

ESSAY

BRIEF HISTORY OF V4 DEFENSE COOPERATION UNTIL 2014 : THE RIDE ON THE ROLLERCOASTER (BUT NOT EXCEEDING SPEED LIMITS)¹

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ABSTRACT

Visegrad cooperation was established in February 1991, on the meeting of leaders of Poland, - international organization, but loosely institutionalized structure of cooperation with very few permanent elements. Nevertheless, security interests has been at the heart of it from the very beginning, since it was intended first and foremost to facilitate development of ties and gradual integration with Western structures – NATO and European Union². However, defense and military cooperation did not develop within the Group at the same pace and to the same level as political or economic contacts.

¹ The first section of this article is partially based on Marek Madej, “Visegrad Group Defense Cooperation: What Added Value for the European Capabilities?,” *Fundation Pour La Recherche Stratégique, NORDIKA Programme*, no. 19/13 (June 19, 2013), <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/notes/2013/201319.pdf>.

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² The beginnings of defense cooperation within Visegrad framework are discussed comprehensively in Rafal Morawiec, “Military Cooperation in Visegrád Group,” in *Cooperation on Security in Central Europe: Sharing V4 Experience with the Neighbouring Countries*, ed. Marek Madej (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

Apart from structural reasons (like limited potentials of the members, particularly in the early 90., as well as differences in their interest, needs and priorities), it was due to common for all V4 members fears that intensive defense cooperation among them could be interpreted in NATO and EU as an effort to build some kind of sub-regional alternative for full integration with western structures. Therefore, defense integration within V4 was limited to some degree because of sober political choice of the participants. Another factor reducing the intensity of cooperation was “a temptation” – felt on various occasions by all V4 states - to look for opportunities to strengthening ties with western structures individually, leaving behind less advanced partners from the group. Such inclination to “desert” from cooperation in V4 framework and to make and efforts to achieve the same goals individually was particularly specific for Czech Republic, the most developed (at that moment) Visegrad state and with most technologically advanced armed forces and defense industry. However, such tendencies were not totally alien also to other V4 countries, like Hungary or Poland.

Hence, V4 defense cooperation has developed in cycles, with many ups and lows. We could discern several stages of it. In the first stage, in early years of cooperation (1991-1997) it was not particularly intensive. Although conducted on continuous basis, it was almost entirely limited to political consultations (like in form of regular, yearly meetings of MODs) and to exchange of opinions concerning problems of regional security, particularly integration with NATO. Any significant initiative aimed at development of contacts on more technical and operational level (for example concerning maintenance and modernization of military equipment of Soviet origin) has not materialized or at least did not bring – despite official interest of all participating governments – tangible

results. Moreover, due to changing political conditions (growing “individualism” particularly of Czech policy concerning relations with the West and taking power by NATO- and Eurosceptic Meciar government in Slovakia) it has gradually lost its initial impetus. It was reinvigorated, however, in late 90, after invitation of Poland, Hungary and Czech Rep. to NATO in 1997 and the end of Meciar rule in Slovakia in 1998. Then the second, much more intensive stage of V4 defense cooperation started. This “new opening” in V4 defense cooperation was stimulated initially by the interest of three NATO invitees in improving the process of integration with the Alliance and later, after their accession (March 1999) accession, by the willingness to speed up Slovakian integration with the western structures. All that led not only to the quite effective political consultations on security and defense issues, but also to the number of significant initiatives in the realm of technical and industrial cooperation. Six different working groups have been created to develop specific capabilities and forms of cooperation (although their main task was still facilitating process of integration with NATO). Several promising projects, like establishment of joint Polish, Czech and Slovakian Brigade or common modernization programs of helicopters (Mi 17 and 24) and tanks (T 72), were then undertaken (primarily in years 2001-2002). However, almost all of them, albeit due to various reasons, have failed and ultimately were abandoned³.

When Slovakia joined NATO and all V4 members accessed to EU, Visegrad defense cooperation again slowed down. In its third

³ Program of joint modernization of Mi helicopters failed mainly because of Russian refusal to grant Poland the necessary licenses (while such transfer of property rights and know how has been agreed on bilateral basis with Czech. Rep.). Modernization of tanks was abandoned due to disputable value of the modernized equipment and members contradictory industrial interests (all wanted to grant work for its own factories and facilities). Multinational brigade was officially disbanded in 2005 because it completed its task as a facilitator of integration of Slovakian army with NATO forces, but in fact it was caused by financial and organizational reasons. Cf. *Ibid.*, 24–25.

stage of development, after 2004, V4 formula was used mainly as a platform for elaboration and manifestation of common position of Central European states in the discussions on security and defense issues within NATO and EU. V4 transformed itself largely into "sub-regional lobby", able to articulate and defend common interests of its participants in NATO and EU, although with substantial autonomy of members and their freedom to join other groups or act independently when they think that was necessary.

Therefore, after 2004 Visegrad defense cooperation returned to be strongly focused on political consultations. Ties between V4 countries on operational (expeditionary missions of NATO, EU/CSDP or "coalitions of the willing") and technical level (equipment acquisition, industrial cooperation) were much more loose and flexible – although the states often decided to participate in the same operation or project within larger framework (primarily NATO, to the lesser extent EU), it was done not as a common V4 activity, but on the basis of autonomous decisions of every member⁴. Hence, after two decades of development, V4 largely remained to be what it was at the beginning – a platform of political consultations on (broadly defined) security issues with still rather nascent capacity to stimulate technical cooperation and joint capabilities development between armed forces and defense industry of participants.

A new stimulus for V4 defense cooperation came in late 2010

⁴ For example, all V4 countries decided to take part in stabilization of Iraq, but did not organized any joint unit and not coordinated their actions. When Hungarian and Slovakian troops were deployed within the area of responsibility of Polish command (Multinational Division Central-South), Czechs decided to subordinate forces to British command. Decisions about deployments to Afghanistan were also done by all V4 countries actually separately, what resulted in their distribution into various areas and subordination to different ISAF Regional Commands. Other example could be Polish and Hungarian accession to NATO Strategic Airlift Initiative – done because of individual decisions, not due to any V4 agreement. Lastly, while Poland opted in the early 2000's for 48 F-16s from the US Lockheed-Martin, Czech Rep. and Hungary decided to buy Swedish Grippens and Slovaks stayed exclusively with post-Soviet Mig-29s. John Blocher, "Conditions for Visegrad Defense Cooperation: A Transatlantic View," *Foreign Policy Review* 6 (2011): 40–64.

