



MEMBERSHIP IN NATO – OUR STRATEGIC NATIONAL INTEREST

The fundamental aim and orientation of the democratic political forces in Slovenia in the former Yugoslavia and to an even greater extent during the attainment of independence and afterwards, has been to draw nearer to the West as the bearer of those values that were foremost in our conceptions and ideals. From the beginning we viewed the European Union and NATO as leading institutions, through membership of which we might realise our ambitious goals. If membership in these two organisations was viewed as remote and difficult to attain in the earliest period of our independence, our endeavours soon began to take on a more defined and formal shape. It was in this manner, so to speak, that the democratically expressed political will for Slovenia's approach to NATO was first clearly expressed by the National Assembly in 1994, and the political decision for membership in NATO was unequivocally expressed in April 1996 in a resolution by the National Assembly that "the Republic of Slovenia wishes to secure its basic security interest through the framework of collective defence made possible by membership in NATO."



We, the citizens of Slovenia, recognised first of all in this national-strategic interest a historic opportunity to preserve, improve and develop our state in line with the tradition of European democracy and transatlantic cooperation. We also confirmed this in a number of elections through the selection of political parties that supported this strategic orientation for Slovenia. And, as public opinion research has attested, the majority of voters remain convinced that Slovenia will best realise and safeguard its key national interests through integration into the European Union and NATO as soon as possible.

A full year before the NATO summit in Prague, when the leaders of the member states should invite the best prepared candidates into their ranks, a very lively public debate began in Slovenia on the necessity or the lack thereof, and even the rationale of Slovenian membership in this organisation. The debate on the pros and cons often led to deep divisions in points of view and even confrontations, not infrequently due to images of NATO that were inappropriate for the time, and even stereotyped. Its critics continue to view NATO primarily or exclusively as a cold war military organisation, and not first and foremost as a multi-dimensional security and political organisation as if changes of historical significance had not taken place in Europe during the last decade, and as if NATO had not adapted itself to them, with a completely new strategic concept of operations and planning as well.

However, there is no doubt that critical points of view, expressed in media debates, are completely legitimate and can enrich reflections and discussions on NATO itself, as well as on Slovenia's efforts towards membership in it. And, because it concerns long-term we may even say, historical decisions concerning Slovenia's future, the continued discussion of this matter is in any case needed, and even vital.

Why does Slovenia actually want to join NATO? First of all because membership guarantees a secure and stable environment for the all-round development of our country. Membership also means a recognition and confirmation of the realisation of candidate countries' aspirations and efforts in building democracy and a market economy, protecting human rights and instituting democratic control over their defence forces. These are the values on which the social and economic systems of NATO member states are based. In short, membership would enable Slovenia to make decisions on the most significant security and political issues in the Euro-Atlantic region at the "same table" as the majority of the all-round best developed, most powerful and most influential states, and this would doubtless also have

an effect on strengthening Slovenia's geopolitical position. Thus, we are talking about membership "in an elite club" that, on the one hand, offers a number of advantages (collective defence under the principle of "all for one, one for all", stability and security) and, on the other hand, expects the consistent fulfilment of obligations arising from the common mission of the Alliance. NATO membership demands the complete political, economic and military preparedness which we are striving for and must achieve first and foremost for our own security and stability, and not (merely) for membership alone. Experiences have conclusively confirmed that the cost of securing an adequate defence within the framework of NATO collective security system is, in the long term, less than that of developing our own armed forces, which would never be able to ensure an equivalent level of security.

In the aforementioned debates over Slovenia's membership in NATO, opinions also emerged maintaining that the integration of Slovenia into the European Union would be enough to satisfy its security and defence needs. However, the fact is that the EU will not guarantee the collective security of its members through its joint European security and defence policy, which means that it does not provide all of the security, defence and other assurances that are of significance for Slovenia in this association. Indeed, with respect to guaranteeing security, the EU and NATO are complementary rather than competitive organisations. All nine candidates for membership are trying with all their might to fulfil the criteria and to be invited to membership at the upcoming NATO summit in Prague in November 2002. We expect that the preparedness of each of the candidates will be assessed in line with the results they achieve. Through the implementation of its third Membership Action Plan 2001 2002, which was recently submitted to NATO, Slovenia wants to fulfil the obligations that it has thereby accepted: the development of democracy, the capability to contribute to a collective security of the Alliance, sufficient financial resources for defence, the safeguarding of classified information and the harmonisation of its legal system with NATO regulations.

Slovenia aspires to join NATO as well as the EU, because membership in both organisations will complete its path towards integration into the "Western civilisation circle". It has already done a lot and traversed a good part of the path in these efforts, and now the decisive test lies ahead. To come through successfully will require all of the energy, will and determination that can be mustered, and political wisdom as well. I wish us an abundance of all of these. ■