

13 A Reluctant Supporter

The Hungarian Perspective on European Strategic Autonomy¹

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Generally speaking, one can argue that political conflicts that are centred around various aspects of the illiberal democratic system that Victor Orbán's governments consolidated since 2010 in Hungary (i.e. constitutional amendments and the various rule of law, freedom of media issues, as well as transparency and accountability of the use of EU funds) have much derailed constructive discussion on European collaboration, not least European strategic autonomy. Hungary's position on European integration favours the "loose federation of strong nation-states" model, Budapest being one of the harshest critics of deeper integration. This is coupled with an internationally often criticised, not very constructive political discourse and conduct. Most recently, politically challenging some elements of joint European action *vis-à-vis* Russia following the Russian military aggression against Ukraine has furthermore distanced Hungary from many European Union member states.

In line with this general attitude, discourse on stronger European cooperation in Hungary is a visible, though not a leading, consensus-building topic. It becomes livelier when strategic shocks and major crises hit Europe, individual states simply cannot cope directly with them or their indirect effects, and wider, European action becomes desirable. Such crises had been the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the 2015 refugee and migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, European cooperation is an element of political discourse mostly in connection with EU–Hungary political debates, not regarding ESA. ESA is mostly interpreted narrowly, focusing on defence, with the discussion brought forward by the Ministry of Defence and defence policy experts. When summarising the Hungarian stance on ESA based on a round of interviews involving policy-makers and foreign policy experts, combined with research into policy documents, academic discourse, media analysis, and opinion polls, Franke and Varma (2019) pointed out that there are few discussions of ESA in Hungary – a situation that still holds in 2022.

This chapter will follow a similar methodological approach. Supported by ten primer interviews with policy stakeholders and experts, an analysis of national strategic documents, a secondary literature analysis on the Hungarian positions regarding various aspects of joint European action (highlighting perceptions and discourse on foreign policy, security, and defence), the chapter

identifies those elements that already enjoy or might gain the support from Hungary, while also explaining why certain areas are excluded. It also assesses the weak conceptual and practical embeddedness of developing ESA within the Hungarian establishment. I argue that the policy establishment seems to recognise what is at stake regarding the future of pursuing European – also Hungarian – interests in the international arena when formulating options for enhancing ESA. In sum, this creates a duality of conceptually understanding the need to strengthen joint European capabilities of action on the one hand, while practically opposing many steps in policy-making that would enable EU member states and institutions to act more successfully on the other. These contradicting features, with the latter one having much stronger emphasis both in current strategic thinking and policy-making, make Hungary a reluctant supporter of ESA. Moreover, several elements of the Orbán government's response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine have strengthened criticism towards Hungary stronger than ever before, undermining cooperation efforts both at subregional and European levels.

Sources, structure, and methodology

The relevant literature on the Hungarian perspective on ESA is very limited. In this regard, even though not “exploratory” in nature, the current chapter offers a novel, comprehensive assessment of these sources. When mapping up available literature, one can rely on three main groups. First, we can use academic sources that offer assessments of Hungarian foreign policy goals, framework, and conduct (Gazdag, 2021), including the EU dimension (Hettyey, 2021; Törő, 2013) or particular aspects, such as EU enlargement (Huszka, 2017), Hungary's stance on Russia (Végh, 2015) or the People's Republic of China (Matura, 2020). A very limited number of policy analyses provide case-specific assessments in the field of defence and can offer some input to the current chapter as well (Nádudvari & Varga, 2019; Nádudvari et al., 2020; Varga, 2019). The second batch of sources is policy documents from which we can deduct primary sector-specific assessments and conclusions. Such sources are quite up to date in Hungary with the National Security Strategy adopted in 2020 and the National Military Strategy adopted in 2021 – although there is no current foreign policy or EU strategy, and the Defence Industrial Strategy (2021) is not open to the public. Secondary analysis of these strategies is also available (Csiki Varga & Tálás, 2020; Resperger, 2021). The third basket of sources includes discourse analyses that focus on narrow aspects (Etl, 2021; Hettyey, 2021) and occasional opinion polls that pinpoint snapshots of how members of the policy community or Hungarian society relate to various issues (Deák, Etl, & Felméry, 2022; Etl, 2020a,b). To add deeper expert insight to the specific research questions, ten in-person/online anonymous interviews involving foreign and security policy practitioners and experts were conducted in February 2022.

