

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN THE VISEGRAD GROUP

A VISEGRÁDI ORSZÁGOK KATONAI EGYÜTTMŰKÖDÉSÉNEK LEHETŐSÉGEI

A gazdasági válság és a védelmi költségvetés folyamatos csökkentése közepette, a Visegrádi országok haderőreformjai lelassulni látszanak. Ebben az esetben a szorosabb katonai együttműködés kívánatos megoldás lehet annak érdekében, hogy növeljük hatékonyságunkat.

Amid the ongoing economic crisis and the reduction of the defence budget the military reforms of the Visegrad Group seem to slow down. In this case, the desirable solution could be closer military cooperation in order to increase our efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The Visegrad Countries or Visegrad Group is a regional alliance in central Europe. The historical roots of the collaboration date back to 1335, when the Hungarian king Róbert Károly invited the Polish ruler Casimir III(The Great). John Luxembourg (The blind) King of Bohemia) was also invited to the negotiation. The rulers of these territories met in the castle of Visegrad in order to discuss regional matters. The goal of the summit was to arrange the differences between the participants and to lay down the foundations of a political and economic cooperation which would be able to counterweight the power of the Habsburg Empire. Bohemia - from the 14th century the Lands of the Bohemian Crown - became part of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. Since the collapse of Czechoslovakia in 1993 it has been known as the Czech Republic. Eventually, the alliance ceased to exist in the coming centuries, because some of the former members were invaded by other empires. The modern Visegrad cooperation was reestablished on February 15, 1991. In 1993 after the collapse of Czechoslovakia the alliance was renamed as V4. So today the V4 consists of Poland, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Hungary. The main purpose of this alliance was to foster accession to NATO and EU as well. After they had reached this goal the regional cooperation became much more important in other aspects. The new types of cooperation are the following: commerce, regional development, education, foreign policy and military cooperation as well. In this article I would like to highlight the most important facts about this alliance and I am going to introduce some other similar regional cooperation which could serve as a desirable example for us. I am also going to mention some opportunities concerning the future military collaboration of V4 states, that could improve our efficiency in many aspects.



WHY IS IT WORTH COOPERATING?

In V4 countries the defense budget has been decreasing year by year since the end of the cold war, especially since the 2008 economic crisis. According to NATO requirements, every member of the alliance has to spend at least 2% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. Unfortunately, none of the Visegrad countries fulfill these requirements. "Poland spent 1.9, the Czech Republic 1.3, Slovakia 1.3 and Hungary 1.0 percent of their gross domestic product on

defense in 2010”¹ If we collaborated in the field of military spending, our money could be spent more effectively. So we would possess better military capabilities for the same money. In this part of Europe the military transformation started after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. Every V4 country abolished the conscription system and due to this fact the number of troops was reduced significantly. In the case of the Visegrad countries, equipment modernization is a key factor in their transition. In some cases these armies are unable to carry out effectively the significant modernization programs by themselves. So the common programs can be extremely beneficial for all participants. In these cases there is no reason to conduct military development strictly on a national level.

THE NORDIC EXAMPLE

In my opinion the behavior of the Nordic countries is the best example for the V4. The Nordic Council was the starting point of their regional cooperation in 1952. They have been cooperating in many civilian aspects, which increases the competitiveness of their economies and the effectiveness of many international organizations. A role model for the regional cooperation is the method of the Nordic countries. They have achieved a lot of success in the field of smart defense. They have a lot of common military programs for instance:

- NORDAC (Nordic Armaments Cooperation)
- NORDCAPS (Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support)
- NORDSUP (Nordic Supporting Defense Structures)
- NORDEFECO (Nordic Defense Cooperation).

„The purpose of the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO) is to strengthen the Participants’ national defense, explore common synergies and facilitate efficient common solutions. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)



provides the framework for comprehensive Nordic Defense Cooperation between the Participants.”² Among the charter members of NORDEFECO there are three NATO members (Norway, Denmark and Iceland) and two neutral countries (Finland and Sweden). The members of Nordic Armaments Cooperation are the same as the members of NORDEFECO,

except Iceland.

COMMON REPLACEMENT AND MODERNIZATION

If the Nordic countries are compared to the V4 initiative, the differences are obvious. All of the V4 countries are members of NATO and EU as well. So it is much easier to make a common decision almost in all cases. The Visegrad countries have similar aims in military and defense aspects. As we have abolished conscription, our armies have become smaller and professional as well, but we have to increase the level of interoperability. In these taxing times, all V4 governments have to apply austerity measures, subsequently budgetary restrictions or budget cuts. A joint approach through the military transformation would be rewarding. On the other hand, the cooperation between the members has to be democratic. As former Warsaw Pact members we have a lot of similar equipment. This kind of similarity can be one of the starting points for collaboration. V4 countries faced questions of modernization, decommissioning and replacement. Poland and the Czech Republic spent more on defense, meanwhile Slovakia and Hungary decommissioned more military systems than the other two. Therefore V4 lost some military capabilities especially in the cases of Hungary and Slovakia. All the same we have still kept many shared technologies in service in our armed forces. We still operate with

¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2012/apr/17/military-spending-countries-list>

² <http://www.norden.org/da/om-samarbejdet/aftaler/aftaler/forsvarsspoergsmaal/memorandum-of-understanding-on-nordic-defence-cooperation-nordefeco>

