

### Tamas Csiki Varga:<sup>1</sup> Hungary's new National Security Strategy – A critical analysis

#### Executive Summary

- Hungary's current National Security Strategy builds on a realist worldview, expecting the deterioration of the regional and global security environment in the 2020s. At the same time NSS 2020 identifies those opportunities that could serve pursuing Hungarian national interests.
- The situation analysis, based on the geostrategic situation of the country, is also well-established, counting on great power influence in Central Europe, the relatively limited capabilities of the country, and its strategic vulnerabilities.
- NSS 2020 reflects a more 'mature', more complex approach to the security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than its predecessors.
- 17 threats and challenges are 'prioritized' and several other relevant factors influencing Hungary's security are identified in a comprehensive approach. Among others, threats include illegal immigration, an unwarranted armed attack, instability arising in Hungary's immediate neighborhood, restrictions to Hungary's national sovereignty, threats in cyberspace, terrorism, threats to economic and energy security, etc. However, the effects of climate change appear to be somewhat downplayed, just like the 'human dimensions' of the strategy.
- Against these threats and challenges, prevention, resilience, rapid and effective response capabilities are defined as fundamental tools and their development is based on whole of government approach.
- Key partners identified are the Visegrad countries, Poland, Germany, the United States, Italy, France, and Turkey.

The government of Hungary adopted a new National Security Strategy (NSS 2020) titled '*Secure Hungary in a changing world*' in April 2020. The new document replaced the previous NSS of 2012, which has widely been considered outdated since 2014-2015, when three strategic shocks drastically changed the European security environment. These were the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the migration and refugee crisis, and the emergence of Daesh, resulting in a wave of terrorist attacks also in Europe. This analysis offers a critical evaluation of the new NSS through textual and contextual analysis, pointing out the most important changes and highlighting a 'mature' and realist strategic culture that a mid-size Central European country has adopted for the 2020s.

#### Drafting, institutional ownership and the timing of release

21<sup>st</sup> century practices usually include a whole of government approach when drafting such a fundamental document as the national security strategy, with one key institution designated as the 'owner' of the strategy. On previous occasions in Hungary, when national security strategies were drafted (2002, 2004, and 2012), the Prime Minister's Office or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were in charge with the close support of the Ministry of Defense and various intelligence services.<sup>2</sup> However, the prime owner of drafting the 2020 document was the Ministry of Defense, more precisely the Office of the Deputy State Secretary for Defense Policy, with close cooperation with the Military National Security Service. This explains the sometimes 'defense heavy' character of NSS 2020. Whole of government approach was ensured this time by contributions offered by other relevant agencies, while draft document versions had been negotiated

<sup>1</sup> Tamas Csiki Varga (csiki.tamas@uni-nke.hu) is a research fellow at the Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies of Eötvös József Research Center at the National University of Public Service (Budapest, Hungary).

<sup>2</sup> While in some countries participants of the drafting process often include think tanks, representatives of academia, industry and even civil society, the process in Hungary is less inclusive, only MoD and MFA background institutes, such as the Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies and the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade tend to be included.



through several rounds of government meetings before the finalized version was adopted for public release in early 2020.

However, there is some controversy regarding the public release of NSS 2020 replacing NSS 2012, not only because it only took place five years after that NSS 2012 became obsolete by 2015, but also as it would be hard to imagine that the most fundamental and largest armed forces modernization program since the Cold War, 'Zrínyi 2026' would have been designed in 2015 without prior strategic analysis and forecast. Despite the fact, that no strategic document was released between 2012 and 2020, we might assume that an early core draft had been delivered and background analysis had been carried out as a response to the 2014/2015 strategic shocks to provide a solid fundament for 'Zrínyi 2026'. Also, early versions of a new NSS had been circulated among experts by 2018 but had not been adopted for public release until a significantly remastered document was drafted by the MoD in late 2019 and approved by the government in 2020.

