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The Relationship of the Slovak Public to the North Atlantic Alliance – Value and Attitude Contexts¹

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“Candidates must show political continuity, success in reforms and the determination to fight corruption. NATO does not seek armies, it has them.”

Bruce Jackson

President of the American Committee for NATO

Introduction

In deciding on inviting a candidate country to join NATO, the political situation, the state of the armed forces and, last but not least, the support and preparedness of the population for this step will be crucial. Jeremy Rosner, formerly Director of U.S. Government Office for NATO enlargement ratification emphasized the importance of domestic political and public support among enlargement factors: “Eventually, NATO membership represents nothing more than a commitment of their members to be part of a community of values, and to act for its protection diplomatically and military. The signature of the Washington treaty itself will do nothing for ensuring this commitment. Political will is the only instrument of enforcing the promise and public support is the only instrument of guaranteeing political will. (Rosner, 2001: 49).

In the past two years the Slovak public was relatively reserved in its relationship to the Alliance – Slovakia-wide, those whose positions on Slovakia’s NATO entry were more or less those of rejection predominated since 1999. The proportion of NATO entry proponents, however, gradually increased over the year 2000 and in the first half of 2001. Thus we may speak of a favourable trend, and the future will show whether this trend is sustainable.

The public’s relationship to NATO does not entail only “first-plane”, **declared support**. The point is whether it has wider **value and attitude backing**. It was the situation factor that had a marked impact on the development of foreign policy attitudes of the Slovak public in the 1990s. In other words, actual situations or foreign political events were able to disturb considerably the support for integration efforts. It suggests that it often included superficial orientations inconsistently linked with other views and convictions.

A partly open question is how public opinion on Slovakia’s foreign policy orientation in general and its NATO entry in particular changed after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. On the whole, the emotional power of an event, in connection with the previous approaches, views and standpoints, presumably determines a public response.

¹ Sources:

1. Media Information Centre (MIC), based on a representative sample of 2043 respondents aged 16 and older (in temporal comparisons only data from 1944 respondents aged 18 and older are used)

2. Omnibus Survey, April 2001, Public Opinion Poll Section at the National Education Centre (NOC), a representative sample of 1111 respondents aged 18 and older.

3. Omnibus survey, June 2001,

Omnibus Survey, June 2001, Public Opinion Poll Section at the National Educational Centre (NOC), a representative sample of 1163 respondents aged 18 and older.

4. IVO, September 2001, a representative sample of 1818 respondents aged 17 and older.

(in temporal comparisons only data from 1757 respondents aged 18 and older are used).

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6. GfK Slovakia Survey, May 1998, 1744 respondents, initiated by the Delegation of EC in Slovakia.

Therefore the manner of the public response will be notably affected by public “entry mood”. The article’s conclusion presents empirical findings even from the period after September 2001.

1. Cultural-political inclinations of the Slovak public

1.1. Civilizational preferences: West vs. isolation

Cultural roots play a pivotal role in foreign policy orientations of the public. The sense of cultural-civilizational belonging to a certain circle, as well as an actual degree of cultural affinity (their alternatives being a split or indefinite identity) are important, although not the only factors of the basic vector and depth of public attitudes. Findings from the period of “a boom of pro-integration attitudes”, namely of May 1998 are available.

Table 1: "I wish that in Slovakia..."

Responses – completion	Percentage
the West’s influences should be markedly strengthened	20
the West’s influences should be somewhat strengthened	47
Russia’s influences should be somewhat strengthened	2
Russia’s influences should be markedly strengthened	0
all external influences should be prevented	22
other	3
don’t know	6
Total	100

Source: GfK Slovakia, May 1998

The West is the main preference; with larger or smaller support even two thirds of the population wish these influences were strengthened in Slovakia. It is followed by the alternative wish that all influences from outside should be prevented in Slovakia “as much as possible” represented by not insignificant one fifth of the respondents. Direct support for eastern, in our context the pro-Russian orientation, is marginal.

