

# Operability and Shared Responsibility After New Membership

(First Impressions from East-Central Europe)

\*Pál Dunay

On 12 March 1999 three countries that had been parties to the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) and members of the Soviet-led military alliance based on this Treaty as little as 10 years ago joined the Atlantic Alliance. The first phase of NATO enlargement to the former Warsaw Treaty, and somewhat more broadly to the East, has thus been completed. It is open to question when this is going to be followed by a second wave. The experience of the first three new members from the East will thus be exclusive and decisive for at least some years to come. It is decisive not only in the political life of the three new members, but also of the Alliance. The performance of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, their readiness to play along with other members of the Alliance, to contribute to extra-territorial operations, to modernise their training and equipment may be regarded important when the Alliance is to decide if and when to continue the enlargement process. Consequently, the three new members should live up to their responsibility and recognise that they can do a major disservice to the enlargement process, and more generally to the Alliance if they turn out to be troublesome allies.

This paper argues that the integration of the three new members will affect both "sides". It has been evident for some time that the threat perception, security policy, and military strategy of the three new members have been undergoing a major re-

\*Director of the International Training Course at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy

arrangement, both during the phase of preparation for membership and since their accession. It could be less evident that the Atlantic Alliance will not be left unaffected by, presumably only, the first wave of eastern enlargement. I think this to be correct despite the probably wide-spread assumption that the mutual influence between the three “new” and the 16 “old” member-States will be asymmetric. The 16 “old” member-State will most probably exert a greater influence on the three than the other way round.

The accession process has remained for most part political. Military-technical considerations played no role in an early phase of the process and a limited one afterwards. Consequently, the Atlantic Alliance has remained with the task of integrating the three countries militarily largely following accession. This seems to be correct in spite of the major contribution of Partnership for Peace and the participation in the IFOR/SFOR operation to military adaptation during the Kosovo conflict. In spite of this one can state that the three do not live up to NATO standards militarily, though, of course the expectations presented by different members are not identical. The U.S. is certainly more demanding than some smaller European member countries.

One could go further and state that the three new members represent a “new generation” of military-technology in NATO not possessed by any other member-state in the Alliance. This is the equipment of the Warsaw Treaty made in the Soviet Union or under Soviet licence. This statement is certainly correct. It would be necessary, however to pay attention to the fact that several members of the Alliance were not entirely compatible with NATO standards for a long period of time after accession. (e.g. Germany until 1967, Denmark until 1972.) Thus the question is not whether the new members are compatible now. It is whether they make steady and sufficiently strong efforts to achieve compatibility in key areas soon or they don't. In order to make the three countries eligible for membership the requirements were lowered to minimum compatibility in certain key areas. It is for a fact that not even those have been fully met.

The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland can be regarded as countries with similar characteristic features, which is true insofar as all the three countries are: 1) located in East-Central Europe; 2) new democracies; 3) former members of the WTO; and 4) it was their strong will and efforts that was rewarded by membership in NATO. If one takes a close look to this list it is easy to conclude that the common features are either of very general nature or they are related to the past. There are some important common politico-military aspects of the three countries. None of them is a great power or even a large country. *Without exception none of them has pursued a policy taker –rather than a policy maker– role in their international affairs since the end of the Cold War.* Furthermore, their defence sectors (and defence budgets) were in steady decline during the larger part of the last decade. This trend was halted in 1997 or in 1998 and was promised to be reversed during the accession talks. Each of the three has dated military equipment, and joined NATO with overwhelmingly Warsaw Treaty (Soviet, or Soviet-licensed) armaments and equipment.

There are major differences among the three as well. They have been largely overshadowed by the commonalities and the fairly little knowledge of the specificities of the countries of the region in the West. If one takes a closer look at the Western attitude toward East-Central Europe the conclusion can be drawn that the knowledge of the former has developed gradually throughout the 1990s. We have reached a phase when not only experts and analysts can differentiate between e.g. Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest and Sofia, but business circles and Western political establishments can do so as well.

In the beginning of the 1990s it was enough to state that Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland were all members of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, Soviet troops were stationed on their territory and the political control of the armed forces was carried out by the Communist Party. In the late 1990s (now 2000) it is necessary to know why the role and prestige of the armed forces in the societies of the three new members is different. It is furthermore important to know, in light of the different standings of the militaries, what level of professional expertise can be expected to develop in defence matters and to what extent can sacrifices be expected to be made and legitimised in the society.

