

“The Kosovo conflict – experiences of a new NATO member”
Presentation
by
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be here this evening and to address such a distinguished gremium as the Oslo Militaere Samfund. May I thank Brigadier Oddbjörn Grinden and also others for offering me this opportunity. I am delighted to share a few thoughts of mine with you on the experiences of a conflict, which has been in the focus of many discussions over the past period. There are certainly many lessons that we all must learn from the Kosovo experience. Its impact on a variety of issues, including the ones that go far beyond the scope of Kosovo proper, will be analysed extensively in the period to come. It is my conviction that the more honest we are in our analyses, the better service we do to ourselves for the future should the need arise for the international community to take resolute action again to prevent or manage conflict. I will therefore not confine myself in this presentation only to the broadly agreed uncontroversial conclusions but will rather try to provoke further thoughts on the matter. After the presentation I would be pleased to take your questions or comments.

It is particularly challenging for a Hungarian to speak on the Kosovo experience at least for three reasons. First, because my country barely joined the Alliance after an extremely short honeymoon, which lasted less than two weeks following accession, when it had to prove in practice that it was indeed ready, willing and able to share responsibilities with the other members. Secondly, among the Allies Hungary was the only one sharing directly borders with the FRY. So, just 12 days after our formal accession we found ourselves practically at war with one of our neighbours. Thirdly, what made Hungary's case even more delicate was that on the territory of the FRY a roughly 300.000 strong Hungarian national minority lived.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before addressing some concrete aspects of the experiences gained, let us have first a general look on the overall results of the Kosovo operation. On the positive side it is to be noted that NATO's five core demands established on Milosevic were met. *Operation Allied Force*, the very first offensive action taken by NATO in its 50 year history, ended with the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo and the return of most refugees to their homes. As a result, a NATO-led international force keeps the peace in the area and the way has been opened for a political settlement as well as for more long-term international efforts aimed at stabilising and democratising the entire region. It is equally legitimate to say that as a result of NATO's military action the consequences of ethnic cleansing could be largely reversed and Milosevic's abilities to fight new wars were reduced. The biggest result where the Alliance could fully achieve its objective was that the spillover of the conflict to adjacent regions and resulting further bloodshed could be prevented. NATO's credibility as a powerful alliance that in addition to the defence of the territory of its members is ready to go out of area to defend also shared values and stop bloodshed was preserved.

While not questioning many of the results achieved, some critics point out that what actually happened in Kosovo was not a triumph of air power but rather, as so often experienced in the history of the Yugoslav drama, a failure of prevention. Already in 1992-93 when Serbian repression and police violence broke loose in Kosovo, which provoked a quick radicalisation of the Kosovo Albanians it was absolutely clear that an explosion there was imminent with all its incalculable high-risk regional consequences.

In spite of this, for long years the international community took no preventive action whatsoever. The fact that this time outside intervention to stop brutality was launched earlier than in the case of Bosnia where a quarter of a million people had to be massacred first and other close to 3 million forced to leave their homes, could be regarded as a step in the right direction but for many innocent victims it was still too late and was considered as half-hearted.

As opposed to Bosnia where after several years of open warfare most refugees have not and probably will never return to their homes, in Kosovo the large majority of Albanians did return mainly from neighbouring Albania and Macedonia even if conditions for their resettlement were neither satisfactory nor safe. But one should not lose sight of the fact that there is now another exodus taking place in Kosovo that of the Serbs which seems to be unstoppable. One should add: this is happening before the eyes of KFOR, which cannot stop atrocities, committed this time against the Serbs. While failure to promote the return of displaced persons to their homes in Bosnia erodes one of the basic principles of the Dayton construction, the failure of efforts to prevent the fleeing of Serbs from Kosovo raises serious doubts about the attainability of the objective to build a multiethnic society there. The creation of an ethnically clean Kosovo and its separation from Serbia seems therefore to have become a reality. If we are honest to ourselves, then probably what we should aim at here is to make sure that this process takes place in an internationally controlled way and that the resulting negative effects are reduced to an extent possible.

