

## SPREMINJANJE IN RAZVOJ SLOVENSKE VOJSKE – POGLED IZ TUJINE

### THE REFORM AND EVOLUTION OF THE SLOVENIAN ARMED FORCES – A VIEW FROM ABROAD

**Povzetek** Republika Slovenija je članica zveze Nato 15 let. Med pripravami na članstvo v Natu je morala Slovenska vojska opraviti korenito spremembo, in sicer preoblikovanje iz teritorialne obrambe v vojsko, ki lahko prispeva k Natovim misijam. Spremembe so postale še toliko nujnejše po odločitvi vlade leta 2002, da se ukine naborništvo in v celoti uvede poklicna vojska.

Spremenjena struktura sil Slovenske vojske je bila potrjena leta 2003, torej pred pridružitvijo Slovenije Natu leta 2004. Slovenska vojska se je v prvih petih letih članstva v Natu kljub nekaterim izzivom razvijala v pravo smer in izdatki za obrambo so se sorazmerno večali. V naslednjih petih letih pa je gospodarska kriza, ki je prizadela večino držav članic Nata, še zlasti negativno vplivala na nadaljnji razvoj Slovenske vojske, kar se je odražalo v občutnem zmanjšanju sredstev za obrambo.

Danes, po 15 letih članstva v Natu, si Slovenska vojska še ni opomogla po varčevalnih ukrepih na obrambnem področju. Poraba znaša približno en odstotek BDP in ne zadostuje za podporo načrtov Slovenske vojske glede sil, zaradi česar ta ne more učinkovito prispevati k Natu. Nujna je odločitev o velikosti in obliki Slovenske vojske v prihodnosti, ki bi ustrezala načrtom za prihodnje obrambne izdatke.

**Ključne besede** *Nato, Slovenija, profesionalizacija, obrambno načrtovanje, obrambni izdatki, misije, struktura sil, demokratični nadzor.*

**Abstract** The Republic of Slovenia has been a member of NATO for 15 years. In preparing for NATO membership the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) were required to prepare for radical change, from a territorial defence force to one that could contribute to NATO missions. The need for change became even more significant after the government decision in 2002 to end conscription and move to a fully professional SAF. A revised force structure for the SAF was agreed in 2003, prior to Slovenia joining NATO in 2004. Progress in developing the SAF in the first five years of NATO

membership, while encountering a number of challenges, showed a positive trend, with a commensurate increase in defence expenditure. In the following five years the economic crisis which affected most NATO countries had a particularly damaging effect on the continued development of the SAF, with very severe reductions in defence expenditure.

Today, after 15 years of NATO membership, the SAF has still not recovered from the cuts made in defence spending. Spending remains close to 1.0% of GDP and is inadequate to support the force plans of the SAF. The SAF is unable to make an effective contribution to NATO and a decision needs to be made on the future size and shape of the SAF which matches plans for future defence expenditure.

**Key words** *NATO, Slovenia, professionalization, defence planning, defence expenditure, missions, force structure, democratic control.*

**Introduction** Slovenia became a member of NATO on 29 March 2004. In marking the 15 years of Slovenia's membership of NATO, it is necessary to look at the state of its armed forces prior to joining NATO, and how they have subsequently evolved. This paper therefore reviews Slovenia's developments in its defence forces from joining the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) in 1999 to the end of 2018, which is the latest point for which information is available.

NATO too has changed more than once over this period. In the 2000s its focus was on moving from an organization that had its origins in the defence of Europe to one that required deployable forces for out-of-area operations. With operations in Iraq and Afghanistan now significantly reduced and a perceived increased territorial threat from Russia, NATO has partially moved back to its traditional role, although with a focus on more adaptable forces which can deal with new threats, such as cyber security.

I will look in detail at the challenges Slovenia faced in meeting the requirements of the NATO Membership Action Plan in the period prior to membership, drawing on my personal experience as UK Defence Advisor to the Slovenian Ministry of Defence (MOD) between 2000 and 2003. Many of the decisions made then about the size and structure of the armed forces remain relevant today.

