

**STRATEGY
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**THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AND THE EXPANSION PROCESS OF THE NORTH
ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION**

BY

Colonel Mikulas Regula
Army of the Slovak Republic

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ABSTRACT

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PREFACE

The Slovak Republic is a democratic state based on the rule of law with interest in peaceful and lasting cooperation with all nations. With a view to the degree of its readiness, becoming a member of the Alliance in the shortest time possible is the strategic foreign and security policy priority of Slovakia, as it has been expressed in the Program Declaration of the Government.

NATO membership fully corresponds with the national interest of Slovakia. This orientation stems from a thorough evaluation of political developments in Europe after the end of the Cold War. The last decade of this century has shown clearly that NATO still is, and will remain in the future, the most important pillar of the European Security Architecture. Sharing with the Alliance common values such as democracy, respect for human and civil rights, market economy, rule of law, security, and freedom, the Slovak Republic considers NATO membership as the only option and the only way of accomplishing her foreign security goals. The principles, upon which the Alliance is based on and ready to defend, have lost neither their value nor their validity. To live in peace with all the nations, to defend peace, democracy, and freedom, to respect the rule of law, these are the very principles and values that bring NATO and the Slovak Republic together.

THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AND EXPANSION PROCESS OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ORGANIZATION

Security in Europe involves not just military, but also political, economic and, above all, humanitarian factors. We look forward to a Europe undivided, in which people of all of states can freely receive ideas and information; enjoy their fundamental rights; and determine their own future.

NATO Heads of States and Government.

INTRODUCTION.

Since 1989, profound political changes have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe which have radically improved the security environment in which the North Atlantic Alliance seeks to achieve its objectives. The USSR's former satellites have fully recovered their sovereignty. All the countries that were formerly adversaries of NATO have dismantled the Warsaw Pact and rejected ideological hostility to the West. They have begun to implement policies aimed at achieving pluralistic democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and market economies. The political division of Europe that was the source of the military confrontation of the Cold War period has been overcome.

NATO membership fully corresponds with the national interest of Slovakia¹. This orientation stems from a thorough evaluation of political developments in Europe after the end of the Cold War. The last decade of this century has shown clearly that NATO still is, and will remain in the future, the most important pillar of the European Security Architecture. Sharing with the Alliance common values such as democracy, the respect for human and civil rights, market economy, rule of law, security, and freedom, the Slovak Republic considers NATO membership as the only option and the only way of accomplishing her foreign security goals. The principles, upon which the Alliance is based and ready to defend, have lost neither their value nor their validity. To live in peace with all nations, to defend peace, democracy, and freedom, to respect the rule of law, these are the very principles and values that bring NATO and the Slovak Republic together.

RATIONALE AND PROCESS FOR NATO ENLARGEMENT.

After democratic changes in Central and Eastern Europe and the end of Soviet influence, the Cold War has melted away, and so has NATO's primary mission- to deter and defend against an attack on

Western Europe by the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact². NATO has therefore changed its mission. The process of adaptation began in 1990, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall³. In July 1990, NATO's London Summit Declaration set out new goals for the Alliance, called for changes in its strategy and military structure and declared that the alliance no longer considered Russia an adversary⁴. Those efforts were reaffirmed by the Alliance's declaration in Copenhagen in June 1991, which stated that NATO's objective was "to help create a Europe whole and free". At Nato's Rome Summit in November 1991, the Alliance adopted a New Strategic Concept, which reaffirmed the continuing importance of collective defence while also orienting NATO toward new security challenges, such as out-of-area missions, crisis management and peacekeeping operations⁵. At the same Summit, NATO created the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC) to provide an institutional framework for political and security co-operation between NATO and the former communist states⁶. Since then, NATO has taken further steps to advance adaptation. At its January 1994 Summit in Brussels, the Alliance made three important decisions⁷.

First, it launched the Partnership for Peace Program to enable intensive political and military-to-military co-operation with Europe's new democracies as well as other states such as former neutrals⁸. The Partnership for Peace Program proved to be an important and effective program for these states and for the Alliance. Forty-five nations have joined the Partnership for Peace Program, including the Slovak Republic; a Partnership Co ordination Cell has been established at Mons, Belgium (the location of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe)⁹. The program is proving its worth in Bosnia, where thirteen Partnership for Peace partner states are making substantial contributions to NATO-led peacekeeping operations in the Balkans¹⁰.

