Comparative Study on the NATO and EU Relations of Central and Eastern European Nations

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Introduction

The main objective of the volume was to examine and assess the role of NATO and the EU's CSDP in the security and defence policy of eight different countries in the Central and Eastern European region. The countries of the Visegrád Four – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia –, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia and Austria all have common traits rooted in their relatively smaller size compared to major European powers and in their geographic location. This simple fact is partly strengthened in relation to the role of NATO and EU in these countries' recent history. All countries examined had to adjust to the major geopolitical trends of the past nearly thirty years, defined to a large extent by NATO's and the EU's leading powers, the integration process in Western Europe, Russia as a major challenge for the security of the whole Central and Eastern region, and the forces of nationalism in the post-Cold war period. However, a more comprehensive and in-depth knowledge on the role of NATO and the EU in the integration of the examined countries into Western political and security structures is essential to understand the recent history and contemporary politics of the regions.

With this objective, the volume examined different dimensions of security and defence policy in the respective countries in relation to NATO and the EU: perceptions towards these organisations, their role in security and defence reforms and military transformation, and specific policy-oriented questions, focusing on the participation in crisis management operations, recent defence and deterrence measures against Russia, and the policies with regards to the EU's new defence initiatives. The following paper will provide an assessment on the most important findings of the country-specific examinations of the volume.

Perceptions towards NATO and CSDP

For the countries in the region that suffered under Soviet rule or communism for forty years – all the countries except for Austria – the Soviet occupation and the communist regime imposed on the country during the Cold War had a long-lasting impact on their security perceptions. NATO was perceived to be the guarantee of security, while the EU was seen as the key to economic development, welfare and democracy. Therefore, joining the premier political-economic-security organisation of the West became a region-wide strategic objective

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for these countries. In case of the Visegrád countries, the new political elites that came to power in 1990–1991 were usually deeply sceptical towards Russia and stood for pro-Western sentiments (Gazdag 2014, 2–3). However, at the beginning of the political transformation, these countries were still part of the Warsaw Pact with Soviet troops stationing there and the post-Cold War European security architecture was still uncertain. Within the new European security environment, neutrality seemed to be a favourable option.

The value of the newly regained sovereignty had a great appeal and the successful example of the Austrian neutrality made this option even more favourable for many. However, in order to even have the option of free choice with regards to the basic foreign and security policy orientation, the Warsaw Pact had to be dissolved and the Soviet Union convinced to withdraw its troops from the region. This objective was finally reached at the Budapest Summit of the Warsaw Pact in February 1991 (Valki 1999). With the Western Balkans soon descending into war and uncertainties remained concerning the future course of Russia, the Visegrád countries soon articulated their objective to gain accession to NATO. For these countries, institutionalised relationship with the United States in NATO meant the necessary security guarantee they were long longing for, while the EU was perceived to be the key for economic development. Among the V4, Slovakia was the outlier, which during especially the Mečiar years had a much more ambiguous approach towards NATO. The broad public support for NATO membership in the three Visegrád countries that joined NATO in 1999 remained strong, while in Slovakia the public was more divided on the issue. However, after the Mečiar era, a strongly pro-Western Slovakian government pushed hard for NATO membership, and during the time Slovakia received an invitation to join the Alliance, the public's attitude turned more in favour of joining NATO.

Among the four Visegrád countries, public support for NATO generally remains the highest in Poland, but public support remained stable in the other countries as well. However, support for the EU was even higher mainly due to the economic benefits EU membership has brought to this region. As for security and defence, NATO remained to be seen as the prime guarantee of security for the four V4 countries. In recent years, the deteriorating relations with Russia and the Ukrainian conflict further strengthened support for NATO especially in Poland and the Czech Republic. Slovakian views on NATO have always been more ambiguous, especially during the 1990s. Support is still much more modest for NATO in Slovakia, since Russia is less perceived as a threat in the country. At the same time, Slovakia and Hungary have one of the most pro-EU populations in the EU.

Although no Soviet troops were based in Romania, having been liberated from the communist Eastern bloc, the Romanian political elite and society also sought to reorient the country towards Western institutions after the fall of the communist regime. The perception was that only NATO would be able to provide stability and security for the newly emerging southeastern European democracies. NATO has continued to play a decisive role in Romanian security and defence policy, and with contingencies in the Black Sea in recent years due to Russia's policies, threats emanating from the East have driven Romania to re-evaluate its defence and defence posture (National Defence Strategy 2015).

As part of the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia had a different set of challenges with the fall of communism. It was not only the democratic wave of the late 1980s that shook the legitimacy of the Yugoslav communist regime, but also growing nationalism and separatism in the Yugoslav republics. As the great political transition accelerated during

1989–1990, Slovenia and Croatia soon found themselves in a war of independence against the Serbian dominated Yugoslavia (Božinović 2007). In this context, the European Economic Community proved to be far more active than NATO in providing diplomatic support for Slovenia in its struggle for independence. This led to much greater public support for the EU in the years to come during the 1990s and for applying for membership there. However, due to the economic crisis and financial cuts, along with a constant public debate about NATO demanding a higher share of GDP for defence, the perception of benefits of being a member of the Alliance has decreased in the Slovenian population. In recent years, some political parties even raised the issue of organising a referendum on NATO membership.

