

**BUDAPEST METROPOLITAN
UNIVERSITY**

**European Visegrad: How to use V4 group as a
platform in European politics?**

V4 Battlegroup

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2021

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ABSTRACT

First of all, thank you very much for attending the summer university. It was very useful for us. We have met other students of the universities of the Visegrád countries and got to know their opinions and positions, as well as ours. We have chosen the topic of the battle group because it may be one of the most important elements of the European Union's security policy in today's world because of the events taking place across the world. Thus, in our essay, after a brief historical description, we describe the purpose, tasks, and future possibilities of the battle group.

Keywords: Battlegroup, Visegrad four, European union, crisis management

1. INTRODUCTION

An example of the formation of a battle group was modeled on the agreement between France and Britain on the need for such an army. The battlegroups make up units of about 1,500 people that are submitted within 15 days can be sown. Battlegroups can be deployed for 30 days, as appropriate and by replenishment this period may be extended to 120 days. However, the joint Visegrad battle group set up also had additional opportunities that could be exploited later.¹ “European battlegroups operate on a six-monthly stand-by basis. The V4 Battlegroup will be the first of its kind on standby between January and June 2016 performed - the next standby service in 2019 II. half a year (Tulok et.al, 2018, p 39)”

The main tasks of the battle group:

- separation of warring parties,
- conflict prevention,
- stabilization,
- reconstruction and military advice,
- evacuation operations,
- humanitarian aid

The battlegroup is based on a battalion-sized, quick-to-deploy, all-armed force, complete with combat support and combat security elements. This includes the capacity for strategic transport (*air, land and water*) and logistics (*systems and 9R*), although no “operational application” has been implemented since the adoption of the EU Battlegroup concept, so its details cannot yet be reported.² Battlegroup V4 works closely with several other EU Battlegroups, such as the Balkan and Northern EU Battlegroups. Another flagship of the four countries’ cooperation is the V4 All-Force Logistics Support Group Command, and this is the first capability offered to NATO jointly by the Visegrad countries.

¹Tulok P., Sáringér J., Perényi Zs., Remete B., Márky Z. & KSH (2018). *A Visegrádi Négyek jelentősége, struktúrája és értékei.* (szerk. Blaskó A.). pp 31-48.

²<https://figyelo.hu/valo-vilag/visegradi-partnerseg-egyre-szorosabb-a-katonai-kapcsolat-10771/>

2. HISTORICAL OF TOPIC

The first meeting of the 3 countries was taken place in Visegrad in 1335. There were three kings, John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, Charles I of Anjou (*Charles Robert*), King of Hungary, and Casimir III, King of Poland. The aim of the meeting was to create a friendlier atmosphere between the 3 rulers, and to set up a new commercial route that avoids Vienna. The meeting was successful, the relationship between them became better, and the first signs of a regional cooperation started to showing. They have created an alliance and a commercial cooperation.³(1. figure)



5. figure: three leaders of Central European kingdoms

https://hungarytoday.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Chronicon_Pictum_I_Karoly_Robert.jpg

After more than 650 years the Visegrad (2. figure) cooperation was revived. With the end of the communist era in 1989 system changes have happened in the countries of the Eastern Block as they have won back their freedom and independence. Although it was a very happy moment for every previously occupied nation, and the day marking the freedom from communism is everywhere a national holiday, these countries were in a harsh situation. Their economy, their commercial relations were in bad shape. They had not just to rebuild them, but to build it in a completely new way: free market economy. This form together with the

³ Stanislaw Szczur: Az 1335. évi visegrádi királyi találkozó http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/40546/1/aetas_1993_001_028-042.pdf Letöltés dátuma: 2021. 09. 06.

democracy was basically unknown for the visegrad countries, not to mention Slovakia who became independent in 1993 for the first time in its history, which means that they had to learn how to be a sovereign nation with own decision, legislation and bureaucracy as well. Besides that the main goal for the new governments were one: to participate in the western integration, more precisely to become a member of the European Union and the NATO. Since they were facing more or less the same challenges and had the same goal, they thought it would be better to pull together.



