

The U.S. and the Second Round on NATO Enlargement: What Candidates Hope to Gain

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Slovenia gained independence in order to become part of a safe and democratic world, sharing a common system of values, and to help consolidate it. Slovenia enshrined this among its priorities at its very birth. It is therefore firmly resolved to meet the required criteria for NATO membership painstakingly and with full responsibility. Slovenia has adopted a demanding but realistic Membership Action Plan, and is implementing it for its own sake and for the sake of its responsibility to strengthen joint defense of the world freedom.

Milan Kuèan
President of the Republic of Slovenia
at the Sofia Conference

In very practical terms, Slovenia hopes to gain a lot with its membership in the Alliance. There are at least three good reasons why we want and hope to become an Ally in NATO.

First and foremost, NATO membership would greatly increase Slovenia's access to the leadership in the Allied capitals and give us a voice, a vote and a seat at the table in shaping the future of transatlantic relations. It is one thing to be a partner, regardless how good and reliable one, and another to be an ally. An opinion of allied governments are sought out and valued. This higher value of influence increases an Ally's sovereignty because it enhances smaller states' abilities to protect their interests. NATO consensus-based decision-making structure is the great equalizer for all Allies, large and small. NATO membership will give Slovenia a voice and to have its opinion respected by the entire Euro-Atlantic community.

Second, NATO does provide the most security for the cheapest price in history. Slovenia has been building its national defense and other state structures from scratch. This had to be done regardless of whether it opted for NATO or not. Although in the short term, it might look like being cheaper to go on its own, in long run only collective defense, including article V, can assure the highest national security guarantees.

We understand that there is no cheap security, as Secretary General Lord Robertson has been reminding us frequently or as President Mr. Kuèan put it during recent public debate on NATO in National parliament that National Security has no price tag. However, it is a rational decision, which enables us to get the best for the given price.

Third, it gives us access to regional crisis management instruments of the Alliance. Non-article V operations of the post-cold war in the Balkans and particularly post-September 11 antiterrorism fight and associated threats of the weapons of mass destruction, are increasingly in the focus of the national security policy. NATO has been a key instrument for crisis management in Europe and is going to remain even more important and relevant in the future. It is important for Slovenia, as a small state, to have possibility to participate an, if necessary, to influence both the decisionmaking and decisiontaking processes.

We support and participate in the building of an integrated European Security and Defense Policy because we believe it can play an important role. Nevertheless, ESDP does not equate to NATO's article V guarantee. It can be used and we hope it will be used if necessary in the crisis management situations. However it has never be meant to substitute or to play the same role as NATO in the fundamental collective defense role. It cannot and will not guarantee national security in the sense of collective security.

Greater access and a seat at the table of the real politics, cheaper and better security and regional crisis management capability are the prime Slovene reasons to become the NATO member. To achieve this goal, we want to prepare as well as possible for our future new status. We want that the Allies would be confident that with Slovenia they will get a relatively small but politically reliable, militarily effective and security credible new ally in the southern end of the Central Europe and on the western end of the South Eastern Europe.

NATO membership will link Slovenia more profoundly also to the United States and Europe, free, whole and at peace. To achieve these goals, Slovenia has carefully planned and implemented a range of activities in order to meet the expectation of the Allies. Slovenia joined Partnership for Peace in 1994, in 1998 the Government adopted the National Strategy for Integration into NATO, which was approved also by Parliament. After the Washington Summit we have embarked on the Membership Action Plan. Its Third Annual National Program for 2001-2002 is in its final implementation phase. Our strategy for joining NATO has been updated and expanded several times and now includes:

- Membership Action Plan /MAP/
- Antiterrorist coalition
- Regional security
- Vilnius group
- NATO awareness campaign

MAP is the political concept, operational framework, planning tool and executive mechanism to prepare us for future alliance role. MAP is all-inclusive: political, military, economic, financial, security and legal. It is totally transparent: internally within the governmental structures and the parliament and externally within NATO. Even if we were not up

to NATO, MAP would still be the best possible defense planning mechanism available outside NATO for defense reforms and modernization of the national armed forces.

We believe that MAP will have an important (but precisely how important?) role in the decisions of the nineteen allies of whom to invite. Namely, it should give NATO members high level assurance that the candidates will turn into credible new allies, who will be politically willing, economically and financially able and military capable to perform their new role in the whole spectrum of Allies traditional as well as new and future tasks.

