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**East Central European Defense Cooperation Initiatives,
2008-2016**

Ph.D. dissertation

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Introduction

Research on the processes of European security and defense in the post-bipolar era, more closely on preserving and developing military capabilities, can rely on a wide basis of academic literature. As these sources show, intensifying multinational military capability development has been triggered by numerous factors: emerging challenges from a continually transforming security environment; the need for joint action the will for establishing European strategic autonomy; decreasing defense funds, increasing defense inflation, resource-intensive research & development in the defense sector, as well as symbolic reasons.

Based on the literature we can say that there are generally two approaches for studying European (regional) defense cooperation: on the one hand examining institutionalized processes within the European Union and NATO in a top-down manner, while on the other hand through identifying and analyzing converging national interests and the ensuing practical cooperation that emerges in a bottom-up manner.

Scholarly research on subregional defense cooperation among smaller groups of states has become more elaborated since the turn of the millennium, even if we can observe significant differences with regards to various subregional formations. Research has been focusing on summarizing and analyzing lessons learnt in a comparative manner, aiming at identifying the factors and preconditions that help creating new frameworks for defense cooperation and aid developing these. Within this literature scarce attention is dedicated to multinational defense cooperation frameworks with Hungarian participation, therefore research and analysis in the field of East Central European defense cooperation is identified as a prospective field for research.

Identifying the research question

Comprehensive, systemic research has been induced by practical problems: operational requirements of the 1990s and witnessed capability shortfalls – both in the 1991 Gulf War and throughout stabilization efforts in the Balkans – have pushed multinational capability development to the forefront of the agenda both the a European and Transatlantic context. Moskos, Williams and Segal pointed out the increasing ‘internationalization’ of European armed forces. They also identified a new pattern, namely that while during the Cold War the subordinate forces within multinational corps-level formations of NATO remained under national command, from the 1990s integration at lower levels became more frequent,

resulting in the creation of multinational structures and commands. (Moskos – Williams – Segal, 2000)

Seth G. Jones argued that multinational defense cooperation was reinforced in the post-bipolar world because European states had to face new geopolitical realities and tried to loosen their dependence on the United States on the one hand, as well as to increase their own strategic autonomy on the other. (Jones, 2007) Frédéric Mérand, (Mérand, 2008), Sven Biscop (Biscop, 2013), as well as Major and Mölling (Major – Mölling, 2013) emphasized that enhanced cooperation in the field of defense, and particularly in the development of military capabilities is indispensable, if European countries wanted to retain, and if the European Union wanted to gain such strategic autonomy and the ability to shape their security environment. In this regard Missiroli, Rogers and Gilli have examined the perspectives of capability development in the European context. (Missiroli – Rogers – Gilli, 2013)

Anthony King explained the growing internationalization and concentration of European armed forces as a consequence of decreasing resources for defense. (King, 2011) Michael Alexander and Timothy Garden argued after the turn of the millennium that the economic pressure on European countries is so intense, that they cannot avoid multinational cooperation without losing significant capabilities and defense industrial capacities. They also pointed out that procurement had become unsustainable due to increasing defense inflation that makes the sustainment of full capability spectrum armed forces impossible. (Alexander – Garden, 2001) Keith Hartley also added that the costly defense research and development programs running parallel, as well as limitations of production because of national caps and protectionism, endanger economy of size production processes. (Hartley, 2008)

Newly formed multinational defense cooperation programs have been driven by the argument that answering new challenges to security requires new capabilities, while scarce resources also push towards more aligned, harmonized and deeply integrated defense policy and capability development. As Bence Németh pointed out, ‘we can state in general that beginning from the 1990s European defense cooperation programs can be traced back to three incentives: countering the drastic fall of defense expenditures; the new task of conducting peace operations; and the need to restore stability in the international arena that required further confidence and security building measures.’ (Németh, 2014:94)

Biscop and Coelmont argued that the transformation of European armed forces is primarily slowed down by the fragmentation of continental defense efforts (their national focus), to which integration could be the proper answer. (Biscop – Coelmont, 2013) Still it is true that in the past decade we have witnessed deeper and more intense integration in the field

of operations, joint trainings and exercises, as well as the harmonization of capability development programs, primarily driven forward by NATO and the European Union. (Matlary, 2009)

