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## The Limits and Achievements of Regional Governance in Security: NORDEFECO and the V4

**Pernille Rieker, Marcin Terlikowski**

*Both Norway and Poland have engaged in regional security and defence cooperation projects: NORDEFECO and the Visegrad Group (V4), respectively. Such initiatives are seen as a promising method for reinforcing military capabilities in a time of deep cuts in defence budgets among the EU Member States. The record of NORDEFECO and the V4 remains, though, rather modest, particularly when compared to the ambitious declarations made at their beginnings. Both cooperation formats have proved effective with regards to less-complicated projects, such as those involving military education, training or logistics. However, common procurement and real integration in some capability areas has turned out to be too difficult. Yet, these failures have helped to identify factors that may make success more likely, and this result is shared by both NORDEFECO and the V4, despite the structural differences between these two mechanisms of security governance.*

Since the start of the economic crisis of 2008, cuts in national defence budgets have become a painful necessity for almost all EU Member States. Due to austerity economic policy, many of them have been searching for new solutions as to how to get at least the same, if not more, out of lowered military spending. This has been the rationale behind both NATO's Smart Defence and the EU's Pooling and Sharing concepts, which have inspired a variety of projects for regional and sub-regional military cooperation and integration. While few of them have been successful so far, Nordic defence cooperation (NORDEFECO) seems to be an exception. Although it was started outside of the NATO or EU frameworks, it is widely presented as a model regional military cooperation vehicle and offers lessons learnt for other regional clusters. One of these is the Visegrad Group, which for the last four years has been trying to underpin its largely successful defence-political cooperation with some concrete projects. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, NORDEFECO seems to have gained speed and clout while even the future of the V4 is now questioned because of deep differences among its members' perceptions of Russia. With this in mind, to make any conclusions and formulate recommendations based on experience with NORDEFECO, it is crucial to understand the Nordic partners' ambitions and mode of operation for this collaborative vehicle and its overall role in their doctrine.

## The Different Stories of NORDEFECO and V4

NORDEFECO must be understood in the context of the broader framework of Nordic cooperation, which has long traditions and covers many different policy areas. This sub-regional cooperation started out in the 1950s and led first to the establishment of the Nordic Council in 1952 and then to the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1972. Further, it resulted in integration of the labour market and the establishment of a passport union. In some sense, it was a testing ground for subsequent elements of the European integration project.

However, cooperation in the area of security and defence has traditionally been difficult due to the different security policy orientations of the Nordic countries. The plan to create a Scandinavian defence union after the end of the Second World War failed in 1948 when Denmark and Norway decided to join NATO. When the Nordic security community was referred to during the Cold War it the so-called Nordic Balance.<sup>1</sup> This concept rested on the assumptions of a bipolar East-West system, with the Nordic region as one of its components, and a perception of interplay between regional policies and those of a larger system of blocs and major powers. In other words, Norden (as the region is called by Nordics) was not considered a form of traditional *military* balance, but rather the argument was that it constituted a system of political deterrence, that is, a balance of potential options for keeping the superpowers out of Norden as much as possible and preventing them from applying maximalist policies of confrontation in the region. The perspective focused particularly on Norway and Finland, each of which had its own superpower to keep in check. Because of the different security policy orientations of the countries, Nordic cooperation in the field of security during the Cold War was limited to UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>2</sup> Nordic defence cooperation as we know it did not start with NORDEFECO. It builds on several initiatives that were undertaken in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War and which established a framework for closer collaboration among the Nordic states in the sensitive areas of security and defence. It started with procurement with the establishment of NORDAC in 1994, which aimed at closer cooperation in the acquisition of defence materiel. This cooperation was based on the principle of mutual exchange of national procurement plans and was set up in order to find opportunities for common development, procurement and maintenance. While cooperation started in this area, this has also proven to be the most challenging. A few years later, Nordic defence ministers attended the first session of the Nordic Council in August 1997—a two-day seminar on “Security in the adjacent areas.”<sup>3</sup> The same year, the longstanding cooperation of the Nordic states in UN peacekeeping was also transformed into the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Peace Support (NORCAPS) and later institutionalised by establishing a small facility in Stockholm in 2000. This change reflected the growing significance of peacekeeping operations led by bodies other than the UN. In 2000, the Nordic countries set up the Nordic Brigade as a joint peacekeeping force, and in 2004, three of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland), together with Estonia and Ireland, decided to establish a Swedish-led Nordic Battlegroup within the framework of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Nordic cooperation has also been important in the Balkans (IFOR/SFOR), in Afghanistan (ISAF) and in Chad (EUFOR). In 2008, a third initiative was launched when the Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian defence chiefs together identified a number of areas where enhanced Nordic cooperation was both desirable and possible to achieve. This led to the establishment of the Nordic support structure (NORDSUP).<sup>4</sup>