– early 2011, in context of NATO Lisbon summit and its aftermath.

It was largely a consequence of budgetary difficulties caused by economic crisis and was directly linked to the introduction of the new concepts of cooperation on capabilities development in NATO (smart defense) and EU (Ghent/pooling & sharing initiative), which constitute central elements of the response of both organizations to that then “austerity conditions”. Central Europeans realized that working within V4 framework, institution already established, tested in practice (although with mixed results) and – above all – recognized by NATO and UE as the stable structure of sub-regional cooperation, would fit very well to the logic of these initiatives and could relatively quickly bring some tangible (or at least visible and politically and publicly “sellable”) results. That led to intensification of contacts both on political and operational level.

However, the former seemed to develop better than the latter. Political cooperation of V4 countries had increased significantly in the course of the discussion over new NATO strategic concept before Lisbon summit (Nov. 2010). V4 members were interested in stressing in the new document the importance of collective defense obligations and necessity to maintain Alliance’s capability to implement them (what means also expectation for some additional reassurances for more fragile members)⁵. Later their political contacts were intensified further, at least when measured by the number of high-level meetings and solemn – and usually highly publicized – declarations adopted (see table 1). However, the actual results of these meetings were largely limited to manifestation of

⁵ It is even now a specificity of V4 defense cooperation to put a strong emphasis on value of transatlantic ties and NATO for European security. In fact for all V4 states NATO remains to be the most important security provider and guarantor for European stability, even if their political elites and societies could show “different level of enthusiasm” toward this organization. Cf. “Joint Communiqué of the Ministers of Defence of the Visegrad Group,” Visegrad Group, May 4, 2012, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2012/joint-communication-of-the>; Robert Kupiecki, “Visegrad Defense Cooperation: From Mutual Support to Strengthening NATO and the EU. A Polish Perspective,” CEPA Report, no. 35, April 2, 2013, 2–3.

political will and enthusiasm over cooperation in V4 framework.

They also served as an occasion to formulate or explain common positions concerning some security issues, in particular on NATO and EU/CSDP capabilities development⁶. Significantly, such high-level meetings were often conducted in various “V4+” formats, with third states or institutions (i.e. the Baltics, Weimar Triangle, Nordic states, eastern Europeans). It definitely strengthened the role of V4 as the consultative platform within NATO and EU (as well as with non-EU and non-NATO European states, like Eastern Partnership participants or countries from the Western Balkans). Moreover, it helped to manifest openness of Visegrad cooperation on other actors, being also intended to engage in V4 initiatives some “attractive outsiders” – countries with significant military, technological and political potential, which could offer significant, disproportionally larger than others input and therefore help to fill technical, operational and industrial V4 cooperation with the assets that V4 states were seemingly scarce of⁷.

Table 1. Main high-level meetings of V4 countries devoted exclusively or primarily to security and defense related issues in

⁶ See for example: declaration *For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defense Policy*, Prague, April 18, 2012 (just before the NATO Chicago summit) and declaration *For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defense Policy*, Bratislava, April 18, 2013. Symptomatically, when the 2012 declaration is substantial on specific projects of capabilities development undertaken by V4 members, the 2013 declaration on CSDP, probably inspired by the relative success (at least in political terms) of the previous document, is largely limited to manifestation of support for already taken efforts within EU framework and awareness of challenges for CSDP development, but scarce in context of specific proposals for initiatives. That suggests mainly political goal of its adoption and the fact that V4 political cooperation was at the time close to the point when adding new and valuable content without developing simultaneously ties on technical and operational level would start to be problematic.

⁷ Probably the most curious effort of that kind was a meeting of V4 MODs with their counterpart from Brasil in Bratislava in October 2013, during which possibilities of training special forces in jungle environment was discussed (surprisingly, taking into account possibility of use of such units from V4 countries in such conditions). Cf. “Komandosi będą ćwiczyć w brazylijskiej dżungli,” *Polska Zbrojna*, October 29, 2013, <http://polskazbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/10168?t=Komandosi-beda-cwiczyz-w-brazylijskiej-dzungli>.

Biztpol Affairs

years 2012-2014

Place and date	Level	Format	Final document
Bratislava (Slk), 9.12.2014	PMs (HOGs)	V4	<i>Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the Deepening V4 Defence Cooperation</i>
Budapest (Hun), 24.06.2014	PMs (HOGs)	V4	<i>Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation</i>
Visegrad (Hun), 14.03.2014	MODs	V4	<i>Long term vision of the Visegrad Countries on deepening of their defense cooperation;</i> <i>Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Defense Planning Cooperation</i>
Budapest (Hun) 14.10.2013	PMs (HOGs)	V4	<i>Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation</i>
Bratislava (Slk),18.04.2013	MFA's	V 4	<i>Declaration For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defense Policy</i>

Warszawa (Pl), 6.03.2013	MODs	V4 + Weimar Triangle (Fra, Ger)	Joint statement <i>Cooperation in developing Capabilities, Solidarity in Sharing Responsibilities</i>
Gdańsk (Pl), 20.02.2013	MFAAs	V4 + Nordic + Baltic states	Co-Chair's Statement (Polish and Swedish MFAAs)
Litoměřice, (Cz), 3- 4.05.2012	MODs	V4	Joint Communiqué
Prague (Cz) 18.04.2012	MFAAs + MODs	V4	Declaration <i>Responsibility for a strong NATO</i>

Sources: The official site of Visegrad Group,
<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements> (access
11.11.19)

However, growth in intensity of meetings on the highest level and development of various liaison ties between MFAAs and MODs led rather merely to elaborating some postulates concerning future cooperation, setting general goals and manifesting will of making improvements, but rarely supported with coherent and “operable” cooperation programs, or even – with a few notable exceptions⁸ – clear definition of specific benchmarks and deadlines for the completion of particular initiatives. In other words, V4 countries managed to show by frequent high-level meetings their determination to foster the cooperation, but revealed at the same time limited capability to elaborate comprehensive strategy or

⁸ Most important of them are two “flagship” Visegrad initiatives in the NATO and the EU frameworks – respectively CBRN defense multinational battalion and V4 Battle Group, both scheduled for 2016 (see further paragraphs).

detailed program of achieving it.

