

## Article: How armed forces are dealing with the COVID-19 in Slovakia?

Name of the association: ZV SR

Country: Slovakia

ZV SR, a member association of European Organisation of Military Associations (EUROMIL) – of our umbrella that covers thousands of members, active or retired soldiers' interests, also would like to bring its input, positions, a short summary and information about how Slovaks are dealing with the COVID – 19.

### Orienteering race run against invisible enemy COVID – 19 vs. decisions of heads and political leaders

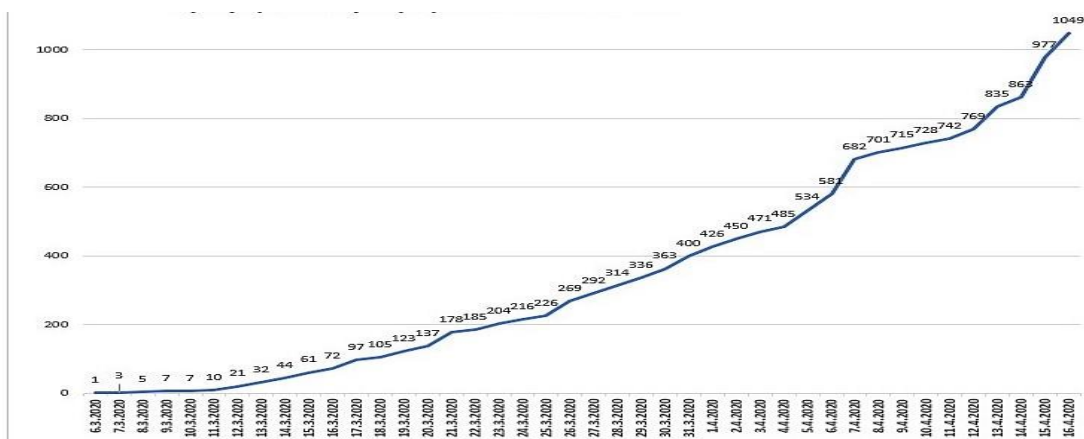
The reason of using the word „orienteering“ in a title of this block concerns with very specific and different situation all over the world. We all are enabled to see a start line (the date of very first positively tested COVID case) in the COVID – 19 pandemic in every one country. Continuous spread of the virus attacks regions from East to West, from South to North, from continent to the other one, all over the Earth. With that first day, the very first positively tested case – a man or a woman, older or younger, a civilian or a soldier, who brought this danger through state's border, brings us new challenges.

The first confirmed case in Slovakia was found on March 6, 2020. National government, regional governments and municipalities prepared rapidly measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We would like to emphasize the most important facts and to bring items for comparing the measures taken in the Slovak Republic. This is a short list of basic decisions of the heads and specialists those influenced situation in a first period:

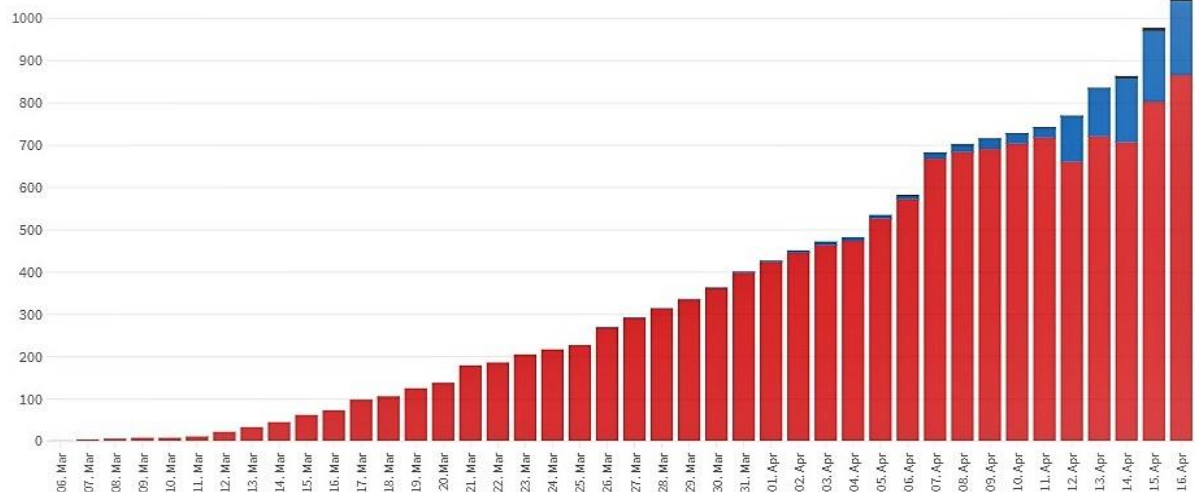
- 28 February 2020- Temperature screening of all passengers arriving in Slovakia by air
- 10 March 2020 – Prohibited to hold any sporting, cultural and social events. Recommendations of the Public Health Authority to avoid **public gathering**
- 11 March 2020– Precautionary measures against spread of new coronavirus in Bratislava, capital city
- **12 March 2020 – Central Emergency Staff (incl. Member from General Staff of SAF) declared state of emergency in the territory of the Slovak Republic, all schools and educational establishments were shut down**
- **13 March 2020 – Slovak residents who return from abroad – any country must undergo a mandatory 14-day isolation/ quarantine**
- 13 March 2020 - Health and police measures imposed at the borders, transportation restrictions
- 15 March 2020 – Slovakia declared a state of emergency over concerns regarding COVID – 19 pandemic
- 25 March 2020 - **Face masks compulsory** (since 15 March in public transport and shops)
- 8 – 13 April 2020 – restricted freedom of movement by a **curfew** (with exceptions), Easter holidays

