

## SLOVENIJA IN NATO – DOLGA IN VIJUGASTA POT

## SLOVENIA AND NATO - THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

**Povzetek** Prispevek obravnava proces vključevanja Slovenije v Nato, predvsem v letih 2000–2004. Avtor ga razume v okviru širših sprememb, ki so se zgodile ob koncu hladne vojne, in kot del evropskega integracijskega procesa. Slovenija je bila edina država v širši regiji, ki je postala članica Nata in EU leta 2004, proces pa je trajal dobro desetletje. Za slovenski obrambno-varnostni sistem in za varnost države je bil to najpomembnejši dosežek po osamosvojitvi. Članstvo v Natu je okrepilo slovensko obrambo in vojaško identiteto ter pospešilo različne transformacijske procese, ki so potekali v Slovenski vojski, na primer profesionalizacijo, namestljivost in modernizacijo. Prav tako je oblikovalo razumevanje dejstva, da so vojaške sile orodje zunanje politike in da sta se temeljna zunanjepolitična cilja države (članstvo v Natu in EU) po uresničitvi spremenila v sredstvo za doseg novih ciljev. Leto 2004 predstavlja vrh integracijske dinamike, ki je spremenila evro-atlantski prostor. To je bilo leto stabilizacije, ki je bila dosežena s t. i. velikim širitvenim pokom. Nekatera spoznanja iz Natovih širitev po koncu hladne vojne niso bila razumljena na Zahodnem Balkanu, kar je vplivalo na zastoj širitvenega procesa. Po širitvi 2004 pa je postala integracijska dinamika v tej regiji vsakdanja, tako je območje dobilo prvič v zgodovini edinstveno priložnost za stabilizacijo. Tudi Slovenija je posredovala svoje širitvene izkušnje državam v regiji. Avtor poleg tega predstavlja še nekatere osebne izkušnje, ki pripomorejo k prikazu posebnosti slovenskega članstva v Natu. V prispevku so uporabljene razne metode, in sicer predstavitev, analiza, komentar, primerjava, generalizacija ter metoda opazovanja z udeležbo.

**Ključne besede** *Slovenija, Nato, evropski integracijski proces, osebni vtisi, Zahodni Balkan.*

**Abstract** The paper reflects the Slovenian NATO membership process, primarily during its last period from 2000 to 2004. The author understands this project within the broader scope of changes that followed after the end of the Cold War and as part of the European integration process. It took Slovenia, which was the only dual member in the 2004 enlargements in the region, a decade to gain membership. For the Slovenian defence and military system as well as for the country's security as a whole it was the most important achievement after the independence. It strengthened the Slovenian defence and military identity as well as supported various transformational trends that were going on in the Slovenian Armed Forces, like professionalization, deployability and modernization. It developed the understanding of the armed forces as a foreign policy tool and pushed for new foreign policy goals after the previous ones (NATO and the EU membership) were realized. The year 2004 presents the so far peak in the integration dynamics that has changed the Euro-Atlantic area. It was the year of stabilization, reached by the so-called Big Bang enlargement. Some of the lessons learned from the NATO enlargements were misunderstood in the Western Balkans; hence the enlargement stalemate. After 2004 the integration dynamics became a reality in the region which, for the first time in its history, had a unique opportunity for stabilization. Slovenia shared its experiences and lessons learned with countries in the region. The author also includes a selection of his personal reflections on the process, since they were rather unique for the Slovenian case. The methods used are presentation, analysis, comment, comparison, generalization and the method of observing through one's own participation.

**Key words** *Slovenia, NATO, the European integration process, personal reflections, Western Balkans.*

**Introduction** This paper reflects and contemplates a brief period of four years (end of 2000 to the end of 2004), during which crucial steps towards the membership of Slovenia in NATO were accomplished. An analytical presentation of the author, stemming from his professional and personal experiences, would be offered, commented, compared and generalized alongside various events, activities and processes that led to the full matrix of the membership. Those experiences would be backed by some theoretical elaborations and supported, among other things, by numerous references of the author, published during that, but also during later, time, all having in common his academic dealing with the discussed topic. Therefore, among the mentioned methods, the method of observing through one's own participation stands out.

The aim of the author could be understood as a twofold one: from one point of view to add to the process of gaining membership, and from another one to add to the full picture and understanding of the way this process was managed and crafted out.