In this light, it is understandable why cooperation on technical level, aimed at creation of the new military capabilities or improving the effectiveness (military and economic) of those already possessed by the V4 states was less impressive. Although the “new opening” of V4 military cooperation in fact even preceded the growth in intensity of contacts on political level – as early as 2009 four working groups for development of specific capabilities were established⁹ – the results were moderate at best. V4 countries were at the time still rather identifying the areas of potential cooperation and defining of its preferred forms and tools than formulating or implementing specific projects. Indeed, the list of areas of potentially fruitful V4 cooperation, based on reviews of national military modernization plans, was quite impressive – V4 authorities recognized as such areas like – inter alia – countering IED and explosive ordnance, individual soldier equipment, integrated command and support, battlefield imaging systems. Additionally, mainly due to Polish persistence, cooperation in training and exercises, aimed not only to strengthen capabilities to perform expeditionary operations, but also to build readiness to conduct territorial defense, started to be more substantial. That included both “exclusive” V4 actions and activities in the NATO or EU framework (like periodic NRF or Capable Logistician exercises)¹⁰.

More developed were works on specific projects within smart defense or pooling & sharing initiative (that is in which V4 countries – all or majority of them – could even play a key role, but

⁹ These groups were devoted to: defense against WMD (works coordinated by Czech Rep.), air and missile defense modernization (coordinator – Slovakia), soldier’s personal equipment (Poland) and strategic transport (Hungary). Justyna Gotkowska and Olaf Osica, eds., *Closing the Gap? Military Co-Operation from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea*, (Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, 2012), 59.

¹⁰ Kupiecki, “Visegrad Defense Cooperation,” 4–6; Gotkowska and Osica, *Closing the Gap?*, 60.

are not the only participants). Definitely the most significant (and most publicized) was the plan to deploy Visegrad battle group (V4BG) in 2016. After rather clumsy beginnings (the idea of Visegrad battle group was discussed for the first time as early as in 2007), the project finally started to get pace and more defined shape, also thanks to leverage associated to it as a “flagship” of military cooperation within V4. Until the end of 2013 it was agreed that V4BG will consist of 3000 troops, and Poland would be a leading nation¹¹. Importantly, V4 considered then V4BG as a semi-permanent unit, potentially placed periodically (in 2-year cycle) in BG rotations schedule, with permanent multinational component on high readiness (i.e. logistics or medical unit) and answerable to various structures and arrangements¹². Such vision of V4BG was to some degree intended to stimulate reform of the overall program of battle groups, which definitely was then (as now even more) in crisis.

There were also some additional projects in NATO or EU framework, in which V4 countries intended to play (or played already) substantial roles – abovementioned CBRN defense battalion, coordinated by Czech Rep.; NATO multinational MP battalion (with significant share from Czech Rep. and Slovakia and Polish leadership), since the beginning of 2013 certified as fully operational. Moreover, for a couple of years specifically Czech input to cooperation within NATO on capabilities (but in coordination and with support of V4 countries) had been training for helicopter pilots, what was manifested by development of HIP initiative since

¹¹ Poland as a leading nation would contribute with c.a. 1500 troops (including combat element), Czech Rep. with 800 soldiers (including medical and logistics unit), Slovakia with 400 soldiers and Hungary with 350 troops. Barbora Bodnárová, “Visegrad Four Battle Group 2016: Run up to Visegrad Four NATO Response Force 2020?,” *CENAA Policy Papers*, no. 6 (2013): 1, <http://www.cenaa.org/data/cms/barbora-bodnarova-pp-no-9-2013-vol-21.pdf>.

¹² Cf. Lorenz Wojciech, “EU Battle Group: A Chance for a Breakthrough in Visegrad 4 Cooperation?,” *Bulletin PISM*, no. 39 (492) (April 16, 2013); Kupiecki, “Visegrad Defense Cooperation,” 6.

2009 and launching of Multinational Aviation Training Center in Feb. 2013¹³. Several other ideas were discussed, including such ambitious programs like air policing, and more prosaic, but equally valuable projects on increasing cooperation in military education, ammunition standardization, etc.¹⁴. Finally, in Fall of 2013, that earlier rather loose discussions started to be streamlined by the decision of V4 prime ministers to task their defense establishments with drafting comprehensive long-term vision of the V4 defense cooperation strategy, particularly in context of capability development, as well as exploring the possibility to create a framework for an defense planning cooperation¹⁵.

However, most of the projects discussed until the end of 2013 had serious limitations. First of all, majority of them functioned rather as vague concepts concerning future actions (like in case of cooperation on military education, joint procurement or industrial cooperation). Moreover, those actually introduced were not representing systemic approach and were not developed in thoroughly planned, coherent manner. Most of those, which were intended as exclusively or primarily V4 projects, were limited in scope and based on the logic of exploitation of existing opportunities (like in case of granting reciprocal access to training ground and facilities) rather than on long-term, strategic plan of comprehensive development of V4 capabilities. Moreover, they were mainly based on coordinative methods of cooperation,

¹³ However, in case of MATC, despite long talks within V4, solely Slovakia has joined the project (along with Croatia and the US) and Hungary is considering accession. Therefore, treating that initiative as V4 program is only partially justified. Oldrich Holecek, "Multinational Aviation Training Centre Document Signed by Four Nations," Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, February 25, 2013, <http://www.army.cz/%20en/ministry-of-defense/newsroom/news/multinational-aviation-training-centre-document-signed-by-four-nations-80184/>.

¹⁴ Cf. Tomáš Valášek and Milan Šuplata, eds., "DAV4 Full Report: Towards a Deeper Visegrad Defence Partnership" (Central European Policy Institute, 2012), 12–14.

