The Role of NATO and EU CSDP in the Hungarian Security and Defence Policy

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Introduction

Although Hungary's road to NATO and EU membership was long, it was a decisive element in the transformation of Hungary to a Western-oriented, pluralist democracy. The consensus that emerged around the objective of Euro-Atlantic integration was strong and wide within the Hungarian political elite and society. Membership in these institutions was perceived to be the best way for Hungary, which as a "ferry-country" so many times had drifted between East and West, would finally dock itself where it always sought to belong. Within this context, NATO meant the promise of security, while the EU the promise of modernisation and welfare. However, in recent years the significance of the EU CSDP in security has increased in the Hungarian perception. The main purpose of this article is to examine the role and impact of NATO and the EU on Hungarian security and defence policies since its transformation nearly thirty years ago.

The paper argues, that the notion that NATO is the cornerstone of Hungarian security and defence policy has remained unchallenged since the early 1990s until the present day. In this context, it was first the criteria outlined in the NATO accession process, and then the fulfilment of membership requirements in the Alliance which provided the decisive framework for Hungarian security and defence policy, including defence sector reform, military modernisation, force posture, contribution to international military operations. The paper will also outline the fact that the influence of the European Union and its slowly progressing security and defence policy structures were much more limited or indirect on the Hungarian defence policy. This has only partially changed from 2014–2015 with the significant negative changes in the European security environment and the growing ambitions of the EU in the field of security and defence. The article will present the decisive areas connected to Hungarian defence policy, including public perceptions towards NATO and the EU, defence sector reform, modernisation of the armed forces, Hungarian contribution to NATO and CSDP activities, and typical international security challenges and threats affecting NATO and the EU.

Perceptions

The ambition to join NATO emerged after a short transition period following the downfall of communism. The Soviet occupation and the communist regime imposed on the country during the Cold War had a long-lasting impact on the security perceptions of Hungary. The new

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Hungarian political elite, which came to power in 1990 was deeply sceptical towards Russia and stood for pro-Western sentiments (Gazdag 2014, 2–3). However, at the beginning of the political transformation in 1989 and 1990, Hungary was still part of the Warsaw Pact, Soviet troops were still stationed in Hungary and the post-Cold War European security architecture was still uncertain. Within this European environment and with the legacy of 1956, neutrality seemed to be a favourable option. The defence of the newly regained sovereignty and the successful example of Austria made this option even more appealing. However, Hungary had to first exit the Warsaw Pact and convince the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from the country. In order to achieve this goal, the Hungarian diplomacy played an active role in the first half of 1991 to reach an agreement on the dismantling of the military structures of the Warsaw Pact (Valki 1999). As the objective was reached at the Budapest Summit of the Warsaw Pact in February 1991, the disintegration process quickly resulted in the complete cessation of the organisation.

During 1991–1992, the uncertainty on the future course of the Soviet Union and later Russia, in addition to the deepening conflict in the former Yugoslavia, prompted a re-evaluation of the long-term objectives of security policy (Gazdag 2014, 3–4). The coup-attempt against Gorbachev in Moscow in August 1991 raised fears in Budapest that the favourable international developments of the previous years could quickly be reversed. At the same time, the conflicts between the Yugoslav federal states escalated in the summer of 1991, creating a war zone to the South of the Hungarian border. Hence, during 1991–1992, all alternatives were sidelined and a near consensus emerged in the Hungarian political elite that Hungary's security could only be assured through joining Western security structures and by positioning Hungary under the security umbrella of the United States (Valki 1999). Euro-Atlantic integration, alongside maintaining good relations with neighbours and support for Hungarian minorities in the region became the three core pillars of the Hungarian foreign policy. Within this triad, the objective of Euro-Atlantic integration often enjoyed priority above the other two pillars during the 1990s. Since the security ambitions of the EU only began to take root in the form of CFSP and later the ESDP, the primacy of NATO in security and defence matters was unquestionable.

This presupposition did not change even after Hungary joined NATO in 1999. The geopolitical and internal EU developments only reinforced the notion that NATO will remain the only credible defence alliance and strategic actor in Europe: the failure of the EU in the Western Balkan wars, the unchallenged military power of the U.S. reflected during the war on terrorism, the continuing mistrust towards Russia and the slow progress of the ESDP (Valki 1999). In addition, NATO's premier occupation at the time, its crisis management operations from the Western Balkans to Afghanistan provided a useful platform for Hungarian foreign and security policy to strengthen its relations with its Western allies (Asmus 2002).