In case of Croatia, the two Euro-Atlantic organisations were perceived to be "two sides of the same coin" in Croatia's endeavour to become a member of the transatlantic community, hence, public support was equally high for both organisations. The concept of neutrality has never been seriously considered as an option, institutionalised defence relations with the West has always been considered a national interest in light of the security environment in the Western Balkans ever since the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Austria's security and defence policy, as well as the perceptions of its public have been strongly shaped by its status as a neutral country that has helped in taking over a function as a mediator and venue for international organisations. Even though public support for EU accession was strong after the political changes during 1989–1990 and Austrian accession in 1995, the majority of the public continued to have strong pro-neutrality sentiments. This perception is still present, which is represented by the fact that public support for the EU and CSDP remains strong in Austria, while NATO is unpopular, and most Austrians still oppose joining NATO.

The development of institutional relations with NATO and the EU

Among the examined countries, Austria was the first to join one of the two Euro-Atlantic institutions, the European Union in 1995. With Austrian EU membership and the emergence of CFSP and then later CSDP, the concept of neutrality completely changed in Austria. Despite its formal neutrality, Austria became an active participant of CSDP activities from crisis management operations to taking part in Battlegroups. However, in the same year, Austria has also began to develop closer cooperation with NATO in the form of the Partnership for Peace program. Although Austria has built ties to NATO in the past two decades, membership is still not seriously considered, and Turkish–Austrian political disputes have recently hampered relations.

Considering the Central and Southeastern European countries in our study, the accession to NATO and EU took place in several waves. These different waves well demonstrate the level of economic development, the health of democratic institutions in the respective countries and outstanding security and defence issues. NATO opened its doors in 1999 for the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, in 2004 for Slovenia, Slovakia and Romania, and in 2009 for Croatia. The EU took a "big bang" approach in its first major enlargement to the former Eastern bloc countries, granting membership for the V4 as well as for Slovenia among others in 2004. Romania joined in 2007, while Croatia managed to become a full member in 2009.

Political system and civilian oversight

Austria has the most significant democratic traditions and experience among the countries examined concerning the security and defence sector. The Federal Chancellor, the Minister for European and International Affairs and the Minister of Defence are the critical government stakeholders in defining the Austrian security and defence policy; however, Parliament has also considerable powers with regards to foreign missions or legislative oversight. Due to Austria's neutrality, it was essential to regulate the conditions in a constitutional law act under which deployment of Austrian troops is possible for peacekeeping missions within the framework of international organisations. As for the post-communist countries in the region, it took a relatively short time to establish the fundamental constitutional and institutional guarantees of democratic oversight of the armed forces (Varga 2011, 32). The requirements of NATO and EU accession were key drivers in all the countries concerned in establishing the institutions and regulations for proper democratic oversight and civilian control of the military. The newly adopted constitutions guaranteed the civilian leadership and oversight of elected officials over the armed forces. However, the depoliticisation of the armed forces took longer, at least several years, while changing the institutional culture was the most difficult task. In case of the countries with parliamentary systems – Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia – the head of the armed forces is formally the President of the Republic, but the powers of authority connected to command and control of the military is delegated to the government, while Parliament also gained powers for exercising democratic oversight (Rašek 2004).

During the first years after gaining independence and fighting the war, Croatia was characterised with visible shortfalls of the democratic system, where political elites were showing limited intentions to undertake the necessary reforms in the field of the security sector and beyond. The democratic deficit of the government in power and the entire setup of the political system in the late 1990s was representing a severe burden for the country's Euro-Atlantic accession ambitions. The entire political system of the country at that time was built around the strong position of the president, who was also commander in chief of the military. "The real transition" started in 2000 with political changes in the country and introduction of policy frameworks, especially those of the EU, that foresee a possibility for full-fledged membership after meeting the required criteria (Staničić 2007).

In some case, as with the Czech Republic, a national security council was also established in order to create and carry out a comprehensive security and defence policy. The appointment of civilian ministers for defence and the abolishment of political structures in the armed forces gradually took place in the examined former Eastern bloc countries.

Defence reforms and military modernisation in the Visegrád Four

The strategic documents also reflected the transformation of the security and defence policy in the region and the increasing role of NATO, and later during the 2000s also the EU. NATO and with the increasing number of CSDP crisis management operations the EU international efforts had a substantial impact on the defence reforms and transformation of the defence sector of the countries in the region. The fundamental objectives of the

military reforms were similar in each country examined and were in line with the changes within the transformation of NATO armed forces: the transition from a territorial defence posture towards an expeditionary, international peace support posture, with, downsizing, professionalisation and modernisation. After NATO accession, defence planning in all of the NATO members was driven primarily by NATO's NDPP (Szenes 2009, 34).