## 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Slovenian membership in NATO (and that of other countries from 1999, 2004 and 2009 enlargements) was part of broader and intertwined processes that were initiated by the end of the Cold War. The three post–Cold War enlargements (a decade, a decade and a half, and two decades later) stabilized, secured and strengthened a large part of the European continent that used to lie on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain for practically the major part of the twentieth century. In NATO language, it secured Europe free and whole.<sup>1</sup>

The year of 1989 was *Annus Mirabilis* – it brought a great structural and unprecedented change that swept across the continent, released enormous social and political energy, dissolved three multinational socialist/communist regimes, and re-created a vast number of countries, which was all together only a year before unexpected, unpredictable and impossible.<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, the security arc that was stretching from the Baltics across the Central and Eastern Europe to the Balkans broke and collapsed, while its dynamics also hit Central Asia with full speed. At the same time – with open space and political dynamics – regional international organizations in the broader European area started to search for new meaning, substances and members. The EU, NATO, the OSCE and the Council of Europe all reached out to the newly re-established countries which were also turning towards them. An almost simultaneous process was launched, partially emerging from the mentioned security and political tectonics. Towards the end of the 1990s, new countries joined previous members and the process started to show concrete results. It slowly became obvious that various integration dynamics and structural momentum was producing what later started to be defined as the European integration process, having in mind the intertwined enlargement dynamics of the mentioned organizations.

An outstanding part of that trend was the quest for security. Since the Peace of Westphalia, there have been three dominant ways of providing security: the system of balance of powers (primarily until the end of the First World War), the system of collective security (since the establishment of the League of Nations), and the system of collective defence (NATO) (Grizold, 2001, p. 141–142). To satisfy the security needs is of primary importance for each state, in particular for small ones, and these presented the majority of those that re-established their statehood after the end of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> All of them showed strong interest in membership in major international organizations. This was understandable, most probably also expected, since “Usually, international institutions are the best friends of small states” (Väyrynen, 1997, p. 42).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the ambition of the NATO membership could be supported by the fact that “for small and medium states entering in the alliances’

<sup>1</sup> For more on some challenges of NATO enlargement compare Bebler, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> For more on structural, contextual and geopolitical consequences of the end of the Cold War compare Antohi and Tismaneanu, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> For more on new small states that re-emerged after the end of the Cold War and their security as well as other related topics comp. Jazbec, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> For more on small states and their security institutionalization compare Reiter and Gärtner, 2000.

relationship means strengthening of their security situation and partial compensation for their economic inferiority (...)” (Benko, 1997, p. 242). In the case of Slovenia, this aim was also codified in the Defence Act, stating in its second paragraph that the goal of defending a state is also achievable with the inclusion and active participation of the state in international security integrations.<sup>5</sup>

During the overall integration dynamics some specific characteristics of the European security processes that tend to be global were crafted out (comp. Jazbec, 2005 a and 2005 b). They were and still are: complementarity, complexity, complicated nature and intensity, to which one should also add the key role of relations between the USA, Europe and the Russian federation.<sup>6</sup> The three players have been bound together throughout history and only when they did/do manage to cooperate, security and stability were/are not questioned. Rotfeld (2000, p. 1) also points out their cooperative and competitive nature. Complementarity appeared to be the most important characteristics of the European security processes. It was a policy result, provoked by the rising complexity of contemporary security challenges and threats, and stemmed from different approaches to the provision of security primarily by NATO, the EU, OSCE as well as the UN (collective defence, crisis management, corporate and collective security). Complexity appeared as a result of activities of various players at different vertical and horizontal levels. Participation of different countries in various security arrangements produced a highly complicated security matrix that was supposed to guarantee security and stability, as a result of combined activities of national and international players (comp. Table 3 in Jazbec, 2001, p. 61-62). Complicated nature of those processes derived, and still does, among other things, from the fact that membership of different European countries in NATO and the EU sometimes crucially influences or even blocks cooperation between the two organizations. They cooperate to avoid the duplication of resources and achieve higher efficiency, but differences between the members of one and non-members of another as well as vice versa complicates and slows down the security efficiency.

The case of formation of the European integration process during its initial period in the 1990s was neither easy nor straightforward. Apart from being rather complicated in the eyes of the aspirant countries (at least both for the EU and NATO aspirants), it was also misunderstood by the policy-makers. The most horrifying example is the mismanagement of the war in Bosnia. Its dimensions were so far-reaching that one could dare to say that it was de facto the Third Balkan War of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

The year 2004 presents the so far peak in the integration dynamics that has changed the Euro-Atlantic area. A decade and a half after the big change one could speak of the year of stabilization, reached by the so-called Big Bang enlargement. The

<sup>5</sup> *Defence Act, Paragraph 2, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 103/04, September 23, 2004.*

<sup>6</sup> *There has always been a question of what to understand as Europe. For the purpose of this paper we should understand it as the overlapping of membership in NATO, the EU and the OCSE, since all three organizations deal with providing security. To understand it geographically, historically and politically, Simms is very useful (2013).*

<sup>7</sup> *The genocide in Srebrenica is the gravest example supporting our claim.*

dual enlargement of NATO and the EU definitely marked the post-Cold War period. During the following years, the integration process started to lose its dynamics and as far as the enlargement process is concerned, it lost practically the majority of its original dynamics until now. It just might be the case that it is also losing its broader attractiveness.

