Meeting, Managing and at Times Failing Expectations: The Mixed Record of the Transformation of Foreign and Security Policy Institutions in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The following chapter offers, first of all, a discussion of the countries overviewed in the present volume as to what may render it intriguing to examine similarities and dissimilarities between them, in how their foreign and security policy institutions evolved since the beginning of the 1990s. Secondly, it offers a list and an evaluation of the challenges commonly faced by these countries in the process, including the management of interethnic co-existence, lustration, civil-military relations, the downsizing of "people's armies", the acceptance of a "new security agenda", engaging in foreign military missions and participating in international burden sharing to the end of global public goods production, building interoperability with a view to this and other purposes, and the acceptance of the role of the civil society and public opinion in the policy process. Reflections on these issues are sought in the studies of this volume, and pointed out in decision-makers' thoughts as well as in formal strategic documents. As visible from the list, we understand institution building with reference to the concept of "institutions" used in the social sciences: i.e. for us, institutions are constituted by norms and rules, written or informal, governing the conduct of government and/or society in a specific issue area.

Introduction: On the sample of countries studied in the present volume

With the exception of Austria, given that it has effectively become a part of the West, even as a neutral country, all of the countries covered in the National University of Public Service's (NUPS) project, that the present volume of studies is a part of, have undergone democratic transitions along varying trajectories and to a varying extent, along with the introduction of market economics and general economic liberalisation.

The starting point for each of them was very different, of course.

Ukraine is the only post-socialist as well as post-Soviet country in the sample. Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are former constituent members of larger

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entities, i.e. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – separation here occurred according to a largely ethno-centric logic and the related quest to build independent nation states in a cultural sense; at the same time real and perceived grievances as to what was not fair about the previous co-existence in a single state with the other parties involved also informed the strategic choices of the key actors in the process.

The change of system proceeded differently across the cases in the volume: e.g. in Poland and Hungary, negotiated transitions occurred, leading at first to an only partially free arrangement of elections in Poland, but leading directly to free elections in Hungary; Romania, in contrast, saw violent upheaval and the execution of the head of the party state.

The departure of Soviet troops was strongly wished for. They were generally not too reluctant to depart from Hungary (albeit this also took a long drawn-out process, and at times highly petty negotiations about financial and other details), whereas in Ukraine the presence of nuclear assets of the former Soviet Union, largely under the control of predominantly Russian forces, was a far more delicate situation that eventually required international mediation and involvement to guarantee a favourable outcome – favourable at the time; notwithstanding the fact that in 2014 the concerning international agreement, the Budapest Memorandum, was quickly superseded by developments, to put this mildly.

Amidst all the differences (and more that may be rightly pointed out) it is also worth focusing in an opening chapter of this kind on the points that may connect the countries studied in this volume. Even as starting points as well as current positions show significant variation, the processes that unfolded in the region, and the challenges faced during their course, were not so dissimilar as to not allow for the identification of certain common features as organising principles for interpreting the contents of the present book.

Unfortunately, not all of the countries mentioned above will be covered in this particular volume. NUPS launched what is in regional terms a megaproject: a quest to produce a 10-volume series on various aspects of foreign and security policies of Central and Eastern European countries.[2] Finding suitable authors, in a region where the number of competent experts (the larger set), those with adequate writing skills in English (a smaller set), and those available at the time (an even smaller set) is limited, proved to be a tough challenge; all the more so in a context where editors of the ten volumes competed with each other, to some extent, in trying to recruit members of the smallest set alluded to above. Accordingly, some chapters were left un-included in the present volume. This shall, hopefully, not detract from the value of this volume as a compilation of studies that may allow for drawing certain conclusions regarding common patterns and key differences with a comparative logic in mind.

It is to this end that below a discussion follows about the challenges commonly faced by the countries of the region in the institution building process that has taken place since the beginning of their transformation, back in the 1990s. This may inform readers' expec-

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[2] A note concerning terminology: the term "Central and Eastern Europe" is preferred here to name the region in the focus of this study, as in fact neither the boundaries nor the names of regions (nor the fundamental issue of whether there *is* indeed a region to speak of in the first place) may be regarded as unquestionable, unambiguous, or even objective at all in any way. Regions are socially constructed in a process where key actors carry more influence than others (e.g. decision-makers, bureaucracies and scholars), but even these actors act to assert their influence under the impact of various incentives, ranging from geopolitical interests and career advantages to naïve beliefs.

tations, and may even advance certain conclusions, suggesting the formulation of some important lessons in advance – conclusions and lessons that the contributors' chapters will then confirm, qualify or possibly question, case by case.

