



GLOBSEC 2009

BRATISLAVA SECURITY CONFERENCE

29TH JANUARY 2009 | BRATISLAVA

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GLOBSEC 2009: SECURITY AND THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES – PROPOSALS FOR EFFECTIVE COOPERATION

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Arising from the fact that the Visegrad countries share common values and interests and believing there exists a large space for them to adopt and defend common positions towards key issues in the sphere of security and defence policy, the **Slovak Atlantic Commission** – thanks to a generous support of the **International Visegrad Fund** – hosted an international expert seminar entitled ***GLOBSEC 2009: Security and the Visegrad Countries – Proposals for Effective Cooperation*** that was held on January 30, 2009 in Bratislava.

The aim of the informal meeting was to evaluate the possibilities of effective close cooperation between the V4 countries in the field of security and defence policy. Via gathering influential high-politics, non-governmental, corporate and intellectual leaders of Visegrad countries the event succeeded in providing a forum for creating synergy between the national security policies of member states and thus achieving more effective addressing of regional and global security threats that can lead not only to higher success in the accomplishment of common goals, but also to the reduction of resources needed from individual states.

In order to achieve the intended goals of the project, the participants of the expert seminar discussed key security issues that the Visegrad countries have to face. As a result, the experts came up with proposals for cooperation in these fields that will be further elaborated and published in the following month.

The informal expert seminar was opened by the chairman of the meeting, **Róbert Ondrejcsák** from the Centre for European and North American Affairs, Slovakia, who welcomed all of the participants on behalf of the organizers. After short introductory remarks on the main goal of the event – to discuss the problem of security cooperation among Visegrad countries – he gave the floor to the guests, who were asked to present their statements and recommendation for the further cooperation in security field within Visegrad countries.



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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

CZECH REPUBLIC

Vít Dostál from the Association for International Affairs, Czech Republic, pointed out that a necessary precondition for discussing the cooperation in security areas among the Visegrad region is to talk about the threats we are facing right now. He continued referring to recently uprising non-military threats from the side of Russia towards Central Europe, specifically expressed in Russian effort to privatize key strategic companies, e. g. airports. The second factor – which the V4 countries should bear in mind – is to establish better inter-connection between Visegrad countries in regard to pipelines. As Dostál added, this policy has been recently supported by a statement of the European Commission as well.

Tomáš Weiss, analyst of the Europeum organization, Czech Republic, focused on the problem of priorities and interests, as all the countries used to consider the membership in NATO and in EU being their priority. However, to some extent it seems that they failed to define the next step and goals they want to achieve and positions they want to have in global affairs. Weiss concluded that V4 states failed in answering the fundamental question how to use their membership in the mentioned organizations. He thinks that first of all the countries need to solve this issue back at home and then it would be favourable to lead politicians to cooperate also in common V4 interests in these newly defined priorities. However, in this moment he does not “see clear area what the security policy in V4 is for”. Weiss stated that “we can’t really cooperate, until we don’t know what we want to do“. Secondly, he advised to divide security and foreign affairs from internal domestic affairs, as e. g. in Czech Republic and Hungary is currently foreign policy used as a tool for domestic policy.

On the contrary, **Petr Zlatohlávek** from Jagello 2000 Association, Czech Republic, thinks that “V4 countries are not capable of taking out the security policy out of the domestic political doctrine”. He used as examples Germany and USA, where domestic policy places big role in outputs of country, in the mean of security policy. He underlined the given similarities that the states of the region share – more or less similar history, languages and size. In addition, there is no superpower among the V4 countries and these three factors create good platform, on which the states can cooperate. However, Zlatohlávek stressed that he would be careful to talk about creating allies within the allies. The V4 countries should balance the cooperation and use benefits from it. The already witnessed Czech-Slovak cooperation in the project of battle groups can serve as a perfect practical example how similarities between these 2 nations can help us to be active in defence and security sector.



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Zlatohlávek advised to continue and strengthen cooperation in this area. In addition, he considers public diplomacy as the other potential sphere of V4 cooperation. There is space to sell security issues to public, as it is not always easy to communicate with it. He concluded that “from these points of view, we should be able to help each other in the issues of security.”