At the public level it is not the eastern orientation, but reservedness or even isolationism, which may assume the form of, for instance, affirming the neutrality requirement, that is the opposite of clearly prevailing pro-Western orientation. Rather than a well-thought-out option, the tendency towards isolation is a reflex, arising from the concern about “a draught” created by opened doors and windows, as well as from suspiciousness towards external influences. Support for neutrality has not shown changes for several years (in surveys in which respondents are not to choose from several mutually exclusive options, but are to express their opinions individually on NATO and neutrality, ranges between 31% and 37%). However, as a requirement, it has not assumed political vigour, it “lays dormant”, not directly manifesting itself. It is also connected with the fact that currently it is not made a political theme more markedly, and support for such a security option is not mobilized. The only parliamentary party (Slovak National Party) which explicitly rejects NATO entry and views neutrality as an alternative has changed its rhetoric during 2000-2001, arguing for an ambiguous concept of common European security.²

² SNS (Slovak National Party) split in the autumn 2001. Since both the parties cannot differ in basic crystallization, they will probably seek to strengthen mutual ‘marginal’ differences.

1.2. USA and Russia, USA and Europe

Public stances and opinions on NATO are shaped in the broad context of the perception of historical events and international and domestic political developments. To the question: “If you consider the whole post-World War II period up until 1989, which country posed a greater threat to peace in the world – the U.S. or the Soviet Union?” – the relative majority (47%) is critical of both the countries, one fifth is critical only of the U.S., and 15% is critical only of the Soviet Union. Overall, a larger number of suspicious glances are directed at the U.S. than at the Soviet Union. However, military competition in the bipolar world was based on different values on both sides, as were dominating political regimes different in form. The long-term risky manoeuvring on the edge between peace and war was thus a power competition for these alternative value systems. The 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia belongs to historic experiences shaping the consciousness of generations. If people have the elementary awareness of these connections and are not neutral to these value systems, it should be mirrored in their judgement of the one-time competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Even the results of earlier polls (*e.g.* IVO, March 2000) show that a certain “cautiousness” towards the U.S.’s influence in Slovakia is rather widespread. However, this finding needs an addition that today common people have many reasons to feel “the American influence” (if films, consumer patterns, communication patterns, etc. are included in it), which over the past decade increased, and on the other hand, less reasons to feel “the Russian influence”, which, by contrast, decreased. It has a powerful effect on the nationwide comparative result reached. However, the average does not have sufficient expressing power. Among the supporters of our NATO entry **cautiousness towards Russia outweighs cautiousness towards the U.S. to a high degree, and vice versa among the opponents.** However, “a causal turn” may seem appropriate, and then it may be stated that NATO entry supporters may be found in the environment more cautious towards Russia, and by contrast, its opponents may be found in the environment cautious above all towards the U.S.

In the question of strengthening or weakening the present level of political co-operation between Slovakia and some countries, or rather, groups of countries, the attention should be paid to the aspect of the comparative evaluation of the desirable level of political co-operation between Slovakia and **EU countries** on the side, and **the U.S.** on the other. Slovakia-wide, **the support for political co-operation between Slovakia and EU countries, as well as between Slovakia and the U.S. is obvious or even marked.** However, at the same time there appears a significant shift in support for the co-operation with the EU and that with the U.S., to the disadvantage of the U.S.: three quarters of the respondents wish that the co-operation with the EU should be strengthened, and 57% with the U.S.. This difference is larger mainly in some environments: among the elder, Ukrainians, or rather, Ruthenians, among the sympathizers of the Smer, the Slovak Democratic Left (SDL), the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and the Slovak National Party (SNS), as well as in groups more or less rejecting Slovakia’s NATO entry.

2. Does the public feel threatened?

2.1. Internal problems are in the foreground

The Slovak public is more concerned about internal than external sources of danger.³ It is above all Mafias in Slovakia and the trend of the standard of living. It reflects a long-term

³ Presumably, a shift in the perception of threat will occur under the impression of terrorist attacks and the subsequent retaliation of allies. Even in the 2001 IVO Survey, held on the days immediately following 11 September 2001, concerns about war and terrorist attacks spontaneously appeared among the most serious problems. Overall, 4 % of the respondents stated to have these concerns.

increased sensitivity to social problems and problems of personal safety. Social dissatisfaction and frustration (based on personal perception, “a social definition of a situation”) is documented by the fact that over half of Slovakia’s population thinks that life was better for people like them before 1989. This proportion is higher than in the Czech Republic, Poland, but even higher than in Hungary. It creates a solid foundation of general dissatisfaction. A high proportion of the respondents do not expect any change for the better even for the future, only one third were more optimistic.

