

## The Future of Military Cooperation in Central Europe

### Budoucnost vojenské spolupráce ve střední Evropě

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**Abstract:** The current security threats cannot be countered by any single country, but only through comprehensive cooperation within reliable security partnerships. Thus, regional tailored military cooperation has gained more importance than ever before in order to tackle various threats and challenges and to strengthen crisis management capabilities. Therefore, Austria launched the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) in 2010 to foster regional security cooperation and to promote modernisation of military resources. Two years later, Austria co-founded the EU Mountain Training Initiative which closely coordinates training and education with the NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence in Slovenia. This paper aims at analysing and discussing current initiatives and possible ways of improving Central European security cooperation between NATO member states and Austria.

**Abstrakt:** Současným bezpečnostním hrozbám nemůže čelit žádná země osamocně, ale pouze prostřednictvím komplexní spolupráce v rámci spolehlivých bezpečnostních partnerství. Díky tomu získala vojenská spolupráce založená na regionální bázi větší důležitost než kdykoli předtím, neboť jen tak je možné vypořádat se s různými hrozbami a výzvami a posílit tak schopnosti krizového řízení. V roce 2010 proto Rakousko zahájilo Středoevropskou obrannou spolupráci (CEDC), aby tak podpořilo regionální bezpečnostní spolupráci a podpořilo modernizaci vojenských kapacit. O dva roky později Rakousko spoluzaložilo Iniciativu horského tréninku EU, která úzce koordinuje výcvik a vzdělávání ve spolupráci se slovinským NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence. Cílem tohoto článku je analyzovat a diskutovat současné iniciativy a možné způsoby zlepšování středoevropské bezpečnostní spolupráce mezi členskými státy NATO a Rakouskem.

**Key words:** Central European Defence Cooperation; Mountain Training Initiative; Hybrid Warfare; Cyber Threats; Crisis Management.

**Klíčová slova:** Obranná spolupráce ve střední Evropě; Iniciativa horského tréninku; hybridní válčení; kybernetické hrozby; krizový management.

## INTRODUCTION

Coordinated military cooperation has gained more importance than ever before in order to tackle various threats and challenges: “If you look at the multiplication of potential threats many countries face – the thinking now about Russia, the terror threat – and general world instability ... defence is really no longer down the agenda.”<sup>1</sup> The need to reflect how to deter, respond and protect against threats such as terrorism, large-scale cyber-attacks, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and hybrid threats, has never been so critical. However, a closer cooperation between European nations is more imperative than ever before – at a time when Europe should move towards closer cooperation in the light of doubts about U.S. President Donald Trump’s commitment to NATO:<sup>2</sup> “President Trump’s focus on NATO’s usefulness and efficacy has caused European allies to no longer assume the transatlantic alliance can be taken for granted.”<sup>3</sup> In July 2016, during the U.S. election campaign, Trump said that if Russia attacked Baltic states, he would decide whether to come to their aid only after reviewing whether those nations “have fulfilled their obligations to us.”<sup>4</sup> Five years earlier, then-U.S. defence secretary Robert Gates told that NATO had a “dim if not dismal future” and warned of possible “military irrelevance”. Gates added that there was “dwindling appetite” in the US to keep supporting the organisation.”<sup>5</sup>

The Ukraine crisis has been a game changer for European security and a wake-up call for European members of the EU and NATO, highlighting the growing strategic challenge of Russia to the institutions and security of Euro Atlantic community. According to retired Admiral James Stavridis, who served both as a commander of NATO and U.S. European Command, Russia conducts military operations with “cleverness”: “Some have called this hybrid warfare. It’s a mix of special forces; information warfare; cyber ... and this element of surprise, building real ambiguity into their maneuvers.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, hybrid warfare relies on a combination of non-traditional tools plus the insertion of irregular forces and/or commandos, all executed below the threshold of a conventional military invasion across borders. Hybrid warfare is designed to create a chaotic environment (by use of deception, coercion and ethnic unrest).

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1 Alexandra Ashbourne-Walmsley, associate fellow of the Royal United Services Institute, in: Jon Henley, Women command EU’s defence stronghold, *The Guardian Weekly*, 26.05.2017, p. 7.

