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## NATO's Enlargement and Slovenia

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*Summary*

NATO's enlargement into Central East Europe has been a lively debated topic for almost a decade. The highly variegated opinions and positions on this question in Europe and North America have ranged from angry denunciations, solid criticisms, serious doubts, guarded support to enthusiastic accolades. These contrasting attitudes underlined the flux and uncertainties as well as the divisibility of security in the post-Cold War era.

Although Slovenia is viewed by a number of observers as a candidate in the best position to be invited by NATO at the next turn, this prospect remains uncertain. The key general problem lies in the large disparity between the desires of the remaining Central-East European candidates, including Slovenia, to join the alliance and NATO's willingness (and some members' clear unwillingness) to expand (it) further to the East and South-East. There is also a number of imponderables: the NATO-EU relations and the development of the European defense identity; the future of Russia; the international policies of the next US administration; the experience with the first Central East European round etc.

Ever since the breakdown of communist regimes in 1989-1991 the West kept dodging and politely rebuffing the ever more numerous East European pleas for EEC/EU and NATO membership. As far as admission into NATO was concerned the main argument against has been quite sound – the young East European democracies needed in the first place rapid economic and social progress and not military protection. Consequently preparation for and admission into the European Union had to come first, followed by preparation for and subsequent entry into the Western European Union. Only several years later select new EU and WEU members might become ready for joining NATO. This sequence pushed the time horizon for possible NATO expansion into the next century.

The switch from the West's initial highly reserved response, to put it mildly, to opting for an early NATO expansion did not come easily. NATO enlargement into Central-East Europe, particularly the inclusion of Poland, had been quietly advocated by the Germans already since 1992-1993. Germany's primary motivation for it has been rather simple – to cease being NATO's Eastern borderland, to cede this exposed position to Poland (and former Czechoslovakia) and thus create a political, economic and security cushion in Central-East Europe which will be integrated with in the West. The shift in NATO's attitude obviously could not happen without a prior change in the US position.

By November 1994 the Clinton administration adopted the platform of a selective and carefully managed enlargement. It is too easy to ascribe this change in heart to B. Clinton's electoral calculations, although they seem to have played an appreciable role. The inability of the West Europeans to act collectively and effectively while facing a regional security problem in Europe, to stop the war in the Balkans as well as the procrastination in integrating the East Europeans into EU have been mentioned as additional motives which led US to revise its previous position. B. Clinton's public arguments written down in his submission to US Senate could be taken as a reasonable although incomplete and only partly convincing explanation: by adding new members the Alliance will increase its military resources and strategic depth; it will thus become stronger while helping to enlarge Europe's zone of democratic stability; it will deter potential threats to Europe and erase its artificial division.

A related expectation, not only in US, has been that the East European blood would rejuvenate the alliance. Combined with NATO's internal reorganization and additional "out of area" tasks the enlargement was to avert the danger of the alliance's slow attrition and eventual withering away. Some experts favored NATO enlargement also as a way to prevent nuclear proliferation in Central-East Europe. The three invited Central European states were expected to bring into the alliance about 200,000 soldiers. This happened to roughly equal the number of soldiers USA withdrew from Europe since the end of the "Cold War". The enlargement could thus be viewed also as a compensation or partial replacement of US troops for carrying out NATO security tasks in Europe. The US Senate resolution of ratification is even more revealing. It clearly links the US interest in the enlargement with maintaining NATO as military alliance, with preventing renationalization of European military policies and with ensuring an ongoing and direct leadership role for the United States in European security affairs. Given the clear US initiative and control over the pace and scope of NATO enlargement and the new sequence of first entries (NATO → EU) the increase in the number of European NATO members did not threaten to dilute the US leading role within the alliance.

