UDC 327

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SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP: NEW CHALLENGES AND HYBRID THREATS

Безпекова співпраця у Вишеградській групі: нові виклики та гібридні загрози

У статті проаналізовано безпеку взаємодії країн Вишеградської групи. Наше дослідження намагається визначити потенційний простір для співпраці країн-членів у сфері зовнішньої політики, політики безпеки та оборони. Автори підкреслюють, що після першого десятиліття членства в ЄС та НАТО позиція країн Вишеграду справді посилилася. Вони не лише зміцнили власний регіональний альянс, але й стали членами транєвропейської коаліції, що сильно позитивно ставиться до подальшої долі європейської інтеграції. Паралельно описані деякі відмінності у поглядах окремих країн-членів Вишеграду. Автори пояснюють, що криза співпраці у формулі V4 була викликана різним сприйняттям проблем безпеки, дещо іншим вибором зовнішньополітичних пріоритетів, а також різним потенціалом країн V4. Наш висновок підкреслює важливі виклики, з якими стикається Вишеградська група, включаючи позиції щодо гібридних загроз, боротьби з екстремізмом, радикалізмом та міграційними проблемами.

Ключові слова: Вишеградська група, комплекс безпеки, військова сила, ідентифікація Вишеграда, гібридна загроза, Вишеградськ бойова група.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the countries of the Visegrad Group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), have been seen as models of transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, recording progress across the economic, political and security spheres. The modernization of these countries was one of the conditions of their accession to the Western structures of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). A pro West position predominated in these countries for reasons that were foremost economic but also ideological and social. Combined with a program of gradual development, this "return to Europe" stimulated changes in the security environment.

In the years after the Second World War, all these states were exposed to the Warsaw Pact and fell under the influence of the Soviet Union, which also held considerable sway over their security policies. History shows that the years 1956, 1968 and 1981 were important milestones for Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland respectively, marking the start of a political intervention. Although the revolts were very different they sought the same outcome: freedom from Soviet oppression. So after the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991 then Eastern European countries has been searching for the most appropriate answers to the security challenges they were facing.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Visegrade states were faced with new challenges that demanded an appropriate response. It is worth summarizing some key concerns: first of all, the option of neutrality offered no security guarantees for these countries; at the same time, they opposed forming their own regional security organization since they had different interests. Turning to the option of integration into an existing regional security organization that would then be transformed, they considered CSCE/OSCE but noted that it had never exercised military force and could not guarantee their defense. Similarly, the

revival of an Eastern security organization was highly unappealing given their historical experience. Integration into Western structures was more attractive though it too seemed unrealistic since NATO had not adopted an enlargement policy. Still, this option promised to connect them directly with a guarantor of regional defense and security. And the last option, development of national defense – was considered prohibitively expensive given the states' obsolete defense technology and the need for large investments in transformation (Ušiak, J. (2018), *The Security Environment of the V4 Countries*, Politics in Central Europe, Vol. 14, No. 2, p.23).

The main aim of our article is to attempt to define the framework for cooperation in the area of security of the Visegrad Group countries and to show contemporary trends and challenges facing them. The problems of V4 functioning in the face of new security challenges in Europe will be discussed. The authors' intention is also to outline the organization's perspective in a changing geopolitical environment (especial in the context of migration problems and hybrid threats).

To achieve the adopted goal was used theory of Copenhagen School of security studies (Regional security complex theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver). The feature of the aforementioned work is the consideration of regional security complexes from a global perspective. The work of R. Bengston "The EU and European Security Order" had a relevant influence. It is about the connection of the security structure in the region with the level of integration of international actors, and about the role played by external actors subjects, such as the Russian Federation, on the formation processes regional security complex in Europe. (Bengtsson, R. (2010) *The EU and the European Security Order: Interfacing Security Actors*, London and New York: Routledge).

