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**POLICIES
OF THE VISEGRAD
COUNTRIES TOWARDS
CFSP/ESDP**

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Policies of the Visegrad countries towards CFSP/ESDP

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union is dramatically changing its external shape with the enlargement project that is likely to bring in a dozen new countries. Although the candidate states are very diverse, there is a special group of Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).¹⁾ Three of them are already full NATO members. These countries are thus in a special position to contribute towards EU activities in the CFSP/ESDP area and influence its direction. The Visegrad group as a form of sub-regional cooperation shares so far a number of interests. Regional cooperation in security and defence area was fostered during the last stages of preparation for NATO membership and later replicated in efforts to support Slovakia's membership in NATO. Some of their shared interests are temporary and may disappear with the entry of the Visegrad states into the EU, while others will be more permanent and will influence their policy towards ESDP development in years to come.

This paper will look at the origins and broad basis of Visegrad cooperation to assess how stable it may be in the future inside the EU. It will further compare the current policy approaches of individual Visegrad countries towards CFSP/ESDP and assess the concrete contribution made towards ESDP. Further sections will distinguish the common and divergent views of Visegrad countries based on temporary and more permanent interests. The basic scenarios of further development of Visegrad security cooperation inside the EU will be sketched out.

¹⁾The paper will focus on all four Visegrad states, although Slovakia constitutes in security and defence matters a special case. Firstly, it is still not a member of NATO (although it received an invitation to join at the NATO Prague Summit in November 2002) and therefore is not so vocal on many ESDP issues. The three Visegrad NATO countries, as non-EU European Allies, have a much stronger institutional position, together with a more detailed policy vis-à-vis ESDP. Secondly, Slovakia was in 1999–2002 an object of intensive security cooperation for the other Visegrad countries aiming at securing its eventual membership in NATO.

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CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the Cold War several regions and political entities were practically non-existent in the dominant Western discourse and consciousness. Central Europe was no doubt one of them that also serves as the primary example of the revival and political use of this term to end the bipolar division of Europe in minds as well as in deeds. It was returned to the forefront of Western debate by dissidents and intellectuals from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland (Milan Kundera, Czeslaw Milos and Gyorgy Konrad) who wanted not only to resuscitate the old dream of this region's special cultural identity, but also to distinguish it from the East. This attempt was driven mainly by distancing from the Soviet system by recovering some of the past values, ideals, aspirations, solutions and practices and potentially by re-Europeanising it.²⁾ This was therefore declared to be an area of Europe "that is culturally in the West, politically in the East and geographically in the Center of Europe"³⁾

The intellectual debate of the 1980s was suddenly elevated to the new political level by the events of the *annus mirabilis* 1989. It not only marked the collapse of the Soviet Union's domination over the area, which was now finally free to decide its own political development, but also created the opportunity for differentiation within the group known for several decades as Eastern Europe. It was therefore this new meaning that associated Central Europe not so much with geography, but more with political, social and economic transformation and the particular course this took. Central Europe was identified as a successful core of transition countries vis-à-vis less happy countries struggling with the basic reform process (termed Eastern Europe) and vis-à-vis the Balkans as the part of former Eastern Bloc falling into a state of instability, internal conflict and clearly disassociating itself from the European family and the West in general.

Claims towards Central European features were later somewhat diluted by the adoption of the general term Central and Eastern Europe, largely defined as all states covering the area between Germany and Russia. The analytical usefulness of this term was further questioned by the inflation of various Central European regional projects and groupings stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea—Central European Free Trade Area or Central European Initiative being the most obvious. This paper will therefore try to avoid the traps of using Central Europe as a normative term because it is still contested and implies several overlapping political, historical, cultural and geographical meanings.

Instead the main focus will be on the heartland of Central Europe,⁴⁾ the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. These four countries are present in all major concepts of Central Europe and are clearly distinct among the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). They are well advanced in adopting market reforms and establishing liberal democracy as recognized by their accession talks with the European Union. Moreover, three of them are tied into the Western political structures through their membership in NATO and all are members of the OECD. Experience of more than a decade of their regional cooperation based on a free will of sovereign states, stimulated nevertheless from outside, can provide the necessary guidance as far as a real substance of their political proximity and group cohesion is concerned and where limits to this new regional identity lie.

Regional cooperation among the Visegrad countries started for primarily political reasons, focused on their shared preferences for swiftly dismantling the remaining symbolic structures of Soviet domination and a joint approach towards security and stability in the region.⁵⁾ The first informal meeting of senior representatives of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland took place in April 1990 in Bratislava where Czech president Václav Havel raised several issues, including the transformation of military pacts, the creation of a new European security system and a joint policy towards the Western European structures. The official birth of the Visegrad group took place

²⁾ See Bugge, Peter: *The Use of the Middle: Mitteleuropa vs. Střední Evropa*. European Review of History, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 25.

³⁾ Milan Kundera: *The Tragedy of Central Europe. The Kidnapped West*. The New York Review of Books, 26 April 1984.

⁴⁾ Garton Ash, Timothy: *The Uses of Adversity*. Granta Books, Cambridge 1989, p. 271.

⁵⁾ For broader introduction see Hyde-Price, Adrien: *The international politics of East Central Europe*. Manchester University Press, Manchester 1996.

during the joint summit of the three countries at the level of presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers in Budapest on 12–15 February 1991, which culminated in the signature of “The Declaration on the Co-operation of the Republic of Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republics, and the Republic of Poland on the Road to European Integration” at Visegrad castle, using thus the historical symbolism of a place that witnessed in 1335 an agreement between the Kings of Bohemia, Hungary and Poland on a range of regional issues. The three countries declared the goals of “the restoration of each state’s independence, democracy and freedom as well as full integration into the European political, economic, security and legislative order” More importantly, they shared acute interests in quickly dismantling the structures still connected to the Warsaw Pact and Council on Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) as well as negotiating the withdrawal of Soviet troops from their territory. During the year 1991, Visegrad cooperation was quite effective in dissolving both the military structures (1 April 1991) and the political structures (1 July 1991) of the Warsaw Pact, COMECON structures (28 June 1991) and above all the quick withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia and Hungary by mid-1991. Visegrad countries also successfully cooperated in negotiating new bilateral treaties with the Soviet Union and resisted thus inserting clauses forbidding free choice of security arrangements (clearly aimed at preventing their future NATO membership). The focus of the group then moved to the strengthening of economic stability in the region and the broader implications for democratisation in the CEE states. The apex of the first period of Visegrad cooperation was reached at the Prague summit on 6 May 1992. The Summit represented a maximalist vision of political co-operation in the format of Visegrad which was viewed as a source of stabilisation and co-operation in the region based on a “new model of relations”

After that the scope of cooperation between the Visegrad countries began to shrink and moved primarily into the area of economic cooperation, aimed at lifting trade barriers and the gradual creation of the free trade area as seen by the signing of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) on 21 December 1992 in Krakow. This was nevertheless only one manifestation of the negative developments which undermined political dimension of Visegrad cooperation and effectively stalled it for several years. First, Visegrad became a victim of the Czechoslovak Velvet Divorce and domestic politics in the two newly established states, where the political parties in power chose divergent profiles of their foreign and security policies. Also the external forces that unified the Visegrad countries lost much of their power with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new threats connected with the Balkan conflict, an issue on which Visegrad countries lacked consensus and diverged with their assessments. Last but not least, also the prospect of quick membership in the European Union or NATO seemed to be vanishing and policies of individual self-differentiation were adopted across the region.⁶⁾

The first revival of Visegrad cooperation came into being in connection with the NATO enlargement process and especially with the period before the NATO Madrid summit in July 1997 and immediately afterwards.⁷⁾ Three Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) were selected as prime candidates while Slovakia, primarily for political reasons, was dropped out of the group. Intensive cooperation ensued the formal invitation issued at the summit in joint lobbying in NATO member states preparing for national ratification. This was especially apparent in the case of the US Senate. At the same time all three countries engaged in the last rounds of individual intensive accession talks. The trilateral co-operation after the Madrid summit involved various levels, from the Ministers of Defence to their deputies and chiefs of staff, and covered also regular meetings of a number of working groups on military reforms, defence planning, NATO infrastructure programmes, C3I, arms procurement, human resources management, etc.⁸⁾ As new NATO member states, the three countries faced similar problems and proceeded with intensive co-operation even after their actual entry into NATO in March 1999.

The second revival of Visegrad cooperation took place after the domestic change in Slovakia following the elections in September 1998, which allowed the resumption of activities in the original format of the four Visegrad states.⁹⁾ The clear and present shared goal of three Visegrad states was to bring Slovakia as fast as possible towards NATO and EU membership. Renewed regional cooperation was also facilitated by the change of government in Prague, where a new Social Democratic government declared Visegrad cooperation as one of its foreign policy priorities. The clear example of the renewed vigour and ambitions for cooperation among the Visegrad countries was the Visegrad Summit held in Bratislava on 14–15 May 1999. The purpose of the group was to “reflect the efforts

⁶⁾ See sceptical view in Grudzinski, Przemyslaw-van Ham, Peter: *A Critical Approach to European Security. Identity and Institutions*. Pinter, London 1999, especially pp. 45–96.

⁷⁾ For further details see Handl, Vladimír: *Visegrad—Chances for Recovery?* In Dangerfield, Martin-Goryumov, Vladislav (eds.): *Subregional Dimensions of European Union Enlargement*. University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton 2001, pp. 7–23.

⁸⁾ See Novotný, Jaromír: *Spolupráce visegrádských zemí ve vojenské oblasti*. *Mezinárodní politika*, 4/1999, p. 9.