Common challenges

The internal transformation of the countries concerned had to occur in a context that itself was transforming in major ways. The Cold War superpower conflict ended with a new era in the relations between the West and Russia ("East and West") under Russian President Boris Yeltsin's early period of leadership. Even as the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia seemed to threaten broader Central and Eastern Europe with the spread of instability affecting even powers external to the region (Western Europe and the U.S.), a whole wide world's problems were also reinterpreted with the sum of reinterpretations translated into a rationale for a "new security agenda".

From a "managerial" perspective on global governance, one often taken by Western leaders, the required tasks were clear: 1. help and incentivise the self-sought democratisation and liberalisation processes in Central and Eastern Europe as this corresponded with the fundamental values of liberal democracy and the progressive liberal utopia strongly informing expectations at the time; 2. contain the instability between these countries by confining it to the former Yugoslavia and eventually tackling it there as well, so that international stability may provide a permitting context for the realisation of the first objective (with a view to which Hungary and its neighbours were encouraged, even pressured, lightly, to sign so-called basic treaties regulating their relationships); 3. respecting the will of the countries concerned, but not independently of the West's own interests; to be integrated into the EU and NATO structures once this did not conflict with international stability; 4. transform them, i.e. modernise and enable them to become "security providers" as opposed to "security consumers", so they can ultimately serve as useful auxiliaries in dealing with the "new security challenges" arising on the peripheries of an unstable world globally.

As I have discussed elsewhere before in a conference paper (Marton 2007), a key question facing any external manager of processes in Central and Eastern Europe is formulated in the language of the English School of international relations, whether the countries of the region may form a society of states without the completion of cultural nationalist projects, or if – at least in certain places – certain local actors' ethno-nationalist utopias (of "ethnically pure(r)" nation states) may need to be tolerated; in other words, whether in governing the region one can strive without compromises for a society of states where states are neutral providers for their citizens (as democratic standards demand).

In the end, the results are mixed. In the Visegrád countries – albeit admittedly not without their actually increased ethnic homogeneity in the wake of the post-World War II changes – democracies have been built that generally give equal rights to their citizens and where ethnic clashes are not present for the moment. This, however, is not to say that conditions have always been, or are perfect within them. Slovakia under the Mečiar era springs to mind, with its markedly more ethno-centric approach to nation building; or in fact, the general conditions of the groups of Roma populations in the countries where they are present in larger numbers (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania).

Elsewhere, in the former Yugoslavia, the issue of interethnic coexistence had drastic and violent implications that are so obvious they may require no extensive commentary. In Ukraine, the issue of the Crimean Peninsula, and the presence of ethnic Russians there, was in effect a long-simmering conflict that culminated in the annexation of the area by Russia, the issue of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers being a general factor of vulnerability for the fragile Ukrainian state – a fault line that Russia proved more than willing to instrumentalise with a view to its own interests, and one that does not help Ukraine's relationship with its other ethnic minorities, including Poles and Hungarians.

Besides the issue of whether the newly independent (Ukraine) or "newly truly autonomous" (NI and NTA) states (post-socialist countries of the former Eastern bloc) would be willing or capable to become neutral providers for their citizens, the completion of the democratic project faced other challenges as well, of course.

Not without significance to NATO, intelligence and military reform (as well as the reform of governance in general) had to grapple with the dilemmas posed by the continued presence of the officials, officers and agents of the former socialist party regimes. Certainly not all of those concerned were of an unamenably or inflexibly anti-democratic view of the world, and many may have been genuinely ready to work towards the reformulated goals of their NI and NTA countries. Even so, they posed the risk of the presence of anti-democratic elements, as well as influencers and informants connected to Russia, too close to power for comfort. Per implication of these risks, they may have been in a position to destabilise politics, to obstruct democratic reforms, or to be complicit in democratic backsliding from case to case. Upon working with, and eventually becoming a part of the NATO alliance, it was also a concern that they may leak strategic sensitive information to third parties (mostly to Russia).

Having said that, lustration and the vetting of state civilian and military personnel occurred only partially and very unevenly across the countries concerned. The new political elites (where they were truly new elites) had to rely on the competences of these former bureaucratic elements. In many cases, the politics of the commemoration of, and even political parties' actual personal connections to the past have impeded this process, a case in point being Hungary itself where there is only incomplete transparency regarding the past up to this day.

