



According to the Head of the NATO Assessment Team, Dr. Bv, Slovenia's Armed Forces are on the right track to become modern, well-equipped and mobile. Here the Slovenian Chief of the General Staff discusses the obstacles encountered and goals achieved so far.

NN&PP: Although Slovenia is not yet a NATO member, many Slovenian soldiers are already performing tasks within NATO. How did this occur?

Brigadier Lipič: In 1994 Slovenia began its participation in the Partner for Peace program. Since then our soldiers have been taking on more demanding tasks in NATO operations in the Middle East and Southern Europe on the territory of former Yugoslavia. In 1997 our soldiers participated in their first peace support mission, the Alba Operation. That was followed by participation in missions in Cyprus, Sarajevo, Kosovo and Skopje. At the same time we had military observers in the Middle East. We have grown in experience and I am proud of our performance.

One of our most successful joint missions was the 1998 exercise Cooperative Adventure Exchange, which was hosted by Slovenia and in which Slovenian units took an active role. Since then we have participated in numerous NATO and PFP exercises. At this moment a military police unit, experienced in multinational activities, is preparing for exercise Strong Resolve in Poland. This will be the unit's biggest exercise so far.

NN&PP: What problems have you encountered in your extensive cooperation with NATO members?

Brigadier Lipič: Our experience has been very positive. Cooperation has increased our expertise from the level of the soldier, up through the unit or com-

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PRIORITY: THE REACTION FORCE





mand, to the Slovenian armed forces as a whole. Of course, we must constantly bear in mind a realistic picture of our capabilities. If we are not aware of our problems, we will not be able to resolve them. Last year we improved numerous problem areas.

Slovenia is currently establishing a Reaction Force, developing the 10th motorized battalion and the 17th military police battalion with the assistance of foreign experts. These units have been successfully participating in activities with other armed forces both in country and abroad. The Slovenian Armed Forces have shown that they are comparable to NATO members in terms of fulfilling assigned missions. This has been proven by General Robertson's request that Slovenia contribute an additional company to our SFOR contingent, a request which we are planning to comply with in the spring.

NN&PP: *In which areas must you improve in order to be more compatible with NATO?*

Brigadier Lipič: First of all, we are focusing on technical and technological interoperability with NATO. As any other military, we depend on financial resources and personnel support. Last year the Slovenian Armed Forces approved an active employment policy to modify gradually the current ratio among soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers. The amendments to the Defence Act – which are currently being processed in Parliament – will provide for the career paths of the Slovenian Armed Forces service members. A very demanding task for the near future is how to train the whole structure of the main and augmentation forces to conduct tasks with Allies on the employment of the NATO defence doctrine ATP 35 (B).

Main Building of the Ministry of Defence.



NN&PP: *Does your NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) define financial issues as well as equipment and personnel?*

Brigadier Lipič: Of course. We have two financial sources. The first one is the defence budget, and the second one is the Basic Development Programmes Acts 1 and 2. We receive funding from these sources primarily for equipment and modernisation. The defence budget specifies the GDP percentage required for the military. The amount of budgetary resources is increasing – last year the percentage was 1.46%, this year 1.50%, and the projected percentage for the year 2003 is 1.54%. Despite this increase there never seems to be adequate funding. But all armed forces face this challenge, including those of NATO countries. Slovenia will utilise its resources as usefully, effectively and economically as possible

NN&PP: *You've been restructuring the Slovenian Armed Forces for several years. Where are you currently in this process?*

Brigadier Lipič: We are downsizing the wartime structure from 74,000 service members to 26,000. Radical changes will be introduced in our employment policy by 2007. We currently have approximately 5,000 service members in the regular structure and will increase that figure to 7500 by 2007. The employment priority lies in the Reaction Force – the 10th battalion and the 17th military police battalion that proved their expertise while serving as military police in Sarajevo. These changes will alter the ratio between the reserve and regular structure, resulting in a better trained, better armed and more efficient reserve force. With regards to equipment, we are planning to modernise some weapon systems and purchase others. Last year we signed quite a few contracts, one for 30 armoured vehicles – Humvees – another contract for two Cougar AS-532-AL helicopters.

We are modernising and upgrading personal equipment and weapons. Last year we obtained 30 upgraded T55 and M55 S1 tanks. Equipment and modernisation funding through 2007 is provided by a special programme developed by the Government.

