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On the multinational development of military capabilities: Recommendations for the Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation

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1. The Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation

Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia have been collaborating within the framework of the Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation in the fields of training, operations and capability development since 2011.¹ The first meeting of the parties at Defence Ministers' level will take place on 18th and 19th June 2012 in Frauenkirchen, Austria in order to elaborate on the possibilities of deepening their co-operation further.

Defence Policy Directors (DPDs) of the above mentioned six Central European countries first met on the margin of the informal European Union DPD meeting in Budapest in January 2011 during the Hungarian Presidency of the European Union to discuss the possible areas of regional defence co-operation. During these negotiations, they could already build on the lessons learnt from previous examples of collaboration. Therefore, the participants agreed to build practical and flexible forms of co-operation where the countries wishing to participate could choose *à la carte* among defence co-operation initiatives without formal obligations. They also agreed not to create costly bureaucratic institutions to this end but to continue negotiations in a round table format, while experts would frame the particular fields of co-operation in workshops.

Following on from the first DPDs' meeting, potential fields of co-operation have been identified and these options have been permanently discussed by DPDs. Particular countries took the role of lead nation in those projects which seemed promising for them and presented 'food for thought' papers. When two or more parties could agree on the details of co-operation in a given field, experts analysed the technical details of realisation. Negotiations have been going on mostly in a bilateral or trilateral form, while in certain cases even more countries began to co-operate in some of the following fields:

1. The Czech Republic leads expert talks on the possible areas and ways of co-operation in the field of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) defence. Progress has been achieved in the area of defence against threats from biological agents; in information sharing and exchange regarding CBRN defence; and in mapping-up the possibilities in joint training. Multinational programmes may begin in 2013.
2. Based on the 'food for thought' paper produced by Austria and Croatia, bilateral co-operation among them has been deepened in the field of training Special Forces.
3. The Czech Republic produced a 'food for thought' paper on regional logistics co-operation initiated on the basis of the Multinational Logistic Co-ordination Centre in

the Czech Republic, responding to a capability gap relating to the creation of Joint Logistic Support Groups and Headquarters in the Atlantic Alliance.

4. Hungary produced a 'food for thought' paper on Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) co-operation, supported by two expert panel discussions where several areas of practical co-operation were identified. Further steps depend on development of Hungarian national capabilities in this field.
5. The joint training of Czech, Croatian and Hungarian Air Mentor Teams for Afghanistan has begun thanks to the negotiation going on in the Round Table. The Czech Republic and Croatia send an Air Mentor Team jointly, while Hungary provides a second team individually. Joint training has been facilitated by the Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation, using funding from the Multinational Helicopter Initiative.
6. Even though co-operation regarding the mission of EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a capability development issue, Austria and Hungary could enhance their co-operation as a result of intensified discussions in the Round Table.

As a determining driver of practical achievements on the ground, political co-operation also has been intensified: DPDs regularly meet on the margin of European Union, Atlantic Alliance and 'Visegrad Group' – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – meetings in order to discuss their points of view on European defence policy and planning issues. Significantly, the Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation seems to be more fruitful and effective than Visegrad's formalised co-operation. Even though a Visegrad European Union Battlegroup will be on standby in 2016, there is no other existing military co-operation using the same format.

The Round Table, on the other hand, provides a forum for the six Central European countries, where they can raise potential areas of practical co-operation and each and every country is free to join and contribute to it. Thus, co-operation is forged on the ground of flexible and practical mechanisms while there is no 'institutional' pressure – as would have been the case in the Visegrad format, where the support of all participating countries is necessary to begin to co-operate on any issue. Last but not least, all participating countries in the Round Table have about the same level of resources and military manpower, providing equal weight and influence, unlike the Visegrad Group, which includes Poland, which is often considered the 'lead nation'.

2. What is multinational defence co-operation?

Multinational Defence Co-operation (MDC) is when a group of countries work together to develop military capabilities. It 'is any arrangement where two or more nations work together to enhance military capability. This can include exchanges and liaison, training and exercising, common doctrine, collaborative equipment procurement, or multinational formations.'²

This definition puts emphasis on the improving of military capabilities. The definition of military capability may vary from nation by nation; however, there seems to be consensus that 'military capability' is a means of action that facilitates the achievement of a given military goal or effect. Armed forces themselves may also define the substance of capabilities differently. While the Hungarian definition³ builds on the elements of the the Atlantic Alliance's definition,⁴ including Doctrine, Organisation, Training, Material, Personnel, Leadership, Facilities and Interoperability, the United States Armed Forces' definition includes Force Structure, Modernisation, Readiness and Sustainability.⁵