In relation to security, the public clearly places **emphasis on “internal” sources of threat**. External threats, dangers which could come from “behind the borders” are perceived as less pressing. Security – especially if it is specified as military security from an external threat – may sound rather abstract and unconvincing to many people, as the main argument for pursuing NATO membership. Moreover, in the consciousness of a large percentage of people a threat has been so far associated with a “classic” military threat. Then NATO membership may be easily rejected by pointing to the fact Slovakia has no enemy, and therefore no defence and joining security groupings is needed. Other, “non-classic” security risks, such as *e.g.* terrorism, excessive dependence on instable energy sources, uncontrollable immigration, etc, have been perceived so far to a lesser extent.

2.2. Why should Slovakia join NATO?

The answer to this question is for a certain part of the Slovak public relatively unclear. On the whole, among the public **Slovakia’s security** is the most frequent argument **in favour of** this step. On the other hand, as was stated earlier, the **awareness of a potential external threat to Slovakia is rather weak**. The view that NATO membership does not entail only protection against an external threat, but also the bolstering of the international trustworthiness of a country, positive economic connections and a significant insurance against less known and therefore less felt security risks, is insufficiently spread among the public. The arguments like: “we belong to this community of countries in terms of civilization and values”, are only marginal in the Slovak public consciousness.

Public support for NATO membership may be diminished by faintly perceived reasons **for entry and deep concern about the consequences** which it would bring. **The most frequent concern in connection with potential Slovakia’s NATO entry even before 11 September was concern over Slovakia’s embroilment in conflicts**, over an increase in spending on the army and armament, as well as over the loss of Slovakia’s sovereignty.

Opponents of NATO entry most frequently point to **an increased security risk, increased financial expenses and NATO’s aggressiveness**. Another, a smaller proportion of opponents feel no threat to Slovakia, therefore they do not see reasons for joining it, and another group considers NATO as a source of threat, since NATO membership would limit the current or recent Slovak sovereignty which they heavily underline.

With respect to a large minority of people rejecting Slovakia’s orientation towards NATO, we were also interested in how they imagine Slovakia’s security should be ensured. It is noteworthy and possibly also symptomatic that **the answers: I do not know, I am not interested in, I have not thought of it were markedly the most frequent type of a response to the question how Slovakia’s security should be safeguarded outside NATO space. This category of rejections of orientation towards NATO thus simply manifested itself as irresponsible**. To a lesser extent the same is the case in relation to the frequent opinion that there is no danger, so “what to make effort for?” The other frequently stated ways supplement each other, both saying that one must rely only on oneself, the only difference being that in the first case the emphasis is placed on the military and in the second explicitly on neutrality. Both these, in fact **“solutions by means of neutrality”**, were spontaneously

expressed by over one third of the respondents from the minority of NATO entry opponents.

Material prosperity and not risk-taking is the main concern of a considerable proportion of the Slovak public. Paradoxically enough, it may lead both to support for Slovakia's NATO entry and its rejection. However, the part of support for membership based on such preferences is unreliable. In addition, the promise of prosperity appears as more straightforward in the EU, and thus the will "to join" this community is markedly greater, over 70%.