On the other hand the open opponents of the enlargement, also in the NATO-member states, have raised their objections and criticism on numerous grounds. Let me recall some of them:

- the enlargement and the strengthening of the military alliance ran counter the highly positive trend in the Euro-Atlantic area: the dissolution of the former communist bloc, drastic diminishment of the threat of a nuclear war, great reductions in the numbers of operational weapons of mass destruction, the very considerable thinning up of conventional military forces in Europe and around it, the lowering of military outlays, the strengthening of the OSCE role and of the UN's peace-keeping operations;

- the enlargement was unnecessary on military grounds, due to the absence of any realistic military threat to the present members;

- the enlargement is unlikely to improve security and stability of the new Central-East European members who also are not threatened by anyone. Moreover it might well detract them from the much more needed economic, social and political reforms. The enlargement of the European Union is much more appropriate and needed in this fundamental respect;

- the enlargement will not eliminate the artificial divisions in Europe created by the “Cold War”. It will only push the line further to the East and as a result will exacerbate the existing and engender new tensions and conflicts in the region;

- the enlargement may well have a number of other negative international effects, contrary to the declared and hoped for objectives: spoil the West's relations with Russia; throw obstacles to and derail Russia's democratic transformation; cause a strong nationalist backlash and a rebirth of Russian imperialist expansionism; stall and even reverse the progress in arms control;

- the enlargement will entail very considerable costs both for the present and for the new members, which are unnecessary and economically, socially and politically harmful;

- the enlargement might well decrease NATO's cohesion, detract attention from the need to reform it internally and adjust to the radically changed and much milder international climate.

In spite of these criticism and admonitions the US position in favor of an early NATO enlargement have been largely followed and eventually agreed to by all other governments of the alliance. Some of them however seem to have remained intimately unconvinced and unenthusiastic. The misgivings about and resigned opposition toward the project of enlargement among North American and Western European experts and influentials ran in fact deeper than the official positions of the NATO member states had indicated. The British expressed concerns about the expanded alliance's effectiveness. Germany's concerns related to Russia and to the need for close political harmonization with France conditioned her basic endorsement of the US position. Once the joint NATO – Russia document was agreed upon and signed in Paris and the Russian hurdle thus cleared the main concern for the Germans became the US-French feud over the scope of enlargement (this quarrel was caused in fact by the French attempt to wrest from the Americans the control over the NATO Southern Command and the US refusal to give in). France, Italy, Canada and the remaining Mediterranean members were said to have been in favor of a wider enlargement – not only into Central but also into South-Eastern Europe. France's pro-enlargement fervor has probably stemmed from the long-standing desire to strengthen the European (and thus the French) role and correspondingly diminish the US role in European security matters. Since the demise of the Berlusconi government the Italian pro-enlargement position tallied well with the *Ostpolitik* Italian style, directed mostly toward the Balkans.

The interplay between various – global (US), continental, regional, national – perspectives and even some tactical political objectives finally produced an internal consensus of sort. It fell between the two extreme positions – (a) the advocacy of five new members and (b) the quiet preference for none. In order to give some psychological satisfaction, mainly to the French and the Italians, the final document mentioned Romania and Slovenia (named in the English alphabetical order). They were singled out as serious candidates, to be reconsidered in 1999. The three Baltic states were also mentioned in this context but without country names stated.

Although hailed by many as a historic landmark and greeted enthusiastically by the three invited governments the Madrid enlargement decision was also met with disappointment, even anger in some quarters and with numerous criticisms. If the real objective of NATO enlargement was to improve security and stability in former Eastern Europe, as publicly claimed, then the invitations ought to have been extended to the weakest and neediest among the post-communist states in transition and not to the militarily and economically strongest and the less exposed to potential external threats. The entire configuration of the first group was also deemed as geostrategically imbalanced and inadequate given the concentration of real and potential trouble-spots in Europe. Some critics felt that NATO missed an opportunity to move the area of security and stability in the most needed direction – the Balkans.

The process of negotiating the three protocols of accession, signing and ratifying them in 19 countries lasted about a year and a half and passed with a few surprises. In almost all parliaments, including the most complicated Belgian four-chamber system, the accession protocols were approved with comfortable majorities. The parliamentary opposition – the communists, radical ecologists, extreme nationalists and (some) regionalists – proved to be too weak to block the enlargement. The most dramatic vote and the biggest excitement were produced in the Italian lower chamber. The Italian government barely survived the test – with the support of opposition parties of the right. This was due to a peculiar composition of the then ruling coalition. The critical vote in the US Senate, on the other hand, showed a majority (80 senators for and 19 against) which was stronger than conservatively estimated by the Clinton administration. Moreover all amendments to the resolution opposed by it were defeated.

