

Central and Eastern Europe and the Changes in Foreign and Security Decision-making: Obvious Successes but Many Failed Expectations

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Abstract

The chapters of the book provide material for further discussion and food for thoughts for further research. They intended to examine similarities and differences between the countries – not all – of Central and Eastern Europe, especially how the security (and foreign) policy decision-making processes have evolved since 1989. The chapters also analysed how the security threats perceptions have changed and the authors chose two case studies to better introduce the decision-making processes, the key actors and institutions in the respective countries. There are obviously challenges and threats that are shared and similar in the countries covered in this book, but we need to take into account that these countries have significant differences at the same time, even though all of them experienced a socialist and post-socialist past and history and of course a heavy legacy. Let us think about Ukraine, which is the only post-Soviet state among the countries included in the book, and the only one not being member of the EU and NATO. The other countries' main priority was to join the Euro-Atlantic institutions as soon as it was possible, and after the accession to prove that they are reliable allies whilst they struggled with many problems of the parallel challenges of democratic transitions and transformations of their polity, economy and societies.

There are times when it is worth to sit back and to analyse the achievements, failures and the steps forward in a region's history. For Central Europe, the most important achievement in the last decades was the Euro-Atlantic integration. In this sense, 2019 is a special year as it marks the multi-anniversary for many countries in the region.

However, as Péter Marton argued in his introductory chapter, it is very difficult to analyse the countries in the region applying the same standards. This is similar with Euro-Atlantic integration. All the countries can celebrate the 30th anniversary of the end of the Cold War, but not all of them were independent – such as Croatia, or Ukraine, or in a sense the Czech Republic and Slovakia – at this time. Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic

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can celebrate being members of NATO for 20 years. In 2019 Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia had been members of the European Union for 15 years. Romania and Slovakia had been in NATO for 15 years and Croatia had been a member for 10 years.

These anniversaries mark important symbolic and at the same time practical milestones in each country's foreign and security policy and also in the evolution of security policy decision-making – Ukraine is an exception in this sense. However, the change of system and the democratic transitions – even though it happened a little bit differently – gave opportunity to all the countries to come closer to the West in a “whole and free Europe”. Of course, the newly democratising countries met several obstacles and caused many headaches to the West and sometimes (many) to each other when they tried to find the institutional way of their respective countries' future when restructuring the polities, economies and societies. It is not surprising – and all the authors highlighted it in their chapters – that the countries of Central Europe still struggle with some open questions after the long and exhausting decades of democratic transitions: whether NATO, or EU membership, the U.S. alliance really serves the countries' self interest in all dimensions.

There are also challenges that have been the consequence of the simultaneous crises facing Europe and the Transatlantic Alliance in at least the last decade: a resurgent Russia, international terrorism, failing states in Europe's neighbourhood, illegal migration crisis and not least the long lasting effects of the global financial crisis.

As it is argued in the chapter about Hungary, despite the above-mentioned challenges and headaches, in 2018, the majority of the Central European societies are pro-NATO, pro-EU and have better views on the United States than many Western Europeans. The people in Central Europe are in favour of strengthening the Euro-Atlantic alliance.²

The success of Euro-Atlantic integration and even the democratic transitions in general is beyond question though there are many challenges as argued above beyond the surface. Nevertheless, NATO regained some momentum after the Russian invasion of Crimea but the Alliance still lacks a clear mission similar to the one during the Cold War, when NATO's obvious task was to defend the territory of the European allies against the Soviet aggression and enhance their integration. Since 1989, maintaining stability in Europe, spreading Western values, managing crises and combatting terrorism all emerged as priorities for the renewed and extended alliance.

Mentioning the anniversaries, we also need to take note that the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Balkan Wars created a new situation in which the Central European countries, similarly to the Western allies became reluctant to keep up pre-1989–1991 levels of defence spending. All the authors mentioned in their respective chapter that restructuring the socialist security sector meant a sharp decline also in the defence spending and caused heavy debates on burden sharing. Those countries who became members of NATO needed somehow to find a way to prove they are reliable allies even if they cannot spend enough on defence. An obvious choice was to participate in the NATO and the U.S.-led missions.