6. figure: The medieval castle of Visegrád

https://hungarytoday.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/311260_visegrad_rajz.jpg

So the Visegrad Group was formed again on 15th February 1991 at a meeting of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Václav Havel, the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, József Antall.⁴The plan broadly explained was that they will harmonize their country's efforts to fulfill the requirements of accession defined by the western organizations (*EU and NATO*). This meant discussion, joint efforts and supporting each other. Although the idea was good, unfortunately did not realized as well as they imagined. The EU had negotiated with the countries separately so they could not really harmonize their actions. Besides that the cooperation soon became a

⁴A V4 és az Európai Unió Jövője. Antall József Tudásközpont. 2018. 7. o.

competition, where all the visegrad countries rather tried to gain more advantage than to wait for or help the others.⁵⁶

This first phase of visegrad cooperation was not favourable for the security cooperation as well. Besides the reasons mentioned above, working together on the field of security and defence policy had further obstacles. The system changes caused a smaller chaos almost in every sector, and in themilitary as well. The governments had to find out how to reorganize, relocate their armed forces, what will be the new tasks of the security sector and also had to create a new security strategy. And even if they were able to work these out, there were not enough money to realize these efforts. It would have been really expensive to transform the obsolete soviet-styled military and equipments to something new that is more compatible with the western armies. But not just the financial resources were inadequate, but the political capacity as well. Between the debates and discussions of the accession talks and the huge work on building a functional western-like country with free market economy and democracy there were barely enough efforts remained to deal with the military sector.⁷ The only thing most of them were able to manage is to lower the number of the soldiers and the equipments, which were calculated for the soviet tactics and so were absolutely inappropriate for the defense of the given country. The other thing they could do is the relocation of the forces. For example in Hungary most forces were stationed on the western side of the country since we were on the western border of the Eastern Block. So after gaining back the leadership over the hungarian armed forces the decision makers tried to work out a more reasonable dispersion that covers the country with higher efficiency.⁸ Beyond this there were not significant acts regarding the security sector. When Czechia, Hungary and Poland were getting closer to the NATO membership, security and defence cooperation became more important than before, but after reaching their goals, first in 1999, then in 2004 with the accession of Slovakia it was fading back into the background. But then this gradually changed as the circumstances became more and more favourable for security and defence cooperation. First the 2008 global financial crisis, then the occupation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia, the

⁵ Hamburger Judit: *Közép-Európa politikai dimenziójának megvalósítási kísérlete: a visegrádi együttműködés (V4)*. In: *Külügyi Szemle*, 2010/nyár. 43-44. o.

⁶ Grúber Károly – Törő Csaba: *A Visegrádi Négyek (V4) Európai Unión belüli együttműködésének szempontjai és eddigi tapasztalatai*. *Külügyi Szemle*, 2010/nyár. 52-53. o.

⁷ Adéla Jiříčková: *Defence Cooperation of the V4+*. Prága, Association for International Affairs, 2015. 3-4. o.

⁸ Szenes Zoltán: *Honvédelem- védelempolitika*. NKE 2020. 32. o.

mass migration in 2015 etc. These occasions made the European countries to work together on the field of security, for example to develop and procure weapon systems and equipments together, to establish joint multinational units, and all in all to spend more on defence (*which was an old request of the United States towards the European NATO members*). This was true for the Visegrad countries as well. After these events they all paid more and more attention to their defence capabilities, and real joint efforts were finally made in this regard, for example the V4 EU Battlegroup. Today security and defence collaboration is a very important part of the V4 agenda, and -considering the security environment with the happenings like in Afghanistan or in the MENA region (*the civil war in Ethiopia*)- it will be in the future as well.