However, a certain level of modification of Hungary's course has taken place since the late 2000s. Although NATO was still perceived to be the only credible actor in terms of collective defence and high-intensity crisis management operations, there has been a greater openness towards enhancing CSDP's role in certain aspects of security and defence policy, especially with regards to common external security policy, low-intensity crisis management and defence capabilities development. Multiple factors contributed to this shift, including questions regarding the long-term commitment of the United States towards the Central European region, the dynamics of EU integration and Hungarian preferences, a more pragmatic and conflict-avoiding approach to Russia, and the changes in the security environment of Hungary.

The Obama Administration's "reset" policy with Russia, the sudden revision of the Bush Administration's missile defence plan in 2009, the decrease of U.S. military presence in Europe between 2009–2012, the "pivot to Asia", and increasing political tensions with the United States in connection with domestic Hungarian issues after 2010 were the main factors which raised questions regarding the long-term U.S. role in Central and Eastern Europe (Rhodes 2012). This was coupled with an increasingly pragmatic, economic cooperation focused relationship with Russia since 2010, in which the Hungarian side sought to avoid any major political conflict with Moscow. This approach had implications for Hungary's policies in NATO. Although these factors did not question the central role of NATO in the Hungarian security and defence policy, they altered the Hungarian policy towards a less "Atlanticist" and initiative course within NATO. Although support for NATO membership has declined, it is still stronger with 47% approval then compared to the Czech Republic (44%) or Slovakia (30%) (GLOBSEC 2016). Support for the EU continues to be very strong in Hungary, with 61% perceiving EU membership as positive. At the same time, traditionally negative, distrustful perceptions towards Russia have not changed in Hungary, with more than 50% rejecting the idea that Hungary should engage Russia more to the expense of relations with the EU, and only 8% supporting such an option.

Concerning European integration, the Hungarian Government has increasingly taken an anti-federalist approach, supporting EU reforms only on an inter-governmental, nation state foundation, which created permanent tensions with EU institutions and more pro-federalist EU capitals. Within this tense political environment, security and defence was one area where Hungary could demonstrate its commitment to deepen cooperation within the EU. The Hungarian support for strengthening CSDP was also based on the changing security environment. The increasing post-Arab Spring instability in the escalating Middle East had a direct effect on Hungarian security in the form of a dramatic increase of illegal migration in 2015. Together with terrorism, these were the types of security issues that the EU had always been better positioned to provide comprehensive responses. Since the Hungarian Government emphasised the necessity of enhanced border protection, the staunch defence of EU member states sovereignty and the tackling of the complex problem of migration at the source of the problem strengthening the toolkit of CSDP, all this fit well into the Hungarian policy agenda. Public support for the European Union is one of the highest among EU members.

Institutional relations

The first freely elected Hungarian Government after the fall of communism, led by József Antal, sought to strengthen political and institutional ties with Western governments and organisations. Within this effort, the formal relations between NATO and Hungary began with the visit of the Hungarian Foreign Minister to NATO HQ in Brussels in June 1990. However, the future course of the Hungarian security and defence policy orientation was still debated.

Before the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, the possibility of a new form of partnership with the Soviet Union was not excluded, nevertheless, this option quickly lost support as the domestic and the geopolitical circumstances changed. Some preferred neutrality and non-alignment based on the Austrian model. Another option supported by the first defence minister was based on the concepts of independence and "concentric defence",

highlighting the need to develop strong defence capabilities against possible threats from every direction. In opposition to this self-dependent approach, the concept of regional cooperation also appeared as a reasonable option. In 1989 Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy and Hungary formed the Quadragonale, which later, in 1992 was transformed into the Central European Initiative (Németh 2014). In 1991, by the initiative of the Hungarian Government, the Visegrád Partnership was formed. Initially, there were hopes that these regional political initiatives could quickly develop into deep and wide raging cooperation enhancing also regional security. However, these hopes were soon proved to be unfounded as these regional initiatives remained to be loose political forums inadequate to seriously deal with the urgent security and defence questions of the region and of Hungary. The Visegrád Platform instead served as a platform to support the integration process into NATO and the EU by enhancing the political cooperation of the respective countries (Németh 2014).