¹⁵ "Budapest Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government On Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation," Visegrad Group, September 29, 2014, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2013/budapest-joint-statement-140929>.

particularly on exchange of knowledge and information. What was lacking were the efforts more of integrative character, like creating common units, harmonization of functioning of armed forces (for example by adopting the same curricula in education and training) or development of common acquisition programs or practices. Highly underdeveloped was also industrial cooperation¹⁶.

Importantly, many initiatives presented as Visegrad projects were in fact initiated outside V4 framework, primarily on bilateral basis. Moreover, in some cases – like participation in AWACS fleet in NATO (all V4 members) or Strategic Airlift Capabilities or Allied Ground Surveillance (only some members engaged) – decisions on taking part in given initiative were taken by V4 countries separately, on the basis of national interests and considerations, not on agreement on “common V4 purpose”. Therefore, presenting them as an example of V4 cooperation was not entirely justified. Cooperation within V4 was neither a condition for establishing such projects or of accession of Visegrad states to them nor was crucial (even if somewhat useful) to their further development. Last but not least, many of implemented or discussed projects were not prospective in that sense that the possibilities for their further development or deepening were limited. If they succeeded, they could bring results imminently (primarily some financial savings and optimizations, like in case of exchange of access to training grounds and facilities), but would not constitute a starting point for more profound cooperation or integration. It was, however, partially

¹⁶ That was caused also by the fact that defense industries of V4 countries are relatively obsolete, underinvested, with limited access to advanced technologies and – with the Polish exception – rather small, privatized and economically, not politically driven. Therefore, V4 companies would prefer to cooperate rather with external partners, viewed as a potential source of financial assets or new technologies, trigger for modernization and a chance to gain access to other markets. Cooperation within V4 framework would be most probably perceived as a “second best” option, interesting when there is no viable alternative or because of fears of being dominated by the stronger partner from the outside. Cf. Marian Majer, ed., “DAV4 III Expert Group Report: From Bullets to Supersonics: V4 on the Brink of Industrial Cooperation” (Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy, 2015), 7–9.

understandable in the light of domination of purely coordinative and consultative approach within V4 defense cooperation. Nevertheless, it also meant that in the realm of technical and operational cooperation V4 members focused on reaping “low hanging fruits” – projects rather easy to perform, but not necessarily highly productive or promising.

V4 defense cooperation since 2014 - in the long shadow of the crisis on Ukraine, migration and EU internal disputes

In the early 2014 defense cooperation in V4 framework seemed to develop quite well. Completing – surprisingly quickly in light of earlier experience, and thanks to smooth cooperation and engagement of all parties - the task set by Group’s prime ministers on already mentioned summit in Budapest in October 2013, V4 ministries of defense finally adopted on their meeting in Visegrad on March 14, 2014, three important documents: two of more general character - *Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening of Their Defense Cooperation* (LTV) and *Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Defense Planning Cooperation* (the Framework) - and one more specific: the *Memorandum for Understanding on the establishment of the V4 EU Battlegroup*.

Among these documents LTV was the most eminent, since it set strategic goals for the V4 cooperation (primarily strengthening European and transatlantic capabilities through regional actions) and identified three critical, prioritized areas of joint efforts: (1) capability development and procurement; (2) establishment of multinational units; (3) cooperation in the field of education, training and exercises. Regarding capability development, LTV stressed the need to focus on long term planning horizon, increased

transparency and harmonization of defense and procurement plans. Above all, it introduced the principle of examining by V4 countries possibilities of common or coordinated procurements (be it in bi-, tri- or quadrilateral formula) before their decisions concerning major defense acquisition. In addition, it declared that V4 defense industries should be involved in such activities “as actively as possible, preventing the region from turning into a mere market for global defense companies”. In context of the establishment of multinational units, it accentuated – somewhat symptomatically - primarily political benefits stemmed from such initiatives (including their “highest visibility”). It also pointed at the already advancing project of V4 BG, presenting it as a manifestation of Visegrad’s “vision” or “philosophy” of such multinational forces, intended to be: available both to NATO and EU (as well as other arrangements when necessary); of modular character; and constituting a solid base for more permanent future cooperation in this respect. LTV was less specific on actions regarding education, training and exercises – the document mention merely the need of increasing contacts and harmonization of efforts between V4 defense education institutions and committed all participants to organize common V4 military exercise on annual basis, as a contribution to NATO’s Connected Forces Initiative. Importantly, LTV envisioned some kind of institutionalization of cooperation, obliging participants to elaborate multi-year Action Plan with the list of specific projects and initiatives, subject to annual presentation to V4 MODs and regularly updated. Such Action Plan should constitute a guideline on defense cooperation for every future V4 presidency. Finally, LTV declares also an openness of V4 defense cooperation on external partners¹⁷.

¹⁷ “Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening of Their Defense Cooperation,” Visegrad Group, December 2014, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014-03-14-ltv>.

The *Framework*, also adopted on March 14, 2014, is in fact a “technical” supplement to LTV. Apart from presenting more detailed definition of principles of the V4 defense cooperation, it envisioned establishment of V4 Planning Group (V4 PG) as a body primarily responsible for preparing and elaborating technical aspects of cooperation on defense procurements. V4 PG would be supported in its operations by Working Teams (WT), formed on *ad hoc* basis¹⁸. Interestingly enough, the Framework argued also for identifying a “flagship projects” for cooperation on acquisition, stressing the suitability of such solution for manifesting “both to political leadership and to the allies” the willingness and ability of V4 defense administrations to work efficiently on common projects¹⁹.

The last document, *Memorandum on V4 Battle Group*, reiterated some already agreed details concerning this “flagship” project of V4, including its size (3000 troops), stand-by readiness as an element of EU rapid response capability scheduled for the first half of 2016, as well as a plan of V4 BG regular exercises – in coordination with NATO exercises within Connected Forces Initiative framework - starting from 2015. Therefore signing the Memorandum, although it mainly just confirmed earlier arrangements, was another step in completion of - so far - the most

¹⁸ V4 Planning Group was shaped as an integrated defense planning body consisted of national experts on defense procurements, tasked to explore potential areas of cooperation and select the most promising and then to report on the results of its work to national State Secretaries/Defense Policy Directors responsible for defense procurements. Working Teams would be responsible for elaborating the details and specification of given projects identified as promising. “Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation,” Visegrad Group, March 14, 2014, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/cooperation/defence>.

