

Lessons learnt and unlearnt. Hungary's 15 years in NATO

Hungarian security and defence policy has experienced a fundamental transformation in the past two decades leading towards and following the country's accession to NATO in 1999. This transformation has meant more than a shift, much more a fundamental change right from its founding values and core aims. During the 1990s, leading to Hungary's NATO membership, the country - its political and economic systems, as well as its society - strived to leave behind the legacy of the Soviet Eastern Block and the Warsaw Pact. Three parallel processes have been underway in this regard: Hungarian security and threat perception, the scope and characteristics of the international role Hungary desires to play, and the corresponding institutional framework have been transformed. Thus, 15 years of NATO membership has had an all-encompassing effect on Hungary's security, including the country's defence policy and its institutions, the country's involvement in international crisis management efforts, the development of national defence capabilities and Hungarian society's relation to the armed forces. In spite of this, the relevant literature in English on the country's lessons learnt in these fields is rather limited, not to mention the practical lack of analyses on "lessons unlearnt", some deficiencies that might serve as guidelines for prospective members of NATO on what to do differently. The aim of this brief study is to draw the most significant conclusions of Hungary's 15 years within NATO from a critical but understanding point of view.

In this chapter, first an overview of the evolution of Hungarian strategic culture sets the wider scene for mapping up transformative processes leading to the birth and naturalization of a truly "transatlantic" Hungarian defence policy. Then the conclusions of Hungary's NATO membership are drawn and the most important lessons learnt, as well as obstacles and prevailing deficiencies as "lessons unlearnt" are pointed out at the strategic level.

Changes in Hungarian strategic culture brought about by Euro-Atlantic integration

Throughout and after the 1989 transition period, military and strategic thinkers were primarily preoccupied with the dilemma of how to define sovereign foreign and defence policy¹ and how to provide a sustainable financial and organi-

¹ J. L. Kiss, *European Security: Hungarian Interpretations, Perception and Foreign Policy*, [in:] O. Wæver, O. Lemaitre, E. Tromer (eds.), *European Polyphony. Perspectives Beyond East - West Confrontation*, Macmillan: London 1989, pp. 141-154; P. Dunay, *Adversaries all around?: (Re)Nationalization of Security*

zational background for the Hungarian Armed Forces.² Later on the evolving strategic trends (the growing number of international peace support, crisis management and stabilizing operations) and NATO (and to a lesser extent EU) enlargement in Eastern Central Europe moved strategic thinking towards new features of strategic culture necessary for participation in such frameworks: multinational cooperation, interoperability and joint missions.³ The non-military toolbox and geographical focus of international action have accordingly been broadened.⁴

The gradual move to the path of Euro-Atlantic integration has significantly transformed the Hungarian understanding of security. The perception of security in Hungary took on a multi-dimensional feature quite early, already from the beginning of the 1980s, opening up economic, societal, political and environmental aspects besides the contemporarily predominant military aspect. This approach has been further strengthened since the transition period, and non-military aspects have been defined both by Hungarian society and political elites as being determinant. Even though the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Balkan Wars were interpreted in the military security domain in the 1990s, as well as the fact that accession to NATO was a predominantly military issue and was understood in the wider context of national and international peace, stability and security in the second place only, empirical research has revealed that the security perception of Hungarian society is primarily non-military: it is focused on internal, existential issues, such as employment, social welfare and public safety.⁵

As Hungarian security and threat perception identifies predominantly internal, existential and social issues as matters of concern, all of them being non-military issues, not only the country's international ambitions are tailored to this tight scope of national concern and popular support, but also the means and resources available for foreign and security policy action (as well as homeland defence and

and Defence Policies in Central and Eastern Europe, Netherlands Institute of International Relations: Hague 1994; H. Vincze (ed.), *Hungary's Security in the New Regional and International Context*, "Defence Studies", No. 42., Institute for Strategic and Defence Studies: Budapest 2000.

² P. Tálás, *Biztonságpolitikai kihívások és haderőreform az ezredfordulón*. "Magyar Tudomány", 2000/7, pp. 933-937; J. Szabó, *Haderőváltás Magyarországon 1989-2001, A rendszerváltás konfliktusa, kezelésük története és perspektívái a védelmi szektorban*, PolgART: Budapest 2003.

