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Bojová skupina EU Visegrádské čtyřky Význam a pokrok

Visegrad Four EU Battlegroup Meaning and Progress

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Abstract

In 2011, the states of the so-called Visegrad Four (V4), i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, decided to form a joint European Union battlegroup by 2016, available for rapid deployment within ten days and within a radius of six thousand kilometres from Brussels. The intention to establish this military formation had become the first initiative of its kind within the V4 ever. The present article therefore aims to examine the content of the mutual military cooperation among the CR, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia in the form of the V4 battlegroup and make readers acquainted with relevant and up-to-date information about the process of the formation of the V4 battlegroup and its importance for the military cooperation of the V4 countries. In order to achieve that, the authors introduce the previous experience of the individual V4 countries with the formation of EU battlegroups, explain the motives of the V4 countries to form a joint battlegroup, describe the path leading to the creation of the V4 BG as well as the possibilities of its deployment and the question of financing, and finally they deal with the perspectives of the V4 BG from the point of view of its importance for further development of military cooperation between the V4 countries.

Abstrakt

V roce 2011 se státy tzv. Visegrádské čtyřky (V4), tedy Česká republika, Maďarsko, Polsko a Slovensko, rozhodly, že do roku 2016 vytvoří společnou bojovou skupinu Evropské unie, schopnou rychlého nasazení do deseti dnů až do vzdálenosti šest tisíc kilometrů od Bruselu. Záměr vybudovat tuto vojenskou formaci se v rámci V4 stal historicky první iniciativou svého druhu. Cílem předkládaného článku je prozkoumat obsah vzájemné vojenské spolupráce mezi ČR, Maďarskem, Polskem a Slovenskem v podobě V4 battlegroup a zprostředkovat čtenářům relevantní a aktuální informace o procesu tvorby V4 BG a jejím významu pro vojenskou spolupráci zemí V4. Za tímto účelem autoři představují zkušenosti jednotlivých zemí V4 s vytvářením dosavadních bojových skupin EU, objasňují motivy zemí V4 k vytvoření bojové skupiny, popisují cestu vedoucí ke vzniku V4 BG, stejně jako možnosti jejího nasazení a otázku financování, a na závěr pojednávají o perspektivách V4 BG z hlediska jejího významu pro další rozvoj vojenské spolupráce mezi zeměmi V4.

Keywords

European Union; crisis management; battlegroups; Visegrad group; defence cooperation.

Klíčová slova

Evropská unie; krizový management; bojové skupiny; Visegrádská skupina; obranná spolupráce.

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) shows incessant effort to maintain its status as a prominent security actor on the international scene. As part of this effort, in 2004 the EU introduced within the then European (today already Common) Security and Defence Policy (ESDP/CSDP) a new tool of rapid reaction - the EU battlegroups (EU BG). Hence the Union sent out a clear signal that it was ready to assume a greater share of responsibility for keeping international peace and security. In 2007, these battlegroups reached full operational capability, which offered the EU a possibility to conduct two parallel operations every six months while simultaneously using two of these battlegroups.

The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, and Poland, which have formed an informal subregional structure for over twenty years - the "Visegrad Four" (V4) - have been facing great challenges since their common accession to the EU in the form of active participation in all political processes within the EU, including the creation of the aforementioned battlegroups. Due to the fact that originally these countries showed a relatively low level of mutual military cooperation and at the same time at the beginning of their membership they logically did not possess sufficient experience with the creation of battlegroups, at first they gave preference to co-participation (and hence gaining necessary experience) in forming battlegroups with the already well-established EU member states individually.

With the growing number of security challenges, the EU articulated more and more vigorously its requirements to intensify the formations of battlegroups by EU member states, including the V4 countries, which gradually started to contemplate the idea of forming their own Visegrad battlegroup. Therefore, in 2011 these four states announced their mutual plan to create the V4 BG, which was to be formed to meet the needs of the EU in 2016. Hence the intention to build this military formation composed exclusively of the V4 countries became the first joint initiative of its kind.

The aim of the present article is to examine the content of the mutual military cooperation of the V4 countries in the form of a joint battlegroup. Due to the great topicality of this issue, the authors tried to collect a great volume of findings pertaining to the given issue and sort them out in a systematic way. When forming the resource base, they did not restrict themselves only to resources available in printed literature and on the Internet, but they conducted a series of interviews with experts from the security and military realm. The main purpose of the article is to make readers acquainted with relevant and up-to-date information about the process of formation of the V4 BG and its importance for the military cooperation of the V4 countries.

The text itself starts with a chapter dedicated to the concept of the EU battlegroups. It introduces the origin of this concept, the process of its implementation and formation and the ways of deployment and it also briefly highlights several problems associated with putting the concept into practice. Simultaneously, the chapter also contains experience of the individual V4 countries with formations of the previous EU battlegroups. The key part of the article is a chapter focused directly on the V4 battlegroup. It clarifies V4 countries' motives to establish a battlegroup, describes the path leading to the foundation of the V4 BG and introduces the readers to the structure of the battlegroup, possibilities of its deployment and the question of financing. The article is concluded with a treatise on the perspectives of the V4 BG from the viewpoint of its importance for the further development of military cooperation between the V4 countries.

