

2023

From Vilnius and Beyond:

Unraveling the Strategic Potential of NATO's
Nordic and Central Eastern European Allies



Authors

Emma Gonzales-Puell
Lucas Lixinski Arnhold
Matthew Chan
Nicolas Fiessinger

Editors

Danielle Piatkiewicz
Frederico Ganz

Acknowledgements

THIS REPORT IS MADE POSSIBLE BY GPRG AND EUROPEUM. NO DIRECT SPONSORSHIP CONTRIBUTED TO THE MAKING OF THIS REPORT.

GPRG AND EUROPEUM DOES NOT TAKE SPECIFIC POLICY POSITIONS; ACCORDINGLY, ALL VIEWS EXPRESSED HEREIN SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD TO BE SOLELY THOSE OF THE AUTHOR[S].

© 2023 BY THE GLOBAL POLICY RESEARCH GROUP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

03

INTRODUCTION

04

THE HISTORY OF COOPERATION BETWEEN NORDIC
AND VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES

07

COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

- SWEDEN **07**
- FINLAND **10**
- HUNGARY **12**
- CZECH REPUBLIC **13**
- POLAND **14**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

16

CZECH AND SWEDISH PRESIDENCIES OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE EU

19

RECOMMENDATIONS

22

REFERENCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an era marked by shifting geopolitical landscapes, the Nordic and Central/Eastern European countries hold key strategic positions within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Following the recently concluded NATO Summit in Vilnius, it's clear that the Alliance stands at a crossroads. The summit underscored the importance of member nations harmonizing their aspirations, capabilities, and strategic priorities.

Our analysis delves deep into both past and current policy initiatives to offer insights into the legacy of cooperation and strategic positioning of these nations. Notably, the anticipated inclusion of Sweden and Finland into the NATO fold demands a reassessment and adjustment of the Alliance's internal structures to maximize potential synergies.

Recently, the Council of the European Union's leadership, notably under Sweden and the Czech Republic, has laid down strategic paths that highlight the convergence and divergence in their policy orientations. These presidencies, with their consequential policy initiatives, provide invaluable learning points for enhancing cooperation and streamlining objectives.

The Visegrád Group, comprising Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, holds a unique position in this matrix. The group's historical efforts in regional collaboration, although diminished from its initial fervor, can be rejuvenated within the NATO framework. The potential for bolstering security ties between the Nordic countries and the Visegrád Group is significant, promising enhanced regional stability and shared defense objectives.

Finland, with its expertise in information and communication technologies, emerges as a leader in telecommunications infrastructure, positioning it to significantly boost NATO's capabilities in this domain. Meanwhile, Sweden's prospective integration provides NATO with a unique opportunity to strengthen Arctic strategies and foster cohesion among member nations.

Hungary and Poland, as key members of the Visegrád Group and influential players within NATO, are pivotal in facilitating the deepening ties between the Nordic nations and Central/Eastern Europe. The mutual benefits of strengthened military exercises, knowledge exchanges, and defense industry collaboration cannot be overlooked.

Based on our findings, we recommend:

Sweden:

- Cooperation Agreements: Riding on the momentum of SAAB Co.'s success in Ukraine, Sweden must actively cultivate additional cooperation accords with potential NATO allies.
- Polish Engagement: Sweden's strategic roadmap should underline enhanced military collaboration with Poland, encompassing joint military exercises and the promotion of its defense sector, particularly companies like Saab, in Poland's military modernization landscape.

Finland:

- MNC Nordic Formation: To respond swiftly to potential threats, especially from Russia, a dedicated MNC Nordic in Finland is proposed. Its deployment should be strategically leveraged, contingent on Russian de-escalation in Ukraine.
- Telecommunication Leadership: Capitalizing on Finland's prowess in ICT, the inception of a dedicated Centre of Excellence for telecommunications infrastructure is pivotal. Such a move would solidify NATO's capabilities in this domain.

Visegrád Group (V4):

- Revitalizing Cooperation: Reflecting on the tapering vigor of V4's collective initiatives, it's imperative to rejuvenate this alliance under NATO's canopy. Envisioned as a specialized subgroup, this framework would invigorate security-focused actions and collaborative policymaking within the Alliance.

NATO:

- Arctic Diplomacy: Recognizing the strategic prominence of the High North, NATO should elevate itself as the principal voice in Arctic affairs. A synergistic dialogue with the Arctic Council would cement this cooperation.
- High North Task Force: Emphasizing the Arctic's strategic significance, the establishment of a dedicated task force can fortify research, bolster rapid response mechanisms, and streamline NATO's Arctic presence.
- Swedish Integration: As Sweden prepares for NATO inclusion, the Alliance should anticipate this by envisioning a tangible presence in the nation. This would not only deepen Sweden's Arctic strategy but also signal unity, foster cooperation, and position NATO as a bridge among its member nations.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the intricate tapestry of global geopolitics, the strategic locales occupied by Nordic and Central/Eastern European nations grant them a paramount importance within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) framework. As the esteemed 2023 NATO Summit approaches its commencement in Vilnius, our analysis delves into the prospective avenues for heightened collaboration among these pivotal states. This exploration embraces a rigorous assessment of past and present policy initiatives, unearthing the legacy of their historic cooperation.

The impending integration of Finland into the NATO architecture, along with the prospective inclusion of Sweden, necessitates a recalibration of the Alliance's internal dynamics. The task at hand is to optimize the inherent potential of its burgeoning capacities. The immediate past has seen Sweden's deft leadership at the helm of the Council of the European Union, followed closely by the Czech Republic's influential presidency. These consequential periods provide a fertile ground for dissecting the strategic alignments and divergences in their respective policy orientations.

In drawing upon these multi-faceted insights, our discourse further amplifies the focus on the prospective security-centric synergies that may flourish between Nordic nations and the distinguished Visegrád group. The Vilnius conclave of 2023 stands as a critical juncture for NATO, an opportune moment to both introspect upon its contemporary posture and to envisage its evolving trajectory. The sustainable vitality of the Alliance hinges upon the intricate weaving of its member nations' aspirations and capabilities.

2. THE HISTORY OF COOPERATION BETWEEN NORDIC AND VISEGRÁD COUNTRIES

The Visegrád Group (hereafter 'V4') was formed on 15th February 1991 at a meeting between the national leaders of then Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, at Visegrád, Hungary. What links them together are more than a political coincidence, or their geographical and cultural proximity. In fact, it attempts to trace the collective historical memories of the Visegrád Congress between the nations of Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary in the 14th century to tackle modern geopolitical and socio-economic challenges. V4 was motivated by four common desires: a) to eliminate the remnants of the communist bloc in Central Europe; b) to overcome historical animosities between Central European countries; c) to achieve set goals through joint efforts; and d) the proximity of philosophy of the then ruling political elites [1].

