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Czech Defence Policy in 2015:
NATO's Framework Nation Concept and V4 Defence Cooperation

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Summary and Recommendations

- The two defence topics, the NATO's Framework Nation Concept (FNC) and V4 defence cooperation were chosen for this policy paper due to their importance for the Czech defence policy in 2015. Both could potentially rewrite the “map of defence” in Central Europe.
- The Germany-led FNC group has tremendous potential as to what it could achieve in terms of defence cooperation. In 2015 we will probably see if this initiative will succeed in creation of functional clusters of cooperation and if the results will be anywhere close to the initial German proposal – creation of areas of cooperation in which the participants agree to treat their capabilities as a single force.
- There is a window of opportunity for the Czech Republic to tie Germany militarily closer to Central Europe since the governments in Prague and Berlin lately seem to be more favourably aligned with regard to security policy. Therefore the possible dependency on the so far restrained German security and defence policy could be less of a problem.
- The February 2015 meeting of the NATO defence ministers will be the first watermark in this regard. The Czech Republic should seek the creation of strategic interdependencies with Germany within the FNC. Successful FNC cooperation could substitute the placement of NATO infrastructure on the territory of Eastern member states and would not violate the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997.
- The V4 defence cooperation still remains an ideal format to develop joint capabilities and permanent modular V4 unit. The objective to have joint unit even beyond the V4 Battlegroup in 2016 bears special strategic value. It would constitute a genuine military capability for force projection within wide range of missions. For the future utility of this unit the Polish operational headquarters should take preference. Having OHQ capability within V4 would certainly be a benefit to the whole group.
- More structured V4 defence cooperation embedded in formal intergovernmental agreements has been developed in 2014. That seems to be a right way forward. The Czech V4 presidency (July 2015-June 2016) will oversee the final certification as well as the stand-by time of the V4 EU BG. Its main task will be to keep the V4 cooperation on track.



Introduction: Czech and European Defence in 2014

The 2014 was indeed an eventful one with regard to European security. The new tension between Russia and the West that followed the Russian annexation of Crimea and aggressive adventure in eastern Ukraine seem to have reinvigorated the transatlantic alliance (and American leadership within it) and given much needed impetus to address long overdue shortfalls in European capabilities and defence spending. Combined with the crisis of statehood in the Middle East and Sunni insurgency, the Europeans can no longer afford to ignore issues relating to their atrophying defence since the only European frontier that was not contested in 2014 was the Arctic one.

These structural changes in the security environment have had profound effects on the NATO as a main security provider in Europe. The Wales Summit in September 2014 was accompanied with a lot of expectations about the NATO adaptation to the new security realities. Nevertheless, it is the actual implementation of these decisions in 2015 and beyond that will make all the difference.

Seen from the Central Europe, the year 2014 marked the first time since the end of the Cold War and the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures when there is a significant threat from the East in form of resurgent and unpredictable Russia. That effectively brings back the fears of many Central Europeans of becoming a potential “battlefield” again.

It is also the year that could mark the beginning of the end of the division between the Western and Eastern European NATO countries in terms of NATO infrastructure and force structure – a step called for by the Eastern European Allies for a long time. NATO in Wales shied away from moving NATO infrastructure on the territory of the Eastern members permanently but pledged its “continuous” presence and pre-positioning of logistical and command cells. NATO's Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and further steps agreed upon only after the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis finally constitute an actual strengthening of the Alliance's Eastern Flank and will blur the line between “old” and “new” NATO members in this respect.¹

The focus of this policy paper will be to analyse two intertwined defence issues with great importance for the Czech defence policy in 2015 – the NATO's Framework Nation Concept (FNC) and its possible ramifications for the Germany–Central Europe relation; and further development of the V4 defence cooperation that, from the face of it, is picking up momentum.

¹ Beata Górká-Winter. Strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank. *European Leadership Network*, 2.12.2014, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/strengthening-natos-eastern-flank_2216.html.



NATO Framework Nation Concept: Tying Germany to Central Europe militarily?

