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V4 SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY – NATIONAL AND ALLIED CHALLENGES IN MEMBER STATES

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Abstract

Making the common European security and defense policy more effective starts at state level. It is of paramount importance that the member states of the respective federations are able to demonstrate modern forces with a high level of compatibility and qualification and also that the use of these national forces, at allied level, should be possible without major obstacles. In this publication, the author presents the main historical points of the defense policy of the Visegrad Co-operation (V4) countries, and in this context the steps and efforts required of the force in order to respond to new types of security challenge.

Keywords*: Visegrad Group, security policy, defense policy, alliance, challenges.*

1. Developing of security factors and defence policy since the beginnings of Visegrad Group

Since their democratic political shift, economic and social security has been of vital importance for the eastern Central-European states. To reform, develop and stabilize these fields in the long term, joining the European Union as an economic and political community seemed to be the solution. However, military security also had to be kept in mind as a sensitive field after the collapse of the socialist system. After the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, the former member states strived to meet all the requirements that would enable them to join NATO in the shortest time possible. Opening towards the West was not the only motivation for these states. The countries of the region were also well aware that in the case of foreign aggression, they would not be able to defend their own territory and nation, therefore becoming a member of such an alliance would be inevitable for them. Eight years after the end of Warsaw Pact on 12th March 1999. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary became members of NATO, and in 2004 – among other Eastern-European states –Slovakia joined the alliance. Parallel to the Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as to speed it up and make it a more smooth transition, Poland, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic and Slovakia after 1st January 1993) and Hungary felt the necessity in the nineties to cooperate also in a tighter, regional form of Visegrad Cooperation.

During its three decades, the Visegrad Group met several stages of cooperation. Following the first success and initiative came failure, faction, and mutual competition in the fight for integration, thus the activity of the group was stuck till the end of the nineties [1]] Given that by 2004 all four states reached the membership in NATO and EU as well, they were ready to base V4 cooperation on new fundaments. The four prime ministers signed a new document during the summit in Kroměříž, changing the document of 1991. The representatives declared, that they had reached their earlier goals, and thus also, as members of NATO and the EU, were willing to proceed with their cooperation, and that they would foster the development and assertiveness of the region. Until the 2010-s, the most common topic of the ministerial meetings and summits was the common foreign and security policy of the EU and the Eastern expansion. Discussion on the initiative for a common V4 defence policy began in the 2010-s. The summit in Budapest on 14th October 2013 was of high importance, since

this was the first time the members declared that in accordance with NATO and EU efforts, V4 states would set the goal of realising a common defence policy. To achieve it, the prime ministers set definite orders for their defence ministers, including:

– long term future vision on common defence cooperation strategies;
– cooperation during the training of member armed forces;
– setting of V4 level frameworks regarding strengthened defence planning, cooperation and identification of new fields in defence cooperation. [2]

Within a couple of months, in March 2015 the defence ministers signed two documents to strengthen the common defence policy strategy. „Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening their Defence Cooperation" defines the permanent perception of the member states regarding the development of their defence cooperation. Based on this, they regard it necessary to develop defence industry and common capabilities, to found multinational military units, to acquire tools and systems supporting common defence aims, and to enhance interoperability via common education and training.

„Framework for Enhanced Visegrad Defence Planning Cooperation" defines the directions and activities, through which the common defence acquisition and development are attainable.

Viewing the outcomes of the above two documents and the intensive defence meetings, both success and failure can be noticed regarding this field of cooperation between the V4 states.

Beyond doubt, the implementation of a multinational force can be regarded as a success, since the V4 Battlegroup reached readiness for the second time in the timeframe between 1st June and 31st December 2019. Also active stake holding in the field of education and training is creditable. Any concept regarding common research and development and acquisition remained unsuccessful however. Cooperation in this field seems to be the most difficult, since it affects vital national defence and economic interests. [3]

2. Armed forces development aims of V4 member states from defence budget aspects

Since the second half of the last decade, serious steps have been made in the four countries regarding the field of armed forces development, in the form of discussion, and also aimed at actual acquisition. Beyond that, also on the field of education and training, several changes have been set. Given their similar historical, economic and social background, these states battle the same problems regarding their defence status, tasks and military obligations towards their own nation, or NATO. At the same time, because of their different national interests, the priorities of their security constellations show mere differences.