The armed forces of most countries except for Croatia experienced significant cuts in their size throughout the 1990s. Another common challenge was the reliance on Soviet or Russian military hardware. The dependency on Russian military equipment obviously created challenges for countries who joined NATO. However, alongside modernisation downsizing was also driven by the lack of resources in many cases, especially during the 1990s. Although the general trends in defence expenditures were similar, there were notable differences. Among the V4 countries, Poland's defence expenditure surpassed all the other V4 countries expenditures since 2008, while Hungary lagged behind from the early 2000s, and there was a general decrease in defence spending after 2008 except for Poland. Only in recent years with the change in the security environment can we observe a region-wide trend of increasing defence expenditures (NATO 2018).

In case of Hungary, the first strategic document after the transition, the Security Policy Principles was adopted 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. The security and defence policy principles adopted in late December 1998 after NATO accession became the first strategic document that 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, and also referred to the EU's foreign and security policy. 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 along the lines of NATO's developing strategy after 2001 (Szenes 2009, 71). Subsequent strategic documents also declared the priority of NATO in Hungary's security and defence policy in relation to the EU's emerging CSDP. The latest National Security Strategy was adopted in 2012 according to which NATO and EU membership serves as the primary foundations of Hungary's security (Government Decree 2012). It declares Article 5 of NATO the cornerstone of Hungary's security, and 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 peacekeeping operations was also reflected in the changing tasks and legal conditions of the deployment of the Hungarian Defence Forces, making it easier for the government to provide troops for NATO and CSDP missions.

However, defence reforms often had poor results, mainly due to the constant cuts in the defence budget. The first major defence review took place as late as in 1998–2000 with mixed results. The professionalisation of the Armed Forces took place gradually, with the introduction of a fully professional army in 2004 (Varga 2011, 35). From the late 1990s until recently, the force structure was mainly determined by the commitments related to NATO's out-of-area operations. This also meant that capabilities designed primarily for territorial defence were either cut back or completely abandoned. Until recently, Hungary had only two major military equipment procurement projects involving Western military equipment, a light infantry missile defence system and fighter jets, while most of the hardware was still Soviet

or Russian made. Even compared to countries in the region, Hungary's defence expenditure levels were very low from 2006, with the numbers only ticking up since 2014. Since then, defence expenditures have gradually increased and will likely continue to do so reaching the 2% target in 2024. This enables the Hungarian Defence Forces to acquire significant new capabilities in the next several years.

After the peaceful separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, integration into Western security structures became an unquestioned priority for the Czech Republic. In this context, adopting the best Western practices of reforms and transformation of the military became a priority. However, the frequent changes in government and inexperience of the new security defence establishment posed significant challenges with regards to modernisation. Decreasing resources also had a negative impact on the military potential and capabilities development of the country. After the pressure of NATO accession disappeared, defence expenditures further decreased from 2002, stagnated for the next several years, and began to shrink again significantly as the financial crisis hit in 2008. The military transformation happened gradually. Just like in Hungary, the armed forces became an all-professional force in 2004. The transformation of force structure and capabilities was driven to a large extent by out-of-area operations led by NATO. This has also led to significant cuts in territorial defence capabilities. The trend was reversed after 2014, and the Czech defence policy supported and followed the key decisions of the Wales and Warsaw Summits on reassurance, enhanced forward presence and increased defence expenditures. With increasing defence budgets, the number of the armed forces was increased as well as new major acquisitions took place. However, there is a lack of shared vision concerning the future force posture of the country, and also shortages in the higher officer corps, which has a negative impact on strategic planning and preparation.

For Slovakia, the first challenge was to create a national army and the necessary political and security structures. During much of the 1990s, under the Mečiar Government, Slovakia only stayed on the course towards NATO and EU membership on a declaratory level, but the actual foreign, security and defence policy decisions drove the country into a different direction. This changed only in 1998 with the formation of a more pro-European government. Since Slovakia was left out of the first round of NATO enlargement, the new government took defence reforms and changes in the country's overall security policy very seriously. However, the challenges were significant especially with regards to the force structure and readiness of the forces, the decaying equipment, the poor planning and internal operational culture. However, conscription was abolished in 2006, and a gradual modernisation of the forces took place.

Poland has always been the most active supporter of NATO among the V4 and other countries examined in the paper. The adherence to hard security guarantees arise from Poland's geopolitical position, negative historical experience and continued fear of Russia. The strategic document of *The Principles of the Polish Security Policy and Security Policy and Defence Strategy of the Republic of Poland* adopted in 1992 was unambiguous about the Polish political elite's objective and intention to take Poland into NATO and the Western European Union (Strategia RP 1992, 5). The most significant value of NATO for Poland lies in the collective defence clause of Article 5 and the involvement of the United States. In exchange for the hard security guarantees provided by NATO, the Polish political elite

demonstrated strong Polish security policy and military commitment towards the Alliance and the United States in particular.