NN&PP: *In view of the 7,500 regular service members and 26,000 wartime service members serving by 2007, will you still need compulsory military service?*

Brigadier Lipič: Our concept of the Slovenian Armed Forces restructuring programme through 2004 is still based on a combination of conscripts and military professionals. As I mentioned, however, we are gradually increasing the number of career service members, and the number of conscripts is decreasing annually. But the decision about whether we will have an exclusively career military in Slovenia will be of political nature.

NN&PP: *What are your priorities during the modernisation process? Where will you begin?*

Brigadier Lipič: We have already begun. This investment is primarily aimed at the Reaction Force, followed by air traffic control, force mobility, personal equipment, logistics, air defence equipment, and armoured and anti-armour systems.

NN&PP: *Did NATO specifically mention any area where you must change or modernise?*

Brigadier Lipič: Experts from various NATO countries are consulting and advising us but have never exerted any pressure. We ourselves have asked for advice. Every decision we have made in the area of restructuring was discussed in advance with experts from different countries. Our mission statement is: "We will become a small, well-trained and efficient military." We would like to achieve this primarily

for our own national defence and then as part of our responsibilities as a future NATO member. There are still challenges to overcome, but with the assistance of international experts we are well on the way.

NN&PP: *Which countries are providing you with special assistance?*

Brigadier Lipič: We enjoy excellent cooperation with the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium and France. We have, of course, developed very good cooperation with our neighbouring countries as well. We have formed a trilateral coop-



eration initiative with Italy and Hungary to set up a battalion for crisis response operations. But the level of cooperation depends on the particular area as well. For example, we work with the United Kingdom in force structure development, with the Netherlands in air force matters, and with the United States in education and training.

NN&PP: How would you define your cooperation with the Slovenian defence industry?

Brigadier Lipič: Due to the small size of our domestic defence industry, we do purchase equipment on the international market. However, because we want our industry to prosper, we insist on an off-set programme when signing a contract with a foreign company. In terms of production, the Slovenian defence industry is small but it produces some products essential to our armed forces. One example is Valuk, which modernises the T55 tank and artillery system. Other Slovenian companies make quartermaster equipment, ammunition, safety and protection equipment. This industry is growing a bit every year.

NN&PP: Are you acquiring air defence systems from abroad?

Brigadier Lipič: We purchased the Roland system which is already being introduced. We are also considering a future purchase of medium-range air defence systems. But the purchase of supersonic planes would not be realistic for Slovenia at this time. We will, however, continue to develop rotor wing aviation and, as

The helicopter unit of the SAF is participating in the Joint Forge operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1997.



Honour guard during the visit of the German Minister of Defence.

I said, have signed a contract for two helicopters.

NN&PP: What role does Slovenia's geo-strategic position play in your arguments for joining the Alliance?

Brigadier Lipič: As far as the geo-strategic situation is concerned, Slovenia will be connecting two NATO member countries, Hungary and Italy. We're in the close vicinity of the Balkans, an area still considered to be in crisis, and we can be of extreme help in stabilising the area due to our knowledge of culture, language

and people. Additionally, we can serve as a model to the other former Yugoslav republics for the democratisation of the armed forces and a comprehensive national security system.

NN&PP: What do you see as Slovenia's contributions to NATO?

Brigadier Lipič: Our contribution to the Alliance may not be as high as that of some other countries, especially in the number of service members, units, and weaponry. But our contribution will be an important one and the Alliance will be able to rely on us. For instance, it is true that only three Slovenian helicopters and one transport aircraft are flying under the SFOR flag, but this is 40% of our helicopter capability. Our allies have always evaluated our cooperation as outstanding, professional and reliable. Slovenian service members are posted in SFOR, KFOR, as military observers in the Middle East, and have served in Cyprus and Albania.

We can contribute also on Slovenian soil. In 2000 the Slovenian Military School of Foreign Languages was recognised by the North-Atlantic Council as the Partner for Peace Language Training Centre providing language and teacher training to the whole EAPC environment; we have already started the same procedures for the Simulation Centre and the Mountain School. Sometimes a smaller and highly-specialised military offers unique capabilities, and these capabilities are what the Slovenian Armed Forces are prepared to offer NATO.