3. TOPIC INFORMATIONS

The only organization within the V4 platform is the International Visegrad Fund.⁹ The aim of supporting the development of cooperation in culture, scientific exchange, research, education, exchange of students and development of cross-border cooperation and promotion of tourism—represents the civic dimension of V4 cooperation. The objective of developing the V4 Smart Platform is to implement uniformly interoperable electronic services supporting the comfort of the citizens and the public administration that can be jointly introduced in the V4 member countries, such as the provision of interoperability between mobility (*transport*), tourism services, creation of a common, standardized electronic and mobile payment infrastructure, ensuring new generation of digital services in a standardized, open model and the provision of new market opportunities for the companies of the V4 member countries.

V4 Think Tank Platform - Its main aim is to create a platform for regular and structured dialogue and for the exchange of views and ideas among the Visegrad experts from the non-governmental sector.¹⁰

⁹ We also have to mention the Visegrad Patent Institute and the V4 House in Cape Town

¹⁰ <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/aims-and-structure>

4. BATTLEGROUP

4.1. About the Battlegroup concept

In the 2000's, more than 10 years after the fall of Soviet Union, more and more signs were showing how the new world order will look like and that Francis Fukuyama was not entirely right. Although the globalization is a great process that makes our life easier and comfortable, it also made the evolving and spreading of the problems and threats faster. Terrorist groups, smugglers, drug cartels etc. also took advantage of globalisation. With the fading borders (*especially in the EU*), the faster traffic and transport they have started to pose a more complex threat with a shorter response time and predictability. As the distance did not matter anymore, countries had to start to deal with countries in other region, even if they were thousands of kilometres away. Defending yourself was not interpretable anymore with defending your borders, but you had to take care of regions far away that could affect your security. Best example is the migrant crisis in 2015: a civil war in Syria made a huge impact on the security and unity of the European continent. Because of these effects the EU realized that if it wants to maintain the security of the continent, rapidly deployable efficient forces are needed.

So in November 2004 the EU came up with the aim of providing a general conceptual basis for the conduct of EU-led military crisis management operations (*CMO*) requiring a rapid response. The result of this idea was the Battlegroup concept. The history of EU battlegroups dates back to 1999 when the meeting of the European Council in Helsinki identified the need for the EU to have rapid reaction forces available that would represent an essential tool within EU crisis management. This session resulted in passing the Helsinki Headline Goal concept, which set up a task for the member states to prepare available and deployable rapid reaction forces¹¹. The Battlegroup (*BG*) is the minimum militarily effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations, or for the initial phase of larger operations. From this notion one can tell that the purpose of the BG's was that with them the EU will be able to turn up in conflict zones as soon as possible to prevent the escalation. Depending on the complexity of the given conflict it would be able to

¹¹R. Hamelink (2005). The Battlegroups Concept: Giving the EU a concrete "military" face. EuroFuture [online]. Winter, p. 8. cit. 2021. 08. 16.

solve the problem or at least to hold the line until bigger and more appropriate forces, for instance NATO or UN units arrive.

In regards of its structure: BG is a multinational unit with a framework nation. Since the forces are given by the participating countries, their size and equipments are not strictly determined because it depends on the capabilities of the nations. With establishing around 13 BG it would be possible to continuously keep one in readiness for 6 month periods. If something happens during this period, they should be able to be deployed to everywhere within 10 days, and should be sustainable for 30 days initial operations, extendable to 120 days, if re-supplied appropriately.¹²

4.2. The Visegrad Battlegroup

The European Union (*EU*) shows incessant effort to maintain its status as a prominent security actor on the international scene. As part of this effort, in 2004 the EU introduced within the then European (*today already Common*) Security and Defence Policy (*ESDP/CSDP*) a new tool of rapid reaction - the EU battlegroups (*EU BG*). Hence the Union sent out a clear signal that it was ready to assume a greater share of responsibility for keeping international peace and security. In 2007, these battlegroups reached full operational capability, which offered the EU a possibility to conduct two parallel operations every six months while simultaneously using two of these battlegroups.

