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The Fico–Trump meeting: Slovakia turns to US nuclear technologies

Krzysztof Dębiec

On 17–18 January, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico paid a visit to the United States. On the first day, in Washington, he signed an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) on bilateral cooperation in civilian nuclear energy with US Secretary of Energy Chris Wright. The agreement provides a framework for US-led projects in Slovakia, notably the construction by Westinghouse of a new 1,200 MW unit at the Bohunice nuclear power plant, as well as the deployment of small modular reactors (SMRs). A binding contract on the former is expected to be signed in 2027, with the unit scheduled to enter operation by 2041. In parallel, national export credit agencies signed an agreement on cooperation to support export financing. On the following day, Fico met US President Donald Trump at his private residence in Florida. In addition to nuclear cooperation, the talks covered the current situation in Ukraine, including prospects for a ceasefire, and what was described as an 'EU crisis'.

Regardless of his pro-Russian rhetoric – aimed above all at consolidating his domestic electorate – Fico is taking further steps, following major defence contracts in previous years, that are tying Slovakia's future ever more closely to the United States.

Commentary

- **Fico frames his meeting with Trump within the foreign-policy slogan he promotes, namely that of pursuing relations 'in all four directions of the world'.** This approach presumes maintaining political dialogue with all major global partners, at times in opposition to the EU's foreign-policy mainstream. Since May 2025, the Slovak prime minister has held bilateral meetings not only with the presidents of the United States and Ukraine, but also – on two occasions – with the leaders of Russia and China. Maintaining contacts with China is important for Slovakia's automotive industry (Slovakia produces the highest number of cars per capita in the world), which exports large volumes of vehicles to the Chinese market (in 2025, Slovakia was the third-largest country of origin for car imports into China). At the same time, around 2027, the Chinese company Geely is expected to begin serial production near Košice of electric vehicles under the Volvo and Polestar brands, and has declared ambitions for the facility to become the largest automotive plant in the country. During the same period, a battery factory for electric vehicles operated by the Chinese company Gotion is to begin operations near Nitra. Meetings with Vladimir Putin serve, on the one hand, domestic political objectives (as a signal to the pro-Russian segment of Fico's electorate), and on the other, the maintenance of supplies from Russia – above all relatively cheap gas – for as long as this remains possible under EU legislation. By contrast, the meeting with President Volodymyr Zelensky and frequent Slovak–Ukrainian intergovernmental consultations were most likely intended to improve the image of Fico's government within the EU (see '*'Dr Fico and Mr Hyde': Slovakia's game with Ukraine and Russia*').

- **Despite having relied on radically anti-American rhetoric while in opposition, Fico's party has, once in power, consistently deepened its ties with Washington.** Largely thanks to intergovernmental agreements with the United States, Bratislava had already brought defence spending close to 2% of GDP in 2020, which at the time was NATO's target for member states. In 2015, Fico's cabinet contracted nine UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters (worth approximately €300 million), while the government of Peter Pellegrini – in which Fico played a key role as leader of the largest party – ordered 14 F-16 C/D Block 70 fighter jets (10 of which have already been delivered). The latter contract, signed in 2018, was valued at €1.58 billion (but including servicing over 40 years, total expenditure is estimated to rise to €6.2 billion), making it the most expensive military procurement in the country's history. At the end of 2024, the helicopter fleet was expanded by a further 12 used Black Hawk aircraft (worth approximately €250 million) purchased from the US company ACE Aeronautics (owned by private Czech investors). The value of the announced agreement with Westinghouse for the construction of a new unit at the Bohunice nuclear power plant could reach €13–15 billion. Independently of this project, prospects are also emerging for cooperation with the United States on small modular reactors: Slovakia has received US grants to identify suitable locations and prepare feasibility studies within two larger US SMR projects, known as NEXT and Phoenix.
- **Nuclear energy plays a key role in Slovakia's energy mix and in its transition towards a low-carbon economy.** Following the expected commissioning of the fourth unit at the Mochovce nuclear power plant later this year, Slovakia is set to have the highest share of nuclear power in electricity generation worldwide; in 2024 it already ranked second globally (62%), behind only France (67%). The determination to pursue further nuclear projects is linked to the anticipated sharp rise in electricity demand, with government estimates pointing to an increase of 40–83% by 2040. At the same time, 2044–2045 is the projected timeframe for the shutdown of two Bohunice units with a combined net capacity of 932 MW. Given the protracted pace of nuclear expansion in countries that have opted for competitive tenders (such as the Czech Republic), Fico's government has decided to pursue an intergovernmental agreement, citing the example of Poland, among other factors. As early as autumn 2024, the Slovak prime minister stated that South Korea, France, and the United States were among the potential partners in talks, and in June 2025 he announced that his cabinet was close to signing an agreement with Washington. Unlike the existing units at both plants – operated by Slovenské elektrárne, which is 66% owned by Czech private capital and 34% by the state – the new Bohunice unit is to be fully state-owned, in part in order to increase government influence over electricity prices.