

Central European Nations' Cooperation: Past, Present and Future

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The original idea of forming CENCOOP was to set a multilateral frame work and mechanisms for cooperation of the Central European countries in the area of peace support and crisis response operations. CENCOOP is also a forum which gives opportunities to the Participating Countries to exchange views and standpoints on the current defence and security issues.

CENCOOP performs its activity in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and is based on decisions of the United Nations, the principles of the EU and NATO, and the objectives of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), as well as the Partnership for Peace Programme.

The prerequisites of a successful cooperation in the area of PSOs consist of setting up the necessary mechanisms and tools for providing a qualitative exchange of information between the Participating Countries regarding all the aspects of PSOs engagement, as well as a security dialogue, peace operation training and concrete activities of the countries in that area.

CENCOOP aims to become an efficient and effective initiative for participating and training for PSOs through the development of common projects. Secondary objective is the exchange of information in the region of Central and South East Europe in the area of defence policy, security dialogue and consultations on PSOs.

CENCOOP intends to create a framework that would allow supporting joint efforts in carrying out the PSOs on the basis of national self-differentiation, regional dialog, openness to others, and ad-hoc cooperation with regional partners, complementary to other initiatives.

CENCOOP takes advantage of synergies in planning, training and logistics, and benefits as an organization from the exchange of information, the economy of resources, and burden sharing by using good neighbourly relations, experience in multinational operations, interactive cooperation in the Central European region, solidarity and unity effort.

Regarding the **membership**, there are two categories of members within CENCOOP: Participating Countries – the full member states – and the Information Partners – observer states –. As of today the CENCOOP Participating Countries are: **Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia** and **Slovenia**. **Switzerland** is a former member which this spring has announced its decision to leave the initiative. The **Czech Republic** and **Ukraine** are enjoying the status of Information Partners within CENCOOP.

Since CENCOOP's creation, there have been significant changes within the Participating countries status related to NATO. In March 1999 Hungary, and in March 2004 Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia became full members of the Alliance. The other 2 Participating Countries, Austria, and Croatia, partake in The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace (PFP) programme. All these changes have certainly contributed to changing the original character of the initiative by influencing the national agendas and priorities.

Concerning the **cooperation mechanisms**, there are 4 main bodies within CENCOOP.

The Defence Ministers' Meeting (DMM) is the supreme authority of CENCOOP and provides political guidance and decisions on general matters related to CENCOOP. Additionally, any decisions on the enlargement of CENCOOP, as well as invitations extended to other countries, international organizations or other institutions as observers or information partners is the responsibility of the Defence Ministers' Meeting.

The Steering Committee (SC), composed of representatives of the Participating Countries, is the decision-making body, following the political guidance and implementing the decisions taken by the Defence Ministers' Meeting. It provides recommendations to the Defence Ministers' Meeting on all relevant issues for CENCOOP and for all Participating Countries.

The Steering Committee convenes the Planning and Coordination Group (PCG), supervises and directs its work, and guides the Director of PCG. It is also responsible for the establishment and convening of Working Groups on specific subjects. The Steering Committee will deal with any other functions that may be conferred by the Defence Ministers' Meeting.

PCG is the task-oriented joint planning tool of CENCOOP. It is established on a non-permanent basis, headed by a Director and composed of representatives of the national delegations. Overall, the PCG facilitates the exchange of information on issues related to CENCOOP among Participating Countries.

Tasked by the Steering Committee, the PCG conducts analysis of common requirements and provides

recommendations. Working Groups (WGs) may support PCG activities.

WGs could be established and convened by the Steering Committee, aiming to safeguard the necessary coordination and progress in certain areas of cooperation. Providing expertise in specific areas, WGs support the Steering Committee and/or the Director of PCG as recommended and tasked.

In the current phase, CENCOOP is working on establishing a new cooperation mechanism the **Chiefs of Defence's Meeting (CHODsM)**. This body is to implement the military oriented/related part of decisions taken by the Defence Ministers' Meeting.

In the last period CENCOOP has tried to readapt its concept, defining new priorities and cooperation areas. In 2004, the Defence Ministers Meeting adopted the "**Interlaken Declaration**" which established the new priority areas for CENCOOP:

- Facilitation and coordination of the contributions by CENCOOP participating states to peace support operations based on a mandate by the United Nations Security Council or the OSCE and led by NATO or the European Union.
- Improvement of the ability to operate together in peace support operations by such means as common training, exchange of training programs and instructors, courses, combined exercises, observers, for exercises, etc.
- Enhancement of the visibility of the regional cooperation, especially within the ESDP framework.

In 2005 the latest developments within the initiative showed a shift of focus from the military aspects to the political ones, thus changing the initiative in a forum of exchanging views in the area of defence policy, security dialogue and consultations on PSOs. Among the topics that could be fruitfully discussed between the CENCOOP countries, the challenges of defence and armed forces reforms were additionally identified.

In this context, Croatia holding the Presidency of CENCOOP proposed a new platform on the future of the initiative – the “Position Paper”, focusing on the assessment of the current situation within CENCOOP and issuing concrete proposals of how to overcome the existing differences.

The approval of this document led to the adoption of a smaller institutional framework without risking to lose the regularity of CENCOOP meetings.