This simple information is essential, looks like as a start line for future period. Maybe, for better strategy in next months we all should use a method of comparing situation in the European countries. Not only due to their economic, political and other connections and impacts. Additionally, support, tasks and activities of Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic are directly dependent **on decisions** of the political leaders and, at the moment, the Central Emergency Staff.

The spread of COVID – 19 cases in Slovakia, source: <https://www.health.gov.sk/Clanok?covid-19-grafy>



Dated: 16 April 2020: 865 tested positive (red) to COVID – 19, 175 recovered cases (blue), 9 deaths (black). Very important fact: blue column – **increasing number of recovered patients.**



### Possible activities of profesive associations, meetings of representatives after Parliamentary elections

COVID – 19 situation touches each citizen, including members of ZV SR, (ZV SR represents professional soldiers regardless their membership) that is a military association with – both active duty professional soldiers and the military retirees.

Comparing this serious situation in other countries, Slovaks expect after this – year -elections lots of changes. When COVID – 19 crisis in Slovakia started, we had previous government and the Parliament. Using long – time experience in practise can be a useful method of dealing with this new situation. As written earlier, crisis in countries differs. It is necessary to emphasize that Slovaks, as planned and announced in November 2019 changed in base of results of elections their political leaders. The Parliamentary elections took place in Slovakia on 29 February 2020.

On 16th March the president of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová met Peter Pellegrini and Igor Matovič to discuss the transition of power. The new government was appointed on 21 March 2020, the 16th day of COVID – 19 crisis in Slovakia.

Let us bring ourselves the hypothetical question to stenghten the idea of differences of countries: How many positive COVID – 19 cases would we have, if the elections would have been planned two weeks later? Almost 66% of voters were 2.91 million Slovak citizens, gathering in 5998 polling stations.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' met with President of the Slovak Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Slovak Armed Forces Zuzana Čaputová at MoD on 27 March 2020. On this occasion, he presented the MoD's new prospects and priorities as well as the MoD's options for additional support to the SVK Government in the fight against the spread of COVID-19. In attendance at the meeting was also Chief of General Staff of the SAF Gen Daniel Zmeko and the newly appointed State Secretary of the SVK Ministry of Defence, Marian Majer. On the spread of COVID-19, the Minister of Defence praised the Armed Forces' quick and effective assistance response. Source, photos: <https://www.mod.gov.sk/46806-en/minister-obrany-jaroslav-nad-predstavil-prezidentke-zuzane-caputovej-nove-perspektivy-a-priority-rezortu-obrany/>

ZV SR as one of the biggest military profesive associations in Slovakia with a longlasting Visegrád group Countries Associations' cooperation evaluates very positively social dialogue with representatives of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic in April 2020. Thanks meetings with new Minister of Defence Jaroslav Nad' and his State Secretary Marián Majer, we could participate at a social dialogue, including topic of the Proposal of the Government programe objectives for next period.

Why this is the right time for our dialogue? In general, the Government in Slovakia has the authority to make major policy on the matters of national economy and social security. Acting in the best interests of the nation, it is responsible for meeting the Government programme objectives within the scope of the adopted national budget. It is a very positive step forward, that ZV SR was called and participated with other partners at the formal meeting organized by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic on 6 April 2020. Participants were informed about the Proposal of the Government programme objectives. This document also reflects current crisis situation caused by COVID – 19. Photo and further information here: <https://zvazvojakov.sk/2020/04/06/rokovanie-na-mo-sr-k-programovemu-vyhlaseniu-vlady/>