A more often considered challenge in the transition process concerned one of the most obvious risks related to the possibility of a democratic reversal: a military coup d'état and takeover of government, not unheard of in the region, e.g. with a view to General Jaruzelski's regime in Poland in the 1980s, and events in Moscow in 1991 as well as 1993. This implication is frequently left undiscussed (at least in an explicit form), but is obviously relevant to the programme of reforming the "civil-military" relationship that was the focus of attention for NATO throughout the period of working with Partnership for Peace and, ultimately, NATO aspirant countries. It shall be no surprise that most of the chapters in the present volume give due (and, proportionally speaking, significant) attention to the subject.

A similarly important element of military reform was the need to downsize the large "people's armies" to smaller, and yet more agile forces, in an age when the general expectation with a view to the strategic competition is to have "leaner but meaner" forces that are sufficiently modernised and where personnel costs, accordingly, do not take up an overwhelming share of the defence budget. The wisdom of this is not, to this day, being revisited in any major way. Ending conscription was generally seen by many as being in conformity with a liberal social order where one may only willingly have to subject oneself to the workings of

a hierarchical authority-based institution such as the military. Up to this day, many issues regarding how the military may restrict one's political freedom remain to be settled decisively – noteworthy in this respect is how, upon the formation (and short-lived existence) of the paramilitary Hungarian Guard, the permissibility for a member of the military of belonging to organisations of civil society/voluntary associations became a subject of debate (Visnovitz 2010). The downsizing of armies and the end to conscription was only contested from time to time by more conservative political forces who may have seen a means of nation building and the building of social cohesion in mandatory military service, and – with more regularity – by fringe nationalist forces that may have seen an unwelcome weakening of national power in this (note how far right organisations, including paramilitary organisations in Hungary often make a point of referring to the past downsizing of the Hungarian military as the rationale for the need for some kind of societal self-defence capability as justification for their own existence[3]).

A more interesting, and actually strategic, question may be whether the "people's armies" of the past may have been better able to handle stabilisation tasks where time and again the modern, capability and effects-focused militaries have proved rather weak, e.g. in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as, to some extent, in the Balkans. A tentative answer may be that there is certainly power in the numbers, and that the culture of a people's army may perhaps permit better outcomes in societal engagement in target countries; nevertheless, the corruption generally seen in people's armies certainly would not have favoured sound operation, e.g. in the context of insurgencies or in a fragile multi-ethnic social environment.

With this question, we already arrive at the discussion of one of the more significant challenges remaining, with relevance to the reshaping of institutions and institutional practices: namely, the general transformation of the security agenda. As the chapters of this volume will show, eventually all countries of the region, not without a level of synchronisation with the leading Western powers and the evolving general consensus in NATO, unanimously mention new security issues in their national security and other strategic documents. Terrorism, energy security, state failure (and the implications of state weakness and state failure) are just some of the relevant examples of this. It may be documented that a whole new generation of leaders as well as bureaucrats was effectively re-socialised into thinking in according terms, open to the consideration of the newly incorporated items as the actual priority challenges facing the political community of the West. Others have joined in this, at least paying lip service to the importance of the canon and the related new ways of approaching the issue of security overall.

The capacity for and the readiness to engage in the military missions that stemmed out of the new thinking have been more uncertain at times. The need to stabilise the Balkan region was never significantly questioned by anyone in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan was already a bridge too far in some respects. The need to justify to the public as well as the international community at large the crossing of international law in Iraq, and even the mere presence of one's forces in a country as far away as Afghanistan, was a major challenge. When two Hungarian UXO (Unexploded Ordnance) specialists were killed in a short time in Afghanistan in 2008, one Hungarian politician, future Defence Minister István Simicskó opined that since no Afghan specialists

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[3] See for example István Dósa, a former leading figure of the Hungarian Guard movement, saying this (Szegő 2007).

help Hungarians dispose of World War II-era unexploded ordnance in Hungary, Hungarians should not be risking their lives in Afghanistan either (Stanga 2008) – the implication being, when unpacked in its entirety, that comparatively poor Central and Eastern European countries that themselves require assistance in some respects, ought not sacrifice money and lives on trying to improve conditions in Afghanistan whose problems they are not in any way to blame for. In other words, while there was clearly a very rational effort in the quest by the West to turn the new Central and Eastern European allies into security providers in global missions themselves, and in fact they proved in many ways useful auxiliaries as such, this has not come without a sort of blowback in the way of negative sentiments in certain segments of the public concerned as well as politicians and decision-makers.