We could also see several cases of bilateral and minilateral defense cooperation dating back to the Cold War (Bailes, 1999; Cottey, 1999 és 2000). By now the cooperation of the Nordic states (NORDEFCO) has become the most developed and complex subregional defense cooperation framework in Europe. (Bátora – Matlary, 2011)

Compared to these, Central European subregional defense cooperation initiatives emerged only later, and have not gained much scholarly attention before the 2008 economic crisis. The Central European Defense Cooperation (CEDC) gained momentum from October 2010 (Molnár – Csiki, 2010; Csiki – Németh, 2012), while the Visegrad cooperation became more active from January 2011, also gaining more scholarly attention both in a descriptive and comparative manner, primarily from regional experts. (Kron – Balogh, 2012; Balogh, 2013; Madej, 2013; Valásek – Suplata, 2012; Suplata, 2013; Majer, 2015)

Amongst Hungarian defense policy experts, Bence Németh conducted groundbreaking research in King's College London, aiming to answer the question 'Why do states enter in subregional defense cooperation?' (Németh, 2017)

Based on the international and Hungarian scholarly literature we can still identify several research areas to which not much analytical attention has been dedicated so far (or none at all). Beyond doubt one such field is the defense cooperation of the Visegrad countries, as well as the Central European Defense Cooperation and the relations, defense policies and strategic cultures of their participating states, in a comparative manner.

For these reasons my dissertation focuses on these two frameworks of defense cooperation, and their members, in a comparative manner in the period 2008-2016.

Aims of the research

The research conducted will be aimed at the following:

- 1) Identifying those external factors that determined the intensification of multinational defense cooperation amongst East Central European countries in the period 2008-2016.

- 2) Identifying and analyzing the character and depth of the cooperation that seven East Central European countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) have begun in 2008-2016.
- 3) Giving an assessment on these cooperative frameworks regarding their degree of development and intensity, compared to international lessons learnt.
- 4) Giving an assessment on the strategic cultures of the seven participating countries in a comparative manner in order to identify the extent to which multinational cooperation in the field of defense is present in their defense policy traditions and thinking as an immanent factor.
- 5) Giving an assessment on these cooperative frameworks regarding the presence of those preconditions characteristics that could enable and trigger defense cooperation – as identified by Tomas Valásek based on international lessons learnt. (Valásek, 2011: 21-27)
- 6) Identifying other possible frameworks for subregional defense cooperation for Hungary and offering a comparative assessment of these based on Hungarian strategic culture and interests in order to map up whether it would be possible for Hungary to enter into comprehensive, permanent, structured defense cooperation in any of these alternative strategic directions and move forward on the path of defense integration.

Hypothesis

Following upon the aims of the research the dissertation examines the following hypothesis:

Even though

- (a) regional defense cooperation initiatives in East Central Europe have intensified since 2008,
- (b) these remained limited in result, and
- (c) currently we cannot identify those strategic enabling conditions present among participating countries that would help further deepening cooperation within these initiatives, as international experience would suggest.

The first element of the hypothesis is examined through describing those security policy processes that have contributed to the serious deterioration of the security environment

since 2008, as well as through analyzing the effects of resource scarcity in the defense sector. These have triggered institutionalized responses at the national and regional level, as far as within the European Union and in NATO. The first part of the dissertation thus aims at answering the question ‘Why have regional defense cooperation initiatives intensified in East Central Europe between 2008 and 2016?’

The second part of the hypothesis is tested through a comparison of the theoretical depth of defense cooperation schemes and the realized cooperation within East Central Europe, pointing out the limited nature of the latter. This part aims at answering the question ‘What results have East Central European countries achieved in their defense cooperation since 2008, and what could further fields of such cooperation be?’

The third part of the hypothesis is examined through an analysis built on the enabling conditions of successful defense cooperation identified by Tomas Valásek (Valásek, 2011). Here the seven participating countries of the two defense cooperation initiatives are examined in a comparative manner, focusing on the converging and diverging characteristics. Thus, this part aims at answering the question ‘Why have defense cooperation initiatives triggered only limited results between 2008 and 2016?’