Importantly, V4 is never institutionalised nor does it give itself the mission to foster deeper integration from within (as opposed to the EU). Rather, it only serves as an intergovernmental platform for ministerial dialogues. This particular configuration offers greater flexibility to members to pursue their individual agendas, for instance, a more efficient process toward NATO accession, at the expense of a more intimate regional cooperation. In other words, rather than serving for a common objective, the *raison d'être* of V4 is merely a platform for inter-governmental channels. Thus, it would not be analytically helpful to evaluate V4 with an EU lens.

When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, V4 members issued a joint statement to 'reaffirm their commitment to the EU policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula', showing V4 countries' common political will against Russia's annexation. Ironically, only Poland out of V4 was supportive to the EU sanction against Russia at the initial stage, the rest have all expressed publicly their dissatisfaction. Although all have agreed to the sanction as the situation had got worse, this example clearly illustrated the very logic of V4 was not centred on cohesion nor a united front, but merely a platform to further their own interests.

In 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine manifested similar logic of V4. Within 2 weeks of the invasion, V4 countries had issued a joint statement with the UK, to 'stand united in condemning Russia's aggression on Ukraine... [t]ogether we offer our full support to... [Ukraine]' [2]. Nonetheless, Hungary alongside with Turkey, have blocked Sweden's accession to NATO membership, the only two NATO member countries to do so. In both instances, V4 has shown its capacity to vocally express a united voice on issues with vital regional interests, but that was not followed by a united action. This is consistent with the very purpose of V4 as an intergovernmental platform for dialogue and cooperation with extremely limited institutional capacity.

The 2016 Warsaw Summit showed NATO's determination in strengthening its border with Russia in Eastern Europe. As a response to Russia's aggression [3], the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) increased NATO's military presence in the Baltic region and Poland on a rotational basis. Nordic countries, especially Sweden and Finland, also play a significant role in the regional security of the Baltics. In 2017, Sweden re-established a military base in Gotland, reintroduced conscription and updated its security concept [4]. With similar security concerns, the Nordic and Baltic countries have cooperated extensively in the past decade. Amongst all, the NB8+V4 ministerial dialogue, and the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNCNE) under NATO's framework are the cooperation mechanism utilised the most between the Nordic and Visegrád group.

Bilaterally, Poland signed a framework agreement with Sweden and Denmark in 2015 and 2022 respectively, to strengthen cooperation in defence and security [5]. The tightening military cooperation between Sweden and Poland was deemed, 'needed and purposeful' [6]. Their close relationship is also reflected by the fact that Swedish officials are part of NATO's MNCNE in Szczecin, Poland, to participate in a joint military exercise in 2020 [7]. Sweden was also able to join the US-led Defender Europe military exercise in 2022 with other NATO member states [8] despite the obstacle of assessing NATO membership. MNCNE was founded in 1999, originally as a trilateral treaty between Denmark, Germany and Poland. The initial purpose of the treaty was to enhance partnership between the three countries [9]. The Baltic states joined subsequently in 2004 and MNCNE grew gradually to have 24 members now. Today, it provides NATO with the capacity to command forces deployed to the Baltic states and Poland, and now is a significant multilateral platform for security cooperation between the Nordic, Baltic, and the Visegrád countries. All the Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) and the Central and Eastern European countries in NATO have their soldiers serving in the MNCNE HQ, Szczecin.

Within the intricate geopolitical mosaic of Central Europe, the unity of the Visegrád Four—often referred to as the V4—has, in recent years, manifested signs of internal fragmentation. Over the past decade, what was once a cohesive bloc is subtly morphing into a V2+2 alignment. Slovakia and the Czech Republic, notably, have been gravitating towards liberal democratic tenets and a more pronounced pro-European Union stance. In contrast, Poland and Hungary appear to veer away, with notable convergence on issues such as EU integration and rule of law [10]. However, beneath this apparent alignment, the waters are muddied by their disparate stances on Russia. Poland's approach has been marked by vigilant assertiveness, particularly in response to Russia's actions in the region. Conversely, Hungary, under the leadership of Orbán, has nurtured a more congenial relationship with the Kremlin. This divergence poses a conundrum for the Visegrád equation. For instance, a tripartite alliance sans Hungary had emerged, collectively pressuring Hungary to endorse the NATO membership for both Sweden and Finland [11].

Observers were left pondering Hungary's selective endorsement of only Finland. The matrix of military procurement might offer clarity. Sweden stands as a pivotal arms supplier to Hungary; its historical dealings span the leasing of 14 Saab fighter jets since Orbán's inaugural tenure in 2002, a pact renewed in 2012. Subsequent modernization efforts during Orbán's third term encompassed the procurement of Swedish-made Carl Gustav anti-tank weaponry and infrastructure supporting the Hungarian Air Force. Thus, leveraging this NATO accession event as a bargaining chip for a favorable arms agreement with Sweden appears strategically sound [12].

In a parallel vein, the Czech Republic, too, has woven a tapestry of military collaboration with Sweden. The Czech Air Force, having leased 14 Saab supersonic jets, evidences this alignment. However, this agreement, set to last until 2027, serves as a transitional phase in anticipation of the acquisition of the American Lockheed jet [13].

3. COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

3.1 Sweden

For the past two hundred years, Sweden has been well-known for its stance on neutrality. Aiming for non-alignment in peacetime and neutrality in wartime, the country's position changed de facto after joining the European Union (EU) in 1995. Since then, the government has been active both within the EU and NATO to strengthen its capabilities and play a role in global crisis management. In February 2022, Sweden, alongside Finland, broke with its past and asked to join NATO on the 18th of May 2022.

Sweden-NATO cooperation began in 1994 when the country joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP), an initiative which aimed for "practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO"[14]. Three years later, Sweden joined the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). This structure provides a "forum for dialogue and consultation on political and security-related issues among Allies and partner countries"[15]. The exercises within the PfP framework allowed the Swedish armed forces to "establish interoperability and develop their international crisis management capability"[16]. For instance, Sweden participated in the KFOR mission (Kosovo) and the ISAF mission (Afghanistan) under the PfP [17]. As a concrete result of this investment, Sweden's first ambassador to NATO's headquarters in Brussels was appointed in 1998 [18]. In the subsequent decades, Sweden-NATO cooperation strengthened with the country's increasing participation in NATO concepts (NATO's Operational Capabilities Concept), programmes (Science for Peace and Security Programme), and fund projects (some of the NATO Trust Fund projects) [19].

In 2014, NATO launched the Partnership Interoperability Initiative, granting Sweden the status of Enhanced Opportunity Partner, facilitating tailor-made cooperation [20]. Following this, Sweden signed a memorandum of understanding with NATO on "Host Nation Support" to increase their readiness in times of crisis. Without being a part of the Alliance, Sweden utilized NATO's frameworks for decades to bolster its interoperability with other countries. To officially become a part of NATO, Sweden's accession protocol must be ratified by all 31 members of the Alliance. As of now, both Hungary and Turkey are delaying the ratification. For Turkey, the issue is that Sweden is hosting alleged terrorists from the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), a stance that is unacceptable in terms of NATO's accession [21]. As for Hungary, the reasons are less clear. Consequently, it wouldn't be unreasonable to speculate that Hungary might alter its stance on Sweden's NATO accession if Turkey does so.