According to the basic definition of a security complex, it is "a group of countries with the fundamental security problems and the perception of these problems that are related to such an extent that they cannot be reasonably considered in isolation". According to it, and in international reality - and thus treating security complexes as an ontological category, and using the concept of the complex as an analytical tool, we can identify their boundaries and describe the structure, and then characterize their functioning and evolution. On the one hand, security complexes are a concept strongly anchored in traditional realistic reasoning - they are not only constituted by the geographical proximity of states and interrelationships between them, the patterns of sympathy and dislike they share, being influenced by the influence of global centers of power, but also, and even above all, perceived threats and ways to counter them, and therefore an argument from the area of the intensively developed constructivist approach. (Buzan B. (2003), *Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World*, in: Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader, (eds.) F. Söderbaum, T. M. Shaw, London)

In this study we use the initial assumptions of this theory say about transformations of the security complex - as a response to changes occurring among the factors constituting it. Therefore these changes consist in transformations of structure (internal dimension of transformation) and transformations in its relations with the environment (external dimension of transformation).

The shared history, geographical closeness, cultural similarities, and similar levels of economic development of Visegrade countries create the potential that can be used for promoting shared interests at the European or generally international level. To what extent it can be used, it depends on the political will and decisions of the representations of member countries.

The researchers agree that all countries perceive the Group as an important factor of their Central European identity – a successful platform and pattern, which is complementary,

or at least not competitive to other forms of international cooperation which the countries take part in. (Naď, J., Gyarmati. I., Szatkowski, T., Frank, L. (2010), *V4 Cooperation and Coordination in Defence and Security.* [Online]. URL: https://www.obranaastrategie.cz/cs/aktualni-cislo-2-2010/materialy/v4-cooperation-and-coordination-in-defence-and-security.html date of accessed: 11/12/2019).

The basic stages of formation of the Visegrad Cooperation show that it's a joint initiative of cooperation which was supposed to empower the democratization and reformation of the member countries through the advancement of mutual projects and strategic partnership. They had to face several problems during times which obstructed the cooperation for longer or shorter periods, but it has survived and it was able to find new goals for itself.

Today, defence and security policy is created more on international, rather than national level. Therefore, it should be the fundamental interest of all V4 countries to discuss policymaking together. Prior to the integration of all Visegrad countries into the EU (2004) and NATO (1999 and 2004), the process of transferring institutions across state borders were of great importance as creating potential buffers that in the absence of common membership in multilateral institutions, one believed that import from some institutional models from the West can help the adaptation to a new international environment. The Visegrad group was not very eager to present itself as an alternative to successful by the European or Euro-Atlantic integration groupings fearing that this can be misused by the EU and NATO as an excuse for closing their doors to new member states. (Samson, Ivo (2009) *The Visegrad Four: from Loose Geographic Group to Security Internationalization?*, International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs XVIII(4): p.5)

Clearly security policies are influenced by not only the evolution of the security environment but also internal political conditions in individual states. So we can describe the main features of the Visegrad Group that set the course for their future orientation. According to Ušiak, the evolution of Czech security policy can also be understood in terms of two main plots. The first of these began with a clear focus on NATO membership immediately after the establishment of the independent state; it has since run into difficulties as the Czech Republic struggles to find its own place in the organization. The second plot traces the complications around the country's efforts to find a consensus on the most appropriate European security architecture and, thus, a position on the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

In Slovakia, the first years of independence showed that one part of Slovak politicians promoted Slovak accession to NATO and the EU, on the domestic scene, others revealed a schism about the country's future security policy. The domestic situation changed after the 1998 elections when Mikuláš Dzurinda's government took office. The effects of this shift went beyond internal political developments, with clear trans-Atlantic goals being set in the area of security. This helped revive the negotiations on Slovakia's accession to both the EU and NATO.

In the case of the Polish, domestic political developments were largely influenced by Lech Wałęsa. After the elections, the political leaders' attention turned to Western organizations, particularly the European Communities and NATO, along with the development of relations with Germany and especial the United States (Ušiak J. (2018), The Security Environment of the V4 Countries, Politics in Central Europe, Vol. 14, No. 2, p.25-30.).

Hungary was the first of the Central European states to unequivocally confirm its pro West orientation is not only in declarations but also in changes to domestic policy. The first of these eras (1990-1999) was dominated by NATO integration process and Hungary's own efforts to work out a strategic position. Hungary sought to achieve a strategic balance between

the EU and NATO in its internal and external security; at the same time, it applied strategic thinking to the collective defense (Nagy, L., Kovács, T. (2006) *Hungary 's Security and Defence Policy in the new geostrategic environment.* In Τέυχος, no. 35. [Online]. URL: http://www.elesme.gr/elesmegr/periodika/t35/t35_09.htm. date of accessed: 10/01/2020.).

