

Security Perception and Security Policy in Slovenia: The Role of NATO and EU Membership

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Introduction

The Slovenian view on NATO and EU as security providers was initially formed during the process of gaining independence (1990–1991). Slovenia as a part of former Yugoslavia strongly supported pro-European politics and Yugoslavia's possible steps towards participation in the EEC (European Economic Community). As the centralist Yugoslavian authorities turned away from the Europeanisation processes, the Slovenian public was disappointed and saw its EU aspirations as a dividing point in relation to the rest of Yugoslavia. When the Yugoslav military units rolled through Slovenia (in June 1991), it was the EEC that urged Yugoslavia's government towards a political and peaceful solution. After the Brioni Declaration (sponsored by the EEC) was signed (July 1991), the EEC formed its first ever peace observation mission, deployed in Slovenia, and later on in Croatia. In all of the struggle (political, diplomatic and military) for national sovereignty and independence, there was no action from the NATO's side.

The invisibility of NATO resulted in public opinion, which initially believed that Slovenia should stick to self-defence and relied on the EU for protection instead of NATO. When the PfP Programme was established, the Slovenian political elite expressed a desire to join it. After 1994, the rapprochement processes to the EU and NATO paralleled each other, but there was a significant difference in the political and public acceptance of Slovenia's membership in them. In the public debate before joining the two organisations, there were nearly no negative or critical positions regarding joining the EU, and a plethora of scepticism, which will be explained later on in this chapter, regarding membership in NATO. The latter went so far that a referendum was called, in order to gauge the people's feelings on joining NATO. It was organised on the same day as the EU membership referendum. Political elites all along presented the necessity to enter both organisations and somehow made the public believe that a possible negative outcome of the referendum for either organisation would affect the approaching process for the other. Over 89% of the voters selected for Slovenia to join the EU, while about 66.03% voted for its membership in NATO.

As regards the public support of the EU's security and defence endeavour, the public opinion survey data shows that over the years more than 70% of the Slovenians know nothing or very little about common security and defence policy as well as the EU's CSDP missions. It seems that Slovenians show higher support for the EU because they perceive it as less "military". As we speak, Slovenia is starting with the military investments as part

of the PESCO program and it will be interesting to observe whether those investments will receive less criticism compared to the NATO capability projects.

The division in public acceptance of the two organisations presents a significant challenge to building up equilibrium in political strategies for any political/governmental authority that would take power in the future wishing to continue these partnerships.

Slovenian aspirations to join NATO and the EU

After reaching independence in 1991 and international recognition in 1992, the Republic of Slovenia started to seek an option for assuring national security and as Vuga and Zupančič (2018) said the country had four options: 1. Self-sufficiency and reliance on the system of collective security would require Slovenia to form strong armed forces capable of defending Slovenia within the framework of UN collective security system. 2. Military neutrality would require recognition and respect by other subjects of the international community. 3. Defence agreements on the bilateral level would again require Slovenia to give something in exchange for the protection offered by another, militarily stronger, country. 4. Entering collective defence agreements, meaning Slovenia would join more multilateral institutions (GRIZOLD 1999). Of all aforementioned options, Slovenian political elites have decided to rely on the collective defence within NATO and collective security within the EU. This decision was known as one of the very few moments when political elites (right and left-wing parties) have agreed upon a specific security question. The first step of this political orientation was included into the Resolution on the Guidelines of the National Security (accepted by the National Assembly in 1994). On that basis, in March 1994, Slovenia became one of the first countries to be included in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and in the same year, it became an associate partner in the North Atlantic Assembly. Two years later (in 1996), Slovenia started its Individual Partnership Programme (IPP) and joined the Planning and Review Process (PARP). The political decision to join NATO was reaffirmed in April 1997 by the Declaration on Slovenian Membership in NATO, which was agreed upon by all political parties in the National Assembly. The conviction to the NATO goals was to additionally strengthen in the same year by the governmental decision to send the military troops to SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The NATO July 1997 Summit decided not to invite Slovenia to the NATO membership, which was a very sobering experience for Slovenian politicians and the public. The debate on enlargement in the U.S. Senate (Meeting the Challenges of a Post-Cold War World: NATO Enlargement and U.S.–Russia Relations) revealed the political and very much financial aspect of enlargement.