HUNGARY

András Hlács from the Hungarian Atlantic Council, Hungary, emphasized the need for focusing on similarities that we share in the framework of NATO membership. Speaking on behalf of the young generation, Hlács noted that within the youth activists the existence of clear ideas is present – these are help to all students, to youth in general and the maintaining of continuous discussion on all issues concerning security and defence policy.

Tamás Magyarics from the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, Hungary, focused his introductory remarks on 3 main areas of cooperation. First, in assessing the possibility of V4 cooperation in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, he pointed out the different geopolitical positions of the V4 countries which make it difficult to create a unified security strategy. Despite this fact, the dynamics of the interrelations between the countries targeted by the ENP should be carefully assessed, as “the ENP is affected by the U.S. – Russian relations and their ‘grand strategies’ with regard to the EU.” Magyarics suggested that the bilateral relations should be complemented with a strong multilateral and regional dimension as well. He continued that “security should be interpreted broadly, including both the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ factors; that is, attention should be paid to the Russian attempts to regain former non-military positions in Central Europe.” Currently, different geopolitical positions, different threat perceptions and divergent interests present the major stumbling blocks for closer cooperation among Visegrad countries. However, Magyarics concluded that the areas of potential cooperation can include expeditionary capabilities, joint R&D, border control, intelligence sharing, etc.

“Discussing about security policy, we have to create distinction between long term objectives and present realities”, **Eszter Sándorfi** from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary commented. During the 90’s, it was a simple picture of geopolitical situation – V4 countries wanted to get out of the Soviet bloc and integrate to the NATO and EU, and the perspective were absolutely clear. She continued that for this moment, the V4 states are all members already and living in the middle of discussions, we have differences now, as each state has its political right to have its own interests, to speak its geopolitical interest. Nowadays we have to approach all of these problems, on the merit of membership. We need to find balance also between V4 level, as well as in



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long term objectives, so also in present realities. Sándorfi therefore recommends the strengthening of consultation mechanism of the countries in the V4 region and also support of think-tanks, institutes which later on can help and produce proposals to the bureaucracy. She concluded that from the material point of view, the issue of energy security is essential, as for instance, the example of Slovak-Hungarian pipeline is an example of good practice in this area.

Gergely Varga from the Institute for Strategic and Defence Studies, Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University, Hungary, drew attention to the cooperation in the area of European Neighbourhood Policy towards third countries as Ukraine, Georgia as an example for perspective long-term cooperation among V4 countries, however there are some serious questions stemming from this issue. Varga proposed that V4 countries could help Ukraine, e. g. to help with all its domestic problems and address them towards institutions, help with transparency, democratization, pro-cooperation in experience sharing, run projects concerning internship programs, research, etc. The main point is that V4 countries should help to bring all those goals from the Euro-Atlantic area also to their neighbours in terms of European Neighbourhood Policy.

POLAND

“Strengthening regional cooperation in security policy has the point, e.g. we can observe cooperation of Nordic states with the EU. Nevertheless, there are some problems to refer to the common strategy and common policy in this area”, **Tomasz Kobzdej** from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland presented. According to him, non-proliferation and disarmament present one of the non-controversial dimensions of V4 cooperation. Kobzdej reminded that last year Poland proposed strengthening cooperation of V4 countries in this dimension, and that they still want to organize a meeting of directors responsible for this area in order to discuss the possible common using of resources from the European Commission. He proposed that the V4 countries should share their experience but they should gain financial resources as well which the Commission can provide. However, only working together as a coalition it would be possible to get access to some resources from Brussels. As for practical examples of cooperation in the dimension of non-proliferation, common detecting and preventing illegal movement of goods and weapons were pointed out. In addition, Kobzdej estimates that concerning the issue of battle groups, there are plans for the establishment of common Visegrad battle group in 2015. However, the V4 countries need to stay alert on what will be the capabilities of the EU in 6 years in these areas, as we may observe some kind of disappointment of those countries that already participated on battle groups duties, especially Nordic states, about what happened, when Nordic battle groups could not be used because of political and financial reasons. The question of direct capability in EU should be open in



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the near future, e. g. during the Swedish presidency. Kobzdej concluded, that “we should coordinate our position on this issue, as far we are engaged in battle group project.”

