



Polish and Czech Security Policy: A (No) Discrepancy Report

Reports

8/2015

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INTRODUCTION

The profound shifts underway in regional and European security have lent a new sense of urgency and importance to Polish-Czech security partnership. Effective bilateral cooperation is central to advancing Polish and Czech Republic's national interests within the European Union and NATO. Moreover, Polish-Czech convergence on critical security dossiers is a prerequisite for the sustainability of regional political structures, in particular the Visegrad Group. Going forward, the quality and depth of Polish-Czech partnership will decisively affect the region's – and, indeed, EU's and NATO's – responses to the mounting security challenges in the Eastern neighbourhood and beyond.

Despite the structural asymmetry inherent in Polish-Czech security relations – owing to differences in size of the armed forces, structure of defence industries, strategic culture, or degree on political consensus on threat perception – **Warsaw and Prague are among each other's closest strategic allies**. Bilateral defence cooperation with Czech Republic, as a Visegrad partner, is enshrined as a specific objective in Poland's Strategy of the Develop-

ment of National Security System 2022, and, conversely, in Czech Republic's Defence Strategy of 2012. A high-level consultation format, inaugurated by Prime Ministers in 2011, ensures continuing dialogue on strategic issues. Bilateral relations are underpinned by **robust economic and trade ties: in 2014, they made for each other's third largest export markets**.

Nonetheless, both sides are aware of the untapped potential of their security partnership, in operational as well as strategic terms.

This report, aimed at decision-makers from both countries, contributes to the strengthening of bilateral security cooperation in priority areas, namely NATO's adaption to the deteriorating security outlook in the East (Section 1), the workings of the Visegrad Group (Section 2), and EU-Russia relations and EU's foreign and security policies more broadly (Section 3). It helps define points of convergence as well as areas that require further dialogue to bridge existing disagreements, and, on that basis, offers a set of policy recommendations to governments and expert communities in Warsaw and Prague (Section 4).

STRENGTHENING OF NATO'S EASTERN FLANK

Areas of convergence and cooperation

Both the Polish and Czech authorities are broadly aligned in their assessment of the deteriorating regional security environment as a result of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, which heightened the risk of conventional armed conflicts in Europe, as stressed in Poland's (2014) and the Czech Republic's (2015) updated National Security Strategies. **They agree on the necessity of strengthening of NATO's eastern flank on the basis of the implementation of the articles of the *Readiness Action Plan*, endorsed in 2014 at the Alliance's Summit in Newport.** Warsaw and Prague are also in agreement in the matter of the key actions needed to realise the commitments made at the Summit. Poland is treating the *Very High Readiness Joint Task Force* (VJTF) as a matter of priority. This attitude is echoed in the Czech Republic, which pledged 150 soldiers and transport helicopters to meet the needs of the VJTF. Moreover, Poland and the Czech Republic have intensified training cooperation during NATO exercises. The latter upped its spending on participation in NATO exercise by 60% in the last year.

In order to make good on the declarations of the Newport Summit, **programmes for the modernisation of the armed forces are being realised in both countries.** Polish defence spending is currently being maintained at a level of 1.95% GDP, but from 2016 will rise to at least 2% GDP. As far as the Czech Republic is

concerned, the government in Prague decided for the first time not to reduce the budget of its defence ministry. Targeted expenditure on arms should rise year by year in order to reach by 2020 a level of 1.4% GDP.

Differences

The Polish and Czech positions align on many key issues save for one – permanent presence of NATO forces in the Central European region. The notion of creating permanent bases of the Alliance in Poland and the Baltic States, in the framework of the *Newport Plus* plan, is a long-standing demand of the Polish government, and was recently underlined by the current Polish President, Andrzej Duda. By contrast, the government of Bohuslav Sobotka in Prague is sceptical of the move, conscious of the geopolitical and legal sensitivities arising from permanent stationing of NATO troops, as well as of the absence of a robust consensus on the issue inside the Alliance itself.

