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HUNGARY'S PARTNERING IN FOREIGN MILITARY MISSIONS: A DIFFERENT KIND OF REGIONALISM

ABSTRACT: This article looks at Hungary's partnerships with other countries in the context of foreign military missions, with a focus on the post-1999 period, i.e. the period since Hungary's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is interested primarily in the motives that may explain partner choice as well as the derivative benefits sought through collaboration of this kind. In particular, the authors are seeking signs if a kind of regionalism (interpreted loosely as a preference of regional partners) may be evident here.

KEYWORDS: Hungarian Defence Forces, Hungary, Germany, military missions, partnering

Shedding light on how bilateral relations and partnerships in the framework of military missions mutually inform each other, may illuminate noteworthy aspects of a country's foreign policy behaviour – revealing how in its civilian and military diplomacy it seeks to establish cooperation in the realm of „semi-hard” interests: a realm of affairs beyond territorial defence but one that nevertheless holds implications for security and thus involves prospectively more significant stakes than routine interactions in other fields.

Naturally, it takes two to tango, and in advance of our inquiry we expect that the initiation of ties of this kind may lie with either or both of the partners involved. It will be important therefore to study motives not only on the side of Hungary but on the side of its counterparts as well.

As we will show in our study, as a result of this overview, it is wrong to expect that an interest in good-neighbourly relations may take precedence over the specific demands of military missions. Taking account of this does nevertheless leave room on occasions for the preference of regional partners.

HUNGARY'S CONTRIBUTION TO MILITARY MISSIONS AS A NATO MEMBER STATE

It is often pointed out that post-1999 Hungary attached a clear priority to NATO missions (to some extent to the detriment of UN peacekeeping participation),² with a presence in all of NATO's foreign military missions since then (with the exception of the one in Libya). NATO occupied this priority position already before 1999 in fact, and this largely explains Hungary's noteworthy contribution to the Alliance's efforts in the Balkans throughout the 1990s. Membership in the Alliance was sought for the sake of a fundamental security guarantee: as a kind of insurance policy against contingencies considered increasingly improbable.

¹ In preparing this study, Péter Marton was supported by the New Program of National Excellence of the Ministry of Human Capacities, Hungary.

² Besenyő J. „Az afrikai műveletek története 1989-től napjainkig”. In Besenyő J. (ed.), *Magyar békefenntartók Afrikában*. Budapest: Katonai Nemzetbiztonsági Szolgálat, 2013. 7–8.

A low-threat security environment and the reassurance of NATO membership then combined to cause a continuous decrease in defence spending relative to GDP up until very recently. Throughout its membership years Hungary was criticised at times for not doing enough in terms of military modernisation (e.g. the procurement of new assets). For this it found a way to compensate in the field of NATO's foreign military missions where this may be marginally more important to the alliance. This helped to some extent to alleviate pressure by allies to spend more on defence (this behaviour is not unique among NATO members).

Just as other Central and Eastern European countries Hungary also attaches the highest priority to military missions, including missions outside the framework of NATO (by coalitions of the willing), that the United States considers important to its – and the Alliance's – security. As Marton and Eichler show³ in a study of the behaviour of the countries of the region in the context of the Iraqi, Afghan and Libyan missions, CEE countries are most inclined to participate (firstly) if the United States is the overall lead nation of a coalition, (secondly) if the U.S. shows high appreciation of ally perseverance in a given context, and (only thirdly) if the mission concerned is considered morally or strategically justified.

FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

In order to develop a basic understanding as well as hypotheses regarding the key motives and the benefits sought by Hungary in partnering with particular nations in the context of foreign military missions, we provide a process-tracing overview of where, in what fields, and with whom Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) have worked in the post-1999 period. We are interested in offering more thereby than a mere chronology of the various commitments undertaken and the list of countries that were partners. To this end we will include contextual references to likely, or at the least plausible, reasons for what might have made a particular partner nation seek Hungary's assistance – or, vice versa: what might have made Hungary seek the assistance of, or the opportunity to work together with, a particular ally.