SLOVAKIA

Elemír Nečej from the Centre for European and North American Affairs, Slovakia, addressed the participants with the existence of two ways of thinking within Slovak NGO sphere concerning the security strategy of V4. The first one is wider, consists of interests, balance of approaches, concepts. On the other hand, the second approach is narrower, simple, starting with analysis of our capabilities, structure, possibilities in cooperation in the area of e. g. battle groups. Nečej claims that political decisions are not the difficult areas, however problems start later, as far, as the year 2015 within the issue of battle groups is coming close.

Ivo Samson from the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Slovakia, started his introductory remarks with the question, “how should effective cooperation in security policy be defined and what the difference between security policy and security strategy is”. He continued that we cannot afford to discuss these questions, but we may discuss the definition of regional security policy and a substructure of regional security policy, how to define a cooperation of the V4 group in security policy, and if it is possible, under which conditions, which circumstances. Samson assumes that defining common security policy interests of the V4 group seems to be the first “stumbling block”. We may define these interests in two lines. Firstly, we may define them in constructive way, as interest of a group within NATO, ESDP of EU, which will be a typical pressure group, interest group towards EU and NATO. The second possibility is to define interests in negative way, in the way of philosophy, where it is possible to put around all of the negative connections, threats concerning in this case security policy. However, Samson asks whether can the V4 group find a common denominator in a common joined policy e.g. against Russian federation? He pointed out the reactions of V4 countries in Kosovo or Georgia case when they cannot find any common denominator in the V4 security and foreign policy. Samson concluded that all four countries should look for some instruments, how to define common security and defence policy, in order to proceed in cooperation. The problem of the V4 group is lack of possibility to define common security and foreign policy of V4 countries, especially political will to define a leader, speaker of the group.

Daniel Šmihula from the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic thinks that being a member of NATO and EU, not a rival, presents a good starting point for the framework of V4 countries cooperation. Therefore “any other formalization of our alliance, e.g. on the ground of V4, in the security area is not necessary, but very close informal cooperation is essential”. As regard to



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the security, e.g. energy security, it is needed to enhance this motion not only to oil and gas, but also towards other raw materials. Freedom of national trade and export, free access to sources of raw materials are very important tasks for all V4 countries, otherwise their economies can collapse within few weeks, Šmihula stressed. Our common problem is also very reduced and low natality. The solution might be the revitalization of our conception of individual balance between rights and duties. Another task is modernization of our economies, technology, societies and political life with the aim to reach the level of western European societies. Also modernization of military equipment, weapons, trade methods etc. is very important because basic military equipment is on the level of 80's. Šmihula considers the security environment surrounding European space being not safe and therefore "we have to understand that some contribution to security dimension is necessary, our countries have to understand that we just cannot let other countries to fight and die". In this regard he sees room for cooperation in information campaigns as public opinion in this meaning is very important.

In his introduction, **Peter Weiss** from the Slovak Atlantic Commission, Slovakia, raised the question, "what is the new sense of Visegrad 4 after the integration to Euro-Atlantic structures and how to define our real common interests and not only in the time of crisis?" Weiss admitted that the V4 countries have common problem to find a politically accepted concept of national interest in security areas, so if we do not clear this fundamental issue, we will not be able to define common regional interests. Political parties do not have sufficiently developed structures to analyze security and political issues and this debate is in the hands of state bureaucrats and NGOs. Public debate is very sporadic and not deep enough. Weiss claims that lack of qualified public debate on security issues is our common problem. Situation in Slovakia 5 years after joining NATO and EU could provoke politicians to discuss the issue what should be the sense of the Visegrad forum, what is the real outcome of our discussion in security issues and not only to have a platform for discussion itself.

DISCUSSION

The discussion was started by **Tomáš Weiss** who expressed his concern with the fact that it is possible that the Visegrad countries even do not have strong common interests. However he insisted that it would be pity not to use the opportunity for cooperation and the Visegrad idea is a very accepted tool to persuade the population. "So the Visegrad states should continue to looking for common interests, otherwise the group will be malfunctioning like it has been for most of the time", he added.



