

Gábor Böröndi [✦], Erika Gazdag [✦]

Road to Hungary's EU Presidency: a Snapshot on the European Security

DOI 10.17047/HADTUD.2024.34.1.3

NATO and the EU are jointly seeking to enhance their security and to act autonomously in the face of emerging crises in Europe and its neighbourhood. The concept of European strategic autonomy has become key, with regional cooperation facilitated by the EU Strategic Compass. Hungary, as a member of NATO and EU, is prioritising the reinforcement of the European Security and Defence Policy, focusing on close regional cooperation through the European defence industry. The unprovoked Russian aggression in Ukraine has accelerated this process, strengthening the EU's defence capabilities and the transatlantic relationship. The future of NATO will require a stronger European pillar, underlining the importance of a higher level of regional and transatlantic cooperation in addressing global security challenges.

KEYWORDS: EU, NATO and regional cooperation, defence industry, modernization of the Hungarian Defence Forces

Magyarország EU elnöksége előtt: pillanatkép az európai biztonságról

A NATO és az EU közösen igyekeznek javítani a kontinens biztonságát és önállóan fellépni az Európában, és szomszédságában, kialakult válságokkal szemben. Az európai stratégiai autonómia kulcsfontosságúvá vált, a regionális együttműködést az EU Stratégiai Iránytűje segíti. Magyarország a NATO és az EU tagjaként kiemelten kezeli az európai biztonság- és védelempolitika megerősítését, a regionális együttműködést az európai védelmi iparon keresztül is segíti. Az orosz agresszió Ukrajnában felgyorsította ezt a folyamatot, megerősíti az EU védelmi képességeit és a transzatlanti kapcsolatokat. A jövő NATO-jában erősebb

✦ General, Chief of Defence, Hungarian Defence Forces –
vezérezredes, a Honvéd Vezérkar főnöke

e-mail: borondi.gabor@hm.gov.hu; <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7948-6130>

✦ Advisor of international security and defence policy, Chief of Defence's Office, Hungarian Defence Forces – nemzetközi biztonság- és védelempolitikai tanácsadó, Honvéd Vezérkar
e-mail: gazdag.erika@mil.hu; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0156-3214>



európai pillére lesz szükség, ami magasabb szintű regionális és transzatlanti együttműködést igényel a globális biztonsági kihívások kezelésében.

KULCSSZAVAK: EU, NATO és regionális együttműködés, védelmi ipar, a Magyar Honvédség modernizációja

A two-day international security and defence congress *Budapest Security Dialogue* (BSD)¹, held at Budapest Marriott Hotel from 26 to 27 April 2024, demonstrated the imperative of advanced partnerships among European states, particularly in the field of defence cooperation. The international forum established a platform for exchanging views and experiences, and highlighted the importance of shared understanding and joint efforts. The Event addressed issues surrounding peace and war, security policy concerns in Central Europe and the Western Balkans, European and global defence industrial development, research and technological advancement, and the current challenges of the world economy. The main programme was attended by international ministers, military and business leaders. The congress was rounded off by a major Defence Industry Exhibition, in which over 22 international companies from the defence companies participated, showcasing their portfolios and capabilities.

This year represents a landmark in our country's international cooperation: in 2024, NATO celebrates its 75th anniversary; 25 years ago, Hungary joined NATO alongside two Central-European nations, Poland and Czechia – just as the NATO mission KFOR², launched in Kosovo in 1999, turns 25 this year. In addition, Hungary became a member of the European Union 20 years ago - just as the EU Force (EUFOR) was established in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR). Moreover, the 25th anniversary of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in 2024 coincides with the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, from 1st July to 31st December. In this vein, Budapest Security Dialogue offered an excellent opportunity to highlight the developments in this policy area within the EU, as well as to scrutinise the potential inherent in international cooperations.

