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DAV4 II EXPERT GROUP REPORT ON VISEGRAD DEFENCE COLLABORATION

FROM BATTLEGROUP TO PERMANENT STRUCTURES

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FROM BATTLEGROUP TO PERMANENT STRUCTURES

The Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) are building their first region-wide EU battlegroup, which will be on stand-by for rapid deployment during the first half of 2016. It is intended to be their first major success in the field of regional defence collaboration, rather than their final achievement. **The battlegroup could and should induce much deeper collaboration** and policy leaders in the four capitals are already considering the follow-up steps to make it happen.

Today, more than ever, the time is right for deliberations about enhanced defence collaboration among the V4 countries. Achieving progress in this sphere is a long-term process requiring advanced planning and commitment across governments and political affiliations, so it is vital to use the opportunity afforded by the process of building the battlegroup to further this goal.

This report argues that the **V4 countries should be bold in their ambitions and permanently integrate the structures and capabilities built for the battlegroup**. It provides specific recommendations on how to proceed and explains how the V4 would benefit from more permanent forms of co-operation.

These recommendations would make sense no matter what form the EU rapid reaction forces take in the future: **permanent forms of regional co-operation would contribute to both the EU and NATO by building capacities at home**. It is also important that the Visegrad countries discuss their positions towards the reform of the EU battlegroup concept – in the run-up to the forthcoming European Council in December 2013 – since they have an interest in making it a more useful instrument of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

MAIN POINTS

- The four Visegrad countries (V4) are building an EU battlegroup that will be on stand-by in the first half of 2016. It would make sense to permanently integrate the structures and capabilities built for this battlegroup, in order to increase training opportunities, achieve a high level of interoperability and boost a co-ordinated approach to capability development.
- A recurring battlegroup with a pre-defined structure and force generation mechanisms would help the V4 to develop the capacity to think and operate at levels unattainable in the national context, and create a more stable environment for long-term planning of joint acquisitions.
- It would also raise the international profile of the V4 if they could offer some elements to the EU battlegroup and NATO Response Force (NRF) rotations on a regular basis.
- The Visegrad battlegroup can help substitute for the ISAF mission in Afghanistan as a way of supporting the transformation of the V4 armed forces after 2014, by driving training, capability development and possibly joint procurements.
- A more permanent arrangement would help to reinforce a collaborative climate and encourage the countries of the region to refrain from further cuts in their defence budgets and to maintain key military capabilities.
- The Visegrad governments should solve capability shortfalls identified during the battlegroup preparations in a way that improves their combined capabilities.
- The Visegrad countries need to work on harmonising their capability development and procurement plans. A first step would be to reciprocally attend each other's joint consultations with NATO and to cross-post defence planners at the region's defence ministries.
- To make decision-making effective within a multi-lateral framework, the four countries should establish a Visegrad Defence Co-operation Committee, a (semi)permanent body that co-ordinates work and prepares decisions at a below-ministerial level.
- The V4 will need to invest more time and energy to develop a common strategic vision in the area of security and defence, including a road-map for joint capability development and scenarios for the use of the joint force.
- The V4 should co-ordinate their positions on the reform of the EU battlegroup concept and promote them collectively.

WHY PERMANENT STRUCTURES?



There are multiple reasons why the region's governments decided to form a joint battlegroup. These include the changing security environment, the need for transformation and modernisation of their military forces, the desire to demonstrate their ability to work together on a regional scale and thus their strategic maturity, and the recognition that various similarities make the four countries compatible. All of these factors will remain valid beyond the current battlegroup project.