We will do this, with due regard to (1) the overall state of the bilateral relations concerned, (2) any noticeable element of direct reciprocity/transactionality in or related to the partnership concerned, (3) wider defence cooperation at the time with the country concerned, and (4) any contextual or long-term consideration openly voiced by Hungarian and partner-country officials of note at the time.

A conceptual issue related to this is what counts as a partnership of interest to us. To shed light on the related complications through a specific example: if an Icelandic and a Hungarian military officer find themselves working as colleagues at the Headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force - Afghanistan (ISAF) in 2010, should it be registered as partnership between the two countries concerned (and all the other countries who had officers there at the same time, i.e. practically all of the members of the coalition)? In a sense there is partnership as a result but we are primarily interested in cases where (i) Hungary is involved at unit-level (e.g. with a whole company or battalion), and (ii) collaboration exists not purely in an institutional context but due to political decision(s) whose motives are consequently interesting to investigate.

³ Marton, P. and Eichler, J. "Between willing and reluctant entrapment: CEE countries in NATO's non-European missions." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46/3. 2013. 361.

Given that presence in a military mission constitutes more or less direct partnership with the host country (e.g. with Afghanistan in the case of ISAF), but one of a fundamentally different nature, we exclude partnerships with host countries from our inquiry. Another set of partnerships we shall ignore in the framework of the present study are those relationships generated by the dynamics of the mission concerned: e.g. between countries succeeding each other in a particular role in a given area of operations, cooperating in a transition process.⁴ The „bottom-up” impact of this at the higher levels of the relationship is certainly interesting, but in the present study we are investigating the „top-down” impact of decisions at higher levels on partner choice in military missions.

As to the timeframe: although we are interested in the post-2001 period, we need to pay attention to partnerships originating from prior to 1999, and these will also be included in our overview – the article will be structured accordingly.

Following this, we test the validity of the assumptions developed. These will serve to inform a case study of the evolution and record of Hungary’s partnership with Germany in foreign military missions that shall be interesting to compare with the trajectory and experiences of similar German-Polish ties.⁵

HUNGARY’S INVOLVEMENT IN FOREIGN MILITARY MISSIONS FROM PRIOR TO 1999

From the times preceding Hungary’s 1999 accession to NATO, three missions deserve attention in particular: the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai Peninsula, and the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Hungary has been involved in Cyprus since 1993, and was a part of the Sinai and Bosnia missions starting in 1995 – the former lasting up to 2015, the latter ending in 2004. In terms of the kind of partnerships of interest to us (see above), especially the cases of Cyprus and Bosnia deserve attention here.

In the case of Cyprus, Hungary is present with a contingent in Sector 4 of the Buffer Zone, together, at the time of writing this, with Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine (Ukrainian officers took over their position from Croatian observers in this mission). That this is a regional grouping of countries is relevant, and in particular the Hungarian-Slovak collaboration in the framework of UNFICYP is often emphasized by officials and commentators alike.⁶

⁴ On such grounds, the Netherlands would otherwise be of interest as Hungary took over its areas of responsibility, both in the case of the Sinai peacekeeping mission and in Baghlan province in Afghanistan (in the latter case in leading the Baghlan Provincial Reconstruction Team, or Baghlan PRT). New Zealand (NZ) may also deserve mention as a stakeholder of Hungary’s performance in Baghlan province: the NZ leadership complained several times over the years about the Hungarian PRT’s performance because of the freedom enjoyed by insurgents in areas of Baghlan in their view created a kind of negative spill-over effect in neighbouring Bamiyan province which was NZ troops’ area of responsibility at the time. In fact, the case is complicated to assess as the kind of combat patrols demanded by the NZ leadership were beyond the official mandate of the Hungarian PRT.