It is the starting point of the paper that the three new members have become different in nearly every aspect of their security and defence and thus it is for the most part impossible to draw major general conclusions for the future of their NATO contribution beyond a certain point of generality. The relevant differences are as follows: First, the size of the countries. Poland claims to be a middle power whereas the Czech Republic and Hungary are significantly smaller. The latter two are of similar size and population. Second, their geo-strategic location. Poland is the second member of the Atlantic Alliance, having a (661 km-s) long land border with Russia and another long one with Russia “proxy” Belarus. Hungary is neighbouring the CIS area (Ukraine) and more importantly three former Yugoslav republics, including (as the only NATO member-country) Serbia. The Czech Republic, for the first time in its history, has an enviable location, surrounded by allies (Poland and Germany) and friends (Austria and Slovakia). It is a lower common denominator that the three countries are the eastern-most members of the Atlantic Alliance, “front-line states” which are of the view that the defence of their national territory matters.

Third, the location has major repercussions for the threat perception of the three countries. Whereas the Czech Republic is in a threat-free environment, the other two perceive some threat. Traditionally, Hungary has underestimated the military threat, whereas Poland, for historical reasons, has tended to overestimate it. Fourth, they have different military legacies. In the Czech Republic and Hungary there is a deep-rooted disbelief in the possibility of national self-defence. The Polish military heritage makes it easier to legitimise major defence efforts than the Czech and the Hungarian ones.

Fifth, the Czech Republic is unique in the sense that the army of that country is the only one from among the three that never ruled the country in its entire history<sup>1</sup>. Sixth, the three countries had different arms industries and exports. Czechoslovakia used to produce

and export armaments on a large scale (the more sophisticated part of its production base was inherited by the Czech Republic). Poland had a comparatively smaller, though still significant, industry. Hungary's was insignificant and specialised in the Warsaw Treaty /bridging equipment and radio transmitters. Lately it has largely been reduced to supplying the country's defence forces with uniforms and ammunition. Thus its military companies were wound up or privatised when the military production terminated. Seventh, the three countries differed in the way their transition took place in the defence sector. Due to the nature of the Czechoslovak Communist regime between 1968 and 1989 and to the subsequent "enlightenment" early efforts were made to create a new military leadership, and thus some "human compatibility" with NATO. In the other two countries the change has been hesitant due to the more gradual transition. In Poland a certain breakthrough was achieved in 1996, whereas a major defence reform has recently started in Hungary, promised to be continued.

## THREAT PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

Ever since the three new NATO members left the Warsaw Treaty a decade ago their declared threat perceptions –and the military strategies based on it– have followed a similar pattern. The East-West confrontation was replaced by uncertainty as the main source of threat and thus a highly ambiguous image of an enemy developed for countries of the region. Moreover, the security perception of the countries of East-Central Europe, including the three new members of NATO, deteriorated during the first years of the post-Cold War era. These comparatively small countries, exposed to new and unknown dangers, hot wars instead of a cold one, felt e.g. "more insecure in 1994 than they did in 1989"<sup>2</sup>. It was more or less clear that countries of the region were of the view there was no individual (i.e. non-collective) remedy for their diminished security. With NATO membership this remedy has been provided and now each feel significantly more secure than here-to-fore.

On the one hand, the above-mentioned uncertainty carried the advantage of making nearly any strategic rearrangement possible and provided for the foundation of the necessary flexibility in military matters. On the other, it carried the danger that in light of other priorities no particular attention would be paid to defence matters, with no resources being allocated to maintain (or establish) modern armed forces.

The situation was aggravated by subjective factors. Namely, in light of the uncertainty of the danger in carrying out experiments in the defence sector and also in regards the disrespect towards the autonomy of the military profession, which was further exacerbated by the arbitrary reference to the "civilian control of the armed forces", very often meaning direct interference of the political leadership in strictly military matters. Civilian defence

ministers were understandably unable to cope with complex military matters and have only exceptionally realised that there is only one way to break the vicious circle: to separate the different functions and respect the autonomy of military authorities.