NATO membership was one of Slovenia's foreign policy priorities; however, Defence Minister Kacin said that no Slovenian political party is willing to increase defence expenditures beyond 2% of GDP (Committee on Foreign Relations 1997, 20). Nevertheless, it was never a question if Slovenia is willing or able to cover its share of costs. Slovenia's GDP per capita, at the time, exceeded the GDP of two EU member states. However, what Slovenia did not have, was a large population of Americans who trace their roots to Slovenia and could mount well-financed advocacy campaigns for Senate ratification on our behalf (Committee on Foreign Relations 1997, 19). Another issue was the unwillingness to open

the national economy to foreign participation. "Slovenes seem unsure about the price they are willing to pay to enter Western institutions" (Committee on Foreign Relations 1997, 21).

Slovenia was described as the only country that managed to win a war, having merely a territorial "home guard" to fight against the Yugoslav People's Army. Regarding the military, according to this report, it met the criteria to join NATO. It was also emphasised that it would be a huge mistake to hold back a country that deserves to be invited to NATO merely to artificially strengthen the pool for a second round of enlargement (Committee on Foreign Relations 1997, 19). Nevertheless, this was exactly what happened. And we must link that message with the attitude Slovenians have expressed towards NATO later on.

After the Washington Summit in 1999, Slovenia joined the Membership Action Plan (MAP) process and later on implemented five Annual National Programmes (ANP). At the Prague Summit in 2002, the formal invitation for Slovenia was issued, which moved the process towards NATO membership quite forward, followed by status talks in 2003. In the same year, Slovenia completed the last ANP. The successive steps in the international arena have shown that the Slovenian decision to join NATO would soon become a reality. That fact awakened the reservations in a part of the Slovenian society and also in some radical left political circles who were critical regarding NATO's out-of-area operations. Their scepticism was based merely on information about American efforts to form a coalition of willing to invade Iraq. The American and NATO policies were regarded as being the same. They forced Slovenian political decision-makers to decide about NATO membership on a national referendum. This request has put the politicians into a very complicated situation: having (years long desired) NATO invitation on one side and sceptical public opinion with anti-NATO influential opinion makers on the other side. They decided to organise the referendum on NATO membership and on EU membership on the same day, 23 March 2003.

All the activities before the referendum were coordinated and focusing on presenting the positive aspects of joining both organisations. As experts of defence policy from the Slovenian Ministry of Defence (Interview 2018a) pointed out, it was a very wise strategy to present NATO and the EU as a package. Despite the fact that we have two different regional organisations, Slovenian politics along with experts somehow managed to publicly present the accession process as interconnected and that both organisations must be joined simultaneously.

Despite the diversity of opinions and constant changes in the attitude towards international organisations, a positive turn has been observed over the years. Before the Slovenian independence in 1991, one-tenth of Slovenians considered NATO as a good choice for assuring defence, while 72% disagreed. At that time, quite an important share of the population believed in the neutrality status (45%) and that bilateral arrangements with neighbours (59%) would assure security. After the war for independence (June–July 1991), the public attitude towards collective security has started to change.

Slovenians expressed their opinion on the referendum in 2003 when 89.6% of the voters supported the idea of joining the EU and 66.03% supported joining NATO (State Election Committee 2003a; State Election Committee 2003b). It seems that the strong political consensus regarding the necessity to join both organisations convinced the Slovenian voters that joining NATO and the EU brings more positive aspects than any other option. The

accession of Slovenia to NATO took place on 29 March 2004. In the same year, on 1 May 2004, Slovenia joined the EU as a full member.

General perceptions on NATO and the EU in the Slovenian public

Ever since the independence (1991), the attitude of the Slovenian public towards the regional organisations has been measured by the Defence Research Centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences along with the Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research Centre. For evaluating the Slovenian attitude towards NATO and the EU, we will interpret a few questions that are directly asking Slovenians about their attitudes towards both organisations. The relevant questions for the purpose of this article have been set in public opinion polls of 1994, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2012. For the sampling framework, the Central Population Register was employed. The sample is a two-stage stratified random sample, where every population unit has an equal probability of selection. The minimum response was 995 persons.