## 2 POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

### 2.1 General Observations

The observed period and its processes offer much to contemplate. We would try to dwell on some most significant policy implications, having in mind the Slovenian experiences.

First and foremost, membership in NATO was for the Slovenian defence and military system as well as for the country's security as a whole the most important achievement after the independence. It brought Slovenia to the very core of the European integration process (together with the EU membership) and cemented its position in the European social, political, diplomatic and historical context. The latter, in particular, is highly important – throughout its history, Slovenia has always been part of the European dynamics, although not at its physical (geographical) centre.<sup>8</sup> Hence, one could claim that it could be understood as part of the process that would hardly be questioned at a general level, as a principal goal.<sup>9</sup> The membership strengthened Slovenian defence and military identity, enriched its tradition and offered possibilities for further development of all related topics.<sup>10</sup> It supported, additionally defined and helped to profile the Slovenian Armed Forces in its various transformational aspects: a) from a conscript to a professional army, b) deployability, c) international engagement, d) modernization, e) further specialization, f) internal and external personnel mobility etc. Moreover, it also definitely constituted the understanding of the armed forces as a foreign policy tool.

Generally speaking, the most outstanding policy implication from the regional point of view would be that in years following the dual enlargement the security ring around the Western Balkans has strengthened and narrowed the security twilight zone that was producing instability throughout the previous years. There has been a clear and strong security belt around the region, consisting of NATO and EU members alike.<sup>11</sup> The direct policy consequence of that achievement has been that the region, for the

<sup>8</sup> *For a thorough overview of the modern Slovenian history comp. Vodopivec, 2006.*

<sup>9</sup> *Another question is whether there were any operational, political missteps or mistakes while implementing that goal. Vidmajer is of the opinion that the Slovenian political elite never knew well to explain this goal to its public (2012, p. 64).*

<sup>10</sup> *For a concise encyclopedical guide on the Slovenian defence and military intelligence comp. Kranjc, 2005.*

<sup>11</sup> *Clockwise: Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, while Croatia and Albania joined NATO in 2009. Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. The fact that Macedonia was not – and still has not been – invited to the membership at the Bucharest 2008 Summit presents a strategic security mistake, which de facto prevented the mentioned security belt from growing significantly.*

first time in its history, was given a unique opportunity for the definite stabilization and hence development. One would dare to say that some policy-makers in the region did not comprehend that fact sufficiently.

The next general observation would be that the integration dynamics became a reality in the region. It was accepted and pursued, although with a different speed and different engagement. Moreover, the later integration *fatigue*, a phrase coined by some outside policy-makers, can not change the overall impression. It stands out that there was no major conflict in the region after the dual enlargement.

The third general observation, although not regional but the Slovenian one, was that the dual enlargement meant the fulfilment of the main two Slovenian foreign policy priorities, namely the membership in the EU and in NATO. Presenting, explaining and repeating them at each foreign policy activity became a *mantra* during those years. Nevertheless, reaching that goal never became an ambition only by and for itself, as both memberships, as a target, have never been a sole point in the air which should be reached as soon as possible whatever the costs. They were not only the main foreign policy priorities but, above all, tools for the transformation of societies, economies and also the national defence and security system (Jazbec, 2005 B, 179). That way of primarily policy and less political understanding of the main foreign policy priorities has also led to the next policy step: With this years' fulfilment, both goals were at the same time transformed to means for, among other things, an enhanced role of a security actor in South East Europe and in the Western Balkans in particular (Ibid.). This meant that the foreign policy goals, when reached, were *via facti* transformed into foreign policy means.<sup>12</sup> This simple statement – and highly important, although a primarily overseen lesson learned – pointed out that membership was the beginning of a process and that membership activities should be based on a kind of a road map which would explain what should be achieved by the pure fact of membership. Transformation from foreign policy goals to foreign policy means appeared almost as a kind of a policy puzzle. Such an understanding of the policy conversion was neither perceived nor instrumentalized, and there is an impression that its absence to much extent dictated the Slovenian membership behaviour.<sup>13</sup> This policy equation helped create and articulate the understanding of peacekeeping operations (and a significant part of the defence policy) as a foreign policy tool that should be planned together with the MFA and not only within the defence – military frame.<sup>14</sup>

Concrete Slovenian experiences and lessons learned, since they were spread around the region on purpose, be it politically, diplomatically or academically, added significantly to this picture (comp. Jazbec, 2005 b, 2005 c and 2005 d). The aim of those activities was at least threefold: firstly, to transfer its own enlargement

<sup>12</sup> The author pointed this out – as the first one in the case of Slovenia – at the international conference “Globalized Europe”, organized in late spring 2004 by the University of Primorska, Koper.