One can also question to what extent was it suitable to issue such mid-term strategy when the first wave of COVID-19 was already ongoing in April 2020, foreshadowing the heavy economic toll of lockdowns, pandemic control, and recovery measures. COVID-19's effects might upset the strategic landscape at the beginning of the 2020s if the much-awaited economic recovery would not be a rapid 'rebounding' in 2021 but stagnation or only a slow return to growth as in the aftermath of the 2008/2009 financial and economic crisis. This could undermine NSS 2020 to some extent, especially if the means for realizing strategic goals would be missing. However, once the strategy gained the necessary political support and was endorsed by the government, ready for release, delaying it would not have had a clear point as no one could foretell when a less turbulent period might come.<sup>3</sup> Also, much of the general strategic analysis and foresight, as well as main national goals for the 2020s remain valid despite COVID-19, therefore NSS 2020 remains a valuable point of reference and source of guidance.

### **A realist worldview**

The new NSS provides a well-established analysis of Hungary's position in the current world order, taking into consideration the major trends and drivers of international security. Its worldview reflects an approach of 'realpolitik', measuring the challenges and opportunities arising for a mid-size European country like Hungary, framed by the power capabilities of various state and non-state actors. As stated in Par. 1, '*new challenges are triggered by a new multipolar world order in the making, the endeavor of altering the rules of international relations and the changing nature of security challenges,*' while '*the competition among global and regional powers has been increasing*' (Par. 47.), thus '*the transformation of our security environment is so rapid, deep and fundamental in nature, that we can clearly speak about the birth of a new world order.*' (Par. 45.) Determining characteristics of this new world order in the making is that '*foretelling when and how the processes that determine our security evolve and what effects they will exert is impossible, what triggers growing uncertainty*' (Par. 2.).

Moreover, the worldview and strategic forecast of the NSS for the 2020s foreshadow a globally deteriorating security environment, characterized by '*unpredictability, volatility, complexity, the intensifying struggle of great powers, an endeavor to challenge universal access to global commons, the effects of climate change and geostrategic challenges posed in our immediate neighborhood*' (Par. 44.). These general characteristics force the government to create both flexible preventive and reactive capabilities across various fields.

The analysis of the geostrategic situation of Hungary also includes some realist elements drawing on historical lessons learnt – something that has not formally been included in Hungarian strategic discourse until now (unlike in the case of Polish or Czech strategic discourse). Thus, the document points out that '*the Carpathian basin has traditionally been situated in great powers' conflicting spheres of influence*' (Par. 19.) – something that has prevailed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well, among altered circumstances –, and '*Hungary's geostrategic situation offers both unique opportunities and strategic vulnerabilities*' (Par. 23.). These vulnerabilities are explained in detail throughout the strategy (see later).

---

<sup>3</sup> Actually, authors of the strategy wanted to ensure the absolute up-to-date nature of the document, thus COVID-19 is literally mentioned in the situation analysis of Hungary's environment (Par. 64.), together with the possible challenges posed by large-scale epidemics (Par. 62-63.).



NSS 2020 rightly points out the fundamental importance of the multilateral alliances Hungary is a member to, demanded by the 'small state' character of the country<sup>4</sup>, as Hungary can 'provide adequate answers to fundamental threats to our security in the framework of multinational cooperation, as a member of alliances' (Par. 21.). Furthermore, these alliances, such as Hungary's EU membership 'increase the security of the country, support its ability to pursue its interests internationally and broaden its means to influence the security environment' (Par. 22.). This means that both joint capabilities for action and the higher level of representation of its interests are deemed fundamental for Hungary.

Regarding hard security, 'military aggression against Hungary or its allies is currently less likely, but due to the generally deteriorating security environment and the increased fragility of the security situation of neighboring regions we cannot exclude the possibility of conventional military conflicts or unwarranted military aggression, including one against a NATO ally, prompting Article 5 collective response' (Par. 51.). Thus, it is understandable that the strategy repeatedly confirms Hungary's commitment to NATO security guarantees, collective defense, as well as European defense cooperation.

Such a safety net can be particularly valuable for small states in such situations when they are in vulnerable positions on their own – like when facing the power capabilities of great powers –, or are incapable of shaping international processes and events. Such examples are enforcing international norms and legal provisions, the work of cooperative regimes such as arms control regimes, and of course major military conflicts. The strategy touches upon these features also reflecting on the 2014 war in Ukraine: 'Great power endeavors that disregard international legal norms might threaten the security of Europe and Hungary' (Par. 52.), while also adding that 'the military dimension of security has gained more leverage' (Par. 51.). Putting extra emphasis on these developments is a necessary step forward from NSS 2012. Increased attention and more emphasis on military security is also justified by the complex nature of conflicts by the 2020s, where the significant interdependence in international relations triggers asymmetrical and hybrid conflicts with the participation of both state and non-state actors, also applying non-military tools of warfare. Furthermore, we must prepare for grey-zone conflicts that do not necessarily include armed aggression, or low-scale atrocities remain below the threshold of war (Par. 46.). In sum, NSS 2020 has a 'modern', up-to-date view of potential conflicts.