The Importance of the European Defence Industry

One of the priority tasks of our presidency is to bolster European security and defence policy based on Europe's defence industry. In April, on the margin of a great opportunity to host the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Robert Brieger, key issues for the Common Security and Defence Policy were discussed and

1 The article is an edited version of a lecture given at BSD. <https://www.budapestbuildingbridges.com/> (Last seen: 06.05.2024)

2 Kosovo Force (KFOR) is currently deployed in the Balkans to maintain a safe and secure environment, freedom of movement of itself, the international civil presence, and other international organisations. The United Nations, the European Union and other international actors continue to support the development of a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful Kosovo. KFOR as a peace-support operation derives its mandate from the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and international agreements. Source: <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor> (Last seen: 04.05.2024.)

we agreed on how to strengthen cooperation using the EU Strategic Compass³ in the fields of *crisis management, military capabilities, and defence industry development*. This initiative reflects a coordinated effort by the EU to adapt and respond swiftly to the evolving security challenges.

The crises in Europe and in its neighbourhood over the past decade had made it necessary to discuss how the European states can enhance their security and act independently, even without the United States. Since February 2022, most European nations have recognized that the Old Continent should have more military strength in a high-intensity conflict: the concept of European strategic autonomy⁴ has become more relevant than ever. The unprovoked Russian aggression in Ukraine gave new impetus to this process enhancing the defence characteristics of the EU and the Transatlantic relations. The EU leaders at the Versailles Meeting⁵ in March 2022 agreed that the European defence cooperation efforts should focus on bolstering defence capabilities and strengthening the European Defence Industry. In the future, NATO will clearly require a much stronger European pillar.

In other words, European states must finally take more responsibility for their own defence. As Carl von Clausewitz wrote in his book *On War*: “Defence is a stronger form of fighting than attack [...] and the superiority of the defensive (if rightly understood) is very great, far greater than appears at first sight.”⁶ Common defence has again returned to the heart of the strategic dialogue between NATO members, including Central Europe. Strengthening military capabilities and readiness, the coordination of the members’ and partners’ strategic thinking, defence planning, military procurement, and force modernization programmes within the collective defence system – all require a higher level of international cooperation.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is an unmitigated catastrophe for peace in the world, and particularly for peace in Europe. It represented a global shock, which marked a sudden disruption of 30 years of globalization and all the rules based international cooperation that made it possible with serious implications for countries around the world. The war threatened not only the stability of Europe, but it has also influenced food and energy security crisis globally including the Middle East and Africa, creating shock waves in a world barely recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷

Security and Defence Priorities of Hungary’s EU Presidency

In preparation for the EU presidency, Hungary intends to strengthen the European cooperation with the following measures:

This year, for the first time in the history of Operation EUFOR ALTHEA, a Hungarian commander is leading the EU military mission in the Balkans.

3 A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, 2022.

4 Molnár and Jakusné Harnos 2024, 3–4.

5 The Versailles declaration, 2022.

6 Clausewitz 1976, 84. 4.

7 Andor, Optenhögel 2023, 39–50. 1.

Back in 2021, a Hungarian general, currently the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, became the first Hungarian commander of KFOR, an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo under NATO's command. As the situation in the Western Balkans maintains its priority for Hungary, the Hungarian EU Presidency is making all efforts to speed up the accession of the Western Balkans countries to the EU.

We are developing our military capabilities to contribute to EU Rapid Deployment Capacity⁸ (EU RDC), which remains central to the EU's efforts to enhance its operational readiness and response capabilities.⁹ Hungary will participate in the creation of the first European Battle Group to be established by 2025, based on a new concept.

In the framework of the EU's overall capability development concept, we supported and contributed to the expansion of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) to achieve full operational readiness.¹⁰ Another priority for 2023 was to promote and further develop Military Mobility as a priority project of EU-NATO.

The European Commission approved the first-ever European Defence Industrial Strategy¹¹ on 5th March 2024, and sets a long-term vision for achieving defence industrial readiness and security within the EU. This strategy, complemented by the European Defence Industry Programme, aims to foster cooperation on defence equipment procurement and enhance the competitiveness of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base.

In this context, Hungary, in the field of defence procurement and development of the defence industry has already achieved its strategic goals by 2030 in several respects.

About 80% of the newly procured military equipment is made in Europe and we cooperate in the armament production with Germany, France, Czechia, Turkey, Sweden, and Norway. Our chief cooperative partner is the German Rheinmetall, which is deployed in the construction and operation of the first four of the six new Hungarian defence plants, such as the factory, which was built in Zalaegerszeg for the producing Lynx tracked infantry fighting vehicles for the Hungarian Defence Forces.