<sup>13</sup> However, this is only an assumption, which the author can not back up by an empirical record.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this see Jazbec, 2009.

experiences to the region; secondly, to express constant support and encouragement to the region's potentials; and thirdly, to promote and explain them to the Euro-Atlantic partners and vice versa. Those experiences also derived from the fact that with the dual enlargement and the membership in NATO and the EU, Slovenia solved its security question. This was strengthened during the next years with the Croatian membership in both organizations. The Slovenian security environment changed during the first decade and a half of the existence of the Slovenian state.<sup>15</sup> One could even say that the traditional security threats that derive from the nature of the nation state disappeared, as far as Slovenia is concerned. This would count as a major achievement of the new state and has not always been perceived so clearly.

## 2.2 Selected Experiences and Lessons Learned

Further on, let us point out some of the most important experiences and lessons learned.

Firstly, the process of gaining membership lasted for a whole decade. The ambition to become part of the Euro-Atlantic area was for the first time put down in the 1989 May Declaration. The adoption of the Amendments to the Resolution on the Starting Points of Slovenian National Security in January 1994 officially declared membership in NATO as a primary foreign policy goal.<sup>16</sup> A few months later Slovenia joined the first partner countries of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme and also started other activities within the NATO cooperation framework – the Planning and Review Process, Individual Partnership Programme etc. At the NATO Madrid Summit in 1997 Slovenia was not invited to membership, although expectations rode very high. Both high expectations and huge disappointment, which followed, were wrong and unnecessary.<sup>17</sup> In autumn 1999 Slovenia, together with other candidate countries, joined the Membership Action Plan (MAP) that was another and demanding tool for the execution of reforms. After comprehensive, systematic and intensive work during the Parliamentary term 2000–2004 Slovenia managed to gain membership invitation at the Prague 2002 Summit. The membership entered into force on March 23, 2004, roughly a decade after its start in the PfP (comp. Jazbec, 2005 d).

Secondly, a number of highly important lessons were learned during the previously mentioned period. The most important one, in particular looking from the distance, was to be realistic. This may sound simple now, but it was a demanding lesson.

<sup>15</sup> For more on this comp. Grizold, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> During the early 1990s, neutrality, as an option, was seriously discussed in parts of the academic and broader audience. Moldova is the only country that emerged after the end of the Cold War and opted for neutrality.

<sup>17</sup> The final decision to extend invitations to the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland was achieved close to the Summit. Germany was also pushing for Slovenia, while France conditioned its agreement with Slovenia only if Romania would be included in the package, which at the end left only the three invitees on the list. The decision was political, which can also be argued with the fact that the three countries, as it came out later and was presented many times to the next group of candidates, were not militarily prepared enough for their membership. The author believes that the political aspect of the decision was additionally strengthened by the fact that during the Cold War the Soviet Union expressed enormous political pressure and also intervened in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, while the West did practically nothing to support them (comp. for example Vidmajer, 2012: 65). Unlike Romania, that fact places Slovenia in a completely different position.