The survey shows that the trust in the EU (on a 4-point scale) has been relatively high over the years. 40% of the public has trusted (relatively or completely) the EU in 1991, while 13% claimed not to know the institution and 34% expressed low or no level of trust. In 2012, when this question was posed for the last time, 38% of the population trusted the EU, 4% claimed not to know it and 53% expressed very little or no trust in the EU. We have measured the strongest level of trust in the EU between 2003 and 2009 (between 55 and 60%). The majority of the population believe that the EU is beneficial for Slovenia. However, there is an evident lack of stability in public opinion, since the share goes from 75% to 63% and back to 73% over the years. In 2012, the share of those who see benefits in being an EU member fell again to 62%. Almost one-fifth of the population claim not to be aware of potential benefits brought by joining the EU.

It seems that the Slovenian attitude towards the EU is relatively opportunist. Even if there is a lack of trust in the EU, the Slovenian public obviously believe that there are certain benefits that should be explored. Regarding trust, Slovenians somehow developed a certain level of trust between 2003 and 2009, but over the past years this trust was lost and the feeling of distrust strengthened. Unfortunately, there were no public opinion surveys conducted after the migration and economic crisis of 2012. It is to be believed that today, trust in the EU is even lower due to certain decisions made (or not made) by the EU during the crisis.

The trust in NATO was constantly high between 1999 and 2009 (approximately 45%), decreasing in 2012 with merely 32% of the Slovenians perceiving NATO as a trustworthy organisation. In 2012, 54% of the population expressed very little or no trust in NATO. When asked about the general perception of NATO being beneficial for Slovenia, the public was very indecisive. In 2003 and 2009, 60% of the public believed that Slovenia gets certain benefits from being a NATO member, while in the years between and also in the last measurement in 2012, only 47% believed in NATO being beneficial for Slovenia. When asking about NATO, the public response reveals that a fifth of the population is not aware of any benefits that Slovenia should have from joining NATO.

In the period before the referendum, positive aspects of being a NATO member have been emphasised on several occasions by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs,

the Minister of Defence, the Chief of the General Staff and several other security and defence experts and politicians. The public debate went on about the positive impact of NATO for our national security, about the opportunity for regional cooperation (Western Balkans in particular) etc., but also about the commitment to accept burden sharing (Interview 2018a). An example of the positive financial impact of membership is air defence, since Italy and Hungary are willing to provide protection of the Slovenian airspace. The Slovenian Ministry of Defence (Interview 2018a) emphasised the NATO assistance in renovating the Cerklje ob Krki military airport. Furthermore, by joining NATO, Slovenia holds a much better position in providing peace at the Western Balkans and in strengthening its position in that particular area of national interest.

However, over the years, the debate about the role of NATO in providing national security and defence has almost diminished. Due to the economic crisis and financial cuts, along with the constant public debate about NATO requiring a higher share of GDP for defence, the perception of benefits of being a member of the Alliance is today probably even lower than in 2012. It needs to be emphasised that over the past decade, Slovenian political elites speak of our national commitments towards NATO quite awkwardly, not explaining clearly enough the burden sharing policy. Especially problematic is the lack of public debate about the process of force bidding in NATO. It seems that the public perceives NATO as an organisation forcing the country to provide certain capabilities instead of an organisation based on the consensus of all members.

Without doubt, the public debate and political attitude towards both organisations as well as political consensus regarding the Slovenian role in them have an important influence on public opinion. Especially before Slovenia joined both organisations, there was a strong political consensus regarding this question along with the publicly presented support of some experts from the civilian society, hence the support was relatively strong. The public consensus, reached through intensive public debate, is something that we are lacking today. The political elites had very few initiatives to debate the meaning of both organisations for the Slovenian security in the past fifteen years. The current President Borut Pahor is one of those rare politicians who advocates a stronger European Union. There is also a political party that entered the Parliament at previous elections (2014) and raised the anti-NATO emotions as its pre-election campaign (May 2018). The party "Levica" (The Left) has promised to call for a new referendum regarding NATO – to ask people if it is worth leaving NATO in the future. While forming the new government (September 2018), the Left party decided to support the Prime Minister but stayed in parliamentary opposition. It is still to be seen whether this party will continue with its critical attitudes towards NATO or not.

