



The evolution of the National Military Strategy of Hungary in the light of NATO and EU-accession: lessons for Ukraine

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The final version of the new National Military Strategy (*Nemzeti Katonai Stratégia*) of Hungary was adopted on 20 December 2012 by the Hungarian Government.² This analysis intends to provide a policy oriented analysis of the new National Military Strategy (NMS)³, focusing particularly on the security and defence policy aspects. In order to understand the changes, the author briefly examines the wider actual domestic political context of the document, and provides occasional comparison with the previous National Military Strategy adopted in early 2009 as well.⁴

The incumbent government of Hungary, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán came to power in May 2010. The Orbán-government aimed at fundamentally re-structuring the political system of Hungary, ranging from the constitution to the system of public administration, from tax policies to higher education, etc.

The new National Military Strategy has been drafted following the adoption of the new Constitution (the so-called Fundamental Law) in April 2011 and the new National Security Strategy⁵, adopted in February 2012. Hence, the government followed the proper hierarchy of preparing strategic documents: following the completion of the highest-ranking governmental document, namely the constitution, first the new national security strategy was adopted, and then the new National Military Strategy was drafted. Though for a Western reader this may sound as an obvious practice, in Hungary this was actually the first case that these documents were prepared in the appropriate sequence.

¹ The views expressed here are of the author's own, and they do not represent the official position of either Hungary, or of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs.

² Government of Hungary: *A Kormány 1656/2012 (XII. 20.) Korm. határozata Magyarország Nemzeti Katonai Stratégiájának elfogadásáról.* [Governmental resolution No. 1656/2012 (XII. 20.) of the Government on the adoption of the National Military Strategy of Hungary.] 20 December 2012.

³ Government of Hungary: *Nemzeti Katonai Stratégia. Tevezet.* [National Military Strategy. Draft.] 25 September 2012. Available: http://www.kormany.hu/download/d/ac/a0000/Nemzeti%20Katonai%20Strat%C3%A9gia_tervezet.pdf Accessed: 2 January 2013.

⁴ Government of Hungary: *A Magyar Köztársaság Nemzeti Katonai Stratégiája.* [National Military Strategy of the Republic of Hungary] January 2009. Available: http://www.honvedelem.hu/files/9/13818/nemzeti_katonai_strategia_feher_konyv.pdf Accessed: 2 January 2013.

⁵ Government of Hungary: *A Kormány 1035/2012 (II. 21.) Korm. határozata Magyarország nemzeti biztonsági stratégiájáról.* [Governmental resolution No. 1035/2012 (II. 21.) of the Government on the National Security Strategy of Hungary.] 21 February 2012. Available: http://www.kormany.hu/download/f/49/70000/1035_2012_korm_határozat.pdf Accessed: 2 January 2013.

The three documents together provide a coherent picture of the vision of the government on the security and defence situation of Hungary and the role of the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) in it. The coherence is strengthened by the relatively quick adoption of the three documents, which is highly different from the practice of the previous governments. The previous National Security Strategy of Hungary was adopted by 2004, while the old National Military Strategy in 2009. The five years that passed between the two obviously prevented providing a coherent vision of the national security and defence environment.

The new NMS is nine pages long, so it is significantly more concise than its sixteen pages 2009 predecessor was. Besides, the new document contains no pictures, graphs and other illustrations, unlike the 2009 NMS. Regarding its physical outlook and structure, the National Military Strategy closely follows the pattern of the National Security Strategy: it uses the same numbered paragraphs, same chapter structure, etc. All in all, the two 2012 documents show much more coherence in terms of appearance and structure than the previous National Security Strategy (2004) and National Military Strategy (2009) did.

The strategy is composed of six main parts: Introduction, Funding principles, Operational Environment (this chapter is divided into four sub-chapters), Tasks of the HDF, Capabilities (with three sub-chapters) and Closing regulations.

I. The strategic security vision

Budapest perceives both the trans-Atlantic relationship and the EU membership as the fundamental guarantors of her security. The NMS follows the same line the National Security Strategy does: Hungary deliberately avoids any prioritization between the EU and NATO, and keeps emphasizing their equal importance. The new NATO Strategic Concept and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy are perceived as factors that strengthen Hungary's security. Hence, the NMS emphasizes the importance of both Article 5. of the Washington Treaty and of the mutual assistance and solidarity clauses of the Lisbon Treaty.