⁵ A similarly key relationship, the one with the United States, falls outside the scope of the present study given that it in many ways is the source of much of what Hungary is involved in overall, and that it would thus require a study of its own.

⁶ Szenes, Z. "A békefenntartás hatása a magyar haderőre." *Hadtudomány*, 3/1. 2006. 3–14. http://www.zmne.hu/kulso/mhht/hadtudomany/2006/3/2006_3_1.html, Accessed on 5 May 2016.

Hungarian-Slovak joint operations, under Slovakian command, began here in June 2001.⁷ Prior to this, the area of operations was under Austrian command, and the Austrian battalion that deployed here had operated jointly together with a Hungarian and a Slovenian contingent since 1995 – Austria and Slovenia then concluded their role in the area in 2000-2001.⁸

Hungary deployed a unit of combat engineers to the Bosnia mission from 1995 to 2002 under the Allied Rapid Reaction Force HQ (HQ ARRC), as „Theatre Troops” unassigned to a particular regional Multi-National Division (MND).⁹ Having said this, the troops in question operated from their base out of Okučani in Croatia, mostly in the southeast, and participated in the reconstruction of railways, bridges and in landscaping tasks primarily there.¹⁰ The most memorable of these was perhaps the country’s contribution to the rebuilding of Mostar’s famous Old Bridge. Hungarian divers recovered stone elements of the destroyed bridge from the riverbed underneath.

Although Hungary’s contribution in this case may be explained with reference to the quest for NATO membership at the time, and also to Hungary’s direct interest in the stabilisation of its southern neighbourhood in the wake of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, the partnership motive emerges in the context of cooperation with Italy in particular. Once Hungarian combat engineers were withdrawn, a 200-strong unit was then joined to the Italian-led Multinational Special Unit (MSU), prepared primarily for possible Crime and Riot Control (CRC) tasks.¹¹

The partnership in these contexts with Austria, Slovakia and Italy, respectively, may be explained partly with reference to proximity (in Austria’s and Slovakia’s cases by their being neighbouring countries), and a shared interest in the stabilisation of the Balkans region. This process of cooperation was also structured, however, by NATO: Hungary, as a non-NATO partner nation, was assigned to the southern command of the Alliance (Allied Forces Southern Europe, AF SOUTH). This arrangement remained in place up till NATO’s reorganisation of its command structure in 2004, well into the period of Hungary’s membership in the Alliance. Thereafter Hungary belonged to the area of responsibility of the Joint Force Command in Naples, Italy (JFC Naples).¹²

Austria also played a key role in setting up regional cooperation in the framework of peace support operations. Notably, at least a part of the territory of the countries involved in this had at once belonged to the Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the initiative can be seen as forming part of Austria’s general relationship-building efforts in its traditional zone of interest in Central Europe. As Schmidl notes:

⁷ "Nem holiday misszió: a török-görög ütközőzónát felügyelik a magyar békefenntartók". Ma.hu. 15 June 2011. http://www.ma.hu/kulfold/99393/Nem_holiday_misszio_a_torokgorog_utkozozonat_felugyelik_a_magyar_bekefenntartok, Accessed on 4 May 2016.; "Az Egyesült Nemzetek Ciprusi Békefenntartó Erő". MH Békétámogató Kiképző Központ (Hungarian Defence Forces Peace Support Training Center). <http://www.pstc.hu/rovatok/felkeszitesek/bekemuvelet/unficyp/unficyp/>, Accessed on 6 May 2016.

⁸ Wagner, P. "A ciprusi ENSZ misszió (UNFICYP)". In Szenes, Z. (ed.), *Válságkezelés és békefenntartás az ENSZ-ben*. Budapest: Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem, 2014. 75–95.

⁹ "Peacekeeping in Bosnia". CNN. 1 July 2002. <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/07/01/bosnia.peacekeeping.mission/index.html>, Accessed on 8 May 2016.