Additionally, possibilities of cooperation and future relations with professional military associations were two basic topics of meeting representatives of ZV SR, Statutory, Col (Ret) Ján Paulech, 1st Vicepresident Lt Gen (Ret) Peter Vojtek and the General Secretary of ZV SR Lt Col (Ret) Marián Mjartan with new Minister of Defence of the Slovak Republic Jaroslav Naď. Further information about offered cooperation and help by representatives of ZV SR to Minister of Defence concerning COVID - 19, during formal meeting held 2 April 2020 is here: <https://zvazvojakov.sk/2020/04/03/minister-obrany-prijal-delegaciu-prezidia-zv-sr/>

### **How can military association ZV SR help or assist**

In March 2020, support to the information campaign and re – sending important general information to our members and their families was recognized as a crucial measure. We informed all our members using personal and electronic forms, especially by providing information brochures on our website [www.zvazvojakov.sk](http://www.zvazvojakov.sk) (counted thousands of visits). **Secondly, there was a state of necessary help and support in next steps.** There were so many institutions, individuals, families, those distributed the face masks. Not only our 1st vice – president Lt Gen (Ret) Vojtek but also lots of members of ZV SR helped to deliver medical equipment to policemen and soldiers „in the frontline“. Members also supported homemade face masks for COVID – 19 efforts, organized by various clubs, organisations and institutions.

In base **of the spread of the virus at the end of April 2020** in the specific settlements mostly in the Eastern part of the country, in base of challenge to members of ZV SR by Statutory of ZV SR Col (Ret) Jan Paulech, the declaration and notice of possible future support was announced on our website: <https://zvazvojakov.sk/2020/04/19/vyhlasenie-zvazu-vojakov-sr/>

One of reasons of the body of the Declaration except supportive effort was connected with inevitable keeping COVID – 19 measures and protective rules by elderly members of ZV SR.

### **Pandemic preparedness, decisions and impact on rights and freedoms**

No doubt, there are several aspects directly connected to the evolution of the crisis and to the spread of the COVID – 19 virus all over the world. The invisible enemy has attacked rapidly in ONLY several weeks. One of these aspects brings us the question: „What is more valuable for us – resilient and healthy economy of the country, the global economic impacts of COVID - 19 or healthy citizens being prepared to work and **to serve**“?

Everybody is able to recognize the reason of the words in the title of this article: **invisible** enemy, orienteering race run. We all should and could give ourselves another block of questions: „If we connect theory of military strategy, tactics and concepts of the possible crisis situation, which armed forces had been prepared or trained tasks in possible PANDEMIC situation? Which decision is and will have been by the date of the end of this new situation?

There are lots of ideas. The right steps lead to minimum summary of positively tested COVID – 19 virus patients, especially deads. In fact, the best solution after the information campaign was system of regrouping personnel, dividing priorities and cancelling lots of exercises or activities. Not only in civilian life, but also in the armed forces. We are and we have to be prepared to help and support. Any ideas of switching off everything for a few weeks using armed forces, emergency, long – term curfew or restricted movement are directly connected with human rights and fundamental freedoms.

### **Support of MoD and of the Slovak Armed Forces in facts - continuous evolution**

The process is changing day after a day. These are detailed facts those show what, how many, how much did armed forces fulfill their tasks connected with COVID – 19. Most of them confirms the role of the armed forces, not only in tasks of support or assistance to police:

#### **1. Armed Forces have deployed nearly 340 soldiers to conduct assistance tasks, all military units are on standby**

Author: **OS SR a KOD** Date: **18.03.2020**

All units and facilities of the Slovak Armed Forces have been on standby since Monday 16 March 2020. In practice, this means that the Armed Forces as a whole is poised to start carrying out assigned tasks within 6 hours of receiving a request for assistance.

On the military response to the coronavirus outbreak, Chief of Defence Daniel Zmeko said: *"Based on my orders, all command bodies of the Armed Forces have been on 24-hour duty shifts, which allows for the requirements and tasks assigned to the Armed Forces by the Central Crisis Staff and the SVK Cabinet to be met as quickly as possible."*

According to the Chief of Defence, in addition to delivering support to the Police Corps and setting up an isolated facility at the Training Centre Lešť, additional tasks can be undertaken by an extra 2,800 soldiers. At the same time, the Armed Forces remain committed to ensuring that all the duties that arise from legislation, such as protecting airspace or operating the radar field, continue to be performed.

After today's meeting of the Central Crisis Staff and the SVK Cabinet, the Armed Forces continue to draw plans for potential requirements that may be requested, should the coronavirus situation deteriorate. These could involve, for example, transporting material, protecting borders, including the "green borders", and deploying military medical professionals.

