



# SLOVENIA – AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE VILNIUS GROUP

**As part of their efforts to achieve greater political influence over NATO's enlargement strategy, the nine candidate countries for NATO membership have agreed on a number of joint activities. In May 2000 two of the aspirants, Lithuania and Slovenia, organised a joint conference in Vilnius on issues pertaining to further NATO enlargement. It was attended by the foreign ministers of all nine candidates for membership or their deputies. The ministers also adopted the Vilnius Statement, which expresses the political solidarity that exists between the candidate countries and reflects their willingness to continue the process of integration and achieve the criteria for membership of the Alliance.**

**Dr. Dimitry Rupel,  
Slovene Foreign Minister,  
hosting the meeting of the Vilnius Group,  
October 4th Bled, Slovenia.**

In Slovenia's view the Vilnius meeting showed the Alliance that the aspirant countries were not merely passive applicants but were willing and able to participate in NATO-related activities. The Vilnius initiative should therefore be maintained with regard to political solidarity and joint activities with the Alliance.

In this sense Slovenia regards the political dimension of the group as an expression of solidarity between the candidate countries in their desire to complete the democratic transformation of Europe.

Slovenia understands the commitment to cooperation between the aspirant countries as a sharing of views and experience gained in implementation of the Membership Action Plan (MAP).

However, Slovenia also believes that each candidate country should qualify individually for membership on the basis of its own merits and that any decision to invite an aspirant to begin accession talks with the Alliance should be made on a case-by-case basis. Inviting any

of the aspirant countries into the Alliance should be regarded as success for all.

In the spirit of the Vilnius Statement, Slovenia has participated in all Vilnius Group activities and will continue to do so in the future. Among other it organised a meeting for political directors from the foreign ministries of the aspirant countries (April 2001, at Brdo pri Kranju, in which Croatia officially took part for the first time), as well as a meeting of the foreign ministers themselves in October 2001 in Bled.

At the latter a Joint Statement was adopted in which the countries of the Vilnius Group expressed solidarity with and support for the United States following the September 11 terrorist attacks.

In 2001 Slovenia also participated in the Bratislava Prime Ministers' Summit (10-11 May), and the heads of state meeting in Sofia (5 October), and in the meeting between Vilnius Group foreign ministers and US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Brussels (7 December).