³ P. Tálás, *Az európai integrációs szervezetekhez való magyar csatlakozás előnyei - a távolmaradás kockázatai*. [in:] *Társadalompolitikai kérdések*. Magyar Honvédség Tájékoztatási és Médiaközpont: Budapest 1998, pp. 43-71; Z. Szenes, *10 éves NATO - tagság és a haderő átalakítása*, "Honvédségi Szemle" 2009/2, pp. 6-9.

⁴ Z. Szenes, *A békefenntartás hatása a magyar haderőre*. "Hadtudomány", 2006/3, pp. 3-14; Z. Szenes, *Conceptual change in Hungarian peacekeeping?* "Nemzet és Biztonság" Special Issue, Winter 2009, pp. 43-55.

⁵ L. Radványi, *A magyar lakosság biztonságfelfogása és értékpreferenciái, 1999-2008*, "Nemzet és Biztonság", 2009/2. pp. 9-22; P. Tálás, *Tatárszentgyörgy után... Szélfegyvert a biztonság szubjektív percepciójának veszélyeiről*, "Nemzet és Biztonság", 2009/2, pp. 3-8.

the armed forces) are very limited. This limitation - further exacerbated by repeated economic crises⁶ - has regularly been echoed by international partners as Hungary performing as a security consumer, thus not contributing proportionately to the ratio of the benefits enjoyed.

The Hungarian professional political sphere shows similar tendencies to those of public perceptions: depicting security and defence policy as being of lesser importance and initiating very limited public debate have been common features of the political and societal discourse. Strategic debate on foreign and security policy issues beyond current problems is rarely held in the Hungarian Parliament, despite the fact that subsequent governments and parliaments have adopted strategic documents on foreign and security policy (the last time being in 2012). The drafting and adoption of these strategies have rarely been preceded or followed by professional and political debate invoking a wide-based national consensus, but have been limited to the participation of a small number of advisors and members of the central administration. Thus, Hungarian foreign and security policy has developed a dichotomy, over which a vaguely defined national consensus has also been reached. On the one hand military aspects of security were pushed back on the agenda (signalled by shrinking military expenditures, the prolonged reform of the armed forces and the strong limitations on participation in crisis management operations). On the other hand, a constant endeavour has been developed to meet the expectations of burden-sharing from Allied and great powers that might improve the negative balance brought about by fading military capabilities, and might buffer international criticism towards Hungary.

At the same time, some mutually reinforcing historical features have also prevailed: the inability to significantly transform the broader security environment (something which can be called a ‘small state syndrome’), an adaptive and pacifist foreign policy orientation, strong limitations on the use of military force and a general risk-limiting behaviour on the international scene. National interests therefore are always articulated with regard to the spheres of influence the country can maintain: regarding neighbouring countries (where also Hungarian ethnic minorities reside) and the wider Central European region and the neighbouring Balkans, and to some extent, Eastern Europe. However, experience has shown in previous years that even in these geographically proximate regions exerting influence through political, diplomatic and economic soft power tools has strong

⁶ Hungarian society has faced repeated economic crises that have gravely effected its security perception: in 1989/90 it was the direct economic consequence of the change of regime, followed by another crisis in 1994/95 due to the mismanagement of the economic transformation; 2006 already brought another economic crisis as the Hungarian economy underperformed and this was further exacerbated by the 2008 European financial and then economic crisis. Lately, 2012 meant another backslide, with somewhat more promising performance since 2013.

limitations and national interests are best channelled through international institutions.

Membership in international institutions also means that Hungary shares their burdens and contributes to the pursuit of their agenda, as in the case of NATO. Unilateral action regarding international security policy is strictly out of reach for the country, both in terms of willingness and capabilities. Peace support/crisis management/humanitarian operations are only possible as a member of a larger coalition, whether be it institutionalized (NATO, EU, OSCE, UN) or ad hoc (as in the case of the 2003 Iraq war), usually in support roles only. These strong limitations on the use of military force can be attributed to a risk-limiting behaviour that seeks to avoid casualties.⁷

The participation in crisis management operations carried out in the wider security environment of the Euro-Atlantic region is justified and is always carefully judged on a case-by-case basis with regard to national interests and capabilities. Accordingly, as one quantifiable measure of international ambitions, in 2007 Hungary set its level of ambition for all types of simultaneous international missions within any organization at a maximum of 1000 troops (including observers, advisors, etc.).⁸ This level was maintained until recently: before the drawdown of ISAF forces began in 2013, about two thirds of Hungarian troops had been deployed in NATO missions, less than 20% in EU and less than 10% in UN missions.