The current forms of multinational co-operation are widely cited under the common concept of 'pooling and sharing' of military capabilities, and practically mean the same as Smart Defence within the Atlantic Alliance and the Ghent Process within the European Union. Accordingly, it is possible to differentiate between four main categories of multinational defence co-operation:⁶

1. The **sharing of capabilities** is based on national capabilities and force structures which are not integrated into a single international mechanism. In this case, command and control is retained by national armed forces, and operational costs fall upon them in proportion to their participation. Thus, national governments retain their sovereign control over those forces, and multinational co-operation remains less effective. The co-ordination of multinational education, training and maintenance activities, the drafting of joint doctrines, the improving of interoperability and the exchange of information, are usually realised within a capability sharing framework.
2. The **pooling of capabilities** is a more complicated mechanism when national capabilities are integrated into an international structure, while the command and control of those forces is still retained by national governments. In this case it is the integrated and co-ordinated planning that decreases the personnel and logistical costs. The best examples for the pooling of capabilities are multinational forces – such as the European Union's Battlegroups, the Atlantic Alliance's Response Force, and Eurocorps – that have their own multinational command structures, while par-

ticipating states retain the control over the troops they have donated to the force. One of the most significant and successful multinational integrations is the Deployable Air Task Force established by Belgium and the Netherlands in 1996. Their joint forces – thirty-two F16 fighter jets – were deployed in 1999 to Italy and successfully participated in the Kosovo conflict. Certain multinational co-operation regarding logistics also belongs to this category: the Movement Co-ordination Centre Europe co-ordinates the air, naval and land strategic transport capabilities of twenty-five European states, while the European Air Transport Command aims to improve the efficiency of air transportation for Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

3. Pooling through acquisition includes two sub-categories:

- a. Joint acquisition takes place when necessary capabilities are lacking at the national level, thus several countries join to purchase, maintain and operate together the given capability. Although this option is very cost-effective, it reduces significantly national control over the capability, therefore joint acquisition is normally used only for procuring and maintaining very expensive capabilities. Evident examples of joint acquisition are the Atlantic Alliance's Airborne Warning and Control System and the similarly built Strategic Airlift Capability. To the latter twelve nations joined to purchase and operate three C17 heavy lift military transport aeroplanes, which are stationed in Pápa air station in Hungary. The most recent example of joint acquisition is the Alliance Ground Surveillance capability, whereby thirteen members of the Atlantic Alliance will purchase and operate five Global Hawk remotely-controlled aeroplanes to provide a surveillance capability for the entire alliance. Member states have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Alliance Ground Surveillance at the recent Atlantic Alliance Summit in Chicago. Equally, the Baltic States have enhanced their co-operation through joint acquisition of air surveillance assets, while Lithuania and Estonia together procured long-range three-dimensional radars.
- b. Co-development is the most intensive form of co-operation, which is realised when two or more countries begin to jointly develop and produce an asset that they individually could not afford alone. In theory, such co-operation should yield significant cost-effectiveness, but experience has doubted this presumption in many cases. The most significant obstacle has been the lack of thorough harmonisation of technical requirements prior to the development phase due to inefficient co-operation. Thus, participating nations posed diverging requirements for the asset under development, consuming immense extra resources and time when developing national variations with their own specifications. This also gen-

erates extra logistical and training costs later, leading to exactly the opposite effect than intended. The most well-known European co-development programmes are the Eurofighter Typhoon strike-fighter, the A400M military transport aeroplane and Eurocopter helicopters.

4. **Role and task sharing** provides a solution when a state needs to give up a certain capability. This supposes that another friendly country will make this capability available when necessary. The co-operation between the Belgian and Dutch navies is an excellent example of role and task sharing, as Belgium provides logistics and maintenance for the mine countermeasures vessels of both countries, while the Netherlands provides the same for both navies' frigates. The parties have pledged to provide this logistical and maintenance support, even in case the other participates in an operation without their respective national forces. Baltic, Slovenian and Icelandic air policing is also based on role and task sharing, provided by other allies in the Atlantic Alliance. Specialised 'niche' capabilities, that are necessary only in limited amounts, are also developed along this scheme within the Atlantic Alliance: any one member state can undertake the development and maintenance of such a capability, providing it to other allies when it is needed. Hungary, for example developed and maintains a biological laboratory and water purification capabilities as niche capabilities.