As Péter Marton argues in his chapter, the selected set of countries for the different chapters is wide and there are significant differences as we can see with regards to the

² For more details see Péter Rada's essay in this volume.

historic backgrounds and the developments in the last decades. Marton highlights that: “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 entities.”³ Ukraine is also the only one not being member of NATO, or the EU. It also must not be forgotten – as Marton underlines – that “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”.⁴ These processes were longer in Slovakia and also happened differently due to obvious reasons in Croatia and Ukraine. Marton also adds that: “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”⁵ the processes of transformations and transitions.

Despite the differences in the countries covered in the volume, the chapters followed a similar structure to try to compare the different cases and countries, which is almost impossible to achieve as argued by Marton and also mentioned above in this chapter. The contributions of this book provided first an overview of how the dominant security/threat perceptions evolved since 1989, with reference to how official documents reflected these changes. These sections of the chapters also provided an introduction to the major foreign policy decisions, to the reorganisations of the most relevant ministries and state agencies, reforms in the field of defence and the military, and to the fundamental trends relating to budgetary conditions – the latter having key relevance for any drive for the modernisation of militaries in each of the countries. The second sections of the chapters discussed the developments of the decision-making processes, the key actors, institutions and agencies of the government and the military. The final sections focused on practical examples and strengthened the argument of the authors by introducing two case studies for major foreign and security decision and the decision-making process in the respective countries.

The evolution of security perceptions since 1989

Zvonimir Mahečić underlines in his chapter that the case of Croatia was different from the other countries because the security sector reform and building new institutions during the parallel democratic transition was very difficult and not entirely successful because Croatia was engaged in a war right after gaining independence. However, there are also some similarities to the other cases covered in this book, because the NATO and EU integration processes due to the conditionality and the obligations brought some beneficial effects and improvements. According to Mahečić the process of the security sector reform in Croatia can “be broadly divided into sections covering five major periods. The key events and

³ See Péter Marton’s essay in this volume.

⁴ See Péter Marton’s essay in this volume.

⁵ See Péter Marton’s essay in this volume.

activities undertaken during these periods mark more or less significant milestones that have determined the way Croatia – its society and political and security institutions developed”.⁶

Péter Rada argues that the “change of system gave an opportunity to Hungary to join the West again and to begin the long and exhausting transition from a socialist style decision-making structure to a modern institutional system which is compatible with NATO and the EU”.⁷ Before 1989, “Hungary spent more than four decades “experimenting” with the Soviet style defence and political structures. The consequence of the inorganic development was the unquestionable desire of the new political elite in 1990 to develop new defence structures, even designing a new basic approach to security policy”.⁸ “The 1990s was the period for rebuilding the genuine Hungarian identity in the constantly changing international environment after the end of the Soviet influence and before joining the West. The socialist period artificially kept the lid on the national, ethnic, or religious differences and conflicts that also came to the surface in Central Europe. Consequently, parallel to the Euro-Atlantic integration, the need for increased regional security and political cooperation appeared on the agenda. The status of the Hungarian minorities abroad, their protection and the functioning relations with Slovakia and Romania were prerequisites of Western integration.”⁹ The new values, articulated interests – which are in some ways still influential today – were formulated at the beginning of the 1990s by the Antall Government. During the 1990s, “the criticism towards the slow Hungarian military reforms and the slow restructuring of the security infrastructure was compensated for by the geostrategic position of the country and the Hungarian participation in NATO’s missions in Bosnia and Kosovo”.¹⁰ However, later criticism grew whilst the defence spending decreased in Hungary. This could not be compensated by the relatively strong Hungarian participation in NATO, or U.S.-led missions.

According to Michał Piekarski’s argument, contemporary Polish foreign relations and the evolution of security were two-fold. “On the one hand, there was the process of creating a new internal political system, which created new institutions. On the other hand, there was also the process of changing orientation in terms of foreign policy and military alliances.”¹¹ During the process, Poland intended to be a reliable ally; lately Poland is one of those few that spends more than 2% of GDP on defence. Poland similarly to other countries in the region paid special attention to the participation in foreign missions, most notably in Iraq.

Cristina Bogzeanu argues that “since the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Romania’s foreign and security policy has passed through a serious set of reforms including the downsizing of the armed forces, establishing democratic control over the military, implying a reform of the institutions as well as a change in its strategic thinking”.¹² Not differently to the other NATO members covered in the different chapters, Romania’s top priority after 1989 was the successful NATO and EU integration. This process was influenced by internal and external factors. “Internally, the need to implement the required reforms to gain NATO

⁶ See Zvonimir Mahečić’s essay in this volume.

