



DR. JANEZ DRNOVŠEK,  
PRIME MINISTER

# EQUAL AMONG EUROPEAN NATIONS



**For Slovenia, 2002 is a year of great challenges as well as great expectations. This year we wish to conclude accession negotiations with the EU and receive an invitation to join NATO at the Prague summit. If we are to attain our objectives in both the domestic and foreign political spheres, a great deal of effort will be required – not only from Slovenian diplomats, the Ministry of Defence, the government and National Assembly – but also from the wider professional and general public.**

It is our desire to be an equal among European nations and within the international community. This is something we can achieve with membership of the new enlarged NATO. Membership of any organisation brings with it rights and obligations, benefits and restrictions. Of course, the desire of every individual, nation and state is to live in an ideal world with nothing to agitate, trouble or threaten it. Let us be realistic. We live in a position that has been and will be exposed to potentially harmful influences due to our geographical and political role and status. We are at a crossroads of cultures, regions, politics, faiths and religions, nations and nationalities, different economic systems and important transport routes. For many we are a window and a gateway to Western Europe, Central Europe, the Balkans and the Mediterranean. It would therefore be ridiculous for us to persist in some imaginary ideal world. As an independent, democratic and internationally recognised state, we have put down roots in a very exposed location between the Alps, the Hungarian plain, the Balkans and the Adriatic. Through this region many pass, or even flee, who desire democracy and freedom. There are also those who are looking for new commercial and political challenges. And finally, some of the routes of international crime and terrorism also pass through this region. We can only hold firm in such an exposed environment through strong ties with an international community that protects democratic values, recognises equality and cooperation, provides internal security, and

actively participates in resolving political, economic and military crises.

There is an urgent need to consider the processes of globalisation, particularly the many consequences of September 11, the new interdependencies of nations, and the inviolability of peace. But we must not forget that a safe Europe also means to a great extent a safe and forward-looking Slovenia. On this is founded a deep conviction that the future of the European continent and the future of Slovenia are closely tied to the decisions to be made this year on NATO and EU enlargement. For our part we want to tell the world that we wish to join NATO and to take on, responsibly and in line with our capacities, our share of the obligations that this entails.

If we desire equal treatment for Slovenia within the international community, we will have to overcome our preconceptions about being small, and responsibly, equally and seriously take part in demanding dialogues within the international community. Only in this manner can we openly answer the question posed by the Slovenian public as to whether all states, even the smaller ones, have the ability and opportunity to make their contribution to forming a new friendly, stable and safe international and European environment. We wish to remind the sceptics at home and abroad that a united, stable and creative international environment offers great opportunities to all, including smaller countries such as Slovenia. And it undoubtedly presents new challenges too. Global, regional and national interests must become factors and promoters

of international cooperation, so we must not allow them to become factors of separation and generators of tension and conflict.

The success of the European and world model of peace, security and stability is partly dependent on our capacity and readiness to leave a fixation with the past and its wounds behind and to take on the burden of the future with responsibility. A stable economic, political

and security environment is an important condition for the successful and rapid renewal of countries in transition.

## A YOUNG INDEPENDENT STATE

Slovenia, as a young independent European state, is well aware of its new role. We are a Central European country with a Mediterranean element. We are a part of Europe that geographically, economically and strategically links West, Central and South-Eastern Europe. We are an important marker for security and stability in this area. These are the basic elements of our geopolitical status; these determine our objectives and our actions.

These are the principle reasons that persuade me that membership in NATO is our most effective guarantee of security and independence. We know that these are things that cannot be assessed in financial terms. These are democratic values and ethical principles and, as such, can only be measured by other criteria. I am sure that the strategic characteristics that Slovenia enjoys, and which it is responsibly ready to share with the international community, will be suitably appreciated by NATO. Indeed, these have already been recognised through Slovenia's active participation in the Partnership for Peace.

Slovenia continues to be a serious candidate for the next round of NATO enlargement. We expect the alliance to take a decisive step beyond the Madrid and Washington summits. We are actively involved in a range of political and military activities that present an opportunity to show our partners within NATO that Slovenia is a suitable candidate for membership. We intend to further strengthen our activities in the coming days, weeks and months. We do not want to engage in this process as mere pupils or as a testing ground for political machinations. Nothing to date has come to us as a gift. On the contrary, we have done it all ourselves, thoughtfully and responsibly – and this includes our independence when the Yugoslav army publicly expressed



its intention to use force to oppose the decision we had taken in favour of democracy, freedom and independence. We are realists and we expect realism from others. We must be responsible to ourselves, to Slovenes, to the international community, where work, freedom, equality and the measurability of efforts invested are the key values of coexistence and creativity. This is a matter of national pride and responsibility that no mature nation or politician can or should reject, much less obstruct others from attaining.