Although the supporters of the Clinton Administration in US Senate succeeded in rejecting also the Warner amendment they did so with a great difficulty and with the difference of only two votes. (The Warner amendment, if adopted would have imposed a moratorium on further expansion.) However the political price for Senate's approval of the resolution was stiff. The Senate resolution contained numerous heavy obligations which the administration had to fulfill, some of them prior to the deposit of the US ratification instrument. Perhaps the most vexing among these conditions concerned the financial burden-sharing within the alliance, the effectively paid contributions by other NATO members, the certified adequacy of their national defense spending as well as the Senate's desire to see the level of US contribution to the NATO budgets reduced by one percentage point annually between 1999 and 2003. For five years after the protocols on the first round were to enter into force US President would be obliged to report annually to the Senate i.a. on the state of possible discussions concerning further expansion. Prior to extending any new invitation President will have to file a comprehensive report on each new candidate. The Senate resolution also clearly stated that US "has not consented ... or committed to invite any other country to join NATO in the future" (other than the three invited states). By doing so Senate sternly rebuffed the French interpretation of the Madrid outcome and all subsequent related speculations about the presumably implicit promises to Romania and Slovenia contained in Article 8 of the Madrid decision. The prescribed time span for obligatory reporting to Senate on NATO discussions concerning new candidates might be indicative of the *de facto* moratorium which NATO will have to observe (until 2004).

With the process of ratifications completed NATO proceeded already in mid-March 1999 to officially admitting the three new members. The celebration of this event at the Washington summit was spoiled somewhat by the bombing campaign against Serbia and by the related humanitarian disaster in Kosovo. Under these unique circumstances of a first warfare waged by the alliance a historic step was finally taken which deeply affected Eastern Europe. Looking back at the period since July 1997 one notices that practically none of the gloomy predictions advanced by the opponents of enlargement prior to the Madrid NATO summit was confirmed by subsequent events. On the contrary the expectation of expansion and the conditions put up by the alliance have visibly contributed to concluding a number of bilateral agreements on contentious issues among and involving the Central-East European countries. Since Madrid there has been no visible worsening in international political climate related to NATO enlargement, in the West's relations with Russia, in Russian-Ukrainian relations, in the position of Ukraine and the Baltic republics, in relations among the Central East European states and in their relations with the Russian Federation. The backlash in Russia was not strong enough to unseat the Yeltsin regime, economic and political reforms in Central-Eastern Europe continued, no deterioration in relations was noticed between the invited three countries and the other hopefuls. In spite of a slowdown there was no breakdown in strategic arms control negotiations. Moreover, according to new, scaled-down assessments the enlargement is deemed now a financially manageable undertaking etc.

Did then the admission of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary put to rest the political and intellectual debate on NATO enlargement into Central-East Europe? It seems to be unlikely. At the general level the enlargement was presented by the alliance as part of its deep internal transformation. The "New NATO", lighter and more mobile, is to assume some new tasks of collective and even cooperative security in contrast with its traditional collective defense role. No temporal or geographic limit of the enlargement (in Europe) was ever publicly stated. If continued the trend of expansion will bring NATO closer to OSCE both in terms of missions and membership. On the other hand, the US Senate resolution, is adamantly negative on the idea of transforming NATO away from its traditional vocation of collective defense. It is doubtful that NATO's open-ended commitment to expand in Europe could be squared up in the long run with the stated imperative to maintain NATO's cohesion and effectiveness as collective defense alliance. As a result of the first East European round of enlargement European reality has even more and not less differentiated. Since this trend is likely to continue one would expect more and not less variegated reactions to the prospect of NATO further expansion. The enlargement as a long process declared by NATO will thus in all probability remain a controversial topic on the international security agenda and a challenge to the alliance in the years to come.

