

POT SLOVENIJE V NATO

SLOVENIA'S ROAD TO NATO

Review paper

Povzetek Slovenija se z več vidikov razlikuje od vseh drugih držav, ki so se od konca “hladne vojne” pridružile Zavezništvu. Od leta 1992 so se vse slovenske vlade močno zavzemale za članstvo v Natu, predvsem iz dolgoročnih varnostnih razlogov. Kljub vsemu pa je to vprašanje zadevalo celoten slovenski politični sistem in je na začetku naletelo na precejšnje nasprotovanje na obeh straneh spektra. Slovenija je bila druga država kandidatka, ki je pred vključitvijo razpisala referendum v zvezi s tem vprašanjem. Glasovi na referendumu so pokazali dvotretjinsko podporo članstvu v Natu, ki je od takrat naprej uživalo široko javno podporo. Sodelovanje Slovenije pri delovanju Zavezništva je postalo pravno urejeno tako v civilni politični kot tudi v vojaški sferi. S slovensko izkušnjo od vključitve dalje je država prejela najpomembnejše lekcije o realističnem obrambnem načrtovanju, solidarnosti med članicami in pomoči državam kandidatkam.

Ključne besede *Balkan, Vzhodna Evropa, širitev, Nato, Slovenija.*

Abstract Slovenia differs in several respects from all other countries which have joined the Alliance since the end of the “Cold War”. From 1992 onwards, all Slovenian governments have strongly advocated NATO membership, primarily on long-term security grounds. The issue, however, cut across the Slovenian polity, initially with considerable opposition on both sides of the spectrum. Slovenia was the second candidate country to submit the issue to a referendum prior to the admission. The vote showed a two-third support for NATO membership. Since then it has become widely accepted by the public. Slovenia’s participation in the functioning of the Alliance has become regularised both in the civilian political and the military spheres. Slovenian experience since the admission has brought the country the most important lessons in realistic defence planning, solidarity among members and assistance to aspirants.

Key words *The Balkans, Eastern Europe, enlargement, NATO, Slovenia.*

Introduction Slovenia, in its relationship to NATO, differs in several respects from all other countries which have joined (and one which was absorbed into) the Alliance since the end of the “Cold War”. It was the first admitted former East-Central European communist-ruled country which never belonged to the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, either as an individual state or as part of a pact member. Moreover, at the height of the “Cold War”, soon after the signing of the Washington Treaty in June 1949, Slovenia – then part of Yugoslavia – was included into NATO’s strategic plans as a potentially friendly territory in case of a continental war (plan Smartweed). Slovenia, unlike all the other former East European countries but Hungary, held a national referendum on membership, prior to its admission to NATO.

1 SLOVENIA AS PART OF YUGOSLAVIA

During the “Cold War” confrontation with the Eastern Bloc, Slovenia’s position as the north-westernmost republic in the federal Yugoslavia was considered by NATO planners as strategically highly important for NATO’s ability to thwart the expected Soviet-led massive armoured thrust from Hungary to Northern Italy. On the basis of a secret understanding between the Tito regime and the United States, the Yugoslav Army was positioned to defend the axis Maribor – Trieste – Gorizia and the area between Graz and Villach in the then still occupied Austria. Once this arrangement was operationalised with the Yugoslav General Staff, the United States signed a mutual assistance agreement with Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1951. In addition to the Marshall Plan-like economic aid to the Tito regime, the Yugoslav Army subsequently received a large quantity of heavy weapons from the US stocks in Western Germany. Most of these heavy arms, including tanks, heavy artillery, jet warplanes, trucks, ammunition etc. were to be deployed in north western Yugoslavia, mostly in Slovenia. Yugoslavia’s leader, Marshall Tito, assured the US and British governments that, in case of war with the Eastern Bloc, the Yugoslav Army would fight on NATO’s side even if Yugoslavia was not attacked directly (Bebler, 1990, pp. 175-176). A US Army brigade stationed near Trieste was presumably to be moved across the present Slovenian-Italian border in order to help defend the Ljubljana gap.