THE EU BATTLEGROUPS CONCEPT

The history of EU battlegroups dates back to 1999 when the meeting of the European Council in Helsinki identified the need for the EU to have rapid reaction forces available that would represent an essential tool within EU crisis management. This session resulted in passing the Helsinki Headline Goal concept, which set up a task for the member states to prepare available and deployable rapid

reaction forces.¹ This step was consequently reinforced by the British-French meeting in Le Touquet where political consensus was achieved confirming the intensified capabilities of rapid reaction of the EU by establishing the EU BG. The Headline Goal 2010, which was consequently passed in 2004, referred to establishing the EU BG as top priority, which led to the passing of the EU BG Concept by the EU Military Committee in June 2004.²

The first important step in the implementation process of the EU BG Concept was soon taken in November 2004 at the Military Capability Commitment Conference, where the representatives of EU member states pledged to create 13 EU BGs in total.³ Based on this commitment, the EU was able to conduct one crisis management operation every six months by means of one EU BG already between 2005 and 2007. At this conference, EU member states also made a commitment that all 13 EU BGs would be fully operational by 2007, which allowed the EU to conduct up to two parallel operations while using two EU BGs every six months.⁴

Based on the EU BG Concept, the EU battlegroup can be defined as “*the minimum military effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations, or for the initial phase of larger operations*”.⁵ The exact composition of the battlegroups is not strictly given though. Nevertheless, there is a general framework according to which the EU BG should have a central core that is to consist of 1,500 - 2,500 operational land forces of the size of one battalion.⁶ A standard EU BG should consist of the headquarters, three infantry companies and corresponding support personnel. However, the exact composition of the particular EU BG is fully up to the potential engaged EU member countries that will decide to establish an EU BG.⁷

In accordance with the EU BG Concept, EU member states can establish national or multinational EU BG. In the case of the multinational EU BG, each participating country must make sure that the elements contributed to the given formation will meet the required criteria and will be certified according to the NATO norms.⁸ The preparation, or, in other words, the formation of a multinational EU BG is also perceived as an opportunity to increase military cooperation between the particular EU member countries. That can lead to the improvement of awareness of the mutual military capacity, means as well as processes of political decision-making. It must be added that the EU BG Concept does

¹ HAMELINK, Ron. The Battlegroups Concept: Giving the EU a concrete “military” face. *EuroFuture* [online]. 2005, Winter, p. 8 [cit. 2014-01-16]. Available from:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/Battlegroup1DefenseandSecurity.pdf>

² HATZIGEORGOPOULOS, Myrto. The role of EU Battlegroups in European defence. *European Security Review* [online]. 2012, No. 56, p. 1 [cit. 2014-01-17]. Available from: http://isis-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/esr_56.pdf

³ *Declaration on European Military Capabilities*. Military Capability Commitment Conference [online]. Brussels, 22 November 2004 [cit. 2014-01-17]. Available from:

<http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/MILITARY%20CAPABILITY%20COMMITMENT%20CONFERENCE%2022.11.04.pdf>

⁴ KORBA, Matúš (a). Európska bezpečnostná a obranná politika (EBOP). In: LUPTÁK, Ľ., R. ONDREJCSÁK and V. TARASOVIČ, eds. *Panorama of global security environment 2004-2005*. Bratislava: Inštitút bezpečnostných a obranných štúdií MO SR, 2005, p. 47. ISBN 80-88842-84-0.

⁵ QUILLE, Gerrard. *The EU Battlegroups* [online]. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, 2006, p. 5 [cit. 2014-01-17]. Available from:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede030909notebattlegroups_sede030909notebattlegroups_en.pdf

⁶ GUTTEN, Miroslav. Bojové skupiny Európskej Únie. *Politické vedy* [online]. 2010, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 59 [cit. 2014-01-14]. ISSN 1338-5623. Available from:

http://www.politickevedy.fpmv.umb.sk/userfiles/file/1_2010/3_gutten.pdf

⁷ LINDSTROM, Gustav. *Enter the EU Battlegroups* [online]. Chaillot Paper, 2007, No. 97, p. 15. Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies [cit. 2014-01-17]. Available from:

<http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp097.pdf>

⁸ ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (a). *DAV4 II Expert Group Report on Visegrad Defence Collaboration: From Battlegroup to Permanent Structures* [online]. Bratislava: Central European Policy Institute, 2013, p. 7 [cit. 2014-01-18]. Available from:

http://www.cepolicy.org/sites/cepolicy.org/files/attachments/dav4_2013_web.pdf

not exclude the possibility to invite a non-member EU country to participate in a multinational EU BG.⁹