In sum, as argued by Csiki and Tálás, based on the assessment of the transformative processes of the 1990s in Hungary that moved the country towards full Euro-Atlantic integration and developed a definite transatlantic bond, we cannot definitely state that a well-defined, coherent Hungarian strategic culture has evolved. “Instead, contemporary strategic culture in Hungary has remained in a state of transformation, stuck between outdated structural-institutional remains of the (post) Cold War era and the pressing need [for] modernization within a multinational Euro-Atlantic security framework.”⁹

The direct effects of Hungary’s accession to NATO and the lessons learnt

Hungarian security and foreign policy has followed a relatively consistent Euro-Atlantic path since soon after the period of regime change. Not only internal political and institutional transitions, but the favourable transformation of the

⁷ F. Molnár, *Napjaink domináns katonai konfliktusa és az adaptív haderő*, “Nemzet és Biztonság”, 2011/1, pp. 48-57.

⁸ Appendix to the 85/2007 MoD Directive for long-term defense planning, 2009 - 2018.

⁹ T. Csiki, P. Tálás, *Can we identify a coherent strategic culture in Hungary?*, [in:] H. Biehl, B. Giegerich, A. Jonas (eds.) *Strategic Cultures in Europe. Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent*. Springer: Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 165-180.

international security environment and the open approach of Euro-Atlantic organizations have significantly contributed to this process. As a result, the country's foreign and security policy can be described as oriented towards the Euro-Atlantic community, within the wider value-based framework of international institutions (Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United Nations Organization).

However, it is important to note that Hungary has experienced two decades of continuous transformation and it was due to these simultaneous and parallel favourable processes that the country gradually moved towards Euro-Atlantic integration. NATO's Rome Declaration on Peace and Cooperation (1991) and the launch of the Partnership for Peace (1994) made for significant positive drivers in this process and opened up the way for Euro-Atlantic integration - and along with the Balkan Wars resulting from the dissolution of Yugoslavia this external transition was the key strategic issue addressed in Hungary throughout the decade. The adoption of new defence policy guidelines in 1998 reflected this shift in priorities, clearly targeting accession to NATO and the European Union after fulfilling the respective political, economic and military accession criteria. Meanwhile, internal transition continued and the democratic control of the armed forces was completed, whilst facing the double challenge of continuously cutting down on defence expenditures both in terms of resources and manpower, and the urgent need to adopt the new institutional culture of NATO for the military in terms of interoperability.

The role the North Atlantic Alliance played in Hungary's foreign and security policy agenda then became fundamental and has remained so since then. The threatening military conflict in the Balkans and the crisis management role NATO decided to take on drove Hungary faster and closer to the Alliance than many would have expected even in 1994. The first major foreign deployment of Hungarian armed forces (military engineers) took place within the framework of the Implementation Force (IFOR) in 1996 also providing host nation support for NATO forces in Hungary, and continued within the Stabilization Force (SFOR) from 1997 (later under EUFOR Althea since 2004). These engagements already paved the way for the interoperable development of the national armed forces. Following Hungary's NATO-accession, further engagement followed in the Alliance's Kosovo (KFOR) and Afghanistan (ISAF) operations showing allied solidarity and commitment to international peace.¹⁰

¹⁰ For an overview of Hungary's contribution to NATO in the period 2010 - 2014 see: C. Törő, P. Wagner, *NATO feladataink, vállalásaink és eredményeink a magyar külpolitika szempontjából az elmúlt négy évben*, Manuscript, Budapest 2014.