At a hearing in the US Senate in May 1951, the Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight Eisenhower, future US President, publicly argued that in order to protect NATO’s “soft belly”, its members should urgently invite four Mediterranean states into the Alliance – Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and Spain. The first two governments responded enthusiastically to the soundings by American diplomats; their countries were speedily invited and joined the Alliance already in 1952. Yugoslavia’s leader Tito, however, gave a cunningly evading answer and instead of Yugoslavia’s straight membership in the Alliance proposed a trilateral mutual assistance treaty among Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. The three countries signed a “Treaty of Friendship”

in February 1953. After protracted negotiations and in spite of strenuous Italian objections, a tripartite “Treaty of alliance, political cooperation and mutual assistance” was finally signed by the three foreign ministers in Slovenia, at Bled, in August 1954. (The initial draft, however, was watered down sometime after Joseph Stalin’s death in March 1953.) Through this new Balkan Pact, Yugoslavia became legally linked to NATO’s network of mutual security guarantees (Ibid., pp. 178-179). Soon after its signing, the Balkan Pact became irrelevant in practical terms, partly due to the tensions between Greece and Turkey. The still valid treaty has been never activated.

The most important reason for a twist in Yugoslavia’s attitude, however, was the perceived diminished threat of a Soviet invasion. This assessment prompted Marshall Tito to normalise relations with the Soviet Union, distance Yugoslavia from the Alliance and assume a prominent role in the international movement of the non-aligned. Yugoslavia actively contributed to forging the Helsinki Final Act. Within the newly founded “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe” it joined the group of neutral and non-aligned states. For about three decades after the mid-1950s, Marshall Tito maneuvered skilfully between the two blocs, exploiting Yugoslavia’s geopolitically sensitive position. The presumed equidistance between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation remained an official foreign policy posture until the breakdown of the SFR Yugoslavia in 1991-1992. Already during SFRY’s last decade, its validity was openly questioned on several grounds. During the closing years of communist rule, the Yugoslav policy of non-alignment became to be viewed in Slovenia as inconsistent with and even contrary to the widespread desire to “(re) join Europe”. In early summer of 1990, this critical attitude was quietly adopted by the first post-1945 non-communist government in Slovenia.

2 SLOVENIA’S QUALIFICATION FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP

Since the proclamation of independence in June 1991, the successive Slovenian governments have abandoned the ex-Yugoslavia’s stance of “active non-alignment” and identified the country’s full-fledged memberships in the EU, WEU and NATO as their chief international objectives. The Slovenian political elite found too little comfort in relying on the country’s participation in OSCE and membership in the UN alone. The ineffectiveness of the international community in dealing with even a relatively small aggressor in the Balkans confirmed this dissatisfaction. Due to the greatly reduced influence of the pacifist “Greens”, to the lacking tradition of neutralism or any constitutional obligations in this respect, the Slovenian National Assembly has been able to pass several resolutions in favour of the country’s membership in Western integrations since 1993. When the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was stopped by a NATO armed intervention, all major political parties came to support Slovenia’s entry both into NATO and the EU. However, as long as it remained outside the only functioning regional security organisation in Europe, Slovenia had no other option but to pursue the policy of non-engagement and armed self-reliance. In addition, the Slovenian Defence Ministry

signed bilateral cooperation protocols with the defence ministries of the USA, UK, Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic etc. and a trilateral protocol on military co-operation with Italy and Hungary.

Although successive Slovenian governments since 1991 have hardly missed a single opportunity to express their interest in being invited to NATO, the Slovenian diplomatic campaign to attain this goal was launched in earnest only in the first half of 1996. The signing of the Dayton-Paris accords at that time allowed the ending of the UN-imposed arms embargo on all ex-Yugoslav republics. By then Slovenia had already joined the NATO "Partnership for Peace" programme and entered the Europe Association Agreement with the EU. It should be noted that the Slovenian government's keen interest in NATO membership was not prompted by the fear of social and political instability, by internal dangers to Slovenia's democratic order, unresolved conflicts with the neighbouring states or by the desire to obtain financial assistance or military hardware. Security concerns related to the geographic proximity of the volatile Western Balkans did play some role but the primary aim in joining NATO was the country's integration into the community of Western democratic states.

According to many experts and NATO officials, an important rationale for NATO's decision to expand eastward lied in the desire to reduce the "gray zone" of insecurity and uncertainty in Europe. Although the underlying contention sounded plausible in general terms, it raised some doubts in relation to e.g. Slovenia. On the whole, the lines separating security and insecurity areas in Europe, Mediterranean and Asia did not coincide with the division between NATO members and non-members. Already for decades, there were flash-points of violence and terrorism on the territory of several NATO members, such as Ulster, the Basque country, Corsica, parts of Turkey etc. Actual or potential interstate conflicts took or could have conceivably taken place between several NATO member states, e.g. on the Greek-Turkish border, in Cyprus or at Gibraltar. Although situated in the geographic proximity of recent armed hostilities in the Balkans, Slovenia, together with a number of other European countries and like neighbouring Austria, belonged to the area of stability and security.