The V4 cannot boast such a rich record of integrative endeavours. True, military integration of its respective members was high during the Cold War, owing to the subordination of the national militaries to the Warsaw Pact’s structures and—almost directly—to the Soviet Union. And although the interoperability level was significant, simply because no military equipment other than Soviet authorised gear was allowed, the mutual platforms or munitions did not enable horizontal cooperation among Poland, Hungary and (at that time) Czechoslovakia, since it was politically unacceptable for the Soviets. The legacy of the Warsaw

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<sup>1</sup> A.O. Brundtland, “Nordisk balanse før og nå,” *Internasjonal Politikk*, no. 5, 1966, pp. 491–541.

<sup>2</sup> P. Rieker, *Europeanization of National Security Identity: The EU and the Changing Security Identities of the Nordic States*, Routledge, London, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> T. Forsberg, “The Rise of Nordic Defence Cooperation: A Return to Regionalism?,” *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 5, 2013, pp. 1161–1181.

<sup>4</sup> [www.nordefco.org/The-basics-about-NORDEFECO](http://www.nordefco.org/The-basics-about-NORDEFECO).

Pact would, however, play a role years later when the V4 would try to launch common military cooperation projects.

The Visegrad Group was born only after the fall of communism in 1989. Right from the outset it adopted a clear functional goal—to act as a bloc rather than individual states in the effort to join NATO and the European Union. The pragmatic character of this cooperation and the specifics of its ultimate aim virtually excluded regional integration projects in any dimension, much less defence. If the V4 first and foremost wanted to join the EU and NATO, than launching any regional integration endeavours was seen as counterproductive as it might have suggested to the Western European partners that the post-communist states had chosen an alternative path to Euro-Atlantic integration. Thus, the potential of the V4 remained largely unexploited.<sup>5</sup>

The states' accession to NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004 was for the Visegrad Group a sense of “mission complete” and meant that it had find a new purpose. Surprisingly, defence became one of the low-hanging fruits. The Visegrad countries had a shared threat perception, a desire to keep the U.S. engaged in NATO, a willingness to participate in crisis-management operations to prove their maturity as allies, as well as structural problems with their militaries. Consequently, political consultations of the group proved to be effective. Over a short period of time, the V4 built a regional caucus in NATO and was often, albeit not always, able to speak with one voice on crucial issues debated in the Alliance. But on the ground, there were few or no practical deliverables, since there were no political, economic or operational, incentives for such endeavours. The V4 did not even seriously consider practical collaboration in common theatres where its forces were deployed, such as *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and then the ISAF mission, unlike the Nordic states, which by then had long established NORDCAPS.

### **Structured or Structureless?**

One year after the establishment of NORDSUP, Thorvald Stoltenberg, a former Norwegian foreign minister, presented a report on Nordic foreign and security cooperation that contained 13 proposals on how to strengthen Nordic cooperation in the areas of security and defence.<sup>6</sup> This led to the signing of a new memorandum of understanding on the cooperation of the five Nordic countries. While NORDEFECO was one of the most concrete results of the Stoltenberg report, attention was also given to other proposals: a Nordic stabilisation force with a permanent command; a maritime monitoring system; joint surveillance of Icelandic airspace; a satellite system; an amphibious unit; and a solidarity declaration entailing mutual defence obligations.<sup>7</sup> Most of these have been put in place even though the solidarity declaration, which was agreed upon in 2011, does not include mutual defence obligations.

The establishment of NORDEFECO in 2009 was in reality nothing more than a merger of earlier cooperation initiatives (NORDAC, NORDCAPS and NORDSUP) in different areas within a common framework. This means that it has not led to the establishment of any new institutions.

This is also perhaps one of the most important successes of this cooperation. Even though most of it concerns various forms of military cooperation, NORDEFECO also has a political dimension with a Political Steering Committee. The Military Coordination Committee aims to handle decisions taken by the ministers at their twice-yearly meetings. Once a year, at the fall session, the ministers' counterparts from the Baltic countries are also invited to these meetings as observers.