Interestingly, the first fully developed National Military Strategy was only first adopted in 2009, showing the secondary role military strategy had played for the political elite on the one hand, and a somewhat belated adoption of the practice of drafting long-term strategic documents for the Hungarian Defence Forces on the other. Even in 2012 when the effects of the financial crisis forced the adoption of both a new National Security Strategy and a National Military Strategy, these documents showed to some extent the lack of executable long-term planning, providing mostly a “global vision”¹¹ and not a functional implementation as the required resources and modernization schedule had not been identified.¹² As repeatedly mentioned, the Hungarian military has continuously been underfinanced since the change of regime and after an initial increase around NATO-accession it has mostly shown a decreasing trend in the past 10 years.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Hungarian GDP (billion HUF)	20665.0	22018.3	23675.0	24989.9	25643.3
Defence budget (billion HUF)	346.9	288.1	283.1	278.2	319.7
Defence budget as share of GDP (%)	1.68	1.31	1.20	1.11	1.25
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Hungarian GDP (billion HUF)	25626.5	26.513.0	27635.4	28048.0	29144*
Defence budget (billion HUF)	320.6	308.2	248.9	234.8	241.4
Defence budget as share of GDP (%)	1.25	1.16	0.90	0.83	0.83

*Table: The Hungarian defence budget, 2004-2013*¹³

(* - Estimated)

Despite some obvious shortcomings, NATO has clearly been identified in these strategic documents as the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security, stability

¹¹ T. Csiki, P. Tálás, *Az új Nemzeti Katonai Stratégia a nemzetközi tapasztalatok tükrében*, “Nemzet és Biztonság”, 2014/2, pp. 45-61.

¹² T. Csiki, P. Tálás, *Stratégiától stratégiáig. A 2009-es és a 2012-es magyar katonai stratégia összehasonlító elemzése*, “Nemzet és Biztonság”, 2014/2, pp. 36-76.

¹³ Source: *Respective annual Budget Acts' provision for defense (without implemented sequestrations)*, Central Statistics Agency statistics for Gross National Product.

and prosperity whose international agenda means primary commitments for Hungary. Still, we can see two opposing trends: on the one hand the ‘strategic vocabulary’ of the transatlantic community has been successfully adopted and Hungarian defence policy has been deeply embedded in NATO’s security agenda, while on the other hand, serious deficiencies have prevailed regarding funding and modernization (see the next subchapter as a determining lesson unlearned).

As for the military tools of foreign and security policy and possible military action, decision making was brought under strict civilian control during the 1990s in accordance with the democratic requirements also formulated by NATO.¹⁴ Command structures evolved further by 1996 when the Joint Forces Command of the Hungarian Defence Forces was created in order to meet NATO requirements, and in 2001 when the Joint Forces Command was integrated into the Ministry of Defence, achieving a fully transparent civilian command and control structure in this field.

The strict authorization rule concerning the foreign deployment of the armed forces also became somewhat looser as a consequence of the decision to create the NATO Response Forces at the 2002 Prague Summit, because a potential deployment required rapid decision making schemes. Previously, 21 days of foreign deployment for a maximum of 100 troops could be authorized by the Ministry of Defence, while after the December 2003 modification of the Constitution and the Homeland Defence Act, any international engagement invoked upon the consensus of NATO member states became possible based on a government decision while also informing the parliament.

The direct effects of NATO membership can be identified in three areas: in the transformed Hungarian security and defence policy that can be traced in strategic documents; in terms of compatibility with NATO institutional structures and systems, and interoperability with other NATO members’ armed forces; and the contribution of the Hungarian Defence Forces to the Alliance’s collective defence tasks and crisis management operations. Lessons learnt in these respects include learning the institutional culture of NATO and participating fully in decision making, also ensuring the democratic control of the defence sector as well as effectively contributing to Allied defence and operations through NATO structures.¹⁵

¹⁴ F. Molnár, *Civil - Military Relations in Hungary: From Competition to Co-operation*, [in:] H. Born, M. Caparini, K. Haltiner, J. Kuhlmann (eds.) *Civil - Military Relations in Europe: Learning From Crisis and Institutional Change*, Routledge: New York 2007, pp. 114-129.

