
FEATURE ARTICLES

Slovenia - Ten Years After Independence

By

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Slovenia, never to be confused with Slovakia, came to the attention of the world in June 2001, as it played host to the first summit meeting between United States President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Most Americans had to go to their world maps to pinpoint its location, surrounded by Italy to the west, Austria to the north, Hungary to the east and Croatia to the south. Yet those who search out the unusual, the less crowded, less expensive destinations in their travels, have long known the secrets of Slovenia. From its small but picturesque Adriatic coastline in the west to its northern Alpine region dominated by Mount Triglav (2864 meters), and to the east and south to reach more rural areas filled with beautiful river valleys, thermal springs, countless medieval castles and warm hospitality, Slovenia is indeed a country which blends the best of several European cultures into one uniquely its own.



With its own way of life, its own language and serving as a natural crossroads of routes from east to west and north to south, Slovenia took her first steps towards overcoming a history of repression by the Hapsburg Empire, and later Tito's Yugoslavia, in December 1990, when Slovenes voted overwhelmingly for complete independence. In March 1991 Slovenia adopted a moratorium on sending conscripts to the Yugoslav Army. Armed confrontations started June 27, 1991, but by July 7 the conflict was officially over, and shortly thereafter Slovenia had control of its own borders and introduced its own currency. As the remaining former Yugoslavia drew the world's attention with its splintering ethnic violence, Slovenia, always the most ethnically homogeneous, the wealthiest, as well as the most Western-oriented among the republics, steadily, and very peacefully, went its own way.

The Slovene Armed Forces

Ten years ago, even before their independence was officially won, the first generation of Slovene conscripts began their national military service in the territory defense forces (TDF) by starting training in Slovene centers using the Slovene language. After their short, but intense, successful bid for independence from Yugoslavia, the TDF was restructured into what is today the Slovene Armed Forces (SAF). The TDF still exists as a civil defense force and as early as 1997 was able to deploy a small number of forces abroad in their first peacekeeping mission to Cyprus. Since then, Slovenia has also deployed forces to support North Atlantic Treaty Organization Stabilization Force and Kosovo North Atlantic Treaty Organization Force, and maintains a robust level of participation in various bilateral and multinational exercises.

Ongoing reorganization efforts within the SAF are trying to reduce overall force numbers while raising the number of professional soldiers in the force, especially to fill out those units designated as the reaction forces which would also support international operations, primarily the 10th and 20th Motorized Battalions of the 1st Brigade. U.S. Army War College and Command and General Staff Officer College graduates coincidentally command the 1st Brigade and the 10th Battalion respectively. The total number of forces today comprises about 47,000, the majority of them reserve forces and conscripts, with nearly 5,000 professional soldiers. About 7,000 conscripts are accessed each year for a seven-month service period. The SAF is primarily an infantry based force, with a small but highly effective, professional Air Force. Organized into two Land Forces Commands plus the Air Force and Air Defense Command, the SAF's 1st Brigade is independent and includes the majority of professional soldiers.

Slovenia's Security Assistance Programs

Slovenia now stands at a critical point in its integration into Western institutions. Viewed as the lead contender for European Union (E.U.) membership, and membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) aspirant nations, Slovenia has also come a long way as security assistance customer. Shortly after a determination of eligibility for foreign military sales transactions in 1996, and the initial allotment of the Warsaw Initiative, foreign military financing (FMF) totaling \$400,000, a security assistance office was opened. One U.S. Army officer is responsible for all programs. Previously, the Defense Attaché Office in Vienna handled the few international military education and training (IMET) students trained between 1993 and 1996.

Five years later, Slovenia enjoys a robust IMET budget of \$800,000 for fiscal year 2002, which meets their requirements, and is projected to receive nearly \$3.5 million in FMF for fiscal year 2002. Slovene decision makers in the Ministry of Defense have matured greatly in their selection of projects for funding thru FMF, as well as in the level of detail they demand in their Letters of Request (LOR). The United States representation has grown as well, with our office now officially an "Office of Defense Cooperation" with one lieutenant colonel and two Slovene nationals authorized. New LORs are almost exclusively aimed at increasing NATO compatibility and interoperability. Requests include NATO-compatible radios and identification friend or foe

equipment for the helicopter forces, an aggressive, ongoing English language training program, and future plans for increases in the area of command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) increased unit training through simulations.

Challenges remain, and the ones we encounter in day-to-day operations are surely similar to those seen by other small ODCs in European Command (EUCOM) and elsewhere. The Slovenia training manager, Irena Cufar, describes in her article the never-ending struggle to come up with qualified candidates for training when dealing with the Slovene Armed Forces whose total number of professional service members does not exceed 5000. This already small pool of potential IMET candidates is further reduced by English language requirements. Slovenian Armed Forces personnel in general have a very high English capability, due in part to mandatory English in primary schools. Slovenia still has a conscript-based force, and will have for many years to come. This, combined with a still-developing noncommissioned officer corps, means that the majority of IMET students are officers and Ministry of Defense (MOD) civilians. Thus the focus of the IMET program in Slovenia is consistently professional military education and expanded international military education and training program resource management courses. We hope to slightly reverse this trend in coming years with a slow but steady increase in technical training and noncommissioned officer leadership development courses.

Foreign military sales activity also stays at a fairly small, yet constant level. A lead participant in the regional airspace initiative going back to 1996, Slovenia used its own funds to acquire the air sovereignty operations center from the U.S. via FMS. Otherwise, the bulk of FMS activity has been through grant funds from the Warsaw Initiative Fund, in small yet still important areas:

- English language training using a combination of contract teachers and language labs;
- Defense Language Institute English Language Center instructors in Slovenia were certified as a NATO-Partners for Peace training center just last year;
- A simulations center judged among the best in the region;
- Weapons simulators;
- NATO compatible communications equipment for aircraft;
- Various small computer purchases to improve automation capability.

Although usually judged to have the strongest economy among the developing democracies of central and eastern Europe, well ahead of regional neighbors in average annual income, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates, and other economic indicators, Slovenia's share of GDP spent on defense reached just 1.45 percent in 2001, and budgets approved for 2002 do not show the growth hoped for by U.S. and NATO in defense spending. As a result, direct purchases have not reached particularly high levels, with a few exceptions when the government made special funds available to the MOD specifically for outfitting the SAF. The most notable among these was the recent purchase for armored high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles intended for reaction forces.

Conclusion

Slovenia has indeed come a long way in just a few short years. Hampered at times over the last few years by too-frequent changes in government, always democratic but very frustrating to defense planners, the current government coalition is stable, and should allow reorganization

plans to reach fruition and for more constancy in policy. Meanwhile, ODC Slovenia will continue to play an important role in the U.S.-Slovenia defense relationship.

About the Author

Lieutenant Colonel Kelly Ziccarello is a 1984 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. She was commissioned in the Military Intelligence Branch and designated a European foreign area officer. In 1996 she received a master's degree in international public policy from the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. From 1996 through 1997 she trained in the Polish language and spent one year of study at Poland's National Defense Academy. Kelly is a 2000 graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

Triglav, the highest Slovenian mountain (9394 feet), gets over 25 feet of snow.



An alpine nation known for its mountains and skiing.