

Summary Report

DIFF GOV City Talk #3

European Defence Policy: Where Is It Heading?

by Martina Babiková and Jacqueline Sirotová¹

What is the vision for European defence policy? What format of cooperation will be introduced by the European Union (EU) in order to succeed? Are the countries of Central and Eastern Europe ready to shape a common European defence? What would this cooperation mean for these countries? And how can Slovakia and its neighbours contribute to the success of European defence integration? These were some of the most important questions raised for our panellists to discuss during the DIFF GOV City Talk in Košice. The event brought together eight experts working on defence and security, including representatives of the Ministry of Defence of Slovakia, think tanks, academia, and a political party.

The speakers on the first panel that dealt with the vision of European defence policy for the future, included: Katarína Jurišová from the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic; Gen. Pavel Macko from TOGETHER - Civic Democracy and Col. Jozef Zekucia (Ret.) from Stratpol. The discussion was led by Martin Reguli from GLOBSEC Policy Institute.

The panel started off by questioning the principle of collective defence, in particular Article 5 of NATO's (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). All of our guests concluded that NATO is the guarantor of our security, which cannot be undermined. Even though both the EU and NATO are intergovernmental organizations, it is NATO that was created primarily with the goal of safeguarding security. The EU, which was born as an economic union, is still lagging behind in term of its own defence and security structures. It is true that neither NATO, nor the EU, have their own armed forces but are both dependent on the set of armies of their Member States (MS). The main difference in favour of NATO is that NATO already has its own standards, practices, institutions and coordination. As such, these attributes give NATO a big head start over the EU.

On the other hand, looking closer at the EU's MS, with few exceptions, they are not as willing to fulfil NATO's commitments when it comes to their defence spending. This fact is often criticized by US, President Donald Trump. When it comes to NATO today, only 8 out of 29 MS meet the agreed threshold of 2% of GDP defence spending. So, in shaping new European defence initiatives, MS need to coordinate both their EU and NATO spending to avoid any further drawbacks in their contributions. The speakers agreed that, in the changing geopolitics of today, the EU does not have a choice but to contribute to its own defence.

The EU has made some first steps towards developing its own defence capabilities, one of which is Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), that, for the first time, is legally binding. This initiative was already included in the EU's 2009 Lisbon Treaty, based on intergovernmental cooperation (without the United Kingdom, Denmark or Malta). Today, there are 47 projects, out of which Slovakia participates in six and leads one. The most active countries are France, Italy and Spain. PESCO projects are in the areas of capability development and in the operational dimension, distributed in various domains such as: training facilities, land-based systems, maritime, air systems, cyber and enabling joint multiple services. In the next budget for the EU, there should be an extra part, among the defence expenses, dedicated strictly to infrastructure, because it is a crucial attribute in ensuring the effectiveness of the military. Since this kind of contribution is something NATO lacks, PESCO is able to compliment it productively.

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Source: Factsheet on Permanent Structured Cooperation, May 2019².

Is there a common perception of threats among MS? The EU remains rather divided on this issue. For example, France is focusing on Africa, while Southern Europe sees the biggest threat as immigration from outside the EU. For Poland and the Baltic states, the threat comes from the Eastern border of the EU. A slight pessimism emerges with the EU’s lack of clarity and coherence in proposals for European defence policy. What is the aim of common defence? How should it be deployed? How will it be governed and financed? What will be its legitimacy? Will the national armed forces be dismissed? What are our priority threats? Our panellists agreed that we still lack discussion on these essential issues on a European level, and, while we cannot agree on basic principles, we also lack respect in the world arena.

When we look at the composition of the EU and NATO, there are slightly different states that form part of them. Therefore, the two platforms should be coordinated and not compete with each other. The EU should keep its own exclusive capabilities and capacities, as it is a smaller and more coherent club. There might be situations where some NATO Members will not be willing to participate in common actions (excluding the collective defence) for political or other strategic concerns.

Overall, speaking of the visions for European defence and specifically the , vision from Slovakia, our guests concluded that the Central European approach should be cooperative, especially in the case of Slovakia, which is as a small country, and does not have enough capacities to deal with security challenges. As for Europe as whole, we should first be able to resolve our political differences and challenges before fully heading into another area of cooperation. But even with that being said, we should pay attention to the functionality of European defence rather than the form by which it should be implemented.

To conclude, there were some questions from the public, using slido.com. Firstly, what should the EU do in case of Ukraine and Syria respectively? The main answer was that the EU should have a common political view on these issues, and that the EU should also be able to play the role of a global player. Another question concerned the further role of Slovakia in PESCO. The foremost concern of Slovakia should be to meet all the commitments proposed in PESCO and proposed within the concrete projects that Slovakia participates.