The decision to endorse German-initiated Framework Nation Concept in Wales gathered actually less attention than other topics from the Wales Summit Declaration. Understandably another endeavour to knot together the ‘bonsai armies’ of European Allies after rather unsatisfying experiences with NATO “Smart Defence” was to be met with sober expectations. On the other hand, there are multiple instances of moderately successful defence cooperation (e.g. the Franco-British, Dutch-German, Benelux or the Nordic) in the Western part of Europe while the Eastern Europe mostly treads water.

From Central European point of view the “added value” of the FNC is that the German side is seeking to militarily tie itself together (and assume responsibility) with its Eastern neighbours. Germany has been, for a long time, active in the Central European region economically and politically but so far not so much militarily mainly for historical reasons. This combination of military and strategic rationale is what sets the FNC apart from the Smart defence.

Luis Simón rightly pointed out also other geostrategic level of the FNC (apart from the Czech-German) that has wider ramifications. Although the German- and British-led groupings (in which participate also the Baltic states) have different functional focus, they both further underpin the two separate military supply lines NATO has into the Baltics. The maritime and amphibious line from the North Atlantic into the North and Baltic Sea and a continental one going to the Baltics through Germany and Poland.²

The FNC group led by Germany (in which the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary participate) faces significant initial obstacles. The possible dependency of these smaller countries on the restrained German security policy especially with respect to different opinions on the use of force in international relations is one. Vastly different structure and size of domestic defence industries (and the fear that Germany would use this to further the interests of German arms industry) is another.³

However, at least with respect to the Czech Republic and Germany there could be a window of opportunity since the security and defence policies of the centre-left coalition in Prague and grand coalition in Berlin seem to be more favourably aligned. That now is the time for the Czech Republic to become more engaged with Germany in the military realm is also further substantiated by the voices from within Germany e.g. the Inspector of the *Bundeswehr* or the chairman of the *Bundestag* defence committee. These call for imitating

² Luis Simón. Assessing NATO's Eastern European “Flank”. *Parameters*. 44, 3, Autumn 2014, p. 71.

³ Claudia Major, Christian Mölling. Das Rahmennationen-Konzept. *SWP*, Aktuell 67, 11/2014.



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the Dutch-German military integration also with Austria and Poland⁴ – should the Czech Republic stay one step behind?

Two further aspects of the FNC remain somewhat unclear. Firstly, important for the success of this new concept will be certainly how it will complement the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP). Will the clusters, or the leading framework nation within the FNC, act as a middleman of sorts between the member states and the target requirements identified through the NDPP? Perhaps possible further step in this direction would be to imitate similar praxis as that recently developed by the V4 countries – to attend as observers each other bilateral meetings and joint consultations with NATO.

Second issue is the real flexibility of the FNC and the commonalities between different groups within the FNC – the German-led group focuses on the capability building in specified areas, the British-led on force generation concept to support crisis management operation. From the look of it, the FNC strikes the middle ground between the EU's "Pooling and Sharing" and "Permanent Structured Cooperation".⁵

In 2015 we will probably see if this initiative will succeed in creation of functional clusters of cooperation and if the results will be anywhere close to the initial German proposal – creation of areas of cooperation in which the participants agree to treat their capabilities as a single force.⁶ The first watermark in this regard will be the meeting of the NATO defence ministers in February 2015. The Czech Republic should not pass this opportunity up and seek the creation of strategic interdependencies with Germany. In a sense, successful FNC cooperation could substitute the permanent placement of NATO infrastructure on the territory of "new" member states and would not violate the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997.⁷

⁴ Thorsten Jungholt. Schwarz-Rot-Oranje: Deutsche und Holländer treiben europäische Armee voran. *Die Welt*, 7.8.2014, http://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/politik/article130961967/Schwarz-Rot-Oranje-Deutsche-und-Hollaender-treiben-europaeische-Armee-voran.html.

⁵ Jo Colmont. Wales, to Spur on European Defence. In *Sécurité globale et surprises stratégiques en Europe: les répercussions sur l'OTAN et l'UE*. Dossier stratégique, La lettre de l'IRSEM n. 8, *Institute de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire*, 2014, p. 21.

⁶ Sven Biscop. Still on the Defensive: European Military Integration in 2015. *Egmond Institute*, 6.1.2014, http://www.egmontinstitute.be/research_area/europe-in-the-world.