¹⁰ "Az IFOR- és az SFOR-misszió Bosznia-Hercegovinában". Hotdog.hu. 8 January 2007. <http://www.hotdog.hu/hadilap/erdekessegek/az-ifor-es-az-sfor-misszio-bosznia-hercegovinaban>, Accessed on 7 May 2016.

¹¹ Zsifko, M. "Hungarian detachment joins MSU". *SFOR Informer#172*, August 2004. <http://www.nato.int/sfor/indexinf/172/p11a/t02p11a.htm>, Accessed on 5 May 2016.

¹² The Revised Military Structure. NATO Allied Joint Force Command Naples. <https://www.jfcnaples.nato.int/page6322744/19-the-revised-military-structure>, Accessed on 6 May 2016.

„The 1990s ... saw a move to integrate contingents from neighboring countries into Austrian battalions deployed abroad. This began with a Hungarian platoon, then a company, and later a Slovenian platoon in Cyprus, and was followed by Slovak, then Croat companies in Syria, and Swiss, Slovak and German elements in Kosovo. This was part of Austria's post-Cold War neighborhood policy and helped some of the neighboring countries to start participating in peace operations. Austria also contributed trainers, especially to Germany when that country embarked on increased participation in international operations. This was also the rationale behind Austria's catalytic role in the establishment of the Central European Nations' Co-operation in Peace Support (CENCOOP) mechanism in 1998, which included Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland.”¹³

In the case of Slovakia, a fellow Visegrad Group country, political cooperation is extensive even though at times it has to navigate the complications of the legacy of history (given that Slovakia's territory was formerly part of the Hungarian-dominated part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and that it has a significant ethnic Hungarian minority). The Hungarian Ministry of Defence (MoD) regularly refers to cooperation with Slovakia on its website as „an especially good example” of „consolidating allied relations with neighbouring countries and their militaries”.¹⁴ On Slovakia's part, official statements reflect a similar approach. In 2010 a joint Slovak-Hungarian military award was established, tellingly named „Good Neighbourhood and Understanding.” Members of the Slovak-Hungarian UNFICYP contingent were then presented with the award.¹⁵

The momentary state of these bilateral relationships seems not to have had much relevance with a view to the above. It may be pointed out that in the period of time when Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi's premiership in 2001-2006 and Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán's leadership (1998-2002) overlapped, there was a higher degree of amicability in high-level diplomacy between the two countries, and that under Robert Fico's first premiership in Slovakia (2006-2010) there was some strain in Hungarian-Slovakian relations over Fico's inclusion of nationalist parties in his governing coalition. This, however, did not interfere with military-to-military cooperation in the latter case.

At the same time there is wider defence cooperation not only with Slovakia but also with Italy, regardless of who leads the government of the day in the two countries. From the MSU contribution in Bosnia this extended to the Kosovo Force (KFOR) mission as well. Furthermore, since 2004, Italy and Hungary patrol Slovenia's airspace together and jointly perform Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) duties there.¹⁶

HUNGARY'S INVOLVEMENT IN FOREIGN MILITARY MISSIONS POST-1999

In the period starting in 1999, in the wake of Hungary's accession to NATO, the Kosovo Force mission in Kosovo, participation in stabilisation operations in Iraq in the US-led coa-

¹³ Schmidl, E. A. "Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: Austria". [ProvidingforPeacekeeping.org](http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2014/04/03/contributor-profile-austria/). <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2014/04/03/contributor-profile-austria/>, Accessed on 6 May 2016.

¹⁴ Galambos, S. "A békét őrzik Cipruson". [Honvedelem.hu](http://www.honvedelem.hu/cikk/40049). 18 September 2013. <http://www.honvedelem.hu/cikk/40049>, Accessed on 2 May 2016.

¹⁵ "General Bulik: Proud of Slovak-Hungarian Cooperation Within Cyprus Mission". Slovak Centre London. 26 March 2010. <http://www.slovenskecentrum.sk/en/news/read/7032/general-bulik-proud-of-slovak-hungarian-cooperation-within-cyprus-mission>, Accessed 4 May 2016.

