HUNGARIAN REGIONAL SECURITY POLICY IN LIGHT OF THE VISEGRAD CO-OPERATION (1990-1994)

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CHALLENGES FOR THE SECURITY OF THE REGION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1990s

The changed geopolitical situation and the new sources of danger in the region

By the end of the 1980s the political, ideological, security and military system collapsed which actually had guaranteed peace on the European continent since the end of the Second World War. The bipolar system functioned well for a long period, nevertheless it is true that it also carried those disastrous effects within itself, which can still be felt today (primarily it is the region's national conflict which is meant here). So it cannot be denied that this security structure was based on mutual determent and it was loaded with dangers and crises.

About 10-15 years ago the international relations took a totally new shape. The Warsaw Pact collapsed (1991), so did COMECON (1991) and the Soviet Union (1991). Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, struggling with national and ethnic problems began to disintegrate, while the two German states found each other again. The integration of a united Germany into the European security structure (primarily into NATO) seemed to be natural; however, the situation of Central Eastern European states could not be described as or hoped to be so simple.

Central and Eastern Europe in this period could be regarded as a continuous crisis zone. Each country – although in different ways and to a different extent – was in an overall political, economic, social and cultural crisis, which was due to the failure of the Soviet model of modernisation on the one hand, and on the other, to the uncertainty sidelining the current reforms. The disintegration of each allied country was a particular source of danger in the region, and in

Yugoslavia there was soon a war to break out. Above all, the co-operation system among the countries of the region completely fell apart, and the new one to replace it evolved only slowly (for example the Visegrad co-operation). Besides, there was another factor pointing in the direction of disintegration, e.g. the uncertainty of the "post-bipolar situation", which followed the bipolar world order. It was unclear how intense the attitude of the United States would be towards a changed Europe, likewise how Western Europe would face the uncertainty factors in Central and Eastern Europe.

According to a large number of military experts, it was due to these factors that a security vacuum appeared in the region. Nevertheless, uncertainty in the region was not new, it was mostly the result of the peace system which had ended the two world wars, and as it has been mentioned earlier, the Warsaw Pact itself did not bring automatic security into the region.

Some were afraid that alongside a security vacuum there would also appear a power vacuum, which would again lead to giving up the sovereignty of the countries in the region, including Hungary. Those who were of this opinion believed that a security vacuum would appear in situations where a certain disintegrated guarantee system is replaced by a new, threatening power factor, and efforts against this, which aim at searching security, do not easily find a solution. We think that this was not the case in the Central European region. These opinions were not justified by time. The view, according to which the uncertainty situation of the region can be derived from the lack of institutions, and which does not reckon with any kind of power vacuum, stands closer to the truth.

According to Péter Deák, a known expert of the topic, "… we have to declare that there is a vacuum in the region, which is a vacuum of guarantee. It is not a power vacuum, it is not a defunct security, but it is the vacuum of those institutions and legal structures which each country can hold onto."¹

The guarantees which developed after the Second World War, and which were inseparable from the block system, collapsed. The block system itself had expressed the protection of real or imaginary security interests against the threats created by the blocks. The institutions of this ambiguous guarantee system did not exist in the Central and Eastern Europe of that time, and the

¹ Deák, P. Security and guarantee in Central and Eastern Europe. *Hadtudományi Tájékoztató*, 1994/1. p. 105.

need for new ones were at the conception stage. In such a situation it is natural for countries to have a high need for guarantee: they intended to establish new institutions and enter into contracts (e.g. regarding the borders).

However, according to Péter Deák, it is also true that as a result of certain processes, the guarantee vacuums normally become filled after a while. Let us think of the recruitment of Germany and its growing influence in the region (primarily economically), or of those power centres (EC, NATO, CSCE) which, after a short hesitation, did not have an interest in further destabilisation.