Another particularity of NORDEFECO is that the responsibility is divided amongst the participating countries in the sense that each country has responsibility for certain cooperation areas: Sweden for strategic development and operations, Finland for capabilities, Denmark for Human Resources and Education, and Norway for training and exercises.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the roots of the V4, see: M. Madej, “Visegrad Group defense co-operation: what added value for the European capabilities?” *FRS Notes*, no. 19/13, pp. 2–3, [www.frstrategie.org](http://www.frstrategie.org).

<sup>6</sup> T. Stoltenberg, “Nordisk Samarbid om Utenriks- og sikkerhetspolitikk,” Oslo 2009.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

What is interesting about NORDEFECO is that it is a low-cost and pragmatic type of defence cooperation, which in fact characterises most Nordic cooperation. In addition to a low level of bureaucracy,<sup>8</sup> all cooperation is voluntary. This means that even though all projects are open to all of the Nordic countries, they are not required to sign up for every one of them.<sup>9</sup>

When it comes to the structural underpinnings of cooperation, the V4 has been long driven by ad-hoc decisions by defence ministers or their deputies and who have changed frequently due to government reshuffling. It's needless to say that this did not help build sustainability, and the V4 has never had its own Stoltenberg to provide a vision of the group's goals and its ultimate ambition or sustainable political and administrative frameworks that could serve as a fabric or a basis for practical collaboration. V4 defence cooperation remained largely unstructured and relied entirely on the institution of the group's one-year presidencies. If defence happened to be high on the agenda of a presidency, it was pushed for. If not, this cooperation lost impetus. Further, the group has not developed either political or expert bodies that could steer the cooperation through the changing presidencies. Meetings at the politico-strategic level, mostly secretaries of state for international security policy or national armaments directors, were linked to the presidency schedule. What it meant in practice was that V4 cooperation in security and defence was being developed chaotically with pet projects of its member states being pursued in one year only to be abandoned a year later, and with a sinusoidal trend of attention given to some longer-term endeavours, such as the V4 EU Battlegroup.

This handicap was finally overcome in mid-2014 when two documents were agreed by the group: the *Long-Term Vision*, setting the goals for V4 defence and military cooperation, and *The Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Defence Planning Cooperation*, setting up mechanisms at the political and administration levels to allow harmonisation of defence planning, with a special focus on procurement, training, exercises and investment in new weapons systems.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Poland presented a document titled *New Opening*, proposing concrete projects and cooperation initiatives to fill-in the *Long-Term Vision* and the *Framework* with content. The former, a non-paper, was the basis of the *Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation Action Plan*, a comprehensive roadmap endorsed in April 2015 aimed at exploring new possible areas of concrete, project-oriented projects, implementing existing ones and deepening collaboration in other areas, such as military education and training.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the V4 did not aim to establish new institutions and instead opted for streamlining existing formats of consultations at the politico-strategic level, arguably taking NORDEFECO as a role model of a "light" administrative footprint. But unlike NORDEFECO, the V4 did not establish genuine and separate support mechanisms or frameworks for cooperation in different areas, such as capability development, engagement in crisis-management operations, training or logistics. All these categories of collaboration are meant to be steered at the political-strategic level by a Senior Body, that is, by State Secretaries/Defence Policy Directors, supported by the subordinated V4 Planning Group comprised of national defence procurement or defence planning directors. The actual task of identifying possible projects, negotiating their framework conditions and launching them will be done by technical and administrative Working Teams comprised of civilian and military experts.<sup>12</sup> In this way the V4 adopted a more central, or centripetal-like, model of managing the cooperation, than NORDEFECO had when it decided to pool existing, previously parallel cooperative frameworks under a single umbrella. As of mid-2015, it was, however, too early to assess the functioning of this mechanism.

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, the costs of this cooperation are limited to the organisation of the annual ministerial meetings and meetings among the chiefs of defence and paid for by the country that has the chairmanship. To illustrate this, the current Norwegian chairmanship has a budget of 1 million NOK (€109,000), which is quite modest.

<sup>9</sup> A.S. Dahl, "NORDEFECO and NATO: 'Smart Defence' in the North?," NATO Defence College, Rome, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> V4, Long-term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening Their Defence Cooperation, Visegrad, 14 March 2014, [www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements](http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements).