2 Ebenda.

3 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Trump has shown the transatlantic relationship cannot be taken for granted, *European Leadership Network*, Brussels 2017, p. 3, <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/trump-has-shown-the-transatlantic-relationship-cannot-be-taken-for-granted> (accessed on 29 May 2017, 12:35 hours).

4 David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman, Trump casts doubt over U.S. pledges to its allies, *International New York Times*, July 22, 2016, pp. 1 and 4, p. 4.

5 Geoff Dyer, Washington can focus on Asia only with a robust NATO, *Financial Times*, May 22, 2012, p. 2.

6 Jen Judson and Aaran Mehta, US Army Pivots to Europe As Russian Threat Grows, *Defense News*, February 15, 2016, p. 8.

Cyber threats and attacks will continue to become more common, sophisticated, and potentially damaging. Cyber-attacks can reach a threshold that threatens national and Euro-Atlantic prosperity, security and stability. Their impact could be as harmful to modern societies as a conventional attack. The current threats to our security cannot be countered by any single country, but only through wide international co-operation and collective effort within international reliable security partnerships. This paper aims at analysing and discussing possible ways of deepening Central European security cooperation in order to face common risks and threats.

## EUROPEAN SECURITY COOPERATION – WAYS AND CHALLENGES

The efficiency of security and military co-operation depends on the political will and interests of the participating states as well as the political framework conditions that determine the depth of such co-operation.

In 2014, a joint statement was adopted to identify privileged areas of cooperation between EU and NATO in Warsaw. This includes countering hybrid and cyber threats, supporting new partners in defence capacity, broadening and adapting “operational co-operation including at sea, and on migration, through increased sharing of maritime situational awareness”, developing “coherent, complementary and interoperable defence capabilities of EU Member States and NATO Allies, as well as multilateral projects”, and facilitating “a stronger defence industry and greater defence research and industrial co-operation within Europe and across the Atlantic”.<sup>7</sup>

The hybridization of security “establishes a complex system of international state, non-state and civic actors, who interact and compete for power and resources and determine patterns of security.”<sup>8</sup> In “such contemporary hybrid security the new quality also includes peacekeeping, crisis management and peace support in the most generic meaning.”<sup>9</sup> However, peacekeeping “*too has to hybridize sooner or later and integrate itself into the logical circle: hybrid war – hybrid peace support – hybrid peace. Hybrid peace operation is carried out by joining different types and means of peace support. We can join different types of operations like military, police, civilian, humanitarian, etc. or share different goals like ceasefire, separation of force, peace enforcement, security sector reform, build-up of civic society, good governance, respect of human rights, etc.*”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Press Release (2016) 119, Issued on 08 Jul. 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Mirko Cigler, Hybrid Peacekeeping, in: Thomas Achleitner and Günther Greindl, New Challenges in Contemporary Peace Operations, October 21st-23rd, 2015, National Defence Academy, Blue Helmet Forum Austria 2015. An Initiative of the Association of Austrian Peacekeepers, Vienna 2015, pp. 53-59, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

This, hybridity can also be considered *“as a relationship between traditional and non-traditional understandings of the role and the extend of peacekeeping in the whole conflict spectrum from early warning and conflict prevention to conflict management, limitation, resolution and post conflict rehabilitation.”*<sup>11</sup>

Security and military cooperation remains of utmost importance, also among Central European states in this context.

In order to strengthen European strategic autonomy, Central European forces should achieve interoperability with each other, by contributing national combat units, anchored in multinational corps structures and multinational command, logistics, maintenance, and training. Targeted Central European forces coordination can foster and enhance EU capabilities in these various fields of cooperation.

European leaders should be convinced that the European Union needs a common foreign policy and the military instruments to support it. Member states will remain sovereign in their defence decisions also in the future. EU Common Security and Defence Cooperation will be continued to be focused on crisis management. To achieve goals defined in the 2016 European Global Strategy (EGS), enhanced cooperation between Member States should be explored and might lead to more structured form of cooperation, making full use of the Lisbon Treaty’s potential. According to the EGS,

*“Member States must channel a sufficient level of expenditure of defence, make the most efficient use of resources, and meet the collective commitment of 20 percent of defence budget spending devoted to the procurement of equipment and Research and Technology.”*<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, capabilities *“should be developed with maximum interoperability and commonality, and be made available where possible in support of EU, NATO and UN and other multinational efforts.”*<sup>13</sup>