¹⁶ "Slovenia Eyes Hungarian Fighters". BBC. 28 November 2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3247920.stm>, Accessed on 6 May 2016.

lition of the willing, and the deployment of a Provincial Reconstruction Team and various other elements to Afghanistan (in the framework of the International Security Assistance Force – Afghanistan, or ISAF) stand out as significant commitments.

Just as previously, in its areas of operations, Hungary worked closely together with particular countries. In Kosovo, it joined the Italian-led Multinational Task Force West (MNTF-W) together with Spain, Slovenia and Romania, while deploying a battalion separately under the KFOR HQ. In Iraq, a Hungarian logistic battalion was part of the Multinational Division Central-South, under Polish command. This division had over twenty contributing nations, including unconventional partner countries such as Honduras and El Salvador but at the same time many Central and Eastern European countries were also present there, namely, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. Just as in the case of Iraq, in Afghanistan, starting from 2006, Hungary had to rely extensively on direct partnership with the United States at many levels.¹⁷ Yet, even here, it is possible to point to a group of countries apart from the US with which it worked closely together.

Hungary was the lead nation in the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Baghlan province where it had support from Croatian military police, a Montenegrin contingent of about 40 troops, and, for a time, a handful of visiting Slovak military officers in its ranks. Hungary also relied for logistical support, and due to its sheer political and military weight, on Germany in the wider framework of ISAF's Regional Command-North. U.S. and German troops, together with Afghan security forces, played a crucial role in taking on an intensifying insurgency in areas of Baghlan province after 2008.

Even without further analysis it can thus be concluded, including on the basis of the previous section (about the pre-1999 period), that a kind of regionalism *seems* to play a role in the choice of partners. Neighbouring Central and Eastern European countries as well as non-neighbouring countries of the region figure prominently among Hungary's close associates in foreign military missions.

In this respect, the post-2001 period has only reinforced a tendency that pre-dates the country's accession to NATO. Looking deeper beyond the surface will, however, reveal in the case of Germany that the close cooperation seen in Afghanistan was partly an accidental result of decisions brought with a view to different calculations. This may shed light on the otherwise perplexing phenomenon that the regionalism in question manifests itself independently of the existing regional diplomatic-political frameworks that the countries concerned are involved in.

Hungary's primary point of reference in this regard is the Visegrad Group – consisting of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – yet cooperation in military missions with Poland and the Czech Republic has remained mostly limited and indirect up till recently.¹⁸ The Central European Initiative on the other hand includes a total of eighteen countries, counting in its ranks Italy as well (but not Germany). It is a much broader framework of cooperation than the circle of countries with which Hungary is typically involved in close

¹⁷ With reference to aid from the United States to the Baghlan PRT's operations and, starting from 2009, assistance received in the framework of the US-Hungarian-Afghan joint OMLT (Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team), and the joint operations of Hungarian special forces with their U.S. counterparts in Wardak province. On the subject, see in more detail: Marton, P. and Wagner, P. "The Hungarian military in the War on Terror". *Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 10/2. 2014. 107–122.

¹⁸ This is changing with the newly set up Visegrad Battle Group, and the planned rotational presence in the Baltic area as part of NATO's eastern-periphery reinforcement measures.

cooperation in military missions. Formal regional cooperation mechanisms are thus found not to be strongly related to cooperation with partners in military missions.