The Hungarian strategic policy documents (the 2020 National Security Strategy¹², the 2021 National Military Strategy¹³) highlight the importance of building up the military industry, the renewal of the Hungarian Defence Forces, and defence cooperation with NATO and EU allies. In addition to Hungary's EU Presidency, our country is also presiding the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC) including the other CEDC members (Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia) and the Western Balkan states.¹⁴ It will seek to expand a high-level

8 Strategic Compass, 2022.

9 Schreiner 2023.

10 Tardy 2017.

11 European Commission, 2024.

12 Hungary's National Strategy, 2020.

13 Nemzeti Katonai Stratégia (National Military Strategy), 2021.

14 Csiki 2017, 133–137.

dialogue and practical cooperation in the EU and NATO framework as well.¹⁵ Additionally, Hungary supports the informal document signed by Austria, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, which aims to bring the Western Balkans more into the focus of the European Union, including through the possible future deployment of an EU rapid reaction capability, if required.

NATO's Security and Defence Challenges

Although the defence cooperation in the EU is increasingly important, NATO remains the cornerstone of European and Transatlantic security, challenges related to and triggered by the war in Ukraine have caused an ever-greater need for ensuring comprehensive understanding of security in Central Europe.

From the Hungarian perspective, threats now come from the East, Middle East, and the South. The contemporary security landscape - with illegal migration, terrorism, and the ongoing war in Ukraine, as well as the Hamas- Israel war - can be described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). This complexity of the current challenges has required complex responses from the Hungarian government.

The changes have opened a New Era for the Force Development in Hungary. The Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) has been going through a robust transformation due to the increasing number and scope of hybrid threats and challenges.

Hungary's 2021 Military Strategy outlined a plan to build a defence force fit for 21st-century warfare. The government announced the Zrínyi National Defence and Force Development Program, named after the general defending this country from the Ottoman Empire Miklós Zrínyi, with the chief purpose to become a significant military force in Central Europe by 2030 with deterrence capabilities. This was originally a 10-year military modernization plan by 2026 but now it is scheduled to be completed in 2032 due to its increased size and scope. The three key features of the plan include increasing defence spending, strengthening the capabilities of the armed forces, as well as improving the home defence framework and social resilience.

In terms of resources, the renewed Defence Investment Pledge requirements, adopted in Vilnius last year, are fully implemented, and the government significantly increases the resources available for defence from the MoD budget, as well as the special governmental defence fund. Based on NATO statistics, Hungary spent 2.43% of GDP on defence in 2023¹⁶, which was the 8th place in the Alliance. 48.4% of this was spent on defence development (procurement, infrastructure), which placed us on 4th place. This year we will spend HUF 1.309 billion (about EUR 3.5 billion) on defence expenditure that is expected to reach 2.1% of GDP.

15 Defence ministers of the Balkan's countries were also invited for the last CEDS meeting in Budapest on 25 April) Szükség van Közép-Európa hangjára - Honvédelem (honvedelem.hu) (We need the voice of Central Europe)

16 FACTSHEET – NATO, 2024.

Although the traditional domains of warfare remain our primary focus of military capability development, conflicts are no longer confined to these domains. This new era of warfare, focused on simultaneously shaping and fighting, involves new domains such as cyberspace and space, which undoubtedly have an impact not only on warfighting but also on how future security architectures are built. As contemporary threats come from various domains, the HDF seeks to cover the development of Land, Air Force, C2 capabilities, Special Operations Forces, Cyber Forces, enabling capabilities, and the Reserve System.¹⁷ The government has launched a major space program, of which the Hungarian Defence Force is a part. This year a Hungarian astronaut will go into space again.