Hungary's current security situation is evaluated as stable, and similarly to previous documents, NSS 2020 declares that 'Hungary does not consider any state as an enemy' (Par. 12.), while 'disputes should be resolved peacefully through negotiation, in accordance with the UN Charter's principles and international law' (Par. 90.). Furthermore, it is stated that 'Hungary does not develop robust strategic offensive capabilities' (Par. 55.). These basic principles serve as confidence and security building measures and reflect the mature and peaceful character of Hungarian strategic thinking.

### **The understanding of security, threat perception and key challenges**

Like in previous strategies and matching the requirements for the strategic analysis of 21<sup>st</sup> century threats and challenges, the understanding of security is comprehensive, including 'all aspects of security for Hungary and its people, such as political, economic, financial, societal, technological, environmental, health, military, law enforcement, information, and cyber dimensions' (Par. 8.). This comprehensive understanding seems to be a general feature of the core establishment shaping security policy within the MoD, MFA, and their background institutes as well.<sup>5</sup>

The geographical focus of NSS 2020 is the immediate environment of Hungary, the Carpathian basin, and Central Europe, also encompassing the strategic aim of contributing to the extension of stability to the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Sahel region (Par. 85.). Keeping in mind the power capabilities of the country and the challenges it faces directly or indirectly this focus is rational and well-established. Beyond the regional focus the strategy also includes transnational and global threats and challenges (such as climate change), as well as those that are not bound to the physical environment

<sup>4</sup> As compared to the Central European middle power Poland, having a population of 38 million versus Hungary's 9.6 million, armed forces of 120.000 versus Hungary's 31.500 troops and approximately five times bigger defense spending than Hungary.

<sup>5</sup> More details on elements of the strategic culture and views of the Hungarian defense policy and foreign policy establishments had been revealed by focused interviews in 2020. See: Alex ETL: [The perception of the Hungarian security community](#). *ISDS Analyses*, 2020/26. [online], 14 12 2020 Source: svkk.uni-nke.hu [28 12 2020]

(cyber security). NSS 2020 lists altogether 17 'prioritized' threats and challenges to the security of Hungary (Par. 124, a-q.), which can be summarized as the following:<sup>6</sup>

- illegal immigration and the settlement of foreign population in Hungary;
- an unwarranted armed attack, instability arising in Hungary's immediate neighborhood;
- restrictions to Hungary's national sovereignty and pursuit of national interest, hybrid attacks targeting the freedom of action of the country;
- threats in cyberspace and challenges arising from the proliferation of modern technology;
- terrorism and challenges arising from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- challenges arising from the unfavorable demographic trends in Hungary;
- threats to economic and energy security;
- challenges to internal security (organized crime, drug consumption, epidemics);
- the consequences of natural disasters and technological catastrophes;
- challenges related to the effects of climate change.

We might assume that in such a document identified threats and challenges are listed in order of importance, even though it is not explicitly stated here, beyond that these all are 'prioritized' threats to Hungary's security. Having witnessed the political discourse and practice of the Hungarian government throughout the past couple of years, one might argue that some elements, especially international migration and terrorism are over-emphasized compared to their relative effects in Hungary. At the same time, it is striking that the effects of climate change are downplayed despite Hungary's exposure to extreme weather phenomena, floods, and the effects of severe drought in agriculture.<sup>7</sup>