Moreover the enlargement is linked to a number of other questions cardinal for NATO's future – the new strategic concept, military modernization, burden-sharing, division of responsibilities for new missions etc. These linkages will undoubtedly affect future debates on "the process of enlargement". This process of the three new members' integration into the alliance, including the necessary upgrading and adaptation of the three countries' armed forces will be costly, effort-consuming and lasting at least until 2005. A few experts doubt Poland's ability and determination to become a valuable and salient member of the alliance, given also the very high level of Polish public support

and readiness to bear increased defense spending. The Czech Republic and Hungary are in a different league – further behind the NATO targets, with a weaker public support and the governments' shakier determination to reach the targets of military modernization. The possible difficulties with the first Central European round might make NATO's decisions concerning further expansion more difficult to reach than was the case in summer 1997. These difficulties will directly affect the chances of the nine Central-East European hopefuls still waiting at NATO's gates. One of them is the Republic of Slovenia.

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According to many experts and also NATO officials an important rationale for NATO's decision to expand lied in the desire to reduce the "gray zone" of insecurity and uncertainty in Europe. Although underlying contention sounds plausible in general terms it raises some serious questions in relation, e.g., to Slovenia. On the whole, the lines separating security and insecurity areas in Europe, Mediterranean and Asia do not coincide with the division between NATO members and non-members. There have been already for decades flash-points of violence and terrorism on the territory of NATO members, such as Ulster, the Basque country, Corsica, Kurdistan etc. Actual or potential interstate conflicts have taken or might conceivably (again) take place between NATO member-states, e.g. on the Greek-Turkish border, on Cyprus or over Gibraltar. It is true that Slovenia is situated in the geographic proximity of recent armed hostilities in the Balkans. In fact, a string of trouble spots stretches from Bosnia and Kosovo across the "Eurasian Balkans", as Z. Brzezinski calls it, all the way to South-East Asia. However, Slovenia, together with a number of other European countries and like neighboring Austria, belongs to an area of stability and security. Also at the level of Slovenia's intentions there is no room for uncertainty or for treating that country as part of a "gray zone" in Europe.

Full-fledged memberships in EU, WEU and NATO have been declared Slovenia's chief international objectives almost since the proclamation of its independence on June 25, 1991. Its political elite found too little comfort in relying on the country's membership in UN and participation in OSCE alone. The then ineffectiveness of the international community in dealing in 1991-1995 even with a relatively small aggressor in the Balkans has contributed to this unease. Since 1991 the Slovenian government has abandoned ex-Yugoslavia's stance of "active non-alignment". Under the influence of the Balkan war considerable political clout of the pacifist "Greens", who advocated Slovenia's unilateral disarmament and neutrality, has practically evaporated. Due to their demise, to the lack either of a neutralist tradition, constitutional or international legal obligations in this respect Slovenia did not opt for a defense policy of armed neutralism. The Slovenian National Assembly has passed by acclamation several resolutions in favour of the country's membership in Western integrations. Among five major political parties three have for several years consistently advocated Slovenia's accession to NATO as soon as possible (LDS, SDS, SKD) while two others showed certain reservations (SLS, ZLSD). By April 1996 all major parliamentary political parties supported this position. However as long as the country remained outside the only effective regional security organization (NATO) Slovenia has had no other option but to pursue

armed self-reliance. In addition to it the Slovenian Defense Ministry signed bilateral cooperation protocols with the defense ministries of USA, UK, Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic etc. and a trilateral protocol on military cooperation with Italy and Hungary.

Having been a candidate for membership both in NATO and in the European Union Slovenia's credentials have undergone thorough examinations by a number of respectable Western institutions, by the US government, European Commission and also by 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... In the light of these considerations, the Commission recommends that negotiations for accession should be opened with Slovenia.”<sup>1</sup>

Slovenia has observed throughout also the requirement of peacefully settled disputes with neighboring states. It has also had fewer problems related to its borders and minorities than some other NATO candidates and indeed less than two NATO members. With the neighboring Hungary Slovenia signed a bilateral agreement providing for mutually favorable treatment of respective national minorities on both sides of the interstate border. The controversial issue of the real estate formerly owned and of the present right to acquire real estate by Italian citizens in Slovenia has in principle been settled through the EU-mediated “Spanish” compromise. In line with it Slovenian Parliament amended an article in the Constitution. Slovenia has also conducted a responsible and constructive foreign policy, actively supported all international efforts to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the troubled Balkans (UNPROFOR, IFOR, SFOR, SECI, Operation Alba, UNICYP, KFOR).