⁹⁾ See Lukáč, Pavol: *Visegrad Co-operation—Ideas, Developments and Prospects*. Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 6–23.

of the countries of the Central European region in working together in a number of fields of common interest within the context of pan-European integration”¹⁰⁾ The four states expressed their will to speak with one voice vis-à-vis the EU.¹¹⁾ Indeed, from 1999 the group issued a number of common statements which focused mostly on sectoral co-operation, security and EU-enlargement issues.¹²⁾

While Visegrad is only one of several patterns of sub-regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe,¹³⁾ it has certain advantages which other groupings and processes lack. The proven record of joint foreign and security policy actions in the early 1990s is not the only one. Visegrad is based on a rather compact group of countries and this size is manageable in comparison to the Central European Initiative (CEI) which now encompasses 16 states from Austria and Italy to Albania, Macedonia and Moldova. Although CEI is a useful political forum for dialogue and promotes practical cooperation through a number of working groups in social, economic and justice areas, it cannot be seen as a likely core group in the foreign and security policy area. Diverse membership, interests and limited resources cast doubt on the prospect of a high CEI profile in CFSP/ESDP for the foreseeable future.¹⁴⁾

The other potential structure which has been active in the CEE region is the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) and in the mid-1990s it was the only vital structure to be found. Unlike Visegrad cooperation it is limited primarily to sectoral cooperation in establishing a free trade zone through liberalising first industrial trade and later also agricultural trade among participating states. This process attracted the interest of other CEE states, which applied for CEFTA membership as they perceived its benefits in accession talks with the EU.¹⁵⁾ There is, however, no political role that CEFTA can play in the foreign and security policy area. Moreover, once the first group of CEE countries joins the EU they will have to formally leave CEFTA, which will remain as a waiting room and practicing field for the less lucky CEE states. That is, in a way, quite natural, since CEFTA was never perceived by its member states as a real alternative to full EU or NATO membership.¹⁶⁾

Visegrad cooperation is thus, since its revitalization after 1998, a regional cooperation process broad enough to have an impact on the foreign and security policy behaviour of the four constituent countries and at the same time is compatible in its structures and procedures with full EU membership. As a loose regional grouping without complicated formal structures it resembles Benelux caucus inside the EU. Later we will look into the incentives the Visegrad states might have to keep this grouping alive and the mechanisms that may enhance this practice of regional cooperation in the forthcoming months prior to their full accession to the EU.

The position of Visegrad countries as prime EU candidate states from CEE in the CFSP/ESDP area before EU enlargement presents us nevertheless with several problems.

They are in a dual position of the subject and object of CFSP, primarily due to the fact that enlargement of the EU is seen as a major CFSP project contributing towards the greater stability and prosperity of Europe as a whole. In this crucial CFSP project they are therefore necessarily split internally. However, their support is in some cases deemed politically valuable in international forums like the United Nations to align with the EU position and give it thus greater influence. At the same time the view of candidate states is not seen as unproblematic and is therefore requested mainly on non-controversial issues which do not affect these states directly. On the issues where they might have strong views and feel their interests directly affected, eg. policy towards the Balkans or Eastern Europe, the EU tries to avoid overly close contact. Also the relatively short history of the active use of various

¹⁰⁾ Visegrad group and its history, www.visegradgroup.org/group.htm.

¹¹⁾ Glauber, Ulrich: *Vier von Visegrad ziehen wieder an einem Strang. Polen, Tschechien, Slowakei und Ungarn planen gemeinsame Projekte. Ziel ist EU-Beitritt.* Frankfurter Rundschau 15. 5. 1999.

¹²⁾ See www.visegradgroup.org/statements.htm; for more details cf. Fawn, Rick: *The Elusive Defined? Visegrad Co-operation as the Contemporary Contours of Central Europe.* In Dawson, Andrew H.—Fawn, Rick (eds.): *The Changing Geopolitics of eastern Europe.* Frank Cass, London 2002, pp. 47–68.

¹³⁾ For the comprehensive overview of other existing structures of subregional cooperation see Cottey, Andrew: (ed.): *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe. Building Security, Prosperity and Solidarity from Barents to the Black Sea.* Palgrave, Basingstoke 1999. Other informal initiatives like regular informal meetings of the Central European presidents (including sometimes also their German, Austrian and Slovenian counterparts) exist in parallel form, but do not have the same degree of influence.

¹⁴⁾ Cottey, Andrew: *Europe's New Subregionalism.* The Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June 2000), pp. 31–33.

¹⁵⁾ Slovenia joined in 1996, Romania in 1997 and Bulgaria in 1999, Lithuania hopes to complete accession soon. All of them saw not just economic, but also psychological and political benefits by successfully claiming to belong to the “Central European” structure. For explicit comments on this rationale for Lithuanian membership application see at www.cefta.org/cefta/invite.htm.

¹⁶⁾ Cottey, Andrew: *Europe's New Subregionalism, op. cit.*, pp. 30–31; *The Role of CEFTA in the Process of EU Enlargement.* IIR, Prague 1999, esp. Paper by Martin Dangerfield.

CFSP tools, including common strategies, makes it hard to determine whether Visegrad states and other EU candidate states are generally acting consistently with the objectives and policies set within the CFSP.¹⁷⁾

There are also natural limits of the influence the candidate countries have on CFSP and ESDP matters. It is still mostly a one-way process, with the EU on the producing end and the candidate countries on the receiving end, with limited scope for interaction, even less for influencing the EU. Only very few topics are chosen as suitable for greater involvement by these countries, given their specific expertise—most notably their views on EU policy vis-à-vis the Ukraine and Belarus and, to certain extent, on Balkan issues.

EU enlargement into the CEE will differ from all the previous enlargements in many ways. In the area of our interest (CFSP/ESDP) we can only partially use the example of the 1995 enlargement. Unlike in case of Finland, Sweden and Austria there is practically no period to compare the international behaviour of the Visegrad countries towards the EU policies that would be politically and methodologically neutral—like for the three non-aligned countries the long period before they applied for EC/EU membership or early 1990s before the existence of CFSP proper. Almost immediately after the CEE countries regained their full sovereignty in the wake of the 1989 events, they declared their desire to join the EC and wanted to demonstrate their independence from the Soviet Union by political solidarity with the West, as in the case of the Gulf War. The motivation behind these policies was therefore in the early 1990s strongly symbolic and political in its nature, rather than based on calculations of national interest by those countries.

Unlike in the case of the previous enlargement, this time the EU will admit the Visegrad states as new members with a foreign and security policy profile greatly affected by their recent NATO membership. The value these countries attach to their membership in Euro-Atlantic structures is substantial in security, political and symbolic terms. More importantly, at least for the immediate future, their pro-Atlantic orientation is to a substantial degree also a pro-American position, since the US got most of the credit for bringing about NATO enlargement. Therefore the political and emotional stamp over the new status of these countries belonging to the West is connected primarily with NATO.¹⁸⁾

Despite all the above limitations and caveats it is nevertheless possible to look at the current policies of the Visegrad countries towards ESDP and in a broader sense also CFSP. Primarily the following sections of the paper will concentrate on the three Visegrad NATO members as they have at least some leverage at their disposal and an institutional position somewhat stronger than the rest of the CEE candidate states, including Slovakia. Given the prominent place of ESDP debates within the Alliance and the EU over the past years they were also influenced in developing their own points of view, amounting to limited political debate on the nature, priorities and possible limits of ESDP process. These features are almost non-existent in other CEE countries and therefore they may be expected to join the debate only relatively late.

¹⁷⁾ For discussion on general relations of EU candidate states in CFSP area see Dunay, Pál: *Boxes: Why CFSP and CESDP Do Not Matter Much to EU Candidate States*. RSCAS Policy Paper 01/5. European University Institute, Florence 2001.

¹⁸⁾ For detailed study of Visegrad countries profile in security policy, pro-NATO or pro-US orientation cf. Šťastný, Marek (ed.): *Visegrad Countries in an Enlarged Trans-Atlantic Community*. Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava 2002; Šedivý, Jiří—Dunay, Pál—Saryusz-Wolski, Jacek. In Missiroli, Antonio (ed.): *Enlargement and European defence after 11 September*. Chaillot Paper no. 53, Paris, EU ISS June 2002.

CURRENT POLICIES AND APPROACHES OF VISEGRAD COUNTRIES TOWARDS CFSP/ESDP

When assessing the policies of Visegrad states towards ESDP we should look not just at the development of their approaches and policy preferences, but also at the time frame used as their reference. The current policies of the Visegrad Three towards ESDP are relevant especially for the period of their gradual integration into the EU before their official entry expected by mid-2004. After this stage is completed the ESDP should be operational as determined in the December 1999 Helsinki European Council decision on the European Headline Goal, and as confirmed by the recent breakthrough in EU-NATO relations. By that time the strategic position of the Visegrad countries—which are all, after Copenhagen December 2002 EU summit, among the first group of invitees and future new EU members—will change. They will have established a clear sense of EU membership, including a new balance of rights and responsibilities. They will also have a chance of greater participation in regular EU work (including in the CFSP/ESDP area), without having the right to vote or block decisions—similar thus to NATO treatment of the Visegrad states in 1998 after the conclusion of accession talks but before their formal accession on 13 March 1999. Policies pursued by the Visegrad countries over the past three years are therefore only a partial indication that can be used also for longer term profile of these countries within CFSP/ESDP area.