Since their activation, earmarked troops have been on mixed patrols with members of the SVK Police Corps. 339 soldiers have supported border checks and the coronavirus information campaign to date. Included in this number are also those participating in protecting the forward deployed aid station of the Institute of Infectology in Bratislava's Kramáre and the entrance to the Trebišov Hospital.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46768-en/ozbrojene-sily-nasadili-na-plnenie-asistencnych-uloh-uz-takmer-340-vojakov-v-pohotovosti-su-vsetky-utvary/>

## **2. First two confirmed cases of COVID-19 across Defence**

Author: **MO SR - KOd**

Date: **24.03.2020**

There have been the first two confirmed cases of COVID-19 across Defence. Namely, a serviceman from the Ministry of Defence in Bratislava and a civilian employee from the Helicopter Wing in Prešov. Both sources of the infection have been identified. The individuals affected require no hospitalisation and are in self-isolation at home. In the first case, on returning from a trip abroad, the serviceman began self-isolation at home as a precautionary measure and has not come into contact with his colleagues. In the second case, the civilian employee contracted the virus from his brother and has not come into contact with his colleagues at the base either.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the MOD has adopted a large number of measures which are regularly reviewed by the Crisis Staff. The body temperature of all staff and visitors is measured on their arrival at the MOD, the wearing of face masks or other face protective equipment is compulsory, and disinfectants are available at the entrances to individual buildings.

The Armed Forces are putting in maximum efforts to assist the public. Acting on the decisions of the Central Crisis Staff, they stand ready to assist with the delivery of medical supplies by Spartan transport aircraft. For this purpose, the military has also offered pre-paid flying hours under the Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS) programme. In practice, this means that supplies can be delivered by an outsized cargo aircraft capable of transporting large quantities of kit at any time.

SVK Minister of Defence Jaroslav Nad' said: *"In this situation SVK citizens must know they can rely on the men and women of our Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence. We will do our utmost to make sure they can really feel our help and confirm our firm place in domestic crisis management."* He insisted that central measures must be put in place to ensure that soldiers are issued with all necessary personal protective equipment (PPE). *"Meanwhile, we are making the best of our own capacities and options. For example, Zemianske Kostolany-based CBRN specialists have started making their own disinfectants,"* he added.

In line with the requests for assistance from the SVK Central Crisis Staff, the MOD has made available its Horezza-run accommodation facilities for SVK citizens to undergo mandatory 14-day self-isolation. Almost 180 citizens who have returned from different countries are staying at the Granite Hotels in Piešťany and Tatranské Zruby. Currently, another 55 citizens are en route to the Granite Hotel in Smrekovica.

So far, service personnel have protected border crossings and provided assistance at the entrances to hospitals in several cities. The Defence Medical Service (DMS) has placed doctors and nurses in civilian hospitals. 13 containers from the military field hospital are being used to sort out patients at the Central Military Hospital Ružomberok. The hospital is now operating under the state of emergency and admits patients only for urgent medical care. Setting up tents as pre-triage areas in front of hospitals to cope with the influx of patients is being offered up for consideration.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46790-en/v-rezorte-obrany-boli-zachytene-dva-pripady-ochorenia-covid-19/>

## **3. Ministry of Defence to assist with on-site COVID-19 testing across Roma communities**

Author: **MO SR – KOd**

Date: **01.04.2020**



The SVK Ministry of Defence is to assist with on-site coronavirus testing across 33 Roma settlements in the coming days. This announcement was made today by Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' at a press conference on the Action Plan for Marginalised Roma Communities regarding the spread of coronavirus.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' said: *"Currently, we are standing up four teams, each made up of about 15 service members. Starting from 3 April 2020, we are going ahead with testing across 33 locations that have been singled out, so that the Government and the Central Crisis Staff can make a comprehensive assessment of the situation no later than 10 April and adopt additional measures accordingly."* He further added that as of today SVK Armed Forces personnel are out in force to talk to the mayors of affected villages, NGOs and local residents about the reasons for the on-site COVID-19 testing and the presence of service personnel there. In addition to collecting samples and keeping the public informed of the military response to COVID-19, they will be on the ground to determine the hygienic conditions of local residents in the communities.

On the military response, Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' commented: *"The MOD and Armed Forces want to bring the situation under control as best as they can. Also for this reason, we have prepared several scenarios, including the options to make available additional capacities and set up a quarantine zone at the Training Centre Lešť."* He stressed that the Armed Forces stand ready to cordon off several villages and communities, if required.

Praising the activity of the MOD, Prime Minister Igor Matovič today said: *"That the Armed Forces are going to help conduct testing in the settlements is not a demonstration of force. It is a demonstration that we do not want to put extra pressure on medical staff in hospitals and that the Armed Forces are willing to provide medical personnel to deal with this situation."*

Meanwhile, 405 SVK Armed Forces personnel are deployed in support of the Central Crisis Staff. They are helping with border checks and assisting at hospitals across Slovakia. Additionally, the SVK military has used helicopters to distribute medical material to hospitals. Over 70 tons of medical supplies have been distributed by SVK Air Force airmen over the past few days.

