



## VIVAT SLOVAKIA:

Team Vivat. (2024). *Vivat Slovakia* (Early Access) [Digital game]. Team Vivat.

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*Vivat Slovakia* is a unique project created by Slovak enthusiasts under the name of Team Vivat. This digital game was released in Early Access on April 18, 2024. Its story is set in Bratislava in the 1990s. It begins shortly after the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic and depicts arguably the most turbulent period in Slovakia's modern history. During this time, the streets of Bratislava were riddled with organised crime and thriving illegal business, involving both gangsters and politicians. It is an open-world action-adventure game, and many journalists have compared it to *Grand Theft Auto* (DMA Design & Rockstar North, 1997-2013) or the *Mafia* (Illusion Softworks et al., 2002-2020) series.

As players, we assume the role of the main character, a taxi driver named Milan who works for the Slovak Secret Service. However, the main character is close to the underworld and often must get his hands dirty while working for corrupt politicians and shady businessmen or organisations. The game's creators took special care with the voice acting, which was performed by several well-known Slovak celebrities – for example, Marián Labuda Jr., Kristína Svarinská, Lukáš Frlajs, Michal “Ego” Straka or Rudo “Čavalenky” Danihel. Even though the characters have been professionally dubbed, the dialogue does not sound natural with the oddest sounding lines being the interjections. This is probably caused by the fact that the lines were recorded individually, not together in a studio. As a result, some of the relationships and interactions between the characters are not believable. Nevertheless, the Slovak dubbing in the reviewed digital game is welcome by most Slovak players, as it is rarely present in any digital games available on the national market. The dialogues of the radio presenters are much more believable. In addition to the music, the two presenters talk about their day and entertain the listeners with funny stories and jokes. Even their expressions have been adapted to the 1990s – the presenters use words and catchphrases that were once ‘cool’. Also worth mentioning are the humorous renditions of commercials and the many Easter eggs. In short, there is a lot to discover in the world of *Vivat Slovakia*. Every sign on the wall is worth reading, and the creators have used witty puns that refer to the names of some buildings, people and brands.

The car models are also elaborate, and the player can ‘borrow’ any vehicle in the name of the law, in addition to their own taxi. If the player saves enough money, they can buy a better taxi from a local shop. There is even a model of the white ‘tuned’ Peugeot from the French film series *Taxi* (Pirès et al., 1998-2018). We really appreciate this, and it adds to the nostalgic value of the game. However, the extreme weakness and incredible fragility of the cars is a big minus. While we understand that some players may enjoy this aspect, the car makes crashing noises even when the character leans gently against it. Keeping the doors or bonnet attached to the car while driving is quite a challenge. There are also several glitches that do not add to the experience: characters wiggling in place or in a T-pose, groups of people running into a wall, cars spawning in the same places as other (already parked) cars and then blowing up and totalling them. Moreover, when a

player parks a taxi and Milan gets out of it, the vehicle may move on its own in any direction, possibly causing a grotesque crash. The characters do not react at all to passing cars. For example, they would walk right under their wheels themselves, and when a car hits them, they do not react to the situation at all, getting up as if nothing has happened. There is no pathfinding system in the game either – if the player blocks the road, the cars behind them just stop and wait. It is true that sometimes they at least honk, which is a positive thing. We also appreciate another nice detail – the indicators that light up when the player makes a turn.

Although the game is still an Early Access version, it crashes, and a lack of optimisation spoils the overall positive impression. Even with the low details, the players can experience constant stuttering and unstable frame rates. The recommended hardware requirements are not exactly the lowest, but the visuals do not match them at all. Objectively, the graphics do not meet today's standards. This also applies to the open world which looks sterile. Despite the developers' best efforts, the title's low production budget is evident. The authors could have spent a little more time making the environment more authentic and variable. At times it is even stereotypical. On the other hand, it is important to remember that the game was created by fans. They put a lot of time and effort into studying the buildings of Bratislava, for example those which they wanted to recreate in the game based on historical photographs. In Early Access, players can see Bratislava Castle, the Presidential Palace or the UFO restaurant where the view is perceived from the main character's perspective.

In terms of mission progression, action-packed moments are nicely intertwined with quieter ones, and one could say that the game offers a little bit of everything. Whether it is a stakeout, a shootout, a taxi ride or even a romantic date. The cut scenes are handled in an unusual way. The characters may be in a static position, not even opening their mouths, but the camera is moving and changing angles. While this is happening, dialogue is taking place in the background. We really appreciate the texts between the missions, which explain the various important events that took place in Slovakia in the 1990s. Based on various sources, experts, journalists and testimonies, the creators bring the era's culture and lore closer to today's audiences. This gives the game a completely new dimension at an educational level.

*Vivat Slovakia* has a huge potential that no Slovak digital game has ever had previously. Thanks to Early Access it is obvious what it can offer after its full release, expected at the end of 2024. Let us not forget that the whole project was created by enthusiasts and not professional developers. Technical errors, poor optimisation and bad visuals cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, *Vivat Slovakia* is a game with an important social and cultural context, and its added value lies in its educational elements. The work refers to a dramatic period in the history of the Slovak Republic, which influenced its political and economic direction in the following decades.

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