We can summarize that this period goes from asymmetric convergence to an unquestionable adaptation of the norms and principles of European integration, which brought together the groups of Central and Eastern Europe with the EU to move in recent years to the necessary symmetrical convergence.

Since the V4 discourse of the pre-accession period has been relying on integration in EU and NATO, once this goal was fulfilled the V4 countries were entering a new phase of cooperation. The post-2004 collaboration was built upon the text of the The Kroměřiž Declaration (2004), which has announced the new goals for the V4 future. Four areas of cooperation were assigned and the mechanism of the cooperation was also recorded (cooperation within the V4 area; cooperation within the EU; cooperation with other partners; cooperation within NATO and other international organizations). (Mogildea, Mihai: *A* (2017) *Regional Integration Model for Advancing the Europeanization Process in Central and Eastern Europe*. Slovak Foreign Policy Association. [Online]. URL: https://think.visegradfund.org/wp-content/uploads/Mogildea_The-Visegrad-Group-A-regional-integration-model-for-advancingthe-Europeanization-process-in-Central-and-Eastern-Europe.pdf date of accessed: 24/01/2020)

In terms of military power and capabilities, all Visegrad countries could be defined as hinge powers with primarily regional interests. All countries have some degree of military crises management capabilities, while they are (maybe with the exception of Poland) hardly capable of fighting at a high intensity. All countries have a clear will to participate in international crises management operations mainly under the umbrella of NATO, but also EU and UN. There are some examples where joint participation in operation appeared to be very successful (Czech Republic and Slovakia in KFOR, Slovakia and Hungary in UNFICYP, Poland and Slovakia in Iraq). It is largely based on the similar or even the same military technology used in the armed forces and also very similar training and structures of the armed forces. The experts agreed that these facts could lead to deeper cooperation on a V4 level in military. (Naď, J., Gyarmati. I., Szatkowski, T., Frank, L. (2010), *V4 Cooperation and Coordination in Defence and Security.* [Online]. URL: https://www.obranaastrategie.cz/cs/aktualni-cislo-2-2010/materialy/v4-cooperation-and-coordination-in-defence-and-security.html date of accessed: 11/12/2019).

But at some point, the Visegrad Group began to turn into a discussion club, which, however, clearly lacked a moderator. From time to time, new initiatives appeared that were a response to short-term problems such as energy cooperation or joint modernization of the army. Unfortunately, many of the projects discussed were not finalized. On the one hand, we can mention successful diplomatic effort of the V4 countries in negotiations with the European Union regarding the admission into the Schengen zone and other areas, on the other, we should mention a number of missed opportunities and unexecuted projects, especially in the areas of defence policy and military cooperation. For example, common (CZE-POL-SVK) international brigade based in Slovak town of Topoľčany, V4 modernization of helicopters initiative and as almost all other military initiatives were unsuccessful and not feasible and sustainable due to a lack of political will and also a lack of appropriate financing.

Another vivid negative example is developing cooperation with the West, even at the expense of other members of the Group. For example, Prague, best prepared for accession to

NATO, recognized the political strengthening of the V4 as a potential burden on its path to Euro-Atlantic structures. Since 1993, regional ties have clearly weakened, mainly as a result of the political crisis in Slovakia and the attitude of the Czech government. The crisis of cooperation in the V4 formula was caused by different perceptions of security issues, a slightly different choice of foreign policy priorities, but also by the different potential of V4 countries. Poland, by far the largest and strongest country in the Group, is a significant player with ambitions to actively co-decide on the development directions of the EU and NATO. Other countries of the Group, however, do not have such aspirations. Poland, wanting to belong to a group of countries that play a leading role in the EU and NATO, instead of agreeing on actions with three smaller countries, tried to conduct talks with the leaders of the most important European countries. (Kużelewska E., Bartnicki A. R., (2017) *Grupa Wyszehradzka – nowe wyzwania bezpieczeństwa i perspektywy współpracy*. Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej, no 11, p. 105).