<sup>11</sup> V4, Joint Communiqué of the Visegrad Group Ministers of Defence, Tomášov, 23 April 2015, [www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements](http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements).

<sup>12</sup> M. Majer, *From Bullets to Supersonics: V4 on the Brink of Industrial Cooperation*, Dav4 II Expert Group Report on Visegrad Defence Collaboration, CEPI, Bratislava 2014, [www.cepolicy.org](http://www.cepolicy.org).

## The Shared Record: A Series of Failures and Some (Modest) Achievements

Even though Nordic defence cooperation is often emphasised as one of the successful examples of sub-regional defence cooperation, the achievements so far have been rather modest. The V4 is strikingly similar to NORDEFECO in this regards, even if it has never earned a reputation as a regional cluster of security and defence cooperation.

NORDEFECO has been attracting attention by declaring some ambitious initiatives in common procurement. Yet, over time they have all failed. The most important of these initiatives was the Nordic Standard Helicopter Project (1998-2000), within which Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland intended to buy the same type of helicopter. However, the project failed badly because of the divergent demands on the model. In the end, the Nordic countries negotiated their own purchases.<sup>13</sup> A second example is the planned development and production of a common submarine (Viking) by Denmark, Norway and Sweden, a project which also collapsed when Norway in 2003 and then Denmark in 2004 withdrew from it despite working on it since the mid-1990s. Another proposal for cooperation, the AMOS (Advanced Mortar System) project between Finnish and Swedish manufacturers, was similarly unsuccessful. Also, Swedish attempts to sell its JAS Gripen fighters to its Nordic neighbours also failed, most visibly when Norway decided to buy American F-35s in December 2008. A joint Swedish-Norwegian artillery project (Archer) also failed, this one in December 2013 when Norway decided to pull out. The country also withdrew from a plan to jointly procure a fleet of military trucks, ending that project.

There are several reasons for these failures. It has been argued that they are due to different or colliding legislation in relation to the procurement process. However, it may also be explained by the somewhat uncoordinated delivery timelines and budgets. On top of this, it was unclear which country was the lead nation on these projects with the result that none of them took on the responsibility for reaching the objectives. Last, but not least, there are different national considerations, including industrial interests.<sup>14</sup>

While the V4 members also have had difficulties agreeing common procurement projects (see below), the most illustrious case of the V4's problems with delivering concrete projects has been the EU Battlegroup. Initially proposed in 2007 by Poland, it entered its first six-month standby period in 2016. Throughout the process, the V4 displayed all its handicaps, including the volatile political will of the partners, their limited military capabilities and the costly trade-offs they had to make when they contribute forces to operations and/or multinational units, shortages in and the unpredictability of their defence budgets, weak internal coordination mechanisms in the civil-military domain.<sup>15</sup> There is, however, a chance that the V4 Battlegroup will lead to some standing capabilities that would form the core of a multinational V4 force, which later may be dedicated either again to the EU Battlegroup system or to NATO Response Forces or other international framework. This would constitute a breakthrough in V4 cooperation, at least in joint military capabilities. Regardless of the future fate of the V4 Battlegroup, it has already increased in importance since, first, it will be checked during NATO's *Trident Juncture* exercise and may demonstrate in practice EU-NATO cooperation options that circumvent the years-long stalemate at the top political level, and, second, it will include force packages from Ukraine, symbolising Kyiv's pro-NATO and pro-European course.

When it comes to common procurement/development capabilities, the V4 also has little to boast, though the level of ambition was almost as high as in case of the Nordic states. Already in 2002 attempts were made to establish a common Visegrad project for upgrading post-Soviet Mil-24 "Hind" helicopters and BMP-2 armoured personnel carriers. Both efforts failed due to rows over the division of labour and the resulting share of the profits. When Poland decided to purchase the American F-16 multirole jets as early as 2004, its Visegrad partners were arguably not ready to join the bandwagon. The Czechs chose the Swedish JAS-39 Gripen soon after. Hungary and Slovakia followed the Czechs' lead, but only in 2013 and 2015, respectively. The Czech purchase of C-295M medium-transport aircraft, which followed the earlier Polish acquisition of the same airplane in 2003, was not coordinated. Some ideas to create a regional

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<sup>13</sup> T. Forsberg, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> This is based on information from interviews undertaken in the Norwegian MOD in May and June 2014.

