
Regional Security

Izlaganje sa znanstvenog skupa
355.356(100-622 NATO:4-69)
Priljeno: 22. svibnja 2005.

**US-Adriatic Charter of Partnership:
Securing the NATO Open Door Policy***

IVAN GRDEŠIĆ

Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb

Summary

The US-Adriatic Charter, an initiative in the spirit of the 1998 U.S.-Baltic Charter, was proposed jointly by the Presidents of Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia to President Bush at the NATO Prague Summit in November 2002. It was signed by four ministers of foreign affairs in Tirana on 2 May 2003. The Charter as a diplomatic project had two objectives – to secure the open door NATO policy and to provide the framework for the cooperation and mutual support of candidate countries. It was successful on both accounts. The Charter partners made strong commitments in the areas such as democratic reforms and the creation of the conditions for NATO membership. An additional effect of the Charter has been the very palpable progress in the relationships of the countries of South East Europe by improving the security conditions in the region. The US-Adriatic Charter of Partnership is a successful example of cooperation among small states with common interests.

Key words: NATO, enlargement, South-East Europe, security, defense policy, USA, Adriatic Charter, Croatia, Vilnius group



Mailing address: Fakultet političkih znanosti, Lepušićeva 6, HR 10000
Zagreb. *E-mail:* : igrdesic@yahoo.com

*“I also pledged my part, and I believe for NATO's part as well, that NATO's doors will not close behind its first new members. NATO should remain open to all of Europe's emerging democracies who are ready to shoulder the responsibilities of membership. No nation will be automatically excluded. No country outside NATO will have a veto.”
President W. J. Clinton, 22 October 1996.*

* Paper presented at the 46th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, 27 February - 5 March 2005, in Honolulu, USA.

“Every European nation that struggles towards democracy and free markets and a strong civic culture must be welcomed into Europe's home. All of Europe's new democracies from the Baltic to the Black Sea and all that lie between, should have the same chance for security and freedom and the same chance to join the institutions of Europe as Europe's old democracies have.” President G. W. Bush, 15 June 2001.

Introduction

This paper deals with the political process created to maintain the interest in the future enlargement of NATO – the interest of the candidate countries, of the US administration and of the NATO bureaucracies. The US-Adriatic Charter of Partnership is a successful example of cooperation among small states with common interests. The Charter created not only a positive relationship with the United States regarding the NATO open door policy, but contributed to the fruitful cooperation of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia in South-East Europe. This is a case in which institutions do matter and help structure political activities. This is the first description of this political project in a more detailed way. During the recent NATO enlargement and the creation of the Adriatic Charter process, the author served as the ambassador of Croatia to the United States and is in the position to provide some “participant’s insider” data and insights.¹

NATO Open Door Policy

It took ten years following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union for the NATO summit in Washington to take place and for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, formerly the members of the Warsaw Pact, to be invited to join the western military alliance. Along with this historic turning-point in Europe's military and security architecture the Washington Summit also proclaimed, in its final communiqué, an open door policy for future membership:

“We reaffirm today our commitment to the openness of the Alliance under Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty and in accordance with the Paragraph 8 of the Madrid Summit Declaration. We pledge that NATO will continue to welcome new members in a position to further the principles of the treaty and contribute to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area.”²

Nine candidate states are mentioned in the Washington communiqué by name in the light of their progress in implementing the necessary reforms and democratization. Also, a decision is made to introduce the Membership Action Plan in order to speed up the process of accession. This is a plan through which the allies will give advice, support and concrete help and the member states will have an instrument that can be used

¹ At the time the ambassador of Albania was Fatos Tarifa and of Macedonia Nikola Dimitrov.

² Washington Summit Communiqué, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D. C., on 24 April 1999.

as a system of structuring their reforms. The MAP has turned out to be a successful mechanism of speeding up reforms, their implementation, control and evaluation.

The open door policy has served and still serves the candidate states as a guarantee that successful political and economic reforms as well as reforms in the military sector will be rewarded by an invitation. The open door policy was strongly advocated by president George W. Bush as well as Secretary general Lord Robertson and current Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

“The expansion of NATO has fulfilled NATO's promise, and that promise now leads eastward and southward, northward and onward... I believe in NATO membership for all of Europe's democracies that seek it and are ready to share the responsibility that NATO brings.”³

This policy secured the political vision necessary for internal mobilization, while shielding the allies from committing to an automatic acceptance of new members because such a decision would need to come not only after a consensus among the allies has been reached but also after a positive review of the implementation of the MAP, through a period of several years. The MAP does not guarantee membership nor is it a list of criteria to be met. However, it is a statement of reforms – political, economic, military, defense, security, legal (as well as a decision on funding these reforms) – that a state has decided to implement. The Membership Action Plan is a practical manifestation of the open door policy. The MAP rules stipulate that any decision on an invitation to join will be made on a case-by-case basis, after reviewing the accomplishments of individual candidate states separately. Nine states accepted these conditions and began implementing the MAP.⁴ NATO did not make a separate decision on the beginning of the MAP process; the candidate countries independently declared the commencement of these activities.