A few points should set a general picture of their attitude towards ESDP. All three Visegrad states were taken by surprise by the rapid development of ESDP into a major issue on the EU agenda during the year 1999. They were not only digesting their first experience of full NATO membership but also struggling at the same time with the side-effects of the Kosovo air campaign that challenged official security policy discourse in these countries. The emergence of ESDP in many ways complicated their original expectations about a clear division of roles between EU and NATO in foreign, security and defence policy areas. The simple model of non-competitive cooperation between them and the gradual merging of the WEU into the EU while serving as a bridge towards NATO was seen as a development that was in no major way changing their strategic position. Being aware of their rather weak position in the entire framework of the Euro-Atlantic debate on ESDP, they understandably focused primarily on the issue of participation for non-EU European Allies inside ESDP and the role of the Alliance in general.¹⁹⁾

A second general point relates to the sources of policies in this area as they can be identified within the Visegrad countries. Policies and attitudes towards CFSP/ESDP are primarily shaped by the two ministries most intimately involved in these issues (MFA, MoD) and from time to time also by the prime ministers or presidents of these countries. The involvement of parliaments, or political parties in general, and indeed of the general public, is still rather limited. Depth of the debate on CFSP/ESDP issues is thus rather shallow and concerns mostly the acute questions of the current position of these countries, not necessarily the future prospects of EU membership. Therefore there is a problem for comparative analysis with some EU member states where similar debate is well advanced and structured on many levels of state and society. This picture is nevertheless gradually changing with the intensification of general EU debate in Visegrad countries. It is partially following the deliberations of the European Convention on the Future of the EU (including debate in its working groups on External relations and Defence), but it is mainly connected with the final stages of the accession talks and the immediately preceding ratification in the national parliaments of current states and by referenda in candidate states (in the case of the four Visegrad states they were held in sequence from mid-April to mid-June 2003).

POLAND²⁰⁾

Polish views on ESDP are largely determined by its position as a new NATO member, looking primarily at the potential risks that ESDP might bring to transatlantic relations and affect thus negatively Polish security. Poland

¹⁹⁾ This general point is well documented in individual chapters on Visegrad states in Missiroli, Antonio (ed.): *Bigger EU, wider CFSP, stronger ESDP? The view from Central Europe*. EU ISS Occasional Paper No. 34, Paris, EU ISS April 2002.

²⁰⁾ Key background texts for the Polish position on ESDP are the Polish chapter by Trzaskowski, Rafael in Missiroli, Antonio (ed.): *Bigger EU, wider CFSP, stronger ESDP?, op. cit.*, pp. 19–25, and Osica, Olaf: *Common European Security and Defence Policy (CESDP) as Seen by Poland*. CSM Report&Analysis 5/01, Center for International Relations, Warsaw 2001.

was initially rather sceptical about the idea of ESDP as such, following a rather narrow interpretation of ESDP efforts as connected primarily with NATO and not as a separate effort of Europeans under the EU aegis. Although its position gradually developed on from a strict interpretation of the Washington summit declaration on ESDI/ESDP, it kept a fairly stable profile in the focusing on transfer of the WEU acquis to the new EU structures, especially in the sections relevant to the position of WEU associate members (non-discrimination aspect, participation but without blocking power). A second recurrent theme was connected with an emphasis on cohesion and harmonisation between EU and NATO. This principle should have been kept as much as possible, especially in operational planning and defense planning in general. Given the geostrategic position of Poland, much of the Turkish argument got a sympathetic ear there when alluding to the close connection of potential EU operations with NATO, invoking its article V obligations in the case that situation on the ground in the course of EU-led operation rapidly deteriorates.

A strong Polish presence and outside pressure on ESDP debates was marked by successive speeches from the foreign minister, Bartoszewski, and defence minister, Komorowski, as well as with the submission of several non-papers on key issues of participation of six non-EU European Allies in ESDP structures and operations. This activity was felt in certain European capitals to be at several points controversial. It was also somewhat disturbing that not all Polish initiatives were concerted in the Visegrad Three format (as a part of NEEA group). The Polish position, shadowing in many issues US policy, even led to French criticism of Poland as a “Trojan horse of US policy in Europe” Taking the rhetoric of heated moments aside, it is quite important to see the roots of very strongly pro-American and in general pro-Atlantic views in Poland. It is not just the influence of a significant group of Americans with Polish origin who lobbied successfully for NATO enlargement, but also a conscious policy of creating the image of Poland as America’s faithful ally in Europe. This policy should secure a Polish place in US security strategy and provide Poland with deeply needed security guarantees. The Polish position was further highlighted after the stopover by US president G. Bush during his first European tour in 2001 and Polish combat participation in operation Iraqi Freedom. This special Polish consideration is reflected in the assessment whether ESDP strengthens transatlantic ties or undermines them, especially whether it binds the US more in Europe.

Although Poland welcomed the progress reached during the 2000 Portuguese EU presidency in completing the proposal on EU relations with third countries (including the six NEEA) and especially establishing four ad hoc working groups for setting EU-NATO arrangements in key areas, it remained cautious about the details. In some sensitive debates concerning permanent EU-NATO arrangements and EU operational planning options dealing with the details of access towards NATO assets, its profile was quite similar to Turkey, especially on the military side. Pressure for regular cooperation, not just dialogue and consultation, which was felt to be a rather weak instrument restricting possibilities for the NEEA, was thus kept throughout the negotiations. A need for clarity on the part of the EU in developing the structures and mechanisms of ESDP was stressed by Polish policy before and even after the 2000 Nice European Council. Poland was nevertheless aware that it cannot resemble Turkey too much in its negative policy of blocking the evolving EU-NATO arrangements by keeping everything based on a ‘case-by-case’ basis until the Turkish concerns about participation in ESDP are met. A final offer made by the EU in Nice was therefore accepted in principle by the five NEEA (except Turkey), including Poland. By summer 2001 this act of distancing from Turkey’s isolated position was made explicit.²¹⁾

While still cautious about the details and actual course of development of ESDP, the other strand of Polish arguments is no less important. Viewed from the perspective of Polish overall security, it is understandable why Poland is so sensitive about the real value ESDP can deliver. As long as the EU cannot add anything significant to Polish security by creating new institutions and mechanisms only half-open to Poland, there is going to be an ambivalent attitude towards it at best. Comparison with functioning NATO structures and a real sense of security guarantees, backed in the last resort by US military power, is quite influential. Polish arguments therefore often stress a fear of empty structures that will not work, of diverting scarce resources and finally of competing structures between EU and NATO which may block each other. Given the recent experience with approaching the EU, candidate states in general, and the three Visegrad states as members of NEEA group in particular, it does not alleviate these fears. Especially after the experience of the French EU presidency in the second half of 2000, questions about the real long-term motivations of certain European countries in the ESDP process (France above all) were in Poland quite widespread. From this perspective it is therefore necessary to push for as many checks and balances inside the ESDP structures. Strong opposition to the principle of enhanced cooperation being applied also to the field of military cooperation inside the EU was understandable. From the opposite direction, the potential influence of Russia in ESDP was also felt more nervously than in many EU member states.

²¹⁾ See the remarks by Polish Defence Minister Bronislaw Komorowski after meeting in 15+15 format on 14 May 2001. *Polska zbrojna*, 20 May 2001.

Much of the Polish political debate on CFSP/ESDP topics which is occasionally carried out in the Polish parliament or Polish press is mainly about the dangers of ESDP developments. Nevertheless it can have more to do with emotions than reality. ESDP is perceived in the majority of political scene as a concept that politically and militarily competes with NATO and brings therefore potentially more risks than advantages for Poland. The focus of the Polish security debate is still primarily on NATO as an organization providing the main security guarantees and dealing with the collective defence of its members' territory. The preoccupation of Polish debate with its position on NATO's eastern border thus focuses primarily on activities connected with Article V and less on crisis management of non-Article V missions. This perception extends also to the EU and ESDP which, in contrast to NATO, is seen as an unproven structure in these operations.

Polish diplomats face difficult task of softening the image of Poland and its attitude towards ESDP and the broader ambitions of the EU in the CFSP area. One practical example can be seen in references made in a new Polish security strategy adopted in January 2000.²²⁾ Although the overall tone tends to be more conciliatory, balancing the role of NATO and the EU as two important parts of long-term Polish security, proportions and details of the text are quite revealing about the tensions. The EU is on the one hand seen as a second pillar of Polish security strategy, but the rest of the text cannot hide the clear priority attached to the role of NATO. A certain division of roles is therefore still adhered to where preference is given for the EU to concentrate on a stabilising role in Europe primarily through enlargement. As in the general Polish debate, a sympathetic ear for the role of Europe acting as a "world power" in various crises around the world is hard to find. No development of opportunities connected with CFSP and ESDP as its new tool (both in the military and non-military dimension) is envisaged for the time being or developed for future Polish foreign and security policy, although Poland is keen to influence or even shape the policy of an enlarged EU vis-à-vis its new eastern neighbours (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Russia).

CZECH REPUBLIC²³⁾

General Czech policy conduct vis-à-vis ESDP has been so far primarily based on a balancing approach between the aspirations of an EU candidate state and a current NATO member. Although there is rational interest in keeping the US engaged in Europe, thus balancing major European powers, the pro-US lobby profile is not as strong in the Czech Republic as in Poland. There is a great deal of understanding for European frustration with US "arrogance" during the Kosovo air campaign, reflecting partially also the deep split among the Czech public on this issue. Czech policy has also been welcoming towards both the military and non-military dimension of ESDP as providing more options for crisis management operations and filling the gap of conflict prevention or post-conflict reconstruction tools with police units. It also perceives this strong emphasis on the non-military dimension of ESDP as more natural for the EU than for NATO and partially preventing strong competition between the two organizations.

The Czech Republic has so far stressed its position as a NATO member, which forms naturally the basis for its current policy preferences. The Czech approach therefore finds primarily an interest in strengthening the Alliance through ESDP by providing better European capabilities for crisis management. At the same time on the institutional level it prefers close relations between the EU and NATO based on non-competitive structures and open and transparent process as shared priorities of all three Visegrad NATO members. Although Czech diplomats and policy-makers were not particularly happy about all parts of the deal offered by the EU in Nice in December 2000 as far as the mechanism for relations between EU and third countries goes, including special arrangements for relations with the six NEEA, they were ready to give the EU a chance to develop a positive experience with it. The mechanisms are viewed as flexible enough and giving opportunities to exploit various channels and instruments offered. Finally, there was an acceptance of the primarily informal character of influence the NEEA will have on the decision-making of the EU-15 in the ESDP area.