When one tries to make an overall balance of the operation, it is generally agreed that NATO has achieved its primary, short-term objectives in Kosovo. The Alliance was militarily victorious even if actually not one but two wars were conducted in parallel. One in the air by NATO aircraft aimed at forcing Milosevic to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, the other on the ground, by Serb military and paramilitary forces to squeeze the unarmed Albanians out of Kosovo. This victory was never questionable even if for several weeks the air campaign did not stop ethnic cleansing but rather speeded it up, multiplying the number of victims and putting in particular Albania and Macedonia under immense political, economic and social strain. To complete the picture, it is to be acknowledged, however, that NATO was not successful in achieving its secondary objective, namely to remove Milosevic from power, and thus promoting a change towards democracy in the country. Observers in this context often put the question: can democracy be imposed on a country and its people if they do not want it? The answer can hardly be other than no. Not only because democracy by definition cannot be imposed, but also because that whole thing would be doomed to failure unless the provoked change is supported by the emergence of a self-sustaining system. But that would require well functioning democratic institutions, which, at present Serbia does not have. Consequently, the approach that the whole problem would get solved with the removal of Milosevic is clearly an overly simplistic one. It is certainly a necessary but alone insufficient criterion.

While armed brutality and genocide could indeed be halted, the ultimate consequences of the Kosovo conflict are still to be determined, which will largely depend on actions yet to be taken. It will certainly not be easier to win the peace than it was to win the war. If we want this newly regained peace to last longer than many cease-fires of the past Balkan conflicts of the 90s, then we must create the necessary conditions for it. Without a genuine international involvement and assistance the chance for success will remain slim. This is only through integration and the raising of personal interest in reconciliation that the wounds of recent tragedies can be healed and the historical separation of the Balkan region from the rest of Europe can be gradually overcome. As experience has shown, international action has been lagging far behind unfolding events in the former Yugoslavia even if in most of the cases future explosions have been clearly foreseeable. So, one important lesson that we learned from all this is that problems of the Balkans should not be taken out of context and handled separately, just because the others are not burning yet, but should rather be approached in their complexity. It is high time to address with honesty and realism, in a non-hypocritical way all problems of the region, whatever sensitive they may be and regardless whether we thought they had already been settled or have been thus far unaddressed. It is equally important to develop with creativity and political far-sightedness a coherent and comprehensive vision that also provides for the necessary resources to support such plans.

The South-East European Stability Pact has the potential, for the time being only the potential, to become a good framework for providing the necessary incentives. In order to achieve the results required assistance should, of course, be made dependent on the performance of individual countries and their efforts made towards democracy.

Looking at the motives of NATO's action in Kosovo the question may be put, was it a value-driven operation or there were identifiable interests behind the decision taken as well? I think that NATO, and the democratic community of nations at large have become more sensitive towards blatant and massive violations of values their societies are based on. At the same time it is equally clear that interests did have an important role to play in the consideration of various options. One such underlying interest had already been mentioned earlier, namely the wish to prevent the destabilisation of the region on NATO's periphery. The perspective of two million Kosovo Albanian refugees in addition to the ones that have fled the former Yugoslavia earlier and the nightmarish vision of a major explosion of the Balkan powder keg with all its unpredictable consequences, coupled with the often cited and increasingly influential CNN-effect did certainly also help policy-makers to take a more resolute stance on the issue than ever before. The absence of national interest conversely helps to explain why the international community was so slow and hesitant in responding to the genocide of the toutsis in Rwanda or why the mass-murdering of people in Tadjikistan has remained practically unnoticed. Based on such conclusions it seems to be unlikely that NATO would want to apply similar conflict management methods in the case of conflicts outside of Europe, when the national interests of its members are not jeopardised so directly. The difficulties NATO was faced with in carrying out the operation may just increase the Alliance's reluctance to engage in a military action far away from its peripheries.

Let me now turn to another subject, namely the question of a United Nations mandate and the legitimacy of NATO's action. As we all recall, just like in the case of Bosnia earlier, repeated attempts were made to get a clear mandate from the UN for a NATO non-Article 5 mission. No doubt, all members of the Alliance would have preferred to have an unambiguous, clear mandate for the operation. But that did not seem to be attainable since both Russia and China were prepared the use their veto right in the Security Council. In the meantime, the situation in Kosovo had developed in a way that could be neither tolerated nor condoned. So, the decision to intervene had to be taken even in the absence of a 100 percent clear authorisation from the UN Security Council. One may argue that the repeatedly confirmed Yugoslav non-compliance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the assessment by the UN that the situation has put regional security in jeopardy and the imminence of a major humanitarian tragedy provided the necessary political and legal framework for NATO to take action. This permissive interpretation was shared by all NATO members. At the same time we all know that others, not only outside the Alliance, but in public debates also in many NATO countries, favoured a much more restrictive interpretation claiming that only a specific UN resolution authorising explicitly NATO to take action can be regarded as a mandate. In situations of genocide, ethnic cleansing or other clear, gross and uncorrected violations of human rights references to an emerging right of "humanitarian intervention" in the accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter have appeared first in US and UK statements. While the point behind this argumentation is absolutely legitimate, not only from a moral but also from a security point of view, the problem is that it is still a political and not a legal argument. This is on this ground that many international lawyers keep asking the question whether we still base ourselves on the primacy of international law or not.