There is another side of the coin, however. Namely, the Warsaw Treaty was a highly centralised organisation also in military terms. In coalition warfare, the decisions were in the hands of the “lead nation” of the Warsaw Treaty. In spite of the training received by many Czech, Polish and Hungarian generals in Soviet general staff academies, the ultimate decisions on the strategic level remained in Moscow’s domain. It remained for the commanders of the smaller Warsaw Treaty countries to integrate their troops on the operational level with Soviet-led forces<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, one has serious doubts whether anyone in any of the three current new NATO members had relevant strategic knowledge when the Warsaw Treaty came to an end<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, throughout the 1990s one has experienced a certain helplessness in East-Central Europe as far as the military component of security was concerned. The laymen’s positions on both sides (defence-political and military) of the decision-making process resulted in brinkmanship. Hasty military reform plans were not followed by implementation because over-politicised decisions could not respect the military life-cycle. The autonomy of the military was not respected by governments. Had it been respected the outcome would not have been different as politics was not in the position to allocate the necessary resources to back decisions. In the previous paragraphs I tried to prove that the fault-line in defence policy was not only the reflection of an objective situation, but of subjective factors as well. Surprisingly, these have had some positive repercussions; for it is easier to carry out strategic integration in the absence of a national security strategy based on in-depth consideration of national interests that would contradict upcoming commitments in the Alliance. The ease with which the NATO integration of military thinking of the three countries takes place is not only due to the fact that the three countries are policy takers internationally; rather it is also due to the severe imbalance between the existence of relevant strategic knowledge in the Alliance and some of its leading member States, most notably the United States, on the one hand, and the lack thereof in the three new member-states, on the other. Those from the new member States who have acquired relevant strategic knowledge after the end of the East-West conflict went through training at Western military academies and were thus in most cases trained in the spirit of Alliance strategy.

It has been emphasised many times that to develop civilian expertise in defence matters is a long and painstaking process in countries where it was non-existent for decades. It is seldom mentioned, however, that in countries where the theoretical basis for defence –and the military practices that outgrow from it– had to go through fundamental change in a relatively short time period, the relevant professional military expertise may stay at a low level for a long time. It seems that the military professionals in East-Central Europe were in similarly deep trouble as their civilian counterparts during the 1990s. Under the conditions

mentioned above the strategic adaptation of those countries that became members of the Atlantic Alliance in March 1999 could not have started with the chance of success without a major external force that could provide the necessary inducement and orientation.

It is open to question whether the three new members of NATO will represent certain unique strategic features in the Alliance framework. It is necessary to refer once again to the different geo-strategic location of the three countries in this respect, where it has to be emphasised that in light of the existence of the common strategy of the Alliance, national strategic peculiarities may remain tacit. In politico-strategic terms one has reason to assume that at least Poland and Hungary will attribute greater significance to the defence of national territory than many other member-States. This might result in some disagreement between some of the new members and the United States, which currently appears as champion of giving priority to power projection and the reduction in the importance of defending territory. This would be deplorable as the new members, at least as far as the two countries mentioned above, inasmuch as they have a solid Atlantic emphasis in their security policy. Suffice it is to refer to a Polish and a Hungarian document in this respect. The former states that "All arrangements concerning European Security and Defence Policy ... should reinforce the transatlantic link and the US presence in Europe and thereby stability and security on the continent"<sup>5</sup>. The Hungarian paper does not differ by much: "NATO's collective defence commitment constitutes the key guarantee for Hungary's security. ... The continued commitment to a firm transatlantic relationship and the strategic co-operation between NATO and the European Union are the prerequisites of ... effective European crisis prevention"<sup>6</sup>. In light of the recent NATO membership of the three East-Central European States and their aspiration to gain EU membership in the years to come it is in the best interest of these countries to consolidate the second pillar of the EU and establish European defence in close cooperation with the U.S. and without conflict between the two.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE MILITARY CAPABILITIES OF THE ALLIANCE - NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

While it is easy to understand how NATO could contribute to the security of the three countries it is less evident whether the Alliance has become "better off" with eastern enlargement. Politically, arguably it has. The (first) eastern enlargement sends the message that the East-West division can be overcome and offers the prospect of membership to other eligible countries, thus carrying an important message. It can also be argued that enlargement further consolidates stability in the region.

In military-strategic terms, the enlargement is a mixed blessing, which can be assessed differently depending upon the starting point. On the one hand, it can be seen as extending the area of responsibility of the Alliance to countries that may be exposed to some security challenges, i.e. to areas where it eventually might be necessary to fulfil the promise of collective defence. If one accepts this, enlargement can be regarded as a net loss. On the other hand, however, one can conclude that since 12 March 1999 the security guarantee has been extended to countries, which de facto belonged to NATO's area of responsibility earlier as well. If one shares the latter view, the assessment is to the opposite, enlargement is certainly not a net loss. This simplified picture, however, does not give any idea about the contribution the three new members can make to the Alliance.

If one accepts that the three new members' NATO contribution in the future is dependent upon a major modernisation of their armed forces it certainly affects their NATO perception how this requirement is presented to them and to what extent they are willing to meet it. The three new members are relatively poor countries, both as far as their gross economic output and their per capita GDP are concerned. Can the three finance the necessary modernisation and what do they have to do? These were the two questions dominating the pre-accession discussions.

