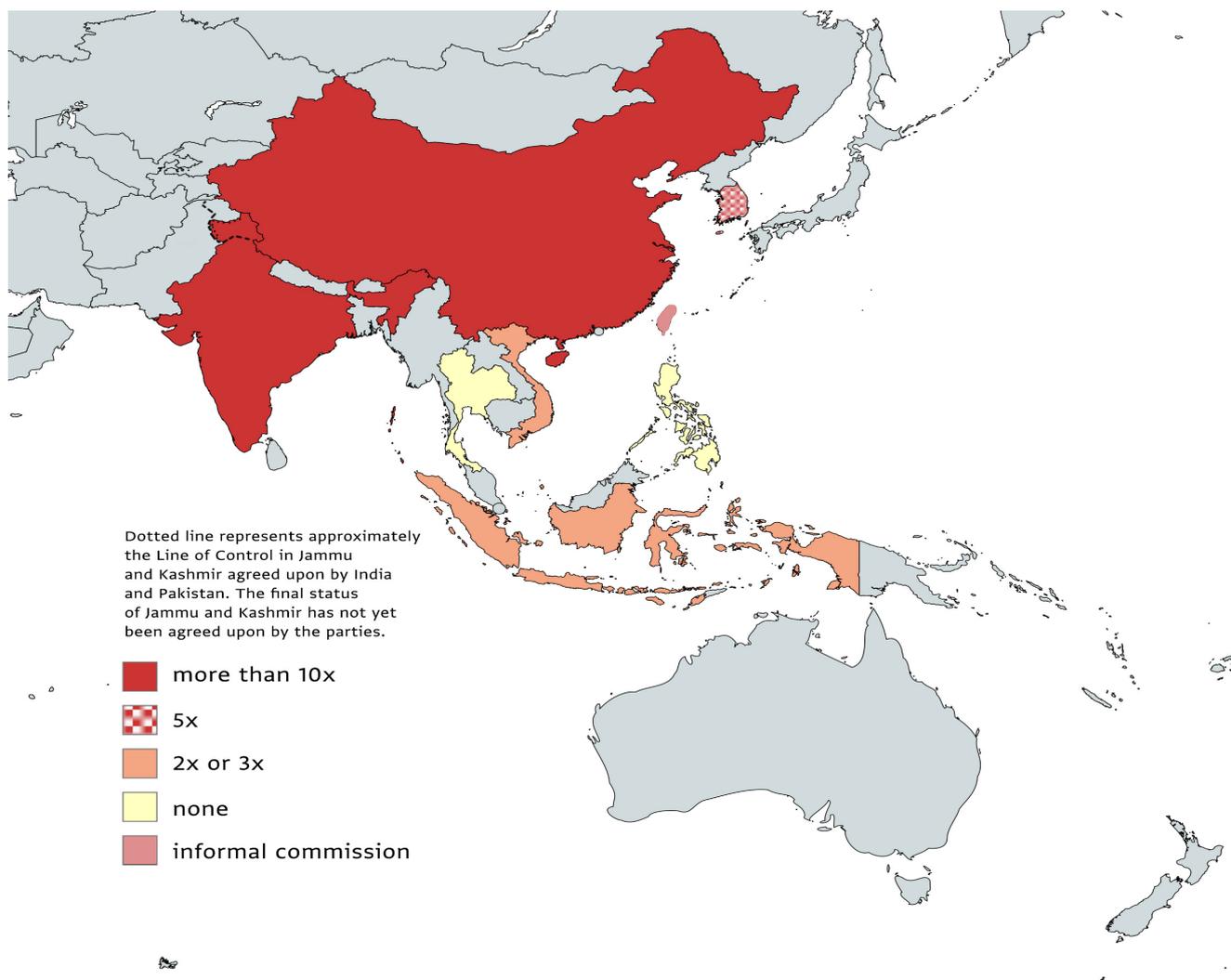
One of the main priorities is to establish lasting cooperation between individual institutions involved in supporting the development of industry, research, and innovation in order to make the best use of the potential for mutual cooperation and identified synergies.