Finland submitted Sweden's protocol for ratification on the same day the country joined NATO (4th of April).

Sweden has been deeply involved in the ongoing war in Ukraine. Since February 2022, the country has unilaterally contributed more than SEK 21.5 billion (1.8 billion euros) to various initiatives [22]. The largest portion of this budget has been allocated for military material (SEK 16.9 billion), followed by humanitarian assistance (SEK 1.82 billion), and financial support (SEK 1.1 billion). From a political perspective, Swedish officials have emphasized that holding Russia "accountable for its violations of international law" remains a "key issue" [23]. In alignment with this stance, the Swedish Prosecution Authority initiated a preliminary investigation into war crimes in Ukraine in March 2022. Multilaterally, Sweden collaborates with the United Nations (specifically the International Court of Justice (ICJ)), the EU (primarily the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)), and the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, Sweden's most significant involvement is with the ICC. Along with 42 other states, Sweden supports investigations into violations of international law, encompassing war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine prompted historically neutral Nordic countries, Sweden and Finland, to seek membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This raised pertinent questions about how this geopolitical shift might influence the cooperation level in the security field, particularly concerning Sweden's primary defense manufacturer and NATO allies [24; 25]. A month after the war's inception, the CEO of Saab noted that while the decision to join the Alliance was fundamentally political, it undoubtedly paved the way for enhanced collaboration—with no foreseeable negative repercussions—in domains such as advanced missile systems, sophisticated sensors, and command and control solutions. Furthermore, a revitalized European defense initiative, combined with an augmented flow of weaponry donations to Ukraine, indicates that Western stockpiles will soon need replenishing, encompassing conventional weapons, radars, and air defense systems [26].

In discussions surrounding the efficacy of Gripen jets, numerous news and military sources have heralded them as one of the best cost-effective operational multirole fighters. They are praised as a potential countermeasure to Russian fighter jets that prioritize stealth technology and may be less equipped for electronic warfare [27; 28]. A notable development related to the Gripen was Ukraine's interest in integrating them into its air force. In early 2023, Ukraine extended a request to Sweden. However, the Swedish government declined the proposition, citing the need to fortify its own air defense capabilities [29].

During the 2022-2023 period thus far, Saab corporation, in addition to other contracts agreed with NATO allies, underwent a leadership reshuffle in its Aeronautics unit. This move was aimed at better harnessing opportunities within the Alliance [30]. Furthermore, Saab secured deals with both the United Kingdom and NATO's Support and Procurement Agency to supply them with anti-armor Carl-Gustaf M4 recoilless rifles and anti-tank AT4s, in response to their depleted arsenals [31]. From the Visegrád group, Poland acquired the AUV 62-AT unmanned training system to prepare naval crews for anti-submarine warfare in the Baltic Sea [32]. Germany introduced the first digital air traffic control tower featuring Saab's r-TWR system at NATO's primary operating base for its Boeing E-3A airborne early warning and control fleet in Geilenkirchen [33]. In the aviation sector, Saab responded to a NATO request for information (RFI) concerning potential platforms, potentially paving the way for the future replacement of NATO's aging surveillance fleet of Boeing E-3. The Swedish company provided insights about its Bombardier Global business jet-based system, named GlobalEye [34]. Additionally, in February 2023, Saab secured a contract worth 770 million dollars from an unidentified western nation for defense equipment [35].

From the 17th of April to the 11th of May 2023, Sweden conducted the Aurora 23 military exercises, its largest in the past 30 years. Fourteen countries participated, notably including NATO member states such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Poland, as well as Ukraine. Finland also contributed by dispatching 1,000 troops to Sweden, a collaborative effort aimed at preparation for potential conflict. American F-18 fighter jets were observed over the Baltic Sea, with Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia also participating.

A significant portion of the Baltic Sea exercises emanated from the base in Gotland, situated roughly 300 km from the Russian military facility in Kaliningrad. This served as a display of Sweden's military might, particularly in the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. Beyond showcasing its military prowess, the exercise also highlighted Sweden's deepening ties with NATO allies. As Colonel Anna Siverstig stated, "our air force interoperability with NATO is already well established, and this exercise will enhance it further." Aurora 23 became a platform to present Swedish military strength to both NATO and Russia, underscoring Sweden's proximity and alignment with NATO and its members.

3.2 Finland

In the prelude to Russia's military incursion, Finland displayed a tempered enthusiasm for entering any military alliance, a reticence grounded in both historical and contemporary contexts. Firstly, Finland, unique among its Nordic neighbors, has maintained robust military capabilities since the end of the Cold War. With the ability to rapidly mobilize some 51,000 military personnel and deploy highly trained reserves [36], the nation's collective memory of the 1939–40 Winter War has bolstered a belief in its self-reliance; a striking 75% of the Finnish populace considers the country well-prepared for autonomous military action [37].

Secondly, the tradition of Finnish nonalignment—born from a fraught relationship with Russia dating back to the 19th century and cemented in the aftermath of World War II, during which Finland ceded 10% of its territory to the Soviet Union—has long informed its strategic ambiguity. This posture grants Finland greater latitude in its diplomatic engagements, allowing for political rather than military escalation with Moscow [38]. Given these factors, it comes as no surprise that Finland's stance toward Russia is one of caution and circumspection.

Even prior to Russia's military actions in Ukraine, Finland had signaled its geopolitical concerns through financial means, earmarking a one-off contribution of 4 million Euros to Ukraine [39]. This support was augmented substantially on the day of the invasion, with an additional commitment of 10 million Euros—3.3 million sourced from the exclusive Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget and 6.7 million funneled through the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross for humanitarian relief [40]. Overall, Finland's financial contributions to the crisis have exceeded a substantial 1 billion Euros [41].

On the military front, Finland has contributed six Leopard 2 mine-clearing tanks as part of an international initiative involving Leopard armored vehicles [42]. Additionally, Finland has cultivated an increasingly intimate military partnership with Sweden. A Statement of Intent to bolster bilateral cooperation was signed in January 2023 [43]. This growing alignment was underscored when Finnish President Sauli Niinistö publicly voiced support for Sweden's prospective NATO membership [44].

This evolving geostrategic picture—financial, military, and diplomatic—indicates a potential recalibration of Finland's historic stance. While its legacy of nonalignment and self-reliance continues to be influential, the emerging challenges in the region are prompting Finland to consider new avenues for security and international collaboration.

In 1994, Finland's initiation into NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) marked the commencement of a sustained albeit non-member relationship with the alliance. While not an official member for decades, Finland remained an active participant in NATO-led operations, with notable deployments in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq [45]. This engagement deepened upon Finland acquiring the Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP) status, facilitating access to areas of collective defense previously reserved for NATO members alone [46]. Notably, this privilege also enabled Finland's representation in NATO's high-level policy committees and military cooperation structures.