There is no need to enter into details concerning different estimates about the costs of enlargement, seeing as that each of the four studies prepared in 1996 and 1997 seemed to have been manipulated or, to put it differently, each had started out from certain assumptions that have since proved unfounded. The first two, those of the RAND Corporation and of the Congressional Budget Office considered full compatibility of the new members as an early objective. Furthermore, if both made their calculations based on traditional military threats, one would be tempted to say they inflated the perceived threat. And even though the calculated costs were fairly high for the members of the Alliance, old and new, these studies might have been willing to indicate that the costs were unaffordable. They did not, though.

When enlargement became a widely shared objective of the Alliance and the U.S. administration two further studies came to light. The State Department concluded that direct enlargement costs would be 700-900 million USD, or 9-12 billion USD totally for the period between 1997-2009, the date by which new members were "anticipated to have reached a mature capability"<sup>7</sup>. In the autumn of 1997 the Alliance also published its own report that went further down with the estimates, stating that the overall cost of enlargement for the 16 members would be approximately 1.3-1.5 billion USD. Perhaps the impression is that the numbers were incredibly low in order not to cause any problems to any one of those sixteen States that still had to ratify the accession protocols with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. One can only guess how the several dozens of billions of USD estimated by some U.S. institutions were reduced to less than 1.5 billion. There is neither a single nor a simple answer to the

question, but it has to be noted that a good portion of the costs have since been reallocated and will have to be borne by the new members themselves. As the costs on the new members have not grown exponentially, this explanation could not cover the difference of estimates fully; there was another major difference in the calculation method. Namely, the NATO estimate was based on extensive evaluation visits in the three countries, which extended beyond interviews with the military leadership. Visits took place at major military installations, including airfields, where the capacity to host NATO reinforcements in case of necessity was thoroughly analysed. As one NATO official involved in the drafting of the document put it: one of the reasons why the estimated cost of enlargement was so low was that NATO, in light of field experience, did not go for “gold-plated solutions” but for minimum compatibility.

As the major portion of enlargement costs are to be covered by the new members the Alliance has given priority to the steady, transparent and predictable increase of the defence budgets of the three countries. These took commitments to increase their defence budgets by a certain percentage point of their GDP in the coming years in order to reach the NATO average. There is a lot to catch up with for two reasons: defence allocations during the existence of the Warsaw Treaty were used to maintain an antiquated military structure; and after the end of the East-West conflict the defence budgets had been declining steadily until the late 1990s in each country.

According to the latest data available from among the 19 members of the Alliance, the defence budgets of the Czech Republic and Hungary increased the most significantly. In comparison with the previous year, the defence budgets of the Czech Republic increased by 8.3, Hungary by 6.7 and Poland by 2.1 per cent in real terms in 1999. A problem for the future is that according to plans the new member states will increase their military allocations on the basis of an increasing GDP. This, as the example of the Czech Republic has demonstrated in the past few years, is not a foregone conclusion<sup>8</sup>.

One should raise the question whether this is the most effective way to increase the defence efforts of the new members. This approach, which focuses on the fiscal aspect of the compatibility of the new members' armed forces with NATO standards, has been present since the beginning of the enlargement process and has proved at least partially to be a fault-line. Except for selected areas where it is important to achieve minimum compatibility, the need to increase the defence budget has not been specific enough and has not contributed to the achievement of certain force goals, goal requirements which appeared fairly late in the accession preparation process. The Atlantic Alliance and some of its leading member states did not understand that the increase of military allocations did not automatically guarantee that the money would be spent well and thus be reflected in an improvement of military capabilities. An ineffective military structure, not to mention an incompetent or corrupt military leadership, may easily waste the increasing military allocations. On the other hand, the increased resources may also be used to ease

accumulated social tensions in the military<sup>9</sup>. The lesson one can draw from the experience of the first eastern enlargement of NATO is that it is necessary to agree upon concrete force goals much earlier in the accession process in the future.

The Military Committee of the Alliance directed SHAPE (in co-operation with SACLANC) to prepare a study on the military requirements of an enlarged NATO. The Military Committee directed SHAPE to focus the study on enlargement requirements eligible for common NATO funding in four areas: command, control and communication (C3) capabilities, necessary integrated air defence and associated air command and control, reinforcement infrastructure, training and exercises. Though it is impossible here to enter into details on every aspect of these, it has to be noted that the so-called Bi-MNC Requirements Study spelled out that the C3 requirements were crucial and had to be met as soon as possible. The initial focus was on linking NATO headquarters and “invitees” headquarters as integration into the Integrated Air Defence System is mandatory. Upon accession the invited nations’ Air Sovereignty Operations Centres (ASOCs) had to be linked with NATO air command and control. After accession, additional command and control upgrades were necessary to further integrate new members into the air defence system of NATO and, ultimately, into the emerging Air Command and Control System of the Alliance. The study concluded that the combined force levels of the 16 and the invited members were adequate to cope with the assumed threat. Infrastructure required for transport of land reinforcements in the invited countries was also found adequate, whereas reinforcement air-bases were found to require improvements to meet NATO standards. It was clear that due to the differences in interoperability in command and staff procedures, considerable effort would be needed to train, exercise, and assess the new members’ capabilities in these areas.