The chapter is developed as follows. First, the place and role of European integration and cooperation in Hungarian strategic thought, as well as foreign

and security policy discourse, is identified based on the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy, as well as a sample of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speeches. Based on this general outline, a more precise definition follows, regarding how the political elite and the defence establishment understand the idea of ESA in Hungary. Here, the key point is the contradiction. On the one hand, Hungary supports strengthening European defence cooperation efforts. On the other hand, the Orbán government is wielding political conflicts driven by the desire to strengthen national sovereignty *vis-à-vis* any sovereignty-sharing necessary to foster European cooperation. This assessment is complemented by identifying the set of EU capabilities and potential (much limited) institutional changes that might become the objectives of ESA, as it appeared in policy analyses and expert interviews.

The assessment of the extent to which the EU should pursue autonomous action in security and defence from the Hungarian perspective follows, pointing out how such initiatives interact with the roles of the US and NATO. Hungary defines NATO as the fundamental security provider for Europe for the foreseeable future, somewhat limiting the EU's opportunities to strengthen its strategic autonomy to the potential detriment of transatlantic relations. These arguments lead to the conclusion that Hungary has limited foreign and security policy objectives to achieve in the context of ESA, leaving Hungary in the position of a "reluctant supporter" of these initiatives, while keeping some stakes in the heat of debates.

European defence integration and Hungarian strategic thought

The analysis of Hungarian strategic documents suggests that the country sees and treats the world realistically and pragmatically with a rather pessimistic outlook. Par. 45 and 47 of the current National Security Strategy see a multipolar world in the making, with transformative effects causing growing uncertainty, great power competition, and challenges to Hungarian security beyond the scale of effective nation-state response (NSS, 2020). Thus, Hungary counts on membership in multilateral alliances to counter these developments and better represent national interests through such frameworks (Par. 21, 22, NSS, 2020). However, any direct reference to the need of enhancing European autonomous capacities to act globally, even in non-military aspects (most importantly technology, energy, and cyber), is missing from the strategy (Interview foreign policy analyst, 8 February 2022). Besides NATO, the European Union has a fundamental role in enhancing the security and providing for the military and non-military defence of the country – with NATO bearing the primacy (Par. 14, NSS, 2020), especially in military security (Interview with Former Hungarian ambassador to NATO, 03 February 2022). An effective NATO–EU cooperation should support these engagements (Par. 91 and 129), particularly regarding hybrid challenges (Par. 100, NSS, 2020). The argument that the European Union should have a more capable crisis management profile is present in the

National Military Strategy as well, pointing out that “beyond providing for its own security, Europe must undertake certain roles in neighbouring (crisis) regions as security provider to prevent and tackle threats”. Also, adding that “strengthening CSDP might enable more effective crisis management on the European peripheries, as well as extending synergies in European defence industry” (NMS, 2021).

This assessment was also emphasised by former Ministry of Defence Undersecretary of State for Defence Policy, Gergely Németh and his colleagues, when they pointed out that an arc of crisis zones had arisen on the periphery of Europe, and “Hungary is affected by the so-called ‘eastern’ and ‘southern’ challenges simultaneously due to her geostrategic position” (Bak et al., 2020, p. 7). As “the security of Hungary is inextricably linked to that of Europe as a whole” <...> “Hungary is committed to assisting the EU’s crisis management efforts” (Bak et al., 2020, p. 13). Moreover, the expert interviews also reinforced these views without any exception and thus can be considered a consensual position of both the government and policy practitioners.

With specific regards to the EU, Par. 95 of the National Security Strategy notes that

Hungary is interested in developing a strong, united Europe, moving on a successful integration path, and offering an attractive integration perspective [to other countries], because the continent can only remain competitive in a transforming world order if it unites its economic and military power

(NSS, 2020)

This and subsequent parts of the strategy already highlight the internal contradiction that is present in Hungarian strategic thought and political conduct. On the one hand, it pledges interest in enhancing defence cooperation. On the other hand, it puts definite and strong emphasis on preserving and strengthening national sovereignty (Csiki & Tálás, 2020, p. 6). As Par. 96 summarises,

the foundation of a strong Europe can only be free nations and states capable of acting. Therefore, we envision the future of the European Union as an alliance and integration of sovereign nation-states, not as a federation, while agreeing to practicing some well-defined shared elements of national sovereignty together, based on their national interest.

(NSS, 2020)

This inherent contradiction becomes even more apparent when the strategy leaves the option of deepening integration in the sphere of defence in the long term open. At the same time, it insists on preserving the intergovernmental nature of security and defence cooperation “until then” (Par. 94, NSS, 2020). There is no roadmap or in-between process identified to achieve the long-term option.