In regard to the multinational EU BG, the responsibility for the composition of units and the provision of their operational capability is assumed by the so-called Framework Nation (FN). Under its auspices, countries participating within the EU BG perform planning, setting up, training and certification and at the same time provide the EU with a deployable EU BG for the period of six months (in the period January - June, or July - December). Concurrently, the FN is responsible for providing the Operational Headquarters (OHQ), which takes on the responsibility for the entire package of forces in case of the multinational EU BG deployment.¹⁰

Based on the six-month rotation principle of stand-by of each of the created EU BG, the deployment can be ordered by the European Council, which decides about the launching of a potential operation within five days after the adoption of the Crisis Management Concept. Based on that, the particular EU BG must be deployed on the ground within ten days and ready to fulfil the tasks of the operation. The sustainability of the EU BG on the ground must be at least 30 days and can reach up to 120 days on the ground if resupplied.¹¹

Based on the EU BG Concept, the deployability of a battlegroup is possible in the full range of the so-called Petersberg Tasks as well as tasks listed in the European Security Strategy.¹² At present, with regard to the Lisbon Treaty, these tasks include “*joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation.*” In addition, the Lisbon Treaty adds that “*All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories*”.¹³

Nevertheless the fact that the EU BGs are being regarded today as the EU flagships that are to represent the EU military force on the outside, it must be stated that these EU battlegroups have never been deployed. This has been caused especially by the EU member states’ lack of willingness to get engaged by deploying their EU BG in military operations in countries that do not pose a direct threat to their security interests. Simultaneously, EU member states are right to calculate that a potential deployment of the EU BG will require considerable financial costs. Last but not least, the member states take into account also the risks of manpower losses, which could be high when deploying the EU BG.¹⁴ Hence we can sum up that in spite of the existing mechanism of operationally capable EU BGs, the EU member states with regard to possible political, financial and human costs intentionally refuse to deploy their EU BG within CSDP missions, by doing which they try to prevent the precedent of their regular deployment.

⁹ *Common Security and Defence Policy. EU Battlegroups* [online]. Brussels: European Union External Action, 2013, p. 2 [cit. 2014-01-18]. Available from:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/esdp/91624.pdf

¹⁰ MAJOR, Claudia and MÖLLING, Christian. *EU Battlegroups: What Contribution to European Defence? Progress and Prospects of European Rapid Response Forces* [online]. SWP Research Paper, 2011, No. 8, p. 11. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [cit. 2014-01-18]. Available from: [http://www.swp-](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2011_RP08_mjr_mlg_ks.pdf)

[berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2011_RP08_mjr_mlg_ks.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2011_RP08_mjr_mlg_ks.pdf)

¹¹ QUILLE, Gerrard, ref. 5, p. 6

¹² *Common Security and Defence Policy. EU Battlegroups*, ref. 9, p. 3

¹³ *Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* [online]. Title V, Chapter 2, Section 2, Article 43. Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2012 [cit. 2014-01-18]. Available from:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%206655%202008%20REV%207>

¹⁴ TERLIKOWSKI, Marcin. Polish-Led EU Battle Group. *Bulletin* [online]. Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2010, No. 3, pp. 157-158 [cit. 2014-01-18]. Available from: http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=2674

Experience of the individual V4 countries with the formation of previous EU BGs

Due to the relatively low level of mutual military cooperation among the V4 countries in the period after these countries' accession to the EU, these four states did not contemplate at first the possibility to establish a joint EU BG. This decision logically stemmed also from their status in the EU, on the basis of which it could not be anticipated that the V4 countries as the new members would immediately and independently solve relatively complex political-military matters, such as the creation of a joint EU BG.¹⁵ However, in order to earn respect and experience with the EU BGs, the V4 states demonstrated their willingness and militarily contributed to other EU BGs formed under the auspices of the already experienced EU countries.¹⁶

In this respect, the first Visegrad country to participate in the formation of an EU BG was Hungary. In 2007, the joint Hungarian-Slovenian-Italian EU BG was formed, of which Italy was the FN. The participation of the Hungarian armed forces in this joint BG, which was on stand-by in the second half of 2007, consisted of a Light Infantry Battalion, while Slovenia detached for the given battlegroup its 10th Motorised Infantry and Italy provided its Alpine Brigade Julia.¹⁷

The subsequent separate contribution to CSDP activities by the Visegrad countries was the decision to establish a Czech-Slovak Battlegroup from April 2008, within which the CR assumed the role of the FN. The joint military unit consisted of 1,800 soldiers capable of deployment within ten days after the European Council has taken a decision. This EU BG's operational six-month stand-by lasted for the second half of 2009 and their OHQ was situated in Potsdam, Germany. As regards its contributions to this EU BG, the Slovak Republic sent c. 400 soldiers and simultaneously provided support elements consisting of a platoon of radiation, biological and chemical protection, military police units and members of logistic support.¹⁸ The core of the battlegroup was composed of the Czech 43rd Mechanised Battalion from Chrudim and members of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade from Žatec.¹⁹