I will also draw on my experience from late 2003 to June 2013 as head of the team responsible for the UK MOD's bilateral defence relations with various European countries, including Slovenia. Finally, I have drawn on the papers written for this publication for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of Slovenia's NATO membership and the annual MOD reports, which are publically available up to 2017.

I will conclude by looking at how Slovenia might best adapt its forces to meet the new threats NATO faces.

## 1 THE YEARS 1999-2004

### 1.1 The initial challenges

At the 1999 Washington summit, which resulted in Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic joining NATO, new guidelines for membership with individualized »Membership Action Plans« (MAP) for Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia were issued.

In the years leading up to NATO enlargement, the UK MOD funded a programme of assistance for prospective NATO members with the aim of ensuring that the nations concerned had the appropriate systems and structures in place to meet the requirements for NATO membership. Under this programme I was appointed as a defence advisor to the Slovenian MOD in August 2000.

I had previously led a team working with a number of other NATO candidate countries, where our focus was on ensuring the government and legal structures were in place for the democratic control of their armed forces. This was less of a concern in Slovenia, where democratic control was already well embedded in the parliamentary system, and my role was initially to provide advice and assistance on the development of an effective defence planning system for the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF). This role expanded over my three years in Slovenia to cover a wider range of issues concerned with the reform and development of the SAF.

The defence planning system was still under development. Although, technically, the lead for defence planning was the MOD, in practice most of the relevant expertise was in the General Staff (GS). This in itself was a problem, as relations between the military-led GS and the civilian-led MOD could be tense. I was familiar with this problem from my experience with other countries seeking NATO membership, whose military, in less democratic times, had not been accountable to the civil authorities.

Since being invited to join the MAP process in 1999, Slovenia had made little progress in the development of its armed forces. They had evolved from the territorial defence forces that Slovenia had had as part of former Yugoslavia, and their focus, understandably, remained on the defence of national territory and borders. However, this was not the type of force that the NATO Alliance was seeking.

A further challenge for Slovenia, unlike most of the other candidates for NATO membership at that time, was that, due to its very different history, the population did not perceive the external threat to its territory as coming from Russia, and they remained to be convinced about the need for NATO membership. Expenditure on defence was, therefore, not a high priority. Furthermore, as the SAF had evolved from the territorial defence force, there was only a limited history and tradition on which to base its future development.

In 2000 the SAF was still a conscript army with professional officers and NCOs. This was not unusual in NATO at that time, and there was no particular pressure from NATO for Slovenia to develop fully professional armed forces. However, Slovenian law severely restricted the roles in which conscript soldiers could be used, meaning that Slovenia's ability to contribute to NATO operations would also be severely restricted.

Slovenia had a General Election due to take place in October 2000, and the period leading up to this, after my arrival in August 2000, was typical of many democratic countries in that few decisions were being taken until the election was decided. Unfortunately, this hiatus exacerbated the challenges with respect to the urgent need to develop an effective defence plan for the SAF.

Following the election and the appointment of a new government in December 2000, some changes to the organization and personnel in the MOD produced a clearer lead for defence policy and planning. Defence policy and planning are interconnected processes with several levels. The policy lead lay clearly with the MOD. In theory, the strategic planning level also rested with the MOD and lower level force planning with the GS, but the MOD lacked expert personnel for this process; thus, most of the planning process was in fact undertaken in the GS.

This disconnect was to prove a problem in making genuine progress. Part of the problem arose from the lack of experience and knowledge of working at senior levels in defence. In the former Yugoslav army, officer numbers were set according to population percentages. This meant that Slovenians occupied less than 10% of the senior military positions. The consequence was that this percentage produced insufficient numbers of ex-Yugoslav military with experience at senior levels in the newly formed SAF. Certainly by 2000, when I arrived in the Slovenian MOD, I found few officers who had the necessary expertise and experience to lead the reform and development of the SAF. There were some exceptions, but they did not carry sufficient authority and influence.