Event of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs — Innovation Day

Intergovernmental and interdepartmental mixed commissions for economic cooperation are among

the direct instruments of the Slovak Republic's pro-export policy, with most departments and institutions actively participating in their activities to support trade, investment, science, research and innovation. Given their multi-sectoral focus, the commissions also include temporary or permanent working groups which assess selected issues of priority interest for cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the country concerned at an expert level. An important aspect is the involvement of business entities in the activities of most commissions for which business forums, investment events and bilateral negotiations between business entities are organized. From the perspective of Slovakia's commercial and economic interests, it is essential that the commissions operate with countries in which there is a real and confirmed interest on the part of the Slovak business community or in which the economic and strategic interests of the Slovak Republic are dominant.



Map 4: Number of meetings of intergovernmental, ministerial, and joint commissions to date

* The Slovak Republic does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan and, in line with the EU's One China policy, does not recognize Taiwan as an independent state. Taiwan is a separate customs and trade entity.

Slovakia’s cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries represents a significant opportunity **to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development.**

Slovakia can share its rich experience in water management, especially with countries in the Mekong region, and **contribute to effective water management and flood protection.** In the field of renewable energy and decarbonization, Slovakia can share its expertise and support joint projects **to reduce emissions.**

The transition to a circular economy can be supported by the exchange of technologies and best practices in plastic recycling and deposit-refund systems. This cooperation opens up new opportunities for economic cooperation and mutually beneficial partnerships.

VIII. Migration

Migration from the Indo-Pacific region presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the influx of migrants from this region provides the necessary labor force, contributes to economic growth, and addresses labor shortages in various sectors.

It is therefore necessary to focus on streamlining and shortening the relevant procedures in order to facilitate access to the Slovak market, especially for skilled labor.

On the other hand, migration also poses **security risks**, including terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking. It is essential that Slovakia cooperates with regional partners to implement security measures and share intelligence to mitigate these threats.

Employment Visas (2023-2024)