HUNGARY'S PARTNERSHIP WITH GERMANY

A foundation of German-Hungarian relations after the transition from socialism was the role that Hungary played in Germany's re-unification by opening its borders, i.e. the „Iron Curtain,” to East German refugees who wanted to go West (in September 1989). This had an impact in terms of military-to-military cooperation as well: first and foremost in the form of the transfer of some of the East German National People's Army's assets and equipment to the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) – including tanks, artillery pieces, helicopters, air defence systems, spare parts of various kinds, etc. It may be noteworthy that Poland at the time was the beneficiary of similar transfers. Due to Germany's generally cautious foreign policy posture and its concerns related to the instability and the crisis in the Balkans, Berlin also adopted a policy of not providing „lethal military aid” or what it saw as combat weapons systems to Hungary and other countries in the region. Even so, the military transfers that took place were sizable, and amounted in total to 5,300 tons of various kinds of equipment, spare parts, and a total of 433 pieces of assets (military hardware).¹⁹

In the framework of the Partnership for Peace program, senior German and Hungarian officers continued to meet. However, once Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were issued the invitation to join NATO, it became clear that Hungary would work under Italian command, as noted above (under JFC-Naples). Political ties remained strong with Germany but military cooperation in this context took a different form. It was in the field of military medical cooperation that a significant connection developed in the years that followed.

Contributing to military missions in this area has always been a convenient and cost-effective solution to Hungarian governments. Military medical teams can be deployed comparatively fast, and they can provide in-theatre for the Hungarian contingent's needs as well. Moreover, contributions of this kind often constitute a quasi-niche area within military coalitions.

The first military medical team was sent by the HDF to Saudi Arabia in 1991, joining the Gulf War coalition against Iraq. Although the international forces did not suffer a large number of casualties in the war, a particularly grave incident did require the involvement of the Hungarian doctors concerned. An Iraqi SCUD missile hit a military base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Tending to the over 150 persons who were wounded, Hungarian military medical personnel were there among others. This left a very good impression in US counterparts who helped establish a connection with the German military related to this. That is how significant cooperation started in this field. Hungary then joined international crisis manage-

¹⁹ The source of these data, as well as a good overview: Hettyey A. "Magyar-német katonai kapcsolatok az Antall-kormány időszakában, különös tekintettel az NVA-fegyverszállítás kérdésére". *Seregszemle* XIII/4. 2015. 118–119. The policy stemmed partly from domestic political reasons. An unauthorised arms deal (involving the sale of 15 Leopard tanks) with Turkey cost the German Minister of Defence at the time, Gerhard Stoltenberg, his job as it erupted into a scandal, resulting in calls for stronger restrictions on arms transfers. Germany was also looking to avoid the impression that it was making an exception out of Hungary, seeking similarly strong or even stronger ties with Poland and the Czech Republic. Hettyey. "Magyar-német katonai kapcsolatok...". 118–119.

ment operations in Albania in the spring of 1999 again with a military medical team, and the same contribution was offered in Afghanistan after 2001. In the latter case, Hungarian involvement began in April 2003. Hungarian doctors worked under German command at the main military hospital in Kabul. This development is crucial as in June 2003, after a bus carrying German troops was attacked in Kabul, with many killed and wounded in the bombing, Hungarian medical personnel were the first to arrive on the scene, starting triage and evacuation procedures there. The rest of the Hungarian team did a similarly good job at the military hospital. Their professionalism left a legacy of respect and good will that helped cooperation across a broader spectrum eventually, in northern Afghanistan (during which the cooperation continued in Kabul as well).²⁰ Directly related to military medical cooperation is the support by Germany to Hungary's application to host the NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED CoE), resulting in a positive decision in 2009 – clearly, Berlin's weight played a role in convincing other Alliance members to agree to the choice of Hungary in this case. MILMED CoE is now led on a three-year rotational basis by German and Hungarian military medical officers.²¹

Broader cooperation began in the framework of ISAF after 2006. Hungary's PRT was launched that year (this task, along with the area of operations, was inherited from The Netherlands) in the area of Regional Command-North (RC-N), led by Germany.