Research methodology

In the dissertation, I have examined the presence of multinational defense cooperation in the strategic thought of East Central European countries in the period 2008-2016 on the one hand, and the realized results, practical content of such initiatives on the other, as well as their perspectives in the future.

The research framework was built on the strategic level analysis of multinational defense cooperation initiatives geographically focused on East Central Europe, in the timeframe 2008-2016, in minilateral frameworks, namely the Visegrad Cooperation and the Central European Defense Cooperation (CEDC). Research and analysis were based on applying the following methodological tools:

- 1) The analysis of the security environment: The effects of the post-2008 period of resource scarcity on the European defense sectors and the post-2014 resurgent perception of Russian military threat due to her use of military force in Ukraine have been analyzed using process tracing.

- 2) The evolution of the two multinational defense cooperation frameworks in East Central Europe have been examined using process tracing, while their outcome was weighted and analyzed along the typology of Csiki, Németh and Tálás (Csiki – Németh – Tálás, 2012) base on the work of Maulny and Liberti (Maulny – Liberti, 2008). This meant an assessment along four possible types and levels of defense cooperation: (1) sharing of capabilities, (2) pooling of capabilities, (3) pooling through acquisition (including either joint procurement or co-development), (4) role and task sharing.
- 3) The presence of multinational defense cooperation in strategic thought of the participating countries, the strategic cultures (Csiki – Tálás, 2013), and national strategic documents (Csiki, 2013) of Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia have been studied using comparative content analysis.
- 4) The enabling conditions of successful defense cooperation is assessed based on the criteria of Tomas Valásek in a comparative manner (Valásek, 2011)

Research results

1. Reactions to the resource scarcity in the defense sector

Following the literature review and the description of the research framework first I analyzed the resource scarcity of the 2008-2013 period and its general effects on the European defense sphere. Through the analysis of several particular examples I studied and presented the trends visible in the European defense forces, as parts of the ‘crisis management practices’ conducted in the defense sphere, in connection with the post-2008 financial crisis. Thus, I demonstrated the internal motives behind the intensification of multinational defense cooperation in Europe, and particularly in East Central Europe.

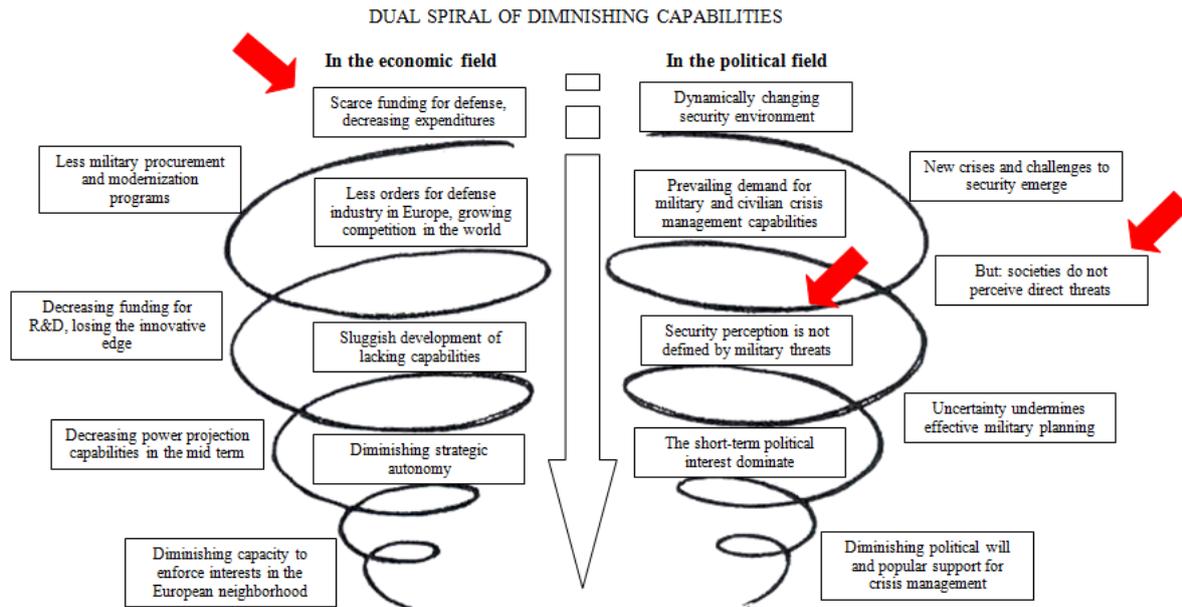
Measures of ‘crisis management’ in the defense sphere taken by European countries in the studied era ranged from *ad hoc* cuts in troop numbers and equipment to changing modernization programs, and even to comprehensive re-structuring of the armed forces. A common phenomenon was (with a few exceptions) the decrease itself; decrease in terms of resources, capabilities and ambitions. Multinational capability-development initiatives and programs, in some cases based on even cost-sharing or joint financing, were aimed at counterbalancing the loss of capabilities, and were launched on national, regional and Alliance levels as a reaction to this trend of decreasing resources.