⁷ See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

⁸ See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

⁹ See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

¹⁰ See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

¹¹ See Michał Piekarski’s essay in this volume.

¹² See Cristina Bogzeanu’s essay in this volume.

and EU integration has been the main force that formed and developed the political, economic, juridical, administrative and military dimensions. Externally, Romania carried out actions proving its adhesion to NATO and EU values, standards and interests.”¹³ Following a similar path than its neighbours, today “Romania is deeply involved in international efforts to manage global and regional security challenges, and foreign and security policy decisions have stood as proof of the state’s responsible engagement as an EU member and as a NATO ally”.¹⁴

In his chapter on Slovakia, István Hangácsi mentioned that Slovakia has experienced a lot of fundamental changes in the last decades: “First, the fall of communism (1989), with its long-term and painful socio-economic outcomes; a few years later the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia; thirdly the road of integration into NATO and European Union followed.”¹⁵ He also argues that the transformation has not been easy as “not all of the governments were committed fully to meet certain democratic, economic and military standards set by NATO or the European Union”.¹⁶ This is true despite the fact that since independence “all elected governments of the country have proclaimed their main aim by joining different international and European co-operations, which support peace, security and collaboration (political, economic and cultural) between nations. [...] After the groundbreaking elections in 1998, the integration to transatlantic and European institutions picked up pace, peaking in 2004, when Slovakia caught up with other aspirant countries and joined both the European Union and NATO”.¹⁷ Similarly to the other countries in the region, the major international challenges such as “terrorism, migration crisis, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea”¹⁸ significantly influenced the evolution of the foreign and security decision-making process and also the related institutions in Slovakia.

As mentioned above several times, Ukraine’s development is significantly different from the other countries. Even though the Euro-Atlantic integration has not been completely out of the question during the last decades, the real accession to the EU, or even more so to NATO is far away. We could also see that even the mere intention of the Ukrainian Government, or the public to maintain a close(r) relationship with the Euro-Atlantic institutions triggered harsh responses from Russia. In his chapter Maksym Bugriy highlights that the different past “left this country with the legacy burden of Soviet and imperial Russian political processes and institutions, which was far from the practices in NATO and EU member states. [...] As Ukraine became independent with the USSR breakup, it created all institutions anew, but it was replicating quasi-Soviet security architecture [...]. While Ukraine’s politics was until recently the bargaining of oligarchic elites, they were virtually sharing the neglect of the importance of the security sector development, leading to its degradation”.¹⁹ The antagonistic differences being present within the society and the political elite led to several “revolutions” and upheavals, most recently in 2013. These events brought some changes and further challenges. “The times post-Maidan led to an increased focus

¹³ See Cristina Bogzeanu’s essay in this volume.

¹⁴ See Cristina Bogzeanu’s essay in this volume.

¹⁵ See István Hangácsi’s essay in this volume.

¹⁶ See István Hangácsi’s essay in this volume.

¹⁷ See István Hangácsi’s essay in this volume.

¹⁸ See István Hangácsi’s essay in this volume.

¹⁹ See Maksym Bugriy’s essay in this volume.

on the reform of the defence forces, which became part of strategic doctrine.”²⁰ The new security strategy in 2015 decided on the security sector reform and not surprisingly named Russia as the single most important source of a security threat for Ukraine. “Meanwhile, President Poroshenko’s strategy was to have a clear security orientation towards NATO–EU as the ultimate benchmark, declared also in the new National Security Strategy.”²¹

Key actors of the foreign and security decision-making

The process of rebuilding, or building for the first time of the security institutions in Croatia was a bumpy road with lost opportunities, failures as Zvonimir Mahečić criticises the country’s development in the last decades. “The majority of the security sector institutions have been established in the years following independence, but obviously, the beginning of the process took place during the time of war. Clearly, a wartime environment does not represent the most favourable framework for such an endeavour. After the year 2000, however, finally some steps have been taken in the process of accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures.”²² Croatia fell behind other countries in the region and needed “to catch up with the other transitional states on their way to accession to NATO and the EU. Because of the blindness of the leadership during the first ten years of independence, being also, partially, the result of the protracted war, all attempts to join these two organisations were stalled to the point that external observers had to wonder if the Croatian leadership was actually expecting to be begged to join”.²³