A lot has happened ever since the three countries have been invited to negotiate NATO membership. As the results of adaptation have become an “in-house matter” after the accession of the three countries fairly little is known about the level of compatibility achieved. It may be illustrative, however, that during the Kosovo operation that started 12 days after accession, the Hungarian airspace was still patrolled by the aircraft of other NATO countries, and not by the Hungarian air force because the Identity Friends-or-Foe (IFF) system was not NATO compatible and the presence of Hungarian planes in the country’s (own) airspace would have created problems for the operation. If this information is correct, then at least in one area minimum compatibility was not achieved by accession<sup>10</sup>. It is not known, however, whether the IFF incompatibility was the real reason. Possibly not even the air-wing of MiG-29s –of which 27 pieces are still in the arsenal, the most modern planes of Hungary– could have carried out the patrolling function<sup>11</sup>.

Modernisation of the arsenal is another requirement in order to meet the technical interoperability with NATO forces, which should be done by either upgrading existing weapon systems or procuring new ones from abroad. There is a lot to do in this area.

For some reasons particular attention has been paid to the procurement of multipurpose aircraft. This has been the case despite there being many other areas where major procurement could occur ranging from air transport to helicopters and others. All three countries have slightly different opinions concerning their domestic industrial potential and financial constraints. Poland, for example, has contemplated building its own aircraft factory or assembly line of Russian Su-39 and buying over 100 modern Western multipurpose planes like F/A-18 Hornet, F-16 Falcon, Mirage 2000 or JAS-39 Grippen. The Czech Republic has decided to produce its own light combat aircraft L-159 (in cooperation with Boeing) to replace old Russian Mig-21 and Mig-23s (temporarily) and to buy from the same range of Western aircraft like Poland later. Hungary has considered buying 30 or so new Western aircraft to modernise its air defence in the much the same way as the Czechs and the Poles. It would be in the best interest of all three countries to buy the aircraft together from the same source in order to minimise the costs and then make maintenance and operation cheaper. For some reasons, though, perhaps because of different national interests, it seems common procurement is not going to take place. The options have gradually narrowed down. For technical (high maintenance costs, high level of fuel consumption) and political reason (the uncertainties of the market), as well as for the non-compatibility of Russian equipment, it is highly unlikely that any of the new member-states would buy Russian made planes. France, too, did not offer its most modern aircraft for sale to the new members: for this, the French aircraft may also be out of the race. The JAS-39 seems to be an attractive option, particularly if one takes into account the flexible financial arrangement offered, but it has not been exported widely; plus the United States, whenever the procurement becomes topical, in all likelihood will use its persuasiveness to convince the new members to “buy American”<sup>12</sup>.

All the three new member states understand the importance of intellectual interoperability with NATO. This includes not only the way of thinking but also language training and the implementation of operational command procedures as the basis of cooperation between armed forces. It looks now that the most difficult part of intellectual interoperability will not be the command of the English language. There is in each country a number of officers whose knowledge is reasonably good, which may be not worse than some other member State's. Rather the most demanding element seems the application of standing operating procedures (SOPs). Already there is a number of officers who work at different NATO headquarters and the preparation of others is a priority of each MOD<sup>13</sup>, but it is an open question how their knowledge will be used after their return from the respective NATO commands. The problem of preparing NCO personnel for positions may be more severe.

Though the three countries have certainly set out to reach compatibility with NATO standards, their advance has been hesitant and uneven in certain critical areas. As one might expect Poland has taken the lead in its efforts based on its security concerns, its

high GDP growth rate and broader social support for defence. The Czech Republic, particularly by a major sudden increase of its defence budget, has made efforts to upgrade its defence. This has been crippled, however, by slow economic growth since 1997 and the conveniently threat-free atmosphere that does not provide for extensive support of defence efforts in the society. Hungary represents a very interesting case. In spite of its geo-strategic location, which places it adjacent to any conflict in the post-Yugoslav space, it has been lagging behind in meeting each target goal. The defence budget has started to increase but due to the insufficient accomplishments of military reform it has not contributed to the fulfilment of force goals. This insufficiency is due to a number of factors ranging from the policy of the government and the incompetence of the leadership of the Ministry of Defence to the personal conflicts diverting valuable time and energy away from military reform. The current government upon its inception of power in the summer of 1998 declared NATO accession a “done deal”. It did not realise that though accession had been completed as a diplomatic task, the military implementation was just about to begin and would require the concentration of resources, human and material alike. As part of a political deal, the two top level jobs in the Defence Ministry were filled by people who have so far demonstrated utter incompetence. Furthermore, instead of focusing on the strategic review, the energies of some competent leaders of the ministry have been sapped by personal rivalries and the regulation of such marginal issues as the place of the chief of staff in the (re)integrated defence ministry’s hierarchy. One hopes that sooner or later Hungary will live up to its responsibility and be a far more performing member of the Alliance than it is nowadays.