2. Changing threat-perception

Concerning external factors, the third chapter of the dissertation pointed out that the direct security environment of the East Central European states changed in 2014-2016, thus did their military security perception as well. New answers given to the new challenges contributed to the intensification of multinational defense cooperation efforts in the region.

From this perspective, the security environment of Europe, that had been gradually worsening already since 2008, radically changed from 2014 on, when new challenges and threats emerged. From the Eastern strategic direction Russia's aggression against Ukraine, while from the South – South-East the 'Islamic State', terrorism, as well as mass migration have all strengthened the threat perception of European societies; moreover, in most countries of East Central Europe they even created the perception of a military threat. Russia's great power ambitions, combined with the use of military force already – conducted already for the second time in 2014 (and since then), following the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 – have fundamentally changed the security situation for many countries of East-Central Europe, particularly for the Baltic States and Poland, but also to a lesser extent for Romania and Bulgaria. The illegal Russian annexation of the Crimea, and thereafter the infliction and sustaining of the separatist conflict clearly demonstrated for countries of the region that international legal norms and obligations are not restraining Russia's strategic objectives. Moreover, even great power guarantees do not provide absolute and unconditional protection for small states any more. As a result, in many countries of the region Russia-related threat perception of the societies, based primarily on historical experiences, forced national governments to take firm counter-measures, including even military ones.

Both integration organizations that play a key role in European security, namely NATO and the European Union have reacted to these changes. Member countries of NATO in their Newport Summit in 2014 decided to strengthen the deterrence, reactionary, and collective defense capabilities of the Alliance, as well as to increase their defense expenditures. The Warsaw Summit of 2016 resulted in maintaining the enhanced forward presence on the territories of six East Central European countries. The European Union started again to address questions of defense policy in December 2013. To 2016 this work manifested in the adoption of the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, as well as in a recommendations package to reinvigorate the Common Security and Defense Policy.



The 'dual spiral of diminishing capabilities' (2008-2014) and its possible breakpoints in the contemporary security environment (2016) /The author's own graph/

Thus, the unfavorable trends of the 'dual spiral of diminishing capabilities' could get partially broken by 2016 on both main fields, i.e. regarding the earlier lack of political will and the shortage of financial resources. A new, explicit intention has emerged to stabilize, in some areas to reinforce, or even to reestablish military capabilities.

Mostly in line with these processes, also due to the political pressure coming from allies, most East Central European countries have started to reassess their national defense policies, to reconsider capability-development plans, to increase defense expenditures and to strengthen multinational cooperation frameworks.

3. Evaluating the two Central European cooperative frameworks

Based on international experiences, I concluded regarding both the defense policy cooperation of the Visegrad countries and the Central European Defense Cooperation that the two 'levels' they reached in capability pooling and sharing are the following:

- In case of the Visegrad cooperation during multinational education, trainings and exercises governments keep decisions on the national level about their share provided to the multinational defense cooperation. Thus, cooperation will only be moderately cost-efficient, because costs fall on the national governments in the share of their contribution. On the basic level, this means the sharing of capabilities based on national force structures and capabilities, while any separate international mechanism

or integration structure is missing. More advanced is the cooperation organized in the V4 EU Battlegroup framework: it is one level higher, because it falls into the category of pooling of capabilities. In this case national capabilities get organized into a single structure that has its own multinational command, but the units provided by the participating states remain under national command and control. Thus, control over the national capabilities remains under national authority, but integrated and coordinated planning helps decrease personnel and logistics costs. In the light of all these, one may conclude that the Visegrad cooperation reached only moderate results, because in the studied period V4 countries did not achieve either joint procurements or such a level of role and task sharing that would have included the sharing of sovereignty.