In the Lisbon Treaty, there are various possibilities to enhance cooperation in the fields of Article 43 EU Treaty “Tasks”, particularly in the field of humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation. All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories.<sup>14</sup>

According to Article 44 EU Treaty *“the Council may entrust the implementation of a task to a group of Member States which are willing and have the necessary capability for such a task.”*<sup>15</sup> According to Article 46 EU Treaty, those member states which wish to participate in the permanent structured cooperation, which fulfil the criteria and have

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> European Union, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, June 2016, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>14</sup> European Union, Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, Official Journal of the European Union C115, 9 May 2008, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions shall establish permanent structured cooperation, shall notify their intention to the Council and to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.<sup>16</sup>

On the development of capabilities, the Foreign Affairs Council of 18 May 2015 noted in particular progress in the four key Pooling and Sharing projects: air-to-air refuelling; remotely piloted aircraft systems (drones), governmental satellite communications, and cyber defence carried out under the auspices of the European Defence Agency *“and encouraged further efforts and incentives for the development of cooperative capability projects.”*<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the Pooling and Sharing *“aspect of a Europe-wide coordination and mutual calibration of defence planning and military procurement [...] has taken a back seat or was simply ‘ignored by the ministries and the bureaucracies’”* as the Foreign Affairs Council (Defense Ministers format) criticised in September 2015.<sup>18</sup> Austria participates in three of the four Pooling and Sharing pilot projects (the exception being air-to-air refuelling) *“and of several smaller ones. Nevertheless, the challenge to adequately participate persists.”*<sup>19</sup>

## AUSTRIAN CENTRAL EUROPEAN MILITARY COOPERATION INITIATIVES

Austria will continue its cooperation with NATO, as also pledged in the 2013 National Security Strategy, in crisis management, in cooperative security endeavours, and in participation in trainings and exercises *“to uphold the interoperability and the relevant military standards of the armed forces.”*<sup>20</sup> To KFOR mission, Austria is, with its nearly 500-strong contingent in Kosovo, the fourth largest troop contributor. In order to increase interoperability, military cooperation with Central European nations remains essential for Austria on various fields.

Thus, in 2010, Austria launched the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) – together with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and Slovenia. It *“is a security policy coordination forum.”*<sup>21</sup> Poland has observer status. CEDC fosters *“regional*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Jandl, Crisis Management Challenges for Austria, in: Thomas Achleitner and Günther Greindl, New Challenges in Contemporary Peace Operations, October 21st-23rd, 2015, National Defence Academy, Blue Helmet Forum Austria 2015. An Initiative of the Association of Austrian Peacekeepers, Vienna 2015, pp. 97-115, pp. 99-100.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> Federal Minister for Defence and Sports, Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC), Vienna 2016, p. 1.

*military cooperation in selected areas through shared military projects.*<sup>22</sup> The shared field of interest focuses to the sustained stabilisation of the Western Balkans.

A cooperation by which security challenges are collectively met, for example Cross-Border Disaster Relief, CEDC enables a regional military partnership in the sense of Pooling and Sharing, which promotes armed forces modernisation through shared experience and synergies. Croatia there is the framework nation for conducting training activities for Special Forces: exercises have been conducted by the Croatian and Austrian Special Operation Forces. Hungary is the framework nation for conducting training activities for Forward Air Controllers, Air Traffic Controllers and in the field of Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Training courses are vital to improve soldier's protection against IEDs.<sup>23</sup>

Reacting to the refugee and migration crisis in Europe, the Central European Defence Cooperation under the Austrian presidency adopted three central goals in 2016: the launch of a joint initiative with respect to the security of the external borders, the closure of the Balkan route and the launch of return measures. These goals have been already nearly achieved.