The same has been true of Slovenia's record as a democratic state. Since 1989, the country has successfully, relatively painlessly and peacefully overcome the stresses, tensions and crises surrounding its fast triple evolution - attaining independent statehood, transforming its political order and the economic system. The rapid transformation in all three dimensions in due legal form took the form of peaceful evolution based on a high degree of consensus between different political currents. In this process there was no politically motivated violence and very few cases of mass civil unrest. Since 1990, six rounds of multiparty parliamentary election, five presidential elections as well as local and municipal elections have been carried out successfully, in full conformity with the European rules for free, competitive and clean electoral contests.

Already in 1997, Slovenia was viewed by qualified observers as a consolidated democracy. For instance, Freedom House rated Slovenia as a "free post communist"

country with the highest score of 1.5 (together with Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Estonia) (Rose, 1998, p. 281). While being a candidate for membership both in NATO and the European Union, Slovenia's credentials underwent thorough examinations by the US government, European Commission and NATO. In its published opinion on Slovenia's application for EU membership, the European Commission concluded on July 15, 1997:

“Slovenia presents the characteristics of a democracy, with stable institutions guaranteeing the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. Slovenia can be regarded as a functioning market economy...” (Agenda 2000, p. 114).

By 1997 Slovenia had also satisfied, to the highest degree, the key NATO-specific requirements elaborated in the *Study on NATO Enlargement* (1995). Having adopted a Western European pattern in civil-military relations, Slovenia reaffirmed democratic civilian rule as one of its fundamental constitutional norms. Moreover, these norms as well as human rights were being observed more thoroughly in Slovenia than in at least one older NATO member state and more thoroughly than minority rights in several NATO member states.

Several circumstances have contributed to a very high degree of civilian domination over the Slovenian military: the strong rejection of the previous Yugoslav model of civil-military relations (which contained both militarist and praetorian proclivities); the smallness of the armed forces; the paucity of Slovenian military traditions; the numerical and intellectual weakness of the Slovenian military professionals; the underdeveloped corporate identity of the Slovenian military officers and the army leadership's extremely low political profile. The parliamentary system of government gave the civilian domination its constitutional and legal foundation and form. An elaborate and partly redundant system of civilian oversight over the small military establishment has been erected in Slovenia.

3 DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN TO OBTAIN AN INVITATION

After a pause in the second half of 1996, caused by parliamentary election and the formation of a new ruling coalition, the campaign for NATO membership was restarted in early 1997. Slovenian diplomats lobbied among the NATO member states using the following arguments:

- Slovenia has conformed to the overlapping EU requirements and NATO expectations concerning successful reforms, functioning political democracy, market economy, human and minority rights, constructive international behaviour and settled relations with neighbours;
- the country has complied with the NATO-specific expectations concerning civilian control over the military;
- Slovenia borders on two EU members and two NATO members; its geographic position would provide for the shortest and safest land bridge between Italy and Hungary;

- Slovenia has conducted a responsible and constructive foreign policy, and has actively supported all international efforts to bring peace, stability, prosperity and democracy to the troubled Balkans (UNPROFOR, IFOR, SFOR, UNFICYP, KFOR);
- Slovenia was able to shoulder its membership responsibilities in NATO and the EU, including the financial ones (a reflection of Slovenia's highest GDP *per capita* in Central-Eastern Europe);
- Slovenia's admission would make NATO and EU enlargement more geopolitical-ly balanced, would move the area of security and stability in the direction of the volatile Balkans and serve as a positive incentive among the Balkan aspirants for NATO and the EU.

In July 1997, Slovenia's admission in the first round is said to have been supported by nine NATO members, including all Mediterranean members. Eventually, the considerable effort by Slovenian diplomacy to gain an invitation ended up unsuccessfully. It was to a considerable extent due to the French insistence on also inviting Romania and on having a French admiral appointed to head the NATO Southern Command in Naples. These demands were said to have been rejected by President Clinton. The position of the US administration in favour of a restrained enlargement in stages finally prevailed with only three new NATO members added by 1999. In a compromise move Slovenia and Romania were mentioned in the final document and singled out as serious candidates to be reconsidered in 1999.