<sup>15</sup> M. Šuplata (ed.), *From Battlegroup to Permanent Structures*, Dav4 II Expert Group Report on Visegrad Defence Collaboration, CEPI, Bratislava 2014, [www.cepolicy.org](http://www.cepolicy.org).

maintenance centre in Poland in an industrial plant already servicing Polish aircraft were not taken up either, at least to date. The most recent case of failed projects concerned mobile air defence radar (MADR), which was intended to be at least a Polish-Czech project with an opt-in for the other V4 partners had they wanted, but it failed in late 2014 over technical requirements and, again, the potential share of work. The Czech Republic chose an Israeli product instead on the condition that it would be developed with the help of Czech companies.<sup>16</sup> These failures have to call into question the most recent proposals for the joint development from scratch of a future Advanced Ground Combat Vehicle.

While many fairly ambitious initiatives in procurement have failed for both NORDEFECO and the V4, there are more positive experiences in other areas. For instance, NORDEFECO has developed improved cooperation in maintenance, education, training and exercises. With regards to maintenance, for instance, the NORDAC project's experience with maintenance of the main battle tank (Leopard) has been positive. And in training, one of the success stories so far has been cross-border training (CBT) between Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish air forces. In addition to this, there are a number of smaller NORDEFECO training activities in the Baltic Sea area.

Similarly, the V4 has achieved some successes, albeit in the less visible or simply less-politicised areas of capability development and training. Yet, these successes have all been bilateral or trilateral initiatives rather than true V4-wide endeavours. Some examples of the latter include NATO Smart Defence projects with V4 participation, such as the Multinational CBRN Defence Battalion, under the Czechs' lead but including Poland and Hungary, or the Multi-National Military Police Battalion, under Polish lead with contributions from the Czechs and Slovaks.<sup>17</sup> Some other projects of this type, mostly regarding centres of excellence, are still in the pipeline. Importantly, these are all strictly NATO-related projects. As for typically regional initiatives, special-forces cooperation (Polish–Czech) is now being formulated but there is one with significant potential as a common project: the Visegrad Group Military Educational Platform.

Even though the achievements are quite modest compared to the ambitions and it is difficult to see either NORDEFECO or V4 as a successful example of pooling and sharing, such cooperation is still important since it increases the interoperability between the involved countries' forces.

## The Main Challenges

The main challenge for regional and sub-regional defence cooperation is usually the reluctance to surrender national sovereignty and freedom of action in such a sensitive policy area and the Nordic cooperation initiative is no exception here. This explains why such cooperation has been most successful when it comes to training and joint efforts in international operations.<sup>18</sup> This has meant that NORDEFECO does not really affect national strategic planning. All of the countries emphasise that this cooperation is strictly defence cooperation and does not affect the various security and defence policies of the four countries.<sup>19</sup>

However, it is interesting to note that NORDEFECO is perceived as being more important for the two non-aligned countries, Sweden and Finland, than for Norway and Denmark. For these countries, NORDEFECO offer a tool for even closer operation cooperation with NATO without having to confront the issue of membership.<sup>20</sup>

For the V4, it seems that the biggest challenge is not even the issue of sovereignty but a problem with the differences in the potential of the states involved and—which became a clear problem following the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine—their divergent threat perceptions. Regarding the latter, the reading of the roots and consequences of the Russia-driven hybrid war in eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea has turned out to be different between Poland and its southern neighbours, particularly Hungary and, to a

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<sup>16</sup> J. Adamowski, "Czech Military Eyes Israeli 3D Radars," *IHS Janes 360*, 1 June 2015, [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com).

<sup>17</sup> R. Kupiecki, "Visegrád Defense Cooperation: From Mutual Support to Strengthening NATO and the EU: A Polish Perspective," *Central Europe Digest*, 2 April 2013, [www.cepa.org](http://www.cepa.org).

<sup>18</sup> H.L. Saxi, "Nordic Defence Cooperation (Nordefco): Balancing Efficiency and Sovereignty, NATO and Nonalignment," in: K. Lepojärvi (ed.), *Perspectives on European Security. State Yearbook 2013*, The Finnish Committee for European Security, Helsinki, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> This is based on information from interviews undertaken in the Norwegian MOD in May and June 2014.