Note that the discussion of the above problems only concerns the issue of being there in foreign missions, and does not yet imply that there is a readiness to think in terms of a burden sharing logic in the production of global public goods. For many in post-socialist countries, the West has remained the perennial benchmark in terms of what is a "rich country", a benchmark that in some ways they would always, up to this day and in the foreseeable future, fall short of, remaining "poor countries" as such, as "countries that have not benefited from the Marshal Aid" (as Western Europe did). Against such a backdrop, it is very hard to initiate an honest debate as to what exactly would constitute equitable burden sharing in efforts at global public goods production with the West – simple GDP-proportionate counts (as in the case of the defence budget), or troop numbers in foreign missions will not do but nominally. Leaders/decision-makers will often agree in principle to have this as key indicators of how much a country is doing in a given military mission or in general for the defence of the NATO Alliance, but both in their societies and (even) amongst decision-makers, negative sentiment is bound to remain as to whether anything may be rightly expected from these countries at all.

Even if working with the Alliance in its overseas missions is at times fundamentally questioned, there has, at least, never been any doubt about the need for the ability to operate together with the Alliance's forces, or more simply: as to interoperability, given the obvious utility of this in the eventuality of an attack on NATO or any of its members. The NATO security guarantee is still appreciated by the public across the post-socialist countries, and for this guarantee to amount to anything meaningful, interoperability is certainly required, as are efforts to get there (even as perfect outcomes are practically unattainable in this respect).

Finally, it may be worth it to devote a few words to certain open-ended processes that can be observed in the region at the time of writing this. There is, currently, worry about the finality and fullness of democratic consolidations, and, regardless of whether the criticisms in this regard are entirely correct, the role of the civil society is relevant to address in this context. In many countries, politicians do not hold back when criticising those NGO organisations' work that are critical of their own record in any way. They do not refrain from using the language of securitisation against them, deeming NGOs and the civil society a threat, in some cases even when speaking from authoritative state positions. This is worrying. NGOs should certainly not be above criticism. But if an independent civil society is criticised without fine distinctions, collectively, or when the aim of this is apparently to decrease pressure on governments to be transparent about their activities, or when the possibility of restrictive legislation, looking to curb NGOs' activities, is looming, and when all of this takes place in an atmosphere of public hostility stoked up against NGOs, that is detrimental to democracy.

This may be particularly important to note in a region where civil society actors have never had great influence on policy-making – in fact, the policy process has been characterised by an avoidance of public debates and decision-making in informal cabinets is more the rule than the exception.

On the structure of the book and the composing chapters

The ensuing studies follow a simple and (hopefully) highly convenient, three-fold structure (besides the alphabetical ordering of countries assessed in the respective chapters).

The chapters of this book will thus provide, firstly, a historical overview of how the dominant security/threat perceptions evolved since 1989, with reference to how official documents reflected these changes (including a view to domestic threats, if applicable). The concerning sections will also introduce readers to the major foreign policy decisions taken during the period in question, reorganisations of the most relevant ministries and state agencies, with special regard to the ministries of foreign affairs and defence, reforms in the field of defence and the military, and in the field of intelligence, as well as the fundamental trends relating to budgetary conditions – the latter having key relevance for any drive for the modernisation of militaries, for example.

This is then followed by a consideration of the key stakeholders in decision-making. The key actors in the field of executive power are discussed, providing an introduction of the institutions in foreign and security policy at present, including the competences of the Head of State/Government, their cabinet(s), the relevant ministries and other agencies, and the organisation of the military. The section also outlines how this is determined and affected by constitutional rules and other relevant legislation. Furthermore, attention is also paid to key domestic interest groups with any observable significance in the field of security policy, as well as to the dynamics and impact of public opinion.

The third and final parts of the studies in this volume will then offer the readers two detailed case studies each. The authors were requested to present one case of a major foreign policy decision that they mention in the overview of their case at the beginning of their chapters, and one other, lesser known case, to thus illustrate the role of key actors and factors examined in the first two sections of their studies.

The countries covered in this volume are, understandably, highly different in some respects, and case selection could not always follow the simple scheme explained above – deviations were therefore flexibly tolerated, in the interest of the reader, as in some of the chapters cases selected based on alternative considerations may have been either more informative, more illustrative of key points that the authors sought to make, or, simply, more convenient to discuss – e.g. if these could be significantly better documented than other cases where decision-making and the role of different actors and factors may have been too obscure. As is often the case in Central and Eastern European countries.

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