If one assumes that the contribution of the three new members to the performance of the Alliance as far as their military competence, human compatibility and armaments are concerned has been marginal at best the question emerges: Is there any contribution that the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland can make? The answer is conditionally in the affirmative. The three countries have been contributing both before and after accession to different peace operations including Desert Storm, IFOR/SFOR, the Kosovo operation and KFOR. While the military significance of the contributions may be belittled, it is important to state that the success of such operations is often dependent on the involvement of several countries, large and small. It is also important to note that all the three countries “inherited large training facilities from the Cold War period, which have already won great favour with NATO troops. This is an important asset, given the tighter political and environmental constraints some Allies are facing in using their domestic facilities.<sup>147</sup>” Last but not least, Hungary has also contributed to the success of peace settlements in the post-Yugoslav area, offering its airspace for monitoring by AWACS planes and, later, hosting IFOR and SFOR troops prior to their deployment to Bosnia and Herzegovina. One can conclude that, even though the contribution of the three is primarily of political and logistical nature at present, their contributions to non-Article 5 operations and the

readiness to offer their sovereign territory for such missions demonstrated high levels of commitment even before accession. Whether the adaptation process of the three countries beyond minimum compatibility will be sufficiently successful remains to be seen. This process is underway, though the result remains inconclusive for the time being.

## LESSONS FROM AN OPERATION

On 12 March 1999 three countries joined NATO. Less than two weeks later the Alliance was at war. The three countries had to share the responsibility with the other members without having the multiyear experience in the Alliance. I do not intend to deal with the general conclusions one can draw from the Kosovo operation for the functioning of the current international system or for the evolution of international law. I confine myself to what one can learn concerning the contribution of the three new members. The conclusions may be divided into two parts: General ones applicable to all three new member States and ones that are specific to one country or the other, among which are the conclusions relevant to Hungary. Hungary had a unique role during the conflict as member of the Alliance. It has a long land border with Serbia where a more than 300,000 ethnic Hungarian minority lives. Both features are unique and of utmost relevance in the Alliance.

The following general conclusions can be drawn. The Alliance with 19 members functioned just as smoothly as it would have with 16 or less countries<sup>15</sup>. The three new members understood their role in the operation and were ready to play a policy taker role. They were playing along with other members of the Alliance in spite of the severe conceptual shortcomings of the operation<sup>16</sup>. With one exception the three did not take the diplomatic initiative and let other players (the U.S., the EU and Russia) make attempts to solve the conflict. All three kept low profiles and it was apparent they were going through a NATO “crash course” in practice. They demonstrated resolve to live up to the responsibility expected from members of the Alliance without challenging consensus.

In light of Hungary’s special interests the issue of the Kosovo air campaign appeared on different levels of the country’s agenda. When making an attempt to contemplate the country’s role it is impossible to draw any conclusion without paying attention to three levels simultaneously. Though it would be tempting to analyse the position of the government exclusively, this would not indicate the complexity of the Kosovo operation for Hungary. It is therefore also necessary to follow Hungary’s attitude as a new member of the Alliance that gained membership after several years of determined effort to join NATO. One must not ignore the domestic political aspects as a third level of analysis either<sup>17</sup>.

On the government level Hungary proved to be a loyal and trustworthy NATO ally. From the very beginning it did not hesitate to take decisions necessary to support the operation to the maximum extent. The very day the operation started the Hungarian Parliament passed a resolution that permitted NATO aircraft not only to use the airspace of the country but to use the airfields and their service facilities by NATO reconnaissance, fighter and transport planes as well as helicopters<sup>18</sup>, permission which was taken advantage of quite extensively by the Alliance. Several times it was emphasised that NATO did not expect Hungary's direct involvement in the operation<sup>19</sup>. There was, of course, huge interest whether the operation would continue with the use of ground forces. The Prime Minister denied that such an option was ever considered, whereas the minister of defence was of the view that consideration was indeed given to launching the offensive from Macedonia (and thus not from Hungary)<sup>20</sup>. The geographical question was particularly sensitive for a number of reasons; primarily, as the terrain in the north of Serbia (from the direction of Hungary) would have been more conducive for the launching of a land offensive than from any other conceivable direction.