The second panel was devoted to the region of Central and Eastern Europe and its role in European defence policy. The speakers included: Vladimír Tarasovič from the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), Tomáš Koziak from Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice and Tomáš A. Nagy from the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. The discussion was led by Martina Babíková from GLOBSEC Policy Institute.

² “Factsheet on Permanent Structured Cooperation”, European External Action Service, 10 May 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pesco_factsheet_may_2019.pdf.

This panel started off by a question on the current state of the European security and defence policy. All of our guests declared a positive outlook and they recognized clear progress. NATO, as already stated, has an undisputable importance, but recent political *momentum* in the EU is accelerating change.

The idea of European defence integration has in fact been floating around for a number of decades. Given the election of President Trump in 2016 and his later questioning the usefulness of NATO, Britain’s expected departure and other security-related matters such as Russian (aggressive) foreign policy, migration and the string of terrorist attacks have prompted the European Union towards a historic push in defence integration.

Especially in the past three years, the EU has made significant steps forward regarding its defence and security policy, particularly via launching a number of initiatives, projects and platforms such as PESCO, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), and the European Defence Fund (EDF), and others. These have been built with the aim of improving cooperation between NATO, the EU and the EU Member States themselves but also deepening coherence in defence planning, defence industry financing, modernisation and procurement.³

THREE NEW EU DEFENCE INITIATIVES	
CARD (the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence)	Provides Member States with an overview of capabilities and identifies opportunities for cooperation.
PESCO (the Permanent Structured Cooperation)	Member States subscribe on a voluntary basis to binding commitments to jointly plan, develop and operate defence capabilities.
EDF (the European Defence Fund)	Offers financial incentives for defence cooperation. It promotes cross-border defence cooperation between EU countries and between different stakeholders (companies, research centres, academia, national administrations, international organisations) to foster innovation and develop state-of-the-art defence technologies and products. PESCO projects may benefit from increased EU co-financing, which could amount to 30% - instead of 20% - for prototypes

Source: Factsheet on Permanent Structured Cooperation, November 2019⁴.

The idea behind advancing European defence integration is that closer cooperation among MS would make the EU stronger. It would also allow the EU to respond more quickly to immediate threats and crises (as opposed to the rigidity for which it is heavily criticized nowadays).

Even though all Central European countries were among the 25 EU Member States that opted to join PESCO, the same countries often struggle to find common ground on issues of key importance to the European Union, such as the future of European defence integration. It is often argued that this is mostly on account of the diversity among MS of threat perceptions and not always perceiving security and defence as issues of urgency or priority. While the three Baltic States, Poland and Romania consider themselves to be most exposed to the Russian threat, the so-called Mitteleuropa Nations (Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, + Bulgaria) do not share the same feeling of fear with regards to the threat from Russia. This has been then naturally reflected in rather disproportionate overall investment in defence.⁵

³ Tomas A. Nagy, “Europe finally ready...to do much more together in defence and security”, Policy Paper, GLOBSEC, July 2019, <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DiffGov-Policy-Paper-3.pdf>

⁴ “Factsheet on Permanent Structured Cooperation”, European External Action Service, November 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pesco_factsheet_november_2019.pdf

⁵ Marcin Zaborowski, „Central Europe and European Defence Integration”, GLOBSEC European Security Initiative, November 2019, <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CE-and-European-defence-integration-1.pdf>

However, this is not the only “dividing” element. The CEE countries also vary in terms of geopolitical perspectives, political resistance within countries or their military capabilities. Reprioritization of defence, greater political will, European solidarity fostering a common threat perception, consensus in defining mutual goals and the development of a consistent defence and security strategy are all required to successfully face these challenges.

To sum up, diverse historical experiences as well as the strategic and geopolitical status of each country, make it very unlikely for countries to come to same conclusions, not only within CEE but also on the level of the EU as whole. It is not possible for all countries to perceive threats alike. The important principle is to be able to find consensus and solidarity.

It was also stressed that European defence integration is not — and definitely should not be — in competition to NATO. NATO remains the backbone of European security and European defence should fulfil a complementary role. However, at the same time, it is crucial not to underestimate the importance of closer European defence integration that would (through transforming the current state of EU defence and security into better shape) provide us with greater security, make the EU more confident and resistant to external threats, many of which we had not been facing a couple of years ago.

The City Talk concluded with summarizing that, since Slovakia does not have enough capacities on its own, participating in such cooperation would give it yet another opportunity to use European contributions to modernize its military capabilities, infrastructure, etc. If Slovakia understands the importance and needs of other countries, which might find themselves in crisis and in need of help, then it can also work vice versa. Slovakia could also contribute to common European defence by its own ideas and innovation proposals. The biggest benefit for Slovakia is security, but there are also benefits for the people who participate in expert missions around Europe and the world. What is more, Slovakia could prove to be a good partner and therefore strengthen its credibility and the security of its citizens.

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