The then seven candidate countries put on paper all possible ambitions and soon the conclusion of the first MAP cycle showed that little of that was realized. Only what was possible to achieve and was backed by available resources out of what was needed, should have been pointed out – that was the immediate lesson. Next, the ability to show constant progress stood up. The MAP process is designed in the way that a candidate country is constantly screened. Therefore, it is rather easy to correct the development process on the basis of regular and frequent consultations with a follow-up reaction, rather than doing it only at the end of each annual process. An inevitable part of this process is also sharing solidarity and knowledge with both the Alliance and individual members. Additionally, cooperation with Parliament is a must. National parliaments are those who adopt the necessary laws and resolutions, exercise democratic control over the armed forces, take the final decision about the level of defence expenditure as well as ratify the membership agreement. Not least important is sharing responsibility with the highest law-making authority. Last but not least, the Slovenian experience points out a highly valuable experience of dealing with the media and public opinion. Slovenia was the only 2004 NATO member country that held a referendum vote prior to the membership (Hungary did it afterwards). An in-depth public awareness campaign was prepared at the government level, with important parliamentary support, for that purpose. During the campaign, numerous public discussions, debates, round tables, live TV and radio shows were organized around the country, with participation of both NATO pros and cons. It should be explicitly pointed out that the ambition for membership was not unanimously shared: part of opinion makers, media and public was undecided and part was against. Rupel points out that “bipartisan cooperation referring to the EU and NATO referendum was exemplary” (2011, p. 93), but also claims that “the transitional left organized intensive campaigns against the agreement with Vatican, then related to Slovenian-Italian and Slovenian-Austrian relations, and finally against NATO membership” (2011, p. 175).<sup>18</sup> Although the fulfilment of both membership ambitions was a parallel process, there were significant differences between them. Vidmajer points out that “NATO membership was already from the beginning less unequivocal in more controversial” (2012, p. 63), meaning that “the NATO equation was significantly more demanding than the EU one” (2012, p. 64). The referendum took place on March 23, 2003 (together with the EU referendum). The turnout was 60%; almost 90% were in favour of EU membership and 66% of NATO. The results proved the governmental policy and equipped Slovenia with a strong political *credo* when entering the Alliance (Ibid.). It would be worth analyzing to what extent the Slovenian political elite has used that *credo* during the years to follow to establish itself as a strong, outstanding and unique partner.<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, there were some important lessons learned during the first membership year, when Slovenia became part of a large and efficient NATO bureaucratic machinery. The lessons could briefly be summarized as follows: an operational (not only

<sup>18</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of the EU and NATO membership issues, primarily from the foreign policy and public opinion points of view, comp. Rupel, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> The author of this paper is not aware of any such analysis.



political) adaptation to the NAC formal meeting's weekly routine; the imbalance between the MFA and the MoD on one side and the country's Mission to NATO on the other; a necessity for an optimal and constant flow of information; principles of the "need to share" and "need to know"; maintenance of a high organizational dynamics (membership is the beginning of a process, not the end); the ongoing communication activities with NGOs, public and the media; relation between running daily business and policy creating activities; the use of multilateral framework for the settling of bilateral issues between member states; learning from previous members, adding one's own experiences and sharing them with candidate and interested countries; the importance of a defence planning system and a defence reform process as hardcore issues of the membership.<sup>20</sup>

Many of those experiences did not mean anything particularly new at the time when the membership was gained. But they proved to be part of a highly demanding management process of the Alliance's activities. The general message would be a need for a highly serious approach to the membership issue, having in mind realistic planning, efficient execution and an open ear to absorb experiences from others.<sup>21</sup>

During the whole project Slovenia witnessed important aspects of the NATO accession process. Some of the most important would be as follows (comp. Jazbec, 2005 d).

NATO membership was originally conceptualized as a state project. Along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, other parts of the state administration were involved. This can be most clearly illustrated by the structure of the MAP document which consisted of the following five areas: political and economic issues, defence, resources, security issues and legal affairs. One could say that the security aspect could have been seen as the most important and comprehensive one. It primarily denoted membership as a structural adaptation of the national security, the defence system and the armed forces in particular to the structure and experiences of NATO as a whole.

The defence and military aspect was just as important, particularly judging from the Ministry of Defence's point of view. It was membership that helped to create and establish a national defence system that would be a logical part of a larger international system with clear and proven rules. The military was being right sized and adapted to the changed nature of security threats. That brought an impact on deployability, moving away from the national territorial dependency of the armed forces. That switch was highly important for the then new members and candidates who had to restructure and reshape their armed forces from socialist to modern ones. Within that context, Slovenia was a kind of an exception because it did not start

<sup>20</sup> *More on this in Jazbec, 2006.*

<sup>21</sup> *Here I do not elaborate on concrete defence and military activities during the reform process like the rightsizing of the Slovenian Armed Forces and achieving their interoperability with the Alliance, although it also presented part of my activities during the period discussed.*

with large dinosaur armed forces at the beginning of its independence. Therefore, it was possible to immediately focus on the establishment process, instead of first dismantling the old military structures. This, in any case, saved a lot of time, resources and energy.

Also important was the organizational aspect. Typical ministries of defence used to be rigid bureaucratic organizations with very low internal dynamics. Fixed hierarchy and tough promotional rules provided slow and not always certain promotion. With membership in the Alliance, this aspect started to change rapidly. One could say that cooperation of armed forces and their bureaucracies stimulated inter- and intra-organizational dynamics. Organizations had to be more flexible, otherwise they could not execute the demanding processes of countering modern security threats. Along with that, the restructuring and downsizing also led to flexibility and were enabling personnel to be seconded more often. When countries entered the Alliance that fact became almost a daily routine and was enhancing the need for constant education and new skills. An important lesson emerged from that change: being part of a large and efficient political, security and military bureaucracy meant following the same rules.