However, due to the dynamic and often unpredictable changes of the global security environment, the National Military Strategy declares that military force remains necessary even in the 21st century. As a result of the interdependency that characterizes global security Hungary needs to address security challenges even if they take place physically far away from the country. The NMS states that *'it may happen even in the beginning of the 21st century that in Europe and its neighbourhood military force gets a primary role in a regional conflict'* that may well be interpreted as a reference to the 2008 war in Georgia and the Arab Spring.

Concerning the concrete threats, the document firmly states that the probability of a conventional military attack against Hungary or its allies is negligible, and it is likely to remain so also in the medium term. An attack conducted by non-conventional means and pursuing limited ambitions is also of low probability, but cannot be wholly excluded.

The strategy emphasizes that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains an unpredictable threat to international peace and security. Though the document states that the terrorist organizations with global ambitions have become weakened, it reminds the reader that terrorism itself is still an important global concern that affects both the trans-Atlantic community and Hungary. Weak and failed states also remain a possible source of security concerns.

The strategy recognizes the growing importance of the non-military aspects of security and asymmetric threats. The NMS mentions particularly the accessibility of global commons such as

the high seas, space, international airspace, in line with NATO's Strategic Concept. Particular attention is paid to cyber security, energy security and environmental security.

II. Financial resources

Before one assesses the financial provisions of the NMS, a particularly important factor that one needs to take into consideration is the economic downfall of Hungary. Contrary to the original hopes of the government, the Hungarian economy has been stagnating in 2011-2012. Whether this is the result of the global financial crisis, or is more connected to the failed economic policies of the Orbán-government – or both – does not belong to the subject of the present analysis. However, the result is clear: even in the long run Hungary cannot be expected to increase its defence spending.

In reality, even stagnation would be a positive surprise for most of the defence sphere. According to the SIPRI Military Expenditures Database,⁶ Hungarian defence expenditures have been constantly decreasing since 2007. They never reached the 2% of the GDP expected by NATO: even in the 'richest' years of 2001-2002 the rate was only 1,7-1,8 per cent, while currently it is less than one.

The NMS recognizes this shortage of resources, but the prescribed measures leave hardly any room for optimism in the defence sphere. The document emphasizes that the government committed itself to at least keep up the 2012 defence budget in the 2013-2015 period as well. An important detail though, is that the NMS speaks about preserving the nominal (!) value, which means a de facto annual 4-6% decrease, depending on the inflation of the national currency.

According to the strategy, the defence budget would start to increase only from 2016, by at least an annual 0,1% of the GDP. Hence, the Hungarian defence budget would reach the 1,39% of the GDP in 2022, i.e. ten years after the adoption of the NMS. On the one hand, the shy wording about the 1,39% - 'approximating the average of the European NATO member countries' – may well be interpreted as a tacit confession of both the economic hardships and the low importance of the national defence in general.

On the other hand, however, the low spending confirms the low threat perception of the government. Should Budapest count on any conventional or unconventional attack in the near future, or expect the radical worsening of the country's security environment, it would surely spend more on national defence.

III. The Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) and its tasks

The NMS emphasizes that the national defence of Hungary is based on two pillars: the indigenous national contribution and the cooperation with the allies. In this aspect the new NMS is literally identical with the old one: this particular sentence is practically the same in the two documents.

The basic task of the HDF is the armed defence of the independence, territory, airspace and material goods of Hungary against armed attacks from the outside. The HDF must be in possession of the necessary basic capabilities and should be able to further improve them in case of a sudden worsening of the security environment. The basic capabilities are to be developed in

⁶ The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Available: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4> Accessed: 2 January 213.

line with Hungary's NATO commitments. Besides, the Hungarian Defence Forces needs to be able to participate in international crisis management missions as well, to be addressed below.

In addition to these tasks, the Hungarian Defence Forces should be able to provide host nation support for allied forces, cooperate in handling natural and industrial disasters and humanitarian crises. Besides, the HDF assists civilian authorities in tasks that require special skills or equipment, in addition to its protocol duties.

Regarding the personnel composition of the HDF, the NMS prescribes a three-pillar structure: professional soldiers, contracted soldiers and a voluntary reservist force.⁷ The foundations of the voluntary reservist force have originally been laid down already in 1999, in order to gradually substitute the conscription-based system (suspended finally in 2004) with an all-voluntary reservist force. This reservist force is intended to provide the manpower necessary in case of a natural disaster, an extraordinary legal status or territorial defence. Hence, in peacetime it provides basic training for the citizens volunteering for the defence of the country, etc.