It is reasonable to conclude that Slovenia has been in the group of four candidates, which have earned in the West at least passing marks in fulfilling the overlapping EU criteria and NATO considerations for membership. These were the states named in the *NATO Extension Facilitation Act* (NEFA) adopted by US Congress in 1996 – Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. The US Department of State made the same selection in its official document published in 1997. Slovenia has satisfied to the highest degree also the key NATO-specific requirements elaborated in the *Study on NATO Enlargement* (1995). Having adopted a Western European pattern in civil-military relations Slovenia has reaffirmed democratic civilian rule as one of its fundamental constitutional norms. Moreover, these norms as well as human and minority rights are being observed in Slovenia more thoroughly than in, at least, one present NATO member state. It goes without saying that the desired democratic standards, including those in civil-military relations, ought to be equally applied to the present members and to the candidates for membership. The absence of double standards is essential for maintaining the coherence of NATO as an alliance of democracies. *It follows from this brief re-*

<sup>1</sup> Agenda 2000, European Commission's Opinion on Slovenia's Application for Membership of the European Union, Brussels: July 15, 1997, p. 114.

*view that Slovenia has complied with almost all, if not all publicly known requirements for NATO membership.*

In March 1994 Slovenia signed up for NATO's "Partnership for Peace" and started actively participating in its activities. The Slovenian government's keen interest in NATO membership has not been prompted by the fears of social and political instability, by internal dangers for Slovenia's democratic order, by external military threats, unresolved conflicts with neighboring states or by the desire to obtain sizeable funds and military hardware. Associating Slovenia with NATO has been viewed instead as an important aspect of the country's general political integration into the community of Western democratic states. In addition this association has been expected to produce indirect positive security and economic effects.

Since 1996 Slovenian public opinion has largely supported the government's positions on the desirability of Slovenia's membership. An USIA-commissioned survey in April 1997 showed that 56% of respondents would vote in favor if a referendum were then to be held. Other polls showed this support oscillating between 62 percent in March 1997 and 54 percent in January 1999, while the percentage of opponents has remained between 18 and 26 percent. This and other surveys placed Slovenia in 1997 behind the most enthusiastic Romania and Poland but ahead of Hungary, the Czech Republic and the rest of the candidate countries. However, like in Hungary and the Czech Republic a very considerable number of respondents still do not accept some corollaries of possible NATO membership, such as increased defense outlays, sending Slovenian troops to defend a NATO ally, allowing routine overflights by NATO aircraft and stationing NATO troops in Slovenia. The public has been most opposed to the clearly unrealistic hypothesis concerning the stationing of NATO nuclear weapons on Slovenian soil.

Thus although improved from the government's standpoint the predominant public attitudes toward Slovenia's NATO membership has been contradictory and trailing behind the much more enthusiastic positions held by the Slovenian political elite. The respondents in recent public opinion polls, conducted in April 1999, confirmed the need for armed intervention in the Kosovo crisis to the tune of 63-70 percent. The degree of public support for NATO's action was in Slovenia substantially higher than in some NATO member states, notably in Greece, the Czech Republic and Hungary. At the same time a clear majority of respondents (about 60 percent) supported the government's decision to allow the use of Slovenia's air space by the alliance (Slovenia was the first country in the region to grant this permission). The degree of support for Slovenia's membership in NATO seem to have even slightly increased compared with the pre-crisis period, contrary to the reactions in some other countries.

Slovenia's membership in NATO has been most favored by students, self-employed and retired persons, males over 61 years of age, better educated, less religious and urban dwellers. The support for the government's strong pro-NATO stance has been the lowest among peasants and unemployed. Slovenian housewives more often than males could not decide on this issue. The general support for NATO has been very appreciably interdependent with the support to Slovenia's membership in EU. Both memberships have been supported by about 40 percent of respondents and opposed by about 15 percent. The additional 13-22 percent of supporters of each option has been made up by

different groups. However in case of referenda on Slovenia's membership in either of the two integrations the percentage of positive votes cast will be probably higher than the polls have indicated heretofore. I suppose that many undecided and some opponents of the membership simply will not show up at the polling stations.