The second initiative launched in Brussels in 1994 was the concept of Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF)¹¹. This concept will enable NATO forces and military assets to be employed in a more flexible manner to deal with regional conflicts, crisis management and peacekeeping operations. It also will permit NATO assets to be made available to support military operations by the European members of the Alliance under the auspices of the Western European Union¹². The Berlin meeting of the North Atlantic Council in June 1996 took the Brussels Summit initiative a decisive step further towards the implementation of measures to adapt the Alliance to the changed circumstances and particularly with regard to the Alliance's internal adaptation¹³.

The third element of NATO adaptation embraced in Brussels in 1994 was opening the doors to admit new members to the Alliance¹⁴. Nato's leaders stated that the Washington Treaty remained open to membership for other European states in a position to further the principles of the Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area and that they expected and welcomed the new membership of democratic states to NATO's east. The Alliance further advanced that goal by commissioning a study, published in September 1995, which set out the Alliance's rationale and process for enlarging its membership¹⁵. Among other conclusions, that study and subsequent NATO efforts have reaffirmed that:

- NATO remains a defensive Alliance whose fundamental purpose is to preserve peace in the Euro-Atlantic area and provide security for its members.
- The purpose of enlargement is to integrate more countries into the existing community of values and institutions, thereby enhancing stability and security for all countries in the Euro-Atlantic region.
- New NATO allies would be full members of the Alliance, with rights and responsibilities equal to those of existing allies.
- The process of considering and admitting new members would be steady and transparent in order to build confidence in the broader European region and beyond.
- No Partnership for Peace State would be automatically precluded from consideration for membership, and the Alliance intends to keep its door open to new members in the future.
- The peacetime stationing of forces on the territory of the new states is neither a condition of membership nor is it foreclosed as an option. All Allies must be prepared in principle to deploy their forces outside their territory in the treaty area as a part of their contribution to collective defence.
- While new members will enjoy NATO's full security guarantees, NATO countries have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.¹⁶

Based on these principles, in December 1995 the Alliance decided to begin a series of year-long intensive dialogues with individual countries, focusing on those that had expressed an interest to join NATO. Eleven countries ultimately expressed an interest for such dialogues: Albania, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Macedonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia¹⁷. In December 1996, NATO ministers agreed to convene a summit for NATO heads of state on July 8-9, 1997, in Madrid, where a resolution that Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland would join NATO in April 1999, was accepted¹⁸.

At the Washington Summit on 25 April 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO at the fiftieth anniversary of NATO and it was declared¹⁹:

*"NATO leaders decided to pause expansion for the foreseeable future. Instead, they issued a Membership Action Plan (MAP), which is designed to reinforce that firm commitment to further indent enlargement. However the MAP provides no timeframe for NATO membership nor a guarantee for eventual membership for Eastern Europe. The MAP consist of a program of activities designed to assist aspiring countries in their preparation for possible future membership"*²⁰.

If the Slovak Republic is not going to be included into NATO, a curious situation will be created in Central Europe: Austria is neutral, and Hungary, a new member of NATO, is cut off from the rest of NATO. It would give the Alliance some geographical incoherence. Is there a compromise solution? My suggestion now is, after the election and establishment of the new government, which is suitable for Western Europe and the USA, the Slovak Republic should be invited to join NATO after the first wave.

SECURITY SITUATION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AFTER THE NATO SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON.

Before discussing the security situation, it would be useful to briefly review the history of the Central European region, since in attempting to understand the security policy of the Slovak Republic one must take into account the historical fate of nations living in this region:

a) Central Europe has always been an area of conflict of European Powers and literally a "winning prize" for the winner. It has always been more an "object" than a "subject" of World policy. Therefore there is strong resistance from Central European countries to the possibility that Central Europe should become a quasi "buffer zone" and a region of lower security.

b) Another characteristic feature in the development of these countries was that they had a two-fold peripheral status, which meant that these countries belonged neither to the West nor, in fact, to East Europe. It is a region that developed in the middle of two different developmental dynamics: the dynamism of the West and the static tranquillity of the East. That's why the Slovak Republic sees its historical role in becoming an integral part of democratic Western Europe²¹.

c) Today the specific development of Central Europe has a new character: On the one hand, these countries are exposed to a strong magnetic power from West-European integrating structures. On the other hand, there is also a strong influence of the processes that are in progress in the East and which also have their inertia and their own logic. We could call this logic the logic of disintegration. Even though each of these antagonistic processes has its own reasons and consequences, in this region these represent a single historical process and are mutually interrelated. It is especially the inhabitants of this region who most realize this fact since it affects their every day life. Therefore one can easily understand why they seek the shortest way towards the main objective of integrating processes: **security and prosperity**.

