



RUDOLF PETAN,
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DEFENCE COMMITTEE

ACCESSION TO NATO



As President of the Committee for National Defence of the Republic of Slovenia, I am also a member of the Social Democratic Party which strongly supports NATO accession. Five years ago the Social Democrats proposed a declaration in support of Slovenia's accession to NATO as a priority objective. The other two priorities are the EU and improved relations with our neighbouring countries. This declaration was signed and adopted by all Parliamentary parties except one small party. The Slovenian Government receives strong support for these three objectives particularly from the Social Democratic Party of Slovenia, which is the largest opposition party.

Support among Slovenian citizens is also essential. The task of our high-level politicians is to inform the public of the benefits of NATO membership. On January 16, 2002, the Parliamentary Defence Committee held a public presentation entitled "Slovenia before the NATO Prague Summit." The Slovenian public showed great interest in this debate due to the high-level officials involved – the President of the Republic, Milan Kucan; Prime Minister Janez Drnovsek, Minister of Foreign Affairs Dimitrij Rupel, Minister of Defence Anton Grizold, former Defence Minister and President of the opposition party Janez Jansa, and several other members of the opposition. Members of the opposition joined in the debate and, surprisingly, almost all of them strongly supported Slovenian accession to NATO. President Kucan stated, "If there are some people who have doubts about this, I must say, *I am for NATO.*"

This debate on NATO accession was broadcast on Slovenian national television and, I believe, resulted in increased public support for membership in the Alliance.

Slovenia celebrated its 10th anniversary as an independent nation in 2001. We are continuing to build up our Armed Forces. Last year Slovenia enacted a special law to provide funds for the purchase of defence equipment, funds earmarked for equipment purchases only which may not be used for administrative costs.

Slovenia is located quite close to the Balkans and until its independence was part of Yugoslavia. We cannot choose our neighbours, but we can strengthen our Armed Forces, work hard to bring peace to this region, and help create prosperity. Slovenia is in a unique position to help create a lasting peace. We know this region quite well and understand the mentality of our neighbours. Emotions still reign over reason in many areas, but we are also aware of the strong abilities of the communities involved.

Slovenia is a proud contributor to the Partnership for Peace Programme. Our Armed Forces have served in peace-keeping units in Bosnia, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo and

Cyprus. Funds have been made available to complete our 10th Battalion and form the 20th Battalion, whose purpose is to cooperate with international peacekeeping forces.

NATO membership means collective defence. But we are not joining NATO in the expectation of receiving something. Slovenia wants to contribute to the Alliance, and one of our earliest contributions is to NATO peacekeeping forces. We are in the process of raising the level of our Armed Forces to meet NATO standards and fulfilling the requirements of the Membership Action Plan (MAP).

The Social Democratic Party has reminded the Government on numerous occasions that we would like to see an all-professional Armed Forces, though there is some debate as to whether we should professionalise just a part of them. We feel that without well-equipped and professional Armed Forces we cannot meet the required standards – especially in the wake of September 11 which created new challenges for us. These events proved that security is not something imaginary, but a very concrete need across the globe. As a result, we have increased our budget funds for defence equipment and the Armed Forces.

Particularly after September 11, it is clear that nations cannot work alone to guarantee their own security, but must cooperate in international alliances. This is why membership in NATO and other international organisations is essential. We have made great efforts to educate the Slovenian public on the advantages of NATO membership for our national security. We know that security is not cheap and must, therefore, increase the amount of our GDP devoted to the Armed Forces. For instance, last year 1.22% of the GDP was devoted to defence, and we want to increase it to 1.56% in 2005 to meet NATO requirements.

The military will continue to restructure the Armed Forces and continue our reforms. With regards to the Slovenian public, we will continue to prepare them for NATO accession by keeping them well-informed of our political goals and the benefits our citizens will receive.