¹⁵ For an insight of what results are identified by current political and military leaders, defense policy experts and diplomats with regard to Hungary’s NATO membership, see the interview series “15 Years - 15 Voices. Lessons Learnt from Hungary’s 15 Years within NATO” compiled throughout 2014. *15 Év - 15 Hang. Magyarország 15 éves NATO-tagságának tapasztalatai*, [www.nit.uni-nke.hu, access: 7 September 2014].

Regarding lessons unlearnt, there are three broad topics in which Hungary needs to learn from the experiences of the past 15 years: the underdeveloped security culture of Hungarian society and the political elite; unfinished and fragmented attempts at “reform and modernization”; and a lack of understanding of the true potential of deep and intense multinational defence cooperation.

The broadest set of problems is that both Hungarian society and the political elite have an underdeveloped security culture that is based on their primarily non-military security perception briefly discussed earlier. This in practice means that issues beyond economic and societal security rarely become subjects of interest or concern for Hungarian people. Unfortunately, subsequent governments have also followed a very limited, self-constrained information policy, providing only superficial information on Hungarian security and defence policy or the Hungarian Defence Forces.¹⁶ Critically speaking, one might also raise questions about transparency and accountability issues taking into account the fact that no detailed information is dispersed in public about the specificities of the budgetary resources used for defence. The negative effects of this restrained stand have been reinforced by the vanishing representation of foreign and security policy issues both in public and commercial media - TV, radio and internet news portals - in recent years, leading to a general disinterest and indifference across wide strata of Hungarian society. Thus, besides being uninterested, people have to a significant extent become uninformed about defence issues, as well as institutions such as NATO.

Thus, 15 years after NATO-accession we can conclude that the Hungarian people in general have very limited contact to defence issues and this trend has been reinforced by the suspension of conscription in 2004, effectively abolishing this direct, practical tie between society and the Hungarian Armed Forces. Since then, the Hungarian Defence Forces has remained visible in everyday life only through their crisis management role in natural disaster relief (floods) and through HDF bomb squads tasked with ordnance disposal which is still a frequent issue due to the large number of ammunitions left behind from World War II.

¹⁶ If we want to contrast this policy approach, we can easily point out German and British examples where both the Bundeswehr and the British Armed Forces provide detailed and up-to-date, easily accessible online information on their international engagement, missions and presence, including force levels and mission tasks, while the Hungarian Ministry of Defense rarely provides such information directly, while the HDF mostly distributes promotional material via online and social media. For MoD-related information see: “Honvédelmi Minisztérium” [www.kormany.hu, access: 1 September 2014], for information released for the wider public see: “Honvedelem.hu” [www.honvedelem.hu, access: 1 September 2014] and related social media sites.

Meanwhile, civic (NGO), governmental (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and media activities that could improve the situation have also largely been lacking or have remained ineffective. Public engagement is very weak and only a surprisingly low number of actors carry out activities - such as information campaigns, public outreach programmes - with limited visibility and practical effect. This is particularly true for NATO.¹⁷

These, coupled with the perception on the part of the population that peace and security can be taken for granted without further effort, have resulted in a lack of ownership and a lack of feeling of responsibility on the part of the population for their own defence. Similar problems have recently been studied by NATO through think tanks in a number of member states with the aim of finding out how much defence in fact ‘matters’.¹⁸ Even though Hungary was not included in the project, and no thorough studies have been carried out in this respect, similarities can be observed in this respect highlighting a general, abstract support for the armed forces and defence, but coupled with a disinterest in particular single issues. The following conclusions identified in eight member states by the Defence Matters Project also count for Hungary: “Defence spending has some general support, but other (social) issues are seen as more pressing. But there is also a lack of interest in the specifics and details of defense among the wider public.” “There is a lack of strategic debate (...) The strategic community is often detached from the general public.”¹⁹

The lesson identified and so far unlearned in this regard in Hungary is that there is an ongoing need to continually keep society engaged and informed. Besides, it is also advisable to keep members of the political elite aware of their role and duty to address defence issues effectively and manage them responsibly.²⁰ In order

¹⁷ In principle, NGOs with a strong focus on the Euro-Atlantic policy agenda do function in NATO member and partner countries, such as national chapters of the Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA) or its youth organization (YATA). In contrast, very few organizations are active in this field in Hungary: the Hungarian Atlantic Council and its youth organization are hardly functioning and currently no other NGO has tried to fill this ‘gap’ in the NGO sector. With regard to think tanks, only two institutions can be found to be active in the foreign, security and defence policy field: the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs and the MoD-affiliated think tank, the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies.