Public perceptions also show somewhat differing emphases. Based on a representative public opinion poll carried out for the Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies in late 2019 – so before COVID-19 impacted public perception – the most important concern of the Hungarian public was climate change (36.8% of respondents mentioning it), closely followed by migration (36.6%), then the dependence on natural gas imports (29%), international terrorism (23.3%) and economic vulnerabilities (21.4%).<sup>8</sup> Military conflicts and instability were seen as second-tier concerns, such as conflicts in the Middle East (20.5%), the armed conflict in Ukraine (17.5%), Russian military threats (8.6%), as well as instability and conflicts in the Balkans (5.5%).<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that threat perception towards Russia is weak, and identifying ongoing and potential conflicts in Hungary's immediate neighborhood (Ukraine and the Balkans) as key threats is less likely. This feature might be attributed to the traditionally non-military threat perception of Hungarian people, focusing rather on economic and social security, prevalent since the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the traditionally strong relevance of societal and economic security in the mindset of the Hungarian people, NSS 2020 is rather weak in the 'human dimension'. This might be attributed to the primary ownership of the MoD, having more of a military mindset. However, previous strategic documents have not put much emphasis on these challenges either. Unlike the strategic practice of modern welfare states, the people – their health, welfare, education, innovative skills, and the successful integration of minorities – are not taken into consideration as strategic assets in the new strategy (either), only marginal aspects are mentioned, even though these would constitute building blocks of a resilient 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

---

<sup>6</sup> For more details see: CSIKI VARGA Tamás – TÁLAS Péter: [Magyarország új nemzeti biztonsági stratégiájáról](#). *SVKI Elemzések*, 2020/17. [online], 04 06 2020 Source: svkk.uni-nke.hu [28 12 2020], 8-14.

<sup>7</sup> This discrepancy is also shown by the fact that climate change and related challenges are mentioned 6 times, while challenges related to migration are mentioned 23 times. A much-detailed overview of countering risks and negative effects of migration throughout the strategy stands beside a brief and superficial overview of climate change related effects, without specifying any means of mitigation or adaptation.

<sup>8</sup> Alex ETL: [The perception of security in Hungary](#). *ISDS Analyses*, 2020/3. [online], 04 03 2020 Source: svkk.uni-nke.hu [28 12 2020], 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Alex ETL – Péter TÁLAS: [The transformation of Hungarian security perception between 1999 and 2019](#). *ISDS Analyses*, 2020/4. [online], 04 03 2020 Source: svkk.uni-nke.hu [28 12 2020], 4-6.

### 'National sovereignty' as a conceptual cornerstone

More than any previous strategies, NSS 2020 puts major emphasis on the issue of national sovereignty as a fundamental value and defined as *'independence and the ability to act freely'*. *'Hungarian national sovereignty is such an unquestionable value that is naturally present in the country's domestic and foreign policy. It is a primary security interest to preserve, protect and strengthen the autonomous freedom of action of Hungary in the continuously changing security environment'* (Par. 8.). Those debates and conflicts that had been borne by this endeavor in the past decade are also tangible in the strategy both regarding the extended understanding of the political nation including ethnic Hungarians living across the border in neighboring countries<sup>11</sup> and protecting their minority rights and livelihood, as well as in the sovereignty-sharing and decision-making authority debates with the European Union.

National sovereignty is also closely bound to the concept of the Hungarian political nation, used in an extended understanding, including all Hungarians living inland or abroad. In this regard NSS 2020 goes beyond the concept of 'cultural nation' to include all Hungarian communities – as stated in Par. 4.: *'Keeping Hungary secure and successful requires sustained effort and cooperation of the whole nation to preserve Hungarian language and culture both inland and across the borders.'* Furthermore, in accordance with the Constitution (2011) and the practice of providing dual citizenship to Hungarians living abroad reinforces the commitment *'to support all Hungarian communities to thrive in their homeland'* (Par. 13.). As *'the situation of Hungarians abroad is inseparable from the security of Hungary'* (Par. 84.), certain measures must be adopted to support them and improve their livelihoods, also *'ensuring the protection of the fundamental rights of Hungarian communities'*. For this reason, *'Hungary dedicates heightened attention to the situation of Hungarian communities living across the border... [to ensure that] ... they can enjoy the most appropriate forms of local governance and autonomy matching their particular situation'* (Par. 127.). These elements clearly identify the most important 'red lines' and ambitions of neighborhood policy – keeping both conflicting coercion and cooperating consensus available as foreign policy tools.<sup>12</sup>

Based on the government's track record and the articulated approach in NSS 2020 we can assume that some political debates will continue in the 2020s as well, determining neighborhood and European policies in many respects. The endeavor to protect national sovereignty also appears among perceived challenges (as mentioned above), for example in relation to European migration and asylum policy that is translated into practice as: *'Any effort that would result in the compulsory settlement of displaced persons or foreigners in Hungary are contradicting Hungary's national sovereignty and as such, it is unacceptable'* (Par. 9.) – an unchanged disposition that contradicts the EU Migration Pact.