Apart from this, the MOD has launched the training of sanitary personnel. Over the next 3 weeks, it is planning to train 150 personnel who will look after up to 3,500 patients in line with NATO medical standardization agreements. *"Along with the Health Minister, we are finalising the discussion on whether to transform the SNP Central Military Hospital into a red hospital, which, in practice, would mean setting it aside as a hospital to treat COVID-19 patients only,"* explained Minister Nad'.

At the conclusion, Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' emphasised: *"I am immensely proud of what our SVK Armed Forces personnel, serving under the command of Chief of Defence Gen Daniel Zmeko and under the control of Surgeon General of the SVK Armed Forces Brig Gen Vladimír Lengvarský, are doing."*  
<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46841-en/rezort-obrany-pomoze-s-testovanim-na-ochorenie-covid-19-v-romskych-komunitach/>

#### **4. Testing for COVID-19 underway across Roma settlements for third day, 244 SVK nationals returning from abroad have been tested in first two days**

Author: **MO SR - KOD**

Date: **05.04.2020**

*Joint press release from Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad', Member of the Permanent Crisis Staff and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Peter Pollák, and Plenipotentiary of the SVK Government for Roma Communities Andrea Bučková*

Pilot testing for COVID-19 has been underway across selected 33 Roma communities in an effort to minimise the spread of coronavirus. There have been 244 tests carried out on recent arrivals from abroad across Roma settlements over the past two days. On Friday, samples were taken in Jarovnice. On Saturday, 196 samples were collected in Trebišov, Smižany, Kecerovce, Zborov, Doľany, Hrabušice and Markušovce. Today, further sampling has taken place in Krížova Ves, Batizovce, Vechec, Ondavské Matiašovce, Bôrka, Dobšiná and Žehra.

Relying on the expertise of epidemiologists, the virus can multiply 13 times faster within Roma settlements, which is why they have been added onto the COVID-19 priority testing list. Fortunately, the results show that as of today none of the residents of Jarovnice, a village which has one of the highest concentrations of Roma in Slovakia, have tested positive for COVID-19. The other results will follow soon.

Member of the Permanent Crisis Staff and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Peter Pollák said: *"Testing people in Roma settlements is an absolute priority for us. It is important to protect the health of people in settlements and villages and I have no doubt this is also true of the whole society. We had information on recent arrivals from abroad, some of them were reportedly not in good health and were afraid to visit their GP. On return to their settlements, up to ten people share a single room, and some have no access to drinking water, nor to a sewer system. One can say there this poor adherence to hygienic measures, not to mention home quarantine. By the time I joined the Central Crisis Staff there was no testing for the virus on this group of nationals. As a result, there was a need to respond quickly and effectively and find personnel and technical resources to conduct such tests across Roma settlements."* He continued: *"After exploring all options for available personnel and technical resources, we decided that the testing would be carried out by doctors in uniform or armed forces, because there was no other institution that would have the equipment and personnel required to swab test about 1,500 people in the Roma communities in just a few days."*

According to Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď, testing for the virus in the communities is going off without a hitch and he has come across positive feedback from local residents. *"They can see that this activity of the SVK Armed Forces is here for their health and safety,"* he said. He further noted that up to 200 SVK Armed Forces personnel, drawn from CIMIC experts of the Special Operations Forces, medical professionals from the Office of the SVK Armed Forces Surgeon General, and members of the SVK Air Force and the SVK Army, have been out to take samples. *"Our service personnel have rich experience in working out in the field with local communities. They were trained for similar situations before deploying on missions abroad, consider Resolute Support in Afghanistan, for example, or before undertaking assistance operations in support of the SVK Police Corps at home,"* he explained.

Testing for COVID-19 has been conducted in cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the SVK Government for Roma Communities. *"I was present at the testing sites in Roma settlements. The Roma people welcomed the possibility of finding out whether or not they were COVID-positive and they all came to take the test voluntarily. I can acknowledge they were pleased to find out about the state of their health, which also allowed them to protect the health of their close ones. Initially, several choices for mapping out the situation throughout Roma communities were up for consideration. Given the fact all medical professionals were overstretched and doctors in surgeries had shortages of personal protective equipment and had not been trained for the testing, we readily looked for the fastest and most efficient solution and we found it. We found it with doctors in uniform,"* said Plenipotentiary of the SVK Government for Roma Communities Andrea Bučková. According to the latest statistics, less than half the Roma live in Roma communities. 1/3 of the Roma people live in poor hygienic conditions and 16% of them have no access to drinking water.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46861-en/v-romskych-osadach-sa-treti-den-testuje-na-koronavirus-za-prve-dva-dni-sme-otestovali-244-ludi-ktori-sa-vratili-zo-zahranicia/>