But despite the unsuccessful pages of cooperation, we can note that there is an opportunity to build up a common "Visegrad identity" when all four countries base their foreign and security policy on NATO's strategic plans. They view NATO as the main guarantor of their security and operate in a context of security related cooperation between NATO and the EU. This idea is part of a long-term project (2008-2010 - initial phase), which is the possibility of forming the basis for a common identity within the community of democratic states. It should rather follow the goal of contributing to NATO's and the EU's security and defense tasks with effective pooling taking place in the Central European region and contributing to the use of common Visegrad capacities and experience. (Samson, Ivo (2009) *The Visegrad Four: from Loose Geographic Group to Security Internationalization?*, International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs XVIII(4): p.9)

While for a long time the development prospects of the European Union focused on the issues of development of integration processes (the so-called "deepening and expanding": deepening integration ties and expanding membership), for more than a dozen years they have been more often related to their inhibition or even reversal. Today we can distinguish three groups of the major challenges and threats to international security: 1) aggressive expansionists Russia's foreign policy; 2) crisis phenomena in the European Union (Brexit, uncontrolled migration, economic problems, populism and Euroscepticism); 3) the unpredictability of the policy of the new US administration.

Present dynamic of security challenges is determined by deeper anti European tendencies have endured especially in Poland and Hungary. And despite their assurances to the contrary, even Slovakia and the Czech Republic do not always contribute to stabilizing the V4 region or its pro European orientation.

A special place among the global geopolitical challenges is occupied by contemporary Russian foreign policy, which is characterized by a willingness to use military force to achieve geopolitical goals. The Russian Federation is a huge threat to regional and global security systems. But in the case of Visegrad countries we can consider the divergence of the reactions of Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava and Budapest by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Many examples that illustrate it can be found in the area of energy activities.

Some Hungarian political representatives began to promote and clearly named the Russian Federation as a partner especially in the area of trade and energy security. The current government of Orban uses good relations with Russia as a leverage in Hungary's relations with Brussels. So these actions by Hungary differ from those of its partners in Central Europe (especially Poland) and indicate that Hungary is partly influenced by Russia. Nonetheless, Hungary remains dedicated to NATO, even though its stance towards the EU is far more

negative. (European Values. *Hungary*. [Online]. URL: https://www.europeanvalues.net/hungary/ date of accessed: 19/12/2019)

In this regards, "new member states" (the Czech Republic and Slovakia) did not support the postulate of strengthening by additional NATO forces in the face of Russian aggression in Ukraine. These countries did not want to participate in such an initiative and called for its narrowing to the territory of Poland and the Baltic State. The NATO summit in Newport in September 2014, as well as the EU discussion on the third wave of sanctions against Russia, highlighted the rift in the Visegrad Group. The problem was to take a joint position on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as issues related to strengthening the Pact's potential in the Eastern flank. The group had trouble developing a common position on strategic issues; V4 members were unable to create a unified block on the war in Georgia in 2008 or the installation of the US anti-ballistic defense system (Kałan D. (2014), *Mieć czy być: unijne sankcje wobec Rosji jako dylemat V4*, „PISM Biuletyn", nr 103 (1215).)

It is worth noting that in the countries of the Visegrad Group there is a particularly strong propaganda activity of the Russian Federation. The mechanisms of its implementation are different: in fact, pro-Russian misinformation, distortion of the facts of the conflict in the Donbass, creation of pro-Russian organizations and creation of news sites that cover the events in the required perspective.

The Ukrainian crisis has revealed limitations in V4 cooperation, which works well as a consultative forum before EU summits, an instrument of financial support (via the International Fund Visegrad), and even the initiator of ambitious energy plans (North-South energy corridors). The conflict in the south-east of Ukraine is unique because it influence on the stability and security of the V4 neighbor, and thus also indirectly in Central Europe. Although creation a uniform agenda against the crisis seems difficult given the current political climate, the Group can still improve the coordination of actions and responses to Russian counter-sanctions.

Another challenge is the migration and refugee crisis of 2015, which increased opposition to 'diversity', strengthened isolationist sentiments and xenophobia. The crisis offered new opportunities for populists and extreme actors to mask prejudice, discrimination and hatred by defending national values and security. These problems have been driving the move for greater EU integration in the areas of security and defense. The potential disengagement of one or several V4 countries might endanger cooperation within the V4. On the other hand, they may reinforce the V4 cooperation as an alternative to higher level integration. (Bienczyk -Missala, A., Goda, S., Hörömpöli, L., Valuch, J. (2017) *Capabilities of the Visegrad Group in preventing extremism*. Budapest: Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention. [Online]. URL: http://www.genocideprevention.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Report_V4_2017_A4_web.pdf date of accessed: 28/12/2019)