Regarding ground forces, a four-brigade structure will be established with the aim of creating one heavy, two medium and one light infantry brigades. In the centre of development, there is 1st Armoured Brigade in Tata where the three *New Big Cats* (as media calls them) arrived at the beginning of the year. The brigade is receiving the state-of-the-art Leopard 2A7HU main battle tank, and now I am referring to the media sources, “the crown jewellery of the Hungarian Defence Force development”, “the spine of deterrence” and “the king of the battlefield”. The set-up, operation and application of this 21st-century technology require an entirely new approach from the military personnel, and currently we are conducting training for the new tanks using Leopard 2A4HU main battle tanks received from Germany in 2020.

Air Force provides air policing and air defence tasks to uphold the sovereignty of the Hungarian and the Allied airspace, as well as to support Land Forces’ operations. In this context, Italian and Hungarian air policing in the Slovenian airspace and the Italian-led Multinational Land Force (MLF) with Slovenia’s and Hungary’s participation also strengthen Central European military cooperation and thus ultimately the resilience of European security architecture. The cooperation of three Visegrád countries – Czechia, Hungary, and Poland – to provide air policing over Slovakia is another important regional initiative that complements European defence.

On 12th April, the first Hungarian Embraer KC-390 Millennium medium transport aircraft landed at Kecskemét Air Base. The Hungarian version differs from the others as it has an *integrated intensive care unit* for use as a medical aircraft. Not only the speed of logistical support, but also the increasing distances that personnel and supplies must cover, given Hungary’s active role in remote missions, justify the use of modern military transport aircraft with high transport capacity. The military has recently replaced its Mi-17 helicopters with modern Airbus H145M aircraft and is also taking delivery of new multi-purpose Airbus H225M helicopters.

The new helicopters will enhance the Armed Forces’ search and rescue capabilities. The new technology required helicopter pilots and crewmembers to gain new skills to effectively carry out rescue operations using the latest technology.

The HDF requires advanced, network-based, autonomous command and control capabilities that can effectively operate also in technologically underdeveloped, non-permissive environments. The establishment of Headquarters Multinational

17 Sticz, Sepródi-Kiss 202, 14–17.

Division Centre (HQ MND-C) in Székesfehérvár, Hungary, is a good example of realizing that ambition. Three nations in the region – Croatia, Slovakia, and Hungary – decided to set up a multinational HQ and offered it to NATO's Force Structure to fill the Alliance's C2 gap in our region. This year MND-C is to achieve its Full Operational Capability.

Hungary is also a lead nation of the established Regional Special Operations Component Command¹⁸ (R-SOCC) in Szolnok involving Austria, Croatia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The special operations units will provide strategic and operational level rapid reaction, and fulfil airmobile, special reconnaissance and special operations requirements.

To achieve all the targets mentioned so far, sustainment is indispensable. The successful execution of the full spectrum of tasks requires the establishment of the appropriate logistics and medical support capabilities as an essential prerequisite.

The commitment of the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) to international peacekeeping operations is a fundamental tool for the implementation of our foreign, security and defence policy. Hungarian military personnel are currently serving in 8 peacekeeping missions in 8 countries on 3 continents, contributing to the success of the operations, missions, or activities. The number of personnel serving in theatre of operations exceeds 700 persons. In terms of the number of ground troops, we have long been one of NATO's "front runners" and best performing nations.

In line with our defence policy guidelines, our main priority is to support NATO-led missions. Almost 60% of our peacekeeping participation – 420 people – are involved in NATO-led operations. Our main security interest is the geographical stability of our immediate neighbourhood, the Western Balkans. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of Hungarian soldiers are serving in this region (KFOR, EUFOR ALTHEA). In addition to the figures mentioned so far, Hungary contributes forces and capabilities to the NATO Response Force and the EU Battle Group in the framework of contributions based on international commitments (NATO, EU). In addition, Hungary provides some 1,000 troops to the NATO Preparedness Initiative as a voluntary national contribution. The security of the Western Balkan region continues to be a top political and foreign policy priority for our country, and therefore the focus of our crisis response operations remains the Western Balkan Theatre (KFOR, EUFOR ALTHEA). The Hungarian Defence Forces are continuously deploying a high number of personnel to KFOR, currently more than 400.