The development of national normative documents in the light of NATO and EU membership

Slovenia has adopted specific strategic acts that define national interest in the field of national security and defence. The position of NATO as an elementary provider of national security, stability and defence are evident in the Resolution on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia (2010), the basic development and guidance document. Furthermore, NATO takes a similar role in the Declaration on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Slovenia

adopted in 2015 by the Slovenian Parliament. The latter document emphasises NATO as a framework for Slovenian and European defence. Being a member of the Alliance was also reflected in the National Defence Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia (adopted in 2012). The NATO membership has been important for the implementation of the specific planning processes in the field of defence. The Defence Act has set the obligation to adopt long-term and mid-term defence planning documents. The long-term plans must be prepared by the Government and adopted by the Parliament. On its basis, the Government is obliged to form the mid-term defence plans. The last accepted Resolution on the General Long-term Programme of the Development and Equipment of the Slovenian Armed Forces up to 2025 was discussed and adopted in 2010, within the circumstances of the deepest economic crisis of Slovenia after independence. The prevailing obstacle for the development of the defence sector at that time was adequate financial support for modernisation and purchasing of new equipment.

The members of parliament and critical civil society institutions advocated the lowering of the defence expenditures, reaching 1.61% of GDP in 2010, although they have been already far under the (NATO) expected 2% of the GDP. Defence expenditures gradually decreased through the upcoming years to 0.94% of GDP in 2016. The Government has obliged itself to stop the decreasing of expenditures and push forward the idea of increasing the defence expenditures to 1.03% of GDP in 2020. The set goal is still far from NATO's expectations to reach 2% of GDP in all member states until 2024. The political debate about the question of defence expenditures clearly follow the NATO defence planning instructions because the government officials would argue the need to increase defence expenditures as "a promise to NATO", and not as a national defence objective.

The parliamentary and civilian oversight

The civilian oversight over armed forces is manifested through the democratically elected political bodies (e.g. Parliamentary Committee for Defence, Commission to Control the Intelligence Services) but also the institutions of the civil society and the media. The Defence Committee is structured in a way to give coalition parties the majority of votes. The parliamentary tradition developed a good practice over the years to leave the presidential function in the Committee to the largest opposition party (MALEŠIČ et al. 2015, 62). The parliamentary control over the defence sector and over the armed forces was set up by the Slovenian Constitution in 1991 according to the standards of the democratic societies. The NATO and EU memberships that were realised in 2004 did not have a particular impact on the structure of the parliamentary control. The only significant consequence of the NATO membership, overseen in the parliamentary debates, was the increased number of the questions and initiatives posed by the members of parliament on the decisions to deploy troops in NATO-led operations, on control of national airspace (air policing currently executed by the Italian and Hungarian aircraft) and on procurement of defence technology primarily from the NATO countries.

In addition to the parliamentary control, the civilian oversight over the defence sector in Slovenia is executed by the organisations of the citizens interested in defence, by defence experts and researchers, and by the media. However, each civilian oversight should be

supported by knowledge about the object of control and instructions of how to exercise the control over the armed forces. The latter unfortunately is not always the case. More than a decade ago, Jelušič and Malešič (2001, 148) have identified the lack of experience with the reality of the SAF and the defence sector as a whole, among the political elite and the civil society. The authors have suggested defence socialisation (education), familiarisation with a new national security environment and the position of the military in it, for all those performing civilian control. Unfortunately today, after more than two decades, we can still observe the same lack of knowledge and understanding, which is perhaps slowing down the development of the SAF.