It is in the Visegrad countries' vital interest to keep NATO and the EU politically and militarily strong, for they see these institutions and the solidarity among their members as the cornerstones of their security. They want to remain reliable members, despite their limited resources. The battlegroup contribution is part of their strategy to promote themselves as security providers and to strengthen both their reputation and their political standing. **Upgrading the collaboration to a higher level and achieving long-term results would give the region the political clout it seeks and promote the solidarity it depends on.**

By forming an EU battlegroup, the Visegrad countries also want to reinforce the European military capabilities that are necessary to keep the CSDP and NATO relevant. With the US pivot to Asia-Pacific, the Europeans – including those in Central Europe – need to assume more responsibility for their own security and for that of their immediate neighbourhood. Europe might soon be impelled to carry out more Libya- or Mali-type operations alone or with only limited US assistance. That will require the possession of rapidly deployable forces, equipped with the necessary strategic enablers, currently insufficiently represented in the inventories of most European militaries. If defence budget cuts and the ensuing loss of capabilities continue, it could be difficult for the V4 coun-

tries to contribute substantially to collective defence and future crisis-management operations, putting the credibility of this region as an active contributor to the EU's and NATO's tasks into question.

The battlegroups are part of the solution. **To comply with the broad mandate set in the EU battlegroup concept, the contributing countries need to provide top-notch interoperable units which would, in turn, drive further modernisation of their militaries.** The Visegrad countries understand this dual role of the battlegroups and therefore see them as valuable, even though they have not yet been deployed.

To effectively contribute with military capabilities, the Visegrad countries need to transform and modernise their forces so that they are professional, interoperable and ready for deployment, including high-intensity combat. NATO's mission in Afghanistan has been fostering these processes for a decade, but it will largely end in 2014. **The Visegrad battlegroup could be one way to substitute the transformational aspect of the ISAF mission**, by driving training, capability development and possibly joint procurement.

However, **more permanent arrangements should follow to help the Visegrad countries sustain and increase training opportunities, achieve a higher level of interoperability and, invest in filling the existing capability gaps through multinational capability development projects.** This would match NATO's "smart defence" and "connected forces" initiatives, as well as the EU's "pooling and sharing" ones, all aimed at ensuring that Europeans have the military capabilities that are relevant in respect to current and future threats.

Fulfilment of the region's political and military aspirations will demand efforts going beyond its first bat-

WHY PERMANENT STRUCTURES?



group attempt. The Visegrad battlegroup could become an impetus for establishing a more robust defence co-operation in the region. It would reinforce the collaborative climate, encourage co-operation and increase peer pressure, mobilising the four countries to refrain from further cuts in their defence budgets and to maintain key military capabilities. More permanent solutions in this field would also cement political will and trust between the four nations, prevent the loss of co-operation habits, and – if combined smartly with multinational maintenance and acquisition projects – bring down costs.

Though the four neighbours will remain free to co-operate with partners outside the region, the Visegrad framework is well suited to be the core of their activities for multiple reasons. **The grouping is geographically compact and its constituents share common historical experience, which makes important aspects of their national strategic cultures compatible** – an important feature since defence co-operation often touches upon sensitive issues, such as sovereignty.

All are still burdened, to varying extents, by obsolete Soviet-era hardware which needs to be phased-out and replaced by new equipment. This situation creates opportunities for joint acquisitions and life-cycle management, reducing costs and improving interoperability of the forces. The compatibility of equipment is crucial because the region's forces are likely

to engage militarily exclusively in multilateral formations such as NATO and the EU.

The V4 has become a strong trade-mark, due in great part to its revived defence dimension. Further advancements in the field of joint military structures and capabilities would make it even more visible, politically relevant and able to better represent and promote the interests of its members on the international stage. The Nordic example shows that regional groupings can help their members to punch above their weight in terms of military capabilities and political influence.¹

By building a "new model" battlegroup and devising ways to sustain it (or at least some of its elements) for a longer period, the Visegrad governments would also become more capable of shaping the Europe-wide debate on upgrading the battlegroup concept as such, setting the agenda for this debate and creating an example to be followed by others.

In sum, **letting the battlegroup disintegrate after its turn on duty finishes in 2016 would be a major missed opportunity:** a waste of money, time, effort and experience. Rapid-reaction capabilities match today's threats and keeping the forces integrated on a permanent basis (though not maintained at a high level of readiness) would make a difference in crisis situations, when militaries need to respond on short notice. **It would help the region modernise their forces and achieve strategic political goals at the same time.**

¹ The Nordic countries have already cross-posted their defence planners to harmonise their acquisition plans and procured jointly. They have decided to permanently build the battlegroup in the regional format and use it as a foundation for long-term co-operation, and the battlegroup's elements have been systematically distributed in existing operations. Their fighter jets train together regularly even though their home bases are spread across the region. Finally, the Nordic Defence Co-operation (NORDEF) has already become a strong trade-mark – something that the Visegrad countries can successfully imitate with their VIDEFCO brand.