I have no intention to overestimate the significance of *Operation Allied Force*, but I am convinced that on March 24, 1999 NATO opened a completely new chapter not only in its own history, but in post World War II history in general. Even if some suggest that NATO's Kosovo operation should not be regarded as a precedent, it was clearly a precedent as was reflected in a somewhat less explicit way in NATO's new Strategic Concept adopted in Washington last year. With the air campaign launched in the absence of a clear and specific UN mandate (or at least while there were still hesitations about that) the era of the UN Security Council's absolute centrality that was indisputable under any circumstances for 45 years has come to an end.

One of the messages NATO's action conveyed was that the lives of tens of thousands of people may be more important than the desire to continue sticking to the absolute authority and centrality of the UN Security Council in situations when it had already proven to be unable or unwilling to take action in defence of human lives. So, in the future NATO may again, without any automaticity, consider military action in response to a government's violence against its own people, if circumstances so require, even in the absence of a specific UN mandate. But only to come back then to the "traditional UN path" as quickly as possible, as was the case with the adoption of UNSCR 1244 on June 10.

Some ask the question, where are the limits of such unilateral actions, where would we end up if other regional groupings would claim the same rights? Well, I do not know, it is not yet clear how a new international order capable of responding more adequately to the needs of today and tomorrow will look like and to what extent the current international legal framework will have to be adapted. What seems to be clear however is that the realities have changed tremendously since the inception of the UN. While the UN continues to play a central role in ensuring peace all over the world, the options we have at our disposal may have to be altered just because the character of conflicts have changed fundamentally. As the statistics show, out of 92 conflicts since the fall of the Berlin wall 89 were regional intrastate ones. Their effective management may require instruments other than the one that was created to avoid the biggest worry that transpired everything right after World War II: the danger of new major inter-state conflagrations. The current international legal framework seems to have reached its limits and is not flexible enough anymore to respond adequately to these changes. The only sensible solution is to adapt the current legal framework to prevailing realities rather than vice-versa. One additional thought that I would like to offer to you in this context. The decision to launch the air campaign was taken by the consensus of the 19 members of NATO. I do not think that after having exhausted all political and diplomatic possibilities and after the failure of repeated attempts to mobilise the UN to take action their clear conclusion that they need to resort to the use of force to stop further tragedies from occurring should have less power than the nodding of the Perm 5 of which three are anyway members of NATO.

A related issue is the limits of state sovereignty. Already ten years have elapsed since the time when the then CSCE affirmed that the way a government treats its citizens is not just the internal matter of the given state, but because of its regional implications and because of the universality of human rights it is a matter of legitimate concern to the whole international community. At the same time with the process of growing interdependence and the advancement of globalisation the principle of non-intervention has lost its meaning to a large degree. Against this background the Kosovo experience seems to reflect a move away from sovereign immunity towards a new concept of international law. The message the actions taken in Kosovo and also in East Timor carry is that governments should no longer feel safe behind a shield of sovereignty, free to carry out whatever actions in violation of their citizens' basic rights. NATO's action in Kosovo was intended to also serve as a deterrent for other potential perpetrators of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The large scale Russian military operation now underway in Chechnya shows that this message was not fully taken everywhere and as Orwell said there are more equals than others.

NATO's decision to actually launch the air campaign came as a cold shower in particular for Russia, which thought to be able to prevent the Alliance's military action by expressing strong opposition to it. The fact that the air campaign started without Russia's prior agreement represented a major blow on the country's perception of its own traditional role as an indispensable superpower with exclusive powers in European and global security, which already for years had not actually been supported by real capabilities and resources. The novelty in this was not that the "king was naked" but that it became evident that others knew about it and behaved accordingly. Russia has been playing a kind of "champagne diplomacy on a beer budget" for many years. Clearly, with dramatically reduced resources and in the midst of an extremely deep internal crisis, Russia would have not been able to play a constructive role in Kosovo, even if it had wanted. Therefore, the objectives they set for themselves were the considerations of a superpower.