3. When is Multinational Defence Co-operation the solution?

Security and defence co-operation ‘occurs when states adjust their foreign and defence behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others. States co-operate to realise gains that are unachievable through individual action; policymaking is achieved multilaterally rather than unilaterally.’⁷ Such collaborative ‘behaviour’ – just like any other form of co-operation that aims at greater efficiency – is typical when forged against a common external threat, or can occur when shrinking military expenditures push nations towards tighter strategic co-operation.

National and multinational forms of capability development therefore should not be approached and evaluated along value pairs such as ‘good-not good’ for a solution, but as one element of a rather complicated set of tools that necessarily include both forms, thus complementing each other. In certain cases, it might require a nation to give up some unsustainable capabilities, offering these capabilities within a multinational framework. It is beyond doubt that it is much more convenient for any armed forces to possess all necessary resources for capability development, without necessary compromises with other nations. In comparison, Multinational Defence Co-operation requires constant pliancy, and continuous and detailed co-ordination: empathy must be shown towards all partners, going through gradual ‘strategic acculturation’, while all parties strive to protect their own interests and attempt to achieve the most possible while using possibly the least resources.

Several European countries have lost a significant portion of their national military capabilities during the last two decades. The most expensive, technically most demanding combat, combat support and mainly combat service support capabilities, were only available in an allied framework – relying on and contributing to partners’ capabilities – when the need appeared to use them in operations. During combat service support capabilities during the Atlantic Alliance’s mission in Afghanistan, pooling and sharing mechanisms resulted in a fifteen-to-seventy-percent cost reduction for contributing nations, than it would have cost for national armed forces acting individually.⁸

There have also been several cases when national armed forces’ ‘emptied force structures’ – reduced troop numbers and outdated military equipment kept form only, but not substance.⁹ On the one hand, the scarcity of resources and austerity measures has resulted in the dismantling of capabilities that have not been used, thus proved to be dispensable. On the other hand, in many cases by the gradual expansion of the Atlantic Alliance and European Union, most neighbouring countries became members of the same alliance, thus large territorial defence forces have become obsolete.

Despite all these examples, it is necessary to admit that, in an ideal case, capability development in a national framework is more simple and effective than within multinational frameworks. However, we live in imperfect times, thus cannot build scenarios on ideal cases. The global economic and financial crisis triggered severe austerity measures in all sectors – including the defence sector. An analysis of the European Commission predicts that austerity measures might have to be kept up even until 2030, depending on the fiscal discipline of countries, bringing about long-term unfavourable effects for the defence sector.¹⁰ As Europe currently enjoy an unprecedented era of security and stability, politicians might easily be forced by electoral preferences to allocate further resources in the coming years from the defence sector to others (such as welfare, pensions, health, education, etc.)

That is why numerous initiatives have been framed in the European Union, in the Atlantic Alliance and also among various groups of countries since the outbreak of the current financial crisis, in order to attempt to counter the gradual process of vanishing military capabilities.

4. The features and future of Multinational Defence Co-operation

Multinational Defence Co-operation will not be interpreted as a tool of short term crisis management but as part – only a part, but an important part – of the mid- and long-term solution. The present lack of financial resources leads to the conclusion that the preservation of national military capabilities in Europe goes beyond national resources in certain cases. This shall urge European states to initiate deeper and intensified political, economic, military and technological co-operation in order to be able to provide, together with their allies, those necessary capabilities that they cannot maintain or develop on their own.

Most areas of co-operation – whether it was a relatively simple joint education and training programme or complicated multinational strategic capability development – can be made more effective if participants keep in mind best practices and not focus narrowly on obstacles only. The willingness for co-operation is further strengthened by financial pressures, the lasting scarcity of resources and the possibility of mid- and long-term cost-effectiveness that arises from the pooling and sharing of capabilities.

Lessons learnt and best practices indicate that a successful Multinational Defence Co-operation programme must be flexible, initiated within a loosely structured and not institutionalised framework and developed further step by step in an increasingly coordinated fashion. Strong political commitment and the agreement of political and military leaders are also basic requirements. However, a rational evaluation must pinpoint potential obstacles to co-operation, including the political and military leaders' lack of deep understanding; real support and commitment regarding defence co-operation; irresolvable technological differences among participating states; the lack of public support; and most of all, continuously decreasing financial resources.

The lack of support from the political and military make the initiation of any co-operation impossible, while the lack of long-term commitment undermines the realisation of any programmes. Multinational co-operation at the same time needs to be 'sold' to the public, both regarding 'principle and practice': the public need to be informed and convinced of the advantages of these programmes that are counterintuitive to traditional schemes of thinking at the national level. However, the fundamental obstacles to co-operation are often technological differences. Because of these differences, potential contributors would not be able to participate even if they strived to do so. This feature can only be favourably changed if participants alter their traditional schemes of thinking and embark upon more co-operation during defence planning by sharing more information on their plans and initiating procurements that are more tailored to each other's needs, always looking for synergies.