¹⁹ In addition to these documents, at the meeting and during subsequent months there was also discussed a non-paper initiated by Poland, in which some specific initiatives to fill-in the LTV and the Framework were proposed (including Polish suggestion of the modular armored platform for land forces as a highly promising initiative, with the potential to be a “flagship project”). Majer, “From Bullets to Supersonics,” 6.

ambitious and engaging V4 project on operational level²⁰.

Documents from March 2014, as well as the atmosphere of earlier discussions, suggested that in context of defense cooperation Central Europeans were ultimately ready to end with intensive, but nevertheless rather initial talks on principles and general plans of cooperation, when manifesting willingness to engage in joint efforts matters for participants more than tangible results of their actions, and start real, substantial works on specific projects, with the true intention and determination to complete them in reasonable time. In other words, it seemed that V4 defense cooperation was finally moving from talking about things to do together to actually doing them. Importantly, adoption of these documents was not prevented by then quickly unfolding political crisis in the Ukraine. V4 countries, however, still manifested then, although with different level of enthusiasm, somewhat unified position on that issue, at least concerning significance of the situation on the Ukraine for European security²¹. On the other hand, substantial differences were already present in their positions regarding Russian role in the Ukrainian crisis, with Slovakia and Hungary adopting the most cautious approach and avoiding to openly blame Moscow – like Poland did - for instigating and inflaming the crisis²².

Nevertheless, meeting in Visegrad in March 2014, instead of spurring the V4 defense cooperation further, ultimately turned out

²⁰ “Letter of V4 and CEDC Defense Ministers to EU’s HR/VP Catherine Ashton,” Visegrad Group, April 9, 2014, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/letter-to-euhr-v4-cedc>.

²¹ They called all parties involved in crisis to refrain from violence and respect territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ukraine, as well as supported EU efforts to find political solution and declared readiness to offer the reverse of natural gas flow to the Ukraine in case of need. “Joint Statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on Ukraine,” February 24, 2014, <https://mfa.gov.pl/resource/a6425f8b-ab28-4ca7-a449-1510811c9bec:JCR>.

²² Mateusz Gniazdowski, “The Countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe on the Crisis in Ukraine,” OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, March 5, 2014, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-03-05/countries-central-and-south-eastern-europe-crisis-ukraine>.

to be rather a “peak” of that cooperation, marking an end of the period of its relatively intensive (although not particularly fruitful) development. Since March 2014 actions taken by V4 states in area of defense, despite efforts to continue the cooperation irrespective to Russian annexation of the Crimea peninsula and further evolution of the situation on Eastern Ukraine, brought disappointing results, particularly in context of capability development. In spite of the base offered by the March 2014 achievements, with the exception of works on V4BG, virtually none of the initiatives already taken by V4 states in defense realm or envisioned in their numerous solemn declarations progressed significantly. So far not a single joint acquisition project has been implemented. Initial hopes for agreement on joint procurement of radar systems needed in all V4 states (such project was discussed since 2011) were blown away by the Prague decision to launch individual tender²³. The same fate was not avoided in case of acquisition of helicopters for V4 armies, since both Poland and Slovakia ultimately headed toward individual solutions (in Polish case, however, not successful, although primarily due to the changes of preferences concerning possible suppliers after the elections in 2015)²⁴. Offers to start cooperation on the new type of infantry fighting vehicle, issued by Poland several times in 2014, found rather cooling reception among the rest of the Group²⁵. There were no substantial results of various initiatives on cyber-defense.

Although it was initially judged as relatively easy task to

²³ Milan Nič, “Visegrad Defense Cooperation: Doomed to Fail or Survive?,” *CEPA Deterrence Paper*, no. 6 (January 29, 2015): 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2–3. It should be noted, however, that Poland, by far the biggest V4 military power and defense market, was at that moment initiating highly ambitious long-term modernization plan for its armed forces scheduled for a decade (until 2022) and worth some 30 billion of USD. However, the plan was prepared in fact without an assessment of the possibility of cooperation with remaining V4 countries on any of its central elements.

²⁵ Szczepan Głuszcak, “The Warsaw Meeting of V4 Concerning the Armaments Cooperation,” *Dziennik Zbrojny*, October 23, 2014, <http://dziennikzbrojny.pl/artykuly/art,1,1,8151,english-zone,1,the-warsaw-meeting-of-v4-concerning-the-armaments-cooperation>.

complete, there was little progress in harmonization and coordination of works and models of functioning of national military education institutions (not to mention creation of joint V4 defense academy)²⁶. Not so successful were also the efforts to cooperate on air policing, stimulated initially by the growing necessity of phasing out Slovakian Mig-29s and difficulties with finding the alternative. Although that would mean that at least temporarily patrolling of Slovakian airspace could be performed by the planes from other V4 countries, particularly Czech Republic (special cross-border agreement was even signed in 2018), and despite failure of the negotiations with Sweden on leasing of a dozen of Jas-39 Gripens, Slovakia ultimately decided to order 14 F-16s from the US, with the delivery date in 2023²⁷.

Therefore, currently in fact the only advancing as scheduled project is V4BG - an initiative within the framework of the EU CSDP, commonly, however, judged now as disappointing and maybe even dysfunctional in context of the development of valuable and usable European military capabilities. V4BG, with Poland as a framework nation and in strength of 3700, was put for the first time in the BG rotation schedule in the first half of 2016, with the intention to make some of its element (i.e. logistics) of semi-permanent character. Then, it was put for the second time on BG rotation in 2019 (July-December), again with Poland as the framework nation and main contributor, but with the addition of Croatian contingent. It is also agreed that the third rotation of V4BG would be in 2023. However, taking into account that EU battlegroups has as yet never been deployed it is difficult to perceive the success of V4BG as a breakthrough in developing

²⁶ Juraj Krupa, "Visegrad Four Defense Cooperation: Years of Missed Opportunities," *Warsaw Institute*, July 5, 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/visegrad-four-defense-cooperation-years-missed-opportunities/>.