“Until then”, the coordinated development of defence capabilities is identified as desirable “to empower the European Union for common defence, and independent, effective international crisis management, substantially supplementing NATO’s activities in this field” (Par. 93, NSS, 2020). Furthermore, the long-term vision articulates some openness regarding “exploring the opportunities based on Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty” (Par. 129, NSS, 2020) in the field of enhanced defence capability development.

Prime Minister Orbán has a fundamental role in determining Hungary’s position on ESA, therefore his remarks deserve attention (Interview with former senior foreign policy official, 14 February 2022). Even though comprehensive and in-depth analyses of his speeches with a focus on ESA and defence cooperation are lacking, one quantitative and qualitative analysis of his 88 official speeches from 2019 (before COVID-19) was conducted by Etl (2021). Security and defence-related issues and the EU were not primary topics for Orbán. “Defence forces” or “the military” were cumulatively mentioned 73 times only, showing rather limited relevance compared to the economy (798 mentions) or migration (531 mentions) (Etl, 2021, pp. 131–135). The EU was the third most frequently mentioned actor (on 141 occasions) when talking about partners and allies, and NATO only the twelfth (54 mentions) (Etl, 2021, p. 132). “European strategic autonomy” was not singled out even once. This was highlighted by several policy analysts as well: the apparent limit of addressing ESA is talking about closer cooperation in defence, without specifying the level of ambition, and never mentioning shared decision-making competences.

Despite the general criticism towards EU institutions, enlargement in the Western Balkans, the creation of a European army, and the development of European defence industry were among topics supported by Orbán (Etl, 2021, pp. 142, 143). As early as 2016, when giving his annual programme speech for the conservative–nationalist camp in Tusványfördő, Orbán spoke about the need to create “European armed forces – one that would be a real common force, with common commanding language, common regiments and common structures” (Miniszterelnok.hu, 2016). However, the *modus vivendi* to achieve this goal was not defined, nor was the way how Hungary could be part of such a deep collaboration while retaining her national sovereignty to such a degree as the government pursues to preserve. Moreover, Orbán has never clarified what exactly he meant by “European armed forces” – an EU army, any permanent non-EU but European formation, or any *ad hoc*, case and task-specific format. Yet, this unique, relatively positive stance regarding European defence within a generally negative EU-related political discourse was pointed out by Hettyey as well (Hettyey, 2021).

Identifying and emphasising this ambivalence is of utmost importance because it draws us to three conclusions. First, Hungarian strategic thought regarding deepened European integration is not monolithic and should not be evaluated based on foreign policy debates with European institutions only. Policy practitioners and experts understand the need, the rationale, and the possible yield of enhancing European cooperation. However, discussions are

not framed around “European strategic autonomy” but “European defence” instead. Second, this ambivalence is apparent in security and defence cooperation as well, as Hungary participates in cooperative formats such as PESCO, CARD, EDF (and is not absent), but limited political and economic weight has been put behind these in practice. This makes Hungary a reluctant supporter of ESA in many ways – as I will explain in the next part. Third, some aspects can still be identified as promising and of Hungarian interest in security and defence, such as enhancing common European crisis management capabilities and developing the European defence industry. The following parts will outline these aspects.

European strategic autonomy: constraints and opportunities

As we have seen, ESA is not named or included even implicitly in Hungarian national strategic documents and is not an established topic of political discourse either. This is so, because the government favours strengthening national sovereignty to deeper integration and is much critical to integration frameworks and their functioning. Therefore, we need to rely on more direct input from the ten experts to map up how Hungarian contributions, as well as opportunities, and constraints to ESA are perceived today.

Based on the division of competences, two government branches, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade have more elaborate views on ESA. The current institutional role-sharing can be described as the Prime Minister’s Office providing the political guidance and setting strong boundaries in joining any mechanisms that would demand more sovereignty-sharing, with Orbán having the most powerful voice in foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has wider competence in policy areas like trade, energy, and technology in the European context (Interview with former senior foreign policy official, 14 February 2022). At the same time, the Ministry of Defence has been keen on sticking narrowly to defence policy and cooperation. The Ministry of Defence currently appears to have a more proactive and pro-European stance (Interview with Ministry of Defence senior official, 4 February 2022).