Participation in international crisis management missions

As it was already stated above, the NMS recognizes the need to participate in international crisis management missions, in order to strengthen the security of Hungary and her allies. In line with the low probability of a conventional military threat, it states that HDF units are typically used in crisis management missions. The NMS declares that the HDF may be sent to missions abroad based on a proper legal mandate, either in the framework of international organizations (thus EU, NATO, OSCE, UN) or in ad-hoc coalitions. Thus the NMS leaves the window open for participation in 'coalition of the willing'-type missions, like the U.S.-led war in Iraq was, even if it has no mandate from international organizations.

The document prescribes that even though nowadays the HDF participates only in low-intensity international missions, in the medium term it has to be able to conduct high-intensity operations as well. In order to achieve this goal, the NMS emphasizes the importance of human resources, continuous training and education and the proper utilization of lessons learned abroad.

The strategy states that Hungary intends to keep one thousand soldiers abroad in international crisis management missions, mainly in NATO and EU-led ones. This in practice means the keeping up the current practice, regardless of the difficult financial situation. However, one may be tempted to ask whether these plans are not too ambitious compared to the overall size of the HDF that is less than 28.000. The question is particularly relevant as out of this number only approx. 10.000 soldiers are really able, trained and fit for such missions.

If this level of ambition prevails in the final version of the strategy, the following question will arise: after the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, where will Hungary find a place for these 1000 soldiers? Currently Afghanistan is by far the largest mission of the HDF abroad: more than 500 Hungarian soldiers are serving there. The rest are mainly on the Balkans, while smaller numbers serve on the Sinai Peninsula and in Cyprus. Taken into account that the international military presence on the Balkans is decreasing as well, the answer in the long run may well be Africa, parallel with the on-going shift of the EU's crisis management missions there.

⁷ For an official description, see: Government of Hungary: *A Magyar Honvédség Önkéntes Tartalékos Rendszere*. [The Voluntary Reservist System of the Hungarian Defense Forces] Available: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/honvedelmi-miniszterium/hirek/a-magyar-honvedseg-onkent-es-tartalékos-rendszere> Accessed: 2 January 2012.; while for an expert analysis: KERN, Tamás: 'A Nemzetőrségtől az Önkéntes Tartalékos Rendszer reformjáig.' [From the National Guards to the reform of the Voluntary Reservist System.] *Nemzet és Biztonság*, March 2010. Available: <http://nemzetesbiztonsag.hu/letoltes.php?letolt=130> Accessed: 2 January 2013.

Besides, the strategy also envisions that in the long run HDF units should be able to conduct also high-intensity missions in addition to the current low-intensity ones. Taken into account the financial constraints described above, one may be tempted to ask, from where will Budapest have the resources to properly train and equip soldiers, who are able to participate in high-intensity missions?

At this point there seems to be a slight contradiction between the various policy objectives. Namely, it seems challenging to keep up the number of soldiers serving abroad, develop high-intensity mission capabilities, continue the modernization of the equipment (including hardware, such as helicopters, APCs, etc.) and do these together with stagnating, or just marginally increasing financial resources.

IV. Regional relevance for Ukraine

By assessing the NMS, one may firmly state that Hungary is a stable and reliable partner for all its neighbours, committed to peaceful cooperation with all of them, and perceives no conventional military danger or threat practically from any side.

Contrary to some radical nationalistic and chauvinistic accusations against Hungary, one needs to clearly see that Budapest has no territorial claims and no capabilities for such intentions. When the text addresses the tasks of the Hungarian Defence Forces, it mentions the defence of the 'population of Hungary' and not of the 'citizens of Hungary.' Thus Hungary even with the much disputed citizenship law has no such 'passportisation' ambitions like Russia does when Moscow speaks about the defence of Russian citizens abroad.

Though the NMS itself addresses the political aspects of NATO only very briefly, its superior document, the National Security Strategy provides more information. It clearly states that Hungary is committed to support the NATO and EU membership of all its neighbours, or to their closest possible cooperation with the two organizations. This in practice means that Budapest remains a firm supporter also of Ukraine's ambitions to further improve cooperation both with the EU and NATO.

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