Another point of divergence lies in the **disproportion of defence expenditures.** Whereas Warsaw has embarked on the largest-ever programme of military modernization, the Czech government's investment and spending ambitions are considerably more modest, and, to a large extent, declaratory. From 2005, the Czech side has successively reduced amounts spent on defence and over the last six years, the Czech national defence budget has fallen

altogether by 23%, engendering a strategic asymmetry that is hindering tighter security and defence cooperation between the two partners

and making it more difficult for Czech arm forces to achieve necessary operational capabilities within NATO.

VISEGRAD SECURITY COOPERATION

Areas of convergence and cooperation

In the Visegrad framework, Polish-Czech cooperation is dominated by the **EU Battlegroup project, the most ambitious cooperative defence initiative in the history of the V4**. This unit should be combat ready in the first half of 2016 and its formation is unprecedented, given that V4 security cooperation has been hitherto confined to political or small-scale inter-ministerial activities. The new structure will comprise 2500 troops including a main combat battalion of 950 soldiers; its operational command fell to Poland. The second-highest contingent by number will be Czechs, who have pledged a 19% contribution in the Battlegroup. Moreover, both governments are broadly agreed on the wisdom of transforming the unit – or at least its elements – into a more permanent structure, subject to further discussions about status and operational modalities.

Differences

The Battlegroup project notwithstanding, **effective security cooperation in the V4 framework still leaves much to be desired**. Informed

by differing threat perceptions, member countries often exhibit **difficulty in formulating joint positions on core issues affecting European security**. Likewise, Polish-Czech cooperation – whether bilaterally or in the V4 framework – has yet to deliver on the promise and potential of greater coordination in defence planning, capability development, training of troops or research and development – to say nothing of shared procurement.

Another area of lingering disagreement pertains Visegrad Group's cooperation with third countries. The Slavkov Declaration of 29 January 2015, signed by the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Austria – an initiative originally proposed by the Czech government as a way of complementing the Visegrad format and bolstering ties with Austria – has caused some uncertainty in Warsaw over its potential impact on the coherence and integrity of the Visegrad Group. Further dialogue is needed to arrive at a common Polish-Czech understanding, in a way that ensures compatibility between the various formats, and clears the path for deeper institutionalized V4 cooperation with external partners, above all Ukraine and also with the

three Baltic states and Romania, on the basis of the Polish-supported V4+ model.

Similarly, all partners should make an effort to forge a common Visegrad position in the draf-

ting of the EU's Global Strategy on Security and Foreign Policy, as proposed by the Czech V4 presidency, as well as on the revision of the Neighbourhood Policy.

EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS AND EU'S SECURITY AND EXTERNAL POLICIES

Areas of convergence and cooperation

The Polish and Czech governments share the view that a forward-looking and cohesive EU security policy – one that makes full use of the institutional and legal innovations of the Lisbon Treaty – constitutes the most effective vehicle for managing the security crises that have sprung up along Europe's frontier. In particular, **both governments appreciate the imperative of a common EU strategy towards Russia and the Eastern neighbourhood: a combination of economic sanctions tied to full implementation of Minsk II accords, and vigorous support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, European integration and reform processes in Ukraine and other Eastern partners.** Furthermore, Warsaw and Prague share the view that **any credible Russia strategy must be backed by efforts to alleviate Europe's energy insecurity and over-dependence**

on Russia's supply (as evidenced by an array of planned bilateral energy and infrastructure projects, including a new gas interconnector and modernized transport routes from the Czech Republic to Szczecin and Świnoujście), bolster the European defence pillar, including through enhanced EU-NATO cooperation, and develop a set of tools to counter Russia's propaganda and other forms of hybrid warfare.