Hungary was interested in preventing installations in Vojvodina, which is more than 15 per cent inhabited by ethnic Hungarians, from being targeted. The Alliance also took into consideration the specific character of some parts of Yugoslavia, practising self-constraint in Montenegro as it had a pro-Western government and a constitutional status that distinguished it from Serbia. Even though the Alliance noticed the Hungarian concern related to Vojvodina, it was not in the position to exclude the region from the target list. As was mentioned by NATO sources: One of the objectives of the NATO operation is "to prevent Belgrade's military machine to feel safe anywhere in its territory"<sup>21</sup>.

Hungary's resolve as a new ally was tested on a number of occasions. When Russia and Belarus sent humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia in April the trucks were stopped on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border. The Hungarian authorities concluded that there were several items in the trucks whose supply would be in violation of the UN embargo<sup>22</sup>. In the end, the embargoed products were returned to Ukraine (and further to Russia). The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took the commitment to provide Russia with a list outlining transit requirements to Yugoslavia. The reference to the UN embargo, and not to the ongoing NATO operation, proved particularly useful as it provided solid legal ground<sup>23</sup>.

In sum, a realist analysis of the Hungarian attitude during the Kosovo operation could conclude that the Hungarian government cooperated at a high level with its new allies and was ready to make sacrifices in spite of its difficult situation and somewhat controversial interests in the conflict. The positive assessment during the Kosovo operation does not, however, extend to the post-conflict phase. Already during the war the Hungarian conservative government was not strong enough to take a tough stance

against those extremist forces that thought it was time to consider some vaguely formulated territorial revision. It took Prime Minister Orbán two months to disassociate himself from those extremist circles in an interview with *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*<sup>24</sup>. In July 1999 the Hungarian Prime Minister found the opportunity to raise the issue of autonomy for ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina in spite of the repeated requests of his negotiating partner not to do so, the context being that, in light of the sacrifices the Hungarian community had to make during the air campaign against Yugoslavia, the community “deserves” autonomy. Informally, this request was declared a “disproportionate demand”. Six weeks later in a radio interview the Prime Minister said it was useless “for the government to sharply dissociate itself from the HJLP’s<sup>25</sup> efforts for border revision”, adding that the government should be tackling more important questions. Border revisions and other HJLP issues do not belong to these questions, he said<sup>26</sup>. It remains to be seen whether this relatively weak stance on a major foreign affairs issue is based on a temporary misperception or is it a long term deviation from a reasonable foreign policy based on consensus.

## CONCLUSION

The three new members of the Atlantic Alliance, while not being adequately prepared militarily upon accession, have demonstrated high levels of loyalty ever since, being ready to make certain sacrifices in the service of common goals both before and after accession. This was demonstrated particularly clearly during several peace support operations before accession and during the Kosovo campaign afterwards.

NATO should use the experience from the first wave of eastern enlargement when preparing for the integration of other States from the same region. This is particularly important when fiscal priorities are turned into force goals. In light of the long military procurement life-cycle it is premature to tell whether the three countries are on the right track as far as technical and human compatibility. No doubt, there are both encouraging and discouraging signs. Bearing in mind the complex system of priorities in front of each government of East Central Europe some pressure may be necessary in order to show the direction each should take. In this respect the helpful orientation should come from those NATO member countries that have accumulated the necessary experience and the sufficient empathy to understand the problems of the countries in transition.

