



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address by
the President of the Republic of Slovenia
and the Commander-in-Chief of the Slovenian Armed Forces
Nataša Pirc Musar
at the state ceremony marking 20 years of Slovenia's membership in NATO**

Brdo pri Kranju, 28 March 2024

Check against delivery.

*Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Mr Robert Golob,
President of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia Mr Marko Lotrič,
President of the Constitutional Court Mr Matej Accetto,
Ministers of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia,
citizens, residents, Slovenians,
ladies and gentlemen, and with
a warm welcome to our esteemed guests from abroad joining us this evening,*

There are several important milestones in Slovenian history. Among them are undoubtedly the gradual steps towards building our statehood. These took place against the turbulent backdrop of World Wars I and II and during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Under the auspices of various entities, we have gradually established our Slovenian identity and asserted our right to self-determination, adapting to the prevailing social dynamics and capacities.

During and after our quest for independence, two crucial aspects deserve to be highlighted. First, in turbulent times, we demonstrated courage, resilience and a keen awareness of the dangers we faced. Through timely and wise decisions and unwavering struggle, we realised the century-long aspiration of establishing our sovereign country. Second, our politicians, despite their divergent views, demonstrated remarkable unity and spoke with one voice. After independence, they came together and directed their collective efforts towards achieving our nation's major foreign policy goals of joining the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union.

The year-long process of rapprochement, learning and reform culminated on 23 March 2003, when a majority of Slovenians, citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, voted in a consultative referendum in favour of Slovenia's accession to NATO. Slovenia formally became a member of the Alliance on 29 March 2004. Our decision has proved to be the right one. Membership has given us not only access to the defence alliance, but also recognition that we are part of a community based on democracy as a fundamental principle, the rule of law, respect for human rights, territorial integrity and sovereignty. In view of the bitter historical experience of Slovenians with foreign territorial ambitions, Slovenia's accession to NATO and the European Union was a truly historic milestone. This decisive step has made it much easier for us to pursue our fundamental national interests, including stability, peace, cooperation, and integration into global economic and development trends. By gaining an equal place at the table with our allies, we have been given the opportunity to seek agreements with each of them individually and with all of them at the same time. As a result, we are now able to live with greater prosperity and security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At their core, international organisations bring together like-minded and value-driven countries to pursue common interests and goals. Working together makes it easier to find effective solutions to regional and global challenges. The relatively long period of stability in Europe since the end of the World War II is proof of this. However, the international landscape is unpredictable. Modern threats are multifaceted, hybrid and increasingly intertwined with advanced technology.

This reality is evident in conflicts on European soil, such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine. It is also visible in regions such as the Middle East, where, after the horrific massacre of Israeli civilians by Hamas, we are still witnessing the unimaginable violence by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian population in Gaza, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths. These conflicts, among many others around the world, have the potential to affect our way of life and the functioning of social sub-systems, critical infrastructure and supply chains and even disregard existing national borders. Our cherished values and international legal norms are increasingly being challenged.

It is disturbing that in the 21st century, the use of force is still a means to an end, a means to shift the borders of sovereign states and an attempt to subjugate nations. And when I speak of the use of force, ladies and gentlemen, as a staunch defender of human rights and freedoms, I condemn most strongly any interference in the lives of fellow human beings, their suffering and torture, their humiliation, and sexual violence against them. The daily images emerging from conflict zones are a stark reminder of the trampling of humanity and the disregard for cherished values. NATO's commitment to defend those countries that uphold these values is enshrined in several provisions of the Washington Treaty. It is therefore only right to be a member of this international organisation and to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of our membership today.

NATO membership brings with it both political and defence benefits and obligations. Its collective defence umbrella is the ultimate guarantee of stability and security. But this guarantee is not a given. It is based on fair burden-sharing, close defence cooperation and real capabilities. Allies must both individually and collectively develop their individual and collective defence capabilities to deter threats and respond effectively to potential attacks. The enduring value of this insurance policy, even after 75 years of NATO's existence, is demonstrated by the recent accession of traditionally neutral countries such as Finland and Sweden and the expressed interest of other countries in joining the Alliance.

NATO membership also has an important international dimension for Slovenia that goes beyond membership. Over the past two decades, Slovenia has demonstrated a willingness to take risks and participate in the Alliance's collective efforts in core missions, despite certain challenges in meeting planned capabilities. With the Slovenian Armed Forces, we have consistently contributed to international security and stability by participating in numerous operations around the world. Our efforts have included deterring military threats on the Alliance's eastern flank, supporting partner countries in neighbouring regions and much more.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the fundamental responsibilities of a state is to ensure security within its borders. Without security, the functioning of other social activities is compromised. Without it, there can be no development and no prosperity. It is imperative for politicians and society alike to give unwavering support to a modern national security system, in particular to the Slovenian Armed Forces, on which we rightly rely to protect us from all kinds of threats and disasters. This requires adequate training, equipment and protection. I am encouraged to see that words are being translated into action, as evidenced by more than a decade of political support articulated in strategic documents aimed at enhancing our country's defence capabilities. We must continue to deliver on our commitments. Only in this way will we protect ourselves, contribute to the security of other member states, and maintain our credibility as a reliable partner in NATO and the wider international community.

The importance of honouring our commitments can be well illustrated by relevant comparisons. Our membership of NATO has enabled us to spend less on defence than we used to, or than would have been necessary had we relied solely on our own defence. Standing alone would require a larger defence force, a broader societal commitment, the development of a wide range of capabilities and the forging of specific partnerships. NATO provides us with what we might not be able to afford on our own. Through NATO, we benefit from airspace protection, access to space and satellite capabilities, security information sharing, natural disaster response coordination centres, training opportunities, and political and security consultations with a network of more than 40 partner nations and other organisations.

Dear Slovenians, citizens and residents of the Republic of Slovenia,

Slovenia holds a special place in our hearts as a green gem and a breathtakingly beautiful corner of the world. We are fortunate to be able to enjoy peace, take care of our families, visit our relatives and tend to our gardens. We want our children to thrive and fulfil their potential. When outsiders ask us about our country, we proudly reply that we are blessed with kind-hearted people and that our homeland is truly breathtaking. My heartfelt wish is that this idyllic corner of the world remains unspoilt, where harmony reigns and there are few worries about the future. There are many such places in the world where people have similar hopes and dreams but are sadly denied the peace and carefree future that we enjoy.

I therefore take this opportunity to thank all the deserving individuals in the profession and in politics for their vision, perseverance, maturity and selfless contribution, which paved the way for Slovenia's membership of NATO. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all those who contribute on a daily basis to Slovenia's reputation and effective functioning in the Alliance while promoting common and national security interests; to the diplomats and experts working at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and research institutes at universities and elsewhere; and, of course, indeed above all, to the members of the Slovenian Armed Forces.

I have visited them several times during their service at home and abroad. They know how proud I am of them and how much I appreciate their work. Ultimately, any institution, including NATO, is first and foremost a people's institution. Mature political leadership means consistently upholding the spirit of the Washington Treaty, which prevents NATO from ever becoming an aggressor power. Its strength lies in deterrence, solidarity, mutual assistance and dialogue. We must therefore strive to make Slovenia an exemplary member and a strong link in the Alliance chain.

Thank you and happy anniversary, Slovenia!