Additionally, the psychological aspect, strongly connected with the educational one, became part of that process of change. Membership in the Alliance and the way it operates offers more promotional opportunities for soldiers. Those opportunities extend out of the national frame and networking spreads within a larger framework which is no longer bound primarily by national limitations. Hence, communication with colleagues within the Alliance in – as far as the then new members are concerned – a foreign language strengthens personal identity, language skills and operational flexibility.

Last but not least, the social aspect should also be pointed out. More relations have been developed, getting stronger and open, and social networking plays an increasingly important role. Only when national armed forces perform in the international arena, it is possible to develop and benefit from the broadening of national social limitations.

### 3 SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Since this paper is of an anniversary nature in an anthological issue of this journal (ten years of NATO membership and twenty years of formal cooperation with the Alliance), this should also be an occasion and an opportunity to add a few selected personal reflections and experiences from the period discussed. They would try to present some specifics of the Slovenian case, to which the author had the opportunity to contribute.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *In this section we primarily use the method of observation through one's own participation (Gilli, 1974). The character of this contribution and the previously mentioned method resulted in more self-quotations than it is usually the case.*

Slovenia was a rare example of having a senior diplomat in the position of the deputy minister of defence.<sup>23</sup> This fact contributed additional dynamics to the bilateral consultations on the defence policy, which the Slovenian Ministry of Defence was, by that time, already exercising with various countries. These consultations were also extended to the corresponding persons in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, when it was possible to arrange it. This practice also provided for a highly useful inside view in foreign affairs for top military personnel included in the consultations. Moreover, continuous exchange of information between the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence was established.<sup>24</sup> More or less regular annual consultations with the following countries took place during that period (alphabetically): Austria (most often and on various possible occasions), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia, and occasionally Turkey and the USA. These consultations provided a valuable exchange of policy information and analyses, lectures, publications, joint activities and media appearances. They also strengthened the professional and personal network that proved highly useful on various occasions.<sup>25</sup> Along with the above mentioned, I had approximately 450 meetings with foreign delegations and visitors discussing a broad range of topics within the defence sector (primarily NATO).

The already mentioned contacts with the Slovenian and foreign media as well as directly with the public in particular strengthened greatly during that period, especially with the Slovenian public. From one point of view, that was a follow-up of campaign activities prior to the referendum on NATO membership, and from another, a way of communication between the defence sector and the taxpayers. It was also a new momentum within the activities of the Slovenian public administration, with the Ministry of Defence never much appreciating having contacts with the media and the public.<sup>26</sup> For the Ministry of Defence alone the public debate was important also because it helped establish direct contact between the Ministry and the public.

<sup>23</sup> *The official title in the Slovenian public administration is State Secretary, meaning that the person has less executive authority than a typical deputy minister. I was appointed on December 8, 2000 and stayed in the position until November 30, 2004. My area of responsibility was defence policy (with particular emphasis on international relations and NATO affairs). As far as I can remember, there was also such a case in the Bulgarian and the Romanian ministries of defence.*

<sup>24</sup> *One current senior Slovenian diplomat was at that time recruited from the Ministry of Defence.*

<sup>25</sup> *Here, one should mention an interesting and important experience for diplomatic human resource management: after finishing my term at the Ministry of Defence I returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and became a desk officer in the Department for Security Policy. The majority of my above mentioned colleagues were posted abroad as Ambassadors of their respected countries, including the colleague from the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: New York (Polish colleague), Washington (Slovene), India (Czech), Canada (Romanian), Vienna (Bulgarian) and Consul General in Milan (Bulgarian).*

<sup>26</sup> *During that period I had approximately one hundred appearances in the media and in public discussions all over Slovenia (once even in four places in one day: Jesenice, Brežice, Ljubljana and Maribor). During the referendum campaign I was careful enough never to push the audience towards the membership, but was trying to present various arguments in its favour with clear, sound and concrete language. At one evening discussion close to Celje I was trying to explain that NATO will not deploy military bases with nuclear weapons in Slovenia, since there were no plans, no need and no financial resources for that. "But let us say, theoretically, that was the case", persisted one of the participants. "In that case", I answered, "you should persuade your member of Parliament to go against such a decision". After a minute or so of silence the gentleman answered, "I believe you, but I do not believe our politicians."*

That alone raised the understanding of projects on the agenda and the support for them. It was very important because of the success of the reform processes taking place and in particular for the professionalization of the Slovenian Armed Forces.