A similar approach based its hopes on a European collective security system with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – later OSCE – at its core. However, the CSCE's poor performance during the Balkan wars and doubts regarding Russia's future geopolitical orientation questioned the long-term viability of this latter option as well. Hence, by 1992–1993, for the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian political elite, Euro-Atlantic integration seemed to be the only viable option for a long-term solution of Hungary's security challenges. Since Hungary was considered one of the front-runner countries regarding eligibility for membership, the pace of the accession was fundamentally determined by NATO (Asmus 2002).

Its leading status in the EU integration process also demonstrated Hungary's front-runner status among the former communist block throughout the 1990s. Together with Poland, and the then Czechoslovak Republic, it was among the first to sign of a special form of Association Agreement, the Europe Agreement with the European Community in 1991. Later in 1994, Hungary together with Poland was the first two countries to officially apply for membership to the European Union, and it was among the six countries to begin the accession negotiations in 1998 with the EU that led to the "big bang" enlargement in 2004.

When NATO introduced the Partnership for Peace plan in January 1994, Hungary was among the first nations to apply for participation in February the same year. The widening political and institutional relations between Budapest and NATO were reflected by the opening of a permanent liaison office at NATO HQ in January 1995. Hungary's accession process was given a big political boost by its role in the NATO conflict intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995 (Varga 2014). Hungary served as a major logistical base and supply route for NATO's IFOR/SFOR operations beginning at the end of 1995, and it also contributed with a military-engineering contingent to the peacekeeping operation.

Despite its good prospects to be among the first post-communist countries to join NATO, Hungary had to make considerable efforts to meet all the criteria for membership outlined in the "NATO Study on Enlargement". The most challenging field among the criteria was maintaining good relations with neighbours and resolution of border disputes with a view on the problematic relations with especially Slovakia and Romania concerning the sizable Hungarian minorities living there. With American mediation and pressure, Hungary resolved these issues by signing a Basic Treaty with Slovakia in 1995 and with Romania the following year. Reforms in the economy and in the defence sector between 1995–1997 further strengthened Hungary's position to successfully apply for membership. In this context, Hungary, together with the

Czech Republic and Poland was invited to join NATO at the Madrid Summit in July 1997. The accession was supported by the majority of the Hungarian electorate, as a referendum on the issue in November 1997 vindicated, where 85% of those who voted supported membership. Together with Poland and the Czech Republic, Hungary gained full membership on the 12th of March 1999.

Political and institutional transition, defence sector reform, defence planning

The NATO accession process was a vital driving force of the defence sector reforms Hungary went through after the democratic transition. The fundamental constitutional and institutional guarantees of democratic oversight of the armed forces were built up and the depoliticisation of the armed forces took place in the early years of the 1990s. Formally, the President of the state became the commander in chief, but the powers of authority connected to command and control of the HDF was delegated to the government, while Parliament also gained powers for exercising democratic oversight (Varga 2011, 32). Compared to the relatively quick formal legislative changes, the actual transition into a civilian-led staff concerning some of the key positions in the Ministry of Defence took several years (Varga 2011, 33).

The Hungarian strategic documents also reflected the transformation of the Hungarian security and defence policy. The first such document after the transition, the Security Policy Principles was adopted as a Parliament Resolution in 1993. The principles already declared the intentions of Hungary to build and expand the relations with NATO in such a way that will gradually lead to full membership (Parliament Resolution 1993). It also called for the armed forces to take into account the requirements of Western standards and international peace support operations in their capabilities development plans (Parliament Resolution 1993). The security and defence policy principles adopted in late December 1998 after NATO accession was the first strategic document which was based upon the requirements of NATO membership (Parliament Resolution 1998). The document declared that Hungary's security is best served through the collective defence principles of NATO. It also mentioned that Hungary supported the efforts to strengthen the European defence identity in the context of allied cooperation and declared the intention to participate in the EU's foreign and security policy as soon as it will be a full member. The first National Security Strategy was drafted in 2002, which strengthened Hungary's Euro-Atlantic security orientation, and paid greater attention to global security threats and contributions to tackle them along the lines of NATO's developing strategy after 2001 (Szenes 2008, 71).