The Czech government was seeking flexible solutions for its participation in ESDP, stressing the positive contributions it can make. Various suggestions regarding how to influence the EU's development of ESDP in a pragmatic way were largely shared with Norway, who is institutionally in a worse situation as a EU non-candidate state. Practical steps taken for example during declarations of contributions towards EHG at the second day of the Ca-

²²⁾ See – www.mon.gov.pl/bezpieczenstwo/1-1-1.html.

²³⁾ Key background texts for the Czech position on ESDP are the Czech chapter by Khol, Radek in Missiroli, Antonio (ed.): *Bigger EU, wider CFSP, stronger ESDP?*, op. cit., pp. 26–30; and Handl, Vladimír—Khol, Radek: *Czech Attitudes Towards the ESDP*. In Ehrhart, Hans-Georg (Hrsg.): *Die Europäische Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik. Positionen, Perzeptionen, Probleme, Perspektiven*. Nomos, Baden-Baden 2002.

pabilities Commitment Conference in November 2000 were very much similar to most of other NEEA countries. The double-hatting principle of assigning units both to the EU and NATO reflected practical possibilities of the country, while priority was clearly given to its use for operations either NATO-led or using NATO assets and therefore giving all NEEA much greater influence in their actual conduct. The current phase of preparations of Czech major strategic documents (like *Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic* or *Security Strategy of the Czech Republic*) makes enough room for implementing the envisaged EU commitments in long-term defence planning. This perspective of more commitments and roles expected from the Czech armed forces was also one consideration in the recent decision to prepare a full professionalisation of the Czech military for the second half of this decade. Also the Czech geostrategic position, which is less exposed than that of its Northern neighbour, contributes towards a more open approach towards non-article V missions and crisis management in general. Current development inside the EU in the security and defence area should also be less alarming for Czech policy-makers as this development was suggested in several expert studies from the mid-1990s onwards, even though the fast pace was less accurately predicted.

Differences of views or emphasis are therefore primarily found between the Czech Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The MoD is traditionally more oriented towards NATO, given that it is a better known structure with a proven military record, a stable institutional platform for safeguarding Czech security interests and establishing full participation rights. The MoD is also lukewarm about ESDP commitments because of the awareness of the demanding tasks connected with meeting Target Force Goals in the NATO framework which are still perceived as the overall priority. The MFA on the other hand tends to be more sensitive to the Czech position as a EU candidate state. Fortunately, the position of the Czech MoD has never got too close to the rather dogmatic Turkish position. Czech policy over the past three years has made use of several channels for influencing EU debates and decisions—not just the institutional basis of NATO in talks using a NATO-EU format, but also through joint initiative of the Visegrad Three and the UK from February 2000 and bilateral talks with Germany, France and the US. British influence over the Czech perception of ESDP has perhaps so far been the strongest

The general view in the Czech Republic towards the newly developed ESDP has been fairly positive across the political spectrum, as a significant majority of Czech political parties view it as a natural stage in further developing of European integration and as the next stage in strengthening the CFSP. The Social democrats, who led previous minority government and after 2002 elections are the strongest party in a new coalition government, are especially positive on CFSP/ESDP ambitions of the EU. This position is not surprising given their foreign policy preferences during the 1990s and the fact that ESDP was brought about by left-wing governments in the EU. The general idea of a stronger external and security profile is shared also by two smaller coalition partners, the Christian Democrats and the Freedom Union. The other party which keeps a high profile on the issue is much more negative. The ODS is not only the bastion of self-proclaimed Euro-scepticism in the Czech Republic, but in security policy it currently holds a strongly pro-US and Atlanticist stance (not always shared in foreign policy issues by its former chairman and current Czech president Václav Klaus). Some fairly sceptical and at times even alarmist arguments are therefore presented from this direction, even though some of the arguments clearly shadow attacks on ESDP from US and UK Republican/Conservative politicians and refer mostly to the situation in 1999 or early 2000. Internal political division thus cannot be ruled out absolutely if a change in government occurs, resulting in a shift of policy emphasis. The more likely scenario however is that any coalition partner will have a moderating effect on the ODS.

With few exceptions, however, no significant public debate has yet been held on the issue of CFSP/ESDP developments and especially on the future implications of these for the Czech Republic as a prospective EU member. Indeed, public and media debate is quite limited in most foreign and security policy issues.²⁴⁾ There is at least a first attempt to present wide range of European views on ESDP through a series of lectures by high profile foreign experts.²⁵⁾ Czech security policy experts were also introduced to the topic through involvement in the Venusberg Group conference in November 2000. The Czech side was also instrumental in bringing about the regular discussions on ESDP matters in the format of the six NEEA countries which started in spring 2000.

An updated version of Czech security strategy, approved in January 2001, already contains important references to ESDP developments as well as more detailed accounts in the Annual Report on the Czech Foreign Policy. The general tone of these comments is either positive or neutral, describing primarily the development of EU policy in the ESDP area, including relations with third countries. There is an explicit statement of satisfaction with the arrangement offered in Nice for the six NEEA, although temporary weakening of the Czech position in comparison

²⁴⁾ Czech public debate on ESDP issues is analyzed in Khol, Radek: *Bílá místa v české debatě o evropské bezpečnosti*. Mezinárodní vztahy 2/2002, pp. 67–80.

²⁵⁾ Grant, Charles; Heisbourg, Francois; Janning, Josef; Bertram, Christopher in the period 2001–2002.

to the previous one in the WEU is acknowledged. Overall, Czech policy can be described therefore as seeking no big or controversial profile, hoping to be able to conform to NATO policy until becoming a full EU member. The participation issue is thus perceived rather as a temporary, yet important, concern and the Czech position is open for further deliberation of the further alternatives available after joining the EU.

HUNGARY²⁶⁾

Hungary could be regarded as initially the most pro-EU oriented within the entire group of six NEEA. This was partially revealed by enigmatic expressions from its non-paper on ESDP prepared in November 1999. Hungary is above all interested in an effective European crisis management mechanism. It therefore hopes that the EU will improve it, especially in the Balkans as conflict region neighbouring on Hungary. In this respect there is an important role of non-military dimension of crisis management operations for which the EU is better suited. At the same time Hungary also supports strengthening of the Atlantic Alliance through ESDP and does not wish to see it undermined.²⁷⁾ It seeks respect for an autonomy of the EU while reinforcing trans-Atlantic cooperation. Hungary was therefore the first Visegrad state to accept the need for parallel planning and review processes in both the EU and NATO, based on necessary transparency but essentially ensuring the autonomy of both organizations.²⁸⁾

Hungary also stresses the argument that the EU should cooperate with the candidate countries, because they are closer to the flashpoints of European security. Hungarian analysts also anticipated cooperation based on changing coalitions after entry into the EU while Hungary should try to keep support for the region and Visegrad cooperation especially.

Hungarian policy towards the EU followed in several instances pattern of accepting a weaker position in exchange for quick accession process. It was, for example, the first Visegrad country to accept a special transition period for the free movement of people during EU accession talks. In the security policy field Hungary was in fact already adopting the position of an EU member state. It is however unclear whether any special benefit for Hungary could be repeated in the CFSP/ESDP area. Its soft and flexible position towards the EU could also reflect the weak situation of Hungary in the concrete crisis management resources it can bring to bear in the non-military and especially the military area. The pace of its military reform is evaluated as the slowest out of all the Visegrad countries invited in 1999 to join NATO and produces a number of outstanding practical problems. Limited aspirations and low level of commitments to the EU's EHG catalogue of forces could be thus offset only through strong political support for EU actions. Weak position however also supports policy aimed at preventing a situation where it would have to choose sides between the EU or the US in NATO or between the individual great European powers.

SLOVAKIA²⁹⁾

Slovakia is a relative newcomer in several aspects. In the Visegrad context it has been severely handicapped by falling out of the first round of NATO enlargement. Its policy on CFSP/ESDP matters was therefore influenced by its candidate position vis-à-vis both NATO and EU. It did not share with the other three Visegrad countries main operational platform of NEEA within the Alliance. As a result it had to choose a cautious approach so as not to alienate either organization. Most of the practical steps taken in the security policy area were much more clearly driven by the prospect of joining NATO and guided through the elaborate Membership Action Plan. ESDP ambitions are from this point of view secondary and any substantial contribution towards the EU's crisis management assets and capabilities could take place only at the expense of NATO. For Slovakia, as smallest of all the Visegrad states, ESDP can be thus beneficially approached via bilateral and multilateral cooperation with its neighbours.

THE EU RESPONSE—THE STATE OF PLAY AFTER NICE (BRUSSELS COMPROMISE)

The EU did not at the start see participation of NEEA in ESDP as an important part of the new project. Only after vocal protests from states concerned with the weakening of their institutional position following the demise of the WEU, and thus also their status as WEU associate members, and through threats of blocking the agreement for EU-NATO permanent solutions did the EU start to work on it. Its first offer was presented in Feira in June 2000 and final compromise worked out at the EU summit in Nice in December 2000. The solution from the EU side cov-

²⁶⁾ Key background texts for the Hungarian position on ESDP is the Hungarian chapter by Rózsa, Erzsébet Nagyne in Missiroli, Antonio (ed.): *Bigger EU, wider CFSP, stronger ESDP?*, op. cit., pp. 36–41.

²⁷⁾ Lecture by J. Herman, state secretary MFA, March 2000.

²⁸⁾ Article by G. Varga, senior analyst at Hungarian MFA. *Střední Evropa*, No. 104–105, pp. 128–141.