- Compared to this, the Central European Defense Cooperation clearly reached only the first, 'introductory' level, on which further and deeper cooperation could be built, depending on the political will. Hence, from the possible forms of cooperation (in the order of intensity: sharing of capabilities – pooling of capabilities – pooling through acquisition – role and task sharing) CEDC falls into the category of 'sharing of capabilities.' Cooperation frameworks established by the six participating countries of CEDC are aimed at setting up such joint capabilities that are based on national forces structures and national capabilities, and are not organized into an integrated structure. In these cases, command remains on national level, and costs also fall on the nations in the ratio of their contribution. Decrease of cost could (have) originate(d) from the coordination of multinational education, trainings and maintenance, the simplification of logistics support, as well as from information-sharing aimed at increasing efficiency. Hence, one may conclude also about the CEDC that results of the cooperation remained limited.

4. Comparing the strategic cultures of participating nations

By analyzing the strategic cultures of the seven countries I identified several similarities and a number of key differences. For example, one country (Austria) gives preference to the UN, another two (the Czech Republic and Poland) strongly prefer NATO, while the remaining four balances between NATO and the EU as main frameworks of realizing their national defense policy objectives. Similarly, differences are also present regarding their preferred institutional frameworks of international crisis management. Many countries stress the importance of bilateral strategic partnership with the United States;

however, practical steps are taken mainly by Poland. Different countries put different emphasis on territorial defense and international crisis management; also in this case Poland constitutes one extreme by prioritizing territorial defense. Meanwhile, the capabilities possessed by many small states are so limited that none of these countries would be able to act independently outside of their direct geographical proximity. When they still need to do so, operational mandates and caveats differ considerably. Besides, geographical foci of national ambitions also vary, ranging from Eastern Europe to the Balkans, and in a few cases even to the Middle East and Africa, which complicates cooperation even in those cases, when they participate in joint operations together with larger allies.

5. Comparing the strategic documents of participating nations

Through the analysis of the seven countries' strategic documents, one can identify several similarities, as well as differences concerning their defense policy plans. These can define the future prospect of regional cooperation, with regards to already available, as well as developing military capabilities, and the countries' political willingness. All analyzed countries have comprehensive threat perception, which generally includes non-military and asymmetric threats too, besides conventional military threats. The readiness to use military force for crisis management – usually through different, international frameworks – and the willingness to modernize the armed forces were common traits in every analyzed case.

The analysis of the strategic documents demonstrates that Poland's threat perception (countering Russia) shows an outstanding pattern, confirming the particularities recognized during the comparative study of strategic cultures. Similarly, Austria provides a somehow different example due to the country's neutral position as well as Vienna's preference to the EU and its strong connection to UN peacekeeping missions, which are less typical factors in the other countries' cases. The priorities of the capability development appear on a relatively wide spectrum (where it is clearly defined, and not just a general modernization is aimed). Although, these usually take into consideration NATO interoperability, and they are not necessarily open for multinational capability development. As a general tendency, multinational capability development acquires an increased emphasis in the case of bigger and more expensive weapon system procurement programs.

According to the analysis of strategic documents, one can conclude that the highest level of willingness and targeted programs regarding multinational defense cooperation can be seen in the case of Austria. Although the V4 countries have already defined long-term strategic plans in 2014, the Central European defense initiatives do not appear specifically in

the analyzed Central European states' strategic documents, raising important questions concerning their willingness for cooperation.

6. Evaluating the preconditions of successful defense cooperation

According to international lessons learnt, the evaluation of preconditions facilitating multinational defense cooperation demonstrates differences among the seven countries involved in two cooperative frameworks. Trust and solidarity between their societies mostly reach only medium level. Sizes of the armed forces are different (the two extremes are Slovenia and Poland), while the armed forces' specificities are also diverging (especially in terms of modernization and operational capabilities). There is no equal defense industrial competition (since Poland, the Czech Republic and Austria are in a significantly better position) and corruption in the defense sphere constitutes a moderate or serious risk factor in several countries.