## **5. Armed Forces transport swab samples taken from Roma communities to laboratory by Black Hawk helicopter**

Author: **MO SR – Kod**

Date: **06.04.2020**

As part of the SVK military's response to the spread of COVID-19, a SVK Air Force UH-60M Black Hawk multi-role helicopter, crewed by airmen of the Helicopter Wing Prešov, flew a mission to transport the nasopharyngeal swab samples taken over these days from residents of Roma communities to a laboratory for testing in Trenčín. As part of a second mission, a total of 29 swab samples were flown from Filákovo to Jelšava.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď said: *"I am immensely pleased that our new air asset – the Black Hawk helicopter – can be called upon at times like these to offer assistance towards the benefit of SVK citizens. Also thanks to this, we can effectively provide air transport of medical material, including test kits and swab samples, which contributes to accelerating the process of testing."* He noted the Armed Forces continue to stand ready to deal with the requests for assistance from the Central Crisis Staff as well as the Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) tasks under domestic crisis management on a 24/7/365 basis.

Nearly 400 SVK Armed Forces members are currently deployed to assist the SVK Central Crisis Staff. Up to 200 soldiers have been involved in on-site sampling across Roma communities. For everything to go off smoothly, the process is overseen by CIMIC specialists from the Special Operations Forces, whereas the sampling itself is carried out by medical professionals from the Office of the SVK Armed Forces Surgeon General. Elsewhere, soldiers are performing assistance tasks at border crossings and hospitals.

Based on the requests for assistance from the SVK Central Crisis Staff, the SVK Armed Forces will be continuing their sampling efforts across the marginalised communities over the coming days. A total of 33 Roma communities are set to be subject to testing for COVID-19.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46868-en/ozbrojene-sily-zabezpecili-prepravu-vzoriek-z-romskych-komunit-do-laboratoria-vojenskym-vrtulnikom-black-hawk/>

## **6. Armed Forces personnel to assist SVK Police in enforcing latest government measures on COVID-19 over Easter holidays**

Author: **MO SR – Kod**

Date: **07.04.2020**

Over Easter holidays, Armed Forces personnel will be out in cities and villages across the whole of Slovakia, to assist members of the SVK Police Corps in enforcing the SVK Government's latest measures on dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. Based on a request from the Police Corps, 714 Armed Forces personnel will be set aside to carry out assistance tasks and enforce the public order as part of mixed patrols from 8 to 13 April 2020. Service personnel will work two 12-hour shifts, with 357 soldiers on each shift.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' said: *"Just as we have witnessed over the last few days when testing for COVID-19, transporting medical material or undertaking assistance tasks, I believe in this case, too, our soldiers will be the mainstay of support for our citizens to fall back on."* He also hailed the exemplary cooperation between the Armed Forces and the Police Corps and pointed to the tasks ahead. *"One of the tasks for our soldiers out on mixed patrols will be to provide guidance to SVK citizens to comply with the guidelines and keep from breaking rules,"* he added.

Based on the Government's decision, the Armed Forces can set aside additional 1,500 regular soldiers to undertake assistance tasks on mixed patrols with members of the Police Corps as part of the measures to control the spread of COVID-19, head of the MOD reminded. He also explained that the government's previous decision to set aside up to 500 regular soldiers for the said tasks is still in force.

Meanwhile, SVK Armed Forces personnel are carrying out assistance tasks at border crossings, quarantine centres and hospitals, as well as assisting with the delivery of medical material. And members of the Office of SVK Armed Forces Surgeon General are continuing to take swab samples across marginalised Roma communities. Today further sampling will be done at another 7 locations.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46876-en/profesionalni-vojaci-budu-pocas-velkonocnych-sviatkov-asistovat-prislusnikom-policajneho-zboru-sr-pri-kontrolach-dodrziavania-opatreni-prijatych-vladou/>