Subsequent strategic documents also declared the priority and significance of NATO in Hungary's security and defence policy and outlined the fundamental objectives of the Hungarian security and defence policy in a way, which would correspond to NATO commitments and responsibilities towards the allies. The latest National Security Strategy was adopted in 2012; however, a working group has been already established to review the strategy in light of the significant changes in the security environment. The 2012 National Security Strategy states that NATO and EU membership serves as the primary foundation of Hungary's security (Government Decree 2012). It declares Article 5 of NATO the cornerstone of Hungary's security; however, it also states that Hungary supports the development of the EU's security and defence policy in accordance with the responsibilities connected to the Washington Treaty.

The impact of NATO's and the EU's role in international stabilisation and peacekeeping was also reflected in the legislation on the tasks of the HDF. The first law that defined the responsibilities of the HDF in connection to NATO membership was adopted in 1998, and a similar legislation was adopted in 2004 after the accession to the EU. In order to simplify the deployment of Hungarian troops in NATO and EU missions from a legal point of view, changes were necessary for the constitution. Until 2004, Parliament had the authority to decide on the foreign deployment of Hungarian troops; however, that year the constitution was altered in a way that the cabinet was given the authority to decide on Hungarian deployments for NATO missions. A similar legislation was adopted in 2006 for EU CSDP missions (Türke 2014, 84).

The Euro-Atlantic integration also had a significant influence on Hungarian defence reforms. However, significant barriers stood in the way for these reforms to be successfully implemented. The lack of financial resources was just one major factor, the inexperience of the new political elite and the new complex political and security environment also posed significant challenges (Szenes 2009, 34). The fundamental objectives of the military reforms were in line with the changes within the transformation of NATO armed forces: transition from a territorial defence towards an expeditionary – international peace support posture, downsizing, professionalisation, modernisation (Szenes 2009, 34).

During the first two democratically elected governments, the reform initiatives were weak and were implemented poorly partly due to budgetary constraints, partly to other priorities of these governments (Varga 2014, 14). However, there were some considerable reforms, such as the transition in 1995–1996 from an all conscription force to a mixed force based on conscripts as well as professionals. The NATO accession process was a key driving force behind the transformation of the army chiefs of staff in 1995–1996 and the integration of the chiefs of staff to the MoD. The first substantive experiment to implement defence reforms took place under the first Orbán Government (1998–2002) in the context of a strategic defence review. The poor results of the military reforms became evident during the 1999 NATO Kosovo intervention when the state of the readiness and applicability of the Hungarian Defence Forces were revealed in an acute situation (Szenes 2009, 35).

Even greater changes took place in the subsequent years during the Medgyessy Government (2002–2004) (Tálas 2014, 16). A major defence review, the transition from conscription to a professional army, the abandonment of the concept of whole spectrum armed forces, and the declaration that the Hungarian defence policy relies primarily on NATO and EU membership, to name a few (Varga 2014, 15). Another major organisational reform took place in 2007 with the establishment of the Joint Forces Command, which was to a large extent influenced by NATO's experience in comprehensive peace support operations (Varga 2011, 37).

Alongside the above-mentioned changes, the professionalisation of the armed forces was also closely connected to the NATO accession process. There were many reasons behind the transition from a mass army structure towards a smaller, professional force, including budgetary considerations, the transformation of the European security environment and general international trends during the 1990s, but corresponding to NATO standards was certainly an important driving factor (Tálas 2014). The most visible changes in the armed forces after the transition were the drastic reduction of the size of the armed forces. The manpower strength of the Hungarian Armed Forces was drastically reduced from 120,000 to 52,000 by 1999, and further down to 29,000 by 2014 (Szenes 2009, 36). The actual number of active military personnel is 15,000.

Since the accession to NATO, the Hungarian defence planning has been based on the NATO Defence Planning Process. Unfortunately, this does not mean that Hungary always fulfilled its defence commitments in terms of the implementation of related decisions on force structure and capabilities development, but the targets were defined based on NATO requirements. From the late 1990s until recently, this force structure was determined largely by the commitments related to NATO's out-of-area operations. From this perspective, this meant that force structure and capabilities development reflected the requirements of NATO-led international peace support operations. During the socialist–liberal government of 2002–2006, capabilities destined primarily for territorial defence missions were significantly reduced, with complete arms systems – heavy artillery, armoured divisions – withdrawn from the HDF (Varga 2011, 34). Within the Hungarian joint forces structure two joint forces battalions had operated since the late 1990s, and in 1998 Hungary offered one out of these two battalions for NATO operations (Szloszjár 2017). In this context, the ambition level of the HDF was to provide one deployable brigade for up to six months with a 90 day readiness (Szloszjár 2017, 26).