The visegrad countries supported the concept, and they came up with the idea of creating an own BG already in 2007. But the circumstances were not favourable: none of the countries had experience, and they could not free up enough forces for this task (*for example because of the NRF and ISAF participation*).¹³ But until 2010 they gradually learned these experiences: firstly Hungary, then Slovakia and Czechia in a common BG, and finally Poland, the two latter as a framework nation. So in 2012 with the conditions given they have decided the establishment of a V4 EU Battlegroup with Poland as a framework nation. The V4 EU BG had its first standby period from 1st January to 30th June in 2016. Its personnel was a bit more than 3900 man. Poland, as the framework nation gave the most personnel: 1870. Czechia sent 728, Hungary 716, Slovakia 466 man. Besides these forces there were several ukrainian groups as a complementary force. Each country had its own role:

¹²Jana Urbanovska: *Visegrad Four EU Battlegroup: Meaning and Progress*. In: *Obrana a strategie (Defence & Strategy)*, January 2014. 3-4. o.

¹³M. Paulech & J. Urbanovská (2014). *Visegrad Four EU Battlegroup: Meaning and Progress*. cit: 2021. 08 15.

- Czechia was responsible for the medical and logistical providing
- Hungary had engineer, CIMIC and PSYOPS tasks
- Slovakia was responsible for the biological, radiological and nuclear protection
- Poland operated the cyber and communication systems, and also the headquarter as the framework nation¹⁴

Between July and December of 2019 they had their 2nd standby period with 2250 man. The share-out of the tasks was the same as previously. The participating nations ceremoniously concluded the six-month stand-by period of the V4 EU Battlegroup in Krakow on 8 January 2020. Soldiers from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia were also present at the closing ceremony. Major General Dr. Slawomir Kowalski, Commander of the V4 EU Battlegroup Operations Command, thanked the participants for their cooperative, high-quality work and stressed that although the six-month stand-by period was over, it was planned to continue in 2023¹⁵. (3. figure)



7. figure: Nations ceremoniously,

https://honvedelem.hu/media/cache/width_1200_p/images/media/5f222b6becb8a000828381.jpg

¹⁴The Visegrad Group's Role In The European Security System. <https://euro-sd.com/2019/05/articles/13041/the-visegrad-groups-role-in-the-european-security-system/> Letöltés dátuma: 2021. 09. 06.

¹⁵<https://honvedelem.hu/hirek/hazai-hirek/bizonyitott-a-v4-eu-harccsoport.html>, Zsófia Halász lieutenant, 2020. január 13.

4.3. The results of the V4 Battlegroup

It is not easy to judge the efficiency of the Battlegroups, since none of them were deployed so far. Without pragmatical experience we can just guess if they would stand a ground or not in sharp position. That's also true of the V4 BG. However having a joint battlegroup has a lot of advantage even so. Forming a BG was a good opportunity to prove their willingness (*and ability*) in the protection of the EU and the Euro-Atlantic area. Nowadays the first thing that comes up in one's mind is the debates between the EU and V4 (for instance on migration, rule of law etc.), even though there are various fields where the visegrad countries are active supporters and good partners. Security and defence policy is one of these, where the V4 is backing the endeavours of the EU on building a strategic autonomy, to raise the defense budget and so on. Unfortunately this is a less popular topic compared to the ones where are harsh debates, but hopefully in the future this will change as the topic gets more and more important.

The BG concept is fostering the interoperability between the 4 country, which is a very important and useful factor. In today's world the states and international actors have to conduct a lot of missions abroad. This means a completely new environment, landscape and in most cases a new culture for the forces sent abroad. So being part of a multinational unit and learning all the experiences and knowledge of working in this kind of environment is a really useful thing. Not to mention that it makes the increment of interoperability easier, which is also a relevant and a cost-saving step to a stronger and deeper cooperation. Besides that a battlegroup is a very good indicator that shows where the participating countries are at the development of their security system and military or of the common projects. It also shows those gaps that need to be filled both on national and international level. Like this the result will be a better harmonized and more pragmatical and effective cooperation.

Considering the whole security cooperation of the visegrad countries, V4 BG is clearly the biggest and the only tangible successful project. It has a lot of advantage for all the member countries and also the EU/NATO can benefit from it.