These security perceptions influenced in no small extent Poland's military transformation and force posture. Poland has always been one of those NATO members, which thought that the capabilities of the Alliance should be developed in a way that preserves the balance between collective defence and out-of-area engagement (Klich 2009). However, Poland began to participate with rather significant contributions in NATO's crisis management operations, including out-of-area operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, as a way to demonstrate its commitment to the Alliance, but also supporting the U.S. in Iraq. These military engagements compelled Poland to develop considerable expeditionary capabilities after NATO accession. However, as the Afghanistan war became increasingly unpopular and Russian foreign policy became increasingly assertive, more emphasis was given on territorial defence. Poland was one of the few NATO members that avoided significant defence cuts during the financial crisis and begun to undertake a major defence modernisation program. This is reflected in not only the increasing defence expenditures, with 2.2% of GDP expected to be spent on defence by 2020 (Palowski 2017a), but in setting serious modernisation plans for the Polish armed forces which it seeks to achieve (Palowski 2017b). While the National Security Strategy of 2014 (Strategia RP 2014) – maintained the unique role of NATO and the United States in Poland's security, it also emphasises strengthening the national capabilities.

Defence reforms and military modernisation in Romania, Slovenia, Croatia and Austria

Romania's gradual integration and modernisation into the NATO structures and fulfilling NATO requirements developed through three main stages, two of which have already been completed: the main downsizing stage (2005–2007), NATO and EU operational integration (2008–2015) and full integration into NATO and the EU (2016–2025). In light of the challenges facing the Romanian armed forces, there was a pressing need for the Romanian army to engage in a process of restructuring and modernisation. The reform process began in the early 1990s as a top-down process, involving the transformation of the Ministry of National Defence and the Supreme Council of National Defence. Romania had to overcome the gaps in its military personnel, finances and equipment to be able to provide the necessary troops upon request, and gradually become a security provider. Prior to NATO accession, the Partnership for Peace framework was a primary asset in the transition and reform process. After that, all the efforts aimed at re-dimensioning the army, professionalising army personnel, establishing a credible defence capability and achieving interoperability with NATO members' armies were guided through the *Partnership Goals' Implementation Plan for 2001–2007.* In recent years, a restructuring of the armed forces took place, and currently, the focus is on major procurement programs, including missile defence systems, navy modernisation programs, rocket launcher systems, all tailored towards Article 5 territorial defence in light of the deterioration of the Black Sea security environment. Romania's increased level of commitment to its own and the NATO's security was perhaps most confirmed by its increased defence expenditure that almost reached 2% of GDP in 2017.

The impact of NATO was a critical factor concerning the Slovenian security and defence policy and the transformation of the Slovenian Armed Forces. NATO has provided the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) a robust framework for its development. Before joining the Alliance, the SAF was a territorially organised compulsory military organisation, while in 2002, it transformed into an all-volunteer force. The knowledge gained from MAP before accession was crucial for defence transformation since they offered a tool for dialogue with NATO and stimulated a reconsideration of the capabilities Slovenia should develop to achieve fulfilling national priorities as well as contributing to NATO. Cooperation with NATO in peace support operations, including in the Western Balkans, was a critical driver in this development. Slovenia has always supported the cooperation and development of capabilities that fulfil the needs of both organisations, NATO and the EU. In 2017, Slovenia joined PESCO and is, at the moment, actively participating in two projects, while taking the role of observer in additional five projects.

As Croatia opted for membership in the EU and NATO during its post-communist and post-conflict period in the second half of the 1990s, it started to develop its security system in accordance with basic principles of the transatlantic community. With a view on the challenging internal post-conflict political and economic situation and the problematic regional security environment, the guidance and assistance of the EU and NATO, as well as of their particular member states was crucial for consolidation of the security sector of the newly established state in such an environment (Božinović 2007). Croatia as a post-conflict state had an oversized security sector and budget allocated for it that had a symbolic importance in the Croatian society. The SSR of the post-conflict Croatia was more a security sector reduction due to economic reasons than the security sector reform. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of NATO policies and political/symbolic significance of the accession process to the alliance for the introduction of a real SSR in the country at the turn of the millennium. The country profited immensely from participation in the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) and the Membership Action Plan (MAP).

Croatia also abolished the conscript system and territorial concept of defence, as well as succeeded in making the troops internationally interoperable that was visible in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. While the newly established ESDP of the EU had a limited impact on the transformation process in Croatia itself, the civilian and military missions to be deployed within the framework of ESDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo in the following years have represented a cornerstone for the post-conflict stabilisation and a functional departure point for the viable transformation process. Croatia's participation in CSDP missions has also significantly improved the interoperability of its security sector and Croatia's image at the international arena. At present, all the main strategic documents in the field of security and defence are fundamentally conceptualising Croatia's security policy as a full-fledged member of the transatlantic community. The national security strategy and national defence strategy recognises the shared threats and challenges of its allies in its chapter dedicated to security threats, risks and challenges.