The legacy of the Warsaw Pact could not be quickly erased with regards to the equipment and capabilities of the HDF. Much of the equipment and hardware of the armed forces were Soviet-made, but there was no possibility to quickly modernise the military (Varga 2014, 35). This situation prolonged the dependency on Russia, which had obviously negative effects on meeting NATO standards and interoperability. The reliance on Russia in terms of maintenance and procurement remained so even during the 1990s. These major acquisition programs during the time only happened as a part of the reimbursement of the Russian state department (Tálas 2014, 20). The first major acquisitions of Western military equipment were realised only at the turn of the millennium, involving the French Atlas-2 Mistral missile defence system and JAS-39 Gripen fighter aircraft (Tálas 2014, 17). However, the modernisation of the Armed Forces went extremely slow due to budgetary constraints and only picked up pace in recent years, as the conditions for acquisitions in the defence budget improved.

Hungary was not alone in the region experiencing budgetary challenges in the defence sector, but even at the level of regional comparison, defence was rather underfunded in the past three decades. The lack of major external threats, the priority of social and economic security concerning the perceptions of the Hungarian society, and the frequency of financial crises in the state budget (1989–1992, 1995–1997, 2006–2014) all contributed to the poor budgetary conditions in the sector (Tálas 2014, 17–18). Within this context, the criteria of NATO membership and then the pressure of meeting NATO commitments as a member was probably the single most important factor, which had some minor positive effect on the defence budget. However, even the major pledges towards NATO before the accession (1998), and at the time of the Prague capability commitments (2002) were not met. The gradual shrinking of defence expenditures was clearly visible trend until recent years. During the time of the transition in 1989, Hungary spent 2.6% of GDP on defence, at the time of NATO accession the figure was 1.65%, and after the financial crisis in 2012–2013, it stood at 0.83%. With these figures, Hungary found itself among the worst performing NATO members in terms of budgets. The trend has only begun to change in 2014 as a consequence of deteriorating security environment and improvement of the conditions in the Hungarian state finances. The Orbán Government has pledged to reach the Wales Summit commitment of 2% by 2024, and it is on a right track to do so.

Policy questions

Peace support operations

Even prior to its NATO accession, Hungary was actively contributing to NATO's out-of-area operations. During the 1990s, this support was not only stemming from meeting NATO accession criteria, but advancing Hungarian security interests. As a neighbour of the Balkans, the security and stability of the region has been a core Hungarian interest. Therefore, contributing to NATO-led military efforts in the region became a priority for Hungarian security policy. In 1995, after the Dayton peace accords were signed, Hungary provided its territory and airspace to help the reinforcement of NATO troops destined for the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia-Hercegovina (Szenes 2014, 112). Furthermore, it contributed with an engineering battalion to the IFOR, and later SFOR efforts. The successful participation in the NATO-led mission played a significant role in enhancing Hungary's membership prospects in the Alliance. Since 1999, Hungary has also significantly contributed to the KFOR mission in Kosovo. The Hungarian forces serving under KFOR have undertaken numerous tasks, including HQ protection, patrolling and crisis intervention roles. The level of Hungarian troop numbers varied throughout the years usually between 200–300 personnel, but recently, Hungary has further increased its presence there to 390. These deployments provided an excellent opportunity for Hungary for training and preparing its forces to integrate into NATO forces and also for transforming the peace support operations of its forces. Although Hungary's contributions were well received and the performance of Hungarian soldiers generally raised respect, the HDF was faced with significant challenges in its efforts to fulfil the commitments, related to capability shortfalls and financial constraints (Szenes 2008, 77).