Last week the NATO Assessment Team concluded its in depth review and assessment of Slovene MAP 2001-2002. Although we'll have to wait for its formal report, its first impressions were very positive. Our national plans were assessed as realistic, financially sound and achievable. They have noticed an important progress in all fields over the previous year. However, they also pointed out to some persistent problems where we'll have to put in additional energy in the forthcoming period. This is only the beginning of an intensive period on the road to Prague. The process of assessing and reassessing will continue in Brussels with meeting of the Reinforces political Committee in March and the NAC with Slovene foreign and defense ministers in the beginning of April. Thus, NATO ministers will have complete and a very precise picture of each of us candidate at the time of their spring ministerial meeting in Reykjavik. Will it be enough for them to make up their minds and to recommend to their respective heads of states of whom to invite in Prague? We don't know. We cannot know. We believe, the allies themselves do not know at this very moment.

The antiterrorist coalition is an important new element, which after September 11 emerged out of its previous hidden content in the Washington Declaration. The tragic events that occurred in the USA dramatically changed the world. The war against terrorism is not a conventional conflict as known in the past. The highest values- peace, freedom, the rule of law, the life itself- are threatened. In Slovenia we regard this time as a challenge in which we have joined the majority of democratic countries in the antiterrorist coalition, thus contributing to the protection of these values.

Slovenia's support to the coalition is shown in various ways, from expressing political solidarity and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, offering expanded operation of the International Trust Found for Demining and rehabilitation to enhanced intelligence and low enforcement cooperation, prevention of the money laundering and other financial transactions which feed the terrorists. Just last week the Government decided to offer an additional mobile company (equipped with the latest version of the Hummvess) as a "backfill" to American forces in SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Slovenia is determined to do its fair share in antiterrorist coalition in the areas where it can be of a real use and assistance.

As the most southern part of Central Europe Slovenia is an important juncture between Mediterranean and Southeast Europe. Slovenia is also a link between Italy and Hungary, both NATO members. This geographic and strategic position makes Slovenia the gate to Southeast Europe and allows it to act as a herald and interpreter of the transatlantic policy in the region. Slovenia is fully involved in practically all activities of the international community as well as bilaterally from military to economy, commerce, culture, etc. In the NATO led operations in

Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo and Macedonia there are over one hundred Slovene soldiers and police officers serving in SFOR (military police platoons in the MSU, helicopter detachment, Role-1 medical unit) and KFOR (staff officers and police instructors). Slovenia has proposed Croatia to be invited into the Partnership for Peace and later to the Vilnius group. And we have offered to the new democratic government in Belgrade to help them to get familiar with Partnership for Peace. We are active proponents of the Pact of Stability. Slovenia is one of the biggest foreign investor in the region. The International Trust Fund for Demining is recognized as one of the most effective demining organization with big success in BiH, Croatia, Kosovo and elsewhere in the region. With Italy and Hungary we are progressing in setting-up the Multinational Land Force – a brigade size unit with headquarters in Udine, which we hope will become operational in the next two years.

Slovenia is today fully involved in the region. As a future member of NATO and EU we will be able to do even more. At the same time we are interested that we will not become most South-Eastern border of the Alliance, and that NATO will continue its open door policy also in this part of Europe.

The Vilnius group with its political solidarity among the aspirant countries has added a new quality to the enlargement process and in NATO's open door policy. Through political transparency, practical cooperation and assistance, sharing experiences and frustrations of the political, military defense, security and legal reforms, candidate countries set a new political culture in the enlargement process, not known at the time of Madrid. Preparations for the next round at the Prague Summit has become first and foremost competition with oneself and not with each other as at the time of the previous enlargement. Heavy agenda for 2002 starting with the foreign ministers' meeting in the beginning of the March in Skopje and then Prime ministers meetings in Bucharest and in Riga is the best proof that the Vilnius process will sustain all the way to Prague and most probably beyond.

Last, but not least important, public support for membership in NATO. The Government is striving to gain overall national approval for its endeavors to join NATO. The public support in Slovenia has remained at a relatively high level of around 50%. The other half is proximally half undecided and half against. In the beginning of this year the Government has started a campaign towards more intensive NATO awareness in order to get Slovenes to know better the positive elements of future membership in NATO and also the obligations that go with it. Public polls in last three months are already starting to show positive results and a steady increase in positive support. In February it is 53%.

In addition to the public support it is important to point out that since 1994 a political consensus with regard to accession to NATO has been maintained across the political spectrum. All but the smallest right party in Parliament (four seats out of 90-seat Parliament) supports the membership at the earliest occasion.

The months ahead of us are the crucial for implementation of the Membership Action Plan and our other endeavors to join NATO. They are crucial also for Allies to sort out many important issues for the future of the Alliance. The new members and the continuation of the open door policy are only one of them, but for us, the most important one.