⁷ Ira Louis Straus. The Myth that NATO Committed to Having No Permanent Troops in Eastern Europe. *Atlantic Community*, 4.9.2014, <http://www.atlantic-community.org/-/the-myth-that-nato-committed-to-having-no-permanent-troops-in-eastern-europe>.



V4 Defence Cooperation: The Moment of Truth Approaches

The V4 cooperation in the area of defence has been in the past accompanied with big words and small actual deeds. In recent years, perhaps as a result of maturity of the defence and political elites, has the V4 defence cooperation finally picked up under the Hungarian (July 2013-June 2014) and Slovak (July 2014-June 2015) Presidency. Should it not yield tentative results in the near term, the frustration on all sides could significantly damage the group's cohesion that is already questioned on the background of the Ukraine crisis.

The Visegrad EU Battlegroup (on standby in first semester of 2016) has in this respect become the group's defence cooperation poster child. The possible participation of Ukraine, with regard to recent events, and NATO agreement to link the V4 EU BG certification exercise Common Challenge 2015 with NATO high visibility exercise Trident Juncture 2015, the biggest NATO exercise in a decade, gives this endeavour even more visibility. But one should not forget that although the proposed linkage between the V4 EU BG certification exercise and NATO Trident Juncture 2015 exercise serve the overall aim of the V4 to bring the EU and NATO closer together, this step was initially motivated by austerity rationale. It would be financially very costly for the V4 countries to participate in both exercises.

The important question what actually comes after the 2016 V4 Battlegroup remains unanswered. Although there is a wide consensus that V4 BG should translate into a permanent joint V4 modular force intended as a regular contribution of the V4 countries to EU and NATO response forces, as of now, the only solution to this question is another V4 EU Battlegroup in the second semester of 2019.

The permanent V4 unit, however, remains a long-term objective. It is therefore somewhat surprising that the V4 so far could not decide what Operation Headquarters (OHQ) to use for its V4 BG even though former Czech defence minister Alexandr Vondra officially asked, already in 2012, for German HQ in Potsdam.⁸

The choice between French, German and Polish OHQ should probably be a no-brainer if the V4 was to eventually use its future joint unit for EU or NATO rapid reaction forces or other foreign deployments. Given that permanent EU OHQ is a non-starter, having the OHQ capability within V4 would certainly be a benefit to the whole group. Poland could become the sixth country in Europe to have multilateralized OHQ after France, Germany, UK, Italy and Greece.

⁸ Vít Dostál, Jakub Eberle, Tomáš Karásek (eds.). Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy 2013. *Association for International Affairs (AMO)*, 2013, p. 60, <http://www.amo.cz/publications/agenda-for-czech-foreign-policy-2013.html?lang=en>.



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As of January 2015 the V4 has reportedly narrowed the choice to the Polish OHQ in Krakow and French OHQ. Should the Polish OHQ prove too costly or the BG timetable too stringent to build-up the necessary capability in Krakow, using the NATO OHQ capability would merit serious considerations. That would amount to breaking a long-standing taboo within the EU and send a strong message that the rivalry between the NATO and EU is over. The strategic rationale here is being that the EU BG has to be beneficial even beyond its utility as a defence cooperation vehicle while not creating new non-essential financially costly duplications.

Under this glamour are also being developed foundations on which will real defence cooperation rest and which can also save finances of the V4 militaries because “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”.⁹

Real savings will come once V4 (or V4 countries bilaterally) start joint defence procurement or start merging their capabilities e.g. in the area of training, military education, and maintenance.¹⁰ The year 2014 has, in this respect, brought significant developments that could create a firmer framework for V4 defence cooperation in the year 2015. Firstly, the creation of *Senior Body* consisting of State Secretaries or Defence Policy Directors responsible for strategic guidance of the V4 defence cooperation – this body convened for the first time in December 2014. Secondly, the *Senior Body* should be supplemented by newly established *V4 Planning Group* that is responsible for the expert-level of defence and procurement plans. Thirdly, the V4 countries in 2014 finally launched the exchange of their defence planners between their respective defence planning divisions within their Ministries of Defence.¹¹

Creation of a more structured cooperation embedded in formal intergovernmental agreements seems to be a right way forward for the V4 defence cooperation. What is now needed is time and stability in respective ministries of defence.