The Republic of Croatia was not a member of the Partnership for Peace at the time of the NATO summit in spring 1999 and was not able to join in the MAP activities. This was a time of political instability in the light of President's Franjo Tuđman's ill health, the international isolation due to the inadequate cooperation with the ICTY, the unsolved problems of refugees and the other consequences of the war and aggression on Croatia. In the region of South-East Europe and the Balkans Croatia was still a part of the problem. Only after the elections of 3 January 2000 and the electoral victory of a coalition of, until then, opposition parties, did Croatia begin the process of closer cooperation with NATO. Croatia was admitted to the Partnership for Peace on 25 May 2000 as its 26th member.⁵ At the same time it was asked to take part in the North-Atlantic

³ President Bush speech in Warsaw, transcript, June 15th, 2001, source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/president/polandvisit>

⁴ The nine countries are: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania

⁵ General Secretary George Robertson's statement on Croatia's joining the Partnership for Peace: “Therefore, I officially invite Croatia's minister of foreign relations to Florence on May 24th and 25th in order to take part in the official signing of the document of admission to the Partnership for Peace. I will also invite him to take part in the official meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council on May 25th. By turning their

Partnership Council as well as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. The Permanent Mission of Croatia in NATO in Bruxelles opened in June 2000.

Vilnius Group: Europe Whole and Free

In Vilnius, on 19 May 2000, nine ministers of foreign affairs from the candidate countries accepted a declaration on their common efforts and cooperation for the future membership in the NATO and the EU. A year after the first NATO enlargement, the Vilnius statement was the political response to NATO's open door policy. Its fundamental messages were the creation of a whole and free Europe through two processes of integration: the EU and the NATO. The candidate countries were willing to accept the values and the standards of these integrations and also bear a part of their responsibility. Cooperation and solidarity are not opposed to the accepted principles of individual assessment of readiness for membership.⁶ The members of the Vilnius group achieved a high level political coordination regarding their common goal of membership in the transatlantic alliance despite their differences in size, economic development, geopolitical characteristics and historical experiences. Their individual assessments of national interests lead to the same conclusion on the acceptance of democratic values – personal liberties, the free market and the rule of law. This made effective political cooperation possible.

The Vilnius group concentrated the activities of promoting their national ambitions for NATO membership at the level of their ambassadors in Washington. There are several reasons for that. First, Washington is the most important place concerning the decisions on NATO enlargement. The US Senate was very reserved during the first round of enlargement. The American administration and President Clinton made a big effort along with the three candidate countries to convince the Senate that the ratification of the enlargement agreement is not only in the interest of the United States but in the interest of NATO and Europe as well. Because of this experience, the Vilnius group decided to unite their lobbying efforts in Washington and to concertedly pressure the Senate and Washington's political community, regardless of the number of countries eventually invited. This lobbying strategy proved very successful because it not only augmented the political resources of the candidates but also demonstrated a high level of union and solidarity – one of the fundamental values of NATO members. The activities of the Vilnius ambassadors from 2000 to 2002 were intensive and varied and the group managed to secure a high degree of visibility and efficiency that otherwise would have

back on nationalist rhetoric and politics Croatia has become an example to its neighbors and an inspiration to all moderate currents in the region. By promoting peace and stability in the Balkans Croatia has shown that the future of the region can be a shiny one. By sharing our values, Croatia has earned its place in the Euro-Atlantic family.”

⁶ “While each country should be considered on its own merits, we believe that the integration of each democracy will be a success for us all and the integration of all countries will be a success for Europe and NATO.” Conference “NATO's Role in the Changing Security Environment in Europe”, Vilnius, Lithuania, 18-18 May, 2000, Vilnius Statement.

been very hard to achieve through individual efforts. The end result surpassed all expectations.

Second, committed and influential ambassadors were a useful means of communication for the American administration concerning American preferences not only on the issues of NATO enlargement but on other transatlantic relations as well. By implementing the open door policy, establishing a practical alliance with the candidates, helping them with reforms and supporting them in making political decisions that were not always popular at home, the US laid a positive foundation for an alliance with the young European democracies and, perhaps, through them also to exert some influence on European relations and the EU's foreign policy. The majority of the political elite in the candidate countries as well as the domestic public opinion had a special attitude towards the US, never forgetting the US role in the collapse of the Soviet Union which paved the way for their political independence. This policy was proved useful at the outbreak of the Iraqi crisis and the American military intervention.

Also, diplomats and the NATO bureaucracy in Bruxelles considered the Vilnius group as an informal interest group of countries without any formal ties with the NATO structures. For many European NATO diplomats, the Vilnius process was an American invention and hence their refusal to accept any formal and political ties between the Vilnius group and the NATO structures. For them, the MAP and the individual approach were given priority. The idea of mass enlargement, the so called "Big Bang", which they identified with the Vilnius group, was at the time for them completely unacceptable. The candidates' estimate that Washington was the major factor in determining the time, the form and the extent of the enlargement turned out to be correct.

Croatia joined the Vilnius group activities at the end of 2000. Because the group functioned around the principles of solidarity and inclusiveness, the Croatian interest to join was received well even though Croatia by that time had not been admitted to the MAP. The influence of the embassies in Washington on the national capitals, along with the support of the US, made it possible for Croatia to be invited into the Vilnius group at the first conference of the Vilnius group prime ministers. The conference in Bratislava was held from 10-12 May 2001 under the title "Europe's New Democracies: Leadership and Responsibilities". Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Mr. Ivica Račan spoke of Croatia's strategic interests in the membership in the transatlantic alliances, emphasizing the principles of accountability, solidarity and the individual approach.⁷ The final statement of the conference congratulates Croatia on joining "the common dialogue" as an important step towards the EU and the preparation for the launch of NATO membership Action Plan. Further weight was given to this first meeting by President George W. Bush's letter. Among other things, in this letter Bush says:

*"NATO must be open to all of Europe's democracies ready and able to meet NATO's obligations and contribute to Europe's security. No part of Europe will be excluded because of history or geography."*⁸

⁷ From Prime Minister's speech "Our Shared Vision: Europe Whole and Free", made on 10n May 2001, at the Bratislava conference of the Vilnius group.

