

BLUE BERET

Slovak Defence Minister visits UNFICYP

The Minister of Defence of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Peter Gajdoš, paid an official visit to UNFICYP on 23 June 2016, where he met with the new Head of Mission, Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, and UNFICYP Force Commander Maj. Gen. Kristin Lund, who conveyed their appreciation for the continued commitment and support of the Slovak Republic to UNFICYP and efforts to build and maintain peace in Cyprus.

Mr. Gajdoš also used the opportunity to meet with Slovak soldiers serving at Mission HQ in Nicosia, visiting the Slovak engineers' platoon and Slovak Mobile Force Reserve troops in camp TATRY. Later on, he visited Sector 4 HQ, located at Camp General Stefanik in Famagusta, where, in the company of Force Commander Lund and Lt. Col. Joseph Panko, Commander of Sector 4, he attended a ceremony commemorating 15 years since Slovak troops first joined UNFICYP.

The highlight of the ceremony was the official unveiling of a plaque in memory of General Stefanik, an important figure in Slovak history. In her speech, Force Commander Lund paid tribute to the Slovak Republic for its excellent leadership and cooperation, qualities highly valued in a multinational environment such as UNFICYP.

Mr. Gajdoš highlighted the inspirational personality of General Stefanik, and expressed his strong belief that the memorial plaque would motivate the country's troops on the island. The Minister unveiled the memorial plaque with SFC Stefan Sevcik, a member of the Stefanik Society in Slovakia; following a brief reception and exchange of gifts, the Slovak delegation concluded their visit to the island.



Slovak troops' arrival in Cyprus

On 18 June 2001, shortly after the arrival of the first Slovak troops in Cyprus, Austrian Contingent Commander Lt Col Günter Kienberger handed over command of Sector 4 to Slovak Contingent Commander Lt Col Milan Kováč in the presence of then Special Representative of Secretary-General and Chief of Mission Mr. Zbigniew Wlosowicz and mission Force Commander Major General Victory Rana.

Initially, the contingent comprised 280 troops who, together with their colleagues from Hungary – present in Cyprus since 1993 – were responsible for Sector 4. In 2004, when the new concept of operation, 'UNFICYP Force 860', came alive, the number of Slovak troops was reduced to the current figure of 159; with colleagues from Hungary, Serbia and the Ukraine, they are responsible for Sector

About General Stefanik

Milan Rastislav Štefánik, born on 21 July 1880 in Košariská, Slovakia, was a Slovak astronomer and soldier who, with Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, helped found the new nation of Czechoslovakia in 1918–19. After studying at the University of Prague and receiving a doctorate of philosophy in 1904, Štefánik went to Paris, where he joined the staff of the astronomical observatory at Meudon, serving on scientific expeditions to Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. He became a naturalized French citizen, joining the French army after the outbreak of World War I before being drawn to the Czechoslovak liberation movement. Encouraged by the French government, he was sent on military and political missions to the United States, Russia, Italy, and other allied powers. In 1918, he became Minister of War in the provisional Czechoslovak government. General Štefánik perished in an airplane crash near Bratislava on 4 May 1919.



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