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. After a long pause in the second half of 1996, caused by parliamentary election and the formation of a new ruling coalition, it was restarted in early 1997. Since then Slovenia had appeared occasionally among the countries mentioned as credible candidates for the first round of enlargement. In July 1997 Slovenia's admission in the first round is said to have been supported by nine NATO members, including all Mediterranean member-states and Canada. Eventually the considerable efforts by Slovenian diplomacy to gain an invitation ended up unsuccessfully both at the Madrid and at the Washington NATO summits (1997, 1999).

President B. Clinton's public arguments in Madrid in favor of only three candidates, if understood as indirect disqualification of Slovenia's candidacy, remained however mostly unconvincing. They contradicted, i.a., the US Government's (Department of State) own assessment of Slovenia's candidacy prepared prior to the Madrid NATO summit. In some respects, such as firm civilian control over the military, the financial ability to pay, a low cost for NATO, public support for NATO membership etc., Slovenia should have been then ranked higher than no. 4.

The NATO deferring decision concerning Slovenia could be explained in a number of ways. One conceivable calculation in NATO might have been that by bringing Slovenia into its wings the Alliance would not make any appreciable gain in geopolitical and military terms as compared with its present assets and forward positions in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Some presumed advantages of Slovenia repeated time over again by Slovenian officials – having not been in the past a Soviet/Russian satellite and a Warsaw Pact member, the visible lack of Russian objections, Slovenia's full cooperativeness with US and NATO military forces transiting and overflying Slovenia etc. – did not materialize as impressive arguments. Moreover they turned out to be largely irrelevant when the Clinton administration accepted the key notion of the West's moral debt toward those Eastern European countries who were betrayed and left "cold in the rain" in 1939-1940, 1945, 1948, 1956 and 1968. On the basis of the notion of Western guilt the former loyal Soviet allies happened to become more desirable in NATO than the countries which did not succumb to Stalin's rule in Eastern Europe. Slovenia was among the latter. The NATO-Russian Founding Act signed in May 1997 also undercut one of the key Slovenian arguments. It was also speculated at the time that NATO wanted to leave in the waiting line a widely acceptable candidate in order to make its pledge of openness more credible.

It should be noted that following the NATO decision in Madrid there has been practically no psychological backlash among the Slovenian population. But the political opposition and critical press portrayed the Madrid outcome as a heavy defeat for the government and demanded convening an extraordinary session of the National Assembly. However the reaction of disappointment among the elite was allayed when on July 15,

1997 the European Commission recommended to include Slovenia into the first round of EU enlargement talks. This move helped the Slovenian government to easily survive the interpellation.

The Slovenian government has continued lobbying prior to the Washington summit hoping to be invited to the second East European round of NATO enlargement. Slovenia's candidacy gained some ground in 1998. In October 1998 the North Atlantic Assembly in its report *NATO in the 21st century* recommended that at the Washington summit, only she should be invited. Other presumably discussed options included four conceivable groups: Slovenia + Slovakia + Austria; Slovenia + Romania; Slovenia + Romania + Bulgaria; Slovenia + one of the Baltic republics<sup>2</sup>. In all five variations a candidate was missing comparable in strength to Poland who really pulled the first Central East European round through. Although the least controversial among Central East European candidates Slovenia could not play this role. The situation prior to the Washington summit was summarized by an American expert in the following manner: "First, digesting the first three members is likely to be difficult... Slovenia is the best qualified for admission on political and economic grounds. But it adds little to the Alliance's military capability. Romania looked like a strong candidate for a second round... but its chances have actually declined since Madrid as a result of its internal difficulties... In short there are no clear-cut candidates for a second round. All the leading candidates have some liabilities and will need time to improve their qualifications. Thus NATO should not rush into an early new round of expansion. Third, there is no consensus within the Alliance for an early second round. With the exception of France, and to a lesser extent Italy, there is no support within the Alliance for issuing new invitations... Indeed, some members, especially Britain, are strongly opposed to an early second round."<sup>3</sup>

