Germany and the Visegrad countries within the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy: promising partners after Brexit?

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INTRODUCTION

• **Brexit** is expected to have large implications for European security

• The significance of **German leadership** will rise X a lot of reluctance → importance of international institutions, int. cooperation and partnerships

• Partnership between **Germany and V4 countries** within CSDP
  • Is it viable vis-à-vis Brexit?
  • Has the defence cooperation between Germany and V4 countries intensified?

• **V4 countries** as **supportive partners** for Germany?
  • Role of path-dependency
  • A way to balance France
  • Central Europe’s pivot to Germany (interrupted by the migration crisis)

• **Defence** as the area where V4 countries most visible as a united group

• Rise of **bilateral defence relations**
MINILATERALISM AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

• Minilateralism as a “trendy” mode of international cooperation

  • Aims to “bring to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem” (Naim 2009)
  • A “process of a small group of interested parties working together … in tackling subjects deemed too complicated to be addressed appropriately at the multilateral level” (Moret 2016)
  • Based on “purpose-built partnerships” (Patrick 2015)
  • “Functional multilateralism” where “coalitions of the willing and relevant” aim to address a certain part of governance as a first step in solving a larger problem (Haass 2010)

• CSDP offering space for minilateral initiatives (EU battlegroups, “pooling and sharing”, PESCO, ...)

• Can recent strengthening of bilateral defence relations between Germany and some V4 countries go beyond bilateralism?
GERMANY AND V4 COUNTRIES WITHIN THE CSDP:
1) EU BATTLEGROUPS

• Examples of minilateral formations in CSDP – cooperation within established groups of states under the leadership of a “framework nation”

• Fruitful ground for a concurrent engagement of Germany and V4 countries
  • **BG I-2010** (Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia)
  • **German-Czech-Austrian BG II-2012** (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Croatia, North Macedonia, Ireland)
  • **Weimar BG I-2013** (Germany, Poland, France)
  • **German-Czech-Austrian BG II-2016** (Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands)
  • **German-Czech-Austrian BG II-2020** (Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden)

• + German operational headquarters for the Czech-Slovak BG II-2009
• + Appreciation of the V4 BG (I-2016, II-2019) by Germany
2) PESCO

- Typical **purpose-built, output-oriented partnerships**

- Established by “those Member States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions” (Lisbon Treaty, 42(6))

- **Germany and France** – main drivers X differing visions

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**PESCO projects led by Germany with a participation of V4 countries**

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3) DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION

- German-V4 Group defence industrial cooperation – little viable

- **POLAND**: major obstacle of a Germany-V4 cooperation; resisting EU strategic autonomy, close ties to the US → unintegrated into European defence industry; disputes over national policies

- **HUNGARY**: increasingly linked to Germany; a way to overcome German reservations over internal policy matters?

- **CZECH REPUBLIC**: interconnected economies suggesting high feasibility in defence projects X not materialized so far, though some promising departures

- **SLOVAKIA**: engagement with Germany non-existent despite all rhetoric; partnership with the CR as the most viable link in minilateral cooperation

- Ongoing bilateral cooperation

- Nascent minilateral cooperation as an upgrade of existing bilateral ties (but only very specific and underdeveloped)
IMPLICATIONS OF BREXIT FOR GERMANY-V4 DEFENCE COOPERATION

• Brexit is expected to shift the balance of power in the EU → strengthening of German leadership

• For V4 countries, Brexit means both...
  • ... new challenges
  • ... new opportunities

• The position of V4 countries will depend on a proper rearrangement of their relationships with Germany and on strengthening their pro-European attitudes

• The potential for cooperation far greater than in the economic field

• Security and defence policy offer a lot of opportunities to strengthen mutual relations

• V4 countries extend the area of EU’s security to the East – much appreciated by Germany
CONCLUSION

• The record of utilizing the minilateral form of cooperation among Germany and V4 countries in CSDP is **mixed**
  
  • **1) EU battlegroups** – cooperation on several occasions X no sign of an intensification since the in/out referendum
  
  • **2) PESCO** – V4 countries present in 4 German-led projects → a viable platform for minilateral cooperation
  
  • **3) Defence industrial cooperation** – yes, but bilateral approaches perceived to be more effective than minilateral cooperation

• Generally, Brexit accelerated European defence cooperation in many ways, BUT
  
  • CSDP has **not** turned out to be the primary platform for V4 countries to cultivate minilateral cooperation – when compared to NATO (FNC)
  
  • Other competing minilateral formats of cooperation (e.g. CEDC)

• Prevailing preference of **bilateral ties**

• Minilateral cooperation in a **nascent phase**
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