### Allies, partners, and other external actors

NSS 2020 provides a qualitatively structured overview of Hungary's allies and partners, as well as the country's relations to external actors. After more than 20 years' membership in NATO and 15 years in the European Union, it is 'natural' that these institutions *'constitute the primary international framework of Hungarian security and defense policy. It is in our interest to preserve the cohesion of these institutions and foster their mutually reinforcing and complementary cooperation'* (Par. 91). Just like in NSS 2012, the strategy also adds that cooperation in the framework of OSCE and the Council of Europe also contribute to Hungary's security (Par. 91). All these underpin that instead of unilateral action, Hungary is committed to pursuing its interests in multilateral formats in the 2020s as well, what is the suitable way, taking the power and capabilities of the country into consideration.

Even though particular conflicts give way to criticism, the long-term strategy clearly states that *'preserving the cohesion of NATO and EU is a priority'* for Hungary, as well as *'supporting effective multina-*

<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of the 2010s an estimated 1.2 million ethnic Hungarians live in Romania, 450.000 in Slovakia, 250.000 in Serbia, 140.000 in Ukraine, 10.000 in Austria, 8.000 in Croatia and 4.000 in Slovenia. Balázs KAPITÁNY: *Kárpát-medencei népszámlálási körkép*. In: *Demográfia*, Vol. 56, No. 2013/1, 61.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Par. 88 refers to the current conflict with Ukraine as: *'Hungary is interested to see Ukraine as strong, democratic, stable, economically developing and having balanced bilateral relations towards the country. However, legitimate endeavors to reinforce Ukrainian national identity cannot result in curbing the acquired historical rights of Hungarian communities living across the border.'*



*tional cooperation in the framework of existing collective and cooperative frameworks'* in the field of security and defense (Par. 129). In this regard, defense against conventional military challenges is also to be realized within these institutions, so that *'Hungary would considerably contribute to collective defense measures through developing the Hungarian Defense Forces (HDF), in accordance with Article V. of the Washington Treaty.'* There is also openness in NSS 2020 towards furthering European Security and Defense Policy, stating that *'opportunities arising from Art. 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty are of great importance.'* Likewise, multinational action is considered the primary forum for countering non-military challenges, as *'Hungary is interested in improving the resilience and reaction capabilities of NATO and the EU'* (Par. 129). NSS 2020 also puts greater emphasis on developing national capabilities in various fields to meaningfully support these international efforts.<sup>13</sup>

### *Relation to NATO*

NSS 2020 shows a high degree of continuation of strategic thinking regarding Hungary's role within NATO, defining the alliance as *'the cornerstone of Hungary's security'* (Par. 14.), emphasizing that Hungary is interested in close transatlantic relations and in preserving NATO's coherence (Par. 92). Strong NATO-alignment is shown throughout the strategy in various elements, including the 360-degree approach to our security environment, not prioritizing *'either threats from the east nor from the south'* but accepting the dual exposure the country must bear potentially towards both strategic directions. This of course also entails a differentiation, as threats from the east – conventional military and hybrid threats – differ from those from the south – primarily soft security challenges such as radicalization and terrorism, mass migration, trafficking, and organized crime –. Even though Hungary aims to develop the widest possible spectrum of capabilities for conflicts in allied frameworks, command and force structures indicate that in practice HDF serves as a second-tier reinforcement in deterrence and defense efforts towards the east, providing for force mobilization, logistics support towards eastern flank countries. Meanwhile, towards the south, primarily the Western Balkans, Hungary provides *'first respondent capacities'*, possible reinforced in the future by some of the new regional frameworks for cooperation promoted by Hungary, Multinational Division – Central (MND-C) and Regional Special Operations Component Command – Central (R-SOCC). These formations are open to Western Balkans countries from joining, offering the opportunity to mutually reinforce national capabilities for crisis management operations as well. We can call this approach *'phased integration'* – though this is not a formalized policy guideline.