During the existence of the bipolar world the main danger was the possibility of the outbreak of a total (nuclear) war between the two alliances. At the same time—as has already been referred to—it was due to the mutual deterrence and the huge accumulated nuclear arsenal, that one could be sure that the source of danger was a real threat only on the level of propaganda. In his book, Mikhail Gorbachev wrote about this distinctly and in a modern way, "...the main principal of the new political thinking is simple: the nuclear war cannot be a tool for reaching political, economic, ideological or any other kind of goal. This conclusion is literally revolutionary, because it means a radical break from the traditional ideas about war and peace. There would not be any winners or losers in a global nuclear conflict, but the world civilisation would inevitably be destroyed. In fact, this is not war in a traditional sense, but a suicide." ² For more than four centuries, humanity lived in fear of a possible nuclear war, and this has probably not ceased even today. However, we can state that in Europe politicans and experts do not expect a deliberate outbreak of a nuclear war any more³.

Based on these facts, one can state that after the collapse of the bipolar security system there emerged some new sources of danger, of another nature, which became conspicuous. The most important of these are touched upon in the following part of this study.

Since 1988, the situation and the social structure of the individual countries have drastically changed, and as a consequence, so has their relation to each other. The biggest source of danger originated from the difficulties of the democratic transition. Its factors were agricultural backwardness, the

² Gorbachev, M. Reform and a new way of thinking. Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1987, pp. 132-133.

³ Bognár, K. About the changing historic role of war. *Társadalmi Szemle*, 1992/6.

insufficient development of the democratic institutions, the lack of law and order and political and social instability.

The most serious of the outer sources of danger which threatened the security of Hungary, was the tragic changes which occurred in the surrounding countries. The protracted internal crisis, the accumulation of unsolved ethnic and territorial problems of the succession states, which emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, resulted in military conflicts in the region on several occasions. The social eruption and the uncontrollable armed forces increased the risk of the spread of military actions to Hungarian territories.

The tensions among the Central Eastern European states were destabilising factors which occurred mostly due to the problems of ethnic minorities. The abuse of the rights of the Hungarian minorities living in the surrounding countries made it more difficult to establish a bilateral political and economic co-operation, which was necessary with respect to security policy. In the most cases, the problem in Eastern and Central Europe was not an independent conflict-producing phenomenon. It was expected to intensify wherever it appeared alongside other factors. As an example, in Yugoslavia it was linked to the need for a democratic change, and in the ex-Soviet zone it appeared as concomitant to economic bankruptcy and mass pauperism. Dávid Meiszter described this process in the following way: "In Europe, the old Berlin wall has fallen down, but a new one has appeared: e.g. the wall of poverty. This is the real security threat. Internal discontent makes way for the emergence of extreme right and left wing powers, and that makes it possible to sell the aggressive nationalism to a wide audience."⁴⁴

The immense flood of refugees could also be regarded as a source of danger. It was primarily the inpouring migration from the ex-Soviet Union and the Balkan region which raised real fears, and the internationalising crime in the region gave a good reason to worry.

⁴ Bognár, K. About the changing historical role of war. Társadalmi Szemle, 1992/6.

Modern security policy

In earlier periods of history the military factor was a basic element of the individual countries' security policy, thus the states considered maintaining an ever larger military power to be the main guarantee of their security. However, experience has shown that at the end of the 20th century there was no state, which would be able to warrant its complete security merely by military power. One can logically conclude that the security of a country can be assured only by applying different factors simultaneously. Modern security policy thrives to achieve security in a complex way, by means of political (diplomatic), economic, humanitarian (human rights-), cultural and other factors.

In the last fifty years of our history the elabouration of an independent Hungarian security policy could not take place, since the country had no sovereignty. The "security" of Hungary was guaranteed by the German Empire and later by the Soviet Union, with the known consequences.

The possibility and the necessity of shaping an independent security policy could be considered only after the political changes, since there had been no chance for that until the country gained actual sovereignty. It was the first democratically elected Hungarian government who had to prepare and realise all that.