We regard the following factors as being critical for the present development of this region:

- a) commonality and interrelation of national interests and strategic objectives of the countries in this region,
- b) high degree of commitment in the course and results of the integration process in Europe,

- c) adaptation of existing defense and security structures and gradual development of a single European security system,
- d) continuing and broadening the processes of militarization and demilitarization control.

The Slovak Republic bases its presumption on the fact that the Central European countries in the transition process, mainly the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic create a single **geopolitical integrity** which is interrelated not only with common historical experiences, but also with cultural proximity and a comparable situation in transitory economic and living standards of its citizens²². We may say that these countries have a certain collective awareness in their ambitions to become members of West European and Transatlantic structures.

While up to the NATO summit in Madrid in July the evaluation of the security situation was common for all transition countries of Central Europe, after the summit positions among them have substantially changed. Different approaches applied for membership regarding not only the time aspect of extending NATO but also the parameters of this process. The right of Slovakia to apply for membership in NATO was not denied by these parameters, however it creates some complications for the country to reach its strategic objectives also in the security area.

Even though the selective expansion of NATO in the form being implemented without the Slovak Republic does not mean full widespread security stabilization of Central European region, we do not regard it as a **deterioration** of the security position of the Slovak Republic. This is based on the grounds that:

- expansion of NATO in its nature represents the process of transferring stability at least to some part of Central Europe,
- it concerns the inclusion of three neighboring states into the Alliance - which the Slovak Republic also seeks to join,
- by accepting the common values and consensus principle within the Alliance we might eliminate or effectively dampen possible unfavorable developments in relations between individual countries.

However, the Slovak Republic has some concerns about possibly lagging behind, and respectively weakening its connections with invited countries at least until the acceptance of the Slovak Republic into the Alliance. The reason for this might be concentration of these countries on developing a new level of contacts between them and NATO with the goal of strengthening mutual coordination and cooperation and to fulfil conditions for the integration. This is in spite of their proclamations for the need of having contacts with those countries which did not succeed in the first wave of expansion and in spite of the efforts of the Slovak Republic to maintain the required level of coordination and cooperation with them.

That is the reason why the Slovak Republic gives such importance to the continuation of cooperation with these countries and is highly interested in using the potential that has been created in the previous period by co-operation within the Visegrad Group. In the process of preparation and meeting the parameters for NATO membership, the Slovak Republic will strive to keep up with these three countries²³.

THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AND EXPANSION PROCESS OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE.

The Slovak Republic welcomes the decisions taken by Heads of State and Government at their Summit Meeting in Washington, which represents a landmark in the history of NATO. The Government of the Slovak Republic highly appreciates especially the reconfirmation of the NATO open door policy. We believe that a Summit in 2002, that will evaluate further NATO enlargement, will come to conclusions favorable to Slovak aspirations. The cooperation and work already undertaken within the Membership Action Plan (MAP) framework is neither an automatic ticket to NATO, nor the only precondition of entry. Slovakia also relies on the results achieved in the cooperation with NATO within the framework of EAPC, PfP and Individual Intensified Dialogue.

Today, the Slovak Republic is not involved in any international dispute that could result in an open conflict. Through its activities within international organizations such as the UN (United Nations), OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), CEI (Central European Initiative), and CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement), Slovakia already contributes to the promotion and strengthening of those principles and values shared by all the Allies.

Even though Slovakia is not a NATO member *de jure* yet, it will, however, act as a NATO member *de facto*. Results already achieved confirm that the choice of aims and procedures of military cooperation with the Alliance was right, as well as in line with the strategic foreign and security policy goals of Slovakia. The Slovak Republic has already proved that both its capacity to contribute to the security and stability of Europe, as well as its ability to act in accordance with the goals and principles of NATO continues to grow. Slovakia has supported the preparation of the IFOR mission, contributes military units to SFOR, AFOR and KFOR, and has taken an active part in UN peacekeeping missions²⁴. During the crisis in Kosovo and the NATO air campaign against Former Republic of Yugoslavia, Slovakia adopted a fully supportive attitude with its future Allies²⁵.

The Government of the Slovak Republic is watching with great interest the discussion on the consequences of the Alliance expansion, which is going on not only in Europe but also in the USA²⁶. This discussion started at the moment when the very idea of expansion was expressed, culminated during

preparation of the July NATO summit in Madrid, and continues even today. The basic question of this discussion is whether expanding NATO will increase or decrease security in Europe and in its regions.

