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## Slovakia and NATO:

### *The Madrid Summit and After*

by Jeffrey Simon

#### Conclusions

- Slovakia, a former front-runner for NATO membership, will likely be excluded from NATO's first tranche because of its domestic political deficiencies.
- Three of Slovakia's five neighbors will likely be NATO members in two-to-three years.
- Despite Slovakia's national political problems, a number of positive elements which constitute a majority—the moderate political center, local/regional political leaders, entrepreneurs, the military, and university students—provide the key for Slovakia's future.
- NATO's post-Madrid Summit policy needs to direct its efforts to these groups and to make credible the "openness" of the enlargement process to keep Slovakia and others engaged.

#### Slovakia's Recent Past

Immediately after the revolutions of 1989-1990, Central Europeans announced their desire to "return to Europe." In policy terms this meant that Central Europeans wanted to join the European Union (EU) and NATO. NATO's initial response was to extend its "hand of friendship" at the London Summit in July 1990 and to establish the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) at the Rome Summit in November 1991.

As 1992 opened, not only did the former Soviet Union (and Yugoslavia) disintegrate, but after the June 1992 Czech and Slovak Federated Republic (CSFR) elections, Czech and Slovak leaders decided to conclude a "Velvet Divorce" on 1 January 1993. Despite the fact that the majority of Czechs and Slovaks in both regions opposed separation, no referendum was convened.

Since 1993, both CSFR successor states—the Czech Republic and Slovakia—have continued to pursue EU and NATO membership. After the January 1994 Brussels Summit announced Partnership For Peace (PFP), Slovakia became one of the more active of the 27 Partners in the program. In September 1995 Slovakia was briefed by NATO on *The Study on NATO Enlargement*. When the December 1995 North Atlantic Council (NAC) session invited those Partners interested in NATO membership to engage in enhanced 16+1 dialogues, Slovakia responded affirmatively—participating in three rounds of discussions during 1996—concluding that it wanted to join NATO.

At the end of 1996, 12 Partners declared their interest in seeking "immediate NATO membership." In addition to Slovakia, the group included Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic; Latvia, Lithuania,

and Estonia; Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and Albania. It is clear that in July 1997 NATO will extend invitations to less than half this number.

### **"Political Cover" For Slovakia's Failed Policy?**

During 1993-1995 most observers considered Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia front-runners for NATO membership. But as a result of domestic politics that have gone sour, since 1995 Slovakia has increasingly and effectively excluded itself from active consideration in NATO's first enlargement tranche.

The political problems that have contributed to Slovakia's exclusion from active consideration have included open political warfare between Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar and President Michal Kovac (e.g., the kidnapping of the President's son and unexplained circumstances involving Slovak Intelligence Service complicity). Meciar's efforts to alter the Constitution to expand his authority and steps to weaken the rights of the Hungarian minority also illustrate serious problems. In sum, the major stumbling block to Slovakia's candidacy to NATO arises from questions about the most fundamental criterion—the shared democratic values of respect for the rule of law and minority rights.

Slovakia's present ruling coalition (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia-HZDS headed by Meciar; Slovak National Party-SNS led by Jan Slota; and Association of Slovak Workers-ASW led by Jan Luptak) has called for a national referendum on NATO enlargement on May 23-24, 1997 which asks the Slovak population three questions:

- (1) Do you support NATO membership?
- (2) Do you support NATO stationing nuclear weapons on Slovak soil?
- (3) Do you support stationing NATO troops in Slovakia?

While U.S. Information Agency (USIA) public opinion polls conducted in February 1997 suggest that more Slovaks (53 percent) support NATO membership than in early 1996 (46 percent), they also indicate that 91 percent oppose deployment of nuclear weapons and 69 percent oppose the stationing of NATO troops in Slovakia.

While it is likely that other Partners may convene referenda on NATO membership after they are invited to begin accession negotiations, Slovakia's decision to hold a referendum before the Madrid Summit has led some observers to suggest that Meciar wants to provide "political cover" for his failure to secure Slovakia an invitation.

In addition to the referendum, Meciar has lashed out at the Czech Republic for failing to settle outstanding problems with Slovakia and promulgated conspiracy theories, an apparent attempt to provide cover for his political failings. For example, in March 1997 Meciar publicly proclaimed that in July 1996 Madeleine Albright had told him that the United States and Russia had made a decision to exclude Slovakia from the first NATO enlargement tranche. (The U.S. State Department has publicly refuted Meciar's false claim.)

In the end, such efforts will likely prove unsuccessful. If not admitted, again according to the above-noted USIA public opinion poll, most NATO supporters in Slovakia are likely to blame it on their country's failure to fulfill the requirements (64 percent) rather than on the West (24 percent).

## **Slovakia's Future Prospects**

Most Slovaks now recognize that Slovakia probably will not receive an invitation for NATO membership in July 1997. Few Slovaks voice extreme opinions regarding exclusion, such as "We'll go East if the West rejects us" or "We'll seek neutrality." The majority of Slovaks seem to take Slovakia's prospects in stride and want to ensure that Slovakia will be in the second enlargement tranche.

Slovakia differs from the other "failed suitors" in that it started out being considered in the first tranche, and has fallen out of consideration because of its own domestic politics. In contrast, if Romania or Slovenia were to fall out of first tranche consideration, it is because they started out late and have not come far enough along, and NATO can work with their respective leaders to keep them engaged. In the case of Slovakia, because it is the policies of the present ruling-coalition government that is the problem, Meciar will probably promote additional "conspiratorial" theories to provide him with political cover.