The essence of modern security policy is that the state behaves in such a way—both in its internal and external affairs—which is not regarded as offensive by its surrounding neighbours and also by other, more remote regions. "It is our elemental national interest not to get in the ring of suspicious groups of countries. If this happens once again, it would be the irreparable sin of Hungarian external affairs, therefore Hungary should not hinder, but promote its neighbours' integration into Europe. Without any intention at the back of the mind, in a way which is clear for them, too."⁵

Thus, even though one is shaping the country's security, emphasis has to be laid on the interests of the partners, too, when choosing our actions. This is the only way to arouse a "country-friendly" reaction.⁶

⁵ Kiss, T. Népszabadság, 12 November 1992.

⁶ Considering the interests of our partners does not mean giving up our own interests. The realistic practise of security policy advances along the way of a continuous search for compromise, in order to achieve its aim.

In 1990 Hungary faced a new challenge: it had to work out a long-term national strategy. Besides the democratic political system and establishing of a market economy, it was the change of orientation in external and security policy which was the base of the strategy. Based on the above, the Hungarian government regarded the following points to be key issues in the country's security policy:

- Shaping a security partnership with the neighbouring countries (political, economic, cultural, military and other relations), including problems arising from ethnic conflicts (concerning Hungarians beyond the borders)
- Developing the Hungarian government's role in regional institutions (Visegrad co-operation, CEI, etc.)
- The promotion of the country's accession to the European and the Atlantic security systems
- Maintaining sufficient military power for self-defence.⁷

A FEW WORDS ABOUT REGIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE REGION

According to the foregoing history of international relations, the connection between states was traditionally characterised by bilateral relationships versus multilateral ones. One of the main reasons for that is perhaps the fact that countries which are geographically distant from each other have only rarely maintained intense relationships. This becomes true even more for the Central and Eastern European region.

Before the political changes there were three multilateral (or similar) kinds of co-operations altogether which evolved in the region. The first one was the Small Entente, established in 1920-21. The second one was the political and economic co-operation among the communist countries in the second half of the century, and the third one was less significant co-operation, which appeared along with the movement of civil rights activists (such as the Charta 77 or Solidarity). In the process of the change in the political system, it became evident that neither of these co-operations could serve as a base of any kind of regional co-operation in the future. So in Central and Eastern Europe there

⁷ When summarising the key issues, I used István Gyarmati's division. Gyarmati, I. The development of Hungary's security policy environment in 1990. *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve*, 1991.

were no patterns for regional co-operation to be found, which would give a direction to the different co-operative forms under the changed political and economic circumstances.

The analysis of Péter Miletics reveals that establishing co-operation in the region was not easy, among other matters because the two world wars had destroyed the state- and the political systems in the region, and a large number of ethnic offences continue to have an effect even today. But the co-operation was further rendered difficult by the fact that the traditional perception of enemy and friend did not always overlap.⁸

For the region's elite, further problems were caused by the lack of such regional co-operations (even in Western Europe) that could have served as an example – except for the activity of the Benelux co-operation and the Scandinavian co-operation within the frame of the Northern Council, primarily in the field of harmonising economy and trade policy.⁹

Security policy experts divide security problems into groups in many different ways. Barry Buzen, a British expert, separates the security of individuals, states and the international system, as opposed to American thinkers (e.g. Richard Schultz, Ted Greenwood), who divide security problems into four groups: national, international, regional and global security.¹⁰

The need for strengthening regional security—motivated by the perception of the security vacuum and the fear from the Soviet Union—gave a strong impetus for regional organisations in Central Europe (e.g. Visegrad cooperation, Central European Free Trade Association, Central European Initiative). Although these organisations cannot be regarded as primary security co-operations, the political, economic, cultural and environmental co-operations within these organisations obviously had a positive effect on the security of the region and on Europe as a whole.

⁸ Miletics, P. Eastern-Central Europe int he changing geopolitical space. In: *Konfliktus, konszenzus, kooperáció*, Pécs, 1996-1997.

⁹ Kégler, Á. Countries of the Visegrad region on the eve of the EU accession. In: Bayer, J. & Kiss, B. (eds.). Trendváltozások, MTA PTI, Budapest, 2003.

¹⁰ Matus, J. Az európai biztonság jövője. In: Varga, Cs. & Tibori, T. A mai világ és a jövő forgatókönyvei (Nemzeti Stratégia Könyvek I.), Budapest, 1997.

