

# EU MONITOR

## Brexit, now what? Examining the future of Central and Eastern European security post-Brexit

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- **January 31<sup>st</sup> will begin the long-awaited legal withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. As the UK disengages politically, Europe's existing security structure will undergo reconstruction as EU Member States reevaluate their future without the UK as active members established security including CSDP, NATO, PESCO, among others.**
- **As the UK seeks bilateral partnerships post-Brexit, steadfast security consumers like Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) should gauge how Brexit will affect their security region. With external threats mounting in the East, the CEE region relies heavily on the existing security blanket that Europe and NATO have provided. As one of the strongest European militaries, an engaged or disengaged UK will certainly affect the security environment, but it will be up to how the EU and CEE countries react and adapt, that will impact the future security of their region once Brexit takes effect.**



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After multiple extensions and a shakeup in Britain's Prime Minister's office, 2020 hopes to bring some form of resolution to the UK's 2016 referendum to leave the European Union. Once the European Parliament gives the green light, the UK will formally leave the EU on January 31, 2020 with a withdrawal deal and enter a transitional period that is scheduled to end on December 31, 2020.<sup>1</sup> Speculation around the effects of the impending Brexit have dominated discussions around the future of Europe's political, social and security fabric post-Brexit. To make matters even more uncertain, Britain's multiple delays in securing a deal with the EU, has left observers in the dark on what a post-Brexit partnership will actually resemble since only after the deal is passed, agreed and ratified – can trade deals and a new relationship with the EU take form.

As the EU grapples with how to best proceed with the UK, Europe's security community have already begun contemplating what the direct and indirect consequences could be on Europe's security. While defense is not a direct component of the EU, there are many "defense-related issues, including research on defense technologies and joint military deployments"<sup>2</sup> that need to be addressed. Including specific concerns that have spurred policy debate among Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries around the future of the transatlantic relationship post-Brexit. Concerns ranging from the UK's future role as a global security actor, questions around burden sharing in-and-outside of NATO, overlapping security challenges on Europe's Eastern and Southern neighborhood<sup>3</sup> and the UK's future role within the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), among other memberships need to be evaluated.

As staunch security consumers, CEE have historically relied heavily on the shared security umbrella that the transatlantic relationship, NATO, and, more recently, joint European defense programs have provided the region over

the last two decades. After rebuilding its security and defense infrastructure after the fall of Communism, CEE countries, especially close to Russia, invested in upgrading and expanding their military interoperability capabilities with the West. Accession to security and political frameworks such as NATO, the EU and joint programs including CSDP and PESCO have provided the region with a degree of stability. With recent events with Russia, the Ukrainian conflict mounting, any shifts in this security infrastructure will inadvertently affect their security atmosphere. It is imperative that the regional members maintain and further develop strong relations with the UK post-Brexit while enhancing their security position in Europe. The true impact of Brexit on European security remains unclear, but this analysis aims to examine the current debates from CEE states, particularly the Visegrad 4 (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia) and gauge their collective concerns on the effect of Brexit on the region's security environment.

### European security framework *sans* Britain

Britain currently stands as one of the EU's top military and defense powers. As of 2019, the UK is one of the "only two member states possessing 'full-spectrum' military capabilities (including a nuclear deterrent) and is one of only six member states meeting the NATO target of spending 2% of gross domestic product on defense".<sup>4</sup> In addition, the UK also holds a seat on the UN Security Council and has the largest military budget within the EU. From a geographical aspect, there is real fear that Brexit may cause Europe "to lose some protection provided by the region's most capable navy"<sup>5</sup> especially as the UK and France are currently viewed as "member states with the military capabilities and political will needed to intervene for implementation the EU's crisis management and peace-

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-46393399>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/uk-eu-defence-and-security-cooperation>

<sup>3</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3296938](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3296938)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/uk-eu-defence-and-security-cooperation>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2019/09/08/as-britain-lurches-toward-brexit-how-will-european-security-fare/>