However, the NATO 2030 Report released in 2021 painted a cautious picture, deeming Finland's official NATO membership as 'unlikely in the near- to medium-term' [47]. Yet, the document underscored shared strategic imperatives between the alliance and the Nordics, particularly Finland and Sweden. The convergence of these strategies pivoted on several axes: curbing the sway of autocratic regimes, proactive conflict preparation, countering Russian assertiveness, and orchestrating a unified approach toward China. The most palpable alignment of these strategic objectives revolved around Russia, offering a contextual framework for Finland's subsequent accession to NATO in 2023 [48].

Similar to Sweden, Finland's 'Comprehensive Security' doctrine presents another layer to this partnership, underscoring a holistic engagement of both civil society and the military [49]. Rooted in routine training, open communication, and a harmonized interplay between civilian and military spheres, this doctrine furnishes NATO with valuable insights on fostering societal resilience. Since 2014, Finland has emerged as a torchbearer in international collaboration against hybrid threats. This commitment crystallized in 2017 with the inauguration of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki [50].

On the broader strategic canvas, Finland's induction into NATO holds significant ramifications. Its geographical positioning places Finland as a bulwark against Russian ambitions in the Baltic and Arctic regions. With Finland's accession, NATO's shared border with Russia effectively doubles, stretching 1,340km. Moreover, Finland's proximity to the High North, coupled with its shared boundaries with other Nordic countries, further cements its pivotal role in the evolving geopolitical tapestry of the region.

3.3 Hungary

In the era prior to the Ukrainian war's eruption, Hungary stood as a stalwart pillar of NATO's structure. Evidencing its commitment, Hungary actively contributed troops to NATO's initiatives, including its participation in operations such as KFOR [51], and hosted strategic military units within its borders. However, under Orbán's leadership, Hungary's stance in the alliance has become increasingly enigmatic, sparking debates about its reliability. Unique amongst the 30 NATO nations, Hungary, in concurrence with Turkey, remains hesitant to ratify the protocols associated with Sweden's induction into the alliance. Hungary's reluctance is evident in its repeated deferments of the ratification process within its legislative chambers. This is thought to be a countermeasure against the EU sanctions currently imposed on Hungary, due to what Orbán describes as being "under pressure" from alleged democratic degradation [52].

While Hungarian officials from the Fidesz party argue that this hesitance is a direct response to the Swedish Prime Minister's criticisms of Hungary's rule of law [53], other analysts see it differently. Zoltan Kovacs, the Hungarian government's spokesperson, underscores that the unresolved disputes between Hungary and Sweden must be addressed, especially as Swedish entities have not refrained from reproaching Hungary. This dynamic has given rise to speculations that NATO is a pawn in this retaliatory geopolitical chessboard. However, if Turkey gives the nod to Sweden's NATO entry, there's speculation that Hungary may follow suit, emulating its prior pattern with Finland.

Still, the intricacies of Orbán's actions can be perceived as a deliberate effort to emphasize Hungary's significance by challenging NATO's foundational ideals. These actions differ markedly from Erdoğan's diplomatic strategies. Yet, Orbán's decisions remain shrouded in ambiguity and lack explicitness [54]. Such behavior suggests that even if NATO eventually approves Sweden's integration, member nations should brace themselves for similar Hungarian responses in future accession scenarios. It's a calculated maneuver to elevate Hungary's geopolitical prominence.

Turning to the Ukrainian conflict, Hungary adopts a nuanced position, differing from many of its EU counterparts. It demurs from certain EU-imposed sanctions on Ukraine and critiques the bloc's strategies. Orbán contends that the EU inadvertently prolongs the war by prioritizing military aid over peace negotiations. This perspective is underscored by Orbán's prohibition against transporting weapons destined for Ukraine through Hungarian territories, viewing such a move as an indirect belligerence towards Russia [55].

Historical undertones further color Hungary's stance. Post the First World War, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1920 led to Hungary ceding approximately 70% of its historical territories. This historical partition resulted in the dispersal of ethnic Hungarians, with approximately 140,000 residing in Ukraine's Transcarpathian oblast today [56]. Concerned about potential threats to these ethnic Hungarians, Hungary remains hesitant in supporting the war effort. Moreover, Orbán's financial assistance to these communities is perceived by Ukraine as external meddling. A 2022 Ukrainian survey revealed that 40% of respondents labeled Hungary as an "enemy nation", ranking it third after Russia and Belarus [57].

Navigating these tumultuous waters, Hungary finds itself tethered between East and West [58]. While being an integral part of the EU and NATO, Hungary's economic lifelines are deeply intertwined with Russia, particularly regarding energy resources. A potential severance of these ties spells economic catastrophe for Hungary, especially considering the significant 12.5 billion euros contract inked with Rosatom in 2014 for nuclear plant construction along the Danube.

3.4 Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has long perceived its NATO membership not so much as a military commitment but more as a profound political alignment [59]. Yet, the nation's evolving foreign policy gestures towards a deeper understanding of NATO's foundational principle of collective defense. This is evident in the Czech Republic's increasingly proactive participation in NATO exercises, especially post the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. There is an evident paradigm shift, with the country increasingly championing policies related to military convoy movement through their terrain. Indeed, in a testament to their commitment, the Czech Republic emerged as a frontrunner in assisting Kyiv. When the Ukrainian capital found itself under siege, the Czechs swiftly dispatched Soviet-designed T72 tanks and BMP1 infantry fighting vehicles. These contributions, reportedly initiated as early as March 2022, distinguished the Czech Republic as the first Western nation to bolster Ukraine's defenses with such hefty military equipment [60].

During his diplomatic sojourn to Poland, Prime Minister Petr Fiala elaborated on the Czech Republic's expansive contributions to the Ukrainian war efforts. Reflecting a seamless blend of state and private sector initiatives, Fiala disclosed that their support package included 226 fighting and armored infantry vehicles, 38 howitzers, 33 multiple rocket launchers, six air defense systems, and four helicopters [61]. Moreover, the United States, recognizing the Czech Republic's contributions, pledged \$200 million for military enhancements and equipment replenishments.

Germany, too, has committed to forwarding Leopard 2A4 tanks, underscoring the intricate network of cooperative defense efforts in the region. Moreover, the Czech Republic's dedication is further manifested in its offer to refurbish armored vehicles for Ukraine [62].

Undoubtedly, the country's defense ethos is reflected in its escalating defense budget, a testament to its acknowledgment of NATO as the linchpin of its security and defense framework [63]. As the war rages, the Czech Republic, along with several of its Central and Eastern European peers, is increasingly expressing solidarity with Ukrainian forces resisting Russian aggression. The transformation of the Czech stance, from viewing NATO purely as a political alliance to acknowledging its military underpinnings, gains credence when one notes the country's recent presidential shift: the inauguration of a former NATO general.

Opposition candidate, Babiš, however, expressed reservations, positing that the Czech Republic shouldn't be ensnared in conflicts not directly involving them[64]. The rebuttal from President Petr Pavel was swift and unambiguous. He contended that Ukraine's future has global ramifications, substantiating his stance with commitments to channel weapons and fiscal aid to Kyiv. A significant chunk of the Czech populace echoed Pavel's sentiments, a sentiment, some argue, rooted in the historical kinship of once being part of Czechoslovakia.