THE VISEGRAD CO-OPERATION

The emergence and the fall of the organisation

In 1335, rulers of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary agreed on deepening the commercial and political co-operation among their countries.¹¹ This meeting was the first trilateral interstate agreement. In the process of the change of regime the three countries of the region found each other once again; however, it is remarkable that the establishment of the co-operation was problematic from the start.

Knowing how the Warsaw Pact and COMECON functioned, the negative attitude of the region's states towards political, economic and any other type of co-operation among the Central European countries seemed to be a natural reaction after the fall of socialism. Non of these countries intended to take measures resembling the forced co-operations of the era before the political changes. In addition, since the socialist version of integration was opposed by the inhabitants of the region, the breakdown of the relations among the communist elites led to the deterioration of the co-operation among the affected states.

However, it soon turned out that the USA and Western Europe treated the Central European region as one unit, and they had no interest in dealing with each country individually. It was partly this thought which motivated the formation of the Visegrad group and the start of co-operations.

The establishment and the strengthening of the co-operation was facilitated by the common historical background (Christianity, the memory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the negative effect of the Yalta-system), as well as the recognition of security risks appearing in the region (fear of the Soviet Union). The break up of the bipolar world led to chaos in the region, and not even the "West" was prepared for the short- and long-term effects of the disintegration. At least the Visegrad co-operation offered a framework for preparation.

Before the establishment of the organisation, the co-operation of the three countries was focused on the field of external relations. The co-operation was indirectly furthered by the Paris Charter, ratified on 19th November 1990, which laid down new European principles and aims. József Antall, Hungarian Prime

¹¹ Kádár, B. The spirit of Visegrad. Európai Szemle, 1992/2.

Minister, made a suggestion to the Polish and Czechoslovak Prime Ministers to meet in Visegrad in the following year. ¹²

After the preparatory meeting of the foreign ministers in January, the first summit was held on 14th-15th February 1991. József Antall, Lech Walęsa and Václav Havel expressed their common intention in a comprehensive agreement: "....the endeavours for framing co-operation and a close connection with the European institutions are to be harmonised according to the interests of each state."¹³ Besides the co-operation facilitating the integration to the European institutions, the parties made plans to harmonise their policies aiming at the termination of

the Warsaw Pact and COMECON¹⁴, furthermore

- they would improve their market-based economic co-operations in order to promote the flow of capital and labour
- they would encourage the mutually advantageous trade of goods and services
- and finally, they would create favourable conditions for direct company co-operation, and for foreign capital investment, to increase economic effectiveness.¹⁵

The above mentioned economic co-operation was further developed by the Krakow Declaration, signed at the 5-6 October summit. In this communiqué, besides declaring their common wish to join the political and security institutions, the parties expressed their need for integration into the European economic structures, and their wish to increase economic co-operation among the individual countries.¹⁶

At the May 1992 summit in Prague, the parties envisioned the future of the Visegrad co-operation in three accentuated fields. The first one was the improvement of the relations with the Western institutions, the second one

¹² Jeszenszky, G. The Visegrad idea and the Euro-Atlantic integration. *Magyar Szemle*, August, 1998.

¹³ Declaration about the co-operation of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary, on the way to European integration. Visegrad, 15 February 1991.

¹⁴ They also declared that they would not form organisations to take the place of teh Warsaw Pact and the COMECON

¹⁵ The Chronicle of the 20th century, Officina Nova, Budapest, 1995. p. 1353.

¹⁶ The Polish-Czechoslovakian interstate contract was signed here. Next day the Hungarian-Polish agreement was signed.

was the deepening of the economic co-operation, and the third one was the harmonisation of the opinions concerning economic and political world events.

In the meantime, at the meeting of ministers of foreign trade on 17th April 1992, the Central European Co-operative Committee was established, which was to be a regular forum for consultations about economy policy. The climax of the economy policy co-operation was the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), signed in Krakow on 21st December 1992. The agreement came into force on provision on 1st March 1993, and then became fully effective from 1st July 1994. With this agreement, the economic co-operation among the countries of the region was institutionalised.

