

SURPRISING ACHIEVEMENTS OF SLOVENIA AFTER FIVE YEARS OF NATO MEMBERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, NATO celebrated sixty years of existence. This venerable anniversary was also marked in Slovenia by a seminar with the very original title *NATO – Young at 60*. The seminar was organised by the Euro-Atlantic Council of Slovenia, together with the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia, and took place in February 2009 at Brdo pri Kranju. At the seminar, we discovered that different countries experience this anniversary in various ways. The founding members of the Alliance see the period of 60 years from a different perspective than those who have joined the Alliance in the last decade. In addition to the 60 years of NATO, the Republic of Slovenia is also celebrating its first five years of membership. The preparations for membership took place over several years, and the alignment with the standards and membership plans brought about many changes. The majority of these changes were introduced in the area of military organisation and the defence system, many of them in the fields of regulatory acts, the protection of classified information and the functioning of the government, and a great many changes occurred in the area of diplomatic and expert activities within NATO's organisational and command structure. The legitimacy of Slovenia's membership is based on the successful referendum in 2003, when 66 percent of voters opted for the membership of the Republic of Slovenia in NATO. After five years we can say that Slovenia has successfully built its reputation based on a strong referendum decision and that it is a credible participant in common defence planning. It plays an active role in the allied command structure and in crisis response operations, and is building capabilities which are being integrated into the joint NATO forces. After half a decade, we can also say that Slovenia has made surprisingly good use of the historic opportunity to be ranked among the Western democracies. What is more, with integration into the Alliance, circumstances were created for a successful transition from the former Slovenian security strategy of relying on its own forces to the strategy of allied security.

NATO – A HISTORICAL OPPORTUNITY

In assessing the five years of Slovenia's membership and paying respect to the entire 60 years of NATO, we should not forget that Slovenia's path to NATO was nevertheless not as straight as it seems now after five years, or as the new candidate countries might think when they proclaim their readiness or even eligibility for membership. Soon after its international recognition, Slovenia endorsed its readiness for membership in its long-term security documents. On 30 March 1994, it joined the Partnership for Peace, wherein the country actively waited for admission to membership. NATO itself successfully transformed from an Alliance for territorial defence of the member countries into an Alliance for pan-European or even extra-European security, and a similar process took place in Slovenia, the process of entering into international politics. The country, which had built its national defence in order to protect itself against possible new attacks from what remained from the former common state, was becoming more and more open to South-Eastern Europe, especially after 1995. In 1997, due to incomplete reorientation in the area of foreign policy and to the international political situation at the NATO summit in Madrid, Slovenia did not receive an invitation for membership. This rejection was not well accepted by the political elites in Slovenia. They cast guilt on the unpreparedness of the Slovenian Armed Forces. The truth is, however, that the Slovenian foreign policy of that time was too isolationist and excluded from contributions to international security to be able to persuade NATO members of its readiness to contribute its forces to the Alliance.

The Slovenian Armed Forces understood the criticism. With its Action Plan for membership and the transition-type orientation into further reorganisation and modernisation, as well as with the support of the entire defence policy, it participated more and more often and with greater numbers in international operations (ALBA, UNFICYP, UNTSO, SFOR, KFOR), where it consistently built its image as a reliable and professional ally. At the same time, the concept of manning the army with professional soldiers was developed, which meant replacing the multitude of relatively poorly trained conscripts and reservists with an increasingly well-trained and deployable professional army. In 2004, upon accession to membership, the Slovenian Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence already had many military and defence professionals who were highly educated and trained abroad, and a system of long-term and medium-term defence planning was established. Although it is true that there were still many doubters within the defence ministry and the society who expressed their scepticism about the provision of security within the framework of the Alliance and who cherished the notion in their criticism of the old times of conscription, the majority still believed in the advantages of allied collective defence.

Awareness of the urgent need for an increased contribution to international security was strengthened, especially after 11 September 2001, and mostly with participation in operations beyond Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which is becoming an essential part of NATO membership. The principles of solidarity and of fair

burden-sharing within the Alliance have been embraced to the greatest extent at the Ministry of Defence. The public has not yet fully comprehended these principles, and a part of the political elite still believes that NATO membership is possible on the basis of an independent decision on where we will, and above all where we will not, participate. This increases, especially in the case of dangerous operations and where the effects of peace operations are not visible at first glance, mistrust regarding NATO operations and the need for wider participation of domestic policy in the process of decision-making on the participation of forces in such operations. This is most evident when considering the issue of integration of Slovenia into the NATO NTM-I mission for training Iraqi security forces, as well as the issue of participation in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, both of which strengthen the requirement for an increasingly more important role of the National Assembly in the relevant discussions. In the light of changes taking place outside the Alliance, these facts taken together constitute a dynamic process of changing and searching for responses to the new NATO strategic concept. While preserving the consensus in political decision-making, this concept should find answers to the question of future enlargement, as well as to the question of improving the response effectiveness and new tasks and challenges faced by the military's capabilities, and by more and more exposed non-military civilian support capabilities.