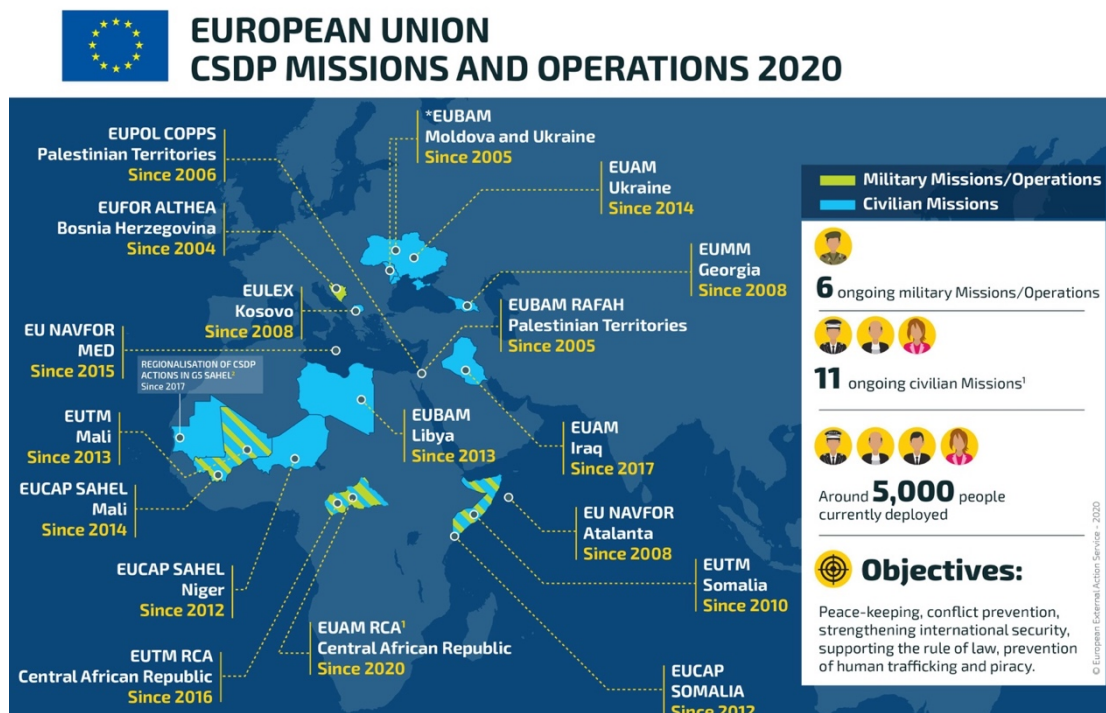
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building operations”<sup>6</sup>. In addition, after Brexit, the UK will inevitably lose specific membership statuses that will have implications on European and CEE security elements. Among these, the UK will no longer be a full member of Europol, CSDP and the European Defense Agency (EDA).

While more of a law enforcement tool, Europol helps Member States to combat international crime and terrorism. The UK has been a key partner in advancing many of their tactics and after being an unfortunate target of terrorism makes the UK’s continued collaboration vital as states need to effectively share information to counter threats and terrorism. Continued efforts to collaborate have been on the negotiating table of Brexit early on. While the future

membership remains in flux, the UK will continue to have access to security cooperation arrangements but if they decide to disengage from Europol, the UK would need to renegotiate their access, potentially following the examples of third-party members Norway, Iceland or opted-out member, Denmark.<sup>7</sup>

Under CSDP, EU members pool their funding and resources to engage in peace-keeping operations, conflict prevention and in the strengthening of the international security.<sup>8</sup> It is currently an integral part of the EU’s approach towards countering external and internal threats within the region including missions in CEE neighborhood in Ukraine, among others highlighted in the below image.<sup>9</sup>



**Image 1.** Military and civilian missions and operations: Overview of the current EU mission and operations, European External Action Service. March 5, 2019, page 2.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3296938](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3296938)

<sup>7</sup> Denmark rejected a government proposal for new laws needed to keep the country inside Europol in 2015 and took effect in 2016. Denmark holds the “status of observer state and be permitted to participate in high-level meetings, albeit without voting rights. Danish authorities will also not have to justify why they want to access information, unlike other third-party countries” like Norway and Iceland who have official third-party status.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/europol-denmark-closes-front-door-opens-back-door/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/uk-eu-defence-and-security-cooperation>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.euam-ukraine.eu>

<sup>10</sup> [http://eueuropaeas.fpfis.slb.ec.europa.eu:8084/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations\\_en](http://eueuropaeas.fpfis.slb.ec.europa.eu:8084/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en)

In addition, the EDA plays an important role within the CSDP as it “coordinates defense planning and assists EU member state governments with weapons development.”<sup>11</sup> The UK has provided significant financial support to CSDP and the EU budget, 16% of which is financed by the UK. In addition, the UK has contributed personnel to 25 out of 35 CSDP missions<sup>12</sup> with an average contribution per mission was 15.72 personnel.<sup>13</sup> While significant, the UK’s personnel contributions amounted to 2.3% of total Member State contributions, and 4.3% of the missions and operations to which it contributed towards CSDP missions and operations.<sup>14</sup> These percentages highlight the greater collective contribution by other Member States and emphasize that they have the potential resources to support future missions without the UK.