In case of Austria, membership in the EU and in NATO's PfP also resulted in greater engagement in international crisis management missions and operations. This had significant implications for the reform programs in the Austrian armed forces. In 2002, the Austrian Government started a major reform of the Armed Forces in line with the capability development processes Austria absolved in the context of NATO's PARP and the EU's

Capability Action Plan (ECAP). However, the reform was as much a strategic decision given the new global security environment as a political and financial necessity considering the obvious budgetary limitations. In this context, significant reduction in the size of the armed forces took place. However, unlike other countries examined, conscription was not abolished.

Table 1.

Defence expenditure trends of countries in Central and Eastern Europe

	2000–2004 average	2005–2009 average	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Hungary	1.6	1.3	1.04	1.05	1.04	0.95	0.87	0.94	1.01
Czech Republic	1.9	1.5	1.29	1.07	1.06	1.03	0.96	1.06	1.04
Slovakia	1.6	1.52	1.27	1.09	1.10	0.99	0.99	1.14	1.16
Poland	1.7	1.5	1.77	1.72	1.74	1.72	1.85	2.23	2.00
Romania	–	1.6	1.24	1.28	1.22	1.28	1.35	1.45	1.48
Slovenia	–	1.6	1.61	1.30	1.18	1.06	0.98	0.94	0.94
Croatia	–	1.6	1.54	1.60	1.53	1.47	1.41	1.37	1.23
Austria	–	0.85	0.82	0.79.	0.78	0.75	0.75	0.66	0.66

Source: NATO 2018.

Policy related questions: Participation in peace support operations, perceptions towards Russia and the new defence initiatives of the CSDP – The Visegrád Four

The security and defence policy perspectives of Central and Eastern European Countries with regards to the common security challenges of NATO and EU CSDP differ as much as they are alike. Participation in the out-of-area crisis management operations of NATO and CSDP not only had a significant impact on the military transition of these countries but also demonstrated the change in the security policy perspectives as members of the Alliance and of the European Union. Alongside the mutual interests in tackling common threats and challenges, participation in these operations differed according to the overall threat perception of the country, to the geopolitical priorities in terms of geography as well as security partnerships to the available capabilities. For Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary and Austria, participation in the Western Balkans stabilisation efforts also had a direct impact on their national security, while the connection and interests at stake were much different concerning the other Visegrád countries. Similarly, the response to the threat from Russia had a different level of impact on Poland's or Romania's security and defence policy in recent years than on Austria, Slovenia or Croatia, which could be also highlighted in their response within NATO. As for other "out-of-area" operations, especially the lengthy operations in Afghanistan, it is fair to say that while countering terrorism and the challenges of failed states certainly was an important factor, the most important motivation for these countries was demonstrating solidarity with the United States in exchange for long-term security guarantees.

The response to Russia's assertive behaviour after Georgia and especially since 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine has also varied among

the countries examined. Although all NATO members supported the alliance's reassurance measures, some were leading the calls for a stronger NATO approach – such as Poland or Romania, while others were more measured in their response to Russia, as Slovenia or Hungary. Meanwhile, the combination of deteriorating security environment, questions with regards to the long-term commitment of the United States as well as a need for greater cooperation in military capability development has led to greater openness towards the CSDP in the region. The V4 Battlegroup created in 2016 and scheduled to be operational again in 2019 is just one highly visible example of the increased regional defence cooperation in recent years.

As a neighbour of the Balkans, the security and stability of the region have been a core Hungarian interest. Therefore, contributing to NATO-led military efforts and later EU CSDP crisis management operations in the region became a priority for Hungarian security policy. In case of Bosnia, Hungary provided its territory and airspace to help the reinforcement of NATO troops destined for the peacekeeping mission, and it also contributed with an engineering battalion to the IFOR, and later SFOR efforts. Similarly, Hungary has provided a relatively sizable contribution to KFOR in Kosovo, with troop levels usually between 200–300.

Since Afghanistan became the focal point of NATO military engagement, Hungary has actively participated in the ISAF forces, and later from 2012 in the Resolute Support Mission. The HDF was involved in numerous roles, including protecting, guarding and airport engineering roles, the leadership of a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghlan Province, and other mentoring and training roles (Wagner 2011). Between 2010–2014, Hungary's mission within ISAF became the largest international engagement of the HDF, with about 300–400 troops serving in the ISAF mission. Hungary also gave political support for the U.S. invasion against Iraq in 2003, and it took part for a short period in the stabilisation efforts of the country. In recent years, Hungary has contributed to the NATO mission in countering the Islamic State with a relatively large, 200-strong contingent. The latter commitment could not be explained only by alliance commitments, but by the direct effect of the instability of the region on Hungary's security in recent years, especially illegal migration. Hungarian contributions to the EU's CSDP missions except for the Althea mission in Bosnia were much more symbolic regarding numbers and commitments. However, Hungary actively took part in most of the CSDP missions, even in African operations. Subsequent Hungarian governments often used the relatively strong Hungarian contributions to NATO operations as a means to compensate for the criticism it received for its low defence expenditure levels.