## **7. Central Military Hospital in Ružomberok launches COVID-19 testing on its own**

Author: **MO SR - KOD**

Date: **08.04.2020**

On Monday (6 April), the Slovak National Uprising Central Military Hospital Ružomberok – Faculty Hospital (ÚVN SNP Ružomberok-FN) has launched its own pilot testing for COVID-19 with the real time RT-PCR method. The hospital's current capacity is 60 RT-PCR tests per day. The first 25 high precision tests were done as early as Tuesday. Today (8 April), Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' and Chief of Defence Gen Daniel Zmeko inspected the hospital's readiness to operate as a "red hospital" for patients with COVID-19.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' said: *"These days we are gradually visiting the MOD facilities that are on the front line in the battle against COVID-19 and so in contact with the people who have either tested positive or who are expected to be confirmed COVID-19 positive in the future. I am very pleased that our hospital has taken all the necessary measures to provide SVK citizens with the best healthcare it can."* On this occasion, he thanked the hospital staff and those taking part in the fight against coronavirus for their work and commitment. As he added, the Central Military Hospital can provide comprehensive healthcare services to 60 COVID-19 positive patients, including artificial lung ventilation, and can hospitalise up to 250 patients with COVID-19.

As part of the measures in place, the Central Military Hospital has converted 184 beds, which is over 1/3 of the hospital's total bed capacity, to care for COVID-19 patients. Additionally, these days a building of the former outpatient clinic in Ružomberok's Považská Street is under reconstruction to serve as a pavilion for COVID-19 patients. The hospital has also ordered 4 pieces of a bio-shuttle, a medical isolation and transport system, to move patients safely from the pavilion to other wards within the hospital, if required.

Photos and the whole article: <https://www.mod.gov.sk/mo-sr-en/> and <https://www.mod.gov.sk/46882-en/ustredna-vojenska-nemocnica-v-ruzomberku-spustila-vo-vlastnej-rezii-testovanie-na-ochorenie-covid-19/>

## **8. Service personnel assist State Material Reserves with unloading and transport of medical supplies as part of Operation Courier**

Author: **MO SR – Kod**

Date: **13.04.2020**

Today (13 April 2020), over 40 service members unloaded more than 20 tons of personal protective equipment (PPE) from a cargo aircraft from China at M. R. Štefánik Airport in Bratislava. As part of Operation Courier, they transported the medical material to the central warehouses of the State Material Reserves. On request for assistance from the Central Crisis Staff, the Armed Forces are ready to distribute the material to end users. Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' today visited the soldiers at Bratislava Airport.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' said: *"As part of Operation Courier, we have driven over 300,000km to date, whereas we have delivered over 1,500 tons of material, including 100 tons of medical supplies. The cooperation with the State Material Reserves and other organisations is very good, which once again testifies to how helpful for domestic crisis management the Armed Forces are. Indeed, they have been continually busy carrying out a lot of different tasks, for which they deserve our thanks."* He added that kind words of praise have been put forward to our soldiers and he is sincerely proud of them.

Today's consignment from China contained 20.3 tons of personal protective equipment (PPE), namely face masks, FFP2 respirators, gloves and protective suits. They were transported to the central warehouses of the State Material Reserves by SVK Army personnel with their lorries.

Also today, Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' along with Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence and Security Juraj Krúpa and Chief of Defence Daniel Zmeko inspected the soldiers serving at the Jarovce border crossings, where they are assisting the SVK Police Corps on mixed patrols.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46896-en/-profesionalni-vojaci-pomahaju-v-ramci-operacie-kurier-statnym-hmotnym-rezervam-s-vykladanim-a-prepravou-zdravotnickeho-materialu/>

## **9. SVK Armed Forces continue to gather swab samples in eastern Slovakia and launch their first civil-military operation – Op UMBRELLA 1**

Author: **MO SR – Kod**

Date: **13.04.2020**

The SVK Armed Forces have today launched their historically first civil-military operation – Op UMBRELLA 1. It is aimed at ensuring civic life and security in the sealed off Roma communities. Meanwhile, specialist Armed Forces teams have been continually gathering swab samples for testing COVID-19. Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad', Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence and Security Juraj Krúpa, and Chief of Defence Daniel Zmeko today (13 April) set out to see for themselves and inform of the situation unfolding in the affected Roma communities.

Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' said: *"The situation is developing relatively positively at the moment. Since Thursday, when the previous meeting was held here, a number of positive steps have been made, even in terms of food supplies for example. Drinking water has also been provided continuously, and so have medical services."* He went on to add that several dozen people from the communities will be moved to state-run quarantine centres at their own request today. *"The SVK Armed Forces definitely do the job 100%. I am proud of how they act, mainly because in this way we can demonstrate their importance as part of domestic crisis management,"* emphasised the Defence Minister.

As Chief of Defence Gen Daniel Zmeko noted, the SVK Armed Forces have been fully committed to steering local responses to the pandemic over the Easter holidays. As part of assistance services in support of the SVK Police Corps, several operations have been underway concurrently, including swab sampling across Roma communities, maintaining public order, and supporting civic life under quarantine in Roma communities. *"Over 1,500 service personnel are currently out in the field, with about 150 of them deployed directly in and around Krompachy. There, two operations have been underway. There is the testing team as part of Operation Carousel, plus there is the task force to maintain order and security and support the daily civic life in local communities. Disinfectants and medical resources are available on site, and so are a team of sappers to supply wood and, last but not least, logistical support elements,"* he said.