Another example of the EU BG with the participation of some Visegrad countries was the multinational Polish-German-Slovak-Latvian-Lithuanian EU BG, which was on stand-by from January to June 2010. The proposal to establish this particular EU BG arose at the trilateral meeting of representatives of the armed forces of Germany, Poland, and Slovakia held in November 2004 in Bratislava. At this meeting, all the three participating parties presented their proposals and possible military contributions for the formation of the given EU BG, in which Latvia and Lithuania were also later involved.²⁰ Based on the subsequent signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of all the participating parties, the role of the FN was assumed by Poland (as the first V4 country ever) within the EU BG and at the same time this country was in charge of its organization.²¹ Out of the total number

¹⁵ For more see for example CHOVANČÍK, Martin and KŘÍŽ, Zdeněk. Czech and Slovak Defense Policies Since 1999: The Impact of Europeanization. *Problems of Post-Communism*. 2013, roč. 60, č. 3, pp. 49-73. ISSN 1075-8216. DOI: 10.2753/PPC1075-8216600304.

¹⁶ E-mail communication with Zdeněk Petráš, assistant professor at the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies, University of Defence, Brno, 19 February 2014.

¹⁷ *Sharing the Experiences of Visegrad Cooperation in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood Countries*, Project Preparatory Study [online]. Budapest: International Centre for Democratic Transition, 2010, p. 58 [cit. 2014-02-20]. Available from: <http://www.icdt.hu/documents/publications/GUAM-Project-Preparatory-Study.pdf>

¹⁸ KORBA, Matúš (b). Vonkajšia bezpečnosť a obrana. In: KOLLÁR, M., G. MESEŽNIKOV and M. BÚTORA, eds. *Slovensko 2008: Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti*. Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejnú otázku, 2008, p. 391. ISBN 80-89345-15-1.

¹⁹ ŠINDELÁŘ, Miroslav. Battle Groups pro EU se připravují na Doupově. *Armáda České republiky* [online]. 2008 [cit. 2014-02-22]. Available from: <http://www.acr.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=10991>

²⁰ NIŽŇANSKÝ, Jaroslav. Možnosti regionálnej vojenskej spolupráci z pohľadu Slovenska. In: *Vojenské aspekty bezpečnosti Strední Evropy*. Brno: Ústav strategických štúdií Univerzity obrany, 2005, p. 133.

²¹ *Memorandum of Understanding between The Federal Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany, The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, The Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, The Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Poland and The Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic*

of 1,800 soldiers, Poland provided nearly half of them, while Germany contributed c. 30% and Slovakia together with Latvia and Lithuania also c. 30% soldiers.²²

However, due to the lack of operational experience, it is difficult to evaluate whether the various BGs, particularly those in which the Visegrad states were engaged, possessed similar levels of military effectiveness and interoperability. As part of the general East-West divide, some observers doubted the readiness, for example of the Czech-Slovak BG, and suspected that such BGs were only a political statements of commitment to the CSDP.²³

On the other hand, taking into account the aforesaid cases of establishing an EU BG with the participation of V4 states, it is possible to argue that over a relatively short time these states had gained direct experience with participating in the process of building and operating within a BG, and in case of Poland and the CR even with the role of the FN. Simultaneously, while contemplating the experience of national troops of these states during the stand-by of the past EU BGs, it can be assumed that the preparation and operation of the first joint political-military contribution of the V4 countries for the EU in history will be a less complicated process in comparison with the scenario if these states had not had such a direct possibility to gain knowledge from the past.

V4 BG AS A STIMULUS OF MILITARY COOPERATION OF THE V4 COUNTRIES

Motives and path to the creation of the V4 BG

The idea of forming a V4 EU BG was first dealt with at the meeting of the chiefs of the general staffs of these four countries already in 2007 in Sliač, Slovakia. At this meeting, the possibility of establishing a common EU battlegroup was first discussed but it was also pointed out that due to its demanding nature, or lack of possibility to simultaneously detach national troops both for the purposes of NATO (NATO Response Force, NRF) and the EU (EU BG), the Visegrad states must harmonize and carefully plan such a potential joint contribution to the EU. Between 2007 and 2011, further conceptual work pertaining to the creation of V4 EU BG itself was suspended, which was mainly due to the slow progress of the feasibility analysis as well as a low degree of motivation to establish such a joint European battlegroup.²⁴

The motivations of V4 countries to establish a mutual battlegroup were increased by the more and more frequent demands to provide military capabilities for the EU, associated with the increasing number of security challenges coming from the European neighbourhood, as well as the rise of the Pooling and Sharing initiatives and persisting curtailing of defence expenses. A major role was also played by the fact that the V4 states had gained experience from the creation and participation in other EU BGs already during the aforementioned years. That was simultaneously related to the need both to establish closer subregional cooperation in the military-defence relations and the need to demonstrate these countries' commitment to the EU.²⁵