The Slovak Republic has always understood that the expansion of the Alliance cannot be judged only with regard to our effort to become a member of the West-European and Transatlantic structures and to obtain security guarantees, but also that this process has to be judged in **the wider context**. First of all, the expansion should be regarded as an important feature in the process of building the new **European security architecture**. And secondly, it should be regarded as a fundamental step in a wider strategy of changes performed within the Alliance itself with the goal to achieve the ability to respond to security challenges in the period after the end of the Cold War.

Basically, in our opinion, four basic tasks are to be solved:

- a) **Create a free and united Europe** – by opening NATO and the European Union towards the East – and in parallel to develop new cooperative relations with Russia;
- b) **Carry out the structural reform of the Alliance**, together with the strategic opening towards the East and the South;
- c) **Transform Europe into a real political union**, which may become a credible and competent partner for the United States in the political, economic and strategic sense.
- d) **Increase and enhance operability of Europe**, which is a precondition for continuing American participation in Europe.

It is obvious that each of these tasks is very complicated on its own. An even more difficult imperative of this time is to deal with all four issues in mutual interaction at the same time, and not to permit a new division of Europe. Therefore, the important condition is **to unite the whole of Europe** in this effort. An important place within this process is especially related to the role of Russia. The process of negotiation on the Founding Act between NATO and the Russian Federation confirmed that NATO respects the role played by Russia as a very important element in the new European security architecture, and that NATO regards Russia as its potential partner. However, on the other hand, despite its strong verbal disapproval of NATO expansion, the Russian Federation could not hinder NATO from starting the expansion process²⁷. This confirms the fact that it is the USA and NATO who determine the basic dynamics and direction of development within the midterm horizon.

The Slovak Republic is convinced that Euroatlantic cooperation within NATO continues to be the greatest support of its security. The further existence of NATO which links North America and Europe as the two greatest political, economic and military centers of the world into a single effective whole, is therefore the basic objective condition for security of individual member states of the Alliance. Without

NATO there would be the risk that Europe could return back to a balance of power system possibly threatening the whole integration process. Powerful nations would again exercise their national interests at the expense of small nations, with enormous consequences for small European countries.

Development of a European security and defense identity within the Alliance that represents a shaping of Europe's ability to act strategically is also regarded as being an important part of the NATO expansion process. We regard as very important the implementation of the "Combined Joint Task Forces" (CJTF) concept that will facilitate the possible participation of non- NATO members in operations under the command of the Western European Union. That will in turn towards development of a European security and defense identity.

The Slovak Republic welcomes the moves in the institutional base of the relations between the Western European Union and the European Union as well as between the Western European Union and NATO. These moves help to clear and to strengthen the position of the WEU within the European security structure, but at the same time they provide an opportunity to resolve specific questions related to the operational capabilities of the WEU and to the improvement of European Crisis Management. We regard as very important the adoption of practical provisions concerning participation of associated members in Petersburg operations, which brought closer the possibility for Partner countries to be involved in WEU operations.

This goal -centered gradual development confirms our belief that the Alliance is capable of managing all complex tasks of building the European security architecture.

The Alliance has always had enough power to change itself and to adjust to the new conditions:

- it created the new strategy and new structure of its military forces;
- it changed its relations with former adversaries from the Warsaw Pact in Central and Eastern Europe and put it on a completely new basis;
- it established close contacts with other European security organizations and took over the UN role in preserving peace.

We regard its approach to the solution of problems as being gradual and pragmatic, respecting real conditions, with the use of the consensus principle of all member states. The significant precondition is also the ability to overcome different interests, different sensitivities of member states to particular problems, and sometimes even national pride and prejudices.

INTEGRATION INTO NATO AND EU AS A BASIS OF THE SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY CONCEPT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC.

At the beginning of this section I would like to emphasize that despite the exclusion of the Slovak Republic from the first wave of expansion, the fundamental characteristics of its interests have not been changed. On their basis, the optimum variant for gaining the necessary security guarantees defined the objective - the achievement of full- fledged membership in the North Atlantic Alliance.

