



## Report

Stocktaking and Evaluating EU defence cooperation – expectations and the role of the V4

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**The expert roundtable discussion titled “Stocktaking and Evaluating EU defence cooperation – expectations and the role of the V4” took place in a hybrid format in Brussels and online. The event was co-organized under the Chatham House rules by EGMONT Royal Institute for International Relations, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, and Think Visegrad platform. The opening words were delivered by Žiga Faktor, Head of EUROPEUM’s Brussels office. During the panel, speakers discussed the latest developments in the NATO Strategic Concept and European defence autonomy debate. In addition, they focused on how Central and Eastern Europe, in particular countries of the Visegrad group, affect the process.**

According to the participants, both NATO and the EU need to strengthen their adaptability and speed up their responses to the unpredictable, as they are facing a vastly competitive rivalry and complexity globally. The NATO Strategic Concept is perceived as a political document with ownership of all 30 Member States, where NATO provides consultations. Therefore, the NATO Strategic Concept is an excellent opportunity to address future threats to any Member State, protect its values and future-proof its alliances. As mentioned during the discussion, democracies are backsliding and alternative models of governments are being promoted aggressively. There is an urgency to have proper financial support, but also to have the right capabilities and people with the right skills. This goes hand in hand with strengthening the resilience of our societies, infrastructures, cyber-attacks, protecting the collection of data, etc. NATO is not global, primarily because of the complexity of challenges the world is facing; however, we still need to strengthen the relationships further among the world.

Later, the discussion moved towards the challenges for Poland, which is at the forefront when it comes to the security of the CEE region. Participants of the roundtable discussed the role of NATO in Poland,

and how the European defence autonomy debate is perceived in Poland. Recent Russian military build-up around Ukraine, Putin-Biden meetings, and the future of Europe are the most recent topics and challenges for Poland right now. The proximity of Russia brings disinformation campaigns and psychological war to the country, and many experts in the region question how much are the EU, the US, NATO, and the West in general willing to support Poland in this situation. In the current context of a crisis on the Polish-Belarus border, strengthening the EU’s borders with its neighbourhoods and releasing pressure from the Member States is crucial. The debates about NATO Strategic Concept and the European defence autonomy are both discussed in Poland, which sees NATO as a key through which we can build a credible defence posture. One of the areas in which the cooperation could be enhanced is in better coordination of different foreign instruments and a better division of competencies, rather than creating a new format of cooperation, such as the concept of “European Army”. As suggested by one of the speakers, Member states should have an instrument that would allow acting independently but in close collaboration within the EU, NATO, and would be complementary to NATO with regard to civilian crisis management abroad.

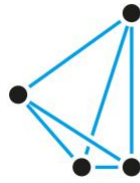
Some of the participants had opposite perceptions on how should the EU further cooperate within NATO and emphasized that the role of NATO is a territorial defence only. Hence, the EU should strive towards a European defence autonomy, put more focus on territorial defence and crisis management, as well as planning for crisis response and reinforcement towards the East. According to these voices, everything NATO does should be complementary to the EU, not the other way around.

As the defence cooperation, especially within regional groupings, should encompass joint procurements, this is an area where we should see more unity in the future. So far the timelines over the defence procurements processes are not aligned which creates further gaps between EU member



states. All the V4 countries are united in their perspectives – to stress territorial defence and deterrence; and although they need the same military supplies (tanks, vehicles, etc.), they are not cooperating in this field. In some of the countries of the V4, European Defence autonomy is perceived as a useless tool due to the lack of a precise definition of hybrid threats or strategic autonomy. Some of the participants mentioned, that if we reduce NATO's tasks to territorial defence only, the rest of the tasks will be delegated to the EU, where interests are hugely incompatible. One of the solutions could be restructuring the relationship between the EU and NATO, where NATO should become a military branch of the EU and deal with purely territorial defence and deterrence, enabling the EU to go beyond its border.

The concept of European defence autonomy showed divisions between the panellists and also different threat perceptions between the countries of the V4, especially Poland, and some other Member States. Regardless of current discussions of whether the EU should strengthen its engagement in defence cooperation or rely solely on NATO, all participants agreed that NATO can only do what the Member States tell them to do and here we still lack more unity. As the threats are coming predominantly from Russia, but also from other countries, the EU should strive to find unity in the protection of its borders and relations towards the perpetrators of the current crisis.



## About the EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

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