Although the response to Russia's behaviour in Eastern Europe was not as dramatic as in Poland or Romania, Hungary supported all the major NATO decisions aimed at strengthening the Alliance's presence in NATO's Eastern flank. Within this context, Hungary has participated in many of the related NATO activities: troops from the HDF have been deployed to 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 continues to host the Strategic Airlift Capability in Pápa and a NATO Centre of Excellence (NATO 2018). Overall, Hungary did not take a leading role in any of the new NATO deterrence initiatives, nor did it initiate any major additional bilateral U.S.–Hungarian defence cooperation but supported maintaining a dialogue with Russia parallel to the defence and deterrence measures. Hungary's threat perception is as much oriented towards the South as to the East.

The 2015 migration crisis had a significant impact on the country's threat perceptions, and therefore, it pays attention to NATO's and the EU's activities in the region. Its participation in several PESCO projects also demonstrates the increased significance of the EU CSDP in Hungary's security policy.

In the Czech case, the political will to support NATO and EU operations demonstrates firm commitments to both organisations. Participation in crisis management operations has always been understood as a fair contribution to Alliance cohesion and the strengthening of its transatlantic link. The Czech armed forces contributed to the missions of IFOR, SFOR, KFOR in the Balkans and ISAF in Afghanistan. A Czech medical team was also deployed so far only to the NATO Response Force (NRF) activation to ensure consequent management after a large-scale earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. The Czech Republic's contributions were relatively large regarding the size of its armed forces and its overall population when compared to other NATO members, even compared to Hungary, though not as strong as Poland's (Hillison 2014, 248). CZAF participation in the CSDP operations has remained at a relatively low level on the military spectrum concerning the degree of complexity, intrusiveness and coercion.

From a Czech perspective, after the annexation of Crimea, Russia has been seen as a risk to the country's security and as a country seeking to undermine the credibility of NATO, transatlantic unity, and weaken European institutions and governments (the Gerasimov doctrine) (Defence Strategy 2017). Since 2014, the CZR's defence policy has been dominated by the outcomes of NATO Summits in Wales and Warsaw, and in this context, NATO commitments influenced the amendments to the Czech defence strategy. As a result, the level of ambition regarding the deployable forces for Article 5 missions was increased in recent years, and the Czech armed forces contributed to the reassurance measures in the Eastern flank. The threat from Russia strengthened the notion that NATO's collective defence and transatlantic link will continue to play a principal role in the Czech security policy. In this context, the Czech Republic will develop a single set of forces for overlapping NATO and EU peace support operations. Prague also supports the EU's capability development initiatives with a view of its own sizable defence industry.

Slovakia also took part in the major NATO-led out-of-area operations. The largest contingent was in Afghanistan during ISAF. As the total number of troops deployed in the continuing Resolute Support Mission decreased, Slovakia also reduced the number of troops. However, the most substantial contribution for an international crisis management or peacekeeping operation is provided to UNFICYP in Cyprus. Its response to the Ukrainian crisis also demonstrated Slovakia's modest policies on the issue. Although it supported NATO's decisions to strengthen the Eastern flank, it initially did not want to host a NATO Force Integration Unit on its territory, though later it participated in reassurance measures in the Baltics. Slovakia has also been one of the main targets of Russian disinformation campaigns, and the government's response was slow to such new challenges. However, regional cooperation and the development in the CSDP became increasingly important for Slovakia. During its most recent V4 presidency, it set ambitious targets for security and defence cooperation, and as holding the EU presidency in the second half of 2016, it put great emphasis on the implementation of the newly agreed EU Global Strategy and moving forward the PESCO of the EU, later leading an artillery development project in the framework. Slovakia continues to put great emphasis on NATO–EU cooperation, recognising the primacy

of NATO in defence and deterrence, but also supporting a gradual strengthening of the EU's security and defence potential.

Although Warsaw had always preferred hard security guarantees with urging the strengthening of the collective defence as the essential task of the Alliance, it has continued to demonstrate strong solidarity to the Alliance regarding non-Article 5 missions. Already in the Balkans before NATO membership, Poland sent a significant number of troops to IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia (500–600 troops), to the Albanian AFOR and to KFOR (800) in 1999. It participated in the operations of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, first mainly with reconstruction tasks, and from 2008 taking over the military stabilisation of the Ghazni Province, which involved also combat operations. Poland was also one the few countries that not only gave political support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq but took part in the combat operations. In 2005–2006 Warsaw also sent 140 troops to NATO's Swift Relief Mission in Pakistan and between 2005 and 2011 participated in NATO's training mission in Iraq (NTM-I). This strong emphasis on expeditionary commitments and crisis management operations received criticism from experts for over-committing the Polish Armed Forces and not paying enough attention to traditional Article 5 missions of the military (Koziej 2012, 37–38).