## **1.2 The NATO planning and review process (PARP) and the NATO membership action plan (MAP)**

From 1999 Slovenia sought to match its defence planning process and its defence reforms to the requirements of the NATO PARP and MAP annual reviews. One negative aspect of this was that insufficient consideration was being given to how meeting the NATO requirements fitted with national requirements, and how the nation perceived its defence needs. The stated long-term ambition of reaching the NATO target of 2.0% of GDP spent on defence rather obscured whether the current level of expenditure (which was closer to 1.0%) was being used effectively.

The combination of the lack of high level expertise in defence, the poorly defined split between policy and strategic planning in the MOD and force planning in the General Staff, and a lack of commitment to defence funding by the government considerably hindered progress in defence reform from 1999 to 2001. However, some

progress had been made in establishing the basis for Slovenia's first professional infantry battalion (the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion) and by 2002 it was able to persuade the NATO assessment team that it was heading in the right direction.

In April 2002 the Slovenian government decided to abolish conscription and make the SAF a fully professional force by 2010 (conscription actually ended in 2003, as it proved impossible to continue it once the decision on ending it had been made). This decision was politically rather than militarily driven, and required the SAF to make a significant change to its force structure plans. While NATO would certainly welcome the ultimate goal of a fully professional force, there would undoubtedly be turbulence in the short term and a need for the defence planning process to be significantly improved.

It is fair to say that NATO's own approach to force planning did not help with Slovenia's development of its defence plans. NATO's approach to defence planning is derived from the policies and plans of its larger members. Many of the smaller NATO nations endeavour to shape their entire defence force structure around NATO requirements. However, the leading NATO nations, notably the USA, the UK, and France, all derive their force structure plans from national defence strategies and then commit to NATO those forces they consider appropriate. This works to the disadvantage of the smaller nations, sometimes producing unrealistic defence plans.

A particular example of the conflict in the defence planning process is that NATO defence planners find themselves unable to say to the smaller nations that they should not spend resources on supersonic combat aircraft. Such aircraft can consume a disproportionate amount of the defence budget, but provide very little added value to NATO's force structure, as the larger nations have sufficient combat aircraft to meet NATO's requirements. Even if they did not, a single squadron of aircraft, which is unlikely to be as well-equipped and advanced as those of the leading nations, is not of much use for high intensity combat operations.

The major nations are also those who are the producers of advanced combat aircraft and they have, therefore, been unwilling to discourage countries from purchasing unnecessary aircraft.

### **1.3 The impact of the decision to create a professional SAF**

Subsequent to the decision to create a professional SAF, a decision was made by the Slovenian government to undertake a Strategic Defence Review (SDR). This was a logical development, but progress was slowed by the lack of an over-arching Defence Strategy needed to provide the basis for the SDR. Slovenia remained unclear as to how it wished to contribute to NATO missions once it became a member.

One particular challenge arising from the move to a fully professional force was the need to develop a new training programme and organization, as training for professional soldiers at the private soldier level is more thorough and intensive than

it is for conscripts. It also required a different approach to NCO and officer training. Additionally, an organization for recruitment would need to be developed. Of course, forming a fully professional SAF would require the force structure to be radically changed, and accurate costings would be needed if it was to be achieved within existing government budget plans.

Another key issue that needed to be addressed was the equipment programme. Some of the SAF equipment was old and needed replacing, but other equipment had been purchased after Independence without a clear idea as to whether such equipment met either the current or future requirements of the SAF. The most notable example of this was (and still is) the Pilatus PC-9 training aircraft. These aircraft had been purchased with the long-term ambition that the SAF would eventually possess jet fighters, without any assessment having been undertaken as to whether this was a realistic aim.

The combination of moving to a professional SAF and of being able to provide forces for NATO operations meant that much of the SAF's equipment did not meet either of these requirements.

#### **1.4 The referendum on NATO and EU membership**

In 2003, as it became clear that Slovenia was likely to be accepted for both NATO and EU membership, the government decided that it should seek the consent of the population. Accordingly, a referendum was held on 23 March 2003.