The impact of the Alliance on standardisation and transformation of the armed forces

The impact of the Alliance with its standardisation has been emphasised by the representatives of the MoD (Interview 2018a) as very positive with regards to the transformation of the SAF. Experts from the Slovenian Ministry of Defence, Department for Defence Policy have emphasised some of the specific subfields that were especially influential in the light of the development and transformation of the SAF and defence system as a whole. Novak summarises the subfields in her report. Firstly, the knowledge gained from PARP and MAP was crucial for the defence transformation since they offered a tool for dialogue with NATO and stimulated a reconsideration of the capabilities Slovenia should develop to achieve both goals: 1. following national priorities; 2. contributing to NATO. Today the planning has undergone another development phase, due to the changing security environment and complexity of the threats, followed by adequate planning tools. Secondly, Slovenia is still slowly moving towards understanding that national is inevitably part of the international security, therefore the national security system needs to contribute to the collective defence and security within NATO and the EU. In addition, public and political awareness and support are also elementary for success in any reform, especially security and defence. Thirdly, security and defence is not merely an issue of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior, but they need to integrate all subsystems, ministries and the civil society. Fourthly, the national planning was improved in order to offer a solid ground for defence and capability planning. The last important influence of NATO and the EU is related to the contribution to peace operations. Slovenia with all its actors (i.e. military, police and civilian specialists) has gained several experiences in cooperation within the multinational environment, including the cultural differences, language barriers, leadership specifics, local support, etc.

Slovenia is striving to develop certain niche capabilities within the NATO framework (e.g. cyber defence) along with improvements of the legislation in the specific field. In 2015, the MoD and the SAF have established the NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence in the Slovenian village Poljče. It forms a part of the wider framework supporting NATO command arrangements (NATO MWCoE s. a.). Foreign languages school is another case of intensive cooperation of the SAF in the international networks. It is one of the partners' centres (PTEC) coordinated by the NATO school in Oberammergau. In addition, the Centre

for language training of Partnership for Peace is part of the foreign language school and its main purpose is to offer international training for the teachers and trainers.

Slovenia has always been open for bilateral or multilateral cooperation, however, the latter was never perceived as an alternative to NATO or the EU. Slovenia very much supports the balanced policy within the NATO members as well as between NATO and non-NATO countries. Slovenia immediately supported the NATO members who felt threatened from the East after the Ukrainian crisis, but at the same time encouraged active diplomacy with Russia (Interview 2018a).

NATO has provided the Slovenian Armed Forces a strong framework for its development and without doubt, membership along with cooperation in peace operations has significantly influenced the transformation of the SAF over the years. Before joining the Alliance, the SAF was a territorially organised compulsory military organisation, while in 2002 it transformed into an all-volunteer force. The planning, following the asymmetric threats, transformed from threat based to capability based. The SAF evolved from in-place to partially deployable force. After the first international deployments in 1997, Slovenia has strengthened its role as a so-called peace provider, mostly by deploying the SAF and also a smaller number of civilian specialists and the police to peace operations, focusing on the Western Balkans.

The NATO procedures and rules have been implemented in the SAF, inherently influencing the transformation of the SAF. Regarding the latter, Prezelj et al. (2015) have conducted the research among 55 military transformation experts from 23 NATO and PfP countries. The analysis proved that NATO (average value of 4.6 on a 6-point scale) and also the EU (3.6 on a 6-point scale) present the “transformation inputs” which have influenced the defence reforms, doctrines, and structures in member states, except the United States (PREZELJ et al. 2015). The latter seems to be more of a “trendsetter” in/for NATO than a “trend follower” (PREZELJ et al. 2015). On the other hand, the EU was perceived as a bit less influential with an average value of 3.6 (on 6-point scale). Security and defence were recognised as less important within the EU in the period before the Slovenian accession, however, in the past years, this trend has been changing.

Slovenia has always been supporting the cooperation and development of capabilities that fulfil the needs of both organisations, NATO and the EU. In 2017, Slovenia joined PESCO and is, at the moment, actively participating in two projects, while taking the role of observer in additional five projects (Interview 2018a). Furthermore, Slovenia participates in several projects under the European Defence Agency umbrella. The projects, as defined by Defence Counsellor at the Slovenian Permanent Representative Office at the EU (Interview 2018b), are: 1. Single European Sky aiming to discuss national positions and find solutions regarding the use of European airspace. 2. Joint Investment Programme Remotely Piloted Air Systems focusing on the development of remotely piloted air systems. 3. Helicopter Exercise Programme aiming to enhance the interoperability of helicopter capabilities for performing the joint operations. 4. Multinational Medical Modular Unit is a project assuring the capability of international field hospitals by integrating national capabilities. 5. Sharing of Spare Parts is a project enhancing the logistic cooperation between member states. 6. Multimodal Transport Hub is tightly connected with the PESCO project of military mobility. 7. Innovative Auxiliary Power Unit for Military Purposes is a project including the civilian scientific sphere, aiming to develop fuel cells.