⁸ From the letter of US President G. W. Bush, 7 May 2001. Source: White House.

Croatia's delegation received special support from President Bush who, in his letter, expresses satisfaction with Croatia's intentions of further integration in the transatlantic community, stressing its devotion to the principles of democracy, the free market and peace.

NATO's doors remained open, Vilnius 9 became Vilnius 10, and Croatia became an active member of the NATO candidate club. In two years, the Vilnius group held many conferences of heads of state, ministers of foreign affairs and ministers of defense with the goal of demonstrating readiness for NATO membership, solidarity and alliance, informing the European and American political public opinion on the progress of reforms in the candidate countries and maintaining the rhythm of the process of the open door policy. The Vilnius 10 process kept the theme of NATO enlargement on the front pages not only in the candidate countries but also in Europe and the US. The spirit of cooperation and solidarity was strengthened. The attention of the American and NATO administration was kept by reinforcing themes of "who, how, when". A solid political foundation was laid down for the debate and decisions at the NATO Summit in Prague (21-23 November 2002).

Completing NATO Candidacy List – Croatia and MAP

The implementation of the Membership Action Plan also meant achieving the formal status of a candidate for NATO membership. After joining the Partnership for Peace Croatia began its international military cooperation and explored the possibility for the beginning of the MAP. NATO allies thought that Croatia was not ready for the MAP in the period between 2000 and 2002. Its membership was made conditional on the continuation of democratic reforms, the acceptance of a national security strategy and other system laws in the area of defense and security, the strengthening of those government bodies within the ministries of defense and foreign affairs that were to be involved in the matters of coordination and cooperation with NATO. At the beginning of 2002 the allies did not have a clear picture on how the second round of enlargement would proceed. Political instability in Yugoslavia (Kosovo) and Bosnia and Herzegovina was a setback for Croatia's plans because Croatia was seen as linked to this unstable region.

Croatia's speeding up of the MAP request was motivated by the expectation that the NATO summit in Prague was to be the summit of enlargement and that it would be good for Croatia to have the formal status of a candidate in Prague even if the chances of receiving an invitation for membership were very slim. The new government achieved democratic legitimacy after two years of rule and Croatia received the status of a formal candidate and the decision on the beginning of the MAP on 14 May 2002 during the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in Reykjavik. Croatia was invited to prepare its first Annual National Program. This was the first formal step towards NATO's open doors.

From September 11 to the NATO Summit in Prague

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, global security and political relations changed dramatically. American national priorities were redefined in two ways: how to increase homeland security and how to destroy the terrorist threat abroad. The dramatic change in international relations changed the domestic priorities as well. For almost all public policies, either domestic or foreign, the criteria of their success was their contribution to fighting terrorism and increasing national security. Nothing will ever be as it was. The usual debate on strategic positions and interests, on the nature of the post-Cold War relations and who the enemy might be, on the unipolar moment of power, became irrelevant. The same would soon hold for NATO, its mission, capabilities and membership.

After the terrorist attacks on the US, NATO quickly responded by activating, for the first time in history, its Article 5. The allies showed their readiness to oppose terrorism. For NATO to be successful it needs to be transformed into an effective instrument of security for the post September 11 world. The transformation of the Alliance needs to be realized simultaneously with its enlargement. The NATO summit in Prague needed to bring a new strategic vision that will be based on:

- New capacities to overcome threats, most of all in bridging the gap between the military capabilities of the US and the other members;
- New relations between NATO, Russia, Ukraine and the Partnership for Peace countries;
- New members that need to contribute to NATO's new goals, secure its role as the key security institution in the Euro-Atlantic region.

The new role of NATO in fighting global terrorism was one of the components which the American administration hoped would form the new state of global relations after September 11. Mark Grossman, Assistant Secretary of State, convincingly presented them as seven themes that shape our world: terrorism, globalization, democratization, alliances and partners, weapons of mass destruction and free markets, development and progress.⁹ The anti-terrorist coalition reinforced old alliances and created new ones. In this sense, NATO became a viable space for creating new alliances as urged by President Bush in the speech he held in Warsaw: “We should not calculate how little we can get away with, but how much we can do to expand the cause of freedom.” The Summit in Prague in 2002 already specified three goals: new capabilities, new relations and new members.

The new NATO agenda was identified and all its elements in place for a decision on a round of big enlargement. John Kingdon's interpretative model of shaping the agenda shows that all three main dimensions for policy innovation (the big enlargement deci-

⁹ Mark Grossman, “Seven Themes that Shape Our World”, speech held on 21 March 2002 for the National Newspaper Association, source: <http://www.usinfo.state.gov>

sion) were in place.¹⁰ Those dimensions are: the defined problem, the available solution and the favorable political environment with a clear political actor.

The problem that the Prague enlargement decision needed to solve was, among other things, to increase the capabilities of the NATO alliance in the fight against global terrorism. The new definition of the danger: terrorism plus the weapons of mass destruction. Although these two threats are not new, their combination and the *de facto* usage in the attacks on New York City and the Pentagon made them even more dramatic and relevant.