However, opinions are heterogenous. This was also the conclusion of Etl, based on 33 semi-structured interviews conducted in the 2019–2020 period with policy-makers and experts. He pointed out that

the Hungarian security community agrees that there is a need to strengthen European defence capabilities, but there is a lack of consensus concerning methods. There are visible perceptual differences with regards to the level of cooperation and the role of NATO as well. Similarly, the perceptions were also diverse <...> whether there is a need for establishing a joint European military force in the medium term, even if Hungary would have to delegate governance competence to the European Union.

(Etl, 2020b, p. 7)

This situation seems to hold in 2022 as well. As one expert summarised:

The main reason for this cacophony is that the inflection point in strategic considerations is national sovereignty for Budapest, and policy options are decided on a case-by-case basis. The government weighs potential short-term absolute gains every time – instead of setting the long-term goal of deepening European cooperation to foster European strategic autonomy, and harness relative gains.

(Interview with senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022)

As Franke and Varma have also summarised, “the nature of Hungary’s attitude towards ESA will depend on an assessment of its impact on national sovereignty” (2019, p. 28). Similarly, Etl explained that “those respondents who argued that there is no need for a joint European military force, usually argued that it would affect the question of national sovereignty” (Etl 2020b, p. 8). Thus, even though closer European cooperation and particularly empowering ESA could be an adequate answer to threats and challenges to European security, the political decisions that Hungary has undertaken so far, do not place the EU in a central position as a capable actor. The policy community is of course strongly influenced by the government’s position. Therefore, practitioners are also divided on the issue of ESA. This leads us to conclude that there is no defined “end-state” or level of ambition in pursuing ESA.

It is worth to note that two surveys of public opinion commissioned by the Institute for Strategic and Defence Studies in 2019 and in 2021 gave a snapshot of popular support to European defence cooperation in Hungary.² In 2019, 65.2% of respondents agreed that “There is a need to strengthen joint European military capabilities to allow European states to act without the support of the United States”, while 23.8% did not agree and 11% did not answer. Moreover, 53.4% even agreed that “There is a need to establish a joint European military force in the medium term, even if Hungary would have to delegate governance competences to the European Union”, while 32.2% did not agree and 14.4% did not answer (Etl 2020a, p. 7). That time, these were stunning results, keeping in mind the many conflicts of the Hungarian government and the EU. By 2021, the support has waned: 49.7% supported the strengthening of European military capabilities, while 34.8% did not agree and 15.3% did not answer. Similarly, 43.4% supported the creation of a common European military force if Hungary was to hand over decision-making competences to the EU, while 39.1% opposed it and 17.3% did not answer (Deák et al., 2022, p. 12). In sum, the Hungarian public also appears to be divided on these issues, with decreasing support in the past two years.

It appears to be a sound opinion among all interviewees in 2022 that the security and defence policy establishment sees ESA defined rather narrowly, focusing on defence issues, as “operational autonomy”. This is centred on crisis management in the Southern neighbourhood (the Balkans and the Sahel region) – if required, even without the US and NATO support (Interview with

Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022). In this regard, concerns about the US perception of such a possible shift were also identified. According to one expert,

the European dependence on the US in defence created an entrapment situation as countries will have to choose between US security guarantees without deep economic ties to China, or weaker security cooperation with the US and better relations with China.

(Interview with retired senior HDF officer, 2 February 2022)

Currently, the effects of the Russian aggression in Ukraine have triggered both substantial US security assistance to European allies and NATO partner Ukraine and reinforced European countries' defence modernisation efforts – but global dynamics might weaken this alignment in the future.

Bak et al. highlight that “Hungary is committed to assisting the EU’s crisis management efforts in Europe’s immediate vicinity” (2020, p. 13), in which regard experts also pointed out that this should not exclusively entail EU crisis management but other formats of European defence cooperation or *ad hoc* alliances (Interviews with security policy analyst and senior Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022). Examples of this with Hungarian involvement are the training, advising, assisting, and counterterrorism operations in the wider Sahel region, where Hungary was also set to join Operation Takuba before the abrupt departure of European forces from Mali in February 2022. This was in line with the strong supportive Hungarian position to reforming the EU’s rapid deployment capability in the EU Strategic Compass negotiation process. However, the decision to join Takuba took a long maturing period and eventually came too late, without political gains and materialising practical contribution (Interview with retired senior HDF officer, 2 February 2022). Takuba can also be considered indicative of the size and character of possible Hungarian contribution in the future: supporting a major European country (France, Italy, Germany) as a framework nation in operation with a rather narrow mandate requiring lower-end capabilities and lightly equipped forces. Three experts defined the level of ambition to include peace enforcement operations, which could involve high-end capabilities in the long term (Interviews with senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022; senior Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022, and Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022).