While there appeared to be little doubt that EU membership would win favour, NATO membership was more open to debate. As part of former Yugoslavia, Slovenia's recent history had been of neutrality (more strictly "non-alignment") and, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it had been on the front line of a war which was not of its choice. It was understandable, therefore, that some of its population would have reservations about joining a military organization in which Slovenia would be a minor player.

The MOD and the SAF were clear that Slovenia was too small to be able to defend itself effectively against external aggression without placing an unreasonable burden on the economy, and that joining NATO provided the most effective guarantee for national security. A campaign was thus undertaken to persuade the population that the potential benefits of NATO membership more than offset any commitments that Slovenia would be required to make to NATO.

The referendum campaign may have been helped by the decision to create a fully professional SAF, as it meant that there would be no question of unwilling conscripts being deployed on NATO operations. The outcome of the referendum was clear support for NATO membership, with 66% in favour. While not as emphatic as the nearly 90% in favour of EU membership, this was a good result given Slovenia's history.

## 1.5 Control and leadership of the SAF

One of the criteria for NATO membership was that a country should have clear democratic control of its armed forces. While none of the former communist countries which were now seeking NATO membership had been under military dictatorship, in many of them the military had wielded disproportionate power and had not been under the control of a parliament. In NATO's history there have been times when a member state has not had a democratic government. By the time of enlargement, however, all NATO countries were governed by democratically elected politicians. In the lead-up to the NATO 2004 enlargement, in which the applicants were also seeking EU membership, the overriding requirement of the many criteria set out for membership was for democratic government.

The application of democratic control to the armed forces of a country was frequently referred to wrongly as "civilian control". This was a misinterpretation of the term "civil control", which, in common use, simply means oversight of the armed forces by elected representatives. NATO countries vary in the roles their civilians play in defence, but they are not generally expected to run their armed forces.

By the time Slovenia joined the MAP it had in place a strong system of political and parliamentary control of its armed forces. Indeed concerns were expressed that the level of civilian control of the SAF meant that the views of the military in the development and deployment of the SAF were under-represented. There was certainly a strong divide between the MOD and the GS prior to NATO membership, which did not help in developing plans for the SAF and ensuring that it had the necessary resources.

The SAF officer corps suffered from a lack of a coherent identity, partly due to the diverse backgrounds of the officers and partly to a lack of tradition. Consequently there was no "esprit de corps". This manifested itself in the failure, on occasion, of the GS to provide a single coordinated military perspective to the MOD, and thus led to civilians taking decisions on military issues.

## 1.6 The new force structure

The force structure that evolved from the decision to create a fully professional SAF presented a number of challenges. The existing structure, based around a conscript force, contained too many officers and also too many civilian staff. Slovenia's employment laws would make reducing the numbers difficult to achieve. For example, plans were made for civilian numbers to be reduced by more than 500 by 2008 through natural processes, without a change in the law. This seemed highly unrealistic. This reduction represented about 25% of the workforce, and the age profile was unlikely to provide sufficient retirements in that period.

The reduction in the surplus number of officers by 2010 was a more realistic objective. However, it meant that major distortions in the organization of the SAF would continue throughout the years when it was undergoing its most significant reform.

The ultimate aim following professionalization was to create a two brigade force structure, each centred around a motorized infantry battalion, an aim which remains unchanged.

## **2 POST-2004 – DEVELOPMENTS AFTER NATO MEMBERSHIP**

### **2.1 Overview**

As noted in the introduction, NATO has changed during the period under review. Slovenia has struggled to respond to this changing environment and, since joining NATO, has continued to plan for the same force structure that was confirmed prior to becoming a NATO member. This is despite an economic crisis making force structure plans and associated equipment plans unaffordable. The following sections look briefly at some of the key issues that arose in the first ten years of Slovenia's NATO membership.