Both countries are supportive of the efforts, as instructed by the European Council and spearheaded by HR/VP Federica Mogherini, to **produce a new European Global Strategy**, endowing the EU and its Member States with a revamped conceptual, institutional and policy frameworks to address rising instability along the EU borders, East and South, and navigate an increasingly fragmented and competitive multipolar order. In a joint statement by Prime Ministers of June 2015, the two countries, along with Slovakia and Hungary, pledged to coordi-

nate their input into the drafting process, highlighting the need to upgrade the institutions and military capabilities of EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.

Poland and the Czech Republic also call for greater interlinking of external and internal facets of EU security policy, a theme that gained further prominence amidst the refugee crisis. In this respect, policy-makers in both countries agree on the need for **more effective – and, to some extent, Europeanized – policing of the external Schengen border**. Both governments, also Hungarian and Slovak, treat the immigrants also as possible security risk and therefore have opposed mandatory quotas as proposed by the EU Commission. Although a source of commonality, this position is likely to be counterproductive with regard to relations with key EU partners and institutions, as well as for both countries reputations with regard to protecting human rights and upholding legal and moral responsibilities as well as European values.

Differences

As regards the EU's handling of the Ukraine conflict and the future of its relations with Russia, the **two governments differ in rhetoric and emphasis: whereas Polish leaders accentuate coercive elements of EU policy mix,**

their Czech counterparts focus on dialogue and peaceful resolution of the Donbas conflict. The dissonance stems not only from different geopolitical attitudes towards Russia's revisionist policies and different threat perceptions, but also from domestic political dynamics and varying degrees of internal unity on foreign policy. In Poland, an uncompromising stance vis-a-vis the Kremlin is a matter of consensus across the political spectrum, and, crucially, between the two main parties, Civic Platform and Law and Justice. In the Czech Republic, by contrast, elite attitudes towards Russia and EU-Russia relations are more diverse, characterized by a pluralistic and competitive discourse. Foreign and defence ministries perceive Russia's threat similarly to Polish policy-makers, but other Czech state institutions and elite groups – notably the Presidency, the ministry of trade and industry and parts of the ruling social-democrats – espouse a more accommodating line, arguing that economic sanctions are harmful to Czech and EU economy. To some extent, the divergence can be attributed to the fact that Russian investment in the Czech Republic is twice as large as that in Poland and the value of Czech export to Russia rose from 2009 by 130%; while Poland's all consecutive governments since 1989 have been opposing Russian investment in the strategic industries, such as energy, it did not prevent the value of export to Russia to rise from 2009 by more than 110%.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Poland and the Czech Republic should strive to maintain a common position within the Visegrad Group and the European Union on EU and NATO approach towards Russia, including a sanctions regime conditional upon full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.
2. Both governments should work towards a common list of priorities and present a joint input into the process of drafting a new European Global Strategy, as well as closely align their positions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, with an emphasis on developing a vision for a more robust Eastern Partnership.
3. Both governments should work towards developing a V4 position on co-operation with additional, non-V4, partners, to ensure that such co-operation does not undermine co-operation within the V4 format. Areas of co-operation where the V4 format is preferable should be clearly identified.
4. Poland and the Czech Republic should intensify cooperation on strategic actions aimed at strengthening the eastern flank of NATO, on the basis of commitments made at the 2014 Newport Summit.
 - In particular, the Czech side should continue its active involvement in Allied military exercises (in conjunction with larger funds earmarked by Prague), meet commitments on defence spending (projected to reach 2% of GDP from 2016 onwards in the case of Poland, compared with 1.4% of GDP by 2020 in the case of the Czech Republic), and fashion a long-term strategic vision for its Armed Forces and their role in the collective defence within the structure of NATO and of the European Union.
 - Poland should, wherever appropriate, offer its support to the Czech armed forces modernisation programme.
 - The governments of Poland and the Czech Republic should work together to forge a regional consensus among the Eastern Flank NATO Member States on upgrading Allied military footprint, in a way that provides for effective deterrence against Russia but does not undermine unity and mutual trust within the Alliance ahead of the Warsaw Summit in 2016.
 - In the face of increasing activity of Russian intelligence activity in Central Europe, Poland and the Czech Republic should also strengthen cooperation between their intelligence and counterintelligence services bilaterally and at a new NATO Counter Intelligence Centre of Excellence (NATO CI COE) to be located in Kraków, Poland.
5. Warsaw and Prague should focus on exchanging best practices in areas such as: civil defence and civil-military cooperation (police and other uniformed services, paramilitaries, etc.), crisis management, protection of critical infrastructure (including cyber security, transportation routes