THE VISEGRAD BATTLEGROUP



On 6th March 2013, at the Visegrad Group's summit in Warsaw, the four defence ministers signed a letter of intent on forming the Visegrad battlegroup, declaring the will of their governments to participate and to yield Poland the role of a framework nation. The letter of intent followed two years of work following the meeting of defence ministers in Levoča, Slovakia on 12th May 2011, which set the stage for cooperating on building the Visegrad battlegroup.

The full details of co-operation will be known at the end of 2013 or the beginning of 2014, but much has been already agreed. **The force will consist of around 2,500 troops:** up to 1,200 provided by Poland, 700 by the Czech Republic, 450 by Hungary and 400 by Slovakia.² Its core will be composed of mechanised companies provided by Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, with logistics and medical teams accompanying each respective company. These will be supplemented by support elements such as communication & information systems, protection against weapons of mass destruction, a helicopter wing and a medical treatment facility.

The battlegroup will consist of eight modules with assigned lead nations responsible for preparation of and co-ordination within their module. For instance,

Hungary is responsible for engineering, Slovakia for protection against weapons of mass destruction and the Czech Republic for logistics. Poland is responsible for the communication and information systems module and for the operational headquarters. As a framework nation, it is also responsible for planning, setting up, training and certifying the whole unit.

In 2014-15, the contributing nations will have to sign various agreements (such as the memorandum of understanding and the technical agreement), examine the possible legal implications of deployment (SOFA agreements) and staff the headquarters. **The preparation process will finish in 2015 certification, training and exercises, so that the battlegroup is on stand-by in the first six months of 2016.**

The Visegrad countries are planning a live exercise for the summer or autumn of 2015, which is required to certify the battlegroup. Central Europe has already held one significant joint exercise, the NATO Response Force's Steadfast Jazz manoeuvres in Latvia and Poland in 2013, which furthered the region's policy goal of ensuring that NATO is a better fit to perform Article 5 contingencies. Holding another major exercise two years later, focused on expeditionary scenarios (since these are the tasks of battlegroups), could help

² The numbers are based on the latest data available, but may be subject to change in the course of future rounds of negotiations. They reflect the highest possible level of participation of the respective countries.

THE VISEGRAD BATTLEGROUP



to reinforce the overall message of Central Europe's commitment to making Europe more capable in defence, using both NATO and EU tools. To reinforce this message, it would make sense to increase the scale of the 2015 Visegrad battlegroup exercise, by involving more EU and NATO members and partner countries (such as Ukraine), and linking it with the calendar of exercises held within the NATO Connected Forces Initiative.

Exercises in an international environment are the best way to increase the interoperability between forces and contribute to their transformation, which is beneficial to both the EU and NATO. If an EU battlegroup conducts exercises in line with NATO standards, it serves as a practical example that the EU and NATO can complement each other in strengthening military capabilities instead of duplicating their efforts.

The EU battlegroups have been criticised as futile, since they have never yet been deployed on operations since their inception, but the Visegrad incarnation may prove (as the Nordic one before it) that they make sense if planned as a part of a broader transformation and modernisation strategy. **To become a strategic success, the battlegroup experience needs to be seized upon to open the door for more permanent forms of collaboration in the region.**

THE EU BATTLEGROUP CONCEPT

A key military element of the CSDP provides the EU with two rapidly deployable units of about 1,500 – 2,500 troops able to conduct the whole range of missions ranging from peace-making to crisis management, conflict prevention, embargo enforcement, evacuations, and humanitarian operations, such as disaster relief.

The structure of the EU battlegroups is not permanent; they are assembled on an individual and time-limited basis. They usually include core elements that remain on stand-by: an infantry battalion comprising two or three infantry companies, combat support units (fire support, engineer, air defence, reconnaissance, command and information systems) and combat service support elements (logistical support, medical support, civil military co-operation, military police and a headquarters element. Each country has to ensure that the elements they provide meet the required criteria and receive certification based on NATO standards.