After the Russian–Georgian war, Poland assessed that Russia poses a threat to Central European countries (Tálas 2014). Since then, Warsaw has stressed even more firmly the need to strengthen the collective defence and territorial defence tasks of NATO, and the security relationship with the United States (Ek 2008, 6). Poland could claim some success even before 2014, with strengthening the collective defence pillar of the strategic concept adopted in 2010 or with the decision in 2012 to deploy a missile defence system in Europe with one of its key components to be based in Poland (Pietrzak 2012, 61). The Ukrainian war only strengthened the perception in the Polish political establishment to view Russia as a direct threat to its territory and sovereignty. Strengthening collective defence efforts of NATO in the region seemed a crucial national security interest. From this perspective, the basing of 4,500 NATO troops – within NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) programme – in the Baltics and in Poland has a considerable significance (EFP Factsheet 2018). Despite the war in Eastern Ukraine, Poland continues to support further enlargement of NATO to the East, with regards to Ukraine and Georgia.

Concerning the EU's security and defence ambition, Poland's initial distrust gradually transformed into a careful support for the CSDP. The Polish position began to change after the Iraq war and the first successful crisis management operations of the EU. As a sign of its new approach, Poland took part in the creation of a Battlegroup within the Weimer Triangle with Germany and France (Weimar Battlegroup) and within the Visegrád cooperation framework with the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, taking up the role of a framework nation in all cases. It also took part in the creation of the European Defence Agency in order to influence the progress of the European capability development.

Poland's shift in its attitude towards the EU security role was also reflected at the doctrinal level, as Polish leaders identified NATO, the EU and the United States as the three pillars of Poland's security. However, from the late 2000s, this approach towards the EU was stalled due to several factors: the impact of the economic crisis, the slow response of the EU for external challenges (Georgia, Arab Spring, Ukrainian crisis) and to a change of government in Warsaw in 2015, which had a much more sceptical view of the EU and based its policies on the defence of national sovereignty (Kuźniar 2018, 66). Despite this trend, Poland has

supported the new EU defence initiatives of PESCO and EDF, seeking to maintain influence in the future direction of these initiatives and emphasising the capability development objectives of the initiatives as a way of strengthening the European pillar of NATO.

Policy related questions: Participation in peace support operations, perceptions towards Russia and the new defence initiatives of the CSDP – Romania, Slovenia, Croatia and Austria

Romania also positioned itself as a reliable "security provider" concerning NATO's international operations. Just one year after its accession in 2005, Romania was contributing all together with 2,300 troops, including the "Active Endeavour" operation, in ISAF in Afghanistan and in the Balkans in KFOR. The Romanian armed forces participated in many roles in these missions, including as instructors in the ISAF mission, intelligence structures in KFOR, and later as instructors for the Training Advice Command in NATO's Resolute Support Operation in Afghanistan. Overall Romania's contributions to these missions were quantitatively as well as qualitatively – concerning the few operational caveats – above the average NATO member contribution. Compared to this robust presence in NATO's missions, Romania's CSDP contribution was less robust but still considerable. Romania participated in every significant CSDP operation, its forces contributed to missions in Mali, Somalia and Central Africa.

Russia's assertive actions in Ukraine and in the Black Sea in recent years raised serious concerns in the Romanian political and security establishment. The new threat perception was reflected in Romania's active contribution to Alliance defence and deterrence activities. Since the Wales Summit in 2014, Romania has begun to host significant NATO structures and capabilities on its territory: the Multinational Division Southeast Headquarters, a NATO Force Integration Unit, a Deployable Communications Module Element and the Deveselu Missile Defence Base (Mod 2016). At the Warsaw Summit, Romania also committed itself to creating a multinational brigade and an intensified instruction program, both focusing on Black Sea contingency scenarios. While Romania welcomed NATO's contribution to the security of the Black Sea region, it considered the Alliance to be taking less attention to the Southeastern flank than to the Eastern flank near the Baltics and Poland. Therefore, it is continuously sending a message to NATO allies and especially to the United States to increase their military presence in Romania.

With regards to the EU's security and defence initiative, Romania is focusing on multinational capability development projects. Previously it was involved in several pooling and sharing projects, and currently, it participates in five PESCO projects. Romania took over the EU presidency in the first half of 2019, and the government intends to boost Romania's efforts in the CSDP framework. However, the role of NATO and bilateral security partnership with the United States unquestionably remains the cornerstone of Romania's defence policy.

Since its independence, Slovenia has participated in 26 international peacekeeping operations, among them many NATO and EU missions. Due to its geographic proximity, Slovenia is canalising its security efforts to the Western Balkans. This is clarified by the fact that 61% of the Slovenian troops deployed for international peace support operation were sent to Kosovo, while only 12% to Afghanistan. The historical, cultural and ethnic ties, as well

as its close proximity to the Balkans, have made security in the region a top priority (Vuga 2014). Active Slovenian contributions to NATO's efforts in the region are highlighted by the relative strength of Slovenian forces in KFOR and by Slovenia acquiring the command post of NATO's operation in Macedonia in 2012.