The Visegrad co-operation started to deteriorate after 1992. The goal to make the co-operation into an experimental terrain where the Visegrad countries could test in practise the co-operation forms prevalent within the EU, was not reached.¹⁷

The alienation can be traced back to several reasons. The most important cause was the split of Czechoslovakia.¹⁸ The two newly formed countries eagerly tried to stress their sovereignty. The established Czech Republic considered the co-operation as remnants of the past, and made it clear that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of the Soviet-Russian troops, it had even become redundant. Prague decided that further possibilities only existed in economic co-operation. Furthermore, the Czech leadership declared that it had got rid of the underdeveloped and ethnically diverse Slovak area, and in terms of economy politics, it had moved from an unstable Eastern Europe to a stable Western Europe. The Czech head of state, Václav Klaus, tried to keep the co-operation on a laid-back, consultative level.¹⁹ Behind this practical politicising there lay the vision that a well-prepared state can join the Euro-Atlantic structure more easily by itself.

In the meanwhile, some anti-democratic signs appeared in the Slovak home affairs, in addition, serious tension emerged between Slovakia and Hungary concerning the Hungarian minority.

¹⁷ Kégler, Á. the quoted work

¹⁸ The Slovakian National Council accepted a declaration of independence on 17th July 1992, as a result of which Czechoslovakia split into two parts on 1st January 1993.

¹⁹ Somos, P. Vysehradnak nem kell Visegrád. Beszélő, 30 January 1993.

Nevertheless, one can say that it was not only the Czech and Slovak mentalities, which caused the fall of the Visegrad spirit, but rather the change of the conditions in Central Europe in the field of economy and security policy.²⁰

Poland and Hungary have done their best to maintain this institutionalised co-operation. A good example of this is that the two countries applied for membership to the European Union at the same time.²¹

Co-operation in the field of security policy²²

As was pointed out above, the Visegrad co-operation cannot be considered an institution that would offer absolute guarantee for its states, but it is certain that it had prepared the accession of the Central Europeans to the institutions of the Euro-Atlantic integration. In the first years the three countries co-operated successfully in the field of external relations and security. Behind this, the reason is clear, namely that there was an accordance to harmonise a common policy against the Soviet Union.

In the early stage of co-operation the Soviet Union still existed, which caused a high level of fear in the region. Among the events conducive to co-operation, it was outstanding that the Soviet domestic forces violently acted against the forces demanding independence in Lithuania in January 1991. The August 1991 coup d'etat attempt rose serious concerns in the states of the region. If one considers that the Soviet-Russian troops were still stationed in the territory of these states, then the acceleration of the co-operation seems natural.

It is the merit of the Antall government that well before the establishment of the organisation it had made significant steps towards the termination of the Warsaw Pact. On 7th June 1990 in Moscow, the Hungarian Prime Minister initiated the termination of the military alliance, which happened relatively shortly afterwards.

In the period of the Moscow meeting, the Central European states did not have a common standpoint concerning their security policy. Because of the

²⁰ After a temporary fall, the Visegrad relation system was reconstructed based on new foundations from 1998-1999. Since then, the co-operation of the four countries has been characterised by minor or major recoveries and declines. The partial eclipse of the cooperation was furthered by the four countries' current membership in NATO and te EU.

²¹ Jeszenszky, G. quoted work

²² This study, due to a shortage of space, does not deal with the role NATO had in this case

unified Germany and the presence of the Soviet troops, Poland had a rather reserved policy, while Czechoslovakia refused to take "radical" steps because of the free elections. Thus the Hungarian diplomacy was left alone, but showing its dedication, it established contacts with NATO in Brussels on 16 June.

The co-operation of the three countries in the field of military policy became more intense from the beginning of 1991, and this period lasted until the middle-end of 1992. At the beginning of 1991, bilateral military agreements were signed,²³ and in August the parties organised a summit of the defence ministers in Krakow. The meeting concluded in an agreement on the co-ordinated defence co-operation. At the summit in Krakow in October 1991 the political leaders declared their intention to join NATO. The co-operation culminated at the Prague summit in May 1992, when leaders of the Visegrad countries, addressing the G7 countries, the EU and NATO, declared their wish to join the Euro-Atlantic structure as soon as possible.