²⁹⁾ The key background text for the Slovak position on ESDP is Slovak chapter by Bilčík, Vladimír in Missiroli, Antonio (ed.): *Bigger EU, wider CFSP, stronger ESDP?*, op. cit., pp. 31–35.

ered both the political and military dimension, regular contacts and special arrangements for operational planning. The final document on EU relations with third countries was presented as an appendix of the ESDP presidency document adopted at the EU Nice summit and included:

- regular information and exchange of views in non-crisis period at different levels, a minimum of two meetings per presidency (including one ministerial);
- liaison officers to the PSC and EUMS, expert meetings for the military side as well;
- an enhanced mechanism for consultations during crisis period, pre-operational period for identifying potential contributors and informing them on the EU's intentions and military options (if NATO assets use is envisaged special attention will be paid to NEEA);
- operational period once the Council has chosen the strategic option, choice of participation and its nature (the mechanism depending on the use of NATO assets—if NATO assets are used, NEEA will choose if they want participate;—if NATO assets are not used, the EU may invite them) also two operational planning mechanisms envisaged (with NATO assets through NATO planning bodies; without NATO assets through European strategic level HQs);
- description of the Committee of Contributors, condition of significant military forces committed to the operation for NEEA to participate at CoC, its work (opinions, recommendations, discussion) and limitations (especially the fact that a final decision on strategic direction and political control will rest with the PSC), influence but not direct control; everything outside exclusive responsibilities of Operational Commander.³⁰⁾

The three years of its existence showed the rather narrow limits of the entire framework—15+15 with its subset 15+6—and their usefulness as practical channels for meaningful dialogue with the EU on security issues. Most of the members of NEEA group, including the Visegrad states, were disappointed with the format and the content of the information exchanges, which were often conducted as one-sided briefings carried by low-level officials on behalf of the EU presidency. Continuation of this practice shifted more hope to the envisaged dialogue at the level of direct EU-NATO talks, where joint sessions of the NAC and PSC could provide a better solution. It is still unknown whether military level of regular consultations will be more promising. The actual practice of EU-NEEA contacts thus goes contrary to the formal arrangements. Although the EU should be in CFSP/ESDP matters open for initiatives and special expert meetings when requested by the NEEA, it has so far not been enthusiastic about this. One negative example would be the EU refusal to conduct special consultations in the 15+6 format about Macedonia in the wake of the unfolding crisis there in mid-2001. The approach of the EU towards the NEEA or candidate states in general has so far depended mainly on the outlook and policy preferences of individual EU presidencies. The Swedish presidency was thus quite open and transparent in comparison to the previous French one. For understandable reasons, after Turkey refused arrangements from Nice and decided to block the further progress of EU-NATO relations, including the participation of NEEA, priority within ESDP development was given to other issues.

Persistent Turkish objections to the EU offer from Nice on the modalities of NEEA participation in ESDP structures, policies and operations was responsible for preventing the conclusion of the NATO-EU framework throughout the entire year 2001. Even the compromise “Istanbul document” from early December 2001, carefully drafted by British diplomats and supported by the US, did not persuade Turkish authorities, especially its top military leaders. Compromise was refused only a few days later by Greece on the EU side and negotiations affecting all six NEEA thus started anew.³¹⁾

Although Visegrad countries are less dependent on the final resolution of the participation issue for approval of the EU-NATO framework agreement as presented by the EU in Nice, they could still benefit from improving the EU offer for the interim period prior to their full membership in the EU. Almost a full year was needed to overcome the disappointment from December 2001 before the EU presented an improved document on the implementation of the Nice provisions on NEEA participation in ESDP in Brussels in October 2002. The Brussels document made eventually only a number of specific moves of reassurance towards Turkey (without naming it) to alleviate fears that ESDP might be used against its security interests. Although most of these concerns were not shared by the Visegrad countries they also benefited from improved frequency of peace-time consultations, a guarantee of regular contacts through interlocutors with the PSC and EUMC, a better defined circulation of documents prior to the meetings in the 15+6 format and also of their follow-ups. The NEEA also gained an important en-

³⁰⁾ For full text of EU document see *From St-Malo to Nice. European defence: core documents*. Chaillot Paper No. 47, WEU ISS, Paris, May 2001, pp. 199–203.

³¹⁾ For detailed account see Missiroli, Antonio: *EU-NATO Cooperation in Crisis Management: No Turkish Delight for ESDP*. Security Dialogue, Vol. 33, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 9–26.

hancement of their involvement in the preparation and planning of an EU-led operation before the EU decision on a military option and Concept of Operations. The main forum of practical participation in management of the EU-led operation will be entrusted to the Committee of Contributors, although the final say in issues of political control and strategic direction of the operation will rest with a PSC.³²⁾ Most of these improvements were welcomed by the three Visegrad NATO states and the entire document helped to prepare the ground for a significant breakthrough in NATO-EU relations in mid-December 2002.³³⁾

³²⁾ Full text of the document was issued as *ESDP: Implementation of the Nice Provisions on the Involvement of the Non-EU European Allies*. Annex II of the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, 24 and 25 October 2002, Brussels, europa.eu.int/abc/doc/off/bull/en/200210/i1015.htm.

³³⁾ See *EU-NATO Declaration on ESDP*, NAC Press Release (2002) 142, 16 December 2002 following joint NAC/PSC meeting.

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN VISEGRAD POLICIES TOWARDS CESDP

The Visegrad states share certain views on European security that influence the security agenda they are specifically interested in. Essentially they support the Western European mainstream as recently manifested during the formulation of NATO's Strategic Concept. This is by far the strongest institutional experience that provides especially for three Visegrad member states major guidelines for their core strategic documents and official security policy. Beyond this basic consensus with the current EU/NATO states there are, however, two additional issues high on the security agenda of the Visegrad states.³⁴⁾

The first puts strong emphasis on keeping Article V missions and thus collective defence at the core of their interest in security institutions. These military tasks may look less probable and relevant to many Western European states, but for the Visegrad states they still represent a basic safeguard. They view viable collective defence as necessary both for political and security reasons.

The second feature that partially sets Visegrad countries and the rest of Central and European states apart from the current Western European core of the EU and NATO is the perception of stability. Overall stability in political, economic and social terms is not yet fully felt in these countries. This outlook is only likely to be fundamentally changed with the EU membership, which will finally guarantee inclusion in the Western organizations in several aspects and therefore also improve the sense of stability.³⁵⁾ Therefore there is also a clear need for the entire spectrum of security tools, dealing with tasks of collective defence, crisis management and conflict prevention. From this perspective the European security project can be seen as the enhancement of their stability as well as another tool available for crisis management and conflict prevention tasks in particular. So far there has been no clear preference for strengthening the military or civilian dimension of the EU's crisis management profile; current Visegrad policy supports a balanced approach.

TEMPORARY INTERESTS

Some of the important interests or features of Visegrad policies were up to now greatly influenced by their institutional position outside the EU. Once they become full members of the Union, several key problems will be easily solved and their general policy preferences may shift towards a more balanced position.

So far the major interest shared by Visegrad countries and the most vocal point of their internal debates or official policy towards ESDP was the *participation issue*.³⁶⁾ Securing their sufficient say over the direction of ESDP development and keeping influence on its eventual operations was a crucial point emphasised especially by the three Visegrad NATO states in the 1999–2002 period. The need for a sense of general inclusion of Visegrad states into the new EU security project was both political and symbolic. It combined an appreciation of the level of participation granted to them by the WEU by status of its associate members with an interest in establishing good working NATO-EU relations. From the beginning of the project it was also felt to be a test of main tendency of new EU policy towards either inclusion or exclusion. Visegrad states therefore sought multiple practical ways by which to safeguard open possibilities of participation in ESDP structures and operations. At the same time they felt more secure than Turkey in this regard and did not present such strong demands vis-à-vis the EU. The realistic prospect of gaining full EU membership helped to soften their approach. The participation issue can be thus regarded as a clearly temporary issue for these states.³⁷⁾

³⁴⁾ For detailed study of security perception in a wider region of Central Europe see Luif, Paul (ed.): *Security in Central and Eastern Europe. Problems, Perceptions, Policies*. Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Vienna 2001.

³⁵⁾ PROGRES project, Centre for European Security Studies, Groningen 1999–2000.

³⁶⁾ For an interesting comparative analysis of different international organizations and their approach to the participation of non-members see Baumgartner, Kelly: *Widening participation in EU Crisis Management*. ISIS Briefing Paper No. 26, May 2002.

³⁷⁾ For discussion from a different angle see Vachudová, Milada Anna (Rapporteur): *The European Defense and Security Policy and EU Enlargement to Eastern Europe*. RSCAS Policy Paper 01/1, Florence: European University Institute 2001.

The second important feature shared by the Visegrad states is their general Atlanticist orientation. In the security field this means that they have so far pursued a pro-US policy within NATO and stood behind the US in European debate following the terrorist attacks of September 11 or during the current crisis over Iraq within NATO. However, some Visegrad countries are likely to balance this position upon entry into the EU. They see the United States as a security guarantor and support its policy primarily in core issues concerning collective defence. For this reason they felt so strongly about the temporary refusal of France, Germany and Belgium to agree with NATO contingency planning for the defence of Turkey and lending it collective allied help with specific assets and capabilities. Pro-US policy in military matters depends nevertheless also on the development of US security policy and its approach towards Europe as a whole. A radical rethinking of US security priorities and a move away from permanent politico-military alliances towards ad-hoc coalitions would probably result in a reassessment of their security policy priorities as well. In the wider spectrum of security and foreign policy issues the Visegrad countries are however much closer to the EU mainstream. They share European approaches towards crisis management and conflict prevention, the pivotal role of UN and international treaty regimes (CTBT, International Criminal Court, Tokyo Protocol, etc.). The institutional experience of EU membership will no doubt strengthen this approach.

The Visegrad states also share a preference for keeping the ESDP process firmly at the intergovernmental level. They see this approach as a good way to enhance their influence and as an appropriate reflection of the nature of ESDP actions. In this manner they see security and defence issues as being too close to the core of their sovereignty to allow any intrusion of supranational policy-making into it. However, it is likely that membership of the EU will lead to gradual evolution of this view and eventually to a dual approach. While in the context of EU decisions with direct military implications this strong insistence on the intergovernmental approach is likely to continue, in other areas of EU security policy these states may allow for the use of QMV methods. It is not surprising that such an approach would put them in the mainstream of the current EU member states and contribute towards broad EU-wide consensus.