2.3. Personal safety and national security – an evaluation of periods

The feelings of people about security and, by contrast, about threat to security - to persons and the country – may be rational and irrational, and their reactions may be the same. Along with adequate and inadequately great concern there may occur **insensibility or underestimation of real threats.**

All the moments stated might be identified in how the Slovak public has evaluated individual historical periods in the recent past and the present. **The period prior to 1989 is often highlighted as the safest period for individuals and the country. A higher degree of personal safety, compared to national security, is more often attributed to this period. Periods following 1989 are perceived as the reverse; personal safety is evaluated as more problematic. In addition, differences between the personal safety judged and national security have been growing since 1989: the personal security perceived decreases even more rapidly than the national security perceived.** If a very+a rather **high** level of security are totalled on the one side, and a rather+a very **low** level of security are totalled on the other, then as from the period before 1989, through the periods 1990-92, 1994-98 to the period after the 1998 election "the score" of the personal **safety** perceived worsens by the sequence 75 : 14 (of 100%), 50 : 41, 29 : 64, 25 : 68, and the analogous "score" of **the security of the country** perceived by the sequence 70 : 18, 54 : 36, 40 : 52, 39 : 53. Thus personal safety **in the post-election period** (but before 11 September 2001) was perceived even by two thirds of those polled as low, and only by only one fourth as high; **over half of those polled considered national security as low, and over a third of respondents as high.** Despite the marked improvement of Slovakia's international position after the 1998 election (and prior to September 2001), overall, the Slovak public opinion on national security was not better, but even slightly worse. Presumably, an evaluation of national security is strongly influenced by the feeling of personal safety and information on organized crime and other threats, largely outside the reach of individual experience.

3. Ideas on how to respond and how not

3.1. "Non-interventionism"

In Slovakia the opinion that events in any country are its internal affairs is rather widespread, the non-civic attitude "let everybody mind his/her own business" and the opinion that countries should not intervene and interfere in other countries are firmly embedded. Sympathies lay more with the smaller and weaker. This widespread approach may be called "non-interventionism". When public opinions on the Alliance's intervention in Yugoslavia, and Russia's in Chechnya, as well as on 14 EU countries' sanctions against Austria were surveyed a short time ago, the two most frequent types were expected to crystallize: "pro-Western", critical of Russia's course of action in Chechnya, and "pro-Russian", rejecting the intervention in Yugoslavia. However, it was in fact the non-interventionist type, rejecting all the interventions mentioned, that was dominant, and the type approving all the interventions

mentioned, represented by a smaller proportion of the respondents, emerged in opposition to it.

3.2. Collective security: to adopt and contribute

Over half of the respondents (57%) approve of Slovakia's pursuing collective protection on the part of other countries; one third consider it unnecessary. The unstated consequence of this effort at the collective safeguarding of protection would naturally be the involvement that would bring not only a higher degree of protection to Slovakia, but also commitments for the republic, arising from the requirement of not being only "a consumer" but also an active contributor. In Slovakia such commitments binding the other party win a little smaller public support than "the consumption of collective security", though the voices for support predominates, but it is only "close" (48% in favour of contribution vs 43 % against it, data are of December 2000). Overcautiousness thus often wins over values. It permits the acceptance of help from others in the form of the collective safeguarding of defence, but more strongly restricts the willingness to help others.

The willingness to undertake obligations arising from NATO membership with the sense of responsibility should be surveyed mainly in the group of those polled supporting NATO membership. **68 % of them are willing to help.** Thus approximately a third of supporters support the country's NATO entry only superficially. For comparison it will be useful to show how the defence questions are perceived by our Czech neighbours. In December 2000, *i.e.* almost two years after the Czech Republic joined NATO, the trust in the help of allies in the case of emergency predominated (83 %), 60 per cent of the respondents expressed the willingness to help (Gabal, Analysis & Consulting, 2000), *i.e.* more than in Slovakia for the time being.⁴

3.3. Support for a membership commitment in two variants

In Slovakia the transformation of the Army into professional one has relatively large support. In summer 2001 it was confirmed that public support for the potential contractual participation of the Slovak Army in the alliance's intervention (in case of Slovakia's joining NATO) was fundamentally different for the situation when the Slovak Army would consist predominantly of conscript servicemen and for the situation of the professionalized Army. Responses in the first and the second contemplated situation were very different. While in case of a predominantly non-professionalized army, the fulfilment of the membership commitment was by (unequivocal or predominating) consent supported hypothetically by 26 % of the adult population and opposed by 67 %, in the case of a professionalized army even 71 % would approve of and 67 % disapprove of the commitment. The second approval (71 %) is markedly above the level of general support for Slovakia's NATO entry, and the first consent (26 %) is sharply under this level.