An important motive to establish the V4 EU BG were also strategic calculations of the military representatives and security analysts of these four states who took into account the fact that from the medium-term perspective it will be necessary to make a new impulse for further transformation and modernisation of the armed forces of these states and provide further preparation of their national troops for combat deployment in crisis regions. This motive made sense especially when taking into

Concerning The Framework Regulations for the European Union Battlegroup (EU BG 2010) [online]. Brussels, 2006, p. 8 [cit. 2014-02-23]. Available from: <http://goo.gl/1vJVxt>

²² TERLIKOWSKI, Marcin, ref. 14, p. 157

²³ MAJOR, Claudia and MÖLLING, ref. 10, p. 18

²⁴ GOTKOWSKA, Justyna and OSICA, Olaf, eds. *Closing the Gap? Military Co-operation from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea* [online]. Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, pp. 58-59 [cit. 2014-03-01]. Available from: http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/closing_the_gap_net_0.pdf

²⁵ E-mail communication with Tamas Csiki, research fellow at Center for Security and Defense Studies, Budapest, 3 March 2014.

consideration the fact that these states were aware of the previously announced termination of the ISAF operation in Afghanistan in 2014, which will represent the reductions of pressures to maintain interoperability of the military capabilities of the individual V4 states with other armies of NATO and EU states.²⁶

Another motive of equal importance for forming a joint EU battlegroup was the intention of the Visegrad states to contribute to further actions of CSDP. This group of states was well aware that a potential creation of the V4 EU BG would fundamentally help the EU fill in the half-empty list of useable battlegroups,²⁷ which would increase the credit itself of these countries within the entire EU.

The combination of the motives listed above and the achieved consensus about the potential not only symbolic but also practical contribution of a joint battlegroup had led to the launching of this project at the meeting of the V4 ministers of defence in May 2012 in Levoča, Slovakia. At this meeting, the intention itself to form a joint V4 battlegroup according to the EU BG Concept was first brought up, by which this meeting confirmed the political will of the Visegrad states representatives to establish closer mutual military collaboration. Besides the intention to establish the V4 EU BG, the parties participating in Levoča also expressed their interest to achieve a preliminary consensus regarding the FN role of the future V4 battlegroup. After initial hesitations, the Polish Minister of Defence Bogdan Klich confirmed the role of Poland as the FN²⁸ and at the same time also determined the deadline of the anticipated operationability (the so-called stand-by period) - the first half of 2016.²⁹

The intention to establish a joint V4 EU BG was further supported and negotiated at the following meeting of the V4 ministers of defence in May 2012 in the Czech town of Litoměřice. In a joint communiqué of the ministers of defence, it was stated in regards to the V4 EU BG that the individual V4 states had approved the accomplished progress in the intention to form this joint EU battlegroup. Simultaneously, the given communiqué became the new “guiding line” according to which it was declared that the military staff of the V4 EU BG would exceed 3,000 persons. Last but not least, the communiqué stressed the importance of a joint battlegroup as a tool to increase the military capabilities of the V4 states.³⁰

In the late February and early March 2013, meetings of the V4 deputy ministers of defence were convened in the Polish cities of Gdansk and Gdynia, at which all the partners within V4 confirmed that they gave priority to subregional cooperation in the military-defence area and that the V4 EU BG would be a contribution of the V4 countries to the further enhancement of CSDP.³¹ The subsequent V4 summit in March 2013 became a significant milestone in the process of the formation of the V4 BG. Besides the ministers of defence of the V4 states, also the V4 prime ministers took part in it, as did the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Holland.³² The summit resulted in a declaration called Cooperation in Developing Capabilities, Solidarity in Sharing Responsibilities,

²⁶ ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (b). *Visegrad Battlegroup: A Vehicle for Regional Defence Co-operation. Report from the DAV4 Visegrad Security Co-operation Workshop* [online]. Bratislava: Central European Policy Institute, 2013, p. 4 [cit. 2014-03-02]. Available from:

http://www.cepolicy.org/sites/cepolicy.org/files/attachments/viseco_workshop_report.pdf

²⁷ Ibid. p. 1.

²⁸ Interview with Marian Majer, research fellow at Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, Bratislava, 3 December 2013.