Appreciating the work of the SVK Armed Forces, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence and Security Juraj Krúpa said: *"I can see that the activities being carried out here are at a very high level. Thanks to this field experience, I will be able to give a better assessment of things that will come up in Parliament."* On different hoaxes and disinformation about the reported militarisation of the service personnel's deployment, he reminded that the SVK Armed Forces form a regular component of crisis management and have an irreplaceable role in this situation too.



A total of 1990 swab samples for testing COVID-19 were collected across 86 communities from Friday 3 April 2020 to Sunday 12 April 2020. Today further sampling is scheduled to take place across 12 villages. The sampling efforts in the field and at the operational centres are supported by 200 soldiers. The Operation Carousel Task Force is composed of Special Operations Forces (SOF) experts for civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). Military medical professionals from the Office of SVK Armed Forces Surgeon General have been embedded with the task force, and so have elements of the SVK Air Force and the SVK Army.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46895-en/ozbrojene-sily-sr-pokracuju-v-odoberani-vzoriek-na-vychode-slovenska-zacali-tiez-s-prvou-civilno-vojenskou-operaciou-umbrella-1/>

## **10. Servicemen come back from RSM in Afghanistan, MOD secures the return of a SVK civilian national to Slovakia**

Author: **MO SR – Kod**

Date: **15.04.2020**

In the evening hours of Tuesday 14 April 2020, a SVK Government Air Service plane touched down at Sliach Air Base with 29 servicemen onboard, returning from Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan. On the same flight, the MOD also took action to secure the repatriation of a SVK civilian national. Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' said: *"We have withdrawn 29 SVK soldiers from Afghanistan, because their presence was non-essential for the provision of operational tasks. We made this decision following a request from the RSM Commander to minimise the staff levels. This move had to do with the anti-COVID-19 measures in place."* He continued: *"I am very pleased that, as well as securing the safe return of our soldiers, despite a complicated process we managed to help a Slovak lady who found herself stranded in a difficult situation, because there was no way for her to return home."* He added that the repatriated SVK national worked in Afghanistan and was subjected to testing for COVID-19 before the flight. The results came back negative and she was allowed to fly home with the servicemen.

On their return to Slovakia, the contingent members and the civilian were taken to the quarantine centre at the M. R. Štefánik Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš to undertake mandatory self-isolation. The Armed Forces are here for the security of Slovakia and its citizens on a 24/7/365 basis and are ready to help in any crisis situation, the head of the MOD emphasised.

20 SVK Armed Forces members remain deployed with RSM in Afghanistan, engaging in the training of Afghan security forces. A total of 464 SVK service personnel are currently deployed on international crisis management missions and operations abroad.

<https://www.mod.gov.sk/46904-en/slovenski-vojaci-sa-vratili-z-operacie-v-afganistane-rezort-obrany-zabezpecil-navrat-na-slovensko-aj-jednej-civilistke/>

## **11. Serviceman tests positive for COVID-19**

Author: **SAF - Cpt Peter Poldruhák**

Date: **15.04.2020**

A SVK Armed Forces serviceman from Nitra Garrison tested positive for COVID-19 yesterday (14 April 2020). He and his family have been in self-isolation at home. How he became infected is unknown. Given his state of health, there is no need for hospitalisation. Elsewhere, there have been two other confirmed COVID-19 positive cases across Defence. Both of them have fully recovered.

Since the declaration of emergency the Armed Forces have put a large number of organisational measures into practice to deal with the spread of coronavirus across SVK military installations and units. One of the measures was to divide personnel into three groups with different standby periods to keep as many personnel as possible deployable and mission ready for the peak of the crisis situation. All the other steps and epidemiological measures are being coordinated with the Military Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology and the Office of SVK Armed Forces Surgeon General.

Focused on the requests from the SVK Central Crisis Staff, the SVK Armed Forces have been continually busy carrying out a range of duties and committing hundreds of personnel to the battle against coronavirus. They are working closely with police forces to conduct inspections at border crossings, monitoring quarantine locations and hospitals, taking swab samples across marginalised Roma communities, airlifting people and medical supplies, supporting daily civic life and security in the sealed-off Roma communities, as well as handling many other tasks. <https://www.mod.gov.sk/46905-en/profesionalny-vojak-s-pozitivnym-testom-na-covid-19/>

Author: **Col (Ret) Jan Paulech, Statutory of ZV SR Slovakia**