Closely related to the media activities were various publications which I wrote or edited during that period and in the first few following years. The aim of the mentioned activities that were atypical for any State Secretary prior to and after that time was to academically inform, discuss, present and promote the activities, projects and agenda of the Slovenian defence sector as a whole to the domestic and foreign public. In Slovenia there were (and still are) three different media discussing security, defence and military topics: a biweekly popular journal *Slovenska vojska* (The Slovenian Armed Forces), published by the Ministry of Defence; a monthly journal *Obramba* (Defence), published by a private company Defensor; and a quarterly bilingual scientific journal *Sodobni vojaški izzivi* (Contemporary Military Challenges), published by the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces. The first one published 15 articles of this author, the second one 9, and the third one 4. Additional 28 papers were published in different other publications, most of them abroad, making it 56 all together. At the same time, four books were published that also relate closely to these topics (Jazbec, 2001, 2002, 2007a and 2007b). The first one discusses, among other topics, security changes in Europe after the end of the Cold War (my PhD), and its appearance at Ashgate coincided with the beginning of my term at the MoD. The other three were published in Slovenia: the second (revised, expanded and updated PhD) was prepared for the purpose of discussing NATO and related topics with a broader audience.<sup>27</sup> The next ones were direct result of my MoD engagement and published afterwards: the third one is a compilation in English of my papers published on various occasions across Europe and the USA, while the fourth one is an academic elaboration of the defence and military diplomacy. From the empirical point of view it stems highly from my then engagement with Slovenian as well as foreign military and defence attaches. With both I have shared numerous individual and group meetings and discussions.

During that period, cooperation with the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) was established and developed. The then Slovenian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Gregor Zore, gave me the idea, and soon the project was materialized and formalized. From autumn 2001 I was representing Slovenia in the Foundation Council of the DCAF and Ljubica Jelušič (later Minister of Defence) was in its Advisory Board. In summer 2003 in Slovenia, we organized an echoed international conference on defence reforms in the Western Balkans.<sup>28</sup> A few years later, the Slovenian Ministry of the Interior took over the cooperation with the DCAF (what I think was a policy mistake) and its office was opened in

<sup>27</sup> Jamea Shea from NATO and Karin Kneissl from neutral Austria contributed forewords. James Appathurai spoke at the presentation of the book.

<sup>28</sup> Papers were published in Jazbec, 2003. The conference was organized by Branko Kromar who succeeded me at the DCAF Foundation Council after my term at the MoD ended.

Ljubljana. Whatever the achievement, it was heavily watered down during the next years, which also minimized Slovenian soft power opportunities.

There are two significant peculiarities related to the then Minister of Defence and his core team that should be mentioned. The Minister Anton Grizold, who was already seventh in a row (in eight years only), and his three State Secretaries (for defence policy, for parliamentary affairs, and for acquisition) were the first team ever at the Slovenian MoD to remain in the office for the full parliamentary term, i.e. four years.<sup>29</sup> When we combine this with the great expectations of achieving NATO membership, it becomes obvious that much of our work at that time was under additional pressure.

Slovenian first contacts with NATO are linked to the first democratic government that was elected in April 1990 and sworn in in May of the same year. With this fact, the independence of Slovenia became an official policy, while Slovenia was at that time still one of the six Yugoslav republics. That fact did not prevent the process, but proved to be an obstacle. For example, the then Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dimitrij Rupel (official title “the Republic Secretary for External Affairs”, while the Yugoslav MFA’s official title was “the Federal Secretary of International Affairs”), was not allowed by the Belgrade authorities to be member of the Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Conference for New Europe in autumn 1990. Nevertheless, he managed to be included in the Austrian delegation at the same event (comp. Rupel, 1992). The first contact with NATO authorities was informal and strictly off the record: in early December 1990, one of the deputy assistants general hosted, in his private Brussels residence, the Slovenian ministers of foreign affairs and defence, Rupel and Janša respectively.<sup>30</sup> The first official NATO visit to Slovenia was paid by Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, Gebhardt von Moltke, in mid 1993. Since he was on a PfP tour, he could not manage to get the connecting flight to Ljubljana and therefore landed in Klagenfurt. Since I was the Slovenian consul there, I was asked by our authorities to receive him there on behalf of the Slovenian Government.