The Visegrad group was, in the security and defence area, driven by one strongly shared strategic interest. It was keen to secure the accession of all its members to NATO and later also to the EU. Most of the practical joint activities in the 1999–2002 period therefore followed a pattern of support provided by three Visegrad NATO states (The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland) to Slovakia.³⁸⁾ Bilateral or multilateral activities concentrated both on political support within NATO internal discussions and on practical support focusing on specific areas of the Membership Action Plan. Transferring recent experience with NATO accession in the five areas of MAP to their Slovak counterparts was instrumental in the creation of basic strategic documents, military legislation, institutions and rules on the protection of classified information and defense planning mechanisms improving interoperability with NATO. Visegrad countries also provided practical venues and projects for cooperation with the Slovak military that proved it to be a candidate suitable for joint military activities inside NATO. Common projects launched within the Visegrad framework ranged from the joint Czech-Slovak unit in KFOR, the establishment of the Czech-Polish-Slovak brigade for crisis management operations and the joint modernisation of Mi-24 combat helicopters.³⁹⁾

This major shared strategic goal was successfully secured at the NATO Prague summit in November 2002 when Slovakia was invited to join the Alliance. It is not clear however whether this concerted support for Slovak membership of NATO can be emulated with any other country aspiring to join NATO. Strategic or political considerations do not point towards any state that would be of clear similar common concern. The “Big bang” approach adopted by NATO at the Prague summit also saw the invitation of the three Baltic countries, Bulgaria and Romania, so there are no further viable candidates that would replace Slovakia. The transfer of experience, political support and practical projects was much easier with Slovakia given that it is an integral part of the Visegrad group and the Central European region. From this point of view the Visegrad effort on behalf of its bid for NATO membership is clearly of unique and temporary character.

MORE PERMANENT INTERESTS

The Visegrad states nevertheless also have more permanent interests that may influence their policies towards the CFSP/ESDP actions of an enlarged EU. At least two important ones can be identified.

³⁸⁾ See Kuča, Jaroslav—Nečej, Elemír—Tarasovič, Vladimír (eds.): *Stredoeurópska spolupráca a jej bezpečnostná dimenzia*. Slovak MoD Centre for Defense Studies and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bratislava 1999.

³⁹⁾ For more details see Štastný, Marek (ed.): *Visegrad Countries in an Enlarged Trans-Atlantic Community*, *op. cit.*, Chapter VIII, especially pp. 196–197.

The Visegrad countries are going to be the member states of an enlarged EU most affected by the creation of a new eastern EU border with Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Russia. This will become the new EU external border for many years (perhaps a decade if not more). The Visegrad countries will naturally be interested in the effects of direct neighbourhood policies of the enlarged EU.⁴⁰⁾ They are still strongly connected with this part of Europe through a web of economic links, especially the import of strategic raw materials. This is above all true for Russian oil and natural gas which is also exported to the rest of Europe via oil- and gas pipelines going through the territory of the Visegrad states. Visegrad states will have strong reasons to become co-creators of the EU Eastern Policy as a complex set of actions in several sectors. They are interested in the positive development of these countries in the area of national and local governments, trade and education. They want to keep the external border of the EU both safe and friendly towards these states, not least because of the significant Polish and Hungarian minorities that are living on the other side of it in Belarus and Ukraine. Direct neighbourhood policy should be both comprehensive for the entire region and country-specific based on national strategies. It should keep the open door policy concerning eventual EU membership for Moldova and Ukraine, while not excluding this option also for Belarus when it meets the basic political criteria.

The Visegrad states are also clearly committed to further EU enlargement in Southeastern direction. This second sub-group of states affected by the new EU external border is comprised of Bulgaria and Romania, who already are engaged in accession talks, plus the former Yugoslav republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro) and Albania. The prospect of EU membership for this sub-group is better and faster than with the three Eastern European states described above. The Visegrad states are expected to act in this area in a similarly active fashion as the three Visegrad NATO states did during the second wave of NATO enlargement. They could provide similar transition assistance and push for EU action plans for this part of Europe with clear perspective of eventual EU membership in mind. While they are not dependent on this region for the import of strategic raw materials, they still have a strategic interest in enhancing the stability of their immediate neighbourhood. They also constantly show a political and economic interest in overcoming the decade of civil wars and economic slowdown in this region.

The second long-term interest shared by the Visegrad states is that of keeping separated the tasks of collective defence under NATO from broadly defined crisis management under the EU. They would not like to see this crucial NATO function undermined and therefore would not support steps leading towards this ambition as shown by certain EU states. An equivalent of Article V of Washington Treaty incorporated into the future version of a Constitutional Treaty on the European Union would be probably opposed by the Visegrad states. This attitude is partially based on their historical experience from the inter-war period, but also reflects the general Atlanticist leaning and preference for a continued US security presence in Europe. A radical reassessment of this approach could be caused only by future negative developments within NATO resulting in its changing character. Only in this case would the Visegrad countries consider supporting the transfer of collective defence roles to the EU. This clear stance, together with the preference for more focus on improving European capabilities and less focus on grand institutional designs, places the Visegrad states on the EU map much closer to the UK than to France or Germany. The Visegrad countries would also look rather sceptically upon the ambitions of Europe as a global military power acting on the world stage as a counter-weight to the United States.

SPECIAL ASSETS AND LIABILITIES OF VISEGRAD COUNTRIES FOR CFSP/ESDP

Four Visegrad countries responded positively towards the EU request for a declaration of their possible contributions towards Helsinki Force Catalogue at the first Capability Commitment Conference held on 20–21 November 2000 and the follow-up Capability Improvement Conference held in November 2001. Although they were not entirely satisfied with different treatment of their forces as a separate additional contribution towards EHG and preferred a single framework for both planning and evaluation, they showed clear political goodwill. The concrete assets offered by the Visegrad countries cover a wider spectrum of specialisations and include: mechanised infantry (Poland: 1 framework brigade, including 2 battalions, Hungary: 1 battalion, the Czech Republic: 1 battalion, Slovakia: 1 company), NBC protection units (the Czech Republic: 1 company, Slovakia: mobile laboratory and detection group), special forces (the Czech Republic: 1 company), air defence units (Hungary), military police (Slovakia: 1 company), military medicine (the Czech Republic: 1 field hospital or medical battalion, Slovakia: 1 field hospital), engineers (Slovakia: mine clearance unit), several helicopter units and transport aircraft (the Czech Re-

⁴⁰⁾ See Mungiu-Pippidi, Alina: *Europe's 'Desert of Tartars' Challenge: The Borders of the Enlarged European Union*. EUI Working Paper RSC No. 2001/43, European University Institute, Florence 2001.

public, Poland, Slovakia) and naval forces (Poland).⁴¹⁾ These contributions are being further upgraded and can be expected to expand again once Visegrad countries become full EU members. Moreover, these countries will benefit from reforms of their armed forces and the move towards full professional militaries (in the Czech Republic and Slovakia by 2007 at the latest, in Poland and Hungary so far only higher proportion of professionals). All of the above mentioned units are already fully professional, capable of deployment within less than 60 days and sustainable in the field of operation for six months (in case of certain specialized assets) or one year. Most of them are also declared to NATO as part of NATO's Rapid Reaction Forces and follow strict interoperability criteria, often tested in deployment for real multinational operations (IFOR/SFOR in Bosnia, KFOR in Kosovo, ISAF and Enduring Freedom).

The Visegrad countries showed not only a readiness to contribute towards preparation of the Helsinki Force Catalogue as a necessary basis for further development of ESDP crisis management activities, but they also demonstrated willingness to participate with troops or military observers in international peacekeeping and crisis management operations under UN, NATO or OSCE aegis.⁴²⁾ In per capita military contributions towards these operations the Visegrad countries rank at the top of all European countries. At the same time crisis management operations are regarded as important missions for their armed forces and receive strong support from the public. These types of mission proved instrumental in improving the public image of the military in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Visegrad states thus shouldered a proportionately higher burden given the significant cost of these operations, especially when they were not run by the UN, which in the long-term reimburses its member states for peacekeeping operations. Similar self-financing principles as are currently applied for NATO peace operations in Bosnia and Kosovo are also expected for future EU operations and should therefore not present a major obstacle for the Visegrad countries.

The special assets that the Visegrad countries will bring to the EU do not stop at the military realm. They have unique experience and human resources that could be a valuable contribution also to the civilian dimension of EU crisis management operations. They can offer a number of experts for conflict prevention, observers to supervise armistices or local administrators for post-conflict reconstruction. So far these people have gained experience through the OSCE and UN missions, but even larger potential rests with the NGOs from the Visegrad countries that engage effectively in humanitarian aid. Successful operations were carried out in such diverse places as Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya and Afghanistan. These missions often illuminated advantages based on knowledge of local cultures and languages. Also the local population welcomed personnel from the Visegrad countries for their combination of impartiality and ethnic or cultural proximity. This benefit was especially strong on the territory of former Yugoslavia.

The unique experience of transition towards democracy and a free market that the Visegrad countries are going to bring to the EU could be easily combined with regional expertise in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Their recent experience could be viewed as more relevant concerning both positive and negative examples of what worked and what did not. Their influence should not translate however into the exporting of rigid models, but rather in improving the reform capacities of countries in the direct neighbourhood of the enlarged EU. Local expertise and initiatives at the level of national government, regional and local self-government and non-governmental organizations should be the key focus of cross-border cooperation, which can draw upon the good record of Polish and Slovak NGOs over the past decade. This approach towards creating an open and flexible border of the EU should find natural allies in EU countries that are also strongly interested in Eastern Europe—Germany, Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.⁴³⁾

Capitalizing on the common Visegrad approach resulted in a major initiative on the Eastern Policy of the enlarged European Union presented at the end of 2002. Promoted at the initiative of Poland it proposes among other things the following concrete measures:

- Establishing a European Democracy Fund to promote democratic values in Eastern Europe, based on the transfer of transformation know-how;

⁴¹⁾ More details were initially provided in Appendix I, WEU Assembly Document 1735: *Contribution of European non-EU countries to military crisis management in Europe*, 19 June 2001. As they became more detailed they were better explained in Missiroli, Antonio (ed.): *Bigger EU, wider CFSP, stronger ESDP? The view from Central Europe*, EU ISS Occasional Paper no. 34. EU ISS, Paris, June 2002.

