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INTEGRATION IS IRREVERSIBLE

Our world is not a safe and peaceful one. On the contrary, its global nature gives rise to contradiction and conflict. The appearance of geographical distance is deceiving – what happens of any corner of the world happens to each and everyone of us. Therefore, Slovenia is under threat as much as any other nation. Armed conflict is but one of many threats – international crime, illegal immigration, terrorism, ecological disaster and the profound imbalance of resources. Challenged by these threats, no nation may live in isolation. Each carries responsibility for itself, for others, and for the future of the world.



The fall of the Berlin Wall and September 11 both gave Euro-Atlantic integration processes new momentum and all Europeans were faced with new challenges. The process of integration is irreversible. The vision of a united and free Europe of peace and security is coming true, in spite of the problems. With full respect to other European and regional organisations, NATO and the European Union are the principal factors in this integration process. Their enlargement leads to a single security, economic and political area – an area of common values. NATO is becoming the central institution of common efforts towards building peace and security in Europe, and remains the only security and defence organisation with a proven ability to create and preserve peace in Europe – events in South-Eastern Europe are witness to that.

In future, Slovenia can be a safe, peaceful, democratic and developmentally successful country as an equal part of that same Europe, as a member of the European Union and NATO. In the current situation and in the future, as is already detectable from global events, NATO membership ensures for Slovenia the highest possible level of national security through collective defence. It allows Slovenia to decide on security and policy issues in the Euro-Atlantic arena together with the most developed and most influential states, thus enhancing the geo-political position of the community on the one hand and that of Slovenia on the other. NATO membership is a mutually binding commitment to

good, clear political relations with Italy and Hungary, who are NATO member states, and enhances Slovenia's relations with Austria and Croatia, who are not members. At the same time, it expands the stable part of Europe, wherein Slovenia will find a definite place. NATO membership increases Slovenia's influence in bringing peace to South-Eastern Europe, as well as its responsibility to do so. It provides for more effective cooperation in the fight against international crime and terrorism. It paves the way into the world of high technology.

One cannot put a price on guaranteed safety for a state and its citizens. These are values that cannot be expressed in terms of money. NATO membership is one such guarantee of safety. It means that what happened to Slovenia in 1991 and what happened for a long time (and is still happening) in South-Eastern Europe, on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, cannot happen to us again.

Slovenia knows what it still has to accomplish in order to meet the membership criteria and in order for our expectations of receiving an invitation to join NATO this autumn in Prague to be justified. This mainly regards Slovenia's ability in military terms to contribute to the strengthening of NATO's common defence. Never before have we worked as diligently to meet this requirement as we have done over the past year. We have fine-tuned our defence doctrine and our plans for the development of the Slovenian armed forces. Slovenia – and NATO – can now expect results.