Being *'an active and credible contributor to Euro-Atlantic security'* is also a returning element, this time further elaborated by adding some more concrete elements, such as developing the HDF into an armed force capable of credible deterrence and providing meaningful reaction capabilities in crisis situations, as well as efficient defense in collective defense operations through spending at least 2 percent of the national gross domestic product (GDP) for defense by 2024 and afterwards – in accordance with the Newport Summit defense spending commitment (Par. 27).

Last, but not least, NSS 2020 formally incorporated NATO cyber policy guidelines into Hungarian strategic thinking, as: *'Hungary considers cyber capabilities capable of causing substantial material damage or a threat to physical security as weapons, their use as an act of armed aggression, to which a response by physical means is also an option'* (Par. 101). This is practically the precise adoption of NATO's policy effective since 2014, similarly leaving the option of response in cyber or physical space open for deliberation on a case-by-case basis.

### *Relation to the European Union*

Within Hungary's European framework of allies, NSS 2020 again realistically evaluates that due to Hungary's geostrategic position and limited national capabilities successfully facing various major (transnational) challenges is only possible in a multinational framework that multiply nation states' reaction capabilities. As stated in Par. 95, *'Hungary is interested in a strong and unified Europe moving forward on a*

<sup>13</sup> Those fields in which Hungary needs to strengthen its national capabilities are defined as: *'capabilities necessary to protect our nation as well as to provide support for allied collective defense and crisis management operations, as well as to participate in international security cooperation regarding the armed forces, law enforcement, civilian protection and counterterrorism forces alike'* (Par. 26).



# Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies

## ISDS Analyses 2021/1.

*path of successful integration and offering an engaging integration perspective, because we can retain our competitive positions in a transforming world order only if we unite the economic and political potentials of our continent.'*

In relation to the European Union, the strategy defines Hungarian interests along two main dimensions: on the one hand, increasing cooperation and fostering integration as a necessary requirement to provide security for the continent in the long term, while retaining national sovereignty to the utmost extent possible on the other. These carry an inherent self-contradiction. The first dimension on the Hungarian vision of the future of European integration appears in Par. 96, stating that *'the foundations of a strong Europe lay within its free nations and countries capable to act. Therefore, the future of the European Union in envisioned not as a federation but as an alliance and integration of sovereign nation states, while it is accepted that certain elements of their sovereignty are exercised together because it is our shared national interest.'* We also need to keep in mind the central role of national sovereignty in the strategy (as mentioned above) and in the foreign policy conduct of the past decade. At the same time, the second dimension mentions the deepening of cooperation, specifically in the field of defense, *'which process in the long run might lead to joint European defense, the foundation of a joint European army in case of the full consensus of member states. But until that point the intergovernmental character of European security and defense cooperation must be preserved'* (Par. 94.). Thus, NSS 2020 also reaffirms the necessary strengthening of European defense capabilities – while maintaining the primacy of NATO collective defense capabilities. A precondition is *'the harmonized development of European defense capabilities and the deepening of defense cooperation'* so that *'the European Union becomes capable of joint defense and autonomous international crisis management, meaningfully complementing NATO's activities in these fields'* (Par. 93). In sum, we can consider the simultaneity of these approaches as a desire to reconcile possible long-term necessities with current realities, though the contradiction is apparent.

### *Relations to other international partners*

Though the list of international partners is not formally prioritized in the strategy, we can assume that primacy here expresses a determining role. Par. 109-115 list the following partners, some of which appear for the first time or with different weight in such a document: the Visegrad countries (V4), Germany, Poland (individually as well), the United States, Italy, France, and Turkey. NSS 2020 puts significantly more emphasis on Central European cooperation – in this respect, on defense cooperation as well – than any previous strategies, therefore, it is logical that the Visegrad partners appear first, as well as Germany, being the primary economic partner for the region and for Hungary as well, being mentioned second. Since 2018 Germany has also become the leading supplier of arms to Hungary, driving the most ambitious defense modernization program of the HDF since the Cold War, 'Zrínyi-2026'. Furthermore, HDF cooperates on several levels of integration within the Framework Nation Concept and defense cooperation is to become deeper and more elaborated, especially in the fields of training, exercises, and logistics to ensure a high level of interoperability. As for the United States, being mentioned third is a marked change to previous strategies. Even though the special 'strategic partnership' that is a usual element of national security and defense strategies across Central Europe is not highlighted to such an extent as earlier, the interpretation is that the V4 and Germany have strengthened their strategic role and elevated their roles, not the U.S. has lost its position. This is underpinned in the defense dimension by the seamless U.S. – Hungarian bilateral cooperation in training and operations, though it cannot be compared in magnitude to 'frontline' eastern flank NATO countries.