So the military and security co-operation in this period proved to be important. It included the trilateral talks on military reform, the preparation for NATO accession, the organisation of civil guards, and in some cases, the intention to shape a common standpoint on security policy.

There were reasons for maintaining the co-operation: within the defence sector, it had become necessary for each state to work out new, national security and defence strategies, and in addition, the civil control of the armed forces and the defence sector had to be established in these states. Due to the similarity of the situations, the co-operation was supported by the obligation of each country to consider duties stemming from the CFE agreement.

The establishment of regional co-operation did not only contribute to the increase of the sense of security, but it also helped these countries to assert their pursuit for independence from the SU, and it helped them to reach their goals aiming at the integration into the "West", although later on this relation system was characterised by a competitive spirit.²⁴

²³ In August 1991 the Czechoslovak-Hungarian military agreement was signed, in February the Czech-Polish agreement and in March the Hungarian-Polish agreement was signed

²⁴ Tolnay, L. NATO and East-Central Europe. In: Kelet-Közép Európa az ezredfordulón. Magyar Atlanti Tanács, Budapest, 1999.

Thus, although the Visegrad countries agreed on further co-operation in many respects, they interpreted the implementation and the individual roles in different ways. Yet, it was soon recognised, although it had a somewhat damaging effect on the co-operation, that these states could not guarantee the security in Central Europe, neither collectively, nor individually. Therefore, from 1991 and 1992 full NATO membership became the declared goal for each member of the group.²⁵ Consequently, some of the countries (primarily the Czech Republic and later Hungary) did not plan to advance the Euro-Atlantic integration within the frameworks of the Visegrad co-operation.²⁶

Further problems arose when Slovakia became more independent. In the web of relations between Hungary and Slovakia, conflicts intensified, moreover, the policy of the Mečiar government, which differed from the European norms, made further co-operation impossible. The participation of Slovakia in the co-operation was dubious because of the country's intense relations with Russia, the non-democratic way of governing and to some extent a questioning of Western values.²⁷

CONCLUSIONS

The Visegrad group, established in 1991 as a regional co-operation—during the observed period—could not properly further the normalisation of relations, and the aims have not been fully achieved. As a partial success, it should be noted that by establishing CEFTA, economic co-operation accelerated and negotiations started—at least in the first period—in connection with the accession to the Euro-Atlantic organisations. However, it should be stated that what the countries achieved on their way to integration was predominantly due to their individual connections and their individual assessment, and not to a negotiated co-operation.

With the Hungarian lead, the Warsaw Pact and COMECON was successfully deleted from among the international organisations, yet at the same time, after

²⁵ The majority of the Polish, Czech and Hungarian political elite did not even consider otheralternatives for security policy

²⁶ Brussels reaffirmed this standpoint by declaring the concept of individual assessment

²⁷ The Slovakian government in power – opposing the goals of the Visegrad cooperation – strengthened its connections to Russia. In the spring of 1993 the Slovak-Russian Basic Agreement was signed

the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the negotiated co-operations towards the East ceased to exist among the Visegrad countries.

The countries did not succeed in strengthening solidarity towards each other, which can also be traced back to historical reasons. The bilateral connections also failed to live up to expectations; co-operation was mainly hindered by the loaded Hungarian-Slovak relationships.²⁸

The effectiveness of the co-operation was decreased by the fact that the institutional system of the organisation had not been established, which would have made it possible to have a better co-ordination for attaining goals.

Finally, one can say that between 1990 and 1994, despite the start (the disintegration of the WP), security did not become an articulated question in the view structure of the new organisation. The co-operation never had the intention to establish an independent, regional security policy organisation.

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²⁸ Tálas, P. The possibilities and limitations of the midpower role in Central Europe – a Polish case. Védelmi Tanulmányok, No. 40., SVKI, Budapest, 2000.