¹⁸ See the *Defense Matters* project’s concluding conference and related reports at Carnegie Europe, 26 November, 2013, [www.carnegieeurope.eu, access: 1 September 2014].

¹⁹ *Defense Matters - Discussion Paper*, p. 3. “Carnegie Europe” [www.carnegieendowment.org, access: 1 September 2014.]

²⁰ Unlike in Poland, for example, members of the Hungarian Parliament - even of the Committee on Defence and Law Enforcement - in Hungary receive no formal in-advance education, training or briefing on national and international security and defence policy or foreign policy issues before they take their offices. This might be problematic in various respects when informed decision making and well-established professional debates would be necessary regarding the budget, moderniza-

to achieve this, the developing of permanent contacts and regular meetings of relevant parties - members of the political and military elite, think tanks, media representatives and various groups within society, especially the young - would be necessary, triggering their active participation and deepening their involvement.

The second set of lessons unlearned can be seen with regard to the ‘reform and transformation’ of the armed forces. As mentioned before, the most fundamental challenges to the Hungarian Defence Forces have been their being underfinanced and being in a constant process of being in unfinished and incomplete waves of reform, transformation or attempts at modernization.

The fluid conditions and unaccomplished targets resulted in various problems already before NATO accession but there have been even more since 1999. The Hungarian Ministry of Defence had to carry out two strategic and defence reviews within a couple of years (1999 and 2003) in an attempt to align policy and planning mechanisms and have them fully interoperable with NATO standards and processes. Recommendations drafted in 1999, first and foremost about streamlining Hungarian command and control processes with those of NATO, were achieved by 2001. As a next step, the recommendations drafted in 2003 on a NATO-compatible defence planning system were fulfilled in the following years, and eventually a new system for the evaluation and assessment of the external and internal security environment and resulting military tasks was been developed and introduced based on the strategic foresight analysis methodology applied by NATO.²¹

However, most conclusions of these strategic reviews regarding military capabilities (or their shortcomings) and the repeated calls for technological modernization have been neglected and no other strategic review has been carried out since 2003 despite the adoption of new National Military Strategies in 2009 and 2012. The negative consequences of this ‘modernization gap’ have been summarized by the current Minister of Defence, Csaba Hende in June 2013 as follows: “The Hungarian Defense Forces have not procured any major equipment since the change of regime period with the sole exception of the *Gripen* program.²² The equipment that is still in service [was] mostly [sic] manufactured in the Warsaw Pact era, 30 - 40 years ago. Within 10-years time all of these will have to be scrapped and we

tion or deployment of the Hungarian Defence Forces. Instead, discussion and debates - if they take place at all - mainly follow the dynamics of party politics even in defence issues.

²¹ B. Németh, *A PESTEM és PMESII stratégiai elemző rendszerek összehasonlítása: A Honvédelmi Minisztérium új stratégiai értékelő rendszere*, “Felderítő Szemle”, March 2014, pp. 126-141.

²² Based on repeatedly altered negotiation targets and contractual commitments, Hungary has been leasing 14 JAS-39A/B *Gripen* planes, in service since 2008. Even though the exact costs of fulfilling the leasing contract have not been disclosed, it is estimated to be beyond 10% of the total annual defence budget.

[will] need to carry out [a] full rearmament of the HDF.”²³ By 2014, the unsustainable situation regarding the financial and modernization gap had been acknowledged at the top political level as well.²⁴ Going beyond the 2012 government decision to maintain the nominal level of the Hungarian defence budget at the 2012 level until 2016 and then to increase it by an annual 0.1% until 2022 (thus reaching 1.39% of the GDP),²⁵ Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared at the 2014 Wales Summit that the increase in defence spending will be brought forward to 2015 in accordance with the growing demand on behalf of NATO. However, no specificities have been announced and the concrete measures to be undertaken will be decided by the Hungarian Parliament, most likely during the debate of the 2015 fiscal budget in late 2014.