Importantly, Hungary's decision to move to Baghlan province rather than eastern Afghanistan came largely unrelated to the existing good will between the German and Hungarian militaries.²² Once that decision was made, however, Hungarian Defence Forces benefited from the availability of the partnership to a great extent. Germany lent its logistical support helping to maintain an air link between Budapest and Mazar-i-Sharif which Hungary itself was not capable of providing with the regularity that was demanded. The Bundeswehr also provided kevlar helmets once the security situation deteriorated in Baghlan (after 2008), improving the operational security of HDF troops. Although ISAF as well as the Bundeswehr itself have voiced criticism of the Hungarian PRT's decreasing level of activity in this context, the military-to-military dimension of the cooperation was unaffected. That the Hungarian PRT had several commanders who had earlier on received training at the *Bundeswehr Führungsakademie* probably helped in this respect. They had a good command of German, and had close personal ties from these times with some of their officer counterparts (some of them their former classmates) in the German contingent. It also needs to be noted, however, that in the last years of the ISAF mission there were several occasions when tensions appeared in the military relationship between the two countries. As already mentioned, once the insurgency strengthened in Baghlan province (after 2008), German and US partners were somewhat dissatisfied with the Hungarian leadership's reluctance to take part in counterinsurgency (COIN) tasks.

Subsequently, following the deaths of two Hungarian soldiers in an insurgent ambush in June and August 2010, the Hungarian leadership began contemplating a withdrawal from Baghlan province (a withdrawal thus affecting about 50 percent of Hungary's involvement

²⁰ Telephone interview with Lt. Gen. (Ret.) László Svéd, the Surgeon General of the Hungarian Defence Forces between 1991 and 2006. Budapest, 13 May 2016.

²¹ The CoE has eight participating countries as of 2016, besides Germany and Hungary: Great Britain, France and Italy are also members, among others.

²² A fact-finding mission examined various options, including, initially, the possibility of deploying to Paktika province in eastern Afghanistan, under U.S. command.

in Afghanistan at the time). This was received with disdain by the US and Germany after they have suffered casualties in operations in Baghlan province themselves. Eventually the Hungarian Ministry of Defence backtracked from this direction, sensing the disapproval. Two years later a similar series of developments was repeated, however, the Hungarian leadership attempted to bring forth the scheduled end of the Hungarian PRT's operations by six months, without giving prior notification to the German command in RC-N. This again resulted in disapproval from all major partners, including Germany, and eventually this plan was abandoned as well, with the last rotation of the Hungarian PRT fully serving its mandate, as planned.²³

IN CONCLUSION: DIFFERENT REGIONALISMS IN DIPLOMACY AND IN FOREIGN MILITARY MISSIONS

The key strategic calculus for Hungary in favour of investing in bilateral military relationships after the transition from socialism was two-fold. These efforts were partly in preparation for accession to NATO, and partly out of a desire to enhance cooperation with neighbouring countries. The two goals were interrelated: the West expected Central-Eastern European countries to settle their disputes and it was especially keen on getting Hungary to create a stable framework for its relationship with those of its neighbours that had a significant ethnic Hungarian minority (vis-à-vis Romania, Slovakia and Yugoslavia/Serbia). These factors contributed to a wide array of initiatives in the period concerned.

Under the Socialist government of 1994-1998 the HDF started to cooperate with the Italian and Slovenian armed forces to create a brigade-sized unit of the Multinational Land Forces (MLF) where each of the participating nations contributed one battalion. Full operational readiness was reached by 2002, and the MLF was deployed in the framework of KFOR from 2005.²⁴

After years of preparations, the Defence Ministers of Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine signed a Letter of Intent to establish a multinational engineer battalion in January 1999. It took another five years until the formal setting up of the "Tisza Battalion". The main responsibility of the latter is to participate in disaster relief operations in the vicinity of the Tisza River.²⁵ Although this multinational battalion held military exercises annually since 2002, it was never activated during the floods on the Tisza.

The case of the bi-national Hungarian-Romanian Peacekeeping Battalion is rather similar to that of the Tisza Battalion. Established in 1998, the unit held annual training exercises but has never been deployed.