The available solution had already been reached: NATO's Big Bang enlargement will increase the American alliance in the fight against terrorism and at the same time consolidate the European region and move the border of stability to the east, which now becomes the space of new threats and a source of long-term insecurity.¹¹ The problem was resolved partly. The candidate countries of the Vilnius group, especially Bulgaria and Romania, used this window of opportunity and strongly supported the US during their intervention in Afghanistan, acting as *de facto* allies. In this way they demonstrated their political readiness to contribute to the fight against common enemies by offering concrete military services to the US and later NATO military forces. The possible drawbacks in military interoperability, democratic standards or similar political conditions were sat aside by clear and decisive gestures of genuine alliance. It was a chance that needed to be taken advantage of, while the reward would come in the form of an invitation to NATO membership.

The political ambience changed from the reserved to the ambitious on the theme of the big enlargement "from the Baltic to the Black Sea". The source of earlier pessimism, the US Senate, became the main advocate of the big enlargement. President Bush became the leading advocate of the big enlargement with the political concept of "Europe whole and free" by which the political argumentation was placed in a broader context of democratization and the undoing of historic wrongs. This leadership was useful especially when compared to the skeptical Europeans. The demands of the candidates, even all ten of them, could have repeatedly been rejected by the NATO diplomacy and bureaucracy on the account of the unmet MAP conditions. Bush's demand carried a different weight. Washington will once again be the place where a decision on NATO's future will be made. Washington's political institutions began a serious media and political campaign for the big enlargement. With this goal in mind, the Subcommittee on European Affairs organized on 1 May 2002 a hearing on the subject of NATO enlargement inviting the Vilnius group ambassadors to present their views and goals of the NATO enlargement. For the Vilnius countries this was the first formal chance to explain the reasons for their interest in NATO membership but also to explain their contribution to the alliance. For the three countries that would not be invited this was a chance to once again stress the importance of the enlargement, even after the Prague summit.

¹⁰ For more on shaping the policy agenda see: John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy*, Boston, Little Brown and Co, 1984.

¹¹ The same opinion is held by Zoltan Barany: NATO's Peaceful Advance, *Journal of Democracy*, January 2004, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 62-76.

In the summer of 2002 it was clear that Prague was not only the first location of a NATO Summit behind the Iron Curtain but also the place where seven new members will be invited to join. Albania, Macedonia and Croatia would not be invited to join because of their insufficient military readiness and the domestic political conditions. In case of Croatia, it was clear that only six months after joining the MAP, Croatia would not be able to meet the needed level of reforms and standards that had been achieved by countries like Slovakia. But for Croatia taking part in the Prague Summit as a country with good chances to be the first one to be invited in the next round of enlargement was a success in itself. What needed to be secured, other than a continuation of internal reforms and the successful implementation of the annual MAP programs, was a continuation of NATO's open door policy.

Croatia left for Prague with the first year of MAP already behind it, with many activities in the Partnership for Peace already launched and as an active member of the Vilnius 10 group. Realistically, the strategy of Croatia in Prague and after Prague needed to secure a leading position in the next round of enlargement, to affirm the cooperation of the three states that were not invited and to receive guarantees that the enlargement would continue. The tactic prepared for the summit was based on four main assumptions:

- Prague was not a failure for Croatia; the success of each individual state is also a success for Croatia
- We consider the procedure of choosing new members correct, based on individual accomplishments, and we expect that our capabilities will be assessed accordingly
- Not receiving an invitation will not slow down our reforms;
- Cooperation with the remaining two countries of the Vilnius group will be intensified.

In preparing for the summit, President of Croatia Stjepan Mesić published an article in the "International Herald Tribune" that among other things says:

*"The next wave of NATO enlargement will open a door for a number of European countries. We welcome this. Success for every single democracy is success for all, and extends the benefits of global security to all. It also encourages the countries whose aspirations still do not correspond with their actual performance to know that the 'open door policy' is not just rhetoric. In the new security environment, NATO enlargement is a necessity."*¹²

The final document, the Prague Summit Declaration, reaffirms the open door policy, and specifically mentions the remaining three countries as potential future members provided that reforms and democratization continue. For Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, the Prague Summit meant a new period of cooperation on the way to NATO. Mr Mesić, President of Croatia, Moisiu of Albania Trajkovski of Macedonia met with president Bush and thus symbolically demonstrated the new spirit of cooperation after Prague, not only between the three countries but with the US as well. The beginning of

¹² *International Herald Tribune*, November 21st 2002.

the process that six months later was officially known as the Adriatic Partnership began in this way at the level of heads of state.

How to Survive the Prague Enlargement?

After the unexpectedly successful enlargement onto the seven new members, Albania, Croatia and Macedonia were faced with a logical question: What now? How to secure the American and allied interest for further enlargements that may take place as far away as 2006? The question was closely linked to the future of the Vilnius group after it had fulfilled its main goal. The problem had been analyzed by the ambassadors of the three countries in Washington before Prague so that the answer to it could be shaped during the Summit. It was clear that the motives and energies of the Vilnius countries would be redirected to the questions of the ratification of NATO membership documents and other preparations for the membership. Even though all the countries declared their support for future enlargement and offered their help to the three non-admitted countries, it was realistic to expect a change in their focus, and that in due time they would completely lose interest in the matter of enlargement. In order to keep the political process alive, both by the American and the national administrations, it was necessary to adjust the experiences of the Vilnius group to the needs of the three countries and to create a political project that would be able to withstand four years of waiting and non-decision-making. The main elements of the Vilnius experience: cooperation, solidarity and individual accomplishments were the basis for the cooperation of these three countries as well.