4.4 . The V4 security cooperation

Despite the successful setting-up of the V4 BG and having other ongoing projects in the field of security cooperation the Visegrad Group's achievements are confined. Although they have other initiatives like regular joint trainings and exercises (via *Training and Exercise Strategy*

and Midterm Plan of Training Opportunities) none of the significant endeavors like V4 Military Academy or the joint procurements and modernisations were realised (except of course the BG). If we review the efforts and attempts of the past years, we can barely find any success. For instance:

- the joint procurement of Mobile 3D Radars was failed in 2014,
- the trade of Rosomak Armored Personnel Carriers between Slovakia and Poland did not realized in 2015. After the failure both parties were blaming each other.
- instead of the joint modernisation of old soviet-era helicopters th countries choose other options

This failures are not just sorrowful because they could have been really fruitful for all the countires, but because every one of them just increased the mistrust among the 4 countries, making it harder and harder for the next project to be realized. As the DAV4 report stressed in 2012, the trust is one of the key issue for a successful cooperation. To overcome the mistrust stemming from the failed projects, they need some smaller success and positive feedback to gradually gain back the confidence towards each other. These projects do not have to bear big importance, the main aim is to achieve something together. A good example of this is the joint acquisiton of 300,000 rounds of ammo in 2021.¹⁶ With small initial steps like this we can count on larger achievements (on middle or long term) in the future.

¹⁶V4 defense ministers discuss joint purchase of ammunition, foreign missions http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/europe/2020-06/25/c_139164847.htm and V4-VÉDELMI MINISZTEREK: A HADSEREGEK A JÁRVÁNY IDEJÉN IS BIZONYÍTOTTAK <https://demokrata.hu/magyarorszag/v4-vedelmi-miniszterek-a-hadseregek-a-jarvany-idejen-is-bizonyitottak-260019/>

5. WHAT NEXT?

As we have seen above, the security and defence cooperation between the visegrad countries is struggling right now. Despite this fact we should not bury and mourn it. The circumstances are quite favourable: the security environment significantly worsening (*most recent example is Afghanistan*), the need for security cooperation and for BGs will grow in the future. The exigency and the necessity of this topic will be more significant. Besides that V4 BG is a great platform for common progression, for developing accurate capabilities and so it is worth for the member countries to keep up with the cooperation and to try to maintain it, although they have to work a lot in this regard.

Also an important factor, that the decision-makers of the visegrad countries have the political willingness for maintaining and boosting the collaboration in security policy. Until it remains like this, the chance of a closer cooperation will endure. And if in some of the visegrad countries the government will change in the future, we can still hope that despite the contradictory political view they will find the V4 collaboration worth to preserve.

On the whole the four countries have all the chance to get to a higher level of cooperation, if they remain on the path they have stepped on. The external pressure of the security environment will grow, the EU and NATO will support and help the regional endeavors like V4, and (at least for now) all the four governments are committed to make the Visegrad Group stronger. It only depends on how capable they will be to overcome the mistrust and build the confidence that will give a stable basis for the future collaboration. (*4. figure*)



8. figure: V4 Nations flag

https://www.30yearsofv4.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/shutterstock_1485791840b-web.jpg

6. SUMMARY

All in all we can say that despite the contradictions the security and defence is one of the most important field of the visegrad cooperation. It has its own structures (*for instance at training and exercises*) and regular discussion and meetings on bilateral, regional and international level (*EU NATO*). With their active and committed behavior towards the security of the european continent is exemplary. It is not a coincidence that the baltic countries started to follow the V4 in some aspects, for example they are making joint declarations now just like the visegrad members. The central asian countries are also looking at the V4 as a good example of regional cooperation. This is a great opportunity for all 4 countries to represent its view stronger or to have access to larger volume projects which would not be accessible as individual. They are playing an important role in the security of the European Union, especially since they are border countries.¹⁷ With the increasing migration flow their importance will be larger, just like their weight in european politics. We really hope that the countires can overcome the existent and the future obstacles and hardships and they can become a strong bastion of the European Union.

¹⁷Törő Csaba: *Visegrad cooperation within NATO and CSDP*. Varsó, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2011. 29. o.

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