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# MEMBERSHIP IN NATO: NEITHER PRIZE NOR ENTITLEMENT

**Slovenia has been pursuing membership in NATO ever since it gained its independence. In 1994 and 1996 the National Assembly unambiguously declared that it supports membership in NATO. The government of Slovenia dedicated its focused and consummate attention to this end. Today, all political parties in the National Assembly, bar one, are committed to membership in NATO.**

In the course of five years that have elapsed since the Madrid Summit NATO leaders covered some new ground with regard to enlargement. They declared their commitment to the Open Door Policy and made it known that the zero-option was “off the table.” Last summer President Bush stated that membership in NATO is in reach of “all of Europe’s democracies that seek it and are ready to share the responsibilities that NATO brings.” It seems reasonable to expect that invitations to new members will be issued at the Prague Summit in November of this year.

Slovenia is willing and ready to become a member of NATO and to share the responsibilities for regional and global security. For Slovenia membership in NATO is neither a prize nor an entitlement. Rather it would be a crowning point of its successful transition. It is a full-fledged democracy, with transparent

and democratic civil-military relations, exemplary treatment of ethnic minorities and it boasts a successful, stable and growing market economy. Its report card is surely impressive. Moreover, in the words of a distinguished German politician it is an “exporter of stability” in Southeastern Europe.

Slovenia is enhancing without respite its ability to contribute to NATO in military terms. Never a part of the Warsaw Pact, it did not have to deal with a cumbersome military and political structure left over from the previous regime. It built its armed forces from scratch after gaining independence. Military structures that are not meeting NATO requirements are being reformed in a responsible and efficient way, leaving no stone unturned. Slovenia is forming modern, flexible, and professional armed forces.

In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, Slovenia joined the antiterrorist coalition without delay. It has quickly enacted additional relevant legislation to do its share in the international fight against terrorism.

It is closely cooperating with NATO through Partnership for Peace. It opened its air space and allowed transfer across its territory to NATO troops involved in operations in the Balkans, and has provided NATO with logistics support for the needs of SFOR in Bosnia,

as well as routinely hosting NATO vessels. Since 2001, the Port of Koper is hosting transshipment of US military equipment destined to crisis areas in Southeastern Europe, consolidating its status as an important logistics link for this part of Europe. Incidentally, this spring the Slovene armed forces will significantly increase their participation in SFOR.

The country sits astride the rail and road links between Central and Southeastern Europe, as well as of the Alpine, the Mediterranean and the Pannonian regions. It would provide a territorial link between Italy and Hungary, both already NATO members, logically rounding off the borders of the alliance.

Its experience and understanding of the Balkans is of considerable value. It has both the capacity and the will to continue to play a helpful role in extending the area of stability, security and prosperity to its southern neighbors. It is an important trade partner and one of the largest foreign investors in the region, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Macedonia.

The decision to invite Slovenia into NATO at the Prague Summit would be an important incentive for the countries of the region to continue along the path of reform. It would send a clear signal that the Open Door Policy is more than rhetoric. It would reassure those that are eyeing the invitation. A decision to the contrary might well engender doubts about the resolve of the Alliance regarding the enlargement process.

And finally, Slovenia is compatible with NATO ranks since it shares historical, cultural, and religious roots, as well as fundamental values with current members.

Based on its geostrategic position, its role as an “exporter of stability,” and widely recognized service in SFOR and KFOR, Slovenia is a well-qualified candidate for membership in NATO. It would be a source of net-gain for the Alliance. It is fully prepared and willing to walk an extra mile and do its part in strengthening the overall security in Europe and in building a stronger and healthier transatlantic relationship.



**A member of the Slovene Military Police and a US Army security officer during the CAE exercise.**  
**(Photo: Mönch archive)**

