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IN THE PARLIAMENT

## WE DO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE



**As Slovenia prepares for the new round of NATO expansion, we can look back on our efforts in 1997 to be included in the first round, efforts which were ultimately unsuccessful. We were an excellent candidate until we joined a “package” of mutual support with other NATO candidate countries. This time, while supporting the entry of other nations into NATO, Slovenia stands on her own merits.**

**A**lso at that time, wounds from the Balkan wars were still fresh. We tried to distance ourselves from our Balkan neighbours, in some respects denying our history. Now we are assuming a new mantle of responsibility as a former Yugoslavian country actively participating in the stability and economic prosperity of South-eastern Europe. Slovenian peace-keeping troops, fluent in the local languages, are currently serving in former Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia. In Bosnia, Slovenian soldiers are serving in the front lines of the SFOR troops.

Slovenia, a nation of only two million, cannot play a vital role in international affairs far from its territory. But we are in a unique position to serve and influence our own region. Stability and peace are often related to economic prosperity. Slovenia is proud to be the number one investor in Bosnia, contributing widely to rebuilding and revitalising the Bosnian economy.

For a decade Slovenia had no formal relations with Yugoslavia. We have recently established diplomatic ties and are working to improve our relations. Yugoslavia, like Bosnia, is in desperate economic straits and Slovenia, though small, can contribute greatly to strengthening the economy. We also contribute to the creation of strong democracies. Slovenia is currently discussing another fact-finding mission to Kosovo, and a visit to Macedonia to help strengthen the role of the Macedonian Parliament. Without the rule of law,

there can be no effective Government. Without effective Government, there is no escape from the present untenable situation.

When we discuss NATO membership, we do not focus solely on military aspects but more on the political environment and strategic foreign policy objectives. We look at ways to make South-eastern Europe a stable and prosperous region as a whole.

In addition to NATO membership, we have made EU membership a major priority. Slovenia's EU membership will assist our neighbours to transition to stable democracies. These new nations will see that Slovenia – like themselves a new nation formerly part of the Yugoslav state – is welcomed everywhere once it changed direction. Slovenia's EU entry will encourage political leaders in South-eastern Europe to change their priorities, create long-term objectives, and lead their people into a new national consciousness.

Slovenia's goal is to help our neighbours prepare for a new future. That is why we will not rest content once we have joined NATO and the EU. We look forward to seeing our neighbours join these organisations once they, too, have fulfilled the membership requirements. The conditions necessary for accession to both groups – democracy, stability, economic prosperity – are the only solutions to heal ancient wounds and create for our neighbours a happy and prosperous future. Slovenia remains committed to this goal. 