The joint position of the Visegrad Group countries is a kind of accidental work resulting from the specific arrangement of political forces and social moods in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, Hungary has become a transit country for crowds of illegal immigrants trying to get from Serbia to Austria or Germany, and the refugee camps are overcrowded. Slovakia, like Poland, is a religiously conservative country and is reluctant to respond to the need to accept Muslims. In the Czech Republic, there is even an anti-immigrant consensus on the refugee problem between the feuded government and the president, because this is how the camps read social sentiment. As survey shows, that 70 % of Czechs oppose the reception of refugees and 80% demand the reintroduction of border controls within the EU (survey from July 2015). (Grodzki R. (2015), *Grupa Wyszehradzka i kryzys uchodźczy: solidarnie przeciw solidarności europejskiej?* Instytut Zachodni im. Zygmunta Wojciechowskiego. [Online]. URL:

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We strongly believe that the V4 group has the potential to be a more important and successful institute than just a discussion club with a relatively weak position in the international forum. Ideally, V4 should serve as a joint platform for preparation, execution, and implementation of initiatives, projects, policies, and strategies based on shared interest, specifically towards the EU, NATO, and other international institutions

The positive page in security cooperation among Visegrad countries is the establishment of one of the largest flagships of V4 cooperation "Battlegroup" (operational in 2016). The Battlegroup has three main components: Force Headquarters (the group's hub) and the operations and strategic resources units. This initiative is based in Krakow, Poland. More than 3,700 soldiers have been involved with the majority coming from Poland (1,800) followed by the Czech Republic (728), Hungary (640) and finally Slovakia (560) (actual numbers have varied slightly based on the capacities and options of individual states). The success of this project is clear not only from the deployment, which extended for an entire half year but from the decision of the V4 countries to repeat these operations in 2019. Joint work on defence planning relates especially to the exchange of information among all involved parties. It is particularly important for ensuring the V4 group's coordination and readiness to handle potential military threats. (Ušiak, J. (2018), *The Security Environment of the V4 Countries*, Politics in Central Europe, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 32)

The V4 decided to keep the Battlegroup as a permanent unit after its operationalization as it was decided to be mutually beneficial. The V4 also agreed to prepare this permanent operationalization in the second half of 2019. The V4 EU BG is one of the main drivers for improving interoperability and joint defense development of the four central European countries and is also highly valued by the EU and NATO.

We can summarize that as a matter of course, the collaboration within V4 will always have a complementary nature compared to the cooperation within EU or NATO. However, the shared historical experience of the member countries, common issues and threats they are faced with, and also close political and interpersonal connections create the potential that can be used for promoting shared interests at the European level. To what extent it will be used, it depends on the political will and decisions of the representations of member countries. Also the possible successes or failures of the V4 will, however, largely depend on the forces' policy towards the region, in the context of competition for cohesion or lack thereof in the face, of real challenges and external pressure.

After a period of clear slowing down of joint initiatives, it seems that now the V4 is gaining new dynamics. The possibility of building a common gas corridor is becoming more apparent, and military-technical cooperation, although still in the phase of projects and arrangements, is expected to intensify. The V4 battle group was formed, and the Visegrade Group also found common levels of political interest. Therefore, more effort should be put forward in develop more successful in security cooperation for closer the V4 countries together in areas of interoperability, concrete defense planning and new common projects

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Vasyl Marchuk, Nataliia Holubiak **Security cooperation in the visegrad group: new challenges and hybrid threats**

The article analyzes the security interaction of the Visegrad Group countries. Our study tries to identify potential space for cooperation of member countries in the area of foreign, security and defense policies. The authors emphasize that after the first decade of EU and NATO membership, the position of the Visegrad countries has really intensified. They did not only strengthen their own regional alliance, but they also became members of a trans-European coalition with a strong position on the further fate of European integration. In parallel, some differences in the views of individual member countries of Visegrad are described. The authors explain that the crisis of cooperation in the V4 formula was caused by different perceptions of security issues, a slightly different choice of foreign policy priorities, but also by the different potential of V4 countries. Our conclusion highlights the important challenges faced by the Visegrad group including positions on hybrid threats, the fight against extremism, radicalism and migration challenges.

Keywords: *Visergad group, security complex, military force, Visegrad identity, hybrid threat, Visegrad Battlegroup.*