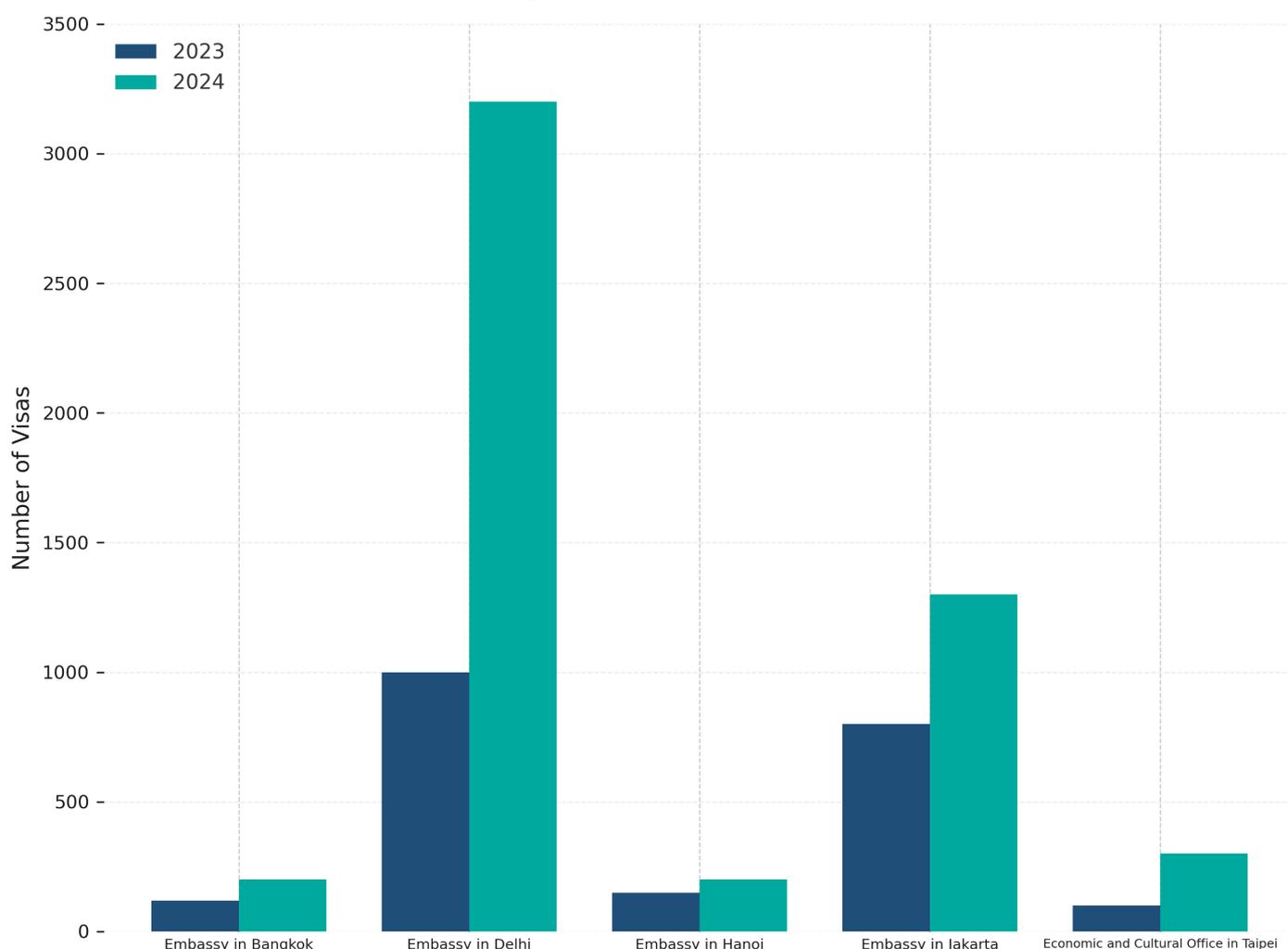


Chart 1 illustrates the increase in so-called employee visas issued through selected representative offices in the region for years 2023 - 2024, which is only a portion of the total number of visas issued.

VII The dimension of interpersonal relations

People-to-people contacts play a key role in Slovakia's interaction with the Indo-Pacific region. They contribute to the development of economic, cultural, and educational cooperation. Trade and business exchanges strengthen business ties by facilitating the sharing of best practices, innovative technologies, and investment opportunities. These interactions help strengthen Slovakia's economic growth and promote mutually beneficial partnerships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Strengthening Slovakia's participation in cultural festivals, exhibitions, and artistic collaborations with countries in the Indo-Pacific region promotes mutual understanding and appreciation of diverse heritages. Cultural diplomacy helps overcome barriers and build friendships.

A mutually beneficial area of cooperation is **the exchange of students, whether through government scholarships or programs such as Erasmus+.**

Academic cooperation and research partnerships also contribute to the exchange of knowledge and innovation. The Slovak diaspora and former students in Slovakia play an important role in these interactions. The diaspora serves as a bridge, facilitating commercial, cultural and academic exchanges. Former students, who are familiar with Slovak culture and society, help strengthen bilateral ties by maintaining contact with their alma mater and Slovak colleagues. These people-to-people contacts raise Slovakia's profile by showcasing the country's values, culture, and intellectual contributions. By investing in these relationships, Slovakia not only enhances its global standing, but also contributes to a more interconnected world. In this context, it is necessary to analyze the current system of awarding Slovak government scholarships and increase their total number for selected countries in the Indo-Pacific region (e.g. Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING SLOVAKIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Bilateral political area

1. On May 29, 2024, and August 28, 2024, the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted Resolutions No 311/2024 and No 521/2024 on the establishment of representative offices of the Slovak Republic in the Commonwealth of Australia, based in Canberra, in Malaysia, based in Kuala Lumpur, and in the Republic of the Philippines, based in Manila. Once they become fully operational in 2025, **the diplomatic presence in the Indo-Pacific region will be sufficiently secured in the long term.**
2. **Expand and strengthen existing political dialogue**, including official and working visits and contact activities at the highest political level (president, prime minister, ministers). In this context, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic will also intensify cooperation through **interministerial political consultations.**
3. **Implement newly concluded strategic partnerships with the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China** at all agreed levels and formats, including maintaining regular intergovernmental and interministerial meetings.
4. Assess the scope and potential for cooperation with other important partners in the region and, where appropriate, **upgrade them to the level of strategic partnership.** In this context, **begin preparations for a strategic partnership with Vietnam** and one other country in the region, if interest is mutual.
5. Continue to establish diplomatic relations and cultivate **cooperation at the level of the UN and international organizations with Pacific island countries.**
6. With a view to strengthening comprehensive ties, including security issues, with Southeast Asian countries, strive **to sign a bilateral agreement on amity and cooperation with ASEAN** (TAC - Treaty of Amity and Cooperation).