The adequate acceptance of the commitment by public opinion is important in itself. Additionally, an interesting test of "the depth of support" is **to what extent the commitment is accepted by those citizens who voice their support for Slovakia's NATO entry.** In the first situation considered 37 % NATO entry supporters agree with the fulfilment of the membership commitment if necessary, and in the second situation 88 %. The first figure is relatively low, and the second relatively high. On the whole, in the public's eyes the type of soldiers who should be directly involved in a conflict decides, and a hypothetical involvement

⁴ The cited public opinion poll in the Czech Republic surveying public opinions on national security, defence and NATO showed that the consensus in Czech society about NATO entry increased even to 70 %, although at the time of entry it was a little more than 50 %. (Gabal, Analysis & Consulting, 2000)

does not generate larger objections, insofar as servicemen are professionals who chose a career in the Army themselves.

4. Is NATO membership advantageous?

The question about the balance of estimated advantages and disadvantages associated with the admission of Slovakia to NATO is also a certain test of the embedment of NATO entry support. Overall data show that general support for the country's NATO entry is 52 % and the proportion of those who consider this step as predominantly advantageous is 26 %.

The conviction that advantages and disadvantages associated with Slovakia's NATO entry would be balanced is represented most strongly. Among other respondents whose opinions are distinct in one or the other direction, those who perceive the option as predominantly disadvantageous are in majority. Only one fourth of those polled perceive potential NATO entry as a decision which will predominantly bring advantages. Although even before 11 September a realistic assessment of NATO entry involved the awareness of commitments, and not only benefits, supporters of Slovakia's NATO entry relatively most frequently perceived NATO entry as "advantageous", with the predominance of favourable effects, while its opponents perceived it as disadvantageous. **But only a little less than half of those who support Slovakia's NATO entry in Slovakia perceive this step as predominantly advantageous.** On the other hand, only one fifth of those who reject the country's NATO entry, perceive the potential step not as disadvantageous, but as a balance between advantages and disadvantages. This last represents approximately 8 % of the Slovak adult population, and perhaps there will be a possibility of addressing them, without their remaining opponents of NATO entry.

5. Support for Slovakia's EU and NATO entry

5.1. The trend in support

Repeatedly, for a longer period of time the same question has been asked in order to find out the basic general relationship of the Slovak public to the EU and NATO: "Do you support or do you not support Slovakia's EU entry/...NATO entry?" The trend in support of entry between December 2000 and June 2001 was as follows:

Table 2: The trend in support for Slovakia's NATO entry (data are in %)

Responses	Period		
	12/2000	04/2001	06/2001
definitely + rather support	47	48	52
definitely + rather reject	47	44	39
don't know	6	8	9

Sources: MIC, December 2000; NOC, April and June 2001

Over the long period of time the Slovak public attitudes have showed more marked support for Slovakia's EU entry than those to Slovakia's NATO entry. However, between December 2000 and June 2001 views on the country's NATO entry showed a more significant change than views on EU entry. The proportion of disapproval significantly decreased, the proportion of equivocal answers and direct support for entry markedly increased. Nevertheless, here the disapproval remained more frequent than the disapproval of the country's EU entry. The ratio between "in favour of NATO entry" and "against NATO entry" changed from the balanced

score 47 : 47 (of 100) in December to the score 52 : 39 in June in favour of the proportion of the citizens supporting entry. It is necessary to highlight that it is a basic, though not the only criterion of the public's relationship to NATO membership.