Slovenia is also participating in several NATO projects and programmes such as joint science and technology projects, including experts in various fields (e.g. the Human Factor and Medicine project, the Impact of Military Life on Children from Military Families). Furthermore, the Ministry of Defence actively participates in the projects related to the capacity development under the programme of Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) and NATO Security Investment programme (NSIP) (e.g. building the air force capacity in Cerklje) (Interview 2018b). Slovenia has joined the pooling and sharing the defence capabilities initiative, namely the multinational Strategic Airlift Capability. Slovenia has supported and is participating in the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre. The country is participating in building and strengthening the NATO Special Operations Headquarters and is developing certain capabilities in this area.

Policy field-specific objectives – cooperation in international operations and missions

Despite the lower share of military contribution to EU-led operations, the SAF is strongly committed to contributing contingents to the Althea mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. SAF is also contributing units to the EU Battlegroup led by Italy. The initiative for this battlegroup has roots in the Multinational Land Force (MLF), a Trilateral Brigade formed by Italy, Slovenia and Hungary in 2001.

Slovenia has been actively contributing its armed and other forces (i.e. police and civilian specialists) since 1997 after the legal framework has been established with the adoption of the Defence Act (1994). Slovenia has participated in altogether 26 international operations under UN, OSCE, NATO or EU. Later on, in 2009 the Strategy for Participation in International Operations and Missions was adopted (Ur.l. No. 19/10) defining the Slovenian national endeavour in an international environment, aiming to provide peace and stability. The common terminology for all national activities (i.e. military, civilian, police, help and rescue) in the international environment has been adopted; international operations and missions (IOM). The conceptual analysis reveals that the UN Security Council mandate is crucial when a decision regarding a certain operation is accepted on the political level. However, there are two exceptions, where Slovenia contributed its troops, although the operation was not clearly mandated by the UNSC, as the operation Mare Nostrum in the Mediterranean Sea, to which Slovenia contributed its naval capabilities and Operation Iraqi Freedom (from 2016 on). In that context, Humar (2017, 86–87) calls for a reconsideration of the Slovenian concept of IOM, questioning whether the NATO concepts of deterrence and defence are sufficiently integrated. Furthermore, he emphasises the difference between NATO operations, ready to use hard military power (and not always demanding the UNSC mandate), opposed to EU mechanisms for strengthening stability, focusing on prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.

Regarding the political focus, we should emphasise that from the geographical aspect Slovenia is canalising its efforts to the Balkans. The historical, cultural and ethnic ties, as well as its proximity to the Balkans, have made security in the region a top priority (VUGA 2014). The close ties and political importance of the Balkans have been manifested in the Slovenian endeavour to acquire the highest position in the NATO-led operation in

Macedonia. In 2012, Slovenian Brigade General David Humar took over the command of the mission, which was at the time the highest position Slovenia occupied within the NATO commanding structure. Another example of the Slovenian prioritisation of the Balkans is manifested in the strength of the Slovenian participation in the Kosovo Force. For the first time in the history of independent Slovenia, the whole battalion of the Slovenian Armed Forces was deployed to a certain IOM in 2007, when the Slovenian battalion-size task force took over its own area of responsibility and was in command of troops of another NATO country (Kosovo, SAF web page). Politically wise, Slovenia supports its partners in NATO as well as in the EU, however, Zupančič (2014) claims that the analysis revealed a stronger prioritisation among Slovenian government officials towards NATO arrangements as opposed to European CSDP. Therefore, Slovenian politics, after the Ukrainian crisis, decided to support the decision to concentrate operational capabilities in Eastern Europe and having the SAF already participating in the framework of Multinational Corps Northeast (Szczecin) made the realisation easier (VUGA–ZUPANČIČ 2018). However, Slovenia tried to balance the cooperation with both East and West, and at the time supported the policy of Germany and Italy who called for the reactivation of the NATO–Russia Council (VUGA–ZUPANČIČ 2018).