Bilateral economic area

7. During 2025, **the strengthening of the embassies of Slovakia in the Indo-Pacific region with new economic diplomats will be completed**, primarily in non-cumulative systemized positions.
8. Consider strengthening the economic segment of the diplomatic service **by establishing SARIO foreign branches in priority countries in the region.**
9. Intensify the frequency of mutual **business missions to and from Indo-Pacific countries.**
10. **Complete the necessary contractual and legal basis**, i.e. agreements on the avoidance of double taxation and the protection of investments in priority countries according to trade turnover as **a basic condition for supporting mutual trade and investment.**
11. Analyze the status, functionality, results and relevance of the existing **intergovernmental and mixed commissions for economic cooperation** and, based on the results, revitalize them or launch new ones based on existing but as yet unfulfilled legal frameworks.
12. Strengthen participation in relevant exhibitions and expo events with the aim of presenting Slovak production and seeking new investment opportunities in the Slovak Republic.
13. **Strengthen cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries in the field of electromobility**, focusing on the development and production of batteries, electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. Cooperation with technologically advanced countries can bring new investments and technologies that will support the transition to sustainable transport.
14. Continue **to develop cooperation in the field of nuclear energy with Indo-Pacific countries.** Sharing technologies and best practices in the field of nuclear energy can increase energy security and efficiency, while supporting the

transition to low-carbon energy solutions.

Bilateral cooperation in other areas

15. Ensure **the opening of the Slovak Institute in Beijing** by 2026.
16. Evaluate the current system of **awarding government scholarships**, their effectiveness and usefulness for the development of bilateral relations, and **adapt their geographical focus to the foreign policy priorities of the Slovak Republic**.
17. In cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic, and possibly other state administration bodies, **strengthen cooperation in the area of crisis management, increase the share of humanitarian aid provided and subsequent development activities** in areas of the region affected by frequent natural disasters or crises of a different nature.
18. Support the expansion and deepening of cooperation within NATO with Indo-Pacific partners – **Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand**.
19. **Support mutual cooperation** between relevant entities operating **in the tourism sector**.
20. With the aim of **making effective use of foreign workers and supporting the economic growth of the Slovak Republic**, and in the context of the needs of individual sectors of the Slovak labor market, focus on the targeted recruitment of workers from Indo-Pacific countries, simplify immigration processes, support integration and inclusion, and cooperate with countries of origin on bilateral agreements on the employment of foreign workers.
21. Continue to support and promote **current scholarship schemes for foreign students in the Slovak Republic and reciprocally, in countries of the Indo-Pacific region**, as well as the mutual exchange of information on the mobility of students and researchers.

Cooperation within the European Union, international organizations and multilateral formats

22. Support EU priorities for expanding and deepening cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region in order to improve its own global competitiveness, introducing new cooperation mechanisms such as trade and technology councils, sustainable investment agreements, and trade and investment partnerships. **Slovakia supports the preparation of strategic partnerships with Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines, and the continuation of negotiations on free trade agreements with Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia**.
23. In the context of EU defense and security cooperation, Slovakia will continue **to support the development of bilateral EU dialogues with Indo-Pacific partners** in the form of non-binding **Strategic Compass** instruments focused on cooperation in maritime activities, security aspects of the space dimension, capability development, disarmament and non-proliferation, as well as the fight against terrorism and hybrid threats.
24. Slovakia **supports intensifying OECD cooperation with India, Indonesia and Thailand**.
25. **Intensify Slovakia's participation** in projects within the **Global Gateway and Team Europe platforms with the contribution of business entities**.
26. **Activate traditional and proven partnerships in the V4+ format** with Japan and the Republic of Korea.

All maps used in this document are for illustrative purposes only.



MINISTRY
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AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
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