²⁹ Poland to head future Visegrad4 battle group. *Visegrad Group* [online]. 2011 [cit. 2014-03-02]. Available from:

<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/news/poland-to-head-future>

³⁰ Joint Communiqué of the Ministers of Defence of the Visegrad Group. *Visegrad Group* [online]. Litoměřice, 4 May 2012 [cit. 2014-03-02]. Available from: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2012/joint-communiqué-of-the>

³¹ Rokovanie námestníkov ministrov obrany krajín V4 v Poľsku. *Ministerstvo obrany SR* [online]. Bratislava, 4 March 2013 [cit. 2014-03-02]. Available from: <http://www.mod.gov.sk/rokovanie-namestnikov-ministrov-obrany-krajin-v4-v-polsku/>

³² Press Statement of the Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group. *Premier.gov.pl* [online]. Warsaw, 6 March 2013 [cit. 2014-03-02]. Available from: <https://www.premier.gov.pl/en/news/news/press-statement-of-the-polish-presidency-in-the-visegrad-group.html>

in which all the parties pledged to boost the European defence cooperation and provide particular support to the pillars of European security.³³ Concurrently, the ministers of defence of the V4 countries signed the Letter of Intent to form a Visegrad Battle Group.³⁴ It was the Letter of Intent to establish a Visegrad Battle Group that had contributed to the final articulation of the political decision to establish the V4 EU BG. In October 2013, this decision was confirmed at the Budapest summit of the heads of V4 states where the prime ministers of the V4 countries referred to the V4 BG as “our most specific contribution to further enhance the EU’s rapid reaction capacities”.³⁵

At present, the most up-to-date document concerning the creation of the V4 BG is the Memorandum of Understanding, signed at the meeting of ministers of defence of V4 countries in the Hungarian town of Visegrad where two more documents about the future of the defensive cooperation within the V4 were signed in March 2014. The memorandum expresses the preparedness of V4 countries to jointly deploy in case of need soldiers to support the EU and confirms the date of stand-by in the first half of 2016.³⁶ In May 2014, subsequently the chiefs of general staffs of the V4 countries signed a letter addressed to the chairman of the NATO Military Committee General Knud Bartels informing him about the certification of the V4 EU BG and the intention of the V4 countries to combine the certification with exercise TJRE15.³⁷

Hence taking into the account the aforementioned frequency of motives, meetings and speeches not only of the ministers of defence but also the prime ministers of the V4 states, it is possible to observe that this ongoing project of forming the V4 EU BG had gained major political support from the very beginning not only of the representatives of all the four Visegrad states, but also from the crucial members of the EU. Due to the fact that forming this group is still a work in progress, it is essential to develop this support further. During 2014 - 2015, all the four Visegrad states will have to draw up and sign other documents (e.g. Technical Agreement), which will further specify details and legally regulate the relations of the individual countries as regards the issue of establishing the joint V4 EU BG. At the same time, the participating states must explore the possible legal implications of a potential deployment of this battlegroup and agree on the personnel of its OHQ. The preparatory process should finish by 2015 when they plan the certification and first exercise of the V4 EU BG called LIVEX,³⁸ the purpose of which will be to verify the compatibility of the individual military contributions. Only on the grounds of a positive termination of this last stage of the preparatory phase will the joint formation be able to be on stand-by.³⁹

Structure, deployment and financing of the V4 BG

³³ Cooperation in Developing Capabilities, Solidarity in Sharing Responsibilities: Joint statement of the Ministers of Defence of the Czech Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, the French Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic after their meeting in Warsaw. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic* [online]. Prague, 6 March 2013, pp. 1-2 [cit. 2014-03-03]. Available from: http://www.mzv.cz/file/966347/Joint_Statement.pdf

³⁴ Meeting of Defence Ministers of V4 countries, France and Germany. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland* [online]. Warsaw, 2012 [cit. 2014-03-03]. Available from: http://www.msx.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/europe/visegrad_group/polish_presidency_of_the_visegrad_group1/meeting_of_defence_ministers_of_v4_countries_france_and_germany;jsessionid=2B33F23971787DCE01C60207EC660CD8.cms2

³⁵ Budapest Joint Statement of the Visegrád Group Heads of Government: On Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation [online]. Budapest, 14 October 2013, p. 1 [cit. 2014-03-03]. Available from: https://www.premier.gov.pl/files/files/budapest_joint_statement_of_the_visegrad_group_heads_of_government_on_strengthening_the_v4_security_and_defence_cooperation.pdf

³⁶ Ministři obrany Visegrádské čtyřky podepsali vizi dlouhodobé spolupráce. *Ministerstvo obrany České republiky* [online]. Praha, 14 March 2014 [cit. 2014-03-10]. Available from: <http://www.mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/ministri-obrany-visegradske-ctyrky-podepsali-vizi-dlouhodobé-spoluprace-95346/>

³⁷ Informácia o stave prípravy bojovej skupiny Európskej únie krajín Vyšehradskej skupiny s pohotovosťou v prvom polroku 2016. *Rokovania.sk* [online]. 2014, p. 3. [cit. 2014-07-25]. Available from: <http://goo.gl/HQEGf1>