First, to preserve as much as possible from the country's superpower role in world politics and second, to counter NATO dominance in the region by weakening its internal cohesion and, first and foremost, by preventing it from taking action in a vacuum that Russia's inability to contribute substantially had created. Kosovo's and Serbia's fate could only have a secondary role to play in Russia's thinking. In addition, Russia's behaviour was also designed to serve the purpose of internal consumption, namely to create the image of a strong state, in a period when its erosion was fairly obvious.

NATO's action was considered as threatening because it signalled the Alliance's readiness to act militarily also elsewhere without Russia's consent and therefore against its interests. Neither Russia's traditional privileged position in security matters nor its membership in the Security Council could prevent that from happening. Russia's warnings to NATO about stringent countermeasures, including the deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus, the mobilisation of forces along the borders with Norway, proved to be elements of a harsh rhetoric mainly.

The Kosovo conflict laid open a key contradiction in NATO's relationship with Russia. In spite of attempts to treat NATO, as a whole on the one hand and Russia on the other as equals in the context of the Founding Act and the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, in reality, the Kosovo experience proved that NATO could not and did not regard Russia as its equal. After bombing had started not only relations cooled down, but somewhat later Russia used NATO's military action in Kosovo as a justification for launching a major offensive against Chechnya, paying practically no attention to any outside criticism. The fact that NATO was much more inclined to agree to Russian terms for participation in KFOR than in the case of SFOR earlier and that it made no effort to stop the Russian surprise invasion of the Pristina airport clearly indicate that in spite of all unfavourable experiences NATO's underlying objective, and that of the West in general, to engage rather than inalienate Russia has not changed, even if methods used thus far probably will need to be thoroughly reviewed. Whatever strange feelings one may have reading Russia's leaked draft military doctrine or seeing the way the new Duma was recently elected, co-operation with the West has no alternative for Russia. I think that as rationalism and pragmatism prevail in Russia this will be more and more realised.

I am absolutely convinced that NATO's decision to start the air campaign was the right one, and it had no alternative. At the same time there are questions about the ways the mission was implemented that need to be looked at with a critical eye so that we could find out what should have been done differently or better. No doubt, there were both deficiencies and miscalculations on NATO's side before and also during the air campaign that brought about some unpleasant surprises. Let me just briefly touch upon some of them that seem to be important for the future.

(1) When the operation started neither NATO nor any other international player seemed to have a clear and sensible political strategy as to how the conflict should be handled. A general wish to drive the parties back to the negotiating framework created in Rambouillet was neither precise nor sufficient enough. Steps beyond the air campaign were excluded in advance and there was no plan what to do if Milosevic does not want to go back to the Rambouillet framework shortly after the air campaign was launched. It is of course very difficult to expect the military to define the military objectives rightly if and when the political objectives to be followed are not crystal clear. There was even less clarity about how other components of a much-desired comprehensive approach to the problems of Southeastern-Europe should be handled. One should add to all these: NATO had no exit strategy either when the operation started.

(2) The political requirements formulated before the air campaign started seemed to be rather incompatible with military imperatives. On the one hand quick military results were expected so that support in individual member countries is not exposed to unbearable tests, and on the other hand, a set of politically motivated constraints were self-imposed, such as: targeting restricted to air defence and military infrastructure; no collateral damage, i.e. no casualties among the civilians; zero death on NATO's side; the exclusion of any ground op-

tion. These conditions taken together created a kind of “mission impossible” situation for military planners for several reasons:

- (a) Military force, whatever sophisticated technology is used, remains a blunt instrument and is not laser surgery. So if one wages a war, casualties cannot be excluded. Moreover, the above mentioned conditions contradicted a fundamental element of modern military doctrine which states that military force “should always execute for decisive results”.
- (b) The rules of the game as declared by the Alliance put a strait-jacket on NATO’s planners and at the same time helped the Serb military commanders to define exactly what they should be doing and how. NATO offered a kind of “gentlemen’s war” to Milosevic, which he was not. So, how did NATO’s conditions work in reality? NATO set the condition that no civilian targets are attacked and all collateral damage should be avoided. It meant for the Yugoslavs that they moved all heavy armour that they wanted to protect to the closest vicinity of public buildings, such as schools and hospitals. No cost in NATO lives? It was translated to mean that the air defence system had to be kept operational at any cost, so to be able to keep NATO pilots uncertain about when Yugoslav SAMs would lock on them again. As a result, air power was restricted to high altitude delivery, which reduced the effectiveness of bombing significantly. No ground forces are going to be deployed? As a result it was much easier to wait out and ignore NATO bombing and deploy or hide forces more freely. At the same time, implicitly, the Yugoslav military and paramilitary forces were given a free hand to accelerate the sweeping out of the Kosovo Albanians, using them as human shields against eventual NATO attacks. While political considerations behind the decision to rule out the participation of ground forces from the operation were quiet evident, namely to assure public support and to reassure some NATO Allies, including my own country, that were particularly worried about the extension of the operation beyond a certain point, militarily and tactically this decision was unwise and did not pay off. As we all know, the Kosovo Albanians had to pay a high price for it.
- (c) The fact that practically all steps NATO intended to take in Kosovo were first communicated through the media just increased strange feelings about the conduct of the operation. The intention to bring about an early collapse of the regime by firstly telling Belgrade how military pressure on them would increase if they do not comply with NATO’s conditions did not work as a method very well.

(3) The fact that NATO’s unity, the cohesion among its 19 members could be maintained throughout the 78 days of the operation was of critical importance. Political unity was the prerequisite for NATO to take action as an alliance beyond its borders and the continued reconfirmation of this unified front over Kosovo limited Milosevic’s freedom of action, put pressure on Russia to accede to allied demands and helped to build a network of support among non-allied states bordering Yugoslavia. To achieve and maintain this unity was not easy at all. With regard to the pre-operation phase NATO, as you will recall, started to threaten with air strikes against Yugoslavia, as a means to enforce the provisions of the Holbrooke – Milosevic agreement. For six whole months the Alliance continued a verbal offensive that was not supported by action at all. This clearly reflects that in spite of unquestionable Yugoslav non-compliance and the damaging effects on NATO of repeated threats that remained unimplemented (of which certain other conclusions are to be drawn) actually to arrive at the triggering point was an extremely difficult decision. To maintain unity was not easier either for many NATO governments. The Greek public’s opposition to continuing the air campaign reached, according to the polls, 98%. But Greece was not alone. The Italian government’s wrestling with domestic opposition is also well known. There are two conclusions flowing from this: (a) in order to maintain unity within the Alliance one had to pay a high price by giving serious concessions to individual NATO countries at the expense of the operation’s military effectiveness. The line between minimal political concessions and maximum military effectiveness is extremely hard to find. In spite of deficiencies this time it worked out. (b) One should pay more attention to the need to generate and maintain public support in NATO member countries. As the Kosovo experience demonstrated, this important task was clearly underestimated. One should also be more careful in selecting the right arguments.

For instance the one that explained that NATO's credibility was the reason why the air campaign had to be launched was probably not the most convincing.

(4) NATO seemed to have many false perceptions or miscalculations at the beginning of the operation. It had to realise quickly that the first days of bombing did not bring about the collapse of the Belgrade regime, but rather generated a higher than ever degree of national unity behind Milosevic on the Serbian side against, as it was presented in Yugoslavia, the outside aggression. The regime could easily manipulate the public opinion in Serbia because it enjoyed an absolute information monopoly within the country, which no one made attempts to brake. The fact that NATO made no effort whatsoever at the beginning to counterbalancing the Yugoslav propaganda was a big mistake. The bombing of radio and TV stations and, in particular, efforts to offer something else to the public instead came too late and the information programmes offered were too weak and largely unprofessional, which, therefore, were sometimes rather counter-productive. A further "cold shower" was for NATO, as was already touched upon, the realisation that its military objectives could not be achieved in the order and within the time frame it had established for itself. Belgrade's outright efforts to achieve the unbelievable: to ethnically cleanse an entire territory inhabited by almost two million Albanians representing 90% of the population was also among the unpleasant "surprises".

Let me now say a few words on military capabilities. The allied force that participated in the operation was undoubtedly both impressive and lethal. Nevertheless, one should not lose sight of the fact that there were also certain deficiencies during the operation that should make us think about urgent remedies. Such deficiencies included, *inter alia*:

- (a) Shortfalls in certain areas like precision-guided munitions, heavy airlift, secure interoperable communications, etc.
- (b) The unavailability of readily deployable forces for peacekeeping. (In this context let us recall what Lord Robertson had to say on the difficulty to pull together and deploy a peacekeeping contingent that represented not more than 2% of the aggregate of allied forces.)
- (c) The unquestionable disparity between US and European military capabilities.