President B. Clinton's arguments in favour of only three candidates, if understood as indirect disqualification of Slovenia's candidacy, remained, however, mostly unconvincing. In some respects, such as firm civilian control over the military, financial ability, low cost of admission for NATO, public support for NATO membership in 1997 etc., Slovenia should have certainly been ranked higher than no. 4. The US Department of State assessment also differed substantively from the US President's statement: "Slovenia is moving rapidly toward integration into the Euro-Atlantic community of nations. Its immediate foreign policy goals are to join NATO and the European Union. In the five years since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia has become a democracy with a multi-party political system, a free press and an excellent human rights record. Slovenia's market economy has registered a healthy growth in recent years, largely due to economic reforms introduced shortly after independence. Slovenia now has the highest per capita income in Central Europe. Slovenia's successful democratic transition, economic transformation, peacefulness and stability serve as an example to other nations in the region. The US has a strong interest of supporting Slovenia's efforts to consolidate and build on its accomplishments. The key (US) objective is: ... full integration (of Slovenia) into Euro-Atlantic community of nations, including such institutions as NATO and the European Union."

The NATO decision in 1997 to defer Slovenia's admission could be explained in a number of ways. One conceivable calculation in NATO might have been that bringing Slovenia in the Alliance would not make any appreciable geopolitical and military

gain in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Slovenian officials repeated time and again that Slovenia had not been in the past a Soviet/Russian satellite and a Warsaw Pact member, that the Russians did not object to Slovenia's membership, that the country showed full cooperativeness with the US and NATO when their military forces were transiting or over-flying Slovenia etc. However, the Slovenian argumentation apparently did not impress the key NATO players. Some of them might have still blamed Slovenia for Yugoslavia's breakdown and for the ensuing troubles in the Balkans. It was also informally suggested to Slovenian diplomats that the Alliance would need a convincing candidate for the next round and that Slovenia fit well into this role.

4 SLOVENIAN SOCIETY AND NATO MEMBERSHIP

The successive Slovenian governments' advocating NATO and EEC/EU membership as soon as possible was buttressed by strong majorities in the Slovenian parliament. Among the five major political parties, three consistently advocated Slovenia's accession (LDS, SDS, SKD), while two others showed certain reservations concerning either the EU or NATO (SLS, ZLSD). In three parties (LDS, ZLSD, SLS) there were minorities in disagreement with their leaderships' pro-membership position. However, public opinion polls showed a very different picture. The discrepancy between the enthusiasm of the political elite and the more sanguine mood of the population was the largest during the first four years of independence in 1991-1995, when the principal sources of perceived threats were closely related to the armed violence and wars in the Western Balkans. During that period the Slovenian public mostly supported the stance of neutrality in foreign affairs (roughly 40 percent), while the reliance on Western Europe (32 percent) and the reliance on NATO and the USA (13 percent) trailed behind.

Support for NATO membership started rising in late 1995, probably due to NATO's successful intervention in the Balkans. A USIA-commissioned survey in April 1997 showed that 56 percent of respondents would vote in favour if a referendum were then to be held. The support reached its acme of 66-67 percent in summer 1997, at the time around the NATO Madrid summit. The opposition to NATO membership accounted then for about 20 percent, while the rest of the respondents were undecided. The Slovenian public opinion support for joining NATO significantly exceeded the corresponding figures in Hungary (32 percent) and the Czech Republic (28 percent) in 1997, while trailing behind those in Romania (76 percent) and occasionally also Poland. However, like in Hungary and the Czech Republic, a very considerable number of respondents still did not accept some corollaries of possible NATO membership, such as increased defence outlays, sending national troops to defend a NATO ally, allowing routine over-flights by NATO aircraft, and particularly the otherwise utterly improbable placing of NATO nuclear weapons.

Thus, although improved from the government's standpoint, the state of public opinion on Slovenia's NATO membership was contradictory and trailing behind the much more enthusiastic position held by the Slovenian political elite. NATO

membership was most favoured by males over 49 years of age, with low education and status. Support for the government's stance was the lowest among the age group under 30 and among those with university degrees. Slovenian housewives could not decide on this issue. The degree of support for EU membership was generally higher than that for NATO membership but occasionally slipped lower. This happened, for example, in the aftermath of the epidemic of "mad cow disease".

The NATO decision in Madrid in July 1997 had little immediate impact on Slovenian public opinion. However, the political opposition and critical press portrayed the Madrid decision as a heavy diplomatic defeat for the government. Two opposition parties seized the opportunity and demanded convening an extraordinary session of the National Assembly. However, the reaction of disappointment among the elite was soon softened when on July 15, 1997, the European Commission recommended the inclusion of Slovenia into the first round of EU enlargement talks. This move helped the Slovenian government survive the interpellation. However, the Foreign Minister was replaced, partly due to the increased opposition pressure.