3.5 Poland

Poland's relationship with NATO has been characterized by proactive engagement since its induction, with a pronounced focus on bolstering security along the Baltic and Black Sea frontiers to counteract Russian geostrategic ambitions[65]. The Russian onslaught against Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, witnessed Poland's swift humanitarian response as it opened its doors to Ukrainian refugees escaping the ravages of war. As the crisis deepened, Poland's advocacy for Ukraine's defense amplified within NATO corridors[66]. It emerged as a pivotal transit hub, funneling critical arms and ammunition to Ukraine and urging fellow NATO members to escalate their contributions.

However, juxtaposing Poland's stance in the European Union prior to the Ukrainian conflict presents a stark contrast. The EU has long viewed the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland with skepticism, particularly its endeavors to constrict the independence of Poland's judicial system. Brussels, in its reprisal, slapped Poland with a staggering daily penalty of 1 million Euros in October 2021, culminating in a debt exceeding 400 million Euros by the Court of Justice of the EU[67].

Moreover, the dangling 35 billion Euros earmarked for pandemic recovery remains inaccessible for Warsaw unless there's a revision in its contentious judicial reforms[68].

In the theater of war, however, Poland's commitment has elicited commendation from unexpected quarters. The Italian Prime Minister, Georgia Meloni, en route to Kyiv, saluted Poland as the "moral and material frontier for the West" underscoring the pivotal role Warsaw has played in bolstering Ukraine. Poland's unyielding support, she indicated, is an archetype that has emboldened other nations to participate more fervently in the conflict. Undeniably, Poland's proximity to the crisis epicenter lends it a unique vantage, leading to a pronounced sense of urgency compared to other distant NATO peers.

A tangible manifestation of these heightened tensions transpired in November 2022, when a missile struck the Polish hamlet of Przewodow. Quick to attribute it to Russian origins, Poland's immediate impulse was to evoke NATO's foundational articles 4 or 5. However, the palpable fear of a conflict spilling into NATO domains was diffused by the US's intervention, dismissing the missile as an errant shot from Ukraine's defense echelons.

Fast forward to March 2023, Poland made an audacious announcement: the dispatch of MiG-29 fighter jets, estimated between 11 to 19 in number, to Ukraine[69]. This decision caught Germany's defense leadership off-guard and drew varied responses across NATO members. President Duda of Poland, however, clarified that these jets would be succeeded by acquisitions of South-Korean FA-50s and American F-35s [70]. This unilateral move distinguishes Poland as the pioneering, and perhaps sole, NATO nation to deploy aerial assets in Ukraine's support, underlining Poland's intrinsic engagement in the conflict - both militarily and as an advocate for Ukrainian defense within the NATO ensemble.

4. CZECH AND SWEDISH PRESIDENCIES OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

The Czech Republic presided over the Council of the European Union (EU) from July 1 to December 31, 2022. This pivotal role, which operates on a 6-month rotational basis among the 27 EU member states, endows the presiding nation with both privileges and responsibilities [71]. While the Presidency enables a country to shape the Council's priorities for a half-year term, the responsibilities it entails (such as representing the Council in dialogues with the European Parliament, the Commission, and various stakeholders) ensure these priorities are not arbitrary and are somewhat circumscribed by the role.

Under the Czech stewardship, the guiding theme was "Europe as a Task: rethink, rebuild, repower," echoing the legacy of the nation's first President, Václav Havel [72]. In his inaugural address for the term, Czech President Mr. Petr Fiala delineated the central concerns of their leadership. Dominating his discourse were topics of the war in Ukraine and European defense capabilities, complemented by references to the ongoing impact of Covid-19.

Emphasizing the foundational values and ideals binding Europe, Mr. Fiala underscored the necessity of cherishing individual national identities within the embrace of shared European cultural nuances [73]. Central to his remarks was the assertion that the liberties and security enjoyed within the EU should not be taken for granted, a sentiment underscored by the Russian incursion into Ukraine. In this context, he lauded the seamless assimilation of Ukrainian refugees into European societies, illustrating their alignment with EU values and cultural norms. Throughout their leadership, the Czech Republic consistently portrayed Ukrainians as intrinsic to the European fabric, deserving of protection and support. Furthermore, a primary objective articulated was the post-conflict rebuilding of Ukraine, encompassing infrastructure revitalization, continuity of essential services, and bolstering economic resilience[74]. This commitment was underscored by the significant €18 billion aid package approved by the Czech presidency for Ukraine—a substantial allocation for a non-EU nation[75].

A defining initiative during the Czech tenure was the launch of the EUMAM (EU Military Assistance Mission), aimed at training up to 15,000 Ukrainian forces [76]. Conducted across various EU countries, this mission reaffirms steadfast support for Ukraine and opposition to Russian aggression.

Additionally, under Czech guidance, the EU formalized agreements against recognizing passports from Georgian and Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia in the Schengen zone [77].

The Czech Republic prioritized strengthening European defense capabilities in collaboration with NATO during its presidency. Their emphasis was on fostering long-term partnerships in strategic military systems and obtaining budgetary resources for modernizing European army armaments [78]. Similarly, Sweden set its presidency goals towards fortifying ties with NATO, anchored in an unmistakable aim of ensuring the EU's defense readiness against any threat to its freedom or security. Notably, during its term, the Czech Republic secured an agreement to launch hundreds of EU satellites, named IRIS2 (Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite), with a €2.4 billion allocation [79]. This initiative aims to bolster intra-EU communication, counter rising cyber threats, and ensure dependable communication during natural calamities.

From January 1 to June 30, 2023, Sweden is steering the Council of the European Union (EU). Currently, the nation grapples with three core issues. First is their progress in fulfilling their presidency's objectives and priorities. Second, their newly-elected government (2022) is navigating the domestic political terrain amidst challenges like gang-related violence. The third concerns NATO accession, a matter that remains in flux. Their key priorities are: security-unity, competitiveness, the green & energy transition, and upholding democratic values and rule of law [80].

Throughout Sweden's presidency, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson has been forthright: he seeks to amplify the EU's clout in foreign affairs and security via the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Kristersson envisions an empowered EU, adept in crisis management, urging closer collaboration with key allies like the US and UK [81]. In addition, a robust consensus, both within Sweden and among EU member states, highlights the importance of nurturing EU-NATO ties. Defense Minister Pal Jonson, in his inaugural address in Uppsala, articulated the interconnected strength of the EU and NATO [80]. As part of this vision, Sweden pledged to enact the third joint declaration between the EU and NATO signed in January 2023, leading to the formation of a resilience and infrastructure protection task force [82]. Further, the nation aims to continue the Czech Republic's legacy by intensifying "cross-briefings in the North Atlantic Council" [83] and implementing the Strategic Compass, designed to position the EU as a formidable security entity. As part of this strategy, Sweden seeks to foster the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity and buttress the Civilian CSDP Compact, directly assisting Ukraine's rule of law and reform initiatives [84].