It is important to note that with all these partners some form of defense cooperation already exists, and there is at least one *additional* policy field where we can identify corresponding strategic interests with Hungary. Italy and Hungary to a large extent share their views on countering mass immigration from the fragile states of North Africa and the Mediterranean to Europe. Also, there is more than two-decades-long defense cooperation going on with Italy (together with Slovenia) in the Multinational Land Force formation and in the Italian–Hungarian–Slovenian EU Battlegroup. France – similarly to Germany but on a significantly smaller scale – is involved in the defense modernization program and have common interests in agricultural policy within the EU. Turkey plays a determining role in countering mass migration from the Middle East through the Balkans and there are plans for joint arms production of armored combat vehicles in the future.



### *Cooperation within Central Europe and among the V4*

Due to its prioritized position, we need to emphasize Central Europe's role in Hungarian strategic thinking. NSS 2020 highlights the common history, similar geostrategic position and shared interests as the basis for cooperation: *'We are convinced that Central Europe is bound together not only by history and culture, but also by shared political and economic interests. We aim at actively cooperating in building closer relations among countries in this naturally unified environment, primarily among the Visegrad countries (V4), and in other multinational and regional capability development initiatives as well'* (Par. 16). The strategy goes even further, identifying more ambitious goals that build upon the results of the past decade in defense cooperation: *'Keeping in mind Hungarian security policy priorities and the scale of perceived threats, it is our interest to participate in, or even lead regional multinational formations and capability development initiatives'* (Par. 97). This endeavor is repeated several times (Par. 108, 130, 141) mentioned together with fostering bilateral and multinational defense cooperation across the region not only in relation to existing multinational formations but also regarding the newly established regional (MND-C) and special operations forces' command structures.

### *Russia*

NSS 2020 deals with Russia twice, Par. 118 directly, and Par. 52 indirectly mentioning the country, with well-formulated messages. On the one hand, the strategy recognizes the great power role that Russia desires to play and is of prestige for Moscow: *'The Russian Federation is one of the key actors of the international arena, playing central roles in numerous global and regional security matters. However, serious strains have burdened NATO-Russian and EU-Russian relations.'* This position is complemented by the NATO- and EU-conform narrative that allies need to rely on a 'dual track' approach towards Russia, *'leaving the channels of political discussion open, as the alliance is not seeking conflict and does not represent a threat to Russia. In the current situation we need political discussion and confidence building measures that limit the risk of open conflict.'* Within this allied narrative the Hungarian approach is clear, considering Russia less as a security threat but as a potential economic partner: *'Hungary – while keeping the cohesion of NATO and EU as a priority – is interested in the pragmatic development of Hungarian-Russian relations and economic cooperation'* (Par. 118).

On the other hand, the NATO-conform position is reinforced by Par. 52 on the evaluation of Hungary's security environment, which does not name Russia directly, but the description of the events and characteristics matches developments in Ukraine in and after 2014 and their general effects. *'Great power endeavors that ignore international law can threaten European, and indirectly Hungarian security as well. The annexation enforced through aggression has fundamentally changed our security environment, significantly increasing the risk of potential conflict. We must pursue dialogue, but we also must prepare ourselves for deterring and defending against any aggression that might target us or our allies through conventional and unconventional means, even without prior notice.'* Considering the strategic shock effect that the Russian aggression against Ukraine exerted in Europe, it was inevitable to draw the conclusions for small states like Hungary on the use of military power and on the European rules-based security architecture.

### *China*

A similar dual approach, motivated by economic incentives, is visible regarding China: *'Hungary's interest is to pragmatically and dynamically strengthen bilateral relations, especially through joining the Belt and Road Initiative, connecting Asia, Europe and Africa, that will bring about mutually beneficial developments. (Par. 119)'* However, this is complemented by a rational risk assessment that has also gained prominence across much of the transatlantic community, saying that *'upon exploiting the potential benefits of economic cooperation, we must also consider greater Chinese influence and those exposure risks that are born from Chinese investment into critical infrastructure and Chinese provision of advanced info-communication technology'* (Par. 119).