The first initiatives at the ambassadorial level were made before the summit in Prague. Because the main lesson of the enlargement so far, other than those mentioned before, has been the decisive role of the American administration: it was necessary to secure their support and to achieve a high level of their future involvement in the process. The first talks with the White House senior director in the National Security Council and the State Department (with the Deputy Secretary of State) showed that the American side had a positive attitude towards this initiative. The American side supported the idea of cooperation between the three countries not only concerning the questions of domestic reforms and adjustments but also the other pressing issues of South East Europe. The cooperation does not have collective requirements since there are no collective decisions – all countries are assessed individually. Cooperation is a good political option for the future. The US policy will be one of support and reward. The initiative was accepted as politically justified, symbolically worthy and timely. The form of cooperation was to be chosen by the candidates and no one would force their choice. The administration accepted the initial project and the first concrete result was a meeting of the four presidents in Prague, and a promise of the continuation of the open door policy. A strategic alliance with the US will provide added motivation and energy to the countries. A special press statement of the Deputy Secretary of State further convinced Albania, Croatia and Macedonia of the sincerity of American support.¹³

¹³ “Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage today received Albanian Ambassador Tarifa, Croatian Ambassador Grdešić and Macedonian Ambassador Dimitrov to discuss the NATO summit later this month in

Some members of the Croatian foreign policy establishment were skeptical about the justification and usefulness of the cooperation with Albania and Macedonia. The difference in economic development, political stability and democratic standards seemed too large so that such cooperation would be an unnecessary burden and slow down Croatia on its road to NATO. If NATO were to accept Croatia as undoubtedly the first and the most serious candidate, this trilateral cooperation is unnecessary. In their opinion, collective arrangements always hold the danger of entry being stalled by other countries' progress. The resistance of that faction of Croatian diplomats was not strong enough to stop the launched initiative, particularly because the individual approach was one of the main criteria of the enlargements. Croatia was often criticized in the past for its insufficient regional contribution and cooperation. The political fiction that Croatia already is a West European country and that it has to isolate itself from its eastern neighbors and the Balkans made enough political damage during the nineties. The cooperation with Albania and Macedonia was a chance for Croatia to prove it was a paragon of democratic reforms and had a Euro-Atlantic orientation, and did not want to be a regional power or even a regional leader. Apart from the regional cooperation and the contribution to their security, this political process secured an alliance with the US regarding NATO membership. The initiative showed political potential and accomplished the initial, albeit symbolic, success in the meeting of the four heads of state during the Prague Summit. The alliance was symbolically presented to the public with a photo-op of the four presidents in Prague.

The Charter on Partnership

After Prague, the three states started to shape their future cooperation at various levels of administration and fields of action. In order for the cooperation of the three countries and the political partnership with the US to achieve institutional stability and structure "The US Committee on NATO", a non-governmental organization active in the field of NATO enlargement¹⁴ suggested that a charter of partnership be written and signed. The idea of such a charter was inspired by "The Charter of Partnership Among the United States of America and The Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania" which was signed by the heads of state on 16 January 1998 in Washington. It was a charter of political alliance that made the cooperation of the Baltic

Prague. The Deputy Secretary reaffirmed U.S. support for a robust round of enlargement at Prague and for NATO's door to remain open to those countries not invited at Prague. He welcomed the progress each country has made in carrying out its Membership Action Plan and urged that they continue their efforts. The Deputy Secretary reiterated U.S. Support for their aspiration to join NATO. He also welcomed their commitment to cooperate and support each others candidacies while reaffirming that each country will be evaluated on its own merits." NATO Enlargement Dialogue, Press Statement, Richard Boucher, Spokesman, Washington, DC, 1 November 2002.

¹⁴ The president of "The US Committee on NATO" was Bruce Jackson. Later, this NGO was replaced with a new one – "Project on Transitional Democracies". However, its goals were mostly the same. This organization worked on the promotion of NATO enlargement and was often used as a link between the administration and the candidate countries.

countries on the way to NATO possible, strengthened democracy, economic development and security in the region and secured the support of the US.

*“Charter of Partnership establishes the institutional framework that promotes the furtherance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, reciprocal support to the Euro-Atlantic integration and common efforts designed for the consolidation of security, prosperity and stability within the region and the Euro-Atlantic are as a whole.”*¹⁵

The cooperation of the Baltic countries as envisaged in the Charter covered a relatively broad range of themes, from political and economic issues to military and security ones. The territorial links, similar development and the common recent past made the Baltic Charter a successful political frame for their cooperation. A draft of the Charter for Albania, Croatia, Macedonia and the US was proposed in line with this successful model. The negotiations began at the level of political directors for NATO cooperation and continued in Washington at the level of ambassadors where the final agreement regarding the text of the Charter was achieved.

Since the economic differences as well as other indicators such as democratic development between the three countries are big, the Charter needed to provide the stipulations that would not be too specific but that would nevertheless be concrete enough for some real forms of cooperation to take place. Croatia's primary interest lied in firmly establishing individual assessment of a country's success and a possible invitation to join NATO. In the final round of negotiations these formulations were added to the preamble, on Croatia's demand, and with the consent of the other three countries. The American side was willing to accept anything the other three countries were able to agree upon. The main American condition was to avoid a commitment that would require the ratification by the Congress or huge funding. The document was to remain in the jurisdiction of the executive branch. This suited the other states because it avoided complications and stalling the negotiations and the signing of the Charter.

