



CONFERENCE

Two Decades of Cooperation on Security in Central Europe (1989-2009): Sharing our Experience with the Neighboring Regions

Warsaw, 5–6 October 2009

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On 5–6 October, the Polish Institute of International Affairs hosted a conference “Two Decades of Cooperation on Security in Central Europe (1989–2009): Sharing our Experience with the Neighboring Regions.” The main goal of the meeting was to review and evaluate the results of subregional security cooperation during the past two decades, in particular within the framework of the Visegrád Group, and to reflect on the possibility of sharing the experiences gathered by the Central Europeans with partners from the neighboring regions, especially the countries of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.

Participating in the conference were security experts from all Visegrád states (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic), as well as representatives from the neighboring countries: Ukraine, Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, Croatia, Serbia and Germany. Discussed at the meeting were such issues as the evolution of Visegrád cooperation in the security realm, the role of the Visegrád Group in NATO enlargement or problems and prospects of practical cooperation among V4 members, although the focus was on Visegrád countries’ current and future initiatives aimed at security cooperation with the neighboring states as well as the latter’s needs and expectations concerning cooperation with the V4 and their ability to draw on the experience of Visegrád members to strengthen regional security.

Participants in the conference described V4 cooperation in the security realm as relatively successful, particularly in the context of NATO enlargement, stressing that the success of V4 security cooperation and internal transformations in V4 countries’ security sectors may be of use to the neighboring countries. Speakers also observed, however, **that the potential of V4 security cooperation had not been fully exploited and significant opportunities remained to be explored**, e.g. through the transfer of Visegrád countries’ experiences and lessons learnt from security cooperation and internal transformation. To facilitate this, **several suggestions and recommendations were proposed** in the presentations of conference speakers and in the discussions that followed, with some of them focusing on improving V4 security

cooperation among members of the group and others centering on developing and enhancing collaboration with V4 neighbors.

Participants agreed that **V4 security cooperation needs a new, strong impulse for development**, reiterating that activities in the security realm require better coordination through, *inter alia*, enhancing contacts and exchange of information at all levels (bilateral, trilateral, multilateral), but especially among middle-rank officials from Visegrád countries and security experts from governmental and non-governmental institutions. Many discussants also supported the call by Mr. Jiří Schneider (PSSI, Czech Rep.) to encourage the involvement of non-governmental institutions and civic organizations in security cooperation under the V4 framework.

There is a need to adopt **a realistic approach to the development of practical V4 security cooperation, focusing on less ambitious but “doable” programs of technical cooperation** rather than on high-level initiatives. Mr. Peter Talas (CSDS, ZM NDU, Hungary) and Mr. Marek Madej (PISM, Poland) were among those strongly stressing this point.

Many participants pointed to the **defense industry** as the most promising area of cooperation. Mr. Karel Zetocha (ISDS UD Brno, Czech Rep.) argued that—despite limited results of such cooperation so far—the common goals of the Visegrád Group in this regard should favor development of common projects, in particular in view of the current economic crisis and pressure from foreign competitors. The modernization of post-Soviet military equipment of the armed forces of V4 countries was depicted as the immediate target of this cooperation, although some warned against focusing solely on such projects and on armaments programs, those being ambitious and prestigious, but also complex and extremely costly.

Several participants suggested concentrating on more specialized and smaller, but potentially more successful **“niche” projects (such as developing common integrated radiolocation systems)**. Mr. Zetocha, supported by Mr. Marcin Terlikowski and others, advocated the development of cooperation between V4 countries in the framework of the European Defense Agency, seeing this as a way to overcoming obstacles stemming from the relative technological underdevelopment of Visegrád countries’ defense industries. Mr. Łukasz Kulesa (PISM, Poland) pointed to several other areas of potentially effective cooperation among V4 countries: development of a common infrastructure (including the future organization of units and component commands at NATO’s disposal); exchange of experience and lessons-learned from programs of professionalization of the armed forces and from engagement in current expeditionary operations, particularly within the NATO framework (especially concerning counterinsurgency tactics and strategies); and formulating common training programs. Mr. Jiří Schneider added to that list possible cooperation in developing Visegrád countries’ air defense capabilities.

During the discussion several important suggestions and recommendations were presented concerning the **transfer of V4 experience to the neighboring countries**.