Bak et al. also pointed out that

the Hungarian defence sector is deeply involved in a number of initiatives under the aegis of the CSDP, including Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects, the European Defence Agency (EDA), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), along with the recent establishment of the European Peace Facility (EPF).

(2020, p. 13)

Especially PESCO projects have attracted attention as potential cost-effective break-out points in capability development (Nádudvari & Varga, 2019). Nádudvari, Etl, and Bereczky identified further room for development in the subregional (broader Central European or narrower Visegrad Four) context in 2020, Hungary being the ninth most involved PESCO contributor among EU member states at that time, and the third in the region behind Romania and Poland. Then, Hungary coordinated the EUROSIM project and participated in additional nine projects: four with “enabling and joint”; one with “training and facilities”; two with “land, formations, systems”; and further two with “cyber, C4ISR” profiles. Hungary’s closest PESCO partners were Germany, France, Spain, and Poland (2020, p. 23).

Beyond enhancing crisis management capabilities, there is one more area of which members of the Hungarian establishment, as well as experts and industry representatives, are supportive: strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base – while increasing Hungarian involvement. The decision to procure mostly European-manufactured arms, not US-made, was undertaken deliberately to support European defence industry (Interview with senior Ministry of Defence official, 7 February 2022). These major equipment types are produced by Hungary’s most important partners, also identified in the National Security Strategy, like Germany (Leopard-2A7 main battle tanks, Lynx infantry fighting vehicles, PzH-2000 howitzers), France (Airbus H145M and H225M helicopters), and Turkey (Ejder Yalcin armoured combat vehicles). Through executing the “Zrínyi” armed forces modernisation programme,³ Hungarian defence planners were able to increase Hungarian participation in arms production through joining European arms industry production lines, particularly through cooperation with German (Rheinmetall) and Turkish companies (Nurol Makina), and some acquisitions in the Czech Republic (Aero Vodochody) and Austria (Hirtenberger Defence Systems). The long-term vision is to go beyond arms production and providing related services for the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) and to invest in defence R&D. For example, the Rheinmetall Lynx factory currently developed in Zalaegerszeg is already accompanied by a test-rink for autonomous vehicles, while the Nurol Makina Ejder Yalcin armoured combat vehicles are modified and developed further under the brand “Gidrán”. The known pillars of the Hungarian defence industrial strategy (not a public document itself) include the production and development of armoured vehicles, air assets, small and light arms, mortars and ammunition, lasers and optics, as well as command and communications systems and cyber capabilities (Magyar Nemzet, 2021). These clusters will provide opportunities for extending the network of defence industrial cooperation with European allies, while also creating opportunities for Hungary to enter international arms trade with cutting-edge product portfolio.

Defence industrial cooperation clearly has a “networked” characteristic with allies, and this regionalisation of defence efforts is also present in two Hungarian initiatives aimed at creating larger formations. First, HQ Multinational Division – Centre (in Székesfehérvár, Hungary) was established in 2019 to fill a

command gap between NATO's HQ Multinational Corps Northeast (Szczecin, Poland) and HQ Multinational Division Southeast (Bucharest, Romania). Here, Hungary, Croatia, and Slovakia serve as framework nations, Poland is a participating nation, while Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey have expressed their interest in possibly joining (Honvedelem.hu, 2022). Second, Regional Special Operations Component Command will be a deployable command element provided by special operations forces of Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Austria, fully operational by December 2024 (NATO, 2022). However, these larger formations were not specifically identified as elements supporting ESA, but to make (Central) European defence cooperation more extensive and are affiliated with NATO (Interview with senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022).

As a possible obstacle to the future of such cooperation, some decisions in Hungarian foreign policy and particularly a seemingly more understanding position *vis-à-vis* Russia during the Russo-Ukrainian war have distanced even its closest allies – such as Poland – at a time when defence cooperation became a cornerstone of regional policies more than ever before. Surprisingly, the Hungarian government and threat perceptions still do not identify Russia as a prime threat to European security, nor call for much stronger European defence cooperation in the framework of ESA. NATO and collective defence retained their fundamental role in providing for defence, as seen from Hungary. This is the reason why collective decisions to reinforce NATO defence and deterrence on the eastern flank were supported by Budapest without raising concerns – while economic (primarily energy) policy decisions and sanctions by the EU had been debated.