The battlegroups also include strategic and operational enablers – strategic air or sea lift, tactical air transport, close air support and helicopter support – that do not on stand-by, but would need to be quickly accessible to make a battlegroup deployment possible and secure its mission within a distant theatre.

LEVELS OF AMBITION

The DAV4 II Expert Group has identified three possibilities for permanent integration of the rapid-reaction capabilities built for the battlegroup: joint force elements, a regularly re-assembled battlegroup or a permanent standing force. The Visegrad countries still need to decide what degree of integration would be desirable for them both politically and financially, and develop a common level of ambition. They also need to agree on fair burden-sharing. Poland is the largest country in the region, but it is unlikely to commit itself to lead, in any of the three constellations, unless the others are ready to share costs.

JOINT FORCE ELEMENTS

The ambition of the Visegrad countries should not be lower than to permanently integrate some of the battlegroup's elements and offer them to the EU battlegroup and NATO Response Force (NRF) rotations on a regular basis. In this case, countries would retain or rotate their leadership over specific capability modules developed under the battlegroup, assuming the responsibility for co-ordination of the contributors and the activities.

If it turns out that the Visegrad battlegroup is not used in real life operations, nations can think about using these components after the battlegroup's stand-by period in the framework of CSDP or NATO operations. Sweden, for example, built its capa-

bilities through the battlegroup and consequently used some of them, most notably the Gripens, in the Libya operation.

Although the least ambitious, this level of integration carries practical difficulties related to its limited extent. Some of the valuable battlegroup components (e.g. communication, training or command mechanisms) are not easy to take out of their context and keep them integrated for further use. What's more, the specialisations inherited from the Visegrad battlegroup's modular arrangement might result in anomalies in capability development, with states choosing to concentrate only on areas under their leadership and not to develop others.

The preservation of limited bits of the previously battalion-sized battlegroup project would also bring the region significantly less international recognition than in the case of a recurring battlegroup. Moreover, the co-operation potential would not be completely used and voices calling for the identification of a follow-up major regional defence co-operation project would not be heard. The four countries would miss the opportunity to fully benefit from the investment-intensive battlegroup venture.

RECURRING VISEGRAD BATTLEGROUP

Much better results would come from a regularly re-assembled battlegroup with a pre-defined structure



LEVELS OF AMBITION

and force generation mechanisms. Such a project would help the Visegrad countries develop the capacity to think and operate at levels unattainable in the national context, and create a more stable environment for long-term planning of joint acquisitions.

Although the repetition of the battlegroup would be easier thanks to the already-built communication links, the contributing countries should not necessarily end up always contributing the same types of troops and leading the same modules. Internal rotation of leading roles in specific capabilities would be necessary to broaden each nation's capability scope. **The individual contributions could vary from one stand-by period to the next, according to national requirements for capability development.**

The possibility of rotating the responsibilities of the framework nation responsibility is also worth exploring in more detail. It is often considered too difficult for smaller countries to handle such a task, as it requires investing a lot of energy, money and human capital. A contribution of about 1,000 troops would be much more than Slovakia, for example, has ever deployed abroad at any given moment. On the other hand, **the framework nation does not necessarily need to provide the largest military component, and its primary role in future versions of the Visegrad battlegroup might be adjusted.** The country could just plan, negotiate and co-ordinate the battlegroup's set-up (possibly with support from Poland which has

both the cadres and the necessary experience). It would make sense for the Visegrad countries to advocate the incorporation of such a possibility into the EU battlegroup concept.

PERMANENT STANDING FORCE

The most advanced level of integration would be represented by a permanently functioning standing force, probably led by Poland, with a permanent headquarters and a dedicated decision-making body. **Permanent structures would be committed on a rotation basis to both the NATO NRF and the EU battlegroup at agreed intervals** (as, for example, the Multinational Land Force of Hungary, Italy and Slovenia recur as an EU battlegroup every five years). Due to the high financial and personnel demands on maintaining a whole unit on rapid reaction stand-by, **the formation could be kept at a much lower level of readiness most of the time.**

This option would produce the best results in terms of increasing interoperability between national forces and modernising them, bringing political benefits for the Visegrad group members, and expanding their clout within the EU and NATO. However, it would require tremendously strong political will and public support to take such a decision as it would put an additional financial burden on the V4 countries and open sensitive questions, such as sovereignty.