In the same year, Austria and Slovenia proposed a project – “**CENCOOP Academy**” as a “tool” for enhancing the cooperation in the field of training and preparation for PSOs, taking advantage from the common training and each others experience, using the available assets (in particular simulation systems) and developing possible “CENCOOP Centres of Excellence“.

Nowadays, the security and political contexts have changed as a result of **NATO and EU enlargement** and the fulfilment of the requirements of membership in these major organizations is regarded as a priority by the majority of CENCOOP countries. CENCOOP Participating Countries face new security challenges and the connected development of NATO and EU, both resulting in increased tasks for the PSOs. Member countries have become aware of the need to re-examine

and adapt CENCOOP to the new needs and requirements of the dynamic environment in the changed security and political context of today, as a result of the new trends in the peacekeeping. Re-evaluation of the CENCOOP concept is in the spirit of recent international developments, as the EU and the UN are also changing the way of approaching new peacekeeping missions. The EU is going to be more and more involved in PSOs on the African Continent as the demand of crisis management is growing in this part of the world. As of today, all such missions require **participation under more robust conditions**, since almost all ongoing PK missions are Chapter VII mandated.

In the last period, during several CENCOOP meetings, it was discussed that the main challenge to the existence of CENCOOP is its sustainability through concrete projects of cooperation and the reduced possibilities to generate common capabilities for a real engagement in PSOs due to the absence of a proper legal framework. The current situation requires the harmonisation of the points of view of member states regarding the debate of the ongoing projects and operationalisation of the new proposals.

One of the most significant opportunities within the CENCOOP area which has positively influenced the initiative was the Austrian EU Presidency. This has represented a major step in **closing relations with ESDP**.

During the 22nd CENCOOP SC Meeting, held in Bucharest in March of this year, the Austria EU Presidency informed the member countries that an important priority was to develop the military capacities within the EU and to continue the development of military operations.

In their view Civil-military coordination (CMCO) represented another important priority. As a second important element of CMCO, disaster response was to be improved. EU also had to work on improving the reaction of the military component. Even though this is not organized to be used for such actions, there are elements within the military structure that can be used (strategic airlift, engineering, etc).

The Western Balkans will continue to represent the focal area for Europe, and from the military side, the involvement could continue in the ESPD context. Within the ESPD frame, a number of orientation courses could be offered to the countries from the Western Balkans. These represent future possibilities for further CENCOOP involvement.

This year Romania is holding the presidency of this regional initiative. Holding the **CENCOOP Presidency** in the year 2006 is not only an honour but also a challenge for Romania.

In the beginning of 2006, Romania took the Presidency of CENCOOP and has proposed the following **goals**:

- to make CENCOOP more “visible”;
- to develop CENCOOP cooperation with other international organizations;
- to improve the CENCOOP Participating Countries’ ability to operate together in PSOs;
- to extend the mechanism of sharing the lessons learned and experience from operations to other issues of mutual interest;

- to involve information partners within CENCOOP activities;
- to support the organization of exercises in the field of simulation training etc.

During its presidency, Romania will centre its efforts in making CENCOOP more visible on the international arena and finding its right place between the international organizations.

For this year, the Romanian Presidency continues the efforts of the Croatian Presidency to constantly develop the initiative and we believe that the last developments in the area of rethinking the basis and the concept of CENCOOP represent an appropriate instrument for future transformation of CENCOOP.

GENESIS of CENCOOP

In 1996, Austria lunched the dialog on the creation of a regional cooperation initiative to facilitate joint contribution by Central European Nations to Peace Support Operations (PSO).

In summer 1997, this initiative was presented to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi ANNAN, by the Austrian Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. SCHÜSSEL. Additionally, NATO was provided with an in-depth briefing by the Austrian Federal Minister of Defence, Dr. FASSLABEND in autumn 1997. In addition, the initiative was introduced to the Western European Union.

During these events, high interest and support was signalled. Based on these positive signals, the “Preparatory Meeting” for the establishment of CENCOOP was convened in December 1997.

*On 19 March 1998, at their meeting in Vienna, the **Defence Ministers of Austria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia signed the Letter of Intent (LoI)** together with the included Framework Document.*

*On March 19th, 1999, **Switzerland** joined the initiative by signing the Letter of Intent (LoI), together with the included Framework Document.*

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GENESIS of CENCOOP (continued)

In the beginning of 2000, the development of the new European Security and Defence Policy as well as the experience gained in CENCOOP framework since its creation led to a reassessment of the basic documents of the cooperation.

As a result of this process, the Participating Countries agreed on a supplement and on the further development of additional CENCOOP documents - “Resolution Concerning the Further Development of CENCOOP” and the “Declaration Concerning the Areas of Priority”, adopted during the 3rd Defence Ministers Meeting in Bratislava, June 22nd, 2001.

*On October 30th, 2001, **Croatia** expressed its intention of becoming a member of CENCOOP. By signing the “Resolution concerning the further development of CENCOOP” and after the approval of the accession as full Participating Country, the Republic of Croatia was accepted as Participating Country during the 4th Defence Ministers Meeting in Slovenia on June 21st, 2002.*