The Charter on Partnership was called the Adriatic Charter which was acceptable to Albania and Croatia since they are located on the Adriatic Sea, while Macedonia agreed on condition it was referred to as The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia but rather as Macedonia. Croatia was especially interested in calling the document Adriatic so as to emphasize the importance of the Adriatic in the process of lobbying for NATO membership. By introducing this term into the debate about the NATO enlargement it was hoped that the geostrategic importance of the Adriatic would be enhanced, and that consequently Croatia would become more important as the country that controls the north side of the Adriatic Sea. The Adriatic is also of great importance for Croatia's security, economy, culture and place in the European civilization. In this way the Adriatic Charter included all the important goals: the Adriatic dimension of the NATO enlargement in which Croatia has the dominant role and is America's strategic partner. The final text was accepted in Washington on 21 March 2003 by the ambassadors and deputy director for South East Europe. It was agreed that the signing of the Charter should be done at the level of ministers of foreign affairs.

¹⁵ From the statement of the President of Lithuania Alirgdas Brazauskas, source: <http://www.usemb.se/BalticSec/remarks>.

The US-Adriatic Charter of Partnership

The Charter, which along with the preamble has six thematic parts or 36 numbered articles, was signed in Tirana on 2 May 2003 by the ministers of foreign affairs.¹⁶

Preamble

The United States, Albania, Croatia and Macedonia (partners) solemnly declare their dedication to a common set of values of liberal democracy. Because of this they have special obligations in promoting peace and multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The enlargement of NATO is a continuation of the decisions of the Prague Summit with the goal of ensuring security and respect for all European countries and their citizens. This is why the partners commit themselves to cooperate in the fight against the new threats in the region and in the Euro-Atlantic community.

The principles of partnership

One of the main goals of the Charter is the continuation of the open door policy which is possible only with American involvement. Because of this the first paragraph concerning the principles of partnership (article 10) is very important. It speaks of the permanent interest of the US in independence, territorial integrity and security of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia as well as of the support for their integration into the community of democratic Euro-Atlantic countries. The other principles are the standard democratic principles of the rule of law, respect for human and civil rights and liberties. The partner countries in the region commit to strengthening bilateral, regional and multilateral relations among themselves as well as with their neighbors Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro.

The common goal of the full integration in Euro-Atlantic integrations

The main political goal of the Charter is stated in this chapter: the readiness for a full integration in European and transatlantic political, economic, security and defense institutions. The partners are willing to shoulder their part of the responsibility in achieving the goal of a whole and free Europe. This Europe will be established only when all the countries become members. The US welcome and support the aspirations of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia for their membership in NATO at the first opportunity. The US feel that these democracies must get their chance for full membership. Aspirants need to be invited into the alliance as soon as they meet the criteria for membership.

¹⁶ The Charter was signed by: US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Foreign Minister of Albania Ilir Meta, Foreign Minister of Macedonia Ilinka Mitreva and Foreign Minister of Croatia Tonino Picula.

Democratic reforms and human rights

In order for the candidate countries to achieve full democratic standards as soon as possible, they pledge to speed up and hasten democratic reforms, strengthen civil society and its institutions and improve the management of public administration. The US will provide financial and material help for achieving these goals. Special protection needs to be given to the rights of national and religious minorities, of women and children.

Economic reforms and cooperation

Because of the disparities in economic development between the three partners, the chapter on promoting market reforms is the shortest and most general. The partners are called on to continue building free market institutions and promoting sustainable economic growth. They are asked to cooperate in creating a positive investment climate and economic opportunities, transparent privatization processes and other government decisions and interventions in their economies. The partners pledge to strengthen their economic cooperation.

Regional security

It is expected of the NATO aspirants to act as allies and to contribute to common and regional security in the process of their candidacy. The Charter binds the countries to consult each other if their territorial integrity, independence and security are threatened. The US give full support to the partners' attempt to contribute to collective security and not only benefit from it. Due to the new circumstances, resolute efforts must be undertaken to address the issues of border safety and transnational threats such as corruption, organized crime, drug smuggling, human trafficking, illegal arms trade and other forms of trans-border crime. The partners will coordinate their activities in order to reduce the dangers of political instability in the region.

Adriatic-American relations

The signatories choose to implement a rich and dynamic Adriatic-American partnership for the 21st century. This cooperation needs to strengthen their mutual relations on behalf of all citizens and to secure the basis of their membership in transatlantic structures.

The Charter creates only one permanent working body, the Partnership Commission that is to meet twice a year in order to review the results of the cooperation and to plan new activities. The national delegations in the Partnership Commission are led by top-level officials. In the last few meetings the Partnership Commission worked at the level of ministers of foreign affairs of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia and the US Deputy Secretary of State.

The Adriatic Charter was to be signed by the ministers of foreign affairs during April 2003 in Washington. This would secure its political visibility in the national capitals. The high political level of the meeting as well as it being the first important event in the context of the NATO enlargement since the Prague Summit would warrant the media coverage and inform the American Congress and other agencies of the administration that were not directly involved in the negotiations. Signing of the Charter in Washington would bring many political and promotional benefits. After the American and allied intervention in Iraq in mid-March 2003, the foreign policy priorities of the State Department and the White House changed dramatically. The first months of the war were not a good time for the American administration to participate in such symbolic events. Because of this the signing was postponed until 2 May 2003. Secretary of State Colin Powell was on his way to the Middle East and he stopped in Albania for the signing ceremony and the meetings with his counterparts. For the US this was a useful and wise decision. The region could be given some extra weight by means of this ceremony and Albania could be rewarded for its high level of cooperation with the US as demonstrated by its decision to send troops to Iraq; also, Albania signed Article 98 of the ICC which was greatly appreciated by the US. Even though Washington would be a more acceptable location for Croatia and Macedonia, their ministers came to Tirana and the Adriatic Charter was signed.