ENABLING DEEPER COLLABORATION

By endorsing the idea of forming a common battlegroup for 2016 and identifying the project as a flagship of their collaboration, the Visegrad countries have set their sights on an ambitious project, implicitly committing themselves to building on the achievements developed in this framework.

The idea of building permanent structures on the foundations set by the Visegrad battlegroup enjoys general political support, as it would bring practical benefits for the militaries as well as a major political achievement. However, the will to turn this idea into concrete policies is highly dependent on the results of the current project. **Governments will need to make it a success story, if they are to deepen defence collaboration and form permanent arrangements.**

The DAV4 II Expert Group has collected and systematised insights from dozens of policy-makers, military officers and security experts from across the region to provide the governments with a set of concrete recommendations on how to benefit from their first regional battlegroup and what policies need to be adopted in the near future to make more permanent forms of co-operation possible.

ADDRESSING THE CAPABILITY SHORTFALLS JOINTLY

The negotiations on the Visegrad battlegroup have revealed some capability shortfalls, including medical evacuation, strategic transport and combat helicopters. The contributing countries need to resolve them as a matter of urgency, as they are a condition of the overall success of the project. The ability of respective countries to fully address them individually is limited due to high costs. **The Visegrad countries should use the battlegroup and other regional platforms of co-operation in the future to solve these issues in a way that improves their combined capabilities,** if they are not to face the same problem the next time they have to provide the EU (or NATO) with a battlegroup. Some processes have been already started at the alliance level and some capabilities are about to be developed nationally.

The Hungarians and Poles, who are participating in NATO's Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) project, might, for example, use some flight hours of its Boeing C-17 fleet to provide strategic airlift. All of the V4 countries are also taking part in SALIS, another NATO strategic transport programme, chartering Russian and Ukrainian Antonov An-124 aircraft.

However, those capacities would not be enough to deploy the whole battlegroup. The four countries

could turn to commercial forms of co-operation, although these are not entirely reliable. The flight is never fully guaranteed because the aeroplane might not be available on the spot market or the operator might have technical or administrative problems. Therefore, **negotiations with Ukraine, which possesses the necessary capacities and is showing the political will to provide them, should be initiated.**

Similarly, the region has limited helicopter capacities at its disposal. Most of the Soviet-era machines are at the end of their life-cycles or even beyond; others have already been phased out. The Visegrad countries therefore need to procure new helicopters and Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic have already confirmed their intent to do so. It is unlikely that they would already be able to offer them for the 2016 battlegroup due to the limited time available, but such an acquisition would help the region to provide rotary-wing capability the next time they form a battlegroup.

Taking into account the similarities in the four Visegrad countries' strategic cultures and their will to establish more robust co-operation in the field of defence, **it would make sense to exploit the option of developing these and other necessary capabilities jointly within the regional framework.**

CO-ORDINATING DEFENCE PLANNING PROCESSES

The EU battlegroup concept requires high interoperability of the force's components. Joint procurement is becoming, more than ever before, a politically attractive as well as an economically effective way to acquire compatible top-notch equipment, essential in multinational operations. The Visegrad battlegroup, especially if it is going to recur, demands a common approach to capability development, serving as a seed of more profound co-operation. However, success will not come automatically; **the Visegrad countries first need to work on harmonising their capability development and procurement plans.**

The NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) sees multinational co-operation in developing capabilities as a way to achieve its declared level of ambition. It co-ordinates specialisation at the alliance's level, and it helps build capabilities on the regional level by capability surveys that foster transparency and information-sharing among all member states, allowing them to find complementarities between their capabilities.³

ENABLING DEEPER COLLABORATION

The Visegrad region has even higher aspirations. **Slovakia and the Czech Republic have already set the course by reciprocally attending each other's joint consultations with NATO;** not a standard practice among the allies. **There is no reason why this custom should not be extended to the regional level.** Furthermore, the Visegrad states have shared their capability development and procurement plans with each other, thus proving an exceptional level of trust.