In 2019, the House of Lords Committee debated on the UK’s future role in CSDP by stating that the collective defense cooperation had “never been central to the UK’s defense effort. It has never been as significant as what we [UK] do nationally, through coalitions or through NATO.” In the context of “foreign policy in a broader sense”, however, CSDP had been ‘more significant’.<sup>15</sup> The report concluded that it is unlikely the UK will remain active in the “development, planning and leadership of CSDP missions and operations” but emphasized the need to “maintain engagement with the EU on wider security and defense.” While the levels of engagement depends on negotiations with the EU once Brexit goes into effect, this could be an opportunity for other countries, specifically within the CEE to play a stronger leadership role in future CSDP missions once the UK withdraws.

## A new NATO?

London recently gathered world leaders as it hosted the 70th-anniversary summit of NATO. At the Summit, the UK used this opportunity to reassure its fellow NATO members that they will remain an active partner and uphold the transatlantic security bond. Both the UK and NATO officials have reiterated that Brexit will not directly affect its membership or role in NATO. The UK government stated that it “will remain the cornerstone of European defense and security”<sup>16</sup> and several experts have argued that Brexit would not reduce the UK’s military power or position<sup>17</sup> but may even increase it. A stronger role within NATO may provide stronger international cooperation as a greater weight on bilateral relations with its former partners has been outlined by UK officials.<sup>18</sup> NATO’s official line has echoed this sentiment. When asked about the impact of Brexit on NATO, Secretary General of NATO, Jen Stoltenberg stated that “Brexit will change UK’s relationship to the European Union, but Brexit will not change UK’s relationship to NATO...[it] will then become an even more important platform for bringing Allies, [and] European Allies together to address common political and security challenges.”<sup>19</sup> However, EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier has warned the policy community that “Brexit means Brexit – also when it comes to security and defense” and that “once the Withdrawal Agreement is ratified, we have 11 months to deliver the priorities of the trade and security partnership.”<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, some experts have stated that Brexit may cause the UK to create stronger bonds with the United States.<sup>21</sup> For CEE states, a stronger UK-US relationship may

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/uk-eu-defence-and-security-cooperation>

<sup>12</sup> [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#\\_idTextAnchor040](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#_idTextAnchor040)

<sup>13</sup> [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#\\_idTextAnchor040](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#_idTextAnchor040)

<sup>14</sup> [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#\\_idTextAnchor040](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#_idTextAnchor040)

<sup>15</sup> [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#\\_idTextAnchor040](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/132/13206.htm#_idTextAnchor040)

<sup>16</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/786626/The\\_Future\\_Relationship\\_between\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_and\\_the\\_European\\_Union\\_120319.pdf#](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/786626/The_Future_Relationship_between_the_United_Kingdom_and_the_European_Union_120319.pdf#)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/uk-eu-defence-and-security-cooperation>

<sup>18</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3296938](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3296938)

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_169183.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_169183.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2019/12/04/how-will-brexit-impact-europe-s-defence-euronews-answers>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/brexit-makes-nato-even-more-important-atlantic>

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cause tension as some countries like Poland, who have actively sought to create strong security bonds with the US through NATO, may see these efforts inadvertently undermined through US reorientation vis-à-vis the new security reality spurred by Brexit. A pivot towards a more unified UK-US approach may take focus away from security concerns facing Europe's Eastern border including the Ukrainian conflict and growing tensions with Russia.