<sup>20</sup> A.S. Dahl, *op. cit.*

lesser extent, also Slovakia and the Czech Republic, which opted for a “balanced” reaction to Russia. They were critical of EU sanctions towards Russia (though they did not veto them for the sake of European unity) and have expressed doubts about additional U.S./NATO military reassurance measures for Central and Eastern Europe—called for by Poland, the Baltic States and Romania. Also, the difference in military/defence industrial potential makes it difficult to set up common projects in any area beyond, perhaps, training. Poland, as the largest partner, is expected by the others to contribute the most, which is contrary to its goals regarding V4 cooperation, i.e., to push its southern neighbours to develop their own military capabilities. The same applies for industrial collaboration. Large, state-owned, and centralised under one roof, Polish companies often perceive their Visegrad counterparts as junior partners, which is not really welcomed by the latter.

In addition to this, there are also many institutional and bureaucratic obstacles to deepen both Nordic and Visegrad cooperation in security and defence policy since the countries have different planning cycles, different rules for classified information, and other national standards, and in general have slow decision-making processes. This is a particular challenge for the V4, as it has never formally discussed defence planning in a structural manner—the newly established coordination mechanisms (under *The Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Defence Planning Cooperation*) are meant to gradually overcome these handicaps.

While the idea of sub-regional defence cooperation or even integration is good, the fact that the implementation of many of the more ambitious initiatives has proven challenging means that it has not been able to meet the initial ambition of cost reduction. In March 2013, the Finnish chief of defence argued that NORDEFECO has so far failed to generate financial savings of significance for the Finnish defence forces.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, many of the proposed Nordic projects, such as patrolling Icelandic airspace or the idea of a Nordic satellite system, come with additional costs, even though one might expect savings in the longer run.<sup>22</sup>

### **Modest Achievements, but Is It Still a Success?**

Whether NORDEFECO and V4 are successes depends on how they are assessed. While both are clearly not successful examples of Smart Defence, where the aim is higher efficiency at a lower cost, they might be successful examples of a lesser ambition of sub-regional defence cooperation.

NORDEFECO is low-cost cooperation that may increase the defence capability of the Nordic states as a result of better training by creating larger and more realistic scenarios. It may also increase Nordic support to third countries in transition, which indirectly strengthens Nordic security. This means that the success so far is rather low on the scale but important nevertheless. This cooperation is also rather new and could result in more substantial achievements in the future.

What are then the main factors behind this more limited success? First, the geographical proximity, similarities in climate, strategic interest and culture (common language, history, etc.) gives NORDEFECO a comparative advantage in questions related to training and exercises. In fact, the existence of a common Nordic culture or perhaps even a Nordic identity should not be underestimated. There is also general public support for Nordic cooperation and which facilitates such initiatives.

Second, Nordic defence cooperation could build upon the existing Nordic cooperation. With the established institutions and meeting points, increased cooperation in security and defence was a natural next step when the different security policy orientations in the post-Cold War were gradually overcome. With non-members Sweden and Finland increasingly active in NATO and Norway’s participation in CSDP and in the Nordic battlegroup, the basis for cooperation in this field was already in place. This means that with a new security policy context, new threats, and the need to modernise Cold War military equipment and develop new capabilities, combined with shrinking defence budgets, Nordic cooperation in defence was an obvious choice.

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<sup>21</sup> H.L. Saxi, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> T. Frosberg, *op. cit.*

Third, the organisational structure of NORDEFECO has been particularly suitable. The fact that it includes participant countries' defence ministers and five chiefs of defence provides opportunities for both top-down and bottom-up initiatives to deepen and widen existing cooperation. This has provided the necessary flexibility to the organisation to adapt to different needs. Beyond this, NORDEFECO is also flexible in the sense that two or more members may cooperate on issues in which the others are not interested. Secretary General of Nordefco Col. Arto-Pekka Nurminen lays out the argument: "At the Nordic cooperation, we are pretty pragmatic—if there is an area, where we can sense a success, we will go for that. If there is an area of cooperation that will not fly, we will delete it. So, pragmatism underscores the Nordic regional collaboration and this system works very well."<sup>23</sup>

Fourth, the relative smallness of the countries has also facilitated the cooperation. In fact, all countries that must reduce their defence budgets face a "critical mass" challenge and this problem is more evident for smaller countries because they must decrease the numbers from initially low levels.