In the speeches of the ministers of foreign affairs the main themes of the Charter were reiterated: cooperation, solidarity, mutual help on the way to the EU and NATO and strengthening security and peace in the region of South East Europe. The Charter confirmed the readiness of the US to help the candidate countries along this path and its resolve to continue the open door policy. Secretary of State Colin Powell said that the Charter “will serve as a road sign to Euro-Atlantic integrations for all three countries... it confirms the resolve of our partners to work with one another and their neighbors in order to build a region of strong democracies that is fueled by an open market economy... it underlines the importance we give to their probable full membership in NATO and other European institutions.”¹⁷ At the end of his speech Powell said:

*“With my signature in the Charter today, I am confirming that the United States will do everything possible to assist the people of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia to reach their potential and together complete their historic journey to the heart of Europe.”*¹⁸

Implementing and Evaluating the Adriatic Charter

The US-Adriatic Charter was the most important political event and the most substantial form of activity related to the NATO enlargement after the decision in Prague. The American administration welcomed and supported it. It meant big progress for the region in which NATO only recently held military operations. The State Department published a fact sheet on their internet web site concerning the Adriatic Charter that was

¹⁷ From the speech of US Secretary of State Colin Powell made at the signing ceremony. Source: <http://www.usinfo.gov>

¹⁸ Ibid.

circulated to the American embassies in Europe and served as the main source of information for the interested public.¹⁹

On the day it was signed, the Charter was welcomed by President Bush in his report to the White House Media under the title “Charter affirms U.S. commitment to further NATO enlargement”.²⁰

The Subcommittee on Europe, the Committee for International Relations of the House of Representatives of the US Congress congratulated on the signing of the Adriatic Charter with a special resolution no. 209. In his statement, Chairman of the Subcommittee Doug Bereuter said, among other things:

*“As NATO prepares to admit seven new countries next year, it is important that these three remaining candidate countries are not forgotten. NATO’s door remains open to all who are willing and able to assume the responsibilities of membership, and it is important that the Congress assert that it is the achievements of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia that will determine when their aspiration for the accession will be realized”*²¹

The public opinion in the three countries welcomed the signing of the Charter, expecting it to secure a political alliance with the US on the as of yet uncertain road to NATO. For the three countries it was a remarkable diplomatic success. The Charter and the activities that it will bring were not directed against the other countries in the region and did not violate, but rather reaffirmed their other international commitments and goals. The partnership was not directed against the candidates’ European interests. The European Union countries did not voice any objections to the special relationship that the three countries were developing with the US even though the military intervention in Iraq was already under way. The NATO administration was indifferent at first but later applauded the cooperative effort even though they would consider the Charter and all the activities that came from it as local forms of cooperation that are not part of NATO’s institutional structure. The ministers of foreign affairs of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia would meet with General Secretary De Hoop Scheffer as the Adriatic Charter countries only on 17 June 2004.

In the first year, the partners demonstrated a high level of cooperation on different political levels: meetings of ministers of foreign affairs and defense, parliamentary representatives, and other government officials. It was a time of designing concrete programs, primarily regarding the question of military exercises and trans-border security. Besides the new trilateral forms of activity, the earlier bilateral military connections

¹⁹ See: U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, 2 May 2003.

²⁰ “President Bush welcomes today’s signing of the Adriatic Charter of Partnership between the United States, Albania, Croatia and Macedonia to strengthen their individual and cooperative reform efforts as they seek NATO membership. The Charter reaffirms the signatories’ political commitment to the values and principles of the NATO alliance. The United States remains committed to NATO’s “Open Door”. U.S. support for the Adriatic Charter underscores our continued support for the shared aspirations of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia to full integration into the Euro-Atlantic community.” Source: The White House, office of the Press Secretary.

²¹ Source: <http://www.house.gov/international-relations>

were expanded into the trilateral and put in the context of the Adriatic Charter. The number of consultations and the extent of political coordination exceeded all expectations and was larger than the comparable activities by the Baltic Charter countries. After eighteen months the three states achieved the level of cooperation and coordination that made it possible to send to Afghanistan a joint medical team that would work under the ISAF. Without the Charter such allied progress would not have been possible. The political progress but also the genuine cooperation prompted the US House of Representatives to make an important recommendation on 30 March 2004 concerning the preparations for the NATO Summit in Istanbul: "That NATO heads of state and governments, meeting at Istanbul on 28 and 29 June, should agree to review the enlargement process, including the applications of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, at a summit to be held no later than 2007."²²

Because of their partnership, the Adriatic Charter countries' prime ministers were invited to participate in the ceremony of the NATO enlargement when the seven new members submitted their ratification documents in Washington on 29 March 2004. On this occasion President Bush said:

*"Forces from Albania, Croatia and Macedonia are also contributing in Afghanistan or Iraq – proving their mettle as they aspire to NATO membership. These three nations joined together under the Adriatic Charter, are building strong democracies at home that can contribute to NATO efforts abroad. The United States supports these efforts. The door to NATO will remain open until the whole of Europe is united in freedom and peace."*²³

The success of the process has attracted the interest of the neighboring countries, Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were invited to the sessions of the Partnership Commission as guests. The positive spillover effect that the Charter has had on the region is already being felt.

