



The Republic of Slovenia's accession to NATO is a priority of Slovene foreign policy; it enjoys the support of the governing coalition as well as the majority of parliamentary parties. With regards to the Slovenian public, opinion polls show that the majority of respondents support membership. According to the most recent public opinion survey conducted in November 2001, Slovenia's endeavours to join NATO are supported by 53% of the population. The Government places special emphasis on informing both the Slovenian public and the international community about activities related to Slovenia's NATO membership. A special communications programme approved by the Government of Slovenia was launched in 2001.



Dr. Alja Brglez,
Director of the
Government
PR & Media Office

NN&PP: Dr. Brglez, how did you manage to turn the initial enthusiasm of your 1991 independence into a continuous movement for democracy and modern economy?

Dr. Brglez: Prior to reaching independence, Slovenia was the most developed republic in former Yugoslavia. With only 8.3% of the Yugoslav population, Slovenia produced up to 18% of the Yugoslav GDP and up to 25% of total exports. A diverse industrial history, a tradition of openness to the world and a well-managed state economic policy contribute to the

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DR. ALJA BRGLEZ,
DIRECTOR OF THE GOVERNMENT
PR & MEDIA OFFICE

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND THE INTEGRATION PROCESS



fact that Slovenia is among the most successful countries in transition from a socialist to a market economy.

Slovenia's Gross Domestic Product has shown stable growth and, according to Dun & Bradstreet's analysis of risk levels of transitional countries, Slovenia has the lowest level of risk. As a democratic and stable country with a well-developed economy, Slovenia is working to fulfil all the necessary criteria and adjust to NATO economic standards.

NN&PP: *How is the Government of Slovenia promoting accession to NATO and the EU?*

Dr. Brglez: We are running two separate public awareness programmes on Slovenia's accession to the EU and NATO. The Public Relations and Media Office assumed the task of informing the Slovene public about EU integration in 1997, while the communications programme on NATO accession started in 2001. With these programmes the Government wishes to contribute towards greater awareness, understanding and public discussion of the integration process into the EU and NATO. We also want to make known the consequences of membership in these Euro-Atlantic associations for Slovene citizens as well as the consequences of non-membership.

NN&PP: *Which organisations assist in the public awareness campaign?*

Dr. Brglez: The task of informing the Slovene public about EU integration has been entrusted to the European Affairs Department in the Government PR & Media Office. The NATO information programme is being run by the Information and Communications group (IC), which consists of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of Defence (MD) and the Government Public Relations and Media Office (GPRMO). In addition to the basic IC group, others participating in the 2002 programme include representatives of public relations services of ministries and government bodies, the Office of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, the Prime Minister's Office, the National Assembly and Slovenian embassies.

NN&PP: *Are there any fears or unpleasant feelings among the population towards plans for EU and NATO membership?*

Dr. Brglez: In a sound democracy, no decision, especially a historic one, can have unanimous support. However, public opinion in Slovenia is generally stable and in favour of NATO enlargement. Public opinion polls in recent years show that Slovenes feel safer than they did in the past. They are increasingly aware of non-military threats, notably ecological and socio-economic threats, while other sources include crime, natural and man-made disasters, the sale and use of drugs, internal political instability, the possibility of social unrest, and lagging behind in science and technology. Respondents do not attribute major importance to external military threats.

The attitude of the Slovenian public towards NATO membership has been monitored regularly since 1997 through public opinion polls carried out by the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre of the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana. Public support fluctuated between 62% and 55% in 1997. After the Madrid Summit, the Slovenes expressed a certain disappointment that we were not invited and support dropped a bit to about 55%. In recent years, it has been between 50% and 55%.

NN&PP: *What are the latest figures?*

Dr. Brglez: In 2001, we took a monthly phone poll to survey the attitude of the Slovene public and the percentage of those who gave a positive response was, on average, between 50% and 55% – occasionally slipping below 50%, but always remaining very close to this figure. Support reached its peak in June 2001 at 55.3%, whilst the lowest level of support was recorded in November 2001 at 48.4%. We must be aware that these results oscillate as a result of current events and reflect wider socio-political developments that influence views on NATO membership. More stable and relevant are the results of the bi-annual public opinion field survey conducted in November 2001 where support reached 53%.

NN&PP: *What is the reaction of Slovenian youth to NATO membership?*

Dr. Brglez: The youth show great interest in Slovenia's future development as well as concern. In cooperation with the Youth Section of the Atlantic Council of Slovenia, we are

organising round tables and debates on various aspects of national security, including Slovenia's membership in NATO.

NN&PP: *Which members of the Slovenian public are the most critical and indecisive with regards to NATO accession? What is the correlation among supporters of NATO accession and EU accession?*

Dr. Brglez: Support for EU membership is slightly higher (57%) than for NATO membership. Statistically, there is a high level of correlation of support for Slovenian membership in both the EU and NATO. The overlap of both groups of supporters is 78%; that means that 78% of those supporting EU membership are also in favour of NATO membership. But overall, Slovenia's joining the EU is supported by slightly better educated people, with a somewhat better socio-economic status and from slightly more urban areas, whilst Slovenia's NATO membership is supported by people with a somewhat lower education, who belong to the middle social classes and appear further to the right of the political spectrum. Women do not oppose NATO membership in considerably greater numbers, although there are more undecided among women than men.

NN&PP: *What are the main elements of your communication strategy?*

Dr. Brglez: The communication strategy relies on a range of communication tools such as TV discussions and other mass media appearances, organisation of public round-table debates throughout Slovenia, preparation and distribution of printed information materials, and a direct toll free telephone line. Also a special joint web site (<http://nato.gov.si>) in Slovene and English has been launched. This website plays an informative and communicative role and represents a rapidly growing database of information on NATO and Slovenia's preparations for membership.

With all these activities we want to contribute towards greater awareness, understanding and public discussion of the process of NATO integration. We believe that those who are better informed about NATO are more likely to support Slovenia's membership in the Alliance.



Special website <http://nato.gov.si> is a great database in Slovenian accession into NATO.