Developing the Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation

Based on the lessons discussed above, we offer the following recommendations for consideration at the Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation, in order to enhance existing collaboration and to avoid known obstacles:

1. **Better co-operation during defence procurement:** participating nations can only expect better cost efficiency from co-operation if they begin to co-ordinate their defence planning processes regarding the procurement of assets, considering other partners' procurement plans as one of the aspects that determine their decisions on what to procure or develop. If participating countries strive to achieve greater interoperability through the procurement of assets compatible to others' assets, joint training and exercises, as well as deployment in operations becomes a more viable option.
2. **Expanding and strengthening personal ties at all levels:** traditional schemes of thinking can be best changed in the mid- and long term if building on the success of confidence and security building measures of the 1990s joint education, training, and exercises. They offer a meeting point, an informal forum to exchange ideas for members of the Central European political leadership, members of the military and experts from ministries. When highlighting the importance of close personal ties, a member of the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence reflected on British-French defence co-operation: 'Everyone here has a mate in Washington, we need to move to a situation where everyone here also has a mate in Paris.'¹¹ A similar approach needs be articulated by Central European countries as well, because knowing the institutional cultures and viewpoints of the other parties makes co-operation much easier and could foster further common exercises.
3. **Internalisation of the new schemes of thinking that build on the best practices of successful pooling and sharing programmes:** As states cooperate in order to realise such benefits that they would not be able to gain individually, Multinational Defence Co-operation also needs to be viewed through the prism of mutual, relative benefits that all parties simultaneously gain. Traditional schemes of thinking, which build on absolute national benefits can thus be partially replaced by new schemes of thinking that understand Multinational Defence Co-operation as a complementary and necessary element of capability development that is beneficial to all parties concerned. Multinational Defence Co-operation should not be considered as a tool for short-term crisis management, but as an important instrument for mid- and long-term solutions – if it is efficiently carried out.

4. **Tendentious and targeted communication of achievements:** In order to ensure long-term political commitment that is not bound to single political administrations but builds on wide-scale societal support, not only obstacles, but achievements need to be highlighted by the media and political communication, with the responsibility for the formation of popular opinion and support. It is also desirable that international media gain sufficient information about the work and achievements of the Round Table.
5. **Revision and re-evaluation of existing multinational co-operation programmes, with the potential allocation of resources to more promising programmes:** Experience from international programmes shows that some institutionalised forms of co-operation are not always functional and effective, or only reach partial goals compared to their original aims and mission. Therefore, it is rational to review existing multinational co-operation programmes; indeed, if potential new forms of co-operation arise, as initiated within the Round Table format, certain resources might need to be allocated to these new programmes. For this purpose, it is necessary to identify those capability gaps that either already exist, or will appear in the mid- and long-term in one or more countries, so that conscious, harmonised, joint co-operation programmes can target these shortages (for example in the field of regional air policing, pilot training programmes, and so on).

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Notes

¹ The idea of this co-operation was raised first at a workshop in Vienna in May 2010.

² United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, *Multinational Defence Co-operation*, Policy Paper, Paper No. 2, (London: Directorate of Corporate Communications, 2001), p. 2.

³ Directive on the Ministerial Defence Planning System 98/2009, Hungarian Ministry of Defence, 11th December 2009.

⁴ 2009 Chiefs of Transformation Conference, Final Analysis Report, Norfolk, Virginia, 2009, p. A-15.

⁵ United States Department of Defence, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (Amended through 9th June 2004). p. 330.

⁶ Jean-Pierre Maulny and Fabio Liberti, *Pooling of EU Member States Assets in the Implementation of ESDP* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2008) and Bastian Giegerich, 'Budget Crunch: Implications for European Defence', *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 4. 2010, pp. 87-98.

⁷ Seth Jones, *The Rise of European Security Co-operation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 8.

⁸ Claudia Major, Christian Mölling and Tomas Valasek, 'Smart but Too Cautious: How NATO Can Improve its Fight Against Austerity', *Policy Brief* (London: Center for European Reform, May 2012) p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Christian Mölling and Sophie-Charlotte Brune, *The Impact of the Financial Crisis on European Defence* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2011), p. 34.

¹¹ Ben Jones, 'Franco-British military co-operation?', *Occasional Paper* No. 88, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, February 2011, p. 34.