²⁷ *Lockheed awarded \$800 million Slovakia F-16 fighter jet contract*, August 1, 2019, <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/08/01/lockheed-slovakia-f-16-contract/> (access 11.11.19)

European capabilities or factor that should stimulate V4 defense cooperation in other fields²⁸.

Second promising cooperative project of V4 is the establishment of V4 Joint Logistic support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ) – Memorandum of Understanding on that was signed in Budapest in 2018 and partial operational readiness is expected to be achieved in 2020 and full in 2023. When completed, JLSG HQ would offer support for joint exercises, V4BG functioning and could be even a platform for coordination of procurement²⁹. However, only when completed.

That increasingly gloom picture of actual state of V4 defense cooperation could not be masked by the political declarations of the Group's leaders on the issue – surprisingly frequent in 2014 (two on the level of prime ministers within just 6 months, in June and December 2014) – in which they again stressed the importance of such cooperation as a crucial element of V4 agenda³⁰. Quite the contrary, both declarations, as it was rightly noted by Milan Nić, seems to be rather some kind of “ticking the box” exercise, since the prime ministers actually discussed defense cooperation very briefly and in inconclusive way³¹. That made the words about “new opening” in defense cooperation, used in PM's Budapest Declaration from June 2014, sound somewhat ironically. Also meetings in following years, relatively frequent and quite often devoted to security and defense issues, did not bring tangible results in context of defense cooperation like joint projects on

²⁸ Magdalena Kowalska-Sendek, “Unijny dyżur grupy bojowej V4 w 2023 roku,” *Polska Zbrojna*, March 19, 2019, <http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/27846>.

²⁹ Krupa, “Visegrad Four Defense Cooperation,” 117.

³⁰ “Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation,” Visegrad Group, June 24, 2014, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/budapest-declaration-of>; “Bratislava Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the Deepening V4 Defence Cooperation,” Visegrad Group, December 9, 2014, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/bratislava-declaration>.

³¹ Nić, “Visegrad Defense Cooperation: Doomed to Fail or Survive?,” 2.

procurement or capability building.

There are many reasons for poor development of V4 defense cooperation since early 2014. Initially among the most important was a Ukrainian crisis-turned-conflict and Russian involvement in it. It impacted on both European security and the relations of all EU and NATO, including Central European states, with Russia. Dynamic changes of strategic reality caused by the events on Ukraine revealed and augmented deep divisions among V4 countries, what significantly weakened and slowed down their actual cooperation in virtually all areas not only in realm of security and defense. Roughly speaking, main division lines within V4 has emerged between Poland and her smaller partners on the character of response to changes in the Ukraine, particularly in context of the adequate approach to Russia. Poland has seen Russia as the main instigator of conflict and perceived Moscow's policy both as the main obstacle to its solution and the evidence (one of many) of Russian growing aggressiveness towards European neighbors. Therefore, Poland was concerned about the possibility of Russia adopting in future similar steps like in case of Ukraine aimed at other countries, some former Soviet republic in particular (Moldova, but maybe even the Baltics). Therefore, while not advocating for such actions like arms delivery to Ukraine, Poland has argued for harsh economic EU sanctions on Russia as well as increasing assistance to Ukraine, financial or other (including deepening of its own and whole-European involvement in Ukrainian security sector reform).

The remaining V4 participants, however, had been less resolute, at least in context of Russia. Hungary and Slovakia were criticizing EU sanctions on Russia almost since the moment of their introduction, judging them as measures not adequate and not effective in solving Ukrainian problem, but simultaneously

seriously damaging both for economies of particular EU members, as well as Union's future relations with Russia. However, when V4 members' defense policies as such were concerned, differences between them seem to be less profound, what was evidenced during NATO Newport Summit. Although, contrary to the previous meeting of that kind (Chicago 2012), V4 members were unable to issue joint statement before the summit, ultimately they supported main decisions of the allies, agreeing both on the necessity of strengthening NATO presence in the Eastern Flank as well as measures adopted for that purpose³².

Economic interests of particular Visegrad states are most frequently presented as a main reason for the differences among them concerning their (and EU) approach towards Russia after Ukrainian crisis. For small, but highly export-oriented economies of Slovakia, Czech Rep. and – although to somewhat lesser extent – Hungary, Russian market was really important, especially after the global economic crisis and not fully completed recovery from it³³. Moreover, profound dependency of Hungary and Slovakia on energy (oil and gas) deliveries from Russia by pipelines through Ukrainian territory (sustainability and continuity of which could be threatened by protracted unrest or frozen conflict on the Eastern Ukraine) also had to have an impact on their policies. In addition,

³² Jakub Groszkowski, Mateusz Gniazdowski, and Andrzej Sadecki, "A Visegrad Cacophony over the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine," *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, September 10, 2014, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-09-10/a-visegrad-cacophony-over-conflict-between-russia-and-ukraine>.

³³ Czech export to Russia more than doubled (130% of growth) since 2009, although still constitute merely 3,7% of the Czech export in total. Nevertheless, Prague has perceived Russian market as highly promising, especially in context of their heavy and machinery industry. At the same time in the Czech Rep. there were serious fears of being replaced permanently on Russian markets by Chinese companies due to EU sanctions and Russian countersanctions. Similar view on costs (actual and potential) of economic embargoes on Russia was common in Slovakia, particularly in context of their machinery industry (lathes) and agriculture. For Poland and Hungary, although Russia was important market particularly for their agriculture products (meat, fruits), the economic embargoes were slightly less disruptive. Cf. Jakub Groszkowski, "Polityka Czech wobec Rosji – biznes i wartości," *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, June 11, 2014, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2014-06-11/polityka-czech-wobec-rocji-biznes-i-wartosci>; Groszkowski, Gniazdowski, and Sadecki, "A Visegrad Cacophony."