Following the failure in Madrid and particularly after the US presidential election of George W. Bush in November 2000, the public support for NATO membership started sliding down appreciably, with occasional ups and downs of several percentage points. By April 2002 it had, for the first time, fallen below 50 percent. The opposition to membership then rose correspondingly to about 30 percent. By the second half of 2002 a virulent negative campaign in several Slovenian printed media brought the level of support further down to about 40 percent, occasionally below the corresponding figures for the opposing opinion. The altered post-Cold War perception of diminished external security risks (and downgrading the military ones) and the rather naive sense of security in South-Eastern Europe (to which NATO's successful peace-enforcement in the Balkans greatly contributed) generally lowered the interest of the public in Slovenia's joining any military alliance. As a consequence, the close relationship between Slovenia and the North Atlantic Alliance became increasingly an object of lively public debates and controversies. The negative trend in the public opinion support to membership ran time-wise parallel to the ever growing integration of Slovenia in the Alliance, and to considerable efforts to effect necessary reforms in the security sector. Slovenia was successfully completing the preparation for membership (MAP), while Slovenian soldiers and policemen were proving their worth as peacekeepers in NATO-led "out-of-area" missions.

The rise of vocal opposition to NATO membership led the Slovenian government to accept the demand for a referendum on NATO membership, which otherwise was not constitutionally required. Under the pressure of criticism expressed in the Slovenian media and emanating from among several groups in civil society (cultural elite, pacifists, anti-globalists, anarchists, environmentalists, veterans etc.) the government decided to hold two simultaneous referenda on Slovenia's EU and NATO membership on March 23, 2003. By late November 2002, Slovenia's membership ceased to be a mere theoretical proposition or a pious wish by the government. When

Slovenia, together with six other states, received an invitation to join the Alliance, this question became a practical and politically acute one. The confluence of events put Slovenia into an exceptional position. Among 26 countries (19 NATO members and 7 invitees) which were to sign the new accession protocols on March 26, 2003, only in Slovenia was this decision submitted for a direct approval or disapproval by the voters. The Slovenian government alone exposed itself to an acid democratic test, while, according to available public opinion polls, NATO enlargement did not enjoy then the majority public opinion support in several older NATO member states.

In internal debates the successive Slovenian governments argued in favour of Slovenia's NATO membership, primarily on the long-term national defence and military security grounds. In general, security arguments dominated in the discussions. The underlying social values as well as the extensive common political, economic, cultural, technological and other interests with the NATO member states were also used in this context. Some ardent supporters of NATO membership, on the other hand, tried to present the Alliance as a bulwark of anticommunism. This dubious contention might have scared off some leftist voters who would have otherwise supported Slovenia's membership.

In this matter, the ruling left-of-the-centre coalition cooperated closely with the largest opposition party and several non-governmental organisations. However, the issue cut across the fabric of Slovenian polity on both sides of the political spectrum with heterogeneous mellays of supporters and rejectionists. Many opponents of NATO displayed outright ignorance of the Alliance as well as prejudices and unfounded fears, such as the presumed danger of losing Slovenian national identity, Slovenia's independence, Slovenian Army etc. They claimed that the Alliance lost its *raison d'être* and became an obsolete and even dangerous remnant of the Cold War. In order to maintain peace in Europe, a much wider, all-inclusive continental security organisation was presumably needed, such as OSCE. Many opponents claimed that Slovenia is not and will not be threatened by anyone if it were to stay neutral. By entering NATO, Slovenia would diminish its security, having become a target of international terrorists. In the post-Cold War environment it would be foolish to raise the country's defence spending, which would be required by NATO membership. NATO was portrayed by some radical opponents as a militarist organisation and even a threat to democratic freedoms. Some opponents cited the NATO enlargement policy in the past and Turkey's poor human rights record. This presumably proved that NATO was not at all an alliance of democratic states. The pacifists and environmentalists opposed NATO because they rejected in principle the presence of foreign troops and nuclear weapons on Slovenian soil and/or everything related to the military and to nuclear energy. Some old-style leftists held NATO for a symbol of capitalism, of Western imperialism and of globalisation which, as they claimed, brought abnormal poverty and mass unemployment to the Third World. Among critics, one was also filled with nostalgia for the former Yugoslavia and Marshall Tito's past policy of non-alignment. Some sharp opponents of NATO at the same time uncritically idolised the European Union, claiming that the EU membership

would be an ample substitute for NATO membership. Some opponents were against NATO simply because they opposed the Slovenian government, disliked Coca-Cola, McDonalds' hamburgers, the domination by the Hollywood film and TV industry etc. Some even linked NATO to global warming. Many of these arguments or objections were due to the relatively widespread misconception which equated George W. Bush with the USA and the USA with NATO. Indeed, the level of public opposition to NATO membership grew visibly in Slovenia after the neoconservative Bush administration came to power in the USA.