Without elaborating upon the current defence capabilities and readiness of the Hungarian Defence Forces, it is indicative in this respect that the general level of technological modernization regarding major equipment is still at the level of the 1970s-1980s (T-72 tanks, BTR-80A armoured personnel carriers, An-26 transport aircraft, Mi-8 transport helicopter etc.) or with modernizations the 1990s at best, with the exceptions of the JAS-39 *Gripen* multirole aircraft and some equipment provided for the land forces deployed in peace operations in Afghanistan and the Balkans. As Tamás Kern has pointed out, subsequent Hungarian governments have tended to design and launch “military reforms” and ‘modernization programmes’ in such a way that cost saving and cutback measures were achieved during their election period while increased investment and procurement measures were always scheduled or postponed to the next or later election periods.²⁶ Unfortunately, incoming governments again tended to redesign or simply further postpone modernization, thus by 2013 the Hungarian Defence Forces came to the brink of their operational capability. Besides procrastinating on modernization, the alarming amount and sustained trend of cuts of the operation and maintenance budget within the Hungarian defence expenditure have caused considerable capability losses and a decrease in operational readiness. Even though the Hungarian Defence Forces has remained capable of fulfilling its duties and commitments within NATO crisis management operations, the general operability and spectrum

²³ Hende: *Újrafegyverkezésre van szükség.* “Világ gazdaság Online”, 6 May 2013, [www.vg.hu], access: 1 September 2014].

²⁴ *Interjú Orbán Viktorral a NATO csúcs után*, “Hirado.hu”, 6 September 2014, [www.hirado.hu], access: 7 September 2014].

²⁵ T. Csiki: *Az új Nemzeti Katonai Stratégia a nemzetközi tapasztalatok tükrében.* “Nemzet és Biztonság”, 2014/2, p. 59.

²⁶ T. Kern, *A rendszerváltás utáni haderőreform-kísérletek. Eredmények és kudarok.* Századvég Műhelytanulmányok 7. Századvég Alapítvány: Budapest 2009, p. 43.

of capabilities can be questioned in various fields and these shortcomings require urgent action.

This type of conduct in defence planning and capability development has become a tendency in several NATO member countries that joined the alliance in 1999 and in 2004 from the East Central European region and the Balkans, thus it is imperative to point out this “lesson unlearned” for prospective members as well.

The third set of lessons unlearned is related to regional multinational defence cooperation (MDC), more precisely the lack of understanding of how to utilize the full benefits these can bring possibly without engaging in unnecessary pilot projects or developing less functional capability packages only for political gains, sacrificing scarce resources without practical long-lasting effects. Hungary has in the past 15 years participated in various forms of multinational defence cooperation with varying practical results. However, these have mostly been developed outside NATO’s capability development framework or the NATO Defence Planning Process with the outstanding examples of two European Union Battle Groups²⁷ and other cooperative projects within the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC).²⁸

While following the broader international trend of developing ‘clusters of capabilities’ within regional frameworks (see the examples of the BENELUX and NORDEFECO co-operations, as well as the French - British bilateral cooperation), what we can see by the end of 2014 in Hungary is that the practical usability of some of the developed high-profile frameworks can hardly be judged. Either driven by the lack of political will, the necessary financial resources or the lack of military capabilities some of these have not fully been developed or if developed, never used (EU BGs for example.) On the one hand, it is positive that the high-level political will to support and participate in such multinational defence co-operative efforts has been strengthening in Hungary as well, as these are often

²⁷ The first EU BG Hungary has become part of is the Italian-led Battle Group that had been developed on the basis of the Italian - Hungarian - Slovenian Multinational Land Force (operable since 2002) on standby in 2007 and in 2012 as the crisis management entry force of the European Union. The second Battle Group is to be developed with the participation of the Visegrád Countries by 2016, composed of Czech, Hungarian, Slovak and Polish troops, the latter taking the role of lead nation as well.