Specifically, Sweden accentuates the need for stability in its eastern periphery, advocating for enhanced security measures in the Western Balkans. Collaborating with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), Sweden's goal is a cohesive and proactive EU. Pertaining to Ukraine, apart from military and humanitarian assistance, Sweden champions Ukraine's aspirations to join the EU [85]. With continuity in EU actions against Russia, Sweden has exerted pressure on Belarus and imposed multiple sanctions on Russia, with the 10th package being sanctioned in February 2023 under its presidency. Sweden's commitment to holding Russia "accountable" for its actions in Ukraine is evident in both its individual and collective stances. Additionally, Sweden has called for an international platform for Ukrainian reconstruction, thus mirroring Czech priorities. On the topic of democratic values and the rule of law, Kristersson alluded to previous EU sanctions against Poland and Hungary due to democratic erosion [86]. Though Kristersson advocates for maintaining rule of law across the EU, the sanctions topic remains a point of contention within some circles.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

As NATO grapples with a defining juncture in its history, the spotlight on the Alliance has significantly intensified due to the escalating conflict in Ukraine. One could posit that the Alliance's prominence on the global stage has been significantly amplified over the past year. This is evidenced by an emergent inclination among certain nations towards NATO membership, which is increasingly seen as a strategic bulwark against foreign aggression. Furthermore, the solidarity demonstrated by NATO member states in proffering military aid to Ukraine underscores the pivotal role of the Alliance in fostering a unified response to global crises. Yet, these achievements are not without their challenges. Turkey's refusal to accept Sweden's bid for membership starkly illustrates the difficulties in maintaining complete unity within the Alliance. This issue forces NATO to confront the realities of consensus-building in a diverse coalition.

To thrive and evolve in this complex geopolitical landscape, NATO must ensure the concerns of all its member states are both heard and addressed. It must work towards fine-tuning a policymaking process that appreciates the unique geopolitical nuances of its member nations. Rather than coercing members to comply with a one-size-fits-all policy dictated by the Alliance, NATO's survival and success hinge upon its ability to gain a nuanced understanding of its members' needs and ambitions. In doing so, the Alliance can craft policies that are not only more comprehensive, but also resonant with the aspirations of its diverse membership. In this complex context, Nordic and Visegrád nations can serve crucial roles, both within the context of NATO and beyond. They have a historical record of collaboration; however, the substance of most efforts has, unfortunately, lacked depth. It is crucial for the leadership of these nations to identify and acknowledge the areas of shared concerns and objectives. Their commitment to NATO testifies to their shared interests and presents an opportunity to forge a robust military and diplomatic front.

The Alliance itself stands to gain significantly from this evolution, mainly due to the potential it holds for simplifying policy consensus amongst its members. Consequently, NATO must not only support future cooperative endeavors between the Nordic and V4 nations, but also proactively encourage and lay the foundation for such initiatives. The V4 nations, in particular, can reap substantial benefits from deeper integration fostered by the Alliance, assisting them in revisiting and revitalizing their prior goals while boosting internal cooperation. Military exercises such as Aurora 23 play a critical role in this regard and should continue to be conducted across all NATO regions. These exercises aim to integrate the forces of diverse countries and prepare them for a myriad of potential scenarios, thereby enhancing the Alliance's overall resilience and responsiveness.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the evaluations conducted in this paper, several recommendations emerge to foster increased cooperation among Nordic countries and members of the Visegrád Group within the context of NATO. It has also been possible to propose changes to more specific internal structure of member states, which could ultimately impact the Alliance as a whole and make cooperation more attractive. These recommendations aim to strengthen alliances, enhance preparedness, and leverage strategic opportunities. The following actions are proposed:

Sweden

- **Sweden should actively pursue additional cooperation agreements with its future NATO allies** to capitalize on the momentum brought by the successful usage of some of SAAB Co.'s military vehicles in the Ukraine conflict.
- **Strengthening ties with Poland is crucial.** Sweden should promote joint military exercises to enhance preparedness for conventional battles and facilitate knowledge exchange between the two armies. Additionally, Sweden should explore opportunities derived from the Polish military's modernization process to promote its defense industry, including Saab and other arms companies, in Poland to secure contracts.

Finland

- **A new MNC Nordic should be established in Finland.** This is to provide NATO and Finland a pool of forces to rapidly respond to potential Russian aggression in the region and for deterrence. This force should be conditional on the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine, allowing for diplomatic opportunities for de-escalation.
- **Finland's expertise in information and communication technologies positions it to lead in telecommunications infrastructure.** Establishing a Centre of Excellence in Finland focused on telecommunications infrastructure would enhance NATO's and member states' capabilities in this critical area.

The Visegrád Group

The V4's efforts to jointly address issues affecting the region, while still impactful to this day, have been reduced if compared to its initial decades. In order to relight these countries' will to work together among themselves but also with others, **a new group should be institutionalized within NATO, comprised of the same V4 states but enjoying the Alliance's overview and close support.** This would motivate more focused security related actions and more intense cooperative policymaking.

NATO

- **Given the increasing strategic importance of the High North, NATO should assert itself as a platform for a united voice in the Arctic.** Establishing a high-level dialogue between NATO and the Arctic Council would formalize a cooperation framework to protect the region effectively.
- **A NATO High North Task Force should be established to deepen cooperation between NATO members.** It should focus on promoting research collaboration, enhancing NATO's rapid response capabilities, and preparing for further integration of NATO's Arctic presence.
- **NATO should consider establishing a physical presence in Sweden once the country integrates into the Alliance.** This presence would contribute to the development of Sweden's Arctic strategy and strengthen ties between it and NATO. It would also serve as an interface between member countries, fostering cohesion, promoting cooperation, and signaling a unified stance on critical geopolitical issues.

By implementing these recommendations, NATO and its member states can forge stronger internal connections, optimize its expanding assets, and enhance its ability to address emerging security challenges. While some of these recommendations directly impact cooperation between Nordic and V4 countries, others would also indirectly provide fertile ground for new bounds to be formed among these nations, with NATO acting as a convenor and enabler of this process. The upcoming 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius provides a valuable opportunity to assess the current state and discuss the future of the Alliance, emphasizing the importance of deeper interlacing among member states for its continued success.