### **Strengthening resilience**

NSS 2020 reflects a more 'mature', more complex approach to the security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than its predecessors. Beyond what has already been mentioned, another novel element of the strategy was matching strategic goals with clear expectations on *how* these should be realized. In practice, Par. 132-175 are dedicated to 'translating' static expectations referring to the future security environment of Hungary into dynamic ways and means of realizing the national goals. A novel element and a fundamental goal in this regard is strengthening the resilience of Hungary, what has become a key driver among NATO and EU allies after witnessing widespread hybrid activities on behalf of Russia and other actors aiming at weakening the political constructs and institutions, as well as societal functions.

Understanding in the wide sense, this includes capabilities for both prevention and rapid, effective reaction. *'It is Hungary's strategic goal to field those national resilience, deterrence, defense, crisis management and coordination capabilities by 2030 that are prerequisites for providing stability and security that is necessary for the prosperous development of our nation in a transforming security environment'* (Par. 126). These goals – in accordance with NATO and EU crisis management mechanisms in place – are also integrated within allied frameworks: *'It is also our interest that NATO and the European Union develop their resilience and reaction capabilities against non-conventional attacks'* (Par. 129).

As the list of prioritized risks and challenges has implied, increasing the resilience of the country as a goal is present across various fields, including hybrid and cyber threats, disaster management, and the control of strategic resources, like energy (Par. 34-35, 40), industry (Par. 37), agriculture and food security (Par. 38.) and water supply (Par. 39).

### **Homeland defense and the role of the armed forces**

Keeping in mind that national security strategies function as the core guideline for sectoral strategies and a separate national military strategy is expected to follow, NSS 2020 has more of a military character, including homeland defense with more emphasis than previous documents. This feature can be attributed on the one hand to the fact that the security and defense portfolio has gained importance and leverage in the government portfolio in the past five years, while on the other hand to the MoD's 'ownership' of the current document, as noted in the introduction of this paper. Furthermore, the negative forecast for the security environment of the 2020s, the increasing importance of military power and the multiplying roles that the military has been undertaking (supporting roles not only in disaster management, but also in border control, counterterrorism, and epidemic control measures) justify such an increased weight.

NSS 2020 sets clear tasks for the armed forces (Par. 27, 52, 134-135): *'HDF need to possess well-equipped and well-trained forces that are flexible, efficient, deployable and sustainable, interoperable with allies to the necessary extent, seeking to improve not only quantitative, but also qualitative indicators. Beyond their fundamental tasks in homeland defense and international crisis management, these forces must be capable handling crisis situations arising as a consequence of irregular mass migration, threat of terrorism, hybrid threats, as well as managing the consequences of natural and technological disasters. Armed forces modernization is to be realized in such a way that HDF would become capable of exerting decisive effects in all relevant domains: on land, in the air and in cyberspace'* (Par. 135). Such a wide capability spectrum will be developed as a net effect of 'Zrínyi 2026' (Par. 27-28), strengthening military cyber capabilities (Par. 159), and the development of Hungarian defense industry (Par. 2, 5, 6, 28-29, 105, 128, 136). Intensified defense industrial cooperation in multinational frameworks also serves the purpose of network-building, namely creating defense industrial capacities and bringing cutting edge know-how to Hungary on the one hand, and developing Central European synergies among Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary, also reaching out to Turkey and possibly including Western Balkans countries as well in the future. More detailed guidelines on the practical realization of these steps are to be included in the National Military Strategy, supposedly due in 2021.



# Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies

## ISDS Analyses 2021/1.

ISDS Analyses are periodical defense policy analyses issued by the Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies of Eötvös József Research Center at the National University of Public Service (Budapest, Hungary), reflecting the independent opinion of the authors only.

The Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies is an independent defense policy think tank, the views and opinion expressed in its publications do not necessarily reflect those of the institution or the editors but of the authors only. The data and analysis included in these publications serve information purposes.

ISSN 2063-4862

Publisher: Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies

Edited by:  
János Árva, Péter Tálas

Contact:  
1581 Budapest, P.O. Box. 15.  
Phone: 00 36 1 432-90-92  
E-mail: [svkk@uni-nke.hu](mailto:svkk@uni-nke.hu)

© Tamas Csiki Varga, 2021

© Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies, Eötvös József Research Center, NUPS, 2021