The need to adapt force structures to the new requirements and to build forces that are mobile, deployable and flexible was recognised well before all the experiences of *Operation Allied Force* could have been gathered. NATO's Defence Capabilities Initiative did not only recognise the problem but committed member countries to identify capability shortfalls and actually ensure that they would be remedied.

Similarly, already long before the Kosovo operation was launched the problem of disparity in US and European military capabilities was identified as an issue that requires urgent attention as it can increasingly cause disturbing interoperability problems within the Alliance. The attention was also drawn to the resulting dangers of NATO's becoming a "two-tiered" alliance.

Kosovo did not make completely new discoveries in this field, simply brought these problems to the surface more forcefully than ever before. The assessment that without US participation the European allies would have not been able to mount this or any other Kosovo-type operation could hardly be questioned. So the need to reduce the gap within the Alliance and to reinforce European capabilities has become an imperative. Current efforts in the EU to develop a European Security and Defence Policy will hopefully concentrate first and foremost on reinforcing capabilities rather than on creating new structures. While ESDP forms part of the EU's ongoing integration process it is also part of an overall effort to enable Europe to contribute more and to help ensure a more equitable sharing of tasks and responsibilities within the Alliance. The requirements vis-à-vis the development of ESDP as formulated by Lord Robertson, the so-called 3 "i"-s (increasing capabilities, inclusiveness and the indivisibility of the Alliance) seem to capture the essence of the thing.

In the period to come it will be critical to define NATO's relationship with the EU rightly. The question often comes up in discussions whether the way ESDP develops can damage things that are of vital importance here for our security. The answer is yes, if things are done unwisely without the necessary care. Yes, in such a case it could damage NATO itself, its primacy not only in collective defence but also in crisis management, it could damage cohesion within NATO by creating walls between EU-member and non-EU member allies and it could cause damage in the long-term interest to keep the Americans with no less commitment in Europe. These dangers must be avoided and achievements that are of great value for us also in the long run should not be jeopardised. In addition, with regard to the security set-up, I think it would be very unwise to fix something, which has been working and working very well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hungary has been certainly a special case in this whole story in the sense that it was the only member of the Alliance that shared a common land border with Serbia and maintained a special responsibility towards a sizeable Hungarian community that lived across the border in Vojvodina. The fact that Hungary just joined the Alliance when the air campaign started did not make the country's case any easier either.

The Kosovo operation represented a multiple challenge for Hungary.

1 The first of them actually applied to all the three newcomers in NATO. That particular challenge was a test of their commitment and abilities. In other words, shortly after accession they were given an opportunity, putting it in a positive way, to prove in practice what they had many times reaffirmed before, namely that they were indeed ready and willing to act as contributors of common security rather than mere consumers or free-riders. In the political sense all the three governments demonstrated a high level of loyalty and trustworthiness that were ready to provide full support to the operation. In Hungary Parliament passed a resolution already on the very day the air campaign started granting NATO aircraft free access not only to the Hungarian airspace but also to airfields and service facilities. In the history of the Yugoslav conflict Hungary always had a special role to play and the country contributed to the implementation of Alliance efforts already at a time when neither NATO guarantees could be offered, nor the perspectives of future membership seemed to be on the horizon. As early as of 1993 AWACS planes could use freely Hungary's airspace, and IFOR and SFOR troops were stationed on its territory. So, Hungarian President Göncz could legitimately say a few years ago that "NATO could enter Hungary well before the country could enter NATO". The conclusion that one can draw here is that the three countries lived up to the political expectations, demonstrated resolve and did not challenge the Alliance's so critical consensus. They played, as was expected, a "policy taker" role and with one exception they did not take separate diplomatic initiatives to solve the problem. One can also add that the Alliance with 19 members did not function less smoothly than it would have done so with 16.

From a military perspective, the picture is less rosy. It is to be recognised that interoperability problems were not only encountered between the US and the European allies but also between the three new members and the rest of the Alliance. What flows from this experience could hardly be denied: upon accession the three did not reach a level of compatibility that could make a smooth interaction possible for them with other alliance members. But probably this did not catch anyone by surprise. When the decisions were taken on the invitation of the first wave countries military-technical considerations, similarly to earlier stages of NATO enlargement, played very little role. The question was not whether they were militarily compatible then with the Alliance but rather whether they made steady and sufficiently convincing efforts towards achieving interoperability in key areas as early as possible. It has started to change even before the accession of the three, by the appearance of the MMRs (minimum military requirements) and later with the definition of a more elaborate set of military-technical conditions set out in the MAP (Membership Action Plan).