The Czech V4 presidency in the second half of 2015 and the first half of 2016 will oversee the final certification as well as the stand-by time of the V4 EU BG. Its main task will be to keep the V4 cooperation on track. Given the fiscal stabilization of the defence budgets in the V4 countries, there could be a room for creative ideas to root.

⁹ Quote of Zdeněk Petráš in Michal Paulech, Jana Urbanovská. Visegrad Four EU Battlegroup: Meaning and Progress. *Obrana a strategie* 2, 2014, p. 49-60.

¹⁰ Tomáš Weiss. Visegrád Battlegroup: A Flagship That Should Not Substitute For Real Defence Cooperation. *Visegrad Revue*, 4.6.2012, <http://bit.ly/1y44Fig>.

¹¹ Oral statement of Slovakian Maj. Gen. Pavel Macko at the conference “NATO 2020 – Alliance Renewed” in Bratislava on October 14-15, 2014.



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Beata Górká-Winter proposed one such idea. In order to create new capabilities that would, on the background of resurgent Russia, limit the potential of Russia to blackmail Eastern NATO members, the V4 countries should consider establishing joint air and missile defence capability. The Polish programme would be potentially treated as a hub for other CEE region countries to link their assets to.¹² As far-fetched as this seems, there is actually potential to develop this idea since the missiles for the Czech mobile surface-to-air missile system SA-6 (KUB) are nearing its life cycle between 2017 and 2020. Hungary that operates its own modernized KUBs should face similar problem; only the Slovaks have also more modern, although soviet made system S-300.

Interestingly, the anti-missile/air defence area could well be a case where the V4 and the NATO's Framework Nation Concept would blend together. Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands and Poland have reportedly created a smaller group within the Germany-led FNC grouping that will focus on the anti-missile defence capabilities.¹³ Finding more projects that would tie together V4 countries within the FNC framework could be one of the strategic tasks ahead and one more added value for the FNC. So far the V4 countries have participated together in zero EU "Pooling & Sharing" project and only two NATO's "Smart Defence" projects.¹⁴

A Look Ahead at 2015

The two defence topics chosen for this policy paper as important for Czech defence policy in 2015 could both potentially transform the "map of defence" in Central Europe. That is, if the underlying assumption that these countries cannot generate and sustain the levels of needed military capabilities on national levels – and choose to finally cooperate – remains valid.

The FNC group led by Germany as a framework nation has tremendous potential as to what it could achieve in terms of defence cooperation. In 2015 we will probably see if this initiative will start to bear some fruits. One thing could possibly hamper positive development. It is possible that the brewing shift from "restrain to responsibility" in Germany would be either slower or will stop altogether. One of the events to pay attention to in 2015 is the report from the so-called Rühle commission in the German parliament. The report, to be presented in the spring 2015, will propose how to loosen the parliamentary restrictions on the foreign deployments of the German army within the NATO and EU framework. Should this endeavour fail to gain endorsement from the grand coalition, the

¹² Beata Górká-Winter. Ibid.

¹³ Jakub Palowski. "Spearhead" is not enough. How can NATO stop Russia? *Defence24.com*, 10.9.2014, http://www.defence24.com/analysis_spearhead-is-not-enough-how-can-nato-stop-russia.

¹⁴ As of November 2013.



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smaller states engaged with Berlin within the FNC framework would think twice about merging their capabilities with Germany.

The 2015 will also bring the final preparations of the V4 EU Battlegroup that still requires some time to iron out (e.g. the OHQ question). In this respect, the June 2015 EU summit tasked to tackle the defence agenda will again serve as an opportunity for the V4 to push the reform of the EU Battlegroup concept a bit higher on the agenda. Since the V4 group is at the moment using this concept as a main vehicle for its regional cooperation, it gives this endeavour pressing urgency.

Finally, NATO should by the middle of the year present new political guidance document, a planned update of the 2011 version. This constitutes a first step in a new four year NATO Defence Planning Process cycle that will determine the character of NATO's future military capabilities and, in a sense, Alliance's reaction to changed post-Crimea security environment.¹⁵ The importance of the year 2015 for the Czech defence policy is therefore hard to exaggerate.

¹⁵ Aylin Matlé, Alessandro Scheffler. After the Wales Summit: An Assessment of NATO's Strategic Agenda. *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Facts & Findings* 162, 11/2014, p. 4.



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