SLOVENIA'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND INTEGRATION

Membership in NATO means that the member countries are ready to participate in various types of operations, both Article 5 and non-Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. This readiness is confirmed by real contributions and not by the mere promises often given by countries in relation to United Nations operations. At the Bucharest Summit in 2007, the member countries made a commitment that half of their forces would be ready for deployment, and ten percent of those forces would have to be ready or engaged in operations under the NATO flag. Quite a number of members have not yet fulfilled these obligations, among others some old members, as well as some that have joined the Alliance during the last three enlargements. NATO transformation included more than just those countries that were among the last to join the Alliance, since all the countries had to adapt to these changes and abandon the notion of defence within the territory from the Cold War period.

For the members of the Alliance, the preparations for participation in joint activities are obviously not yet concluded. After membership accession, the internal adjustments within the military organisation have to be continued in order to reach a standard level of equipment and training for joint operations within NATO. Only when the multinational structures are integrated can they represent real capabilities for national and collective defence.

The process of integration has to be further developed, above all in the areas of allied political decision-making, coordination and defence planning. Slovenia's representatives operate successfully in NATO subsidiary bodies and committees, and both

political and military representatives (Head of the Government, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defence, Defence Policy Director, Armaments Director, Chief of the General Staff and military representatives to NATO) successfully represent the views of Slovenian foreign and defence policies. Members of the defence system are integrated into the NATO command structure. A series of units have successfully completed the process of transformation within the NATO Response Forces. In non-Article 5 NATO-led operations, Slovenia contributes 0.6 percent of the total forces, which ranks it among the more credible members. However, Slovenia was less successful in the area of capabilities-building. The country also endeavours to cooperate in forming NATO policy regarding the Western Balkans, persistently and constantly stressing at all levels the necessity of integration of all the countries of the region into the Alliance.

In the area of air policing, Slovenia has relied on the allied capabilities, and the same is true for participation in joint forces for strategic transport. The Air Traffic Control Centre in Brnik and the Maritime Operational Centre in Ankarán are capabilities for Slovenian control of air and maritime traffic. The process of integration into or joining the NATO force structure is in the concluding stage and will strengthen the cooperation between various units of the Slovenian Armed Forces and units in the NATO corps, and thus enable collective training and education of military commands and units. With the standardisation procedures we want to fulfil the requirement for interoperability and comparability within the Alliance. Due to the contribution to the NATO investment programme, we are building a dual-use airfield in Cerklje ob Krki.

Since 2004, when Slovenia was accepted into the Alliance as a full member, NATO has gone through demanding processes of change. This has been a period of transformation, bringing a clearer picture of the necessary changes for the future. Slovenia has understood and accepted these challenges. We are aware that the greatest challenge for the Alliance is its transformation and proper comprehension of changes in the security environment, as well as reacting to these changes. In this way, issues are more and more coming to the forefront that are related to energy security and ecology, as well as asymmetric threats which usually no longer have real military forms. We are now entering an era of hybrid technology and hybrid warfare, and it is only a matter of time and availability of resources before we will be able, or forced, to take part in them. Therefore, with the organisation of key seminars in 2009, we are actively participating in the formation of the new NATO strategic concept. Slovenia is thus becoming an increasingly reliable and competent ally.

The financial and economic crisis we are now facing will have negative implications for the speed of development and modernisation of the Slovenian defence system. However, we should not stop or even freeze the development process for a number of years, for this would actually represent a regression. The political scepticism due to participation in certain non-Article 5 operations must enable joint reflection and the development of strategic premises regarding the future functioning of the Alliance.

Slovenia used its historic opportunity for the sake of its own security, and in order to show the successor countries of the former Yugoslavia the right path to Euro-Atlantic integrations. Now is the time to understand this opportunity as a starting point for active participation in the shaping of NATO's policy of operation and decision-making in crisis situations.

CONCLUSION

Five years of membership and sixty years of existence are two different dimensions of processes which take place in NATO for all the member countries, the processes of continuous mutual interoperability, coordination and combined operation. Members of the Alliance react to changes in the security environment, develop new concepts, consider the asymmetric character of modern threats, and acknowledge the order of priorities and the long-term need for energy and environmental security. Slovenia is successfully integrated into the processes of interoperability, deployability and sustainability in the conduct of operations, and we want all the political elites to be aware of the effectiveness of allied defence. Just as the Alliance developed from political integration into a group of countries which contributes to world peace and stability with its operations, led on behalf or under the mandate of the UN, Slovenian membership in the Alliance also has to be upgraded with successfully certified units which, by fulfilling the NATO standards, become comparable internationally (Light Battalion Battle Group, Battalion Manoeuvre Hospital ROLE-2 LM, CBRN Defence Battalion) and trained up to a level enabling us to have complete confidence in our armed forces.

It should not sound overly complacent to say that, according to many countries, we are a pleasant surprise in the majority of areas related to the process of integration into the Alliance. However, this assessment does not have eternal value, for we also have to do our best in the future to preserve the credibility of our contribution and follow the emerging changes. What is more, we must make every effort to become participants in the process of creating the changes and the future of the common security framework.