³⁸ Rokovanie námestníkov ministrov obrany krajín V4 v Poľsku, ref. 29

³⁹ ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (a), ref. 8, p. 6

Based on negotiations between the representatives of V4 countries, it was specified that the V4 EU BG would comprise approximately 3,260 soldiers. By June 2014, the individual countries had declared the following approximate contributions: 1,450 persons will be detached by the Polish armed forces, 600 persons by the Army of the CR, 650 persons will be sent by the armed forces of Hungary, and 560 will be provided for the purposes of this group by Slovakia.⁴⁰ The core of the group will contain mechanised companies provided by the armed forces of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. These companies will be logistically and medically provided for and at the same time supplemented by support elements such as communication and information systems, elements of the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence (CBRND), helicopter wing and medical facility. Simultaneously, the V4 EU BG should consist of eight modules within which the individual V4 countries are in charge of their preparation and coordination in the status of leading countries. The CR is, for instance, responsible for the medical and logistic module of the V4 EU BG, Hungary accounts for the engineering module, and Slovakia is the leading country of the CBRND. Poland is in charge of the communication and information systems module and this country is also responsible for creating the OHQ. At the same time, Poland, as it is the FN, is also responsible for the planning, creation, training and certification of the entire battlegroup.⁴¹

As in the case of any other BG, it will be expected that during the six month operational readiness, the V4 EU BG will be deployed, if appropriate, in the radius of 6,000 km from Brussels. However the possible deployment of the V4 EU BG is a rather hypothetical question. Even though a potential deployment of the V4 EU BG during its stand-by in 2016 will be fully up to the political responsibility of the EU Council, which will decide on the grounds of an unanimous consent of all EU member states, the deployment of the V4 EU BG itself to any potential crisis will also depend on the mutual political will of the V4 countries and the national caveats of these states and the financing mechanism of the deployment of the joint formation. In this respect, Col. Zdeněk Petráš from the University of Defence stated that “*the V4 EU BG can in no way be regarded as an example how to save finances. The establishment of the EU BG itself, its preparation and being on stand-by is very costly, not to mention its potential deployment*”.⁴² Hence if the V4 BG is going to be really deployed, V4 countries’ decision-making concerning the deployment will definitely be problematic due to high financial costs. Simultaneously, in this case it will also be necessary for the individual states to come up with strong arguments by which they will explain any deployment of the V4 EU BG to the public. The convergences of the strategic cultures of these states will be another key aspect for a potential deployment of the V4 EU BG in 2016. As there will have to be a consensus over the deployment of the joint forces within the cooperating parties, it will be essential for these four states to have identical points of view of the character of the potential operations.⁴³

At present, a certain problem of the potential deployment of the V4 EU BG appears to lie in the fact that none of the V4 countries has at its disposal sufficient means of air strategic transport essential for the potential transfer of the battlegroup to the crisis region.⁴⁴ However, in this respect, it is necessary to point out various options how to solve this problem. The first possible solution can be a potential use of the NATO program called SALIS, in which all the four V4 states participate. This program uses Russian and Ukrainian planes An-124 and is focused on air strategic transport. It should also be taken into account that Hungary and Poland take part in the NATO project called SAC, within which these two parties can use the flight hours of the air strategic transport Boeing C-17 fleet, which is based at the

⁴⁰ Informácia o stave prípravy bojovej skupiny Európskej únie krajín Vyšehradskej skupiny s pohotovosťou v prvom polroku 2016, ref. 35, p. 4

⁴¹ ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (a), ref. 8, p. 6

See also: BODNÁROVÁ, B.: *Visegrad four Battle Group 2016: Run up to Visegrad four NATO Response Force 2020?*, [online], CENAA, Policy Papers, 06/2013, Available from: (<http://cenaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/PP-6-2013-Visegrad-four-Battle-Group-2016-Run-up-to-Visegrad-four-NATO-Response-Force-2020.pdf>)

⁴² E-mail communication with Zdeněk Petráš, ref. 15

⁴³ ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (b), ref. 26, p. 3

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 2

Hungarian town of Pápa. Another option of providing strategic transport of the V4 EU BG would be renting the high-capacity plane An-124. At present, the relevance of this option is documented by the ongoing negotiations with Ukraine, which has the particular capacity at its disposal and also demonstrates a political will for its potential provision.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, despite these now already identified options of solving the potential transport of the V4 EU BG, it is questionable whether the given capacities will be available in order to provide the potential transport of the battlegroup (as a whole or in parts) in the required time limit to the place of crisis.