The most marked changes occurred between December 2000 and June 2001 among sympathizers of several political parties. The support increased among HZDS sympathizers (there was a shift in the proportion "in favour of vs against" from 20 : 76 of 100 % in December to 37 : 55 in June), Smer sympathizers (from 39 : 56 to 58 : 37) and SNS sympathizers (from 10 : 89 to 21 : 73). An increase in support in the environment of the sympathizers of the opposition parties – which, however, has always started at low figures – was apparent. However, the other point might be the depth or permanence of this change. In any case, two aspects must be distinguished: a trend in the survey period, and the level of support achieved. Owing to group trends, sympathizers of the HZDS and the Smer most contributed to an increase in direct support for entry in the analysed period, and to a lesser extent also supporters of SNS. However, only in the case of Smer sympathizers, the proportion of supporters of entry outweighed the proportion of its opponents. Compared to opposition parties, support for entry remained markedly stronger among sympathizers of coalition parties, but the difference between them is not as large as it was a few months ago.

5.2. A simulated referendum

The marked majority of the public wishes to voice its opinion on NATO entry in a referendum, if the offer from NATO member states comes. However, speeches of some political parties and politicians showed that the pointing to the need of a referendum often served them as a substitute for non-existent own clear-cut views, or rather, as a more comfortable way of not speaking against NATO entry, and at the same time attempting at precluding it. The negatively suggestive selection of three questions for the marred referendum in May 1997 is memorable, moreover in the situation when Slovakia even did not get an invitation. The experience of the referenda held in Slovakia in 1990s displayed a lack of public interest in them. However, the opinion that when there is a ballot on something really significant and ballot tickets are not falsified (as it was in the case of the marred referendum), the public interest may be aroused, is the antithesis of this experience. But is Slovakia's expected NATO entry the matter that would really attract the public to a referendum?

Table 3: "Imagine that a referendum is held with the questions: 'Are you in favour or against Slovakia's NATO entry?' Would you or would you not take part in such a referendum?"

Responses	June 2001	Sept. 2001
would certainly take part	37	32
would very probably take part	30	25
would very probably not take part	13	21
would certainly not take part	13	14
don't know	7	8
cely riadok vyhodit		

Source: NOC, June 2001; IVO, Sept. 2001

If the proportions of those polled who are clearly resolved to take part in the referendum are added to the proportions of those who are inclined towards it to a certain extent, it will make a presumable two-third or 58 % poll for summer 2001, and that would be sufficient for the referendum's results being valid. However, the experience shows that it is very uncertain to foresee a real poll. Actual polls was several times markedly lower than the numbers of those

resolved to take part found out in surveys. Therefore a tougher criterion may be applied, *i.e.* taking account of the proportion of those who stated that they would “certainly” take part in such a referendum. With a substantially tougher criterion applied, a 37 % poll showed up in June 2001, and a 32 % poll three months later. With a poll lower than 50 % the referendum’s results would not become valid.

The proportions of forces in the simulated referendum need to be calculated both for a heavier as well as a lighter estimated poll.

Table 4: Responses of probable participants in a referendum (for two estimated polls)

Responses	Proportion of responses (in %) in a poll...			
	...higher (67- or 58 %)		...lower (37- or 32 %)	
	June 2001	Sept. 2001	June 2001	Sept. 2001
in favour of the SR’s NATO entry	66	61	67	66
against the SR’s NATO entry	30	32	31	31
don’t know	4	7	2	3
cely riadok vyhodit				

Source: NOC, June 2001; IVO, Sept. 2001.

According to a lower or higher estimated poll, in a referendum in summer 2001 there would be a clear predominance of the votes approving Slovakia’s NATO entry. They would predominate at a markedly higher rate than the support signalled by the basic non-referendum research question (that was 52 %). It was caused by the fact that **those supporting this entry showed exceptional preparedness to take part in a referendum on NATO entry.** By contrast, the citizens opposing the entry were less mobilized at that time. According to a presumed heavier poll in the first variant, the vote would make possible, or confirm Slovakia’s NATO entry. In the case of an estimated lighter poll, it would not decide on the question, and it would leave an ambiguous political message: the victory of the votes favouring the country’s NATO entry and low public interest indicating a certain indifference to this issue.

Insofar as the identified distribution of public forces for a possible referendum is stabilized in the following months, calling for a referendum on the part of those politicians in Slovakia who have wished – at least until recently – to use a referendum as an easy political instrument against Slovakia’s NATO entry would weaken.

