



SLOVENIA: A VIBRANT YOUNG DEMOCRACY OFFERS NATO A CENTRAL EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN ELEMENT

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The Alliance, now 53 years old, is a flexible organisation, growing and changing to meet new challenges as a result of worldwide developments. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many questioned NATO's continued existence. Was NATO still relevant in the post-Cold War era?

The events of September 11 were historic for NATO. Only one day after the attacks in New York and Washington, the Alliance immediately offered the United States concrete and full support by authorising the declaration of Article 5 – an attack on one NATO member was an attack upon them all. NATO sent seven AWACS aircraft from Europe to patrol American skies. NATO offered increased intelligence support, blanket overflight rights, and access to ports and airfields. On October 10, President Bush said in a joint news conference with NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, "This has never happened before, that NATO has come to help defend our country, but it has happened in this time of need and for that we are grateful."

The main lesson learnt from these tragic events was that global security -- including the battle against international terrorism -- requires allies worldwide, allies with political, geographical and manpower support. The map of Europe indicates that in order for the Alliance to become an even more efficient geo-strategic power, it must invite some states to become full members as soon as possible. One of these states is Slovenia, which offers NATO both a Central European and Mediterranean element. As a Partner for Peace, Slovenia has already been working with NATO in many areas. For instance, during the crisis in the former Yugoslavia when NATO served as a powerful political and military instrument on behalf of the world community, Slovenia stood by her side. A nation of only two million, Slovenia is well-versed in the languages and cultures of the Balkans, and today serves as a force for stability and peace in this still troubled area.

In selecting new members, NATO considers not only geopolitical factors but other criteria as well. In its Membership Action

Plan (MAP), NATO stipulates realistic annual goals that each candidate country must work to achieve. For instance, is the country practising democratic and parliamentary procedures? How are the Armed Forces structured? Is the parliamentary "civil control" over the Forces and their leadership guaranteed? Is the economy healthy? Is there growth in the industrial base? A vibrant young democracy, Slovenia has earned top marks in all these areas.

The people of Slovenia have already proven their willingness to defend their independence and cultural heritage. In 1991 they were attacked by the Yugoslav Army in the so-called "War for Slovenia". Clear underdogs, Slovenian courage, determination and cleverness won the day, launching a future of independence and freedom and a return to European institutions and values. In the past 11 years, Slovenia has worked hard to speed its return and sees NATO as the central institution towards building peace and security in Europe.

This is the second edition of NATO'S NATIONS & PARTNERS FOR PEACE about Slovenia. The first one came out in 1999 at the Washington Summit. Slovenia has made tremendous progress in the past three years, and I am sure you will enjoy reading about this spirited young nation in this issue. I would like to thank our partners who contributed to this project -- mainly in Ljubljana but also in Washington and Brussels. We enjoyed working with the Slovenian diplomats and officials who -- with typical Slovenian charm -- made the issue happen.

Welcome to NATO and we look forward seeing you in November in Prague.

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