and communication systems), as well as resilience to other forms of hybrid threats. The experience of Polish-Czech partnership in these areas could form the basis of joint projects undertaken at a multilateral level (mainly NATO and the EU).

6. The two governments should consider a joint initiative to place NATO's Centre of Excellence in the field of civil defence in either Poland or the Czech Republic (following the Centre of Excellence of the Military Police in Poland's Bydgoszcz and the Centre of Excellence in the Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence in the Czech Republic's Vyskov as well as a new NATO Counter Intelligence Centre of Excellence (NATO CI COE) located in Kraków, Poland). Such a Centre would tie in with the Smart Defence initiative (by NATO) and the Pooling and Sharing programme (EU), and complement the tasks of the Centre of Excellence of Civil-Military Cooperation in Enschede (the Netherlands), focusing mainly on expeditionary missions.

7. During their successive presidencies of the Visegrad Group (the Czech Republic's in July 2015 – June 2016 and Poland's in July 2016 – June 2017), they should strive to raise the profile of the grouping as a security forum and actor, not least by effective implementation of the EU Battlegroup project, and using it as a stepping stone towards the establishment of a permanent modular unit. The Polish and Czech presidencies should also be used to strengthen defence partnerships and harmonize defence

planning cycles within the V4, based on the example of the Nordic countries' cooperation.

● In the context of their V4 presidencies, Prague and Warsaw should prioritize refining and institutionalizing the V4+ format as a model of cooperation with other countries at various levels (one recent positive example includes the meeting of chiefs of armed forces general staffs from the Visegrad Group and Ukraine in June 2015).

8. The issue of refugees and of high demand for inward migration more widely is likely to increase in the coming years. The Czech Republic and Poland should explore the possibility of formulating a common position on EU policy in this regard that takes account of humanitarian concerns, economic, moral and legal responsibilities and economic and social benefits as well as costs of inward migration and mobility. As well as considering security concerns, both countries should examine the issue through the lenses of solidarity with other EU member states – particularly those that are key points of arrival and key destinations – and with a clear appreciation of the need to share the burdens as well as the benefits of Schengen and EU membership.

9. It is desirable to introduce a mechanism of regular meetings of committees on European affairs and committees on defence and security of Czech and Polish parliaments so as to discuss problems experienced by governments and experts of the two countries.

10. Poland and the Czech Republic should intensify efforts to promote a regional energy market (also including Slovakia and Hungary) and complete work on a North – South gas corridor.

11. As a way of contributing to common security (especially in the economic field, including power generation), governments should work to improve transport links (road and rail lines) as well as energy transmission corridors.

12. Poland and the Czech Republic should deepen their mutual economic cooperation. Priority areas in this regard which should be considered: increasing the level of mutual investments (including the creation of favourable conditions for investors by the public administration and public-private partnerships), emphasis on cooperation in science and research to develop innovative sectors of the economy, and to strengthen partnership for joint activities in third markets. •

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Website of the project: <http://polishczechforum.csm.org.pl/>



Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland

The project was co-financed from the funds granted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in the competition for the public task “The Polish-Czech forum for the sake of closer acquaintance of societies, enhanced cooperation and good-neighbourly relations 2015”.

This publication presents the views of its authors. It does not reflect the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

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