5.3. Types of relationships to EU and NATO

It is generally known that **compared to apparently lower support for Slovakia’s NATO entry, marked support for Slovakia’s EU entry has been characteristic of the Slovak public for a long time.** Along with supporters of EU and NATO entry, and along with opponents of both EU and NATO entry, there exists a numerous group of people favouring EU entry, but not NATO entry.

Slovakia wide, relatively the most represented type favouring both Slovakia’s EU and NATO entry (46 % in December 2000) later became even the majority type (51 % in June 2001). By contrast, the proportion of opponents of both EU and NATO entry decreased from 21 % to 16 %, and the proportion of the attitude combination “EU yes & NATO no” decreased from 25 % to 21 %. From the position of state and national interest of the Slovak Republic, these shifts in public opinion and attitude had a favourable trend.

6. NATO membership as an issue

Foreign policy and integration are not priority topics for citizens. On the scale of urgent problems unemployment and the standard of living are at the top, and foreign policy generally at the bottom. On the other hand, **the interest in international political events is slowly rising**. It is smaller than the interest in national events, but overall, half of those polled regularly or at least more or less regularly watch events in the world. With respect to NATO integration, **in general the interest in political events is the greatest in crystallized groups: in explicit supporters and explicit opponents**. It may be implied that the interest in information leads to more crystallized and more definite attitudes, and more crystallized attitudes increase the need for information of this kind.

For studying “natural” informal communication environments of the Slovak public in relation to the alliance, it is important to know that **the majority of the population (37 %) over 16 have no trustworthy individual in their environment who would clearly speak “in favour of” or “against” Slovakia’s orientation towards NATO**. It also implies that this topic does not occur in direct communication, or is entirely tangential. In other words: what is not told by the media, it does not exist in the “public”. This type most frequently occurs among those who are not to take any position, as well as among lukewarm opponents of NATO membership. **The second most frequent type (31 %) are cases of a pluralistic environment as to opinions**, *i.e.* such an environment in which both trustworthy individuals holding one view in relation to the alliance (“in favour of”) and trustworthy individuals with the opposite view (“against”) occur. There remain two distinct types with a “unicolour” character. Overall, their proportion in the population is smaller, though the number of those who know only individuals speaking “against” NATO is larger (21 %) than those in whose environment only individuals speaking “in favour of” NATO occur (11 %).

Among those who know only individuals speaking in favour of NATO entry in their environments, even 91 % support Slovakia’s NATO entry. In the opposite, communication negative group, 83 % reject Slovakia’s NATO entry. **The pluralist environment (“both/and”) markedly favours the alliance** (it is in fact an urban environment, in which a higher proportion of educated people live who express their opinions on the topic, *etc.*). The so-called **empty environment** (“know neither “in favour of”, nor “against”) represents a specific case. **In such an environment attitudes of rejection towards NATO prevail** (and again, we must add that it is also connected with the fact that it is a rural environment in which people with lower education live, and in which this topic is rarely discussed). **It seems that** the absence of a topic, and thereby also the absence of disputes, strengthens the persistence of unconcerned stereotypes.

In Slovakia recently (at least) the basic consensus of relevant political forces about orientation towards NATO as a priority of our foreign policy was achieved. However, many stereotypes and myths persist at the public opinion level, which are largely standing behind the attitude of rejection towards NATO membership. An image of the new NATO, a shift from military-security to political and value accents, an interconnection between West-European and transatlantic integration and many other facts are poorly present in public consciousness. A discussion is vital to increase public informedness and to establish solid and sustainable public support; without this support the entry will probably not take place. The historian Lubomir Liptak characterized the features of the Slovak society as follows: a lack of self-confidence, a tendency towards fatefulness and the philosophy “it will somehow develop”, passivity, openness to extensive adoption of stimuli from outside, an internal oscillation between extremes, between adaptation and a denial of obvious reality, *i.e.* “between opportunism and rebelliousness”. (Lipták, 1999) These features also mark the relationship of the Slovak public to the country’s foreign policy orientation. National elites

(political and cultural) may markedly contribute to their overcoming, if they concur in several national interests, and will be more convincing in their verbal and practical advocacy.

