

# REPORT

## New Transatlanticism in Central Europe: The V4 and NATO in Question

Thursday, June 7<sup>th</sup> 2018, 17:00 – 19:00

The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Brussels Office

- **The event took place at the German Marshall Fund of the US Brussels Office, Rue de la Loi 155, 1040, Brussels on Thursday June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018. With the 2018 NATO Summit bringing between 15 and 20 years of NATO membership for the Visegrad Four countries, the unique opportunity to understand what the Alliance has brought to these countries and how it continues to be perceived today was presented.**
- **V4 countries remain committed to long-term deterrence measures toward Russia but have had lackluster levels of defense spending and commitment in other frameworks – the EU, for example. This event explored the expectations of Central European countries from the next NATO Summit and beyond. The conference was co-organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Think Visegrad platform.**

The event was moderated by **Bruno Lété**, (Senior Fellow for Security and Defence Policy, The German Marshall Fund of the United States). The moderator started by presenting the main points to be discussed regarding the relationship between the NATO and countries in Central Europe, the overall transatlantic relationship and the role of the US in such relations. His questions included: Can we still relate to the US in matters of security, differences within European states etc.

**Tomáš Nagy**, (Research Fellow, GLOBSEC Policy Institute, GPI) was the first speaker of the event, who brought forward the Slovak positions on transatlantic relations. He highlighted the fact that threats differ in each country as exemplified with the different experiences of the

migration crisis but stated that threats from the East take up the discourse of Visegrad countries. He also presented the Central Eastern mentality regarding defence spending, as it seems illogical to spend 2% of the GDP when people and regions still struggle with other issues. Furthermore, it will take a couple more years to reach that level of defence spending as it is still a big challenge, however he predicts that 1.6% will be reached by 2020. Regarding the upcoming Summit and overall relations with the US, he expressed that Slovakia is supportive in general and willing to adapt and evolve, however, nothing is sure about the upcoming summit, as with Trump representing the US all we can do is wait for their approach to NATO.



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**Daniel Bartha**, (Director, Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy CEID), continued the discussion by presenting the Hungarian point of view. He said that although the V4 is example of regional integration, there's not much unity regarding threats as the latter differ in each country. He also highlighted that Hungary is attentive to threats from the East but also the South (however, he argued such threats are currently less visible). He talked about the focus of the V4 on CSDP missions rather than NATO ones. This, he exemplified with their active participation on EU battlegroups and other projects of the kind, which can increase protection and deepen cooperation within the EU. Concerning the NATO summit, he stated that Hungary has always been under 1% of GDP spending for defence but recently it has aimed to increase this budget and he predicts that the 2% will be feasible in the near future.

**Elisabeth Braw**, (Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council) brought forward issues with participation by arguing about the point of membership in an alliance if

countries are not fully committed to it. She highlighted the issue of differences within NATO, in the European-American spectre. On top of these differences there are tensions within NATO as the alliance cannot provide everything to everyone. She talked about the importance of small regional initiatives, when it comes to security and defence when taking the example of the V4 battlegroups (but also mentioning the Belgium and Dutch navy integration and other examples from the Nordic countries). However, she also mentioned the differences within the V4, regarding their position towards the US, whilst taking as an example Poland's stance in contrast to the other partners.

Their discussion was followed by a Q&A from the audience which included questions about aspects of Transatlanticism such as: the impact of Brexit, concerns about what the NATO summit will bring in terms of drifting apart, East-West splits within the EU as a cause for concern, the Ukraine issue for V4 countries, differences in policies towards Russia etc.



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