Hungary was a strong proponent of Russian-led project of South Stream pipeline until the very moment of its cancellation in the end of 2014, and finalized a contract – despite some European Commission reservations – with Russian company Rosatom (based on intergovernmental agreement of cooperation) on expansion on its only-nuclear energy plant in Paks.³⁴

Obviously, all that differences in interests among Visegrad countries and their political leaders were quite skillfully exploited by Russian authorities, who mastered “divide and rule” principle in the relations with V4 members. While V4 joint activities, and specifically its defense cooperation, were generally depreciated in Russian propaganda³⁵, in relations with particular Visegrad capitals Russian approach was more nuanced, with the “sticks” offered to “recalcitrant” like Poland³⁶ and carrots given to more “sympathetic” partners like Hungary³⁷. However, such moves weakened internal cohesion and functioning of Visegrad Group as such, so in fact they were not focused specifically on paralyzing its defense cooperation, even if such results would be welcomed in

³⁴ “Paks Expansion Project Gets Contract Boost,” *World Nuclear News*, December 9, 2014, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NN-Paks-expansion-project-gets-contract-boost-9121401.html>.

³⁵ Some examples of that kind of “strategic communication” could be found on Russia-financed website Sputniknews, published in Polish. See for example: Gajane Chanowa, “Do czego NATO potrzebna jest wyszehradzka grupa bojowa?,” *Sputnik Polska*, October 13, 2014, http://pl.sputniknews.com/polish.ruvr.ru/2014_10_13/Do-czego-NATO-potrzebna-jest-wyszehradzka-grupa-bojowa-3003/.

³⁶ Such “sticks” most often came in form of economic embargoes on products earlier exported to Russia or announcements of changes in stationing of Russian military equipment, including deployment of Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad (what seems now to be almost ritual Russian action in relations with Poland, repeated almost always when tensions in bilateral contacts are increasing). Cf. “Russian Military Completes Rapid-Deployment Drills in Kaliningrad,” *RT International*, December 16, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/214667-russia-drills-kaliningrad-region/>.

³⁷ The good example of the “carrots” offered by Russia was a visit of President Putin in Budapest in February 2015. During the visit the changes in contract on gas delivery between Russia and Hungary (like abolition of take-or-pay clause), were announced. Andrzej Sadecki, “Putin in Budapest – Overcoming Isolation,” *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, February 18, 2015, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-02-18/putin-budapest-overcoming-isolation>.

Moscow³⁸.

Nevertheless, even deep divisions among V4 countries on Ukrainian and Russian issues are by no means the only reasons for loss of steam in developing V4 defense cooperation. To large degree they have only augmented problems already present and somewhat inherent for that form of common activities of Visegrad states. These problems are linked to structural factors characterizing the V4 cooperation and therefore are serious, permanent and difficult to solve, eliminate or overcome. Particularly important are substantial disproportions in size and potential within V4, particularly between Poland and three remaining partners – it is worthy to mention that both Polish defense budget and GDP are bigger than respective values of all remaining V4 even taken together (see table 2). That could continuously hamper their defense cooperation, particularly on technical, operational and industrial level³⁹.

Table 2. Defense spending of V4 countries in years 2014-2019

	Year	Poland	Czech Rep.	Hungary	Slovakia

³⁸ However, Russia’s policy towards the Ukraine and European partners was not the only challenge to V4 internal cohesion and Group’s defense cooperation. As a result of Czech initiative, a new formula of sub-regional cooperation – so called Slavkov Triangle (Czech Rep. Slovakia, Austria) – was initiated in February 2, 2015. Although officially not intended to be a competitor or rival for V4, proclamation of Slavkov formula caused some anxiety particularly in Poland (where – apart from alarmist and unjustified voices calling this initiative as a potential pro-Russian fraction and agent of influence in the region – some analysts quite logically asked why such cooperation was not based on already tested V 4+ format) and, to a lesser extent, in Hungary. Lubosz Palata, “Praga z Wiedniem i bliżej Moskwy,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 3, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75399,17344411,Praga_z_Wiedniem_i_blizej_Moskwy.html; Dariusz Kalan, “The Slavkov Triangle: A Rival To the Visegrad Group?,” *PISM Bulletin*, no. 19 (751) (February 16, 2015); Jakub Groszkowski, “The Slavkov Declaration. A New Format of Regional Cooperation,” *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, February 4, 2015, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-02-04/slavkov-declaration-a-new-format-regional-cooperation>.

³⁹ For more see Madej, “Visegrad Group Defense Cooperation.”

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Defense expenditure (million USD)*	2014	10 104	1 975	1 210	997
Def. exp. as a GDP share		1.85	0.95	0.86	0.99
GDP (billion USD)*		460	177	119	84
Defense expenditure (million USD)*	2015	10 596	1 921	1 132	986
Def. exp. as a GDP share		2.22	1.03	0.92	1.12
GDP*		478	187	123	88
Defense expenditure (million USD)*	2016	9 405	1 866	1 289	1 003
Def. exp. as a GDP share		1.99	0.96	1.02	1.12
GDP*		492	191	126	91
Defense expenditure (million USD)*	2017	9 938	2 255	1 468	1 053
Def. exp. as a GDP share		1.89	1.04	1.05	1.10
GDP		516	200	131	93
Defense expenditure		11 856	2 746	1 791	1 297

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(million USD)*	2018**				
Def. exp. as a GDP share		2.02	1.12	1.15	1.22
GDP		542	206	138	97
Defense expenditure (million USD)*	2019**	11 971	2 969	2 080	1 905
Def. exp. as a GDP share		2.01	1.19	1.21	1.74
GDP		565	211	143	101

* - Constant 2015 prices and exchange rates

** - Estimates

Source: “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2012–2019),
Communique PR/CP(2019)069,” NATO, June 25, 2019,
https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf.

Moreover, despite some positive changes in light of Ukrainian crisis and pledges already done on NATO Newport summit, financial resources available for V4 cooperation would remain rather limited in scale, since growth of military budgets announced in the aftermath of Newport summit by respective governments (excluding Poland) are modest at best. Although Poland increased its defense spending above the required by NATO level of 2 % of GDP as early as in 2015 (although later not always managing to maintain that), other V4 countries were not so determined. Obviously, while their current military spending are much lower than Polish, for them matching the benchmark of 2 % of GDP (even if formulated in Newport as an intended, not

obligatory goal for allies) is by far more demanding task. Nevertheless, leaders of all V4 countries promise to increase military spending, although in the pace that rather exclude reaching NATO expected level as scheduled (or even at all) ⁴⁰. Although such situation could stimulate search for some joint efforts as – at least potentially – more economically efficient, it raise also the questions concerning determination of particularly three smaller V4 members in their efforts to transform Visegrad into truly ambitious and effective platform for defense cooperation.