Development in Slovakia, confirmed by last year's parliamentary elections, and the building of a functioning democratic system prove that the Slovak Republic is able to uphold and defend the principles of the Washington Treaty and contribute to peace and security in Euro-Atlantic area.²⁸

It is absolutely true that the security of the Slovak Republic - which has only limited human and other resources - built solely on the basis of national defense without the possibility of using the benefits of collective defense can never be fully guaranteed. We regard both of them as important, the Alliance mechanism and the cooperation mechanism, to guarantee our security. However, we believe that our integration into NATO is the most reliable way to guarantee our security on the basis of utilization of our limited national resources in the most effective way.

Our conclusions derive from the fact that no European country is excluded in advance from possible membership in the Alliance and that the process shall continue after the first wave²⁹.

The Slovak Republic will seek to take every appropriate occasion to be included among the countries with which the accession talks will be conducted. It will carry on with intensive dialogues started in 1996 and will take opportunities provided by the EAPC and Enhanced Partnership for Peace.

By becoming a member of NATO, Slovakia is ready to assume all obligations and commitments resulting from the Washington Treaty, including the political-military and legal requirements of the Alliance.

Equally, the measures which create the preconditions for transition from national to collective defense will remain as the basic contents of the transformation process of the Army of the Slovak Republic. To pursue this difficult and complicated process the Army of the Slovak Republic has already spent considerable financial means. The process covers the following:

- development of conceptual and normative documents on security and defense elaborated in a way that they become compatible with similar documents of NATO member states ;
- creation of the preconditions for transformation of the national defense planning system;

- gradual harmonization of the organizational structure, command and control system of the Army of the Slovak Republic with the standards of NATO Forces³⁰.

Our vision on how to achieve the final integration objective rests in our ability to participate in the collective defense and is divided into three phases:

- reaching the minimum level of interoperability level through assigned forces of the Army of the SR by the end of the year 2000;
- reaching advanced interoperability level of the Army of the SR in the period prior to making decision on integration of the Slovak Republic into NATO and forming the basic ability militarily to contribute to the collective defense of NATO;
- reaching full ability of the Slovak Republic and its Army to participate in the collective defense of NATO by the year 2010³¹.

At present we focus our attention on the solution of problems associated with:

- differences in the ability of individual elements of the Ministry of Defense of the SR and the General Staff of the Army of the SR to communicate effectively with NATO, to develop contacts and create the required information base necessary for dealing with issues linked to development and interoperability of the Army of the SR;
- insufficient expert and language readiness;
- current requirements for human resources adaptation

The Slovak Republic remains fully committed to the Partnership for Peace Program (PFP), which is regarded as a permanent part in formation of its cooperative security in the Euro-Atlantic region as well as an effective tool for improving its interoperability with NATO Forces and for possible integration into the collective defense of the Alliance. We seek to reach the results comparable to other Partner countries. In our Presentation Document we took a commitment to assign at least 1% from our annual defense expenditures. In 2000, we plan to set out 674 mil. SK (app. US\$ 20 mil.) for interoperability and compatibility of the Army of the SR, which represents 4,6% of the Defense budget³².

We believe that the development of military co-operation with NATO in the future will require:

- more effective utilization of the EAPC mechanism for consultations on political approaches and on the scope of future operations under NATO command;
- enhancing programmatic character of military cooperation;
- participating in creation of the Partnership for Peace staff elements;

- full preparation of units and staff officers at individual levels of command structure of the Army of the SR for joint operations of assigned forces with NATO Forces.

The Slovak Republic has assigned the following forces and means for deployment in multinational peace support operations under NATO command:

- **rapid deployment battalion** - able to perform tasks as a single unit or in its components, with possibility of their rotation, under 1 month readiness.
- **two flights of MiG – 29 aircraft** with the strength of eight MiG – 29 fighters equipped with navigation and communication systems compatible with NATO, with a deployment readiness within 14 days³³.

To gradually reach interoperability of the above-mentioned forces the Slovak Republic adopted within the frame of the Planning and Review Process (PARP) 12 recommended interoperability objectives. The Army of the SR has completed 10 of them so far. On the basis of NATO invitation, the Slovak Republic took part in the second PARP cycle by accepting another 30 interoperability objectives. The best results were reached in air traffic control, communication systems and topographic service³⁴.

The practical culmination of military cooperation was our participation in joint PFP exercises. Since 1994, the members of the Army of the SR have participated in 31 command - post and field exercises.

Since 1995, the Slovak Republic has hosted each year two Partnership for Peace exercise. This year, the members of the Army of the SR will participate in 12 exercises³⁵.