These initiatives reflect a wider regional trend whereby many similar frameworks of cooperation and even joint units were created but were never put to use in practice, in the second half of the 1990s. For instance, Romania has also established a peacekeeping battalion

²³ Wagner P. "Unable to adapt: The Hungarian PRT in Baghlan". In Bernhard Chiari (ed.), *From Venus to Mars: Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the European Military Experiences in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*. Berlin: Rombach Verlag, 2014. 195–209.

²⁴ Papp, Gy. "The Military Engagement of Multinational Units in the Interest of European Security and Capability Enhancement". *Hadmérnök* III/1. 2008. 156–164.

²⁵ The Tisza River springs from the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine and flows through Romania, Slovakia and Hungary before entering the Danube in Serbia. Devastating floods have occurred regularly on the river – providing the *raison d'être* of the Battalion itself and the multinational cooperation related to the river in general.

together with Bulgaria. For comparison, Poland, for its part, had bi-national peacekeeping battalions with Lithuania, Ukraine and the Czech Republic.²⁶

After the turn of the Millennium, further initiatives were born, often parallel to each other, and thus ending up as being each other's rivals to a certain extent. The Visegrad framework which had for a long time not been applied in the practice of military cooperation, does by now have a military dimension. In 2007, an agreement was reached that in the first half of 2016 a Visegrad Battle Group (BG) shall be ready to provide an EU stand-by force. Since then, cooperation related to the establishment of the Battle Group has progressed on schedule. The BG itself is now a reality but there have also been more frequent exercises between the four countries, and they have started planning jointly for the common development of their capability set.

In 2010, at Austria's initiative, the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) was born, with the participation of Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This mechanism of cooperation has so far focused on capability development in certain specific areas (special forces training and Counter-IED²⁷ capability). The grouping has also had several rounds of high-level political coordination meetings. A peculiarity of this initiative is that Austria is not a member of the Alliance, and that Poland and Italy, two countries with more significant military weight in the region, are not part of this cooperation.

Following the establishment of the CEDC, however, in 2012 a Defence Cooperation Initiative was launched by Italy to complement the existing MLF format (of Italy, Slovenia, and Hungary) with contributions from Austria and Croatia, upon the latter countries' decision to participate. In the Italian-Slovenian-Hungarian EU Battle Group (slated to stand by in 2017) Austria and Croatia will consequently also take part.

In the end, the initiatives overviewed here matter in the context of foreign military missions only insofar as they may be suitable or "well-fitting" force elements. Without this "fit-good" factor, key partnerships will form according to different patterns in the future as well, determined by the actual needs of missions and the actual organisational structure of the NATO Alliance. Paraphrasing former US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld: "the mission must determine the partnerships on the ground, not vice versa." To which we might add: "in the framework of larger coalitions," as that is usually the context in which these partnerships have to function.

As we have shown, this does nevertheless leave room for an expression of the preference of regional working partners – on the one hand. On the other, the existing good will in the regional relationship matrix can be the basis of actually meaningful practical cooperation in military missions – as we have seen this happen in the case of northern Afghanistan between Hungary and Germany.

For a comparison as to German-Polish relations: the 2014 agreement between Poland and Germany to swap battalions is an encouraging sign of cooperation between the two countries, but the commitment to make strides for increased compatibility in various ways (be it through integrating more Leopard tanks in Polish armoured units, or joint naval monitoring operations in the Baltic Sea) may be even more important to bring about lasting and strategically meaningful results, that may manifest in actual military missions.

²⁶ Latawski, P. "Bilateral and Multilateral Peacekeeping Units in Central and Eastern Europe". In Stuart Gordon and Francis Toase (eds.), *Aspects of Peacekeeping*. London: Frank Cass, 2001. 68–70.

²⁷ IED stands for "Improvised Explosive Device".

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