As a consequence of NATO's transforming agenda after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, Hungary's military contributions to international peace support operations have geographically shifted towards the greater Middle East. Although Hungary did not participate in the Iraqi invasion, it contributed to NATO's Iraq training mission with a small force between 2003–2011. Since Afghanistan became the focal point of NATO military engagement in the region, Hungary has actively participated in the ISAF forces, and later from 2012 in the Resolute Support Mission. The HDF has been involved in numerous roles throughout the years since then. Kabul was one of the focal points, where medical, protecting, guarding and airport engineering roles were needed. In 2006, Hungary overtook the leading role of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghlan Province. HDF forces also served in mentoring and training roles in Baghlan Province and in Kabul, and in the later years of the ISAF mission, Hungary also sent special forces to the country (Wagner 2011). Between 2010–2014, Hungary's mission within ISAF became the largest international engagement of the HDF. During the peak years of the ISAF mission, about 300–400 troops served in the ISAF mission; since 2014 that number is closer to about 200. However, the mandate given to the HDF in the different roles within ISAF usually was stricter than some of those allies where there were deployed units even in combat roles (Wagner 2011). There were often heavy debates about the roles of HDF in Hungary; however, Hungary generally managed to follow the expectations of the United States and other allies, and never let a gap emerge in the overall force posture and engagement in Afghanistan (Szenes 2014, 110). Whenever Hungary withdrew its support from a certain commitment, it sought to compensate that by increasing

its role in other areas within the ISAF. Overall, the performance of the HDF was considered a success by experts and by NATO allies.

Since NATO has also become engaged in Iraq in recent years in connection to the international efforts in countering the Islamic State, Hungary has contributed to the NATO mission there. Hungary is also part of the international coalition outside the NATO framework fighting the Islamic State, with nearly 200 troops in training roles. In NATO's latest engagements to the greater Middle East region, Hungary is also participating in the capacity building programs helping Jordan and Tunisia. These efforts demonstrate Hungary's efforts in countering threats emanating from the South, which has become even more significant for Hungary's own national security interests in light of the migration crisis and terrorism.

As described before, Hungary has always perceived the significance of CSDP secondary to NATO, and this was reflected in Hungarian contributions to the much more modest CSDP missions. At times, Hungarian participation was rather symbolic, but from this perspective, Hungary was far from an outlier compared to other countries in the region. In the first CSDP missions, in the Concordia, in the Artemis, and in the Proxima missions Hungary participated only with 1–5 personnel (Türke 2014, 84). This was not the situation in the case of the Althea mission in Bosnia, in which Hungary participated with about 300 troops from 2004. Since 2012, some of the Hungarian units assigned to the EU mission in Bosnia are stationed in Hungary and are in a mode in case of a crisis. Alongside the military contributions, Hungary also sent police units to the EUPM mission in Bosnia. This engagement demonstrated the Hungarian interest in the stability of the Western Balkans. Hungary also participated in other smaller EU peace support operations, such as the EUSEC RD Congo, the EUJUST Lex for Iraq and the EUFOR Chad (Türke 2014, 84–85). However, as the security environment in 2014 drastically changed in Europe due to the Russia–Ukraine conflict, Hungary's contribution to NATO and CSDP defence efforts were transformed.

Reassurance, deterrence and southern challenges

The annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine had an impact on Hungarian security and defence perceptions. Although the changes in these perceptions were not as dramatic as in other neighbouring countries, such as Poland, or the Baltics, Hungary noticed the significance of conflict from the perspective of NATO and European security. Hence, it has supported all the major NATO decisions aimed at strengthening the Alliance's presence in NATO's Eastern flank, the reassurance package of the Wales Summit in 2014 and the deterrence package of the Warsaw Summit, and the related decisions of the Brussels Summit (Novotný 2017). Within this context, Hungary has participated in many of the related NATO activities: the HDF has participated in assurance measures in the Baltics almost every year since 2014, it has set up a Force Integration Unit in Székesfehérvár, it has contributed to military exercises in the region and it has hosted a NATO Centre of Excellence (NATO 2018). Meanwhile, it continued to host the Strategic Airlift Capability in Pápa, which is an important hub for logistics and military mobility not just concerning out-of-area operations but also a reinforcement base of the Eastern flank. In 2019, it will again participate in the Baltic air-policing mission. At the same time, demonstrating the differences in the perceptions of Russia, Hungary's activity was less visible within the Alliance. Hungary did not take a leading role in any of the new NATO initiatives

focused on the Eastern flank, and did not initiate any major additional bilateral U.S.–Hungarian defence cooperation or larger U.S. presence in the country but supported maintaining a dialogue with Russia parallel to the defence and deterrence measures. Russia was seen more as a security challenge than as an imminent threat, and in this regard, it did not completely share the threat assessment of some of its allies in the region.