### **2.2 2004-2008/9: The first five years**

A fairly comprehensive review of Slovenia's first five years of NATO membership was published in Bilten Slovenske vojske in November 2009. At that time, a number of challenges facing Slovenia's development of its armed forces were recognized, but the overall mood seemed positive. To quote:

*“After 5 years of membership in NATO, the SAF is close to finishing the formal part of the integration. The next part leads towards increasing efficiency and affiliation of declared capabilities within the NFS.”* (Humar, D., et al, 2019, p 68)

Slovenia's defence expenditure up to 2008 had shown small but steady growth, reaching just over 1.5% of GDP in that year, and had yet to be hit by the economic downturn. The annual MOD report for 2008 does reflect that the final budget allocation was lower than planned, but still shows general progress and is positive overall about the development of defence plans and the SAF.

### **2.3 2009/10-2014: The next five years**

Although, as already noted, Slovenia faced challenges in the first five years of its NATO membership, the SAF had been evolving in the right direction. The next five years were to prove more difficult. Like most NATO members, Slovenia was affected by the economic crises that arose from 2008 and afterwards. However, Slovenian defence expenditure suffered some of the most severe cuts. Defence expenditure continued to grow slightly until 2010, reaching a peak of just over 1.6% of GDP.

However, expenditure both in 2009 and 2010 was subject to in-year reductions against the figure originally planned, necessitating adjustments to defence plans (Annual Reports of the Ministry of Defence for 2009 and 2010). Defence expenditure then experienced an abrupt downturn, sinking to less than 1.0% of GDP in 2014.

The impact of the cuts has been cumulative and can be clearly seen in the papers written for this publication on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slovenia's NATO membership. The situation in 2014 was clearly articulated in this extract:

*“The SAF entered the year 2014 with the military budget (the military defence programme) of EUR 266 million; in 2013, the military budget amounted to EUR 300 million. Thus, there is a growing gap between the requirements set out in the Mid-Term Defence Programme 2013-2018 and the amount of budgetary resources provided for the realization of this and other documents. This is the complete opposite of the need for the procurement of equipment and weapons, and prevents the realization of certain requirements.”* (Osterman, 2014, pp 58-59)

These reductions in defence expenditure were not matched by reductions in SAF personnel numbers. The inevitable consequence was, and continues to be, that personnel costs, which in 2010 were about 52% of the budget, grew to consume a disproportionate part of the budget, with inevitable reductions in expenditure on new equipment, equipment maintenance, and training.

## 2.4 Deployments on NATO and EU missions

Prior to joining NATO Slovenia had already deployed military personnel under the PfP banner, and had thus gained some experience of military operations outside its national territory. It had also provided some personnel for UN and OSCE missions.

Since joining NATO and the EU, Slovenia has deployed SAF personnel on a number of missions. Slovenia made its first large scale deployment in 2007 to KFOR in Kosovo, demonstrating its commitment to deploying on NATO missions. This deployment has continued to the present day. Slovenia has predominantly taken part in missions in the Western Balkans. While it is possible to criticize Slovenia for not having contributed more to the higher risk missions, in particular Afghanistan, there is a degree of logic in concentrating on the Western Balkans in that local knowledge and language skills mean that Slovenia can contribute most effectively to these missions.

While the SAF has undoubtedly gained knowledge and expertise through these deployments, they will not have equipped them with the skills and training needed for the more complex NATO missions. The SAF has no recent experience of exercising at battalion level with other NATO forces for high intensity combat operations.

### 3 THE CURRENT STATE OF THE SLOVENIAN ARMED FORCES

Having decided to create a fully professional SAF in 2002, as already noted, progress initially appeared to be good. There was an understanding of the radical changes that the SAF would have to undergo to reach its planned state, and defence funding assumed an upward gradient. Slovenia, like the majority of European countries, was hit by the wider economic crisis of 2008, and suffered a recession in 2012-13 and was obliged to reduce government expenditure. However, defence appears to have been particularly badly hit by these cuts. From reaching a peak of 1.62% of GDP in 2010 it fell to 0.93% of GDP in 2015, despite GDP having returned to growth by then. While defence expenditure has returned to growth since 2016, as the table below shows, it still represents less than 1.0% of GDP.