However, after the Ukrainian crisis, Slovenia also demonstrated its solidarity with countries on the Eastern flank and sent troops to support NATO's reassurance measure there. At the same time, it supported Germany's position of maintaining a dialogue with Russia in a NATO framework. In this context, Slovenia continues to have a balanced approach towards Russia of deterrence and engagement. Slovenia has also taken part in CSDP operations, including Althea in Bosnia and has always been supportive of cooperation between NATO and the EU. The Slovenian Armed Forces also contributed units to the EU Battlegroup led by Italy. The initiative for this battlegroup has roots in the Multinational Land Force (MLF). Within the context of the recent EU defence initiative, Slovenia participates in two PESCO projects, and is active in the European Defence Agency.

Croatia has always demonstrated a strong commitment to NATO's out-of-area operations. Croatia was punching above its weight even before accession to NATO from the very beginning as a way to cement its close relations with the U.S. and remove last doubts about its NATO accession perspective. In this context, the Croatian armed forces contributed to ISAF with twenty contingents and more than five thousand officers in fifteen years, offering a wide range of services, including training Afghan military forces to help develop the educational infrastructure in the Afghan society. Since 2009, Croatian forces also contributed to KFOR missions in Kosovo, mainly conducting transport roles.

Since the annexation of Crimea, Croatia has also firmly supported NATO's measures to strengthen the Article 5 commitment to the Alliance's Eastern flank. Compared to the size of the country, the Croatian contribution with mechanised infantry units to a German-led battlegroup in Lithuania and with U.S. troops in Poland is considerable. As a country located in a still unstable region, Croatia considers the demonstration of solidarity a vital aspect of NATO membership. However, the importance of the CSDP in European security is also recognised by Croatia. Since 2009, it has participated in numerous CSDP military and civilian missions, with an emphasis on the EU's security engagement in the Western Balkans. Croatia also took part in the Nordic EU Battlegroup 2011 and the EU Battlegroup 2012 led by Germany. However, the focus of Croatian international defence efforts remained within a NATO context. From this perspective, it is clear that the transatlantic concept of cooperative security will hardly have any alternatives for the country in the foreseeable future.

As a member of the EU but not part of NATO, Austria's participation in international crisis management operations concentrated on contributions to the CSDP and to the UN. However, as a PfP partner for NATO, Austria has also been engaged in missions led by NATO. In comparison to its size and officially neutral status, Austria's 1,200-strong engagement in international crisis management and peacekeeping operations is quite robust. This is partly because Austria has traditionally been very active in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and the Middle East. Austria's geographical responsibility lies clearly in its neighbourhood, and the political guidelines of Austria's security strategy reflect this reality, prioritising operations in Central and Southeast Europe. Within this context, Kosovo and Bosnia have been one of the priority areas for crisis management contributions.

Alongside CSDP and PfP structures, Austria has been also active in finding alternative frameworks to enhance regional security cooperation. One such framework is the Central European Nations' Co-operation in Peace Support (CENCOOP), in which Austria is an active member. Vienna was also active in the creation of the Central European Defence Cooperation with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia. The main focus area of the CEDC has been the Western Balkans, and cooperation on selected military projects and border control. A similar setting is the Salzburg group, though it is focused mainly on justice and home affairs. However, Austria's accession to the EU and its contribution to the CSDP missions have led to a higher level of solidarity towards EU members also in the area of security and defence. In this context, Austria's security policy is fully embedded into the CSDP and is perceived to be a member of an alliance of the EU states.

NATO membership is still not a desirable option for most Austrians, and one factor in this general perception is the different attitude towards Russia. Despite its historic memories of the Russian occupation, Austria has historically enjoyed good relations with Russia. The Austrian Security Strategy continues to call for targeted cooperation with both the U.S. and Russia taking European values into account and asserting the rights and fundamental freedoms with self-confidence. In practice, Vienna's approach towards Russia certainly differs from most NATO members examined in the paper, and this has been demonstrated by Austria's political and economic engagement towards Moscow ever since the Ukrainian crisis broke out. The critical question for the Austrian security and defence policy seems to be focused instead on the EU, as any further deepening in the security and defence realm could open up old and new debates about Austria's neutrality and whether it can be sustained.

Conclusions

NATO and the EU had an unquestionable role in maintaining peace and security in much of Central and Eastern Europe in the past three decades. Although conflict is again present at Europe's periphery in Ukraine, the likelihood of a significant conflict between any of the two members of the EU and NATO countries examined is still extremely remote. This is not a small achievement given the problematic history of these countries. As security institutions with a defining role in transforming the internal and external security and defence postures of the region, NATO and the EU deserve credit for this achievement. If one examines the similarities and differences of the respective countries' security and defence policy, several conclusions can be made. NATO and the EU in many ways streamlined the security policy orientation of these countries. Alliance solidarity, common structures and common threats led to similar patterns in how these countries conducted their security policies in the past two decades. It is important to note that it was not only NATO or Western countries shaping the security policy of these nations, but as they engaged with each other more often and more deeply through the structures of NATO and the EU, they also began to shape each other. It is important to note that this has not led to a significant convergence of threat perceptions, national interests or strategic culture. However, it provided a platform that enabled a level of security and defence interaction and cooperation not seen before in the region. Whether these countries will be able to build upon this experience, constructively going forward in light of the many external threats and internal political challenges this region faces remains to be seen.

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