Last but not least, there is a need to point out that one of the driving forces of the Slovenian membership in NATO was the late State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Ignac Golob.<sup>31</sup> He was one of the most experienced Slovenian diplomats and was tirelessly promoting NATO as a solution for the Slovenian security issue. As State Secretaries at both the Slovenian MFA and MoD respectively, the two of us were co-chairing the Intergovernmental Working Group on NATO (the first such body among the all candidate countries of the post-Cold War enlargements) as well as all activities within the MAP, both in Brussels and Ljubljana, on behalf of our Government. He died on the very eve of the Prague

<sup>29</sup> *The same happened only with the following minister, Karl Erjavec (2004–2008). All other Slovenian Ministers of Defence served, for various reasons, shorter terms.*

<sup>30</sup> *Source known to the author.*

<sup>31</sup> *He was the Yugoslav Ambassador to Mexico (twice), to the UN in New York and to the CSCE in Vienna as well as State Secretary in the Slovenian MFA in three different Governments. Comp. Čačinovič, 1994, and Golob, 1993.*

Summit 2002 and did not live long enough to witness the invitation for membership that was extended to the seven candidate countries, Slovenia included.<sup>32</sup> From this point of view, this paper should be understood as an act of tribute to the late colleague.

**Conclusion** Achieving Slovenian membership in NATO was both a project and a process. Formally, it took slightly more than a decade: from January 1994, when this ambition was formalized as a foreign policy goal in the Amendments to the Resolution on the Starting Points of Slovenian National Security, to the membership in late March 2004. It was an ups and downs trend: Slovenia was among the first PfP members, the first to establish the Intergovernmental Working Group on NATO, but was not invited at the Lisbon Summit in 1997, although the expectations rode high. During the following years, the topic almost disappeared from political discussions, and a few months before the 2003 Spring referendum the public support fell below 40%; even more, in the early 1990s, neutrality as a foreign policy and security option was discussed. Last but not least, the political ambition to become part of the Euro-Atlantic area was, for the first time, officially presented by the Slovenian opposition in the 1989 May Declaration. This means that the whole process lasted a decade and a half.

With membership in NATO, Slovenia (as the other member countries) gained in stability, security and development opportunities. Its defence and military identity were strengthened and the Slovenian Armed Forces benefited from various points of view (but also contributed some of their experiences to the Alliance, in particular in specialization as offered by divers, helicopter pilots and the alpine training centre). It also brought to the Alliance a huge political *credo* from a strong and clear referendum support for the membership. All these aspects call for an in-depth analytical survey with the aim to empirically determine to what extent and how these advantages were transformed into the policy approach of Slovenia within the Alliance.

The final stage of the Slovenian membership process (2000–2004) had some specifics, when compared to the other then new members. Membership as such gained strong and broad political and public support at a referendum, organized prior to the membership. The then Minister of Defence and his team (the first one until then that remained in office full term) clearly conceptualised and consistently exercised a range of activities. Apart from typical ones, related in particular to the armed forces, constant communication with the public stood out. There were two crucial policy conclusions that emerged towards the end of the process: firstly, when membership as a foreign policy goal was met, it was transformed into a policy means for achieving new goals which, however, remained undefined for a long time; and secondly, the defence policy, in particular because of the participation in peacekeeping operations, was understood as a foreign policy tool and not only as an activity of the defence sector. The process was also accompanied by numerous publications which were

<sup>32</sup> *He died after serving in the diplomatic service for consecutive 52 years, what was at that time more than my age (and I was already a senior diplomat). Needless to say I learned much from the experienced colleague.*

discussing and contemplating it, in particular papers published by this author (what was an exemption in the Slovenian case).

Slovenian membership was useful for the broader region, in particular since Slovenia was the only dual member of the 2004 NATO and EU enlargements. Slovenia was dispersing its experiences, know-how and lessons learned throughout the region, be it either directly to the relevant institutions (the MoD and Armed Forces) or to the civil society, the media, academia etc. It has been exercised in forms of consultations, seconding personnel, through diplomatic channels (defence and military attaches in the region included), lectures, interviews, publications etc.

Towards the end of the previous decade the enlargement dynamics slowed down. It was to a certain extent pushed out by the stagnation and enlargement *fatigue* (more as far as the EU is concerned, but it has affected the European integration process and its dynamics as a whole). At the same time, in some parts of the region, there was not enough understanding of the importance of the dual enlargement, its messages and lessons learned. This meant that a certain decline in the enlargement enthusiasm was noticeable on both sides of the coin.

Overall, there is one general lesson learned and conclusion drawn from the discussed project: there exists an absolute necessity for further enlargement – this is not the only, but one of the most important preconditions for development. The enlargement standstill in the Western Balkans during the previous years points this out clearly.

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