**Table 1:**  
The Proportion of  
the MoD's Financial  
Plan in the National  
Budget and GDP in  
Millions of Euros  
**Source:**  
Annual Report of  
the Ministry of  
Defence for 2017,  
p 87.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
National Budget	9,314,513	9,654,921	9,797,661	9,000,298	9,156,852
MoD Financial Plan	350,703	339,949	343,939	389,227	406,569
DEFENCE EXPENDITURE	381,658	366,460	361,376	406,166	422,277
GDP in Million EUR	36,239	37,615	38,837	40,418	43,278
% of the MoD's FP in the NB	3.77	3.52	3.51	4.32	4.44
% of the MoD's FP in GDP	0.97	0.90	0.89	0.96	0.94
% of DE in GDP	1.05	0.97	0.93	1.00	0.98

GDP in Slovenia has grown relatively strongly by European standards since 2013, and the unemployment rate has been falling steadily in the same period. However, improved GDP has not led to significant increases in the defence budget, and better employment opportunities within the wider economy have made recruitment to the SAF more challenging. While actual defence expenditure has risen to EUR 422.3 million, this is still below the EUR 552 million figure for 2010, which, of course, does not take into account inflation.

Slovenia was already spending more than the NATO recommended 50% of the defence budget on personnel when the decision to move to a fully professional SAF was made. Professional soldiers will only be attracted to the armed forces if salaries are competitive with the civilian sector, particularly in areas requiring specialist skills, such as communications. With a much lower defence budget than originally planned, personnel costs currently consume more than 60% of the defence budget, despite personnel numbers being below the planned requirement. What is left is completely inadequate to meet the costs of maintaining and purchasing new equipment and professional military training.

Even with personnel costs taking the majority of the defence budget, it appears that, in a growing economy, pay is still inadequate to attract and retain personnel, and shortages exist. Spending on capital equipment appears to be virtually non-existent, and it is unlikely that there are sufficient funds for training. The current state of the SAF might, therefore, be assessed as not meeting either NATO requirements or national defence requirements. The planned small boosts in defence funding are unlikely to significantly improve the situation.

The latest year for which personnel figures are available is 2017. The tables below come from the MOD 2017 Annual Report.

**Table 2:**  
Comparison of  
the SAF Active  
Component in  
2017 and 2016  
**Source:**  
Annual Report  
of the Ministry  
of Defence for  
2017, p 93.

Status	Situation as of 31 December 2017	Situation as of 31 December 2016	Difference
Officers	1071	1061	10
NCOs	1970	1960	10
Soldiers	2711	2886	-175
Senior Military Specialists	261	255	6
Junior Military Specialists	318	315	3
Civilian Personnel	446	443	3
TOTAL	6777	6920	-143

**Table 3:**  
Ratio between  
Officers, NCOs  
and Soldiers

Category	Officers	NCOs	Soldiers
2017	1	1.8	2.5
2016	1	1.9	2.7
2015	1	1.9	2.8
2014	1	1.8	2.8

Unless there has been a significant change in 2018, it is clear that the SAF is unable to meet its personnel requirements, and that the trend in the ratio between officers and soldiers is in the wrong direction. The report also notes a significant increase in the average age of SAF personnel.

The SAF is only able to conduct low intensity operations and cannot make any useful contribution to any high intensity NATO operation that might arise. This means Slovenia is not assuming its fair share of the NATO burden, even by wider European standards (i.e. acknowledging that the USA already assumes a disproportionate part of the NATO burden).

Slovenia is currently only capable of undertaking low-level peace support operations, and has a very limited capability to deploy SAF personnel. Peace support operations are not NATO's primary role; indeed this is where the EU or the UN tends to take the lead, and thus Slovenia's contribution to NATO is negligible.