⁴²⁾ Over the period 1998–2002 Visegrad countries participated annually at dozen of peace support and crisis management operations of various type with average total strength of 3300 men (Poland 1500, the Czech Republic 1000, Hungary 600, Slovakia 200). The projected strength of parallel participation of Visegrad armed forces upon full professionalization may easily double this figure.

⁴³⁾ More details see *The Eastern Policy of the European Union—The Visegrad Countries' Perspective*, December 2002, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, www.msz.gov.pl.

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- Human capital development through a scholarship scheme and study visits/internships for graduates and young professionals combined with distant learning courses at universities in EU countries;
 - Assistance programmes in institution-building based on a combination of twinning projects, study visits and advice in specific reform areas;
 - Support for local government structures and the process of decentralization, management of social services and financing of local investments
 - Information on the EU provided through the European Information Centres with broadband internet access
 - Support for small and medium-sized enterprises through initial training in preparing business plans, start-up capital through the newly established European Investment Fund for Eastern Europe.⁴⁴⁾

The profile of the Visegrad countries in CFSP/ESDP in an enlarged EU will also be greatly influenced by the direction of EU-NATO relations. The positive or negative contribution of these countries may depend on whether cooperation or competition predominates between the two organizations. One of the shared features of the Visegrad countries even after they join the EU will no doubt be a tendency to support the cooperative mode of EU-NATO relations. This is shared in part by some current EU members that do not want to be faced with a situation in which they would have to choose between NATO (including the United States) and the EU. This might be partially attributed to the effects of the pro-US orientation from the time that these countries were in a position of only NATO full members, but also to their relative inexperience in major trans-Atlantic controversies and connected manoeuvring. The only recent example is the major dispute over Iraq, where four Visegrad countries (together with the majority of Central and Eastern European countries) were backing the US position together with several EU member states. Although the French-German approach towards this crisis points in a different direction, the rebuke from Chirac towards the EU future member countries made the situation much worse. It was vigorously and unanimously refused in the Visegrad states as a dangerous example of mentoring that was earlier connected with Moscow and its strong hand over the Eastern bloc. However, it should be noted that the Visegrad countries also joined the EU compromise common position and would not support the US policy at all cost.

⁴⁴⁾ Presented at speech “*EU Eastern Policy—the Polish Perspective*” of Polish Foreign Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz in Prague 21. 2. 2003.

SCENARIOS

Is there any similarity between the coming 2004 EU enlargement including the Visegrad states and the previous 1995 EU enlargement that brought in Austria, Finland and Sweden? Can we look at their experience and behaviour in the CFSP/ESDP area shortly before and after the entry into the EU? Unfortunately, there seems to be only very limited connection between the two enlargements. Austria, Finland and Sweden are militarily non-aligned states with a long tradition of independent foreign and security policies existing for decades before they gained membership of the EU. Nevertheless, they also shared for a long period of time views of EC/EU in international organizations like the UN on issues connected with development and environment. They had to change partially their profile and become post-neutral states because strict neutrality is incompatible with EU membership. When faced with joining the EU at a time of rethinking the future of CFSP, they successfully put forward a specific agenda in this area. The inclusion of the Petersberg tasks into the text of the Treaty on the EU can be seen as a special way of preventing the EU from developing towards a common defence policy that would create severe problems in their domestic politics. In this comparison the Visegrad states do not have the similarly strong profile to the three post-neutral states of the 1995 EU enlargement. They cannot present similarly radical ideas shaping the agenda of EU crisis management and push for inclusion of non-military dimension in it. The 1995 example is somewhat more relevant only in the case of the specific Finnish-Swedish initiative with Northern Dimension of CFSP. In the opposite direction there is relatively big room for influence by the EU policy towards Visegrad countries. Unlike in the 1995 enlargement debate in the three neutral states CFSP/ESDP is not perceived yet as either a crucial or a controversial point of accession for both EU and candidate countries.

Are there any relevant models of regional cooperation inside the EU that could be used as a guidance for the Visegrad countries? Two examples are viable and already exist within the EU—the Benelux and Nordic states act in several specific areas as a regime or group for increased influence over security policy vis-à-vis the big states inside the EU.⁴⁵⁾ Although their degree of cooperation varies over issues, it combines relatively strong cooperation in the Nordic area towards more pragmatic cooperation among the Benelux countries. In comparison, Visegrad is still regional cooperation in making and has to prove its vitality through a regular pattern of consultation and collaboration, joint projects and common initiatives that characterize both Nordic and Benelux activities.⁴⁶⁾ In the security and defence area there are several types of military integration and joint procurement projects (Admiral BENELUX, DATF or NORDCAPS, Nordic transport helicopters, etc.) that could provide a positive example also for the Visegrad countries. The potential of the Visegrad regional group inside the enlarged EU was also explicitly recognized by the Benelux countries and resulted in first close contacts and high-level meetings, although practical outcomes have so far been limited.

SCENARIOS OF VISEGRAD STATES' POLICIES AFTER EU ENLARGEMENT

1) Strengthened regional cooperation

The first scenario sees the development of Visegrad towards strengthened regional cooperation, building a “security community” in Central Europe. There already exist firm roots for the creation of a space where political, economic and military cooperation and integration developed to the extent that war between the states of this region is inconceivable and all differences are resolved by peaceful means. Dynamic and positive relations are based

⁴⁵⁾ A good overview of current forms of subregional cooperation may be found in Telo, Mario (ed.): *European Union and New Regionalism : Regional Actors and Global Governance in a Post-Hegemonic Era*. Ashgate, Burlington 2001.

⁴⁶⁾ Initial comparison of the two processes of regional cooperation and possibility of learning lessons was shown in *Regional Cooperation and the European Integration Process: Nordic and Central European Experiences* Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, Budapest 1996.

on mutual trust and the emerging collective identity. Visegrad countries are in the ascendant phase of a “security community” relying on increasingly dense networks, existing institutions and organizations for tighter military cooperation and multiple channels for intensified relations between societies and states.⁴⁷⁾

The regional security community option could be based on the increasingly dense networks and interactions based also on a period of intensive cooperation prior to entering NATO, existing institutions of Visegrad cooperation, similar geopolitical situation and security outlook. The potential of the existing Visegrad structures in this respect is rather good because of their basic compatibility with EU structures and policies. This distinguishes Visegrad in a major way from CEFTA structures. A regional security community based on the original Visegrad group is nevertheless an idea attractive also to other countries like Austria and Slovenia, as proved by the Austrian initiative to create a “Regional Partnership” (originally called rather unfortunately a “Strategic Partnership”).⁴⁸⁾ Although the Visegrad group declared its unwillingness to officially enlarge beyond the original four countries to prevent similar fate of the Central European Initiative, it could benefit from variable geometry in specific areas of cooperation.⁴⁹⁾

Visegrad cooperation after its revival is based primarily in the political, cultural and educational fields, combined with tackling shared problems in the protection of the environment, transport and infrastructure development and justice and home affairs. It is also gradually spreading to other areas that are by no means excluded, including foreign, security and defense policy. Firstly, there is a framework of regular meetings of foreign and defense ministers, relevant parliamentary committees and permanent working groups. The closeness of the security outlook has been demonstrated most recently over highly contentious issues like Iraq. Visegrad countries not only voiced their position through a meeting of their defense ministers, but they also joined the US-led coalition in various ways (with the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland contributing specialized military units and Hungary supporting the training of Iraqi exile groups).

Advantages:

Following the NATO Prague summit, small and medium-sized countries have a further incentive for pooling resources in joint projects and capabilities. This approach is also encouraged by the ECAP initiative focusing on the improvement of EU military capabilities. The Visegrad countries can thus contemplate various specific steps, from the setting up of joint multinational units to the joint procurement or shared maintenance of larger weapon systems. Multinational military cooperation in the Visegrad format can benefit from mutual linguistic comprehension (with the exception of Hungary), similar operating procedures and in many areas persisting equipment proximity facilitating good compatibility of weapon systems. The potential of military cooperation has been already tested in the following projects:

- a joint Czech-Slovak peacekeeping battalion (520 men) in KFOR, deployed in March 2002;
- a joint Czech-Slovak NBC battalion (450 men) deployed during Enduring Freedom and the US-led coalition war against Iraq, deployed in March 2003;
- the creation of a joint Czech-Polish-Slovak brigade for crisis management operations under NATO, EU or UN command, with an HQ established in May 2002 in Topolčany (Slovakia); the entire brigade should be operational by 2005;
- the joint modernization of 100 Mi-24 combat helicopters, with a memorandum of understanding signed in May 2002;

Following the invitation for Slovakia to join NATO issued at the Prague summit in November 2002, military cooperation is going to be better facilitated. The first radical proposals for “Joint Sky”, a Czech-Slovak integrated air defence project, even based on the prospect of possible joint procurement of supersonic aircraft by the two countries, was floated around.

Limitations/Liabilities:

There are several limitations to the strengthened regional cooperation among the Visegrad countries. The sense of a common fate and purpose can easily be undermined by pressing parochial issues not shared by all members.

⁴⁷⁾ A detailed theoretical framework is developed in Adler, Emanuel—Barnett, Michael (eds.): *Security Communities*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, esp. Chapter 2; see also Gambles, Ian: *A lasting peace in Central Europe?* Chaillot Paper no. 20, WEU Institute for Security Studies, Paris 1995, esp. Introduction.