The Slovak Republic continues to recognize that the fundamental part of the security policy of each country consists of the country's ability to affect actively the external environment in which decisions on defense and ways of achieving national interests are taken. Here belongs not only the ability to detect the risks in time but also the ability to react adequately to those risks. The threat of aggression and every breaking of international law are considered as being the worst evil which has to be opposed not only by an active foreign policy, but also by active participation of the Army of the Slovak Republic in the missions of the international community with the objective to prevent these conflicts and to soften their consequences or to help to resolve them. This active participation positively affects also the transformation process in the Army of the Slovak Republic as such.

Therefore, the Army of the SR will continue to participate in peace initiatives of the international community. The Participation of the Slovak military engineer unit in UNPROFOR and UNTAES missions proved our approach to interoperability and compatibility and it set the direction for the practical application of requirements for staff procedures and expert and language training of staff officers.

Currently we participate with a company from the Rapid Deployment Battalion in UNDOF peace mission in the Golan Heights within an Austrian Army battalion. We also participate in the third phase of the SFOR mission with eight officers³⁶.

By the time the Slovak Republic becomes accepted into the security structures our defense policy will continue to be based on the necessity to further guarantee our security on an **individual basis**, in combination with the system of bilateral agreements signed with neighboring countries and continuously improving the system of co-operative security within the OSCE, the EAPC and Enhanced Partnership for Peace Program.

At the regional level the Slovak Republic will further concentrate on the Central European area that is in a narrower sense represented by a group of four countries – the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and the Slovak Republic. They gained their experience during their past co-operation as the Visegrad Group. There is a visible need to take advantage of the results gained in the course of our mutual political, economic and military co-operation that create conditions for optimal use of the resources and experience mainly in connection with preparations of these nations for joining the European structures in the future.

In this regard, the CENCOOP project (Central European Countries for Peacekeeping Cooperation) may be of great importance at the regional level. The project consists of participation of six Central European countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland. The basic idea of the Project stems from the limited capacities of smaller countries for participation in peace support operations with contingents smaller than the battalion, mainly in long-term deployments. A joint brigade of peacekeeping forces to support UN activities should represent the highest level of the co-operation³⁷.

At the **bilateral level** the Slovak Republic will continue to pay permanent attention to its neighboring countries with respect to generally accepted rules of mutual respect and in accordance with its own international legal obligations in the field of peace and security enhancement in Europe. Besides co-operation with the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary we concentrate on the development of relations with **the Austrian Republic** and we are also interested in the further strengthening of Ukraine as a sovereign and internally stable country and its participation in the existing regional, integration and security structures³⁸.

At the bilateral level the deepening of relations with the member countries of NATO and EU, is a priority interest, i.e. by our orientation to European and Transatlantic political, security and economic structures. The Armed Forces of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the United States are the most active partners

of the Army of the Slovak Republic. The dynamics that we reached in developing our mutual co-operation forms a solid basis for the development of medium-term programs for cooperation in the future.

When stating these objectives and the results of our integration activities we are fully aware, that the relations between the Slovak Republic and NATO will effect, on the one hand, the unchanged strategic objective of our security and defense policy to become a full member in the Transatlantic and Western European integration formations, and the adaptation process of the Alliance, but especially the development of opinions on the state of readiness of the Slovak Republic to become a member of NATO.

CONCLUSION.

The threats of the Cold War belong to the past, but achieving the goal of a stable and secure Europe will be neither quick nor easy. We know from history that Central and Eastern Europe fermented dissension and war. Today we are witnessing great strides in reform and progress. Vigilance, solidarity, and functioning European security structures, however, remain necessary if we want to strengthen stability in the new Europe. I say "we" because each and every European nation must participate in keeping Europe secure and stable.

The transformations that we are currently witnessing are evidence of the rapprochement of many parts of Europe. This coming together in turn is providing a positive foundation for future European policy. Under these new conditions, Europe will be better able to work toward global cooperation and dynamic global interdependence. This is why European countries must continue to engage in fundamental democratic development.

The Slovak Republic as a part of the North Atlantic area is fully aware of its share of responsibility for maintaining the peace and stability in Europe and is ready to contribute to their preservation. Although the collective defense - the key function of NATO - is in our view the only way of guaranteeing the security of the Slovak Republic, we fully support new non-Article 5 crisis response operations that are an inevitable answer to new security challenges and risks. The participation of Slovakia in the NATO Integrated Military Structure and collective Defense Plan, the assignment of its forces and resources to the Article 5 operations, as well as to other missions carried out in accordance with the new Strategic Concept will tangibly contribute to the strengthening of defense capabilities and effectiveness of the Alliance.

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