Experience gained in Kosovo is likely to be translated into more concrete requirements vis-à-vis new applicants when NATO prepares itself for a new wave of enlargement.

2 The fact that Hungary is an immediate neighbour of the FRY represented a further challenge. On the one hand it just increased the country's interest in containing the conflict quickly and promoting a settlement, which is effective and durable. On the other hand it also created certain limitations in the country's freedom of action. Looking more deeply into the matter it is quite obvious that for a neighbouring country it is of fundamental importance to see predictable and stable circumstances prevail along its borders. Based on such considerations Hungary from the outset urged the international community to take preventive steps in Yugoslavia and when the conflict already broke out was among those who supported a coordinated and resolute international action to take place early. In order to increase the effectiveness of the outside pressure exerted on Yugoslavia Hungary also agreed to the extension of stringent international measures to include also economic sanctions, even if such measures effected very adversely its economy. One should clearly understand that durable stability in Yugoslavia could only be achieved if democracy takes root and democratic institutions start functioning. With that objective in mind Hungary has been active in promoting democratic initiatives in Yugoslavia.

Neighbourhood with Yugoslavia has also been a limiting factor. There are apparently certain rules of behaviour that neighbouring countries should always respect that are based on the fundamental interest of every country to maintain good relations with their neighbours. So it is with self-restraint that certain things need to be looked at. This was in this spirit that Hungary declared fairly early on two such limitations on itself: firstly that it is not prepared to send troops to Yugoslavia and secondly that it is not prepared to authorise NATO to launch a ground operation from Hungarian territory. With regard to the first the underlying thought behind such a constraint was to avoid any situation from occurring in which a Hungarian soldier would be forced to shoot at a Yugoslav. In other words not to create wounds that will remain there even when the conflict is long over. This basic rule for neighbours has been broadly accepted in international practice. Some may see a certain contradiction here, namely that countries that are certainly the most interested in peace and stability in their immediate neighbourhood do not participate in an international military action the very objective of which is to stop warfare there. In order to "counterbalance" the effects of such limitations Hungary was determined to offer more in other fields, so that it could contribute more substantially to Alliance efforts. This was in this spirit that Hungary for instance sent a contingent – though not combat troops – to Macedonia. Hungarian opposition to launch any NATO ground operation from Hungarian territory had several reasons besides the already mentioned general rule that wounds in the neighbourhood should not be inflicted. Let me just quickly mention two such reasons: first, the intention to avoid any eventual Serbian countermeasure that could represent a direct risk to the lives of Hungarian citizens, and second, to save the lives and property of the Hungarian minority living right on the other side of the border.

3 Another challenge Hungary was faced with stemmed from the requirement within the country to lessen to the minimum the danger of the Hungarian population being affected in any negative way by the conflict. You may ask the question: was Hungary exposed to any direct threat during the conflict? I think in certain ways yes. Militarily, the country's membership in NATO brought about an unprecedented level of security that could be visible to any Hungarian for instance by looking up and watching NATO aircraft patrolling the Hungarian airspace. In particular in the event of a NATO ground operation, smaller incursions could not be ruled out completely. Whatever unwise a larger Yugoslav strike against targets in Hungary would have been, irrational steps could not be entirely excluded, again in particular, if a land operation had been launched from the direction of Hungary with the then obviously more ambitious objective than merely to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Two mechanised infantry brigades were deployed and moved up and down along Hungary's border at a depth of 50-60 km. In addition to it the fact that Yugoslavia possessed chemical weapons made potentially such a risk more real. All in all nevertheless I think that realistically the likelihood of non-military risks was much higher.

What I have in mind is primarily the arrival of waves of refugees, which, in case of a ground operation in Serbia could have been much worse, affecting directly the more than 300.000 Hungarians there.