The majority of deployed troops are engaged to NATO-led operations or missions (over the years the highest share was deployed to KFOR and ISAF), similarly the civilian specialists have been so far deployed to NATO-led operations alone, while the police deploys their units mostly to EU-led operations (MALEŠIČ et al. 2015). Šteiner (2017, 50) analysed the flow of Slovenian contribution to international operations over the years. As he established, after 1999 Slovenia regularly and in a high share contributed to the NATO-led operations. He explains the lower level of contribution to EU operations with two facts: firstly there is a relatively small share of EU-led military operations in general; the second reason is Slovenia's very humble contribution to civilian missions that are led by the EU (only a few members of the police) (Šteiner 2017, 51). Table 1 confirms the statement that Slovenia's strategic priority is the neighbouring Balkan region. It seems that Slovenia prefers regional organisations (NATO and the EU in particular), probably because Slovenia's political and public priority lies in its neighbourhood region (Southeast Europe).

Table 1.

The percentage of Slovenian yearly military contribution to NATO, EU, UN and OSCE-led operations

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| NATO | 8.8 | 13.9 | 70.3 | 67 | 66.7 | 95.7 | 97.7 | 99 | 37.3 | 65.9 | 87.4 |
| EU | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.6 | 0 | 61.9 | 29.5 | 10 |
| UN | 54.4 | 86.1 | 29.7 | 33 | 33 | 4.3 | 1.7 | 1 | 0.8 | 4.6 | 2.6 |
| OSCE | 36.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | | |
| NATO | 86.2 | 92.4 | 91.4 | 90 | 91.4 | 92.9 | 91.5 | 89 | 87.6 | | |
| EU | 10.1 | 4.9 | 5.3 | 6.3 | 4.7 | 3.6 | 4.1 | 3.3 | 5.3 | | |
| UN | 3.7 | 2.7 | 3.2 | 3.7 | 3.9 | 3.5 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 5.3 | | |
| OSCE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | |

Source: ŠTEINER 2017.

Nevertheless, the 2009 Strategy for Participation in International Operations and Missions also emphasises the importance of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Mediterranean, Asia and Africa. Furthermore, it is also important for the Slovenian economic rationale. Due to the size of the country and its armed forces, the SAF usually deploys its troops along with other armed forces. In the case of distant international operations and missions, the SAF does not have capabilities to fully support larger units logistically and therefore usually needs a partner (e.g. often the Italian Armed Forces). It seems likely that the presence of troops in a certain area stimulates additional deployments or participation in a new peace operation in that area, due to already established logistical networks.

Šteiner explains that so far 61% of the troops within NATO-led operations were deployed to KFOR and only 12% in ISAF. Furthermore, Table 1 confirms that since 1999, Slovenia has mainly contributed to NATO-led operations. The participation in peace operations influenced the redefinition of functions in armed forces (e.g. the organisational structure changed considerably and the proportion of Special Operations Forces increased more than 5 times) (CEBEK 2014). Furthermore, Cebek (2014) statistically proved that among other reasons, by turning focus to peace operations, the SAF is investing less in traditional national defence.

Final remarks

Slovenia believes in the benefits of being a member of NATO and the EU as organisations that are providing peace, security and stability in the Balkans. The Slovenian public or civil society might be at times questioning either of the two organisations, however, the longitudinal support remains relatively firm. The support would be more persuasive, if Slovenian politicians and decision-makers would take a clear position on the national interest and benefits the membership is bringing to the country. Instead, the response to claims that Slovenia is being subordinated to or even losing its sovereignty due to the membership in either organisation, is often loose and unconvincing. Furthermore, as regards NATO, Slovenes still have a strong memory and perception of the unfair rejection during the approaching process in 1997. Hence, a part of the public and the civil society keeps their doubts.

Slovenian decision-makers are emphasising the cooperation and dual use of capacities in both organisations. Furthermore, Slovenia is supportive towards the enlargement of both organisations to the Western Balkans. Enlargement of both organisations is in a way perceived as an assurance for more security in the region and consequently for Slovenia.

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