Although NATO and U.S. security engagement in Eastern Europe remains to be a cornerstone of Hungarian security and defence policy, Budapest has become more open to European options in the area of security and defence. This shift in the Hungarian position stems partly from questions about long-term U.S. commitment towards the region. These questions were to a large extent fuelled by the Obama Administration's "reset policy" and lack of attention to sensitivities and interest of the Central European countries (Rhodes 2012). The U.S. continues to be the most important security and defence partner for Hungary; however, Hungary has become more selective in its support for U.S. requests towards Hungary.

What also deserves attention is that the geographical focus of these reassurance activities has been North Central and Eastern Europe from a Hungarian perspective. The related Hungarian forces serve under the command of the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin. This Northern focus demonstrates the significance of the Visegrád Four's political and defence cooperation as well as Germany's role in regional security from a Hungarian point of view.

The emphasis on Germany and the V4 is also reflected in other aspects of the Hungarian defence policy. The participation in the V4 Battlegroup in 2016 is just one example of Hungary's support for regional defence cooperation. Although there have not been substantial follow-ups of the Battlegroup, the potential is there for the V4 to further develop such defence cooperation. With regards to Germany, defence procurement and defence industrial cooperation has come forward recently as an area of common interests. The Hungarian Air Force has recently bought Airbus transport planes as well as Airbus rotary wing light attack aircraft, and defence cooperation is likely to continue to develop in the near future as Hungary implements its Zrínyi 2024 modernisation program. This development is all the more noticeable that so far there has not been any major Hungarian arms procurement from the United States, which has been strongly advocated by the U.S. behind closed doors.

Meanwhile, the significance of threats emanating from the Southern flank of the Alliance has increased in Hungarian security perceptions. The 2015 migration crisis hit Hungary unprepared and hard. While the terrorist threat remains to be low in Hungary, Hungary has been used as a transit route for ISIS related fighters and terrorists. Protecting the borders, controlling the flows of illegal migration and tackling the causes of migration have been important features of Hungarian security policy. From this perspective, Hungary has also urged the EU to strengthen its border protection, law enforcement as well as military capacities in order to successfully challenge migration flows. Apart from the previously mentioned shift in Hungary's Atlanticist standing, these comprehensive security challenges were important factors in making Hungarian security policy more open for European security and defence initiatives.

Hungarian activities within both NATO and CSDP reflect the importance of the Southern dimension as well as keeping the options open for CSDP. Although outside of the NATO framework, Hungary has been a member of the global coalition against the Islamic State, and in this context, has sent troops to Iraq to assist in training Kurdish forces in Iraq. Hungary will also contribute to the NATO training mission in Iraq, which has been agreed upon between the Allies in 2017. Hungary has recently announced that it will increase the troop numbers not

just in Iraq to 200, but also in Afghanistan to about 130. As a result of recent NATO decisions, the Alliance is also engaged with Jordan and Tunisia for military capacity building, to which Hungary will also contribute. There is also a strong support from the Hungarian leadership for the establishment of a Southern hub in Naples. As a sign of the traditional focus towards the Western Balkans, Hungary will also further increase its troops serving in Kosovo to 300.

Conclusions

NATO and the European Union has been the cornerstone of Hungarian security and defence policy since the early 1990s, and this will likely remain so in the foreseeable future. During the 1990s, NATO and EU accession was an important component of the defence sector reforms with regards to civil control, democratic oversight, as well as modernisation of the armed forces. However, in a paradox way, the security benefits of NATO accession derailed the urgency and the need to invest the necessary resources into modernisation programs. Even among many other NATO allies with shrinking defence budget and military capabilities, Hungarian performance in terms of funding for the defence sector was poor. Hungary sought to compensate this by engaging above its weight in NATO missions. The operational experience gained through the participation contributed to the professionalisation and modernisation of the HDF. Moreover, it strengthened the security relationship of Hungary towards its NATO allies and the military integration into NATO structures.

Even though NATO continues to remain the bedrock of Hungarian security and defence, the importance of EU CSDP has strengthened in recent years. The most significant factor in this shift was the negative change in the European security environment, the concerns about the long-term U.S. role in Europe and the potential financial and military benefits of enhanced European cooperation. Another major feature of current Hungarian security and threat perceptions is the combined sensitivity connected to Eastern and Southern security challenges given Hungary's geography and historical experience. Sensing the implications of the deteriorating security environment around Europe, and the growing pressure from the United States to invest more in defence, Hungary has begun to increase its defence expenditure and started to implement the long awaited military modernisation program.

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