Finally, this cooperation has succeeded relatively well since it has not been seen as an alternative to cooperation within the EU or NATO. It also enjoys strong popular support, as does all Nordic cooperation.<sup>24</sup>

Whether the V4 is a success depends on the measurement criteria. To begin with, one has to acknowledge that on a political level it has already facilitated a big achievement—integration into NATO and the EU. Consequently, the post-2004 Visegrad Group needed to find a new rationale for its existence. This has to be a departure point in any assessment attempt. But there is more: after 2006, the V4 declared a focus on concrete, capability-oriented projects, not fully aware of the barriers to them. Further, the partners found that their strategic cultures are not completely the same and that the existing differences can be serious and undermine trust in each other. The lack of sustainable mechanisms for programming and managing the cooperation was a clear handicap, too. Added to that, the fiscal conditions, rapidly worsening after the 2008 financial crisis and recession in the EU, did not help this cooperation to bloom.

Surely, the V4 has not delivered what it promised in a number of ambitious declarations. But these failures have also provided important lessons learnt, which seem now to be taken seriously by the leaders. The setup in mid-2014 of the basic political mechanism for streamlining the cooperation in all its phases and in the agreement on filling it in with content—the concrete cooperation projects as spelled out in the *Action Plan* from April 2015—are a foundation that is likely to enable more cooperation in the future. So, too, are the Visegrad Group Military Educational Platform and the cross-posting of military planners in the respective defence ministries, both of which are seen as a preconditions for building more commonality among the strategic communities of the V4 countries. Finally, the troubled V4 Battlegroup can become a driver of cooperation through exercises and in the theatres of potential future deployments. Of course, with a lack of political will, these good steps can be in vain, but despite the differences regarding Russia on the high political level, the V4 countries seem to display increasing willingness to tighten cooperation in the military domain, at least within the framework of NATO's adaptation to the evolving challenges in the European security environment—if not because of a shared threat perception, then maybe due to the willingness to be a trustworthy ally.

## Conclusion

Both NORDEFECO and the V4 are a practical illustration of what can be achieved through security and defence policy governance at a regional level. While they are not successful examples of military integration *per se*, they have proved to be effective vehicles for technical, military-to-military cooperation. Although low, this level of collaboration might lead to increased sub-regional defence integration in the future. The recent developments in Russia may also lead to more interest in strengthening Nordic integration in security and defence. A recent joint opinion signed by the five Nordic defence ministers confirming their

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<sup>23</sup> <http://eubulletin.com/1657-nordic-defence-cooperation-nordefco-inspiration-eus-common-security-defence-policy.html>.

<sup>24</sup> T. Forsberg, *op. cit.*




commitment to Nordic defence cooperation is an indication of this.<sup>25</sup> It's remarkable that the V4 has made a similar move, albeit in a less publicised manner—defence ministers, in a declaration issued from their meeting in the Slovak town of Tomášov, stated that their countries agreed that “Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine as well as provocative activities along the eastern border of NATO have profoundly challenged the security architecture in our region.”<sup>26</sup> This suggests that the V4 may tighten its cooperation as a result of Russia’s conduct in Ukraine despite the diverging assessments on the place and role of Russia in European security policy. This is particularly likely to happen under the roof of NATO and using the momentum of the V4 Battlegroup establishment process.

Meanwhile, true integration in the Nordic sub-region will only be possible if Finland and Sweden take the final step of joining NATO as full members. For the Visegrad Group, in turn, what is needed to move the cooperation to a higher level is simply living up to the commitments it’s already made and pursuing the goals of the ambitious documents adopted already by the political leadership of the group.

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<sup>25</sup> The Norwegian Ministry of Defence, “Taking steps towards enhancing the cooperation on defence,” a joint opinion written by the ministers of Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland, originally published in Norwegian in *Aftenposten*, 9 April 2015, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/vi-utdyper-det-nordiske-forsvarssamarbeidet/id2404378>.

<sup>26</sup> Joint Communiqué of the Visegrad Group Ministers of Defence, *op. cit.*



The GoodGov project explores how Poland and Norway can learn from each other in the crucial policy areas of security, energy and migration. This paper is one of three analyses devoted to the problem of migration and mobility in the European Union and the European Economic Area. It is one of the core issues in relations between sending countries, like Poland, and receiving countries, like Norway. The project is conducted by PISM in cooperation with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

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