REFERENCES

[1] The Visegrad Group. (n.d.). History of the Visegrad Group. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/history/history-of-the-visegrad#:~:text=The%20Visegrad%20Group%20was%20formed,Republic%20of%20Hungary%2C%20J%C3%B3zsef%20Antall.>

[2] The Visegrad Group. (2022). V4 + United Kingdom Joint Statement of Prime Ministers. Available online: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=488>

[3] NATO. (2017). Warsaw Summit Key Decisions. Available online: [20170206_1702-factsheet-warsaw-summit-key-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/docu/summit/2017/20170206_1702-factsheet-warsaw-summit-key-en.pdf) (nato.int)

[4, 6] German Marshall Fund. (2019). A New Alliance Between Poland, Sweden, and the United States for Baltic Security?. Available online: [A New Alliance Between Poland, Sweden, and the United States for Baltic Security? | Strengthening Transatlantic Cooperation](https://www.gmfus.org/publications/a-new-alliance-between-poland-sweden-and-the-united-states-for-baltic-security) (gmfus.org)

[5] Ministry of National Defence of Poland. (2022). Poland and Denmark strengthen military cooperation. Available online: [Poland and Denmark strengthen military cooperation - Ministry of National Defence - Gov.pl website](https://www.gov.pl/web/ministry-of-national-defence/poland-and-denmark-strengthen-military-cooperation) (www.gov.pl)

[7] Defence24. (2015). Poland and Sweden Expand the Military Cooperation. Available online: [Poland and Sweden Expand The Military Cooperation | Defence24.com](https://www.defence24.com/news/poland-and-sweden-expand-the-military-cooperation)

[8] NATO. (2022). Troops from Sweden and Allied countries build pontoon bridge during exercise Defender Europe 22. Available online: [NATO Multimedia - Troops from Sweden and Allied countries build pontoon bridge during exercise Defender Europe 22](https://www.nato.int/pr/pr_2022092201.html)

[9] Multinational Corps North East. (2023). History. Available online: [MNCNE - History](https://www.mncne.nato.int/history) (nato.int)

[10] Politico. (2022). The not-so-fantastic 4: Central Europe's divided Visegrad alliance. Available online: [The not-so-fantastic 4: Central Europe's divided Visegrad alliance - POLITICO](https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/22/visegrad-alliance-000001)

[11] Kafkadesk. (2022). Visegrad partners to urge Hungary to ratify Finland and Sweden's NATO accession. Available online: [Visegrad partners to urge Hungary to ratify Finland and Sweden's NATO accession - Kafkadesk](https://www.kafkadesk.com/en/news/visegrad-partners-to-urge-hungary-to-ratify-finland-and-sweden-s-nato-accession)

[12] VSquare. (2023). Favor to Russia or Turkey? Why Orbán is still Blocking Sweden's NATO Membership. Available online: [Favor to Russia or Turkey? Why Orbán is still blocking Sweden's NATO membership - VSQUARE.ORG](https://vsquare.org/2023/05/23/favor-to-russia-or-turkey-why-orban-is-still-blocking-sweden-s-nato-membership/)

[13] Ministry of Defence & Armed Force. (2016). Defence cooperation between Czech and Swedish armed forces continues. Available online: [Defence cooperation between Czech and Swedish armed forces continues](https://army.cz/en/defence-cooperation-between-czech-and-swedish-armed-forces-continues) | [Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic \(army.cz\)](https://army.cz/)

[14, 17, 19] NATO. (2023). NATO Relations with Sweden and Partnership for Peace. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52535.htm

[15] NATO. (2023). Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49276.htm

[16] Swedish Government. (2023). Sweden's Cooperation in the EuroAtlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and Partnership for Peace (PfP). Available online: <https://www.government.se/contentassets/2e85a5b2191c4a4393afbd2e608cc613/swedens-cooperation-in-the-euro-atlantic-partnership-council-eapc-and-partnership-for-peace-pfp/>

[18] Swedish Government. (2023). Sweden and NATO. Available online: <https://www.government.se/government-policy/sweden-and-nato/history-of-sweden-and-nato/>

[20] NATO. (2023). Partnership Interoperability Initiative. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_132726.htm

[21] Kirby, P. & Adler, K. (2023) Turkey's Erdogan seals deal on Finland joining NATO. BBC News. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64986744>

[22,23] Swedish Government (2023) Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Available online: <https://www.government.se/government-policy/russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>

24] Forsberg, R., Kähkönen, A., Öberg, J. (2022). Implications of a Finnish and Swedish NATO Membership for Security in the Baltic Sea Region. Wilson Center. Available online: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/implications-finnish-and-swedish-nato-membership-security-baltic-sea-region>

[25] Milne, R. (2022a). Nato Entry Finds Favour with Swedish and Finnish Companies. Financial Times. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/7aff6128-af80-4e44-93a7-0080493292d7>.

[26] Milne, R. (2022b). Saab Anticipates Fresh Opportunities If Sweden Joins Nato. Financial Times. Available online: <https://www.ft.com/content/bf4c0a51-c3a6-4f85-a6a4-88dad950d514>.

[27] Tiwari, S. (2022). With Power of Gripens, Sweden Can Deploy a Whopping 1000 Fighter Jets to Help Ukraine against Russia - UK Media. Eurasian Times. Available online: <https://eurasianimes.com/sweden-can-deploy-1000-fighter-jets-to-help-ukraine/>.

[28] Defense Express. (2022) The Jets for Ukrainian Air Force Have Already Been Decided and It Is Not the F-16: Tips from the Pentagon and Copenhagen. Available online: <https://en.defence-ua.com/analysis/the-aircraft-for-ukrainian-air-force-have-already-been-decided-and-it-is-not-the-f-16-tips-from-the-pentagon-and-copenhagen-4022.html>

[29] The Kyiv Independent. (2023). Sweden Considers Ukraine's Request for Fighter Jets Available online: <https://kyivindependent.com/sweden-considers-ukraines-request-for-fighter-jets/>.

[30] Hoyle, C. (2023). Saab reshuffles Aeronautics unit leadership as it pursues NATO defence sales. Flight Global. Available online: <https://www.flightglobal.com/defence/saab-reshuffles-aeronautics-unit-leadership-as-it-pursues-nato-defence-sales/152014.article#:~:text=Saab%20reshuffles%20Aeronautics%20unit%20leadership%20as%20it%20pursues%20NATO%20defence%20sales,By%20Craig%20Hoyle&text=Saab%20chief%20executive%20Micael%20Johansson,opportunities%20with%20NATO%20member%20nations>.

[31] MacDonald, A. (2023). Saab, NATO Sign Framework Agreements for Anti-Tank Weapons. UK Defence Journal. <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/saab-nato-sign-framework-agreements-for-anti-tank-weapons/>.

[32] Charlish, I., Strzelecki, M. (2022). Poland Inks Deal with Saab for Naval Training System. Reuters. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/poland-inks-deal-with-saab-naval-training-system-2022-12-16/>.