Another point of possible contention is the UK's future role in European defense cooperation. In 2017, European countries sought to deepen security partnerships by increasing their "effectiveness in addressing security challenges and advancing towards further integrating and strengthening defense cooperation within the EU framework" <sup>22</sup> known as the [Permanent Structured Cooperation](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/34226/permanent-structured-cooperation-pesco-factsheet_en) initiative (PESCO) and created measures to support European defense companies with the European Development Fund (EDF). The official position of the UK on their future participation remains open stating that "the UK remains outside of PESCO and as such will have no decision-making rights or any veto over its future strategic direction" and highlight's its preference to keep the "option of third party participation in PESCO, on a project-by-project basis, on the table." <sup>23</sup> Some experts speculate that without support, mainly financially, the UK will remain on the periphery as the EU pushes for greater defense autonomy. This means that "London will no longer take part in EU decision-making or operational entities, and any British contribution to an EU operation will be subject to the rules that apply to third countries."<sup>24</sup>

For V4 countries in particular, Europe saw early enthusiasm in PESCO engagement but due to growing political clout and fear of duplicating NATO security functions, enthusiasm has wavered since it's initial launch. However, in the recent additions to PESCO programming in

late 2019, CEE countries have showed that they value this platform as a positive development in the upgrading old Soviet tech and integrating further resources and military tech between other European countries.

While there is only one project where all V4 members collectively participate in, PESCO remains an opportunity for V4 to work in tandem with other Member States, and potentially closer with the UK. Yet, without Britain's industrial base, it could be difficult to make future integration projects viable.<sup>25</sup> At the moment, this is not a huge concern for members of V4 as most of their recent military purchases have been with the US and other Member States, but future participation of the UK in PESCO projects and EDF should be politically supported and encouraged by members of the V4.

### Views from the V4

Created as a post-Communist construct, the Visegrad 4 has been an avenue for "political consultations on security and defense related topics"<sup>26</sup> focusing on cooperation on joint capabilities, interoperability of the V4 Armed Forces and development of their respective defense industries. However, with the accession into NATO and the European Union, the intensity of the V4 cooperation in the area of defense has decreased over the years - but remain relatively strong on unity towards concerns around security issues. On the political side, growing divisions among the group have been exacerbated by a decline in shared values and priorities. With current government leaders changing their discourse towards EU engagement and cases of democratic backsliding and anti-liberal rhetoric rises, it left the group vulnerable to external influences and threats and at odds with the EU and other Member States.

<sup>22</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/34226/permanent-structured-cooperation-pesco-factsheet\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/34226/permanent-structured-cooperation-pesco-factsheet_en)

<sup>23</sup> <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8149>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2019/11/29/britains-defense-ties-to-the-eu-are-still-up-in-the-air-post-brexite/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2019/09/08/as-britain-lurches-toward-brexite-how-will-european-security-fare/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/cooperation/defence>

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When Brexit first was posed, fear among EU leaders circulated around the possibility of a domino effect with more countries exploring the idea of a “Polexit” or “Czech-out”. Thankfully, these concerns have not been warranted but the reasons behind the fear stemmed from the rise of right-wing, populist rhetoric and growing Eurosceptics among countries within CEE. Janusz Bugajski from CEPA recently wrote that “governing parties in Poland and Hungary and Eurosceptics throughout the region may criticize alleged meddling in their sovereignty by officials in Brussels, but they are not prepared to follow London through the exit door.”<sup>27</sup> As this sentiment tapers down, regional members are still trying to understand what kind of impact Brexit will have on their country’s relationship with the UK.

According to the 2019 Visegrad trends report which surveyed the V4 policy communities, when asked how important the UK is as a partner for their country, UK was ranked as the “five most important partners by 52% of the Polish respondents, 30% of the Czech respondents, 23 % of the Slovak respondents, but only 8% of the Hungarian respondents.” It was noted that these were dramatically

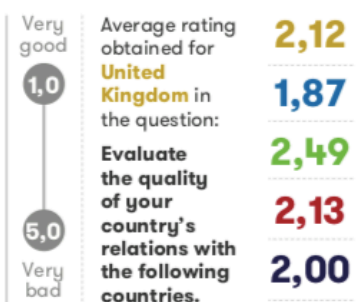
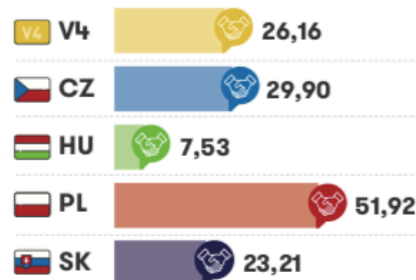
lower compared to a 2017 report, in which the UK was considered top three most important partners, highlighting that since the UK’s decision to leave the EU, V4 countries have shifted priorities towards other regions.