Conclusion

Terrorist attacks on the WTC in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, in which thousands of people were killed, shook the whole world and provoked strong protests and condemnation, and became the milestone in the global development. A broad antiterrorist coalition began forming in the world, and at the beginning of October 2001, the U.S. and Great Britain started military operations against the Afghan Taliban, aimed at the elimination of global terrorism. The Slovak public responses to this event of global significance were initially monitored by swift telephonic surveys conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs and the Polis Agency⁵. A more extensive survey focused on public opinion on the terrorist attacks in more detail and in relation to support for NATO entry was conducted by the National Educational Centre (NOC) in the first half of October 2001⁶. According to its results, the overwhelming majority of the population (85%) agrees with the idea that “a strong international coalition should be formed in order to fight terrorism, otherwise it will expand”; Slovakia’s involvement in the fight against terrorism has somewhat smaller but clear majority support. 64 % of the respondents agreed with the statement “Slovakia should join in the fight against terrorism to help to remove a threat which is also aimed at us”.

Opinions of citizens on the terrorist attacks and the position of Slovakia in the fight against terrorism differ according to political preferences. For instance, 75 % of the supporters of the government coalition approve of Slovakia’s participation in the fight against terrorism. In the case of the supporters of the parliamentary opposition, that is also majority opinion, although represented by a smaller proportion. The views of HZDS and SNS sympathizers slightly differ. With HZDS sympathizers, the ratio of responses is 56 % : 41 % to the advantage of this step, with SNS sympathizers, the ratio is 44 % : 54 % to its disadvantage. The majority of Smer and ANO supporters are favourably inclined to this support, but their proportion is lower than that of the sympathizers of coalition parties.

Terrorist attacks on the U.S. and the subsequent military retaliation of the U.S. and Great Britain have not influenced the Slovak public attitudes to Slovakia’s NATO entry – deviations from the 2001 June figures are statistically insignificant – the proportion of supporters/opponents rose by 1 percentage point and the proportion of supporters/opponents by three percentage points. Several factors have had an impact on the positions of Slovak citizens. Undoubtedly, it was above all the character of the terrorist act that had an effect on them, which by its brutality has surpassed all the assaults conducted so far, and has provoked strong protests and condemnation. The general availability of information on the tragedy and its circumstances has been an important opinion-shaping factor. Opinions of Slovak citizens have been shaped by the unequivocal stance of the Slovak government, which has acted in perfect unison since the first moment, and has clearly defined where the position of Slovakia, as a country applying for NATO membership, is. The opinion that Slovakia can belong to

⁵ In Slovakia a representative telephonic opinion poll surveying a representative sample of 500 respondents about their opinions on the terrorist attacks on the U.S. was conducted by the IVO between 18 – 20 September 2001 through the GfK agency.

The Polis agency conducted several telephonic surveys about this topic for the STV (Slovak Broadcasting Company), the first being conducted between 12 –13 September 2001.

⁶ The Public Opinion Poll Section at the National Educational Institute (NOC), the collection of data took place between 5 – 14 October 2001, polling a representative sample of 1152 respondents over 18 years of age.

nowhere else than to the antiterrorist bloc predominated in all the relevant opinion-shaping environments and media. In contrast to the Kosovo crisis in 1999, today even many opposition politicians have taken the side of the antiterrorist alliance and support the course of action of the Dzurinda Government. Last but not least, the course of action of the U.S. government, which before starting military retaliatory attacks, sought to create a wide antiterrorist coalition, also played its role.

The public opinion on the terrorist attacks on the U.S. and Slovakia's participation in the fight against terrorism displayed that the Slovak public had showed a great amount of understanding of the seriousness of the situation as well as a certain measure of preparedness to share responsibility for the development extending beyond the boundaries of our country. The dynamic of the trend in public opinion on the fight against terrorism is difficult to estimate. The results presented suggest that support for integration into the alliance rests on a better information basis today, and is more deeply anchored in part of the population in terms of value and attitude, and therefore it is also "more resistant" (or "less vulnerable") to situation variations.

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