Among Visegrad states, in all her indicators Poland is the biggest. The territory of the country is of high strategic importance as a border state of NATO and the EU, thus geopolitical thinking is strongest in the case of Poland among V4. Poland has a favourable status, given that although she decreased her military budget after joining NATO and EU, but didn't let her armed forces collapse, so revitalisation and modernisation could have been maintained relatively quickly. This process is still in an ongoing state. More and more intense renewing and development have been on the agenda even before Crimea was occupied by Russia in 2014. Poland has been realising a thorough defence reform since 2009, and in accordance with that, she has been holding her defence budget constantly high – around 2 % of the GDP – but after the Russian annexation this tendency proceeded even faster. 2030 is set to see defence expenditure to be around 2.5 % of the GDP. To date, Poland has clearly became leading military power of Eastern Central-Europe, regarding the number and structure of her armed forces.

Slovakia is also in a similar position at the border of EU and NATO, thus the security of Ukraine is of vital importance for it as well. According to NATO expectations, Slovakia agreed to have her defence expenditure at 2% of her GDP, but this has not been realised in recent years. However, since 2014, the defence budget has shown a constantly growing tendency here also. According to the known data, it grew from the 2014 1 % to 1.74 % by 2019.

The Czech Republic also aims for a seriously raised defence budget for the coming years, which is also strengthened by the fact that in the last half decade, the 0.91 % in 2014 constantly grew to 1.19 % by 2019. [4] Also the Czech aim is to reach 2% of their GDP being spent on defence expenditure.

In the historical aspect, Hungary has a serious task to tackle regarding the field of military development. From the nineties on, a permanent, long term amortisation began in the technical inventory of Hungarian Defence Forces, leading to the armed forces possessing absolutely obsolete gear and armoury by the end of the 2000-s, with most of it being still of Soviet „heritage". In this period, military personnel has also been seriously affected by the effects of the decrease. According to 106/2007. (XII.6.) parliamental resolution, the number of HDF has been maximised, not being allowed to reach beyond 23 950 after 31st December 2007 with which number the budget of HDF reached its lowest. [5]

Since the 2010-s some attempts have been noticed regarding modernisation, but more serious outcomes evolved only in the last three years. From the second half of the decade, development and the money spent on it shows a growing tendency, regarding technical background and military capability as well. „Zrínyi 2026" the defence and military development programme has been released in 2017, with the aim of modernizing the whole technical background, and strengthening professional education in a 10 years' timeframe. With this programme, the government set the aim to turn HDF into a definitive armed force of the region.

In 2020 several modern and professional technology is expected to emerge in the inventory of HDF, of which the acquisition has been set and agreed by the Hungarian state via earlier discussions. Defence budget of 2019 was 513 billion HUF, further growing in 2020 by an additional 103 billion, up to 161 billion HUF, also containing 216 billion to be spent on development. [6] This means 1.17% of the GDP, which still is well below the minimal 2% expected by NATO. The latter has been aimed to be reached by 2024.

Figure 1. shows the four states in comparison to each-other and other NATO states, regarding the GDP percentage of their defence budget in the years 2014 and 2018. Regarding military development activity and the expenditure spent on defence aims thus far, Poland can be noticed as peeking high above the other three member states. Defence expenditure can be divided into the following four groups:

– technical hardware,
– personnel related expenditure,
– infrastructural expenditure,
– other. [8]

Question is, in what proportion given state realises each field of the modernisation.

The estimation for 2020 of Global Firepower gives a roundabout picture comparing the state of the four countries regarding military capabilities, and the status and attributes of the armed forces. [9]

To define the Power Index of the given nation, 45 individual factor is viewed within the 8 main category of human resource, air force, armoured power, navy, natural resources, logistics and geography. According to the most up-to-date data, Poland is first among V4, being 21st, followed by the Czech Republic as 34th. Hungary is 54th, with Slovakia being 58th in the list of 138 countries.