The above-mentioned "Slovenia alone" recommendation was later supported by some well-known US figures but remained unheeded nevertheless. Thus the relative improvements in Slovenia's position proved to be insufficient for a breakthrough. The other enlargement options were discarded as well. The alliance, busy with the Kosovo crisis, was not inclined to burden further its agenda. So in April 1999 it decided to make a pause. Months before the Washington summit a silent consensus is said to have been arrived at not to invite any additional state, not to mention any particular candidate and not to fix any date for a future decision on enlargement ("no names, no dates"). The Kosovo crisis, the needs related to NATO's military operations and to the international humanitarian efforts in the Balkans led however to several modifications in this position. They affected the text of the relevant Chapter 7 in the Washington summit communique. In addition to confirming once again the principle of the alliance's openness the names of all nine candidates were stated for the first time. The pair of Romania and Slovenia was placed at the top of the pack – in the same alphabetical order as in the corresponding 1997 document. It was followed (with no alphabetical order) by the names

<sup>2</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee NATO Enlargement after the First Round, *International Spectator*, vol. XXXIV, no. 2, April-June 1999, p. 83-85.

<sup>3</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee NATO's Adaptation and Transformation: Key Challenges RAND Testimony, Washington: April 1999, pp. 7-8.

of the three Baltic states, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Macedonia and Albania. This sequence imperfectly and partly incorrectly reflected the actual standing and chances of the candidates, including the improved ratings of Slovakia, Bulgaria and Lithuania. In fact the strongest candidates would have been elsewhere – among the neutralist Sweden, Finland and Austria, should they decide to join the alliance. To sweeten the pill of deferment a new “Membership Action Plan” (MAP) was offered to those willing to sign up. Once accepted by NATO the participating candidates will have to go through a grueling preparatory course and examinations, without however a guarantee of admission. And thirdly, a review of the enlargement process was promised no later than in 2002. However the relevant formulations used in the communique contained several escape clauses which could be utilized by NATO in 2002 to postpone again the next step of enlargement or even to stop the process altogether.

In expectation of the next opportunity a number of Slovenian arguments used in 1997 remain valid:

- Slovenia conforms with the overlapping EU requirements and NATO expectations concerning successful reforms, functioning political democracy, market economy, human and minority rights, constructive international behavior and settled relations with neighbors;

- the country complies with the NATO-specific expectations concerning civilian control over the military;

- Slovenia's geographic position provides for the shortest and safest land bridge between two NATO members;

- Slovenia would be able to shoulder its membership responsibilities, including the financial ones (a reflection of Slovenia's highest GDP *per capita* in Central-Eastern Europe) and would not appreciably burden NATO resources;

- Slovenia's admission would make NATO enlargement more geopolitically balanced, would move the area of security and stability in the direction of the volatile Balkans and would serve as a positive incentive for good behavior of the Balkan aspirants for NATO and EU.

Although the geostrategic importance of Slovenia has been devalued since the breakdown of the Eastern bloc its space and resources could be still valuable for NATO. Slovenia's strategic value could rebound again if NATO in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis decides to reorient its usable military capabilities in the direction of the Balkans. Slovenia's territory could usefully serve for projecting security and possibly servicing NATO's peace-making or peace-keeping activities in the Balkans. Slovenian professional police and military personnel could valuably contribute to international policing and peace-keeping in the Balkans (including Kosovo), due to their language skills and knowledge about the region.

Although Slovenia is viewed by a number of observers as a candidate in the best position to be invited by NATO at the next turn, this prospect remains uncertain. The key general problem lies in the large disparity between the desires of the remaining Central-East European candidates, including Slovenia, to join the alliance and NATO's willing-

ness (and some members' clear unwillingness) to expand (it) further to the East and South-East. There is also a number of inponderables: the NATO-EU relations and the development of the European defense identity; the future of Russia; the international policies of the next US administration; the experience with the first Central East European round etc. All this might affect also the future of Slovenia's relations with the Western integrations. The country's smallness (and a very modest military potential) has contrasting effects on her relations with EU and NATO – facilitating the inclusion into the economic integration and serving as a disincentive for the military alliance. Consequently, at least, at present Slovenia seems to be closer to EU than to NATO membership with her status as a EU candidate comparable or better than those of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. It cannot be excluded however that Slovenia will be admitted to NATO and EU roughly simultaneously, sometime during the next decade.

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