In 2012 Austria took the leading role with regard to the EU Pooling and Sharing – and co-founded the Mountain Training Initiative. After years of cooperation between Austrian and German mountain troops, the readiness of mountain troops is further developed with other European partners by means of this Austro-German initiative. Nine nations are part of this initiative, the permanent members being Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden. Close coordination was established with the NATO Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Mountain Warfare in Slovenia in order to exchange experience, especially within the “Lessons-Learned” process and in order to avoid duplication. The NATO CoE focuses on doctrines and rules, the EU initiative on concrete educational and training cooperation.<sup>24</sup>

## DEEPENING CENTRAL EUROPEAN COOPERATION – CAPABILITY MANAGEMENT

Central European nations can create a pool of coordination in order to increase capabilities in peace support operations within the UN, NATO and EU framework relating to the following tasks:<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Grünwald, ‘Mountain Training Initiative’. In: Der Offizier. Zeitschrift der Österreichischen Offiziersgesellschaft, no. 1 (2016): pp. 24-27, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Blue Helmet Forum Austria 2015 – Summary of Essential Points, in: Thomas Achleitner and Günther Greindl, New Challenges in Contemporary Peace Operations, October 21st-23rd, 2015, National Defence Academy, Blue Helmet Forum Austria 2015. An Initiative of the Association of Austrian Peacekeepers, Vienna 2015, p. 11.

- The protection of the civilian population, the safeguarding of cultural assets and preventive deployment;
- Training and education: Peace operations will continue to be focused on the Middle East and Africa, directly affecting European security. Therefore, cooperation with regional partners such as the EU, NATO, OSCE and African Union will continue to be intensified. Peace operations get riskier due to uncontrolled armed elements and usually chaotic conditions in operational areas. Troops participating in peace operations must continuously be well trained and well equipped in order to cope with robust operations;
- Reconnaissance, engineers, air transport and logistics are key capabilities of Austrian forces, thus Austria is in a good position to contribute towards covering the capabilities required;
- Interoperability is the key to mission success in particular in a multinational environment. NATO is considered the recognised 'standardisation agency' for European and also for international forces, and here the PfP network plays a significant role. NATO's PfP for example offers many tools to achieve interoperability like the Planning and Review Process or the Operational Capabilities Concept Evaluation and Feedback program..
- A list of the elements for which there is always the greatest need in peace operations shows as follows: Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (including satellites, drones (UAVs), electronic reconnaissance (SIGINT) and human intelligence (HUMINT)<sup>26</sup>
- Capabilities for command and control (C2).
- Rapidly available intervention forces (Rapid Reaction Forces) – including the EU Battle Groups;
- Medical evacuation capacities (CESAVAC/MEDEVAC helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft like the Pilatus Porter);
- Tactical transport aircraft (especially helicopters);
- Tactical air support (close air support);
- Robust infantry;
- Military and police instructors and trainers (train-advise-assist);
- Strategic planners on civilian, police and military levels;
- Experts in security sector reform and justice;
- Civilian and military observers;
- Formed police units, i.e. paramilitary deployable and trained police units along the lines of constabulary or carabinieri or military police;
- Specialised police in terms of forensics;
- Experts in bomb disposal (Explosive Ordnance Disposal, EOD) and in combating improvised booby-traps (Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices, C-IED).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Current capability-based requirements, in: Thomas Achleitner and Günther Greindl, *New Challenges in Contemporary Peace Operations*, October 21st-23rd, 2015, National Defence Academy, Blue Helmet Forum Austria 2015. An Initiative of the Association of Austrian Peacekeepers, Vienna 2015, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

## CONCLUSIONS

Austria covers some of the fields listed here to provide urgently needed personnel or specialised equipment and therefore is able to contribute to Central European security cooperation and provide niche capabilities. Furthermore, regional tailored cooperation could strengthen crisis management capabilities in the following tasks and objectives:

- Rapid response;
- Support to the African peace and security architecture;
- Cooperation in the domain of rule of law and Security Sector Reform, including in the area of Defence Sector Reform; and
- cooperation in support and logistics.

The UN has, at several occasions, expressed interests in having the EU Battlegroups deployed in supporting UN mandates in order to prevent or curtail conflict and to protect civilians. More enhanced military cooperation and coordination can provide – from an Austrian standpoint – the necessary assets to conduct more effective peace support management. Our common goal in Central Europe remains to stabilise the Western Balkans, to train soldiers from the region, and to further integrate this region into the EU. Enhanced military cooperation in Central Europe will continue to be necessary to tackle common man-made and natural threats as well as challenges in the region and out of area. Fields of cooperation are manifold, particularly also for and among Central European nations. Coordinated and effective military cooperation has never been that vital for the future of Central Europe and the European Union itself in order to keep our societies safe and secure.

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