Péter Rada emphasised that the “Hungarian governments paid special attention that Hungary participates in military missions, mostly in NATO frames”²⁴ with the clear goal to deploy around 1,000 troops in the different missions. The Euro-Atlantic integration and the NATO and later the EU membership significantly influenced the development of the security institutions. The legal regulations and the decision-making processes intended to adapt to the new realities that came with the memberships. “After 1989, the Hungarian strategic culture has changed fundamentally due to the fact that Hungary left the Warsaw Pact and strived for quick integration in NATO and the EU. Despite this fact, feeling small has remained part of this culture that has imposed serious limits on decisions on the use of the Hungarian Defence Forces.”²⁵ Since 2010, Hungary has experienced further changes and developments, but taking off the post-socialist historic burden needs more time.

Similarly to the other countries in the region, the development of the regulations of the security sector has been defined in the Constitution. As Michal Piekarski argues in the second section of his article, the fundamental legal document has defined the key actors in the security policy decision-making process and also the process itself. The Constitution of Poland was adopted at the end of the first decade of independence on 2 April 1997.

²⁰ See Maksym Bugriy’s essay in this volume.

²¹ See Maksym Bugriy’s essay in this volume.

²² See Zvonimir Mahečić’s essay in this volume.

²³ See Zvonimir Mahečić’s essay in this volume.

²⁴ See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

²⁵ See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

Cristina Bogzeanu argues in her chapter that in Romania the application of the democratic principles in the security policy decision-making process and the development of the institutions were based on the democratic civil-military relations and the achieved consensus on the norms guiding the transformation process. Bogzeanu highlights that “Romania is defined as a semi-presidential republic, the executive power resting with the President and the Government. Foreign and security policy decision-making in Romania can be considered centralised, the main stakeholders being the holders of the executive power – the President and the Government. The constant mainstream in Romanian foreign and security policy – NATO and EU integration, U.S. strategic partnership, and security and stability in the Black Sea Area and Southeastern Europe – are visible the most in foreign and security policy, where decision-makers are keen on showing a strong consensus”.²⁶

István Hangácsi also underlines that in Slovakia “as in every constitutional and democratic country, only specific state representatives and officials are allowed to shape the foreign, security, defence and military developments”.²⁷ Besides the most important actors – “the President, the National Council (Parliament), the Prime Minister (PM), the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs (MoFaEA), the Minister of Defence (MoD) and the cabinet”,²⁸ there are prominent think tanks that have some influence over the security policy decision-making process: “the Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs (CENAA), the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), Slovak Security Policy Institute (SSPI), GLOBSEC and Stratpol.”²⁹

As was mentioned above, Ukraine is an exemption in many senses. Maksym Bugriy also highlights that: “The roles of all key players in the security sector were recently specified in more details in the new Law on National Security. Ukraine distinguishes between “security” and “defence” areas. The law defined the security and defence sector as “unified under one leadership and the coordinated aggregate of government and military and security institutions, citizens and civic associations that participate in the provision of national security”. The law proposed to differentiate between the “security forces” and “defence forces”, with some overlaps, most notably the National Guard, which is a combination of militarised police and, in some units, mechanised infantry. The National Guard is under the Ministry of the Interior as a “security force” in peacetime and under the MoD in wartime. Currently, some of its tactical units are on the frontline in Donbas, just like a regular military.”³⁰

The case studies

It seems to be obvious that Zvonimir Mahečić chose first the case when Croatia got involved in the Bosnian War. It happened at the same time when Croatia struggled for international recognition and also needed to build up its security institutions. The second case is less known. The government’s decision “fraught with problems and inconsistencies is the long

²⁶ See Cristina Bogzeanu’s essay in this volume.

²⁷ See István Hangácsi’s essay in this volume.

²⁸ See István Hangácsi’s essay in this volume.

²⁹ See István Hangácsi’s essay in this volume.

³⁰ See Maksym Bugriy’s essay in this volume.

protracted but relatively recently resolved (we will see how durable it is) issue of re-equipping the Air Force with new fighters”.³¹ The modernisation of the military and buying new equipment has brought problems to the surface. However, this development is not unknown to other countries in the region that needed to take difficult decisions when choosing either American or European equipment, or military materiel.