### A CLEARLY MARKED DESTINATION

NATO membership is a fundamental foreign policy objective for the Slovenian government and a clearly marked destination on the horizon. That objective has never been in question within the government, although at times we have often been reproved for the modest level of public support and its fluctuations. These fluctuations are of course understandable if we consider what a sensitive issue this is and that it has been going on for almost ten years. Retaining national identity is an extremely important issue for Slovenia given its small size and its historical experiences. Yet, despite this, public opinion polls show that the majority of voters are in favour of Slovenia deepening its Euro-Atlantic ties, and of protecting its independence, democracy and sovereignty within that framework. It would be strange indeed if Slovenia's policy had overwhelming public support and if it was not under the constant gaze of a critical, sceptical and cynical public. It is a good state of affairs to be in, as this is the way to hone and refine our historical objectives, expectations and political actions.

I would like to underline with regard to full NATO membership – as I have on many occasions – that the reason for joining is not the sense that we are under threat. Membership of the alliance would provide conditions that enable us to cooperate more effectively in security operations in those environments where a threat to Slovenia's security exists, and in the wider world. Furthermore, membership would be a challenge and encouragement to our industries and our economy, and bring international recognition to our policies and social groups. Finally, it would offer the chance to participate at the international level to every professional soldier, police officer and specialist, and even every Slovene and citizen of Slovenia.

Two key reasons for NATO membership remain. The first is the strategically and politically based realisation that, as a small country, Slovenia is better off if it resolves issues related to its military security in an integral

and long-term manner and with the maximum professionalism demanded of any military component of NATO. We know NATO to be an effective, well-functioning organisation that we can also trust because of its democratic values. The second reason is the logical conviction that we could organise our external security more effectively as a member of NATO than on our own. We must not forget that we are on the edge of the unstable Balkan region and are not so far from the Middle East. We must not forget 11 September and the massacres that occurred not so long ago and not so far from us.

Slovenia is economically capable of bearing the cost of NATO membership independently. As a member we would contribute to security in this part of Europe and provide a territorial link between present and future

**Prime Minister Janez Drnovšek talking to the press at the main entrance to NATO Headquarters. (Photo: NATO)**

members. These are powerful reasons – above and beyond the fact that we fulfil the democratic criteria – for us to expect to be among those invited to join at the Prague summit.

We must remember that the world has never, in human history to date, been so interdependent and linked as it is today. The end of the second millennium brought great changes to human life and exceptional development, especially in the fields of economics, technology and information. Until the Second World War the world was largely divided into separate, self-contained worlds that lived independently and introspectively in accordance with their own spiritual, cultural and political traditions. Although this was also the case in Europe, it has experienced a developmental explosion in the last few centuries in particular and, through technological inventions and the discovery of the New World, has become, alongside the United States, the developmental generator of modern human civilisation. This is the new challenge for Europe and the new opportunity.







**Cultural- and Congress-Center, Ljubljana.**  
Throughout history, Slovene culture  
has established exceptionally close links  
with foreign cultural circles.

## EUROPE FACES A NUMBER OF HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Europe is faced with a number of historically important decisions today. These have appeared at a point in time when one stage of Slovenia's development is coming to a close and the next is gradually beginning. The course the next stage will take depends on how Slovenia cooperates in the two key processes now unfolding in Europe – the enlargement of the European Union and the enlargement of NATO. And a third dimension is opening up today: how will Slovenia contribute to preserving peace, stability and above all human dignity in South-Eastern Europe? The deci-



sions on Slovenia's participation in these processes depend partly on us and partly on outside factors that we cannot directly influence.

Experiences gained in NATO operations in the Balkans have revealed the growing importance of hitherto unfamiliar forms of cooperation, such as temporary bases (land, air and sea), transshipment facilities, transit concessions (airspace, road and rail links, sea transport), access to national strategic intelligence, joint exercises in specific conditions, linguistic and other forms of civilian-military cooperation, medical services and so on. The status of individual members within the alliance will

be far more defined by the highest quality military equipment and weaponry, and having expert personnel at its disposal who are capable of managing high-tech systems than by the number of brigades, tanks or aircraft.

We are aware that with our work today we are also deciding on the fate of future generations. EU and NATO membership is something we can give them that we have not had. Through membership we will ensure for posterity the international recognition of a secure, free, independent and democratic Slovenia.