When asked specifically on what type of Brexit the EU should pursue, results indicated that bilateral ties with the UK are “important, and in practice significant numbers of citizens from the Visegrad countries live, work and study in the UK”<sup>28</sup> and that they preferred a “moderated, “soft” Brexit, or actually for the UK to stay in the EU.”<sup>29</sup> If Brexit went through, the need to “regulate relations they overwhelmingly preferred an EU-UK deal (96% on average fully or somewhat in favor), as opposed to possible regional or bilateral agreements with the United Kingdom (35% and 41% respectively fully or somewhat in favor).”<sup>30</sup> The report concluded that 86% of Visegrad respondents would reject with fully or somewhat oppose any ad hoc handling of relations<sup>31</sup> and that the “UK would still be welcome to stay in the EU, but if it leaves, it should land softly.”<sup>32</sup> Overall, it reported that “Visegrad stakeholders would prefer the foundations of the new ties to be laid by the EU.”<sup>33</sup>

### UNITED KINGDOM AS PARTNER

%

Share of respondents who picked **United Kingdom** as one of the five most important partners for their country’s foreign policy.



**Image 2;** ‘United Kingdom as Partner’, Pavlína Janebová and Zsuzsanna Végh, Trends of Visegrad Foreign Policy 2019. 30, October 2019, page 17.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.cepa.org/brexit-impact-on-europes-east>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO\\_Trendy\\_2019.pdf](http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf)

## A security island all alone?

While the countdown until the UK exits the EU continues, the UK government is developing its action plan for the next Strategic Defense and Security Review (SDSR) scheduled to take place later in 2020. While the previous 2015 SDSR aimed to outline the UK's commitment to further establish its security path, the CEE region was specifically mentioned (excluding under the context of EU Member States). The review stated that it will continue to commit to its "strategic relationship with Poland" and highlighted three areas of collaboration including: security; prosperity; and people and ideas. They referenced the progress made with the Defense and Security Cooperation Treaty<sup>34</sup> signed between Poland and the UK in 2018 and the investment of over £5m in jointly funded strategic communication projects in Eastern Partnership Countries along with and working together internationally on NATO and the UN Security Council.<sup>35</sup>

The current rhetoric from the UK is that they want to strengthen bilateral economic and security ties with Europe – while remaining an independent entity. As the UK develops their next SDSR, it would be important to stress the importance of working with Europe as a whole on security issues but also focus on bilateral relations with CEE states as rising threats from the East remain core issues for the UK's national security. In particular, dealing with an authoritarian Russia post-Brexit has been a delicate issue for the UK as they navigate the fine line between developing relations with Russia once outside of the EU but also remain aware of the external threats they pose to European autonomy – particularly towards countries within CEE.

Recent support for the region has been illustrated by coordinated announcements of new deployments of Typhoon aircraft to Romania, army personnel to Poland and an infantry battalion of 800 staff to Estonia.<sup>36</sup> While it is not likely that Brexit will lead to significant changes towards its

current relationship to the CEE neighborhood, it is vital for the UK continue to coordinate with the region to counter threats from the East.

## Only time will tell

While there will be winners and losers after the UK departs from the EU, the CEE region hopes to be on the winning side. In order to do so, members of the V4 will need to decouple the political aspects of Brexit and focus on what it means for their respective security policies and how it will affect their participation within the EU framework. It will be vital for the region to find joint approaches to dealing with UK post-Brexit if they want to remain a barrier for growing external threats from their Eastern border.

At the moment, the UK seems to want a strong relationship with the EU and Member States post-Brexit. However, if rhetoric were to change after Brexit goes into effect by the UK taking an alternative stance against European strategic autonomy for example, setting its foreign policy against the EU, siding with external challengers like Russia - while unlikely - a stronger reaction from the CEE policy community will occur.

With trends showing that the UK is decreasing in relevance for CEE countries, if the UK wants to establish stronger bilateral relations, some courting from the UK will be needed. As CEE states actively invest in expanding their security infrastructure within existing frameworks including PESCO and NATO, the UK will need to ask themselves, what can they offer CEE countries that EU members and the US cannot? As the countdown begins, only time will tell how Britain's security agenda will take form. EU Member States and countries within CEE can at least be proactive and engage with the UK as a security partner while balancing and maintain their own security objectives.



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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ts-no32018-ukpoland-treaty-on-defence-and-security-cooperation>

<sup>35</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/819613/NSS\\_and\\_SDSR\\_2015\\_Third\\_Annual\\_Report\\_-\\_FINAL\\_2\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819613/NSS_and_SDSR_2015_Third_Annual_Report_-_FINAL_2_.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3296938](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3296938)