In this line, it is necessary to draw attention to other military capabilities of the V4 EU BG that are still missing nowadays and are yet to be solved by the Visegrad states. They concern mainly helicopter capabilities, medical evacuation, communication and information systems and logistics. In order to provide the missing capabilities, the V4 states negotiate also with partners coming outside the Visegrad region. In this respect, negotiations are held with Ukraine and they were also the subject of negotiations at the summit of V3+3 countries (CR, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Austria, and Slovenia), which was held in the first half of 2013.⁴⁶

As regards the issue of financing of this joint formation, based on the draft version of the Memorandum of Understanding, “each participant will bear one’s own costs stemming from V4 EU BG activities” separately.⁴⁷ Each leading country of the individual modules may have to invest (in some cases) great financial means in its military capabilities in order to achieve interoperability and sustainability of its military capabilities so that they contribute to this formation at least during the time it is on stand-by. Simultaneously, in case the V4 EU BG is deployed, the participating parties will be able to use the mechanism for financing military operations called ATHENA, which was established by the European Council decision 2011/871/CFSP. This mechanism of managing common costs essential for conducting EU operations that have military or defensive implications is administered by a special committee, which is authorised by all EU member states. Due to the fact that military operations conducted within CSDP are not financed from the EU budget, the purpose of this mechanism is to establish and administer financial contributions of the individual member states used to cover the common costs of the preparation or continuation of EU military operations.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE IMPORTANCE OF V4 BG FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE MILITARY COOPERATION OF THE V4 COUNTRIES

Despite the fact that the formation of the EU Visegrad battlegroup is nowadays the only particular military project of the V4 countries,⁴⁹ the anticipated added value of this current “flagship” of the Visegrad states is launching further cooperation and projects in the military-defence area.⁵⁰ Such expectations are presented in nearly all joint declarations of the political and military representatives of the V4 states. The military representatives and experts from the V4 countries have already started to analyse together other areas in which they could develop cooperation. Among the most promising today are:

⁴⁵ ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (a), ref. 8, p. 10

⁴⁶ ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (b), ref. 26, p. 3

⁴⁷ *Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Defence of Hungary, the Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic Concerning the Principals for the Establishment and Operation of the European Union Battlegroup Formed by the Nations of the Visegrad Countries (V4 EU BG) to be Available to the European Union in the First Half of the Year 2016*, draft version, p. 9.

⁴⁸ The mechanism for financing military operations (Athena). *Europa* [online]. 2012 [cit. 2014-03-11]. Available from:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/foreign_and_security_policy/cfsp_and_esdp_implementation/133281_en.htm

⁴⁹ Obranná Spolupráce V4. Tematický informačný materiál. *Ministerstvo obrany České republiky* [online]. 2013, p. 1 [cit. 2014-03-11]. Available from: <http://goo.gl/BWUnSA>

⁵⁰ Interview with Marian Majer.

- Joint logistics
- Medical treatment facilities
- Air controller training (FAC/JTAC)
- CBRND
- Helicopter pilot training (MATC)
- Multinational experimentation
- Training in Counter Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED)
- Joint construction of armoured vehicles and munitions
- Individual soldier's equipment and armament
- Integrated command and control systems⁵¹

By the potential implementation of these identified projects or parts of them the given four states would not only intensify their future military cooperation but also contribute to the elimination of the absent military capabilities characteristic for the EU and NATO.

Besides these now already identified and potential projects, the V4 EU BG is also expected to be the basis for further integration of these countries' military capabilities after the end of the stand-by period of this joint formation. In order to use experience from the V4 EU BG and endeavouring to maintain the capacities of rapid reaction of the V4 states, especially the three following options are in question, which will be relevant after the end of the V4 EU BG operation: create elements of joint force; regularly repeat the V4 EU BG; or create a permanent force.⁵²

Another possible stimulus stemming from the V4 EU BG project appears to be the possibility of joint planning and military equipment procurement, which would undoubtedly be the most obvious manifestation of the intensified military cooperation between the Visegrad states. Hence the states in question could overcome the defects within the V4 EU BG already identified today, such as absent medical evacuation or insufficient helicopter capabilities. At present, there are obstacles hindering the implementation of such a joint procurement (e.g. lack of detailed information about defence planning processes as well as the partners' non-identical procurement cycles);⁵³ nevertheless, from the long-term perspective they are not insoluble.

All the options and future prospects mentioned above are a positive signal of the undoubtable potential the V4 EU BG project has to enhance or even to intensify further mutual military cooperation within the Visegrad subregion. Simultaneously, by their decision the V4 states have demonstrated their interest to maintain the status of the EU in the international field and by means of mutual cooperation boost its military capabilities. Due to the impacts of the economic crisis as well as the current security challenges stemming from the east of V4 states this cooperation appears to be not only a logical choice but also a necessity. However, it is exclusively up to these states how their mutual cooperation will evolve and hence it is necessary to observe further if and to what degree the V4 states will exploit their potential in the given context.

⁵¹ LORENZ, Wojciech. EU Battle Group: A Chance for a Breakthrough in Visegrad 4 Cooperation? *Bulletin* [online]. Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2013, No. 39, p. 2 [cit. 2014-02-22]. Available from: http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=13381

⁵² ŠUPLATA, Milan, ed. (a), ref. 8, p. 8

⁵³ ŠUPLATA, Milan (c). *The Visegrad battleground: Building new capabilities for the region* [online]. Bratislava: Central European Policy Institute, 2013 [cit. 2014-03-14]. Available from: <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/visegrad-battlegroup-building-new-capabilities-region>