²⁸ Within the CEDC (formerly also known as the Roundtable on Central European Multinational Defence Cooperation, or Central European Defence Initiative), six Central European nations - Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia - began to intensify their defence cooperation in 2011 and various programmes have been implemented since then: a multinational CBRN defence battalion was established, joint Special Operations Forces training, C-IED training and Air Mentor Team training for Afghanistan have been initiated and a Multinational Logistic Coordination Centre was also established. T. Csiki, B. Németh, *Perspectives of Central European Multinational Defence Cooperation: A New Model?*, [in:] *Panorama of the Global Security Environment 2013*, Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs: Bratislava 2013, pp. 18-19.

seen as a possible solution to the identified capability shortages in Europe.²⁹ While on the other hand, delivered results, real capability development that would go beyond the pooling of existing capabilities and generate new ones in missing fields through joint procurement and sharing mechanisms are currently missing. The only exception is a NATO-branded project also included among the role models of Smart Defence: Strategic Airlift Capability, where 17 nations procured and have been operating three C-17 *Globemaster* strategic transport aircraft from Pápa Airbase in Hungary. This signals a strong contrast in favour of well-functioning large capability development projects within NATO and smaller, practical cooperative programmes within CEDC. While the use of developing another EU Battle Group that rather provides solutions to the capability needs of the 2000s³⁰ and not the post-ISAF and post-Crimea security environment can be questioned, it also distracts resources from existing and functioning frameworks for the sake of harvesting the political gains within the Visegrád Group for developing a capability package that may never even be used as experience with EU Battle Groups has demonstrated so far.

Thus, in sum, the significance of multinational defence co-operations has been realized, its short-term political yield has been harvested, yet the real value delivered in terms of usability can be questioned, for example, in the case of the current flagship project of the V4.³¹ For the coming years it would be of utmost importance for Hungary to align the current parallel processes of MDCs with its limited financial resources available and to opt for operable, deployable capabilities also within the framework of NATO that are achievable in the mid-term and sustainable in the long term.

²⁹ T. Csiki, B. Németh, *On the Multinational Development of Military Capabilities*, “European Geostrategy - Long Post”, 13 June 2012, [www.europeangeostrategy.ideasoneurope.eu, access: 7 September 2014].

³⁰ T. Csiki, B. Németh, *Perspectives of...*, pp. 20-21.

³¹ We have seen other examples of this kind as well in the past: the Hungarian - Romanian Joint Peacekeeping Battalion was established in 1998 incorporating 500 troops from both parties, while the Multinational Engineer Battalion “*Tisza*” incorporating troops from Ukraine, Romania and Hungary, each providing a company for the battalion was established in 1998 and became operational in 2002. Despite various occasions when these units could have been used, none of them has ever been deployed - still, they are kept alive, for which building confidence, trust and enhancing interoperability can only be a partial explanation. B. Németh, *Magyarország szerepe a regionális biztonsági-védelmi együttműködésekben*, [in:] *Magyar biztonságpolitika, 1989 - 2014*. Nemzeti Közszerzői Egyetem, Nemzetközi Intézet, Stratégiai Védelmi Kutatóközpont: Budapest 2014, pp. 93-106.

Conclusions

Several controversial characteristics of Hungary's NATO membership as well as the broader Hungarian security and defence policy and Hungarian strategic culture have been examined throughout the chapter, resulting from the continuous, unbalanced and in certain areas unfinished transformation the country has experienced in the past two decades.

The direct effects of NATO membership can be identified in three areas: in the transformed Hungarian security and defence policy that can be traced in strategic documents; in terms of compatibility with NATO institutional structures and systems and interoperability with other NATO members' armed forces; and the contribution of the Hungarian Defence Forces to the Alliance's collective defence tasks and crisis management operations. Lessons learnt in these respects include learning the institutional culture of NATO and participating fully in decision making, also ensuring the democratic control of the defence sector as well as effectively contributing to Allied defence and operations through NATO structures.

Regarding lessons unlearnt, there are three broad topics in which Hungary needs to learn from the experiences of the past 15 years: the underdeveloped security culture of Hungarian society and the political elite that puts restraints on the defence sector, ranking security and defence policy as only one of many tasks and needs; the unfinished and fragmented attempts at 'reform and modernization' leaving the Hungarian Defence Forces with mostly outdated military equipment even 15 years after accession; and lacks in the understanding of the true potential of multinational defence cooperation with some positive signs, and the need to prioritize and align efforts effectively in accordance with the country's resources.