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obsolete Soviet vehicles and armaments, for instance: T-72 main battle tanks, different types of MI 24 attack-helicopters, MI 17 transport helicopters, KUB air-defense systems, and the most popular small arms family called AK. Some of them were replaced or modernized by a few members, but the lack of proper financial opportunities delay the process. This process could be carried out jointly to gain more benefits from the cooperation. During the modernization the Czech



Republic and Hungary bought the same type of jet called Saab JAS 39 Gripen. Slovakia also has to replace their fleet, meanwhile Poland chose another type. If these countries had cooperated during the replacement, the jets would have been cheaper for them. All V4 members keep the obsolete T-72s and Russian APCs and IFVs in service. The replacement of these systems has a primary importance in order to become well equipped, modern armies. "The Polish Army bought 128 used Leopard 2A4 tanks from Germany, but they still use T-72s in many regiments."³ A common cost effective solution for the replacement of dated tanks could be profitable for

everyone. In the 21th century, nonconventional warfare becomes more and more common. As members of NATO we have to take part in peacekeeping missions where the most effective weapon of the insurgents is the IED (Improvised Explosive Device). We consider the IEDs as the most frequent reason for human losses. The most suitable vehicles for these missions are the MRAPs (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles). The purchase of this equipment has been proceeding in the V4 countries but this is just the top of the ice berg. We can use the same procedure that I mentioned in the case of tank or jet replacement. So V4 is able to save a lot of money in this way, which could foster our modernization efforts. We need political willingness and it is also important to capitalize the good opportunities in the future.

POSSIBILITIES TO DEVELOP THE REGIONAL MILITARY INDUSTRY

Unfortunately, the defense industry in the region is less developed than in Western and Northern Europe. Every V4 country has been trying to develop their own defense industry, but the unsatisfying amount of ordered equipment causes a lot of hardship for them. „During the Cold War, the armament industry was one of the economy's most developed industries in Czechoslovakia. After the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the Warsaw Pact, the production of arms was reduced. After the Czech Republic joined NATO and established a professional army, it was necessary to procure new arms systems.”⁴ There are some other successful armament projects such as the Polish "Rosomak" APCs or the Hungarian "Gepárd" anti-material rifle family. Every member has long traditions in the defense industry and the division of labor could be rewarding instead of competing with each other. If we shared duties we could become more cost effective producers. It could give us a big boost. Regional production has more benefits for all members than remount products from the US or Western Europe. It is also a compelling idea to share the cost of research and development as well. We can find a lot of prosperous examples for research and development cooperation in Europe. Two of the most successful programs are the Eurofighter Typhoon jet program and the nEUROn UAV program. We are not as rich as the western countries, thus we have to manage cheaper weapon developments such as small arm and other armament modernization.

³ <http://www.army-technology.com/projects/leopard/>

⁴ <http://www.czech.cz/en/Business/Czech-companies/Armament-industry>

BENEFICIAL DIFFERENCES AND OTHER FIELDS OF COOPERATION

The geological variety of V4 countries provides a great opportunity to variegate the training by organizing joint military exercises on different locations. The different geological givens can provide another stage for group work. Joint military exercises carried out on the sea-coast or in a mountainous region could provide valuable individual experiences for soldiers, because these kinds of areas are not available in every V4 country. Some kind of exchange program like military Erasmus for military cadets or some other exchange programs could also be beneficial. V4 is a cooperation with great potentials. Recently, the General Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military Academy of Land Forces was awarded with the grant from the International Visegrad Fund for the project concerning the preparation of officers for the future Visegrad EU Battlegroup. Four cadets from every country will have the opportunity to take part in the exercise in the Czech Republic in 2013. We hope it will be the beginning of a gainful program for every participating country.

In the 21st century one of the most valuable resources in the world is proper information. We do not need any investment to use IT in order to share information with each other, but it can be useful for every attendant. We can share the experiences which were gathered during peacekeeping missions or other kinds of service. In March, 2013, a bilateral agreement between Poland and Hungary was signed by the Defense Ministers. According to this treaty Polish and Hungarian special forces will cooperate in many fields, for instance training, information sharing etc. This is a proper evidence for the system's operability.

EUROPEAN BATTLE GROUPS

The EU founded a system called battle groups (BGs). "The Battle Group is a battalion size force with combat support elements, these military units are adhering to the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union. Battle Groups are usually organized regionally (Nordic BG, Balkans BG, French-German BG) yet the four Visegrad states are members of three different BGs."⁵ The establishment of a Visegrad EU battle group could be the perfect opportunity for gaining individual experiences. We could practice the process of supporting one another and operating side by side. As the Czech Defense Minister Alexandr Vondra said: "We want to put into place a combat unit for EU forces before the end of the first quarter of 2016." The defense ministers also agreed to continue with joint military training after NATO's mission to Afghanistan ends"⁶. The agreement about the foundation of the Visegrad BG was signed on the 6th of March, 2013, by the four Defense Minister. This Battle Group will consist of approximately 3000 personnel.

CONCLUSION

In order to become a more cost effective regional alliance we have to follow the example of the NORDIC alliance, because in that way we could develop our political and military power as well. As neighboring countries, we had political disagreements, which could be the obstacle in our way. In the other hand the common history, culture and memberships of alliances foster the collaboration. So, we have to forget our historical disagreements and cooperate as allies.

Kulcsszavak: V4, Visegrádi katonai együttműködés

Keywords: Visegrad, military cooperation

⁵ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/eu-battlegroups.htm>

⁶ <http://www.acus.org/natosource/central-european-nations-agree-set-joint-combat-force>

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Budapest, 2013.
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