However, in spite of the largely negative publicity in the Slovenian printed media, the twin referenda on March 23, 2003, clearly confirmed the government's position. On that day, Slovenia became the third country (after Spain and Hungary) to hold a referendum on NATO membership and the second country (after Hungary) to hold it prior to the country's admission to the Alliance. The somewhat surprisingly positive results (in comparison with the public opinion polls only one month earlier) showed roughly a two-third support for NATO membership and a still higher support for EU membership (about 85 percent). Similarly to the Hungarian referendum, these results were apparently largely due to the publicly stated views of important opinion leaders, to the strong pro-membership position taken by the Roman Catholic Church and to a high abstention rate among the opponents of NATO membership. A solid majority of voting citizens recognized the country's long-term security, political and economic interests in joining the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. Compared with the Hungarian referendum in 1997, the Slovenian referendum ought to be given a higher mark due to a more straightforward question and a much lower abstention rate. It also took place in a much less favourable international environment, as the war in Iraq clearly negatively influenced public attitudes toward NATO.

The ratification of accession protocols by NATO member states in 2003 went more smoothly than in 1997-1998. There were several reasons for this difference. The Eastward opening of 1999 paved the way for the second (or more precisely the third) enlargement into the former Warsaw Pact area, the Balkans and to Slovenia. Thus, in spring 2004, about eleven years after the first pronouncement by the Slovenian National Assembly in favour of NATO membership, Slovenia finally joined the Alliance.

Since the country's admission, the Slovenian government has consistently supported NATO's further enlargement to the Western Balkans. At the Bucharest summit of 2008 it was in favour of inviting Croatia, Albania and Macedonia as well as of upgrading the Alliance's relations with the rest of the region. The Slovenian delegation, however, went along with the omitting of Macedonia, thus bowing to Greece's intransigence over that country's official name (which Slovenia officially recognises). It also fell in line when a compromise paragraph on Ukraine and Georgia was agreed upon between the USA and the more cautious Western European members. In February 2008, after short delays caused by parliamentary opposition parties and in spite of the second chamber's appeal to postpone the decision, National Assembly, with 75 votes for and 11 against, ratified the protocol on Croatia's and Albania's accession to NATO.

Since Slovenia entered the Alliance, the issue of NATO membership ceased to be a polemical item in Slovenian politics, as occasional verbal attacks on the Alliance in the press have time and again failed to ignite a wider public debate. The membership became a fact of life accepted by a great majority of Slovenian citizens, including many of those who opposed NATO membership in 2002-2003. The movement in Slovenian public opinion during the last decade is illustrated by the following tables:

Table 1:
The level of trust in NATO

	Year	Full distrust 1	Little trust 2	Considerable trust 3	Full trust 4	Unaware 8	Do not know 9
NATO	1999	8,1	32,1	31,6	12,4	5,4	10,5
	2001	12,0	32,1	32,1	5,4	9,0	9,4
	2003	12,0	36,5	32,1	12,0	3,3	4,0
	2005	9,9	32,8	36,2	10,8	2,9	7,4
	2007	9,6	32,5	38,8	10,5	2,2	6,4

Data from the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey 1999-2007.

Table 2:
The usefulness of Slovenia's membership in NATO

		2003	2005	2007
1 -	Useful	59,5	51,0	53,1
2 -	Not useful	27,7	19,9	29,4
9 -	Do not know	12,8	29,1	17,5

Data from the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey 2003, 2005 and 2007.

However, Slovenian public has been rather critical of NATO's engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, has viewed the threat of international terrorism very differently from the official NATO (and EU) documents on the subject and has not supported an increase in Slovenia's defence spending in line with its government's previous promise. Slovenian participation in the functioning of the Alliance has become regularised both in the civilian political and the military spheres, with about 25 civilians posted in the NATO headquarters in Brussels and about 40 military personnel serving in the NATO commands in Brussels, Mons, Naples, Madrid, Izmir etc. To these numbers one should add civilian and uniformed officials in the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs dealing with NATO matters.

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