⁴⁸⁾ Regional views on the prospects for this project are presented in Luif, Paul (ed.): *Regional Partnership and the Future of the European Union*. OIIP Arbeitspapier 41, Austria Institute for International Affairs, Vienna, November 2002.

⁴⁹⁾ The official declaration of intention not to enlarge Visegrad beyond the group of four was adopted during the Visegrad summit at Bratislava in May 1999. Shortly afterwards nevertheless Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski presented a plan for flexible cooperation with the “Vilnius Ten” group of NATO candidate states from Central and Eastern Europe.

One example would be the position of ethnic minorities if strongly supported by the Hungarian government, as was the threat under the previous Orban government. The minority issue not only implicitly targets another Visegrad state (Slovakia), but could also point towards different priorities for Hungarian foreign policy vis-à-vis the rest of the group. Parochial individual preferences could also undermine the cohesion of the Visegrad group should any of its members prefer a special relationship with only one of its neighbours (for example in Eastern Europe) at the expense of the rest of the group.

The second liability is connected with the financial limits that all Visegrad countries face in the case of simultaneous participation in international military operations. These could be more severe than political limits. There is already experience with the challenges faced in contributing towards both SFOR and KFOR at the same time. In such a case it might be to the detriment of such military cooperation that it is composed of “poorer” countries and does not provide the added resources of “richer” countries as in the case of German-Polish-Danish corps. The Visegrad countries must also demonstrate that they can act together under difficult circumstances of external pressure.

2) The divergent paths of the Visegrad countries

A second possible scenario is centred, on the other hand, on factors that may undermine the current structures of the Visegrad group and strengthen features that set them apart on divergent paths once they are inside the EU. Perhaps the single most important variable will be Poland and its strategic choices in foreign and security policy or in its general attitude towards European integration. It has a clear ambition to become a key regional player inside the enlarged EU, an ambition which may run against the interests of the rest of the Visegrad group. Poland also pursues several major foreign and security policy initiatives in parallel. It presents itself as a key and faithful US ally in Europe and keeps functioning also within the Weimar Triangle in cooperation with France and Germany. Both of these activities may be seriously affected by the current Iraqi crisis that casts doubt over the future of sharing a strategic vision among Warsaw, Berlin and Paris. At the same time Poland supports the Visegrad cooperation framework and develops partnership structures with Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova). The Polish profile as a big country aiming to have a strong voice inside the enlarged EU on a par with Spain may in the end be incompatible with the profiles and preferences of remaining smaller states that form Visegrad group.

The Visegrad group also still has to prove that it has enough clear and strong interests and mechanisms to hold it together beyond achieving the basic goal of EU membership. The new EU member states may be by then driven more by the prospect of better access to the EU structural funds and realizing basic EU freedoms rather than fostering a regional group. A new playing field of EU-wide policy may induce competition for these benefits that in turn will exacerbate the existing disparity in size, strength and specific ambitions of the Visegrad countries. Given the relatively short period of cooperation between these countries they would need strong mechanisms of alternative communication channels to bridge situations of discord in certain areas. Visegrad countries have recent experience of not so easy cooperation during the EU accession talks. Despite the official declarations, attempts to form a united block vis-à-vis the EU negotiators brought only limited results. Individual Visegrad countries eventually chose specific deals concerning free movement of labour force and sales of agricultural land and property to foreigners. The Visegrad countries also sought out different priorities and did not coordinate their policies in areas like minority policy (Hungary), the Roma issue (Czech Republic and Slovakia), the visa regime with Ukraine, Belarus and Russia (the Czech Republic adopted strict EU rules early on, followed by Slovakia, while Poland waited until the last possible moment).

The Visegrad countries may in the enlarged EU face also the challenge of creating different alliance patterns on specific issues. The Visegrad states are clearly divided on issues of CAP reform. Ad-hoc voting coalitions may, in the EU of 25 members, be a decisive tool by which member states will react to the broader use of QMV procedures, including in certain CFSP matters. The comparative example of Spain and Portugal joining the EC also led to the two states rarely cooperating with one another, but rather joining different groups once inside. The size of the Visegrad group and its voting power (58 votes)⁵⁰⁾ inside the enlarged EU is not big enough and requires cooperation with other member states even to form a blocking minority. The Visegrad group would need some positive examples of developing joint position papers or memoranda on important issues from EU agenda like those that were presented by Benelux on institutional reform or JHA prior to major EU meetings debating them.

⁵⁰⁾ As of 1 January 2005 in the Council of Ministers of the enlarged EU, the distribution of votes should be: Poland 27, Czech Republic 12, Hungary 12, Slovakia 7.

3) The scenario of slow EU enlargement

Although it is unlikely, the Visegrad countries must also have a backup option if any of the current EU members blocks EU enlargement during the ratification process. Such an outcome would be far more dangerous than the failure of individual EU candidate countries in their respective ratification processes. Bringing the entire EU enlargement to a halt would require finding an interim solution for keeping cooperation and integration processes alive. In the area of CFSP/ESDP activities the EU is especially interested in the continuing support of CEE candidate states. The EU may, in such a situation, prefer to keep practical cooperation resembling observer status in the EU structures as established for EU candidate states upon the signing of the EU accession protocols. This step would minimise the backlash in the candidate countries. Even more radical and innovative solutions of special arrangements building upon partial membership in intergovernmental CFSP/ESDP structures are possible should there be deep-rooted opposition to EU enlargement in any of the EU member states. On the other hand some of the important political forces inside the current EU states, led by France, may not support such solutions out of fear connected with pro-US orientation of Central and Eastern European states. Delay in EU enlargement may thus be welcomed as a way of limiting their influence over EU policy in foreign, security and defense matters at a time of deep split within the EU in connection with the Iraqi crisis.

If there is no formal strengthening of the position of the Visegrad countries in the ESDP structure, their actual treatment in their interim position as candidate states (later EU observers) might affect their behaviour in CFSP/ESDP matters once they are full EU members. The sense of EU inclusion or exclusion might thus be established. Concrete practical steps taken in this area may also indicate EU willingness towards an open ESDP architecture. A major EU crisis management operation is unlikely before 2004 without recourse to NATO assets. In such circumstances, the three Visegrad countries will be in a good position to influence its direction. They will be sufficiently informed and may offer concrete contributions if interested. An atmosphere of information-sharing should also be strengthened by the inclusion of diplomats from the Visegrad countries in the inner EU circle following the signing of the EU accession treaties on 16 April 2003.

The first two instances of EU operations prepared under the ESDP heading are so far positive. The EU police mission in Bosnia started in January 2003 and is open to non-EU countries. The military operation in Macedonia was launched at the end of March 2003 and has greatly benefited from series of NATO-EU agreements signed after the breakthrough reached in mid-December 2002. The Visegrad countries are thus pleased with arrangements concerning the use of SHAPE and D-SACEUR as NATO assets for the EU operation, something that will also indirectly facilitate NEEA involvement. The use of ESDP procedures and mechanisms during the launch and conduct of the EU military operation in Macedonia will in many respects set the tone in the Visegrad states vis-à-vis ESDP. Current course of action with first ESDP military mission is certainly better than the risky alternative of a small EU-only operation (without the use of NATO assets) carried out for mainly symbolic reasons and restricted towards the NEEA. This option was fortunately ruled out by the recent conclusion of the NATO-EU framework agreement.

CONCLUSIONS

What are the main conclusions regarding the future profile of the Visegrad states in the CFSP/ESDP area? What should the Visegrad states and the current EU member states prepare for?

The Visegrad countries are soon going to face the full spectrum of responsibilities and benefits associated with EU membership. The CFSP/ESDP area will be a natural part of it and generally it can be expected to be uncontroversial, but also perhaps underestimated by new EU members at the beginning. While the Visegrad states are already familiar with most of the EU tools in this area, they have to make the transition from passive supporters of EU policy to active co-creators. This task will depend on the resources and assets that the Visegrad countries can contribute towards EU policy in this area. The Visegrad countries have a clear advantage over the last wave of 1995 EU enlargement because they are not limited by non-aligned status and have demonstrated their capacity to act as members of the international community in various crisis management operations.

Several features of potential Visegrad influence on the CFSP/ESDP agenda are already starting to emerge. They are in a good position to find allies inside the enlarged EU and to influence its Eastern Policy. Utilizing their unique transition experience, they can act both as a bridge and as well-informed member states towards countries that will remain outside the EU and which will form the new EU's neighbourhood along its Eastern or South-Eastern border. The preparation of a common Visegrad approach should start before their full entry into the EU and is already underway. Visegrad countries can contribute towards the creation of innovative approaches and new EU tools for the broad stabilization and successful reform of these countries

Institutional experience of dialogue, consultation and cooperation in the CFSP/ESDP area from the EU side in the period immediately preceding membership may influence the preferences of the Visegrad countries as full EU members. At the same time it is not an absolute factor and the more permanent interests held by the Visegrad countries are at least as important. The concrete performance of the EU may facilitate either a positive or negative image of CFSP/ESDP structures. So far the slow evolution of EU policy towards the participation of non-EU European Allies, including the three Visegrad states, has contributed rather to a negative picture.

The option of Visegrad as a strengthened regional cooperation operating inside the EU is possible, although not guaranteed once the EU membership is secured. The Visegrad countries share the recent experience of concerted efforts to bring Slovakia into NATO and have started several practical projects including ad-hoc or standing multinational military units and a joint modernization of weapon systems. Together with the success and regular practice of Visegrad cooperation in the non-military field this could enhance prospect of continuing development towards a regional security community. Visegrad countries do face, however, certain factors that may set them apart once they all join the EU and which may contribute towards different security paths for individual countries. Firstly the role of Poland as the strongest member of the Visegrad group may undermine cooperation if the country follows its own strategic ambitions. Then there is the question of the still weak mechanisms helping the Visegrad group to overcome strong external pressure or domestic political turmoil.