As in the case of strengthening internal V4 cooperation, appeals for **better coordination of individual activities of V4 countries** were heard, with Mr. Ivo Samson (RC SFPA, Slovakia) and others pointing out that the transfer of knowledge and experience from V4 countries to the neighbors was conducted primarily through individual initiatives of V4 members in an uncoordinated manner. Hence Mr. Samson suggested the development of **joint projects, prepared and implemented by all V4 countries**. As many V4 initiatives concerning the transfer of experience pass unnoticed among potential partners, Mr. Samson, supported by several other discussants, appealed for an enhanced **public information campaign on Visegrád activities**, both in participating and in neighboring states, with a view to promoting the efforts of the V4 resulting from a uniform and coherent approach (Mr. Samson labeled this “promoting **Mr. Visegrád approach**”) and not from individual steps undertaken by Visegrád states with no strategic plan or coordination.

The participants agreed on a number of areas where the transfer of experience could be especially effective and promising from the perspective of its beneficiaries, i.e. the neighbors of V4 countries from Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Emphasized in particular was the importance of experience-sharing in the sphere of **security sector reform** (including intelligence services) and in **introducing and strengthening democratic control over the armed forces** (Oazu Nantoi, IPP, Moldova; Sonja Stojanović, CCMR, Serbia). Other important areas indicated included **support in reorganizing and modernizing the armed forces** (reforming training doctrines, handling surplus obsolete military equipment), **implementation of NATO and EU standards in defense policies** (defense budget reforms), cooperation on a number of soft-security issues (assistance in strengthening border control) and developing ties between V4 and the neighboring countries’ defense industries. As Ms. Sonja Stojanović cautiously observed, however, such transfer and assistance should take into account the differences between V4 states and their neighbors, factoring in the regional and national characteristics of all the countries engaged in specific programs.

Discussing the channels and tools of the transfer of experience and knowledge, the speakers pointed to some mechanisms as particularly promising and relatively easy to introduce or develop, describing as useful the practice of **inviting representatives from neighboring states to events and meetings organized on a regular basis in the framework of V4 security cooperation** (annual meetings of V4 chiefs-of-staff with the participation of the Ukrainian chief-of-staff are a good example here). Also important would be to strengthen the **involvement of security experts from third countries in V4 security cooperation at expert level** through their

participation in various working groups, seminars and workshops organized in the V4 framework. Some discussants (Alexander Rusetsky, SCIRS, Georgia; Eugeniusz Smolar, Poland) reiterated the crucial importance of cooperation between think-tanks from V4 and the neighboring states, while others (Jiří Schneider) emphasized the value of the open character of V4 governments' initiatives addressed to civil societies in neighboring countries. Some participants suggested that the transfer of experience to the neighbors could be improved by more extensive use of possibilities offered in this regard by the Visegrád Fund, in which programs focusing on developing such transfers could be a priority.

Appeals were frequently issued during the conference for more extensive **coordination of V4 initiatives towards the neighboring countries with efforts conducted by other states and international actors**, in particular the Baltic and Nordic states as well as Romania. In the eyes of many speakers (Oleksiy Kolomiyets, CETS, Ukraine; Oazu Nantoi, Moldova), V4 countries could play a more important and positive role in shaping their neighbors' relations with European structures, especially the EU. Through individual and collective projects, the V4 countries could also enhance the effectiveness of EU pre-accession and development assistance to countries from the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe.

Reiterating the significance of coherence and consistency in V4 activities, the participants appealed for substantial **improvements in the process of formulating V4 presidencies' programs** to avoid dramatic changes in priorities with respect to projects targeted at the neighboring states and regions through enhanced cooperation between successive presidencies.

Marek Madej

Warsaw, 16 October 2009

The conference "Two Decades of Cooperation on Security in Central Europe (1989-2009): Sharing our Experience with the Neighboring Regions" was organized within the framework of the research project "Creating a Sphere of Security in the Wider Central Europe: Sharing V4 Know-how in Cooperation on Security with the Neighboring Regions" of the Polish Institute of International Affairs (Warsaw, Poland), the Institute of International Relations (Prague, the Czech Republic), the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs (Budapest, Hungary), and Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (Bratislava, Slovak Republic). The project is co-financed by the International Visegrád Fund.