Regarding the EU–NATO institutional setup, the two are seen as complementary to each other, both recorded in national strategic documents and perceived by policy practitioners. The informal balance of expert opinions appears to settle around “strengthening the European pillar of NATO, and empowering European defence as much as possible in such a way that these capabilities and capacities directly strengthen NATO as well” (Interview with Ministry of Defence senior official, 7 February 2022). Policy papers also reflect this stance: “NATO and especially the collective defence of allies remains the main pillar of Hungarian security and defence policy. The present form of European defence initiatives cannot do more than strengthen NATO’s European pillar” (Nádudvari & Varga, 2019, p. 14). All sources showed that Hungary is strongly committed to avoiding delinking, duplicating, or discriminating between NATO and the EU. While many experts emphasised even closer cooperation and alignment between the two organisations, one of them went even further, calling for a “single set of defence planners” – following upon the reformed defence planning procedures of the EU (Interview with Ministry of Defence senior official, 7 February 2022).

Future practical (or only theoretical) options for reforming existing CSDP procedures, generally, find little openness and positive prospects in Hungary. Extending qualified majority voting to become the standard procedure

or granting further competences to the European Commission will not be supported (Interview with security policy analyst, 4 February 2022). Not to mention the idea of prospectively creating the “EU Security Council” (Interview with foreign policy analyst, 8 February 2011). In these issues, small member states might be Hungary’s allies, whose influence can also be maximised through their voting and veto powers. Even with existing formats and procedures, Hungary was very cautious when they had been in their negotiating and adoption phase. For example, one expert highlighted that Hungary joined European Defence Agency only one year after its establishment as there were concerns about whether the Agency would limit the room for Hungarian national decision-making (Interview with retired senior HDF officer, 2 February 2022).

In sum, as we have seen, elaborate discussions on ESA including its political, operational, and industrial pillars take place among policy practitioners and experts, who are actively involved in defining the Hungarian position. However, they are balancing on a tightrope between a strong sovereigntist national position determined by Viktor Orbán and the need of being an active and (somewhat) constructive member of the EU community.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I argued that the options for strengthening European (defence) cooperation are not addressed in the framework of ESA in Hungary. ESA is missing from strategic documents and political discourse because the strong sovereigntist position of the Orbán Government puts limitations on the Hungarian support to deepening European cooperation since 2010. Experts have more thorough understanding of the concept. ESA is defined rather narrowly by policy practitioners and analysts, who focus more on defence, and more particularly, enhancing European crisis management capabilities. This makes Hungary a reluctant supporter of ESA in many ways, keeping NATO as the cornerstone of European (as well as transatlantic) defence, even though the current position can be characterised as a “reinforced pro-CSDP” stance, with a strong emphasis on NATO–EU cooperation. The aspects that can be identified as of Hungarian interest in security and defence are strengthening European crisis management capabilities in the Southern neighbourhood of Europe and supporting the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base. Especially, the ongoing armed forces modernisation and the development of Hungarian defence industry build on European cooperation, as well as on Central European regionalisation. At the same time, most steps that would require sharing more sovereignty, particularly institutional and decision-making reforms within the EU, have been – and most likely will be – avoided.

Interview list

Senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022 (in person)

Retired Hungarian Defence Forces senior officer, 2 February 2022 (online)

Ministry of Defence official, 2 February 2022 (online)
Former Hungarian ambassador to NATO, 3 February 2022 (online)
Ministry of Defence senior official, 4 February 2022 (online)
Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022 (online)
Security policy analyst, 4 February 2022 (in person)
Ministry of Defence Senior official, 7 February 2022 (online)
Foreign policy analyst, 8 February 2011 (online)
Former senior foreign policy official, 14 February 2022 (online)

Notes

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- 2 Both surveys were representative, including a sample of 1,000 respondents. The first one was conducted in December 2019 (before the first wave of COVID-19 appeared in Hungary), while the second survey was conducted in December 2021 (before the Russian aggression in Ukraine), thus these strategic shocks did not “distort” the results.
- 3 The “Zrínyi” homeland defence and armed forces modernisation program was designed in 2015 as a comprehensive long-term program for modernising all branches of the Hungarian Defence Forces. Its pillars are increasing defence expenditure (to reach 2% of GDP by 2024 the latest), procuring state-of-the-art equipment throughout all branches (as resources allow), and using this opportunity to extend and modernise Hungarian defence industrial capacities with tie-in to European defence industrial production lines. Germany plays a determining role in reaching these goals.

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