A step further, the permanent exchange of defence planners between the four ministries would be a qualitative breakthrough, a practice pioneered by the Nordic defence co-operation (NORDEFECO). Partners would gain concrete experience of how exactly the partners' national planning processes work and what the planning timelines look like, helping them to identify possibilities for co-operation and shift from observation towards active involvement. As the Nordic example has shown, defence planners posted abroad can be fully engaged in the national planning processes, and not just observing and collecting data.

The Visegrad countries are already exploring the possibilities for common procurement and modernisation programmes. The most promising areas of collaboration include the acquisition of ammunition, armoured vehicles and soldiers' individual equipment and armaments, counter improvised explosive device (IED) capabilities, and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR). However, to fully exploit the region's negotiating and buying power – which is important especially given the financial constraints in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia – **the Visegrad countries need to establish a co-ordinated approach to defence planning** which would allow them to jointly identify collaborative opportunities stemming from their missing capabilities. **The on-going processes should be seized upon to result in the harmonisation of their defence plans** with regards to both aspects – types of equipment to be purchased and acquisition schedules, **and ultimately foster joint acquisitions.**

REMOVING LEGAL BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

The Visegrad countries need to address several legal barriers to regional defence co-operation, especially if they intend to deepen it in the future. Cross-border activities, for example, will require more flexibility in

national decision-making (especially on the mid- and micro-management levels). There are complicated procedures even to send an aeroplane to another V4 country for an air show, not to mention transfers between various locations within the theatre of a real operation where the region's multinational unit would be deployed. In addition, legal barriers mean that equipment used abroad has to be brought back and serviced at home instead of on location.

The four nations should also rethink decision-making so that it is effective within a multilateral framework that sometimes – as in the case of force deployment – demands swiftness and flexibility. **They might establish a Visegrad Defence Co-operation Committee to serve as a (semi)permanent body for co-ordinating and preparing decisions at a below-ministerial level.** Despite the fact that Visegrad has been touted as super-light in bureaucratic terms, a more permanent arrangement for defence matters, involving both civilian and military officers, would make the V4's decision-making, as well as the all-important delivery of longer-term results, more effective.

One significant constraint to creating a more co-ordinated system of planning to allow joint identification and acquisition of missing capabilities is underfinancing. This not only holds back the development of the region's militaries, but also raises concerns about the seriousness of commitment among the partners and creates a danger that co-operation will be terminated due to insufficient resources. If the collaboration is to succeed, the burden needs to be shared fairly, based on the overall military capacity of partners and their genuine capability needs – nothing disrupts co-operation more than free-riding. **Long-term ring-fencing of resources for collaboration projects would help create more pressure on national governments to deliver and solidify trust among the four countries.**

Most of these problems could be solved at the national level, but a multilateral agreement that would address at least the most visible and problematic examples of unnecessary barriers to collaboration would be a more systematic, solid and practical solution.

IMPROVING THE COLLABORATION ENVIRONMENT

In the process of building the battlegroup, the Visegrad countries have established expert groups, creating

³ See our previous publication for more information on this topic: Maintaining Defence Capabilities: European Share by Jan Havránek, Jan Jirěš and Milan Šuplata. March 2013, CEPI, Bratislava. <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/maintaining-defence-capabilities-european-share>

ENABLING DEEPER COLLABORATION



a collaborative and information-sharing environment. The intense communication has already revealed areas where countries would be ready for more permanent co-operation and will continue to result in new ideas on pooling and sharing, combined exercises and training. The battlegroup negotiations have also brought experience which will facilitate the formation of multinational task forces, such as a recurring Visegrad battlegroup, in the future. This practice is too valuable to be terminated in 2016, so **communication channels established for the battlegroup should be sustained on a permanent basis**, possibly at all levels.