Although Meciar will not likely be as receptive to NATO proposals and programs as other "failed suitor" leaders, there are at least five groups in Slovakia that NATO needs to target in the build-up to the Madrid Summit and in its immediate aftermath. These include the following:

(1) *Slovakia's moderate political center* (Christian Democratic Movement-KDH led by Jan Carnogursky; Democratic Union-DU led by Jozef Moravcik; Slovak Social Democratic Party led by Peter Weiss; and the Hungarian Coalition led by Miklos Duray). Their efforts to create a so-called Blue Coalition that stresses the common goals rather than the particular differences of the opposition need support.

Even within the HZDS, serious differences remain evident on the question of NATO integration. In a March 19, 1997 Parliamentary resolution recommending that the population vote "yes" at the May referendum on NATO enlargement, 21 of the 63 HZDS deputies supported the resolution, 8 opposed, and the remainder abstained.

(2) *Local/regional moderate political leaders* (e.g., mayors of large towns such as Igor Presperin of Banska Bystrica and Rudolf Schuster in Kosice). They have been developing an independent power base with local/regional popular support that transcends national party appeals.

(3) *Entrepreneurs* who have acquired significant economic power and who have been dependent on the ruling HZDS. This dependency is likely to change. In time their pragmatic economic interests are likely to prevail over the present HZDS party ideology. Many see EU membership as an increasingly important outlet to advance their economic interests. In other words, pragmatism is likely to increase within the HZDS.



(4) *The Slovak military.* Although it had to start building from scratch after Slovak independence on January 1, 1993, the military has performed with distinction since May 1993 in the former Yugo-slavia and has been extremely active in PFP. After 31 months of operating an engineering battalion in Croatia under UNPROFOR, Slovakia agreed to transfer its engineering battalion to Eastern Slavonia under the UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES). Slovak military efforts need to be recognized and supported.

(5) *University students and the younger generation* who clearly represent Slovakia's future. There appears to be a serious generational divide between university-age students and the older generation politicians. In general, this generation is better informed than their elders, most speak foreign languages and have travelled abroad, and are quite cosmopolitan. They are more apt to see through the political games perpetrated by some of the national political leaders and will hold them accountable for Slovakia's international failures.

### Next Steps For NATO

The United States and NATO should encourage these five groups in their policies and efforts to help build Slovakia's future. To accomplish this, the July 1997 Madrid NATO Summit, in addition to visibly and consistently stressing the "openness" of the enlargement process, should take the following steps with NATO's likely new members, PFP, and the newly-launched Atlantic Partnership Council (APC):

(1) Assuming that the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary are likely to receive invitations at Madrid, Slovakia will find that three of its five neighbors will be NATO members (Ukraine and Austria excluded; see map). Although Slovakia's security will be enhanced, NATO's new members are likely to become consumed with accomplishing the necessary tasks for membership by 1999. Hence, their attention is likely to be distracted from neighboring Slovakia, and an ensuing sense of "isolation" might

result.

NATO should encourage invited members to maintain vigorous activities with their neighbors. For example, NATO might urge:

- Poland to include Slovakia in its combined military unit with Ukraine.
- The Czech Republic to develop deeper military cooperation with Slovakia.
- Hungary to publicly reiterate its bilateral Basic Treaty (Article 6) commitment regarding EU and NATO which confirms "their identical interests . . . and determination to assist one another in this respect."

Such activities will help to overcome the understandable sense of isolation that will arise in Slovakia from omission at Madrid.

(2) To ensure the credibility of the "openness" of enlargement process, an enhanced PFP needs to be demonstrably visible in Slovakia. Slovakia, a young nation, needs numerous visible manifestations of PFP support to bolster the Defense Ministry and General Staff who want PFP to continue after exclusion at Madrid.

To accomplish this objective the Madrid Summit should announce:

- continuation of enhanced (16+1) dialogues with Slovakia and other "failed suitors" who still seek membership;
- NATO's and its members' commitment to allocate resources for continued enhanced PFP activities specifically for Slovakia and those "failed suitors" still seeking NATO membership; and
- that Slovakia's peacekeeping training facility might be used as a site for partner peacekeeping activities. This could be in conjunction with a "visible" PFP peacekeeping exercise held in Slovakia.

(3) To ensure Slovakia's (and other "failed suitors") continued political integration with the Alliance, much work on the Atlantic Partnership Council (APC) needs to be achieved before and after Madrid.

- The APC's structures and functions need to be clearly defined by the time of the Madrid Summit, to make evident NATO's commitment to Slovakia. This should include a commitment to have the APC meet in consultation periodically (perhaps monthly) with the NAC.
- After a high-level heads-of-state inauguration of the APC, agendas for periodic APC meetings at the level of defense and foreign ministers need to be established and developed. Concrete agendas are necessary to visibly demonstrate NATO's commitment to deepen political relationships with "failed suitors."

#### Recommendations

- Though new NATO members are likely to be distracted by the demands and requirements of integration, NATO needs to encourage all new members to maintain vigorous activities with their neighbors.
- To ensure the credibility of the "openness" of the enlargement process, 16 + 1 dialogues should continue and an enhanced PFP for "failed suitors" needs committed resources.
- The APC, to be politically successful, needs to be well formulated before the Madrid Summit and visibly and actively developed in the Summit's immediate aftermath.

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