## Notes

1. Daniel N. Nelson, Civil Armies, Civil Societies, and NATO Enlargement, *Armed Forces and Society*, vol. 25, no. 1, Fall 1998, p. 139.
2. Jeffrey Simon, Central European Security, 1994: Partnership for Peace (PFP), *INSS Strategic Forum*, no. 1, 1994, p. 1. (The exception in this respect was the Czech Republic where, following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, and thus the "move" of the country to the West the population felt more secure than before.)
3. This point is not entirely correct as some doubts may be raised concerning the subordination of Romanian forces to Warsaw Treaty command. It is certainly correct as far as the three new NATO members, however.
4. This point can be supported by personal impression. Whenever one met ranking military people from the three countries during the 1990s and started to systematically investigate the strategic position they found tenable it was striking to notice how little orientation the military could provide. More often than not generals tended to speak about security (and not defence) policy.
5. Polish position on the development of European security and defence policy. Manuscript, November 1999, p. 1.
6. Hungary's position on European security and defence. Manuscript, November 1999, p. 1.
7. Report to the Congress on the Enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization: Rationale, Benefits, Costs and Implications. The executive summary is reprinted in August Pradetto/Fouzieh Melanie Alamir (eds.), *Die Debatte über die Kosten der NATO-Osterweiterung*, 1998. Nomos Verlag, Baden-Baden, pp. 272-275.
8. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to enter into details on the delicate relationship between the increase of defence appropriations on the one hand, and the reduction of budget deficit in order to meet one of the Maastricht criteria of the EU on the other.
9. It is worthy of mention that the Hungarian defence minister announced in December 1999 that in the year 2000 the living and working conditions of servicemen will significantly improve. It is open to question whether such, undeniably necessary, improvement will not take place at the expense of urgently needed modernisation of the military structure or the acquisition of modern armaments and equipment. See: Haderő átalakítás 2000-től: javulhatnak a katonák élet- és munkakörülményei /Reform of the defence forces from the year 2000: The living and working conditions of the soldiers may improve/, <http://www.mti.hu>, 29 December 1999.
10. This practice has continued since the end of the Kosovo operation. See Zord Gábor, NATO-örjárat a magyar égen: Szövetséges gépek a légtérben /NATO-patrol in Hungarian sky: Allied planes in the airspace/, *Napi Magyarország*, 21 December 1999. See M.P., Repülőtender csak 2008-ban /Aircraft tender in 2008 only?/, *Népszabadság*, 13 October 1999.
11. Due to the shortage of spare parts the MiG 29s are "cannibalised" in order at least some of them could fly. For the sake of accuracy one has to mention that this practice is not unknown in other NATO countries either.

## Operability and Shared Responsibility After New Membership

12. The issue of purchasing modern multipurpose aircraft may not be particularly topical bearing in mind the prohibitive costs. It is not a coincidence that Hungary concluded one wing is sufficient and may postpone the procurement of new planes until 2008. It is open to question whether other NATO states will find this an adequate solution.
13. It was interesting to see at least one of the three countries requesting more positions in international staffs than offered during the accession talks and when reaching the objective it is now apparently not able to fill in the posts.
14. Sebestyén L. Gorka, NATO After Enlargement: Is the Alliance Better Off? *NATO Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, Autumn 1999, p. 34.
15. In a broader framework one should give serious consideration to the issue what was the precondition of this "smooth functioning". Was it the genuine unity of the 19-member countries throughout the operation that provided for this? Or was it the dominance of one member-State that provided for the necessary unity?
16. It is suffice to remind that the Alliance had no appropriate entry strategy as further steps of escalation beyond the air campaign were excluded in advance. There was no plan what to do in case Milosevic did not accept the Rambouillet plan after a few days of air campaign. Last, but not least, there was no exit strategy either. There was no idea about the future status of Kosovo, particularly in relation with Serbia in the event there was no leadership change in Belgrade following the military operation.
17. In light of the marginal importance of this aspect for the current study the domestic political debates surrounding the role of Hungary during the Kosovo campaign will have to remain out of consideration.
18. The Hungarian legislative had already approved the use of the country's airspace by NATO planes in the autumn of 1998. The resolution on 25 March was passed by 255 votes in favour, with 12 against and 8 abstentions. The votes against were cast by the MPs of the extreme right MIEP (Party of Hungarian Justice and Life). A parlament döntött: a NATO használhatja a magyar reptereket /The Parliament decided: NATO can use the Hungarian airfields/, *Népszabadság*, 26 March 1999, p. 1.
19. This was emphasised by the prime minister in his statement in the Parliament on 12 April 1999. A miniszterelnök üdvözölte a pártok egységét /The prime minister welcomed the unity of the parties/, *Magyar Hírlap*, 13 April 1999, p. 3.
20. A pártok támogatják a NATO-akciót /The parties support the NATO action/, *Népszabadság*, 31 March 1999, pp. 1 and 3.
21. Gy.Z., NATO-légicsapás érte Szabadkát /NATO air strike reached Subotica/, *Magyar Hírlap*, 17 April 1999, p. 1.
22. Among the suspected items there was approximately 57000 litres of fuel and some armoured trucks. The Russian authorities harshly criticised Hungary and the Russian minister of emergency situations Mr. Shoygu had to pay a visit to Budapest to solve the problem.
23. Contrary to the operation proper that, in the absence of a UN Security Council (or OSCE) mandate, was based on a shaky ground.

24. It is interesting and probably not a coincidence that the prime minister distanced himself in front of a foreign, and not a domestic, audience. A summary of the interview is available (in Hungarian) on the web-site of the prime minister. See <http://www.meh.hu>
25. Hungarian Justice and Life Party.
26. Orban on Vojvodina Hungarians in the Hungarian Radio (25.08.1999). <http://www.meh.hu> (available in English).