Important was also intensification of cooperation within NATO and – although it happened somewhat later – and EU, what exposed the divergent security interests and priorities of V4 countries. Although immediately after Newport summit all V4 states seemed to fully support NATO focus on strengthening Eastern Flank and manifested willingness to engage seriously in this process (for example, all V4 states except Czech Rep. relatively quickly – until September 2015 - established on its territories so called NFIU's – NATO Force Integration Units⁴¹), in the aftermath of Warsaw NATO summit substantial differences in priorities and determination in that context started to be more visible. Poland focuses strongly on strengthening NATO Eastern Flank further, particularly through – initiated in part by Warsaw – Enhanced Forward Presence⁴² as well as expanding NATO command structure on its territory (enlargement of already existing Multinational Corps North East – MNC NE in Szczecin,

⁴⁰ Groszkowski, Gniazdowski, and Sadecki, "A Visegrad Cacophony."

⁴¹ "NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) Activated Today in Six Allied Nations," U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, September 2, 2015, <https://nato.usmission.gov/nato-force-integration-units-nfiu-activated-today-in-six-allied-nations/>.

⁴² Enhanced Forward Presence is NATO initiative established at NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016, with the intention to strengthen NATO deterrence and defense capability and readiness in the eastern part of treaty area by deploying on continuous rotational basis four multinational battalion-size battlegroups to four Eastern Flank allies (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland). For more see "Enhanced Forward Presence," NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, accessed November 20, 2019, <https://shape.nato.int/efp>.

establishment of additional Multinational Division North East – MND NE in Elblag). The remaining V4 participants, however, although engaged in EFP and other NATO initiatives to develop the Alliance’s deterrence and defense capability and readiness in the East of the treaty area⁴³, do not show similar determination. That was pretty understandable, taking into account differences in their threat perceptions (Poland strongly focused on challenges posed by Russia, including its military potential; Hungarians and Slovaks more preoccupied with the irregular migration and Czechs as the least threatened by external problems of all V4 countries)⁴⁴. In such circumstances Polish recent focus on cooperation rather than V4 countries with its NATO allies from the North East (particularly the Baltics) or – to lesser extent – with Romania (also interested in strengthening NATO deterrence in Eastern Europe, through so called tailored Enhanced Presence) is hardly surprising.

Another potential stimulus for V4 defense cooperation, which ultimately proved rather weaknesses of it, was triggering of PESCO initiative within the CSDP framework in late 2017. It was a chance to reinvigorate sub-regional cooperation on defense issues within Europe and in fact it was even expected that V4 – so vocal and tough as a group on EU forums as far as immigration issues were discussed – would also be interested to demonstrate its cohesion by igniting some new projects of industrial cooperation or in capacity building through more efficient use of existing resources. However, with particularly Poland (and to lesser extent

⁴³ As for July 2019, Poland, Czech Rep. and Slovakia has deployed troops to Canada-led battlegroup in Latvia, Poland is hosting and participating in the US-led battlegroup and Czech Rep has troops in Lithuania-based battlegroup led by Germans. Hungarians are absent from current rotation of EFP, although have contributed to previous ones. “NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence,” NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, July 2019, https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/factsheet_efp_en.pdf.

⁴⁴ Read more in Šárka Kolmašová, “Competing Norms and Strategic Visions: A Critical Appraisal of V4 Security Potential,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 2 (February 7, 2019): 225–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1562045>.

Hungary) joining PESCO at the very last hour and significantly reserved towards the initiative, it was hard to develop clear “V4 agenda” within it. Hence, the only PESCO project that all V4 members are currently participating is Military Mobility (but in this program almost all PESCO countries are involved) and none of those projects within PESCO that are led by V4 member (i.e. EuroArtillery - indirect fire support – led by Slovakia, SOF medical training center led by Poland or on electronic warfare capabilities led by Czech Rep.) were even designed to be a platform for joint V4 effort⁴⁵. So the case of PESCO shows very well the actual, not declaratory state of defense cooperation and internal cohesion in the group.

Summing up, after almost 30 years of its evolution, defense cooperation within the V4 framework could be assessed as successful only by strong optimists. Despite multiple declarations of the leaders of Visegrad countries, the profound rhetoric they have used and most probably good, sincere intentions of all participants, this cooperation still lacks substance and did not lead neither to establishment of permanent mechanisms or infrastructure of cooperation, particularly on the level of industry, nor to completion of significant capability development projects and useful military resources (maybe with the exception of V4BG). Moreover, even when the circumstances started to be seemingly more conducive for development of defense cooperation between Visegrad states – years just before and after 2014, when on the one hand new goals, plans and structures for that cooperation had been proclaimed and on the other the eruption of the crisis in the neighborhood could elevate the security concerns and change

⁴⁵ Martin Michelot, “The V4 on Defence: The Art of Disagreement,” *European Leadership Network*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/the-v4-on-defence-the-art-of-disagreement/>; “PESCO,” accessed November 20, 2019, <https://pesco.europa.eu/>.

threat perception of the V4 participants – it actually did not materialize. Quite the contrary, it had rather revealed both the importance of structural factors that limit such cooperation in the past as well as the scale of divergence between the interests and political calculations of Visegrad governments. Hence, although all four of V4 countries ultimately started to increase its military spending and reinvigorate their security policies, they decided to use for that purpose other platforms of cooperation (NATO, EU), not necessarily looking among the Visegrad participants for the closest partners in these endeavors. So they have deliberately chosen to keep Visegrad Group in context of security and defense issues in the same formula as in the past – as a platform of political consultations and – from time to time - “the base” for common position on selected security or policy issues (currently it is mainly migration), which boost their position within larger forums (like EU), not the mechanism for somewhat tangible, more technical, but still productive defense cooperation and integration. Definitely, it was a manifestation of pragmatism and generally rational choice, but which also shows rather slim chances for a substantial change and improvement in future.