The latest publically available MOD report, for 2017, makes clear that the SAF has suffered severe deterioration in its levels of training and equipment:

*"In 2017 the downward trend of aging and wear of weapons and equipment, the aging of the armed forces, and the inadequate ratio of the personnel structure between officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and soldiers continued. The economic measures had a negative impact on the planned provision and maintenance of capabilities, and on training in accordance with current professional military standards. The failure to update the SAF has led to a technological lag in comparison to modern armed forces, and has hindered the SAF's interoperability within the Alliance."* (Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence for 2017, p 17).

The list of equipment purchased in 2017 was notable for its lack of any major capital equipment, and comprised mainly uniforms, pistols, and soft-shell passenger vehicles. The 2017 Annual Report shows less than 5.0% of defence expenditure being allocated to equipment and infrastructure.

### Conclusion and the way forward

The decision to join NATO forced Slovenia to make radical changes to its approach to defence. It had to move from what was essentially a territorial defence force, based around the ability to mobilize a significant number of soldiers who had completed military service, to a smaller, fully professional armed service. It also meant a change to national defence thinking, away from solely defence of national territory to being willing to deploy to other countries in support of NATO operations. Joining the EU with its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) further underlined the need for change.

Today Slovenia has completed the transition from a conscript army based on territorial defence forces to an all-volunteer force intended for a wider range of operations, including contributing to NATO forces. However, they are not fit for purpose. More than 60% of the defence budget is spent on personnel costs, leaving very little for new equipment, maintenance of existing equipment, and training. Increasing the defence budget to address these shortfalls (and to get closer to the NATO target of 2.0%) is an obvious solution. No country can double its defence budget overnight, and existing government plans, according to the 2016 MOD Annual Report, appear to be aiming for 1.2% of GDP. Therefore, other solutions need to be considered.

I am sure the Slovenian leadership will point out that Slovenia is not alone in failing to meet NATO targets – Germany is the prime example. However, Slovenia must decide whether it wants to take defence seriously. After all there are countries, such

as Costa Rica, which have no army at all. The best way forward may be to abandon the ambition for a two brigade structure and concentrate on one properly equipped and trained brigade. NATO does not necessarily seek larger force numbers; its key requirement is for highly trained and deployable forces. One well-equipped and trained battalion is of more use to NATO than three or four battalions which are poorly equipped and trained. Irrespective of what NATO wants, the Slovenian MOD has a duty of responsibility to the Slovenian tax payer to provide value for money. The present SAF does not do that.

The threat in Europe has grown. Thus, while the threat to Slovenia was low when it joined NATO, it could be considered to have increased in the last few years. Although there are laggards – notably Germany – Europe as a whole has significantly increased its defence expenditure in recent years, largely as a response to a perceived increase in the threat from Russia. Slovenia's security is threatened by attempts to destabilize Europe and undermine its collective defence. Slovenia's security is also threatened by events outside Europe which can, for example, lead to refugee influxes into Europe. Slovenia, therefore, needs to be prepared to deploy forces on operations outside its national boundaries.

Employment law and conditions of service make it difficult to achieve a rapid reduction in personnel numbers, and stopping recruitment would lead to an unbalanced structure. However, it is clear some action needs to be taken. Personnel numbers are currently below the force structure requirement and this presents an opportunity for change. Any increase in defence funds might best be used to pay for the early retirement of surplus officers. A decision on a revised force structure could be adopted quickly, with the aim of working towards it over the next few years. A decision to sell the Pilatus PC-9s and close the unit would also save money.

As I understand it, the division of responsibilities between the MOD and the GS remains a source of friction and a barrier to the effective management of defence. This problem would be best resolved by merging the MOD and the GS; if countries the size of the UK can manage with a combined MOD/GS structure, there is no reason why this cannot be achieved in Slovenia. A merged organization would be better placed to deliver the restructuring of the SAF I have proposed in the preceding paragraph.

Slovenia should also consider where it can add best value. It has expertise in CBRN and Mountain Warfare and should discuss with NATO the option of primarily focusing on these areas. However, Slovenia should not seek to avoid committing personnel to the front line; otherwise it risks being seen as avoiding dangerous tasks.

In conclusion, radical decisions need to be taken urgently in order to turn the SAF into an effective armed force.

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