- [33] Saab. (2022). NATO Air Base Geilenkirchen Goes Live with Digital Tower from Saab. Available online <https://www.saab.com/newsroom/press-releases/2022/nato-air-base-geilenkirchen-goes-live-with-digital-tower-from-saab>
- [34] Osborne, T. (2023) Boeing, Saab, Northrop Respond to NATO E-3 Successor Calls. Aviation Week Network. Available online: <https://aviationweek.com/defense-space/aircraft-propulsion/boeing-saab-northrop-respond-nato-e-3-successor-calls>
- [35] Rasmussen, L. (2023) Saab Gets \$768 Mln Order for Defence Equipment. Reuters. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/saab-gets-768-mln-order-defence-equipment-2023-02-24/>
- [36, 46, 47, 48] Kjellström Elgin, K. & Wieslander, A. (2021). Making NATO's Partnership More Strategic: Sweden and Finland as Partner Models for Development. NATO 2030: Toward a New Strategic Concept and Beyond. Brookings Institution Press. Pp. 109 - 130.
- [37, 38] Atlantic Council. (2020). Geometries of Deterrence: Assessing Defense Arrangements in Europe's Northeast. Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24665>.
- [39] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. (2022a). Finland will provide Ukraine with EUR 4 million in additional support via humanitarian aid and development cooperation. Available online: https://um.fi/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/gc654PySnjTX/content/suomi-myontaa-4-miljoonaa-euroa-lisatukea-ukrainalle-kehitysyhteistyon-ja-humanitaarisen-avun-kautta
- [40] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. (2022b). Finland grants additional support to Ukraine. Available online: https://um.fi/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/gc654PySnjTX/content/suomelta-lisatukea-ukrainalle
- [41] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. (2023a). Finland supports Ukraine. Available online: <https://um.fi/finland-s-support-to-ukraine>
- [42] Ministry of Defence of Finland. (2023b). Russian attack on Ukraine and Finland's support to Ukraine. Available online: https://www.defmin.fi/en/topical/russian_attack_on_ukraine_and_finlands_support_to_ukraine#536d988f

[43] Statement of Intent Between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Finland and the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Sweden. (2023). Available online: <https://www.government.se/globalassets/government/block/aktualitetsblock/forsvarsdepartementet/230120soi.pdf>

[44] Bayer, Lili., and Von der Burchard, Hans. (2023). Finland gears up for Turkey's NATO blessing, as Sweden gets left behind. Politico. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/finland-turkey-nato-blessing-sweden-sauli-niinisto-recep-erdogan/>

[45] NATO. (2023). Relations with Finland. Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm

[49] The Security Committee of Finland. (2017). Security Strategy for Society. Available online: <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/en/security-strategy-for-society/>

[50] It has regularly been stated by Viktor Orbán that the Western Balkans were key for Hungary, and thus the country is acting toward more stability in the region.

[51, 52] Yilmaz, M. (2023) Hungary to stay out of Russia-Ukraine conflict. Available online: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/hungary-to-stay-out-of-russia-ukraine-conflict-orban/2841720>

[53] Tũma, P. (2023) Hungary has approved Finland joining NATO. But its delays raise deeper concerns. Atlantic Council. Available online: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/hungary-has-approved-finland-joining-nato-but-its-delays-raise-deeper-concerns/>

[54] The complete statement is "Europe is drifting into the war in these very minutes, it is doing a dangerous balancing act" "Actually, they are in fact already indirectly at war with Russia." Ibidem.

[55, 56] Stern, D. & Loveday, M. (2023) For Ukraine, Hungary's Orban is another problematic strongman next door. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/12/26/ukraine-hungary-tension-border-war/>

[57] Simon Eszter. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and Hungary's continuing dance between East and West. Available online: <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2022/03/expert-blog-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-and-hungarys-continuing-dance-between-east-and-west>

[58] Blank S. (1996). Prague, NATO, and European Security. US Army War College. Available online: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1219&context=monographs>

[59] Pavel, P. (2023). Ukraine deserves to join Nato, says new Czech leader. BBC. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64455121>

[60, 61] Reuters. (2023). Czechs have sent 89 tanks, hundreds of pieces of heavy machinery to Ukraine -PM. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czechs-have-sent-89-tanks-hundreds-pieces-heavy-machinery-ukraine-pm-2023-02-22/>

[62] DW. (2023). Former NATO General sworn in as Czech President. Available online: <https://www.dw.com/en/former-nato-general-sworn-in-as-czech-president/a-64937411>

[63] Johecová, K. (2023). Babiš plays on fears of war with Russia in long-shot Czech presidency bid. Politico. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/czech-republic-election-oligarch-andrej-babis-war-russia-presidency/>

[64] Maksymenko, I. (2022). Regional Approaches to Strengthening the Eastern Flank of NATO: Case of Poland and Romania. In: Sinovets, P., Alberque, W. (eds) Arms Control and Europe. Contributions to International Relations. Springer, Cham. Available online: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-03891-4_15#citeas

[65] France 24. (2023). Ukraine war hands Poland new international role. Available online: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230221-ukraine-war-hands-poland-new-international-role>

[66, 67] Cienski, J. (2023). It's all or nothing for Poland's ruling PiS party this year. Politico. Available online: <https://www.politico.eu/article/its-all-or-nothing-for-polands-pis-this-year-kaczynski-morawiecki-rule-of-law/>

[68, 69] AP News (2023). Poland to be first NATO member to give fighter jets to Ukraine. Available online: <https://apnews.com/article/ukrain>

[70] European Council Council of the European Union. The presidency of the Council of the EU. Available online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20Council%20presidency,EU's%20work%20in%20the%20Council.>

[71, 72, 73, 77] Embassy of Czech Republic in New Delhi. (2022). Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union (Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky). Available online:

https://www.mzv.cz/newdelhi/en/bilateral_relations/czech_presidency_of_the_council_of_the.html#:~:text=The%20Czech%20Presidency%20is%20focusing,post%2Dwar%20reconstruction%20of%20Ukraine.

[74] Government of the Czech Republic. (2023). Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU Ends, Government Presents Achievements. Available online:

<https://www.vlada.cz/en/media-centrum/aktualne/czech-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-eu-ends--government-presents-achievements-203545/>

[75, 76, 78] Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (2022).

Achievements of the Czech Presidency - November. Available online: <https://czech-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/achievements-of-the-czech-presidency-november/#:~:text=The%20Czech%20Presidency%20has%20succeeded,Interconnectivity%20and%20Security%20by%20Satellite>).

[79, 80] Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (2023). Priorities of Sweden's presidency. Available online: <https://swedish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/priorities/>

[81, 83] Swedish Government. (2023). Opening speech by the minister for defence Pal Jonson at the conference on security and defence within the framework of Sweden's presidency of the EU. Available online:

<https://www.government.se/speeches/2023/02/opening-speech-by-the-minister-for-defence-pal-jonson>

[82] European Parliamentary Research Service. (2023). The third joint EU-NATO declaration. Available online: <https://epthinktank.eu/2023/02/09/the-third-joint-eu-nato-declaration/>

[84] European Union External Action. (2023). A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense. Available online: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

[85, 86] Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (2023). The Swedish Presidency's priorities in the foreign affairs council. Available online: [The Swedish Presidency programme \(europa.eu\)](https://czech-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/achievements-of-the-czech-presidency-november/#:~:text=The%20Czech%20Presidency%20has%20succeeded,Interconnectivity%20and%20Security%20by%20Satellite)

[87] Riegert, B. (2023). Sweden takes over presidency in crisis mode. DW. Available online: <https://www.dw.com/en/sweden-takes-over-eu-presidency-in-crisis-mode/a-64255179>