4 The presence of a sizeable Hungarian community in Vojvodina was a special challenge for Hungary. Already long ago it was clear that the way Milosevic treated the Kosovo Albanians and the degree to which the international community was ready to accept that determined to a large extent Belgrade's policy toward its minorities, including the Vojvodina Hungarians. To prevent the exodus of the Serbs from Kosovo has been an important objective for Hungary. Apart from more general considerations also because Vojvodina constituted the main target of displaced Kosovo Serb settlers. Since 1991 as many as half a million Serbs have settled in Vojvodina. Their arrival did not only change considerably the region's ethnic composition but since they came from war-torn regions where they themselves were exposed to atrocities, they imported a kind of "war psychosis" that poisoned the atmosphere in the traditionally calm, multiethnic Vojvodina. Vojvodina which was deprived of its autonomy just like Kosovo in 1989 because of its specific features may become an example of ethnic patience within Serbia.

The Vojvodina Hungarians who feared that they may be subjected to Belgrade's retaliation just because of Hungary's role in NATO's military action kept the Hungarian government under constant pressure throughout the air campaign to exclude the region, and in particular, non-military installations from NATO's target list and not to authorise the take-off of NATO aircraft from Hungarian airfields attacking targets in the Northern part of Vojvodina. It was not easy at all to convince them that NATO's proclaimed objective that "Milosevic's forces should feel secure nowhere in the country" was the right approach and that they have to cope with the fact that a disproportionately large percentage of bombs fell on Vojvodina.

The resolve of Hungary to act as a new ally was also tested in its relations with Russia. Let me dwell on two concrete cases. The first was in April 1999 when a truck convoy from Russia and Belarus wanted to cross Hungary to deliver, as it was labelled, humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia. When the authorities at the border found out that among the trucks there were easily convertible armoured trucks and that the convoy carried 60 tons of fuel that were under UN embargo they returned the convoy. The incident led to a serious deterioration of bilateral relations, unknown since the suppression of the 1956 revolution. The other case two month later was when Russia requested an overflight of six IL-76 transport aircraft firstly cheating about their cargo and destination. As it turned out to be, the request for urgent overflight happened to be submitted on the eve of the Russian surprise invasion of the Pristina airport. Instead of 10 technical crew on each plane, the planes all together in reality carried 600 fully armed infantrymen. The overflight was denied. It took a lot of time and concentrated efforts to find remedies to revert the declining trend in the Russian-Hungarian relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me mention a few specific lessons learned for Hungary.

(1) In the political field such a lesson was, that even if some might have thought that with accession the country's integration can be regarded as a "done deal", the experience gathered very clearly put all deficiencies in the lime-light. The conclusion here could be that the integration process was far from being over and it would require constant political attention and the concentration of resources to carry the process forward at a higher speed.

(2) The Kosovo experience made Hungarian approaches more nuanced in questions like the participation of Hungarian troops in a military effort that is carried out in a neighbouring country. While the underlying thought (not to inflict wounds in a neighbouring country) has remained the same, a distinction was made between a sufficiently permissive environment (when all parties give their consent to the presence of troops, when there is a UN mandate, etc.) and other non-permissive cases. It had to be realised that non-Article 5 operations are

far more likely to be needed in Hungary's neighbourhood than for instance in that of Denmark, and for Hungary to exclude itself from all such NATO operations would probably create a strange impression. This shift in the approach enabled Hungary to deploy a 320 strong battalion to serve with KFOR.

(3) In Hungary, public support for NATO membership remained very high ever since the November 1997 referendum, which produced a sweeping result of 85% of the turnout voting in favour of membership. As the bombing campaign started the level of support dropped by some 10%. Even if it is not a dramatic decrease and the level of support by now climbed up again, this sudden change is indicative. This reflects that probably one should do more to better prepare the public for similar situations with all their implications.

(4) In the military field with regard to the substance Hungary's experiences did not differ from the ones in many allied countries. But the magnitude of the problem in Hungary was never so clearly realised. Of a 53.000 strong armed force only two battalions could be readily deployed within the country. The Hungarian Defence Forces' air transport capacity did not give much reason to be satisfied either, which came to the surface when a large quantity of humanitarian aid was awaiting shipment to Albania. As a result of such unpleasant discoveries a strategic review of the armed forces, which was long overdue, started in Hungary, bearing also in mind the requirements of the DCI. In addition to create a balance between resources, force goals and the size and structure of the armed forces, the review is also intended to make sure that the money that is available in the budget is spent in the order of priorities.

(5) The Kosovo experience also highlighted the importance to create buffers within the budget to cover unplanned and unforeseeable expenses. The lesson learned here was that if there are no such buffers within the budget then expenses could only be covered if money is taken away from other key objectives, such as modernisation.