Before 2 May 2003 and the signing of the Adriatic Charter the cooperation of the three countries was minimal and symbolic. The Charter has opened up many political, military, security and economic possibilities. Meetings, talks and contacts of the political elites of the three countries have enabled prejudices to be overcome and the trust built. The positive outcomes of these activities were felt in the media which now informs the public on the issues concerning these three countries more often and in a more positive context than before.

Structuring Political Partnerships

The US-Adriatic Charter partners came to the NATO Summit in Istanbul expecting that their headway in carrying out reforms and cooperation would be recognized, both individually and collectively. Because Istanbul was not a summit of further enlargement the final statement could have only confirmed and welcomed the progress made. Even

²² Resolution 558. Source: <http://www.house.gov>

²³ Source: White house, <http://www.whitehouse.gov>

though some countries, like Croatia, had set their sights much higher in the preceding months, the final result of the allied meeting was positive. NATO renewed the open door policy, recognized the progress the candidate countries made through the MAP and asked the ministers of foreign affairs to monitor the progress of the aspirants and report to the next Summit about the readiness of the three candidates. The final document of the Summit says in Article 25 (out of 45):

“We celebrate the success of NATO's open door policy and reaffirm today that our seven new members will not be the last. The door to membership remains open. We welcome the progress made by Albania, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in implementing their Annual National Programmes under the Membership Action Plan and encourage them to continue pursuing the reforms necessary to progress towards NATO membership. We also commend their contribution to regional stability and cooperation. We want all three countries to succeed and will continue to assist them in their reform efforts. NATO will continue to assess each country's candidacy individually, based on the progress made towards reform goals pursued through the Membership Action Plan, which will remain the vehicle to keep the readiness of each aspirant for membership under review. We direct that NATO foreign ministers keep the enlargement process, including the implementation of the Membership Action Plan, under continual review and report to us. We will review at the next Summit progress by aspirants towards membership based on that report.”²⁴

The partners of the US-Adriatic Charter have tried in their activities to be compatible and interoperable with the main new goals of the Alliance which is itself in transition. The Charter's regional goals – to broaden their activities, to improve capabilities and to strengthen cooperation – are also the main goals of NATO after the Istanbul Summit.

This has once again shown that institutions matter. Institution building on the foundation of an international political document such as the US-Adriatic Charter has shown that even in a short time (a year and a half), an institution can structure the behavior of actors and articulate and strengthen their interests. Institutions define interests and mobilize actors even when they are less motivated for action. In the next step institutions convert these interests to decisions and the decisions that are not mere manifestations of political will result in some real action. The Charter shaped the candidates' interests and transformed them into political action. Besides, it showed that action through an institutional format influences perceptions of the environment and the future. The aspirant countries successfully used the institutional resources of the Charter both for their common interests and for their individual goals. The synergic effect of the common will has proved to be very successful. The alliance established by the Charter has secured a relatively high level of permanent motivation and activity while the impact of accident and contingent events has been minimal. Within this institution of partnership a specific political culture based on solidarity, equality and the respect of sovereignty is being developed.

²⁴ Source: <http://www.nato.int>

Considering that the goal of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia is NATO and EU membership, the Charter was the best form of working towards this goal given the circumstances in the international arena and the countries' existing capacities. Knowledge, experience and the skills of diplomatic management and institutional history that develops with this process will be priceless, not only for the fulfillment of the goals but also later with the new institutional arrangements and rules.

The Adriatic Charter partnership formed the candidate states as allies, assertive in their national ambitions but ready for solidarity. The US-Adriatic Charter became a brand for continuing the NATO enlargement. As with all brands, it brought more visibility to its owners, attracted new allies and friends, raised self-esteem and showed initiative on the market of political projects. For small and relatively weak states emerging in the region burdened with negative political metaphors and symbols, this kind of image is a dramatic improvement. This was indirectly confirmed by Secretary of State Colin Powell who said during the signing of the Charter in Tirana that now we must speak not only of the transatlantic but of the transadriatic cooperation as well.

Conclusion

If politics was only perception as is commonly said, the US-Adriatic Charter would be an instant success. But politics is also an activity directed towards changing an unwanted condition or maintaining the existing one. The Adriatic Charter policy had two parallel missions: to secure the open door policy and to contribute to the conditions for the future membership of the candidate countries. While it is still early to speak of the second goal, the first one was accomplished successfully. The NATO enlargement policy continues and the US adheres firmly to this political platform. A state's international activities have an important but limited influence on domestic politics. The commitments contained in the Charter, concerning domestic reforms and the creation of the conditions for NATO membership, managed to motivate and focus the national actors. But the achievement of the second goal, that of meeting the membership conditions and standards depends on the political will of the countries to persevere in democratic reforms.

The political project of the US-Adriatic Charter has its limited and instrumental purpose in ensuring the cooperation of the three states and the support of the US in their efforts to become NATO members. Additional effects of the Charter are a very real progress in improving the relations among the countries of South East Europe, improving the security and the positive influence on the processes of democratic consolidation. Each of these countries has a special interest in developing a strategic partnership with the US on military and security issues. The Charter has been successful on this count as well. The processes of reform and adjustment on the road to NATO have an important intrinsic meaning for building democratic institutions for all countries, including Croatia. Maintaining national sovereignty and creating a positive security ambience for the daunting reforms is the most important effect of these countries' efforts on the road to NATO. The membership in this alliance is the final confirmation of democratic legitimacy and the validation of stable democracies, free markets and dynamic civil societies.