



In 2002 Slovenia finds itself at the crossroads of numerous important decisions. This year will choose the path that leads our country towards safety and prosperity.



The Slovenian National Assembly will conduct a constitutional debate. We will also conduct, encourage and widen the European debate, organising a Slovenian convention to deal with questions related to the future of Europe – our own future. We recently organised a public presentation of opinions on Slovenia’s accession to NATO, the beginning of the finale of this strategic question.

We will be witness this year to numerous demanding tests; these will contain a great many problems and a great many opportunities. Whether we create problems from the opportunities, or opportunities from the problems for the successful future of our state and its people, will depend on our overall political maturity, respect for difference and the ability to achieve sensible political compromises.

In any case we are certain that we will perform all these tasks more satisfactorily if people have a better understanding of them and if we have their support and trust. We in the National Assembly have therefore also decided to define the strategic themes and decisions, above all those which are, in many ways, irreversible and require wide national agreement, and to conduct wide-ranging public debates on them, respecting differences of opinion and in the end building wide political support for the final decision.

Slovenia’s membership in NATO is one of these themes. This is a strategic matter of primary national importance. Slovenia did not receive an invitation during the first round of enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe – nor was there an invitation two years later at the Washington meeting. But for many reasons we

can expect that Slovenia will be invited to join this autumn at the Prague summit.

WE MUST NOT WAIT UNPREPARED

It is not just a matter of fulfilling material conditions but also of strengthening national agreement regarding the benefits of this decision for NATO and for Slovenia. The large majority of parties represented in the National

Assembly support Slovenia’s accession to NATO, but public opinion is far from united. With the recent public presentations of opinion and with all the other political activities that we will carry out this year, we wish, first, to encourage debate and, second, to strengthen the unity of our people in support of Slovenia’s accession to NATO.

In some respects Slovenian politics is taking a risk with public debate and the building of political unity among people, raising the threshold of expectation that Slovenia will certainly be invited to become a member in the autumn. There is no such guarantee. However, the decision in favour of public debate and the strengthening of agreement is nevertheless a sensible decision and represents a reasonable risk. It would be a great deal worse, and essentially more impermissible, to avoid the confrontation of arguments and the task of strengthening unity, and for the invitation to membership to find us unprepared.

NATO – NOT A NARROW MILITARY QUESTION

I am sure that the great majority of our people, after fundamental and exhaustive debate, will understand that Slovenia’s accession to NATO is not merely a narrow military question but a broad strategic matter. It concerns the position of our country in the international community in general, a question of who we wish to share responsibility with, as allies and partners, for common peace, security and well-being, and from whom we can expect help and

who we are prepared to help. It is thus a crucial question of our basic identity in the international community, as we see it and as the international community sees it.

The debate will clearly be dynamic and polemical. There is no harm in that. Some questions which are raised in connection with security and defence, in connection with European security identity or the role and future of NATO, are not just our own questions here in Slovenia. Member states themselves are also raising them. In this sense this debate seems to



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**AT THE
CROSSROADS**



SLOVENIA AND NATO

me a very constructive one. Not least, it will also strengthen our awareness that we are entering the alliance as an active partner.

During the debate we will certainly hear demands for a referendum on this question. Here and there it is possible to understand them as the only way of preventing politicians from deciding instead of and on behalf of the people. Divided public opinion is again put forward as the justification. My own modest opinion is that advocates of accession to NATO could also, to the same or even greater extent, espouse a refer-

endum – not merely because it would remove criticism of a lack of democratic decision-making, but also because a well-conducted debate would strengthen people’s unity of support, meaning that implementation of all the preparations for membership would be so much more successful.



**... for a successful future
of our state and its people.**