Péter Rada argued in the last section of his chapter that there are many obvious choices in the last decades in Hungary to analyse through case studies concerning the security decision-making process but two are especially interesting: the Hungarian contribution in Kosovo and the Hungarian participation in the counter-ISIL coalition. “The Balkan crisis and the wars in the Western Balkans put Hungary in a very difficult situation. A large number of Hungarians live in Serbia [...]. Consequently, for Hungary, it was most important not to be involved actively in the conflict and the government tried to emphasise neutrality, while supporting the international organisations’ efforts to find a political solution.”³² In case of Kosovo, Hungary was already member of NATO and intended to fulfil the voluntarily accepted obligations brought on board by the membership. “After the United States initiated the global coalition against ISIL in August 2014 and began air strikes first in Iraq, and later in Syria, Hungary joined the coalition and participated at the high-level and regular counter-ISIL meetings. Furthermore, Hungary offered humanitarian aid – around 70,000 EUR – and military materiel to the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government in 2014.”³³ The Hungarian Parliament later authorised to deploy Hungarian troops helping the coalition efforts in Northern Iraq.

In case of Poland, probably the best example for a classic decision in security policy is Poland’s involvement in the Iraq War in 2003. Michał Piekarski argues that the decision “was made in the context of a strongly U.S.-orientated foreign and security policy, formulated after 1990, which became only stronger in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks”.³⁴ The second case study – “the Caracal case” – analyses a decision rather influenced by the EU membership and related to the failed modernisation of the Polish armed forces. In “2012, the Ministry of Defence formally announced its intention to purchase twenty-six medium-size helicopters, including sixteen cargo ones, three of the land SAR (Search and Rescue) variant, three of the maritime SAR variant and four of the ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) variant in order to replace old Soviet-era Mi-8 and Mi-14 helicopters”.³⁵

Cristina Bogzeanu argued that “the highly centralised decision-making process in Romania’s foreign and security policy can be clearly illustrated by two major cases of foreign and security policy decisions – the one on becoming a NATO Member State and the one about support for the NATO military campaign in Kosovo in 1999”.³⁶ “In the context of the 9/11 events, Bucharest rallied to the international community’s position and supported the U.S. response to the attacks. Parliament itself lent its support to participate in the coun-

³¹ See Zvonimir Mahečić’s essay in this volume.

³² See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

³³ See Péter Rada’s essay in this volume.

³⁴ See Michał Piekarski’s essay in this volume.

³⁵ See Michał Piekarski’s essay in this volume.

³⁶ See Cristina Bogzeanu’s essay in this volume.

ter-terrorist fight, together with the other NATO Member States, and to increase Romania's contribution to the SFOR and KFOR missions."³⁷

István Hangácsi also highlighted that Slovakia needed to compete for more Western attention. Thus the first case analysed the decision about NATO integration. The process "had certain phases and trends, even setbacks, which made a huge impact on Slovakia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures".³⁸ The second case study is similar to the one of the Croatian chapter's case. "Obtaining new and modern armoured vehicles is a key and long-term goal of the Slovak security and military strategy."³⁹ Among the many available examples Hangácsi focused on "the ongoing procurement scandal related to armoured vehicles (4 x 4 and 8 x 8), in which different interested parties are involved".⁴⁰

Maksym Bugriy chose two interrelated cases from Ukraine's recent history. First, he analysed the Ukrainian government's decision to defy the Russian demands and threats and to maintain Ukraine's territorial sovereignty also in Crimea and use the tools of international law and agreements. The second case mainly stems from the first one. Bugriy argued that Crimea's annexation in 2014 occurred in a very different context and obviously with a different outcome. "The Ukrainian Government initiated certain decisions: strategically not to respond to the Russians, attempting to stage only unarmed resistance to the capturing of military units, raising the Army to defend mainland Ukraine, and using the scarce diplomatic instruments available, including the UN Security Council and the consultations under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum".⁴¹

³⁷ See Cristina Bogzeanu's essay in this volume.

³⁸ See István Hangácsi's essay in this volume.

³⁹ See István Hangácsi's essay in this volume.

⁴⁰ See István Hangácsi's essay in this volume.

⁴¹ See Maksym Bugriy's essay in this volume.