Among others, this is also a proof, that even with their common history, the four countries possess armed forces, being at different status. Differences can be noticed in their numbers, but also their budget and the level of development. Shared aim is doubtlessly to change the obsolete military technology of Soviet origin. In NATO regard, compatibility and interoperability is still given, but – with a scope to the industrial, economic and political state of the countries – there is not much chance for the V4 members to establish common inventory and technical background. Defence expenditure of each country shows great differences, but regarding the main tendency, it can be noted, that raising such budget is of high importance to these states.

3. Conclusions

New types of security threats can only be met efficiently by armed forces with modern inventory and professional personnel. V4 states have put their focus on military and capability development during the recent years. These four states are – compared to themselves – since the years of political shift possibly nowadays on the highest level of development regarding their military. Based on the programs and plans of recent development, this process is visualized to be at its final at the beginning of the 2030-s. Question is – with a scope on the domestic and regional political and economic changes – how these states will be able to hold themselves to their set development goals. The changing security environment requires beyond national, also international efforts and cooperation. To meet new types of security threats, new aspects, new approach, new solutions and methods are necessary. Instead of large mass armies, modern

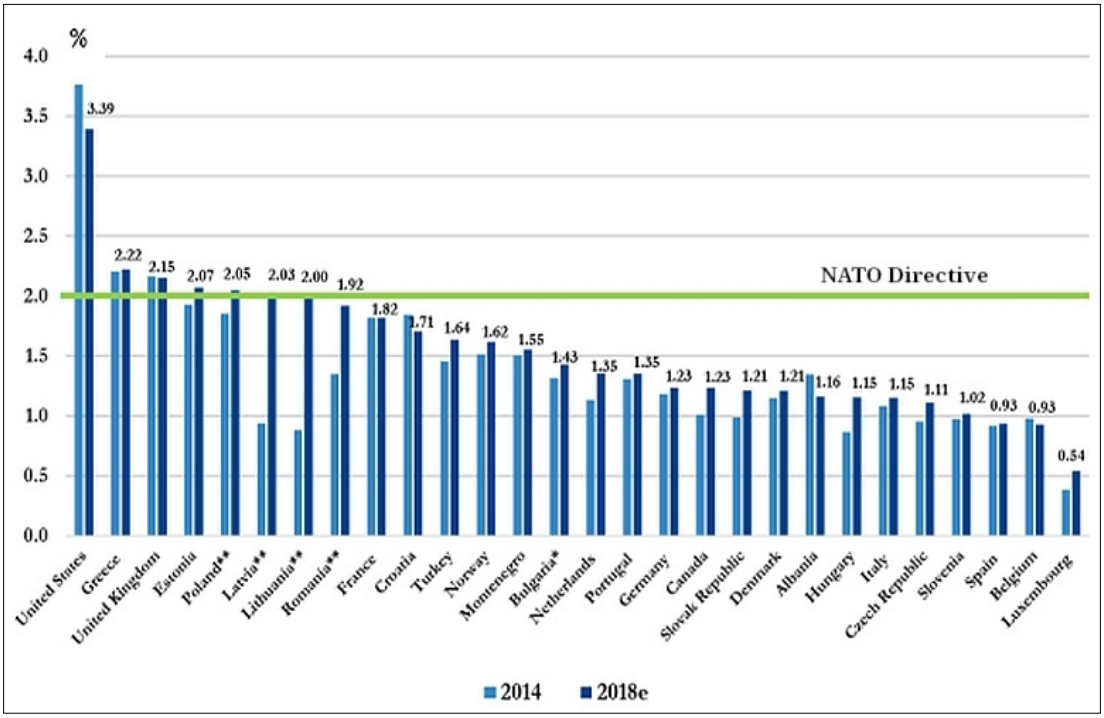

Figure 1. *Defence expenditure versus GDP* **[7]**

technology, and their professional utilisation stands in the foreground, thus importance of education and professionalism of the soldiers is beyond any doubt. One key feature of 21st century is the utilisation of armed forces for international tasks as a strengthening tendency. **[10]** V4 countries bear this in mind during the years of their military development program, which are affected primarily by national interest, and domestic economic and political state and attributes, but beyond that it can be noticed, that the member states have a scope on maintaining the balance of mutual cooperation for a stable security of the Eastern Central-European region.

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