

Security concepts of the EU and NATO – the point of view of Slovakia

Conference Report

28 November 2002

The conference “Security concepts of the EU and NATO – the point of view of Slovakia” was held in Brussels on November 28, 2002 in Val Duchesse. The event was organised by the Royal Institute for International Relations with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia.

The opening speech was delivered by the President of the IRRI-KIIB, Viscount E. Davignon.

Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Kukan was very pleased to say that Slovakia obtained one of its foreign policy priorities: the invitation to join the Alliance at the recent NATO Summit in Prague. He expressed his appreciation for Belgium’s support. He hoped that a similar decision will be made at the EU summit in Copenhagen.

In his opinion NATO’s recent enlargement is “part of the process involving the Central and Eastern European countries into the building of the Euro-Atlantic structures after the end of the Cold war and in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11 on American cities, which brought about new urgent security challenges”. He sees the invitation to join the EU and NATO as a commitment and a new beginning. But he stressed that meeting the requirements of the membership of those organisations as well as new unforeseeable tasks in the future will still demand from Slovakia enormous efforts and energy.

For Slovakia, NATO is the only organization that is able to protect Europe and its values. As former special envoy of the UN Secretary General for the Balkans, he looked at the issue of the Balkans. Military intervention in FRY was necessary when the leadership of Yugoslavia violated the rights of others and the fundamental freedoms that are the core of the Euro-Atlantic community. The mission of NATO troops was supported by Slovakia who acted as if it were a member of the Alliance. This earned Slovakia the respect of its partners.

Although the peace-keeping missions of different organisations brought significant stabilisation of the situation, Minister Kukan pointed out that the key task for NATO and the EU is to continue to support the democratic developments in South-East Europe. They also have to address problems as pending constitutional and legal arrangements in certain countries, territorial conflicts between nations, the return of displaced persons and refugees etc. He emphasised the need to support a full integration of the FRY into the UN, the EU and NATO. “We cannot let the Balkan countries alone in their efforts”, he added. With regard to this, he said that the EU’s prime task will be to speed up preparations for having necessary military capabilities to eliminate security risks.

Slovakia supports the ESDP. On the other hand, it is also interested in maintaining the cohesion of the NATO; it sees the ESDP functionally complementing NATO in addressing crisis situations in Europe in particular. He promised that his country would contribute to the project of creating Europe’s military forces. He mentioned Slovakia’s active and concrete approach towards the ESDP. He recalled the progress made in the negotiations on the EU-

NATO treaty with respect to one of ESDP's crucial issues – the EU's access to the planning capabilities of NATO.

The Foreign Minister of Slovakia Kukan then moved on to the challenges of the present day for NATO.

He sees the Prague Summit and NATO's enlargement as only one of the components of the deeper debate on the need for the transformation of the Alliance into an effective organization for the 21st century. He considers the fight against terrorism one of the most serious challenges, which NATO as a whole must deal with. NATO must also face other threats: weapons of mass destruction, international crime, threats that undermine democracy, economic growth and so on. Minister Kukan summed up the efforts made by Slovakia to provide for a more efficient involvement in the international fight against terrorism and crime. Slovakia fully supported the adoption of UN Security Council n° 1441 regarding Iraq, and sees it as the last appeal to Iraq in order to prevent a potential military action.

NATO should play a preventive role in respect of the treaties, but should not become an "international anti-terrorist organization". Therefore the speaker welcomed the concrete commitments to improving NATO's military capabilities at the Prague Summit. Slovakia analyzes its possibilities to contribute with specific assets to the required defence capabilities. It also continues to reform Slovakia's armed forces to contribute to the formation of the new rapid reaction forces.

Fundamental is the harmonious transatlantic relationship that is now tested. In Minister Kukan's opinion, it will be necessary to restore the relationship between Germany and the US and the Europe-US relationship in a broad sense in order to solve global problems in an effective way. In respect to the technological gap, we have to consider the difficult economic conditions in Europe. Important is that new invitees will continue increasing their military spending, as Slovakia does. The deepening of the partnership with the South-East European countries must go on. Developing cooperation with countries neighbouring the recently admitted members and invitees, pursuing an open-door policy and strengthening ties with the partners of the Alliance remains a part of reinforcing security and stability. The speaker added that for Slovakia, the building of such transatlantic ties remains one of the fundamentals of Europe's security.

Standing on the doorstep of the EU and NATO, Slovakia has proven that even a small country may have an enormous potential. New challenges and tasks could only be appropriately addressed by the joint efforts of small and big nations. Slovakia will see that it remains a functional and reliable partner, capable to defence NATO's territory against all military and other threats to the Alliance, Foreign Affairs Minister Kukan concluded.