The modernization of the HDF is also surrounded by a major national defence reform, which is taking place in Hungary. New special situation of Law and Order were created (*state of war, state of emergency, emergency*), the Parliament amended the Fundamental Law. A new law was passed to prepare civil administration, the economy, and the public for national defence. In 2021, a new defence law came into effect. The Defence Council, a new high decision-making body in Hungary was established in 2022, headed by the Prime Minister, whose work is assisted by the Military Office and the newly appointed National Security Advisor based on the American model.

18 NATO – News, 2021.

Conclusion

The restructuring of the administrative system is designed to enable the HDF to better fulfil its national defence and allied defence tasks, to help prepare the national economy, the civil protection system, the institutional network, and citizens for the new security challenges of an evolving security environment, and to strengthen its resilience. We tested the new defence administration system with great success last year at the Adaptive Hussars 2023 national and NATO exercise. And we will continue to do so until we achieve our modernization goals. Hungary's EU Presidency will undoubtedly help this process, as the EU defence ministers and chiefs of defence staff meet in Budapest to discuss the current European defence issues.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Academic literature

- Carl Clausewitz 1976. Michael Howard, Peter Paret: *On war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400837403>
- Csikó Tamás 2017. *A kelet-közép-európai államok védelmi együttműködési törekvései, 2008–2016*. Doktori (PhD) értekezés. Budapest, 2017. [csiki_tamas_doktori_ertekezés.pdf](#) (uni-nke.hu) (Accessed: 16. April 2024.)
- László Andor, Uwe Optenhögel (Eds.) 2023. *Europe and the War in Ukraine: From Russian Aggression to a New Eastern policy*. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2023. ISBN 978-1-913019-89-1
- Molnár, Anna and Jakusné Harnos, Éva 2024. From Quasi-Sovereignty to Full Sovereignty? The Interpretations of Strategic Autonomy and Sovereignty in the European Union. 3-4. *Anali Hrvatskog politološkog društva*, 21 (1).
<https://doi.org/10.20901/an.21.02> (Accessed: 10 May 2024.)
- Sebastian Schreiner: EU Rapid Deployment Capacity. 13.02.2023. EU Rapid Deployment Capacity | EEAS (europa.eu) Brief 17 MPCC.pdf (europa.eu) (Accessed: 12. April 2024.)
- Sticz László, Seprődi- Kiss Árpád 2020. Az MH képességfejlesztése, egy korszerű haderő megteremtése. Capability Development in the HDF: Building a Modern Force. *Hadtudomány (Hungarian Military Science)*, 30 (4), 3–19.
<https://doi.org/10.17047/HADTUD.2020.30.4.3>
- Thierry Tardy 2017. MPCC: towards an EU Military Command. *EUISS Brief 17*. January 2017. Brief 17 MPCC.pdf (europa.eu)

Documents

- A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade. Security and Defence. *Council of Europe*. Brussels, 21. March 2022. A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade - Consilium (europa.eu) (Accessed: 01 April 2024.)
- Defence expenditure as percentage of GDP NATO total and NATO Europe. Meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence, Brussels, 15.02.2024. FACTSHEET-NATO-defence-spending-en.pdf (Accessed: 02. April 2024.)
- European Commission: First-ever European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) to enhance Europe's readiness and security. March 5, 2024. European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) to enhance Europe's readiness and security (defence-industry.eu) (Accessed: 12 April 2024.)
- Four NATO Allies and one partner boost Special Operations Forces capabilities. NATO – News, 2021.05.12. NATO - News: Four NATO Allies and one partner boost Special Operations Forces capabilities, 12-May-2021 (Accessed: 02 April 2024.)

Hungary's National Security Strategy (2020). Government Resolution 1163/2020. (21st April)
<https://honvedelem.hu/hirek/government-resolution-1163-2020-21st-april.html>
(Accessed: 10. April 2024.)

1393/2021. (VI. 24.) Korm. határozat Magyarország Nemzeti Katonai Stratégiájáról. (Hungary's National Military Strategy. Government Resolution 1393/ 2021. (4th June) In: Nemzeti Jogszabálytár.
<https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2021-1393-30-22> (Accessed: 02. April 2024.)

The Versailles declaration, 10 and 11 March 2022. 20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf (europa.eu)
(Downloaded: 02.04.2024.)