7. Alternative cooperative frameworks

Observing the limits of Central European defense cooperation initiatives, there is an emerging need to analyze alternative cooperation frameworks, their potential and obstacles. These were assessed in the fourth chapter of the dissertation through separate case studies. The specificities of the Central European strategic direction, which builds on the leading role of Poland (practically the V4) can be summarized as 'territorial defense model.' In contrast to this, the Italian-led Southern strategic direction can be described as a 'status quo model', while the Western strategic direction with a German leading role could stand for a 'defense industrial modernization model' from the perspective of the Hungarian national interest. All of these models create different opportunities and clashes of interests, thus a deeper analysis requires increased policy attention in the future.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, there are unequivocal and clearly defined defense policy goals among the V4 countries, due to their long-term strategic plans, accepted in 2014. Nevertheless, the shortcomings concerning the implementation of the defense policy programs undermine the credibility of these goals, with Poland being the only exception. Similar medium or long-term goals were not even defined among CEDC member states. For this reason, in this case it is not possible to recognize the same level of structured collaboration and the willingness for the long-term cooperation in the field of defense.

New scientific results

My dissertation about the East Central European states' two defense cooperation frameworks contains the following new scientific results:

- 1) I have **analyzed and summarized** the processes in defense policy that resulted in a decrease of military capabilities of several European states due to the economic and political effects of the 2008 crisis. As summarized for the 2008-2013 period, I have described this in the model of the 'dual spiral of diminishing capabilities'.
- 2) I have **identified** the defense policy factor which induced a fundamental change in East Central European states' defense policy practices after 2014, and chiefly contributed to breaking the dual spiral, as well as to the development of military capabilities at national and allied (NATO) level: the perception of Russian threat by several states in the region.
- 3) I have **proven** that the achievements of the Visegrad cooperation and the Central European Defense Cooperation between 2008 and 2016 remained limited also in the interaction of the two above mentioned factors, and I have identified the root causes.
- 4) Through **qualitative applied research** I have compared the strategic cultures of the member states of the two Central European defense cooperation initiatives, their national defense documents between 2008 and 2016, and I have **evaluated comparatively** the preconditions of a multinational cooperation, also highlighting their deficiencies.
- 5) I have **proven** that based on the international lessons learnt currently no such common strategic factors can be identified among the participating countries, which would result in the further enhancement of their defense cooperation.

Recommendations for the practical use of the research results

Results of the present research may get used in the following fields:

- (1) Policy: The dissertation provides a strategic-level overview of the frameworks of Central European multinational capability development cooperation, as well as of the main features of these frameworks. It describes the Hungarian defense policy's Central European links, the motives for extending and deepening multinational

defense cooperation and its supportive factors and obstacles. If used in defense policy and defense planning, this knowledge may help coordinate multinational cooperation in the future. The recognition of factors that support the efficiency of regional capability development may increase the effectiveness of policy planning and helps the procedure of international negotiations; moreover, the identification of obstacles may help to handle them.

- (2) Applied research: the dissertation focuses on an under-researched field in Hungary, the Central European unilateral defensive cooperation initiatives. The study is explanatory and it synthesizes, analyses and evaluates its subject as it is embedded in the international literature and the basic research results of recent years. Its comparative research methodology constitutes a novelty in Hungarian Military Science, regarding particularly the assessment of unilateral defense cooperation frameworks and strategic culture. This methodology is a result of the basic and applied research conducted by the author and his closest colleagues; it might also serve as an example and basis of further applied research of similar character and focus.
- (3) Education: the revealed and synthesized international scientific sources can become embedded in Hungarian Military Science or narrowly in the field of security studies. It may provide future professionals in the defense sector with up-to-date knowledge that may satisfy an already growing demand even in the short run. Furthermore, the majority of the sources and findings of the dissertation has not yet been published in Hungarian and did not appear in the Hungarian scientific literature; consequently, it can be used for refreshing the curriculum of related subjects.

The author recommends the dissertation and its results to those researchers who conduct research related to the topic, those who work in the field of defense policy and who are involved in graduate or postgraduate education in security studies.

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