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Eszter Sándorfi responded that the Visegrad group had really important role in the early 90s – in a period before the process of joining NATO. However, “different interests are not obstacles for our cooperation because we have many common issues like Russia, European security architecture, energy security and eastern partnership”, Sándorfi suggested.

Daniel Šmihula replied to this opinion by saying that “our common interests are not too radically different from common interests of all European countries on general level – energy security, military security etc.” Therefore, according to him, the cooperation between Visegrad countries is logically dissolved in a broader NATO and EU cooperation; however, as special common interest of our countries, the eastern policy of EU and NATO could be identified.

“If the Visegrad countries want to build something in security community than we have to focus what is uniting us in the realm of a security policy and we have to discover common Visegrad security identity”, **Ivo Samson** proposed. He urged for defining this idea and setting up a substructure within the EU and NATO while defending our common interests. Samson continued that in effort to build regional security identity, the Visegrad group needs strong leadership which definitely is not the case of the current weak leadership under the rotating speaker of a presidency. Therefore, Samson called for the need of a permanent speaker and leader who would have its weight in transatlantic security relations.

Another contribution to the discussion presented **Vít Dostál**, who thinks that “the Visegrad works now – especially in cultural and social efforts; unfortunately there is not a time now for the grant of security strategy because we do not have common strategy”. He agreed with the idea that the eastern partnership is a perspective and well-functioning sphere of cooperation. In addition, Dostál asked Ivo Samson for further explanation of the proposed concept of common speaker of the Visegrad countries.

Ivo Samson replied that the representative of Visegrad countries should be a representative of a strong country – country which is most visible in the EU and NATO and which is able to formulate the interests of a group.

Daniel Šmihula remarked that among the Visegrad countries only Poland is capable of being the leader in the military and security field but there are some discrepancies between our foreign policies, e.g. relations with Russia, Hungary etc.



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Ivo Samson responded that accepting the concept of leadership or a specific person as a leader does not mean supporting a particular nation. In this context, he meant being able to agree on a speaker what could trigger the ability of the Visegrad group to speak with one voice.

On the contrary, **Tomáš Weiss** warned that speaking with one voice does not actually mean having one voice and having common interests. He did not agree that the Visegrad group should have a representative like a speaker because “unless we have common interest and unless the countries are willing to have just one person to represent them, it is irrelevant.”

Concerns about the formalization of the V4 group expressed also **Petr Zlatohlávek**. He prefers the V4 group being “a spare framework which we can call to live whenever we feel we have a common interest – than we can use this group as a better platform for promoting our goals”. He added that “unless we have common interest, the V4 group would be a label which we will not be comfortable with”. Zlatohlávek concluded that he understood that in the defence or security area it is not effective to call ad-hoc groups to start coming up with some solutions but as we have seen it in a history, the Visegrad group is much more a debate forum than an actual institutional structure.

In this context, **Gergely Varga** pointed out that “we are not even cooperating on those issues in which we have common grounds and this is the problem we should focus on.”

Tomasz Kobzdej agreed with him and suggested to focus on cooperation related to the European Union, as there lies a natural space for such regional groups of interests.

Similar opinion presented also **Tomáš Weiss** who said that “in the EU especially it would be really good for V4 if we were able to present joint opinions representing all four countries”. He added that for this purpose it is not necessary to establish the position of the speaker of the Visegrad countries.

In response, **Ivo Samson** tabled the question whether “the Visegrad group is able to find common security strategy today because there were 3 major common programs which simply failed – common airspace over Czech Republic and Slovakia, modernization of Mi-24 battle helicopters and international Visegrad brigade.” He answered that in order to find common security interest, the V4 states need common security identity and need somebody who will formulate it at the international forum which is the most reasonable way how to communicate with the rest of the world.

András Hlács presented the final contribution saying that he does not “see a point why we would need a common speaker who should stand up within the NATO and EU because I do not think



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that we should create a state within the state.” He claimed that the representatives of the V4 countries should discuss all the issues, come to common denominator and then on the certain EU and NATO forums present the same opinions as opinion of the whole V4 group.

Róbert Ondrejcsák concluded the meeting with his closing remarks summarizing the key messages addressed by the experts.

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