A permanent process of keeping and analysing the collaboration know-how and lessons learned should be introduced, as currently happens at the national level when it comes to processing experience from operations. Lessons learned from building and providing the battlegroup – touching upon areas such as common strategic understanding, joint command and control arrangements, or shared doctrine – need to be remembered and kept at hand for the future.

Contributing nations have also introduced co-ordinated operational standards and practices. This experience could be preserved by **regular training, particularly by a sustained contribution of all Visegrad states to NATO live exercises**, which would be yet another Visegrad contribution to the NATO's Connected Forces Initiative.

In order to keep and use all the experience gained in the process of building the battlegroup, **the defence ministries also need to tackle the high fluctuation rates among their staff**. Long-term co-operation cannot be

founded only on strong individuals; it has to be built systematically into personnel management.

To achieve an advanced stage of regional defence co-operation, a rapprochement of strategic perspectives is also imperative. Even though there are significant similarities – more often assumed than explicitly articulated – **the Visegrad countries need to invest more time and energy to develop a common strategic vision in the area of security and defence**. They should start the process by having a deep and frank discussion about their threat perceptions.

Moreover, the battlegroup will only be able to foster capability development if the four countries are able to adopt a common vision of what needs to be developed together. Such a plan would also make it easier for leaders to take decisions on the desirable level of battlegroup-spurred integration.

The EU battlegroup could represent a milestone in the trust-building process that would be indispensable for defence collaboration to blossom. **The battlegroup preparations should foster a complementary vision of the possible scenarios for the use of the joint force** which would bring the region closer to a common strategic vision. Such a catalogue should include the most relevant geography-based deployment scenarios, but would not restrict the use of force only to those situations. The first practical step in developing a common strategic vision would be to commit to a joint briefing for the Political and Security Committee ahead of the battlegroup's stand-by period, which would motivate the four countries to launch an intra-regional discussion.

ENABLING DEEPER COLLABORATION

Consultations have been established between the four countries not only to co-ordinate the preparation of the battlegroup, but also to collaborate at the strategic level, as well. Ministers and policy directors meet regularly before major international gatherings, for instance. Such practices need to be intensified. One way would be to **establish procedures allowing consultations for day-to-day policy formulation**, including between the defence policy sections of the permanent representations to NATO.

Alignment at a more strategic level would also be achieved by **deepening collaboration in military education**. Joint courses with the same curriculum, teachers and literature – at least those for the senior officials – would help the Visegrad countries to build a common military culture. A higher quality of education and more intensive relationship-building would further improve cohesion among the four militaries.

REFORMING THE EU BATTLEGROUP CONCEPT

The battlegroups have the potential to become the EU's most useful and visible military tool, yet they are limited by serious deficiencies that make any deployment too complicated and therefore unlikely. Moreover, countries have been unwilling to fill the roster of future rotations appropriately. The reform of the EU battlegroup concept should, therefore, receive appropriate attention in the Visegrad region.

The Visegrad countries need to co-ordinate their positions on reform and promote them collectively. In the upcoming months, they should put special emphasis on bringing reform on the agenda ahead of the December 2013 European Council devoted to the Union's defence and security dimension.

They should also launch a discussion on:

- Addressing extraordinary deployment costs. To cope with the individual unaffordability of strategic transport, the V4 countries should jointly advocate solidarity measures, such as common funding of battlegroups' deployment through the Athena mechanism at the European level, as well as in NATO bodies concerning the NRF.
- Establishing appropriate co-ordination and planning capacities at the EU level.
- Clarifying the role of framework nations within a battlegroup to motivate rather than dissuade smaller member states from assuming this re-

sponsibility, by giving more flexibility for sharing the burden among contributing nations.

- Augmenting battlegroups with non-combat military and civilian components, which could be used outside the original battlegroup concept contingencies, while mitigating the possible loss of the battlegroup's overall readiness in line with the EU's level of ambition.
- Making it possible to prolong the stand-by period of future battlegroups to one year on a voluntary basis (some countries would need time to prepare for it due to their other commitments).
- Rethinking planned reaction times and types of operations to which battlegroups are suitable, as well as the rules of follow-on force generation. One of the reasons why nations are suspicious about deploying the battlegroups is that it is unclear whether the EU would be able to replace the "first entry" force with a follow-on force so as to avoid the deployed battlegroup being stuck in the theatre of operation.
- Introducing unified certification requirements and processes. At present, each battlegroup looks different – the quality of training and equipment varies from one to another. The most effective solution for the battlegroups would be to adopt the existing relevant NATO certification standards used for the NRF as a universal requirement.
- Improving the quality and relevance of joint exercises (including live exercises) and seeking connectivity with NATO's Connected Forces Initiative.
- Maintaining those co-operation and communication mechanisms that were put in place for the sake of the battlegroups, allowing them to be used repeatedly.

Due to lack of time and consensus among EU member states, it is unlikely that the December European Council would be able to adopt a wholesale reform of the concept. However, the EU should at least adopt a few partial changes that would improve the situation in the short term and task the EEAS and the High Representative to conduct a profound review, identifying the shortcomings of the battlegroup concept and proposing deliverables in the foreseeable future. The Visegrad countries should jointly support and advocate this idea vigorously.

ABOUT

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ABOUT



DAV4 PROJECT

The DAV4 II is a project of the Central European Policy Institute, a think-tank by the Slovak Atlantic Commission, and its Visegrad partners (Polish Institute of International Affairs, Jagello 2000 and International Centre for Democratic Transition), supported by the International Visegrad Fund. It is a follow-up to last year's 'Defence Austerity in the Visegrad Region' (DAV4) project, which has played an important role in boosting defence collaboration among the Visegrad countries. The second DAV4 project aims at analysing possibilities for regional collaboration in two specific areas identified by the original report: collaboration on cyber-defence and common rapid-deployment capabilities. This report elaborates on the latter, focusing on why the region should build permanent structures based on the 2016 battlegroup, what options the governments have and what needs to be done to make their ambitions happen.

CREDITS

The work of the present DAV4 expert group directly follows on from the work of the preceding expert group, which produced its report⁴ in 2012 and which deserves credit for launching the initiative. The group led by Tomáš Valášek included top security and defence minds from the region: Jozef Bátora, Jiří Schneider, Gareth Chapell, Gen. (Ret.) Jiří Šedivý, Attila Demkó, Marcin Terlikowski, Amb. István Gyarmati, Gen. (Ret.) László Tömböl, Jan Jireš, Amb. Rastislav Káčer and Marcin Zaborowski.

Credit belongs to all those who took part in the policy debates and interviews. We are thankful par-

MAKING OF THE REPORT

Throughout 2013, the DAV4 experts carried out research based on interviews with defence and foreign policy professionals and decision-makers, inputs from debates organised by the Central European Policy Institute, and desk research. In the course of the project, two events open to the expert communities were organised, in order to learn, put forward ideas and receive feedback. To launch a broader discussion on the topic among the ministries' professionals, think-tankers and academics, the Visegrad Security Co-operation workshop took place in Bratislava at the end of January 2013. The debate continued on the margins of the GLOBSEC Bratislava Global Security Forum, the leading foreign and security conference in Central Europe, in April 2013. The expert group had the opportunity there to test their ideas and receive all-important feedback from security and defence policy practitioners. Based on their advice and the data already acquired, a draft of the document has been elaborated and vigorously peer-reviewed.

ticularly to those who have worked closely with the members of the group during the research phase or have actively contributed in the peer-review process: Sandra Dobříková, Ken McDonagh, Jaroslav Naď, Martin Sklenár, Brig. Gen. Josef Pokorný, Lt. Col. Norbert Tornyai, Fruzsina Tófalvi. Special thanks go to Amb. Tomáš Valášek, CEPI's president and founding member, for his intellectual leadership and active support.

Photos courtesy of: Government Office of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Defence of Hungary, NATO, SITA Slovak News Agency, Slovak Atlantic Commission.

⁴ DAV4 Full Report: Towards a Deeper Visegrad Defence Partnership by Tomáš Valášek et al. November 2012, CEPI, Bratislava. <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/dav4-full-report-towards-deeper-visegrad-defence-partnership>





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