

### András György Deák – Zoltán Felméry – Tamás Csiki Varga<sup>1</sup>: Perceptions of security in five Central European countries. Preliminary lessons from a comparative study<sup>2</sup>

#### Executive Summary

- 20-30 percent of respondents in the five surveyed countries – Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia – can be considered well-informed regarding their respective national defense spendings.
- For the next five years, the majority of respondents in Romania want to see an increase in defense spending, while those in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia mostly want to keep spending at its 2023 levels.
- Beside various defense-related activities, the majority of societies currently endorse the (re)introduction of conscription. However, in Hungary, public support for it is barely 36%.
- In all countries surveyed, almost an equal ratio of respondents (58% in the Czech Republic, 52% in Hungary, 56% in Poland, 53% in Romania, and 56% in Slovakia) think that in the next ten years there would be an armed conflict between the great powers.
- Respondents from the region do not believe that a military attack on their country is likely to occur within the next ten years. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents consider a significant cyberattack on their national networks, as well as a new migration crisis highly likely in the foreseeable future.
- Respondents in all five countries see the Russia-Ukraine war, economic vulnerability, Russia's military threat, and uncontrolled migration as significant security challenges, albeit to differing degrees.
- Greater defense cooperation is required among the Central and Eastern European nations in the areas of border control and the management of migration, the security of energy supply, economic security and stability, cyber security, information security, and data protection.

**Our institute surveyed the security and threat perceptions of 5,310 people in five countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) in late 2023. The core findings of this survey are presented in this analysis. We examine and briefly assess the polling results regarding respondents' opinion on defense spending, military capabilities, alliances and threat perceptions. The Hungarian sample's results can be compared to surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021 – with a few methodological disclaimers.**

#### Introduction and methodology

Commissioned by the Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies, Szociometrum Ltd. performed a computer-based poll on security and threat perceptions in five Central European countries – the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia – between September 20, 2023 and October 19, 2023. Each national sample of at least 1,000 individuals was representative for the age, gender, education level, and settlement patterns of the surveyed societies. For the Hungarian sample and more than 90% in the other cases, the survey data had been gathered prior to the escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict on October 7, without any other significant incidents influencing the polling results.

Similar surveys had previously been carried out among Hungarian respondents in 2019 and 2021. Certain questions remained unaltered and were posed in a similar way, while others saw only minor adjustments in response to evolving circumstances. Essentially, this permits us to investigate time-series patterns for Hungarian respondents specifically contrasting the circumstances prior to and following the 2022

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escalation of the Russia–Ukraine war. These observations, however, should only be considered as indicative because of the somewhat differing methodology and — above all — the distinct means of data collection. (2021 was a face-to-face survey, whereas the 2019 and 2023 iterations were computer-based. In case of personal surveys, the outreach to the population is typically greater, also reaching people who infrequently use internet or not at all. Though estimates vary, the surveyed population gap in the Hungarian case can be estimated up to one-fifth of all citizens. More significantly, this group – primarily the elderly, people from rural areas, and less educated – may have distinct value preferences and perceptions. Therefore, the computer data recording in these subpopulations may yield significantly different results from that of the personal surveys, even if representative samples are taken in all cases.)

In the present descriptive assessment, we offer a collection of the primary findings along two lines of comparison: we examine the security and threat perceptions for the five countries' populations in 2023, and we also offer a general comparison between the Hungarian population's 2023 sample and the intakes from 2019 and 2021. Corresponding analyses have already been published for the Hungarian surveys in 2019 and 2021.<sup>3</sup>

### Key takeaways from a comparative analysis

As a first snapshot of this extensive survey, the following subchapters will assess results regarding the perception of current and future threats and challenges, the views on defense-related public education and training programs, and the possible reintroduction of conscription; attitudes to NATO collective defense and joint European defense; defense spending, views on national armed forces' capabilities, performance and modernization programs, as well as international partners and cooperation opportunities with them.

#### *Current threats and challenges to Central European security*

Figure 1 illustrates national rankings of 16 pre-selected potential sources of currently perceived security threats (of which respondents could pick maximum three). Not surprisingly, the Russia–Ukraine war was identified as the most likely threat perceived in all countries (46% in Hungary and in Poland respectively, 43% in Romania, 40% in Slovakia, and 39% in Czechia). Still, the notion of a threatening war shall be differentiated along other polled notions. The perception of Russia as a military threat is the most important factor in this regard: results varied widely from 15% in Hungary up to 44% in Poland (21% in Slovakia, 23% in the Czech Republic, 32% in Romania).

Regarding non-military threats, economic vulnerability had primarily been identified in Romania and Hungary, while uncontrolled migration in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The Hungarian public has shown an outstanding fear of gas dependence (26.5%), rising Chinese influence (21.5%), and climate change (18%), while 20.5% of Poles were concerned of cyber attacks, 18% of Romanian respondents were afraid of organized crime, while 19.5% of Slovaks considered the growing reliance of NATO on the U.S. as a problem.

In both the 2019 and 2021 Hungarian national surveys, the three most commonly identified threats were climate change, migration and gas dependency, in this consecutive order, with a consistent and sizable lead ahead of any other threats perceived. Comparatively speaking, the Russia–Ukraine war — previously included as 'the armed conflict in Ukraine' — had only been mentioned by 17% and 17.5% in 2019 and 2021, ranking it at 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> place, respectively. Consequently, the 2023 result of 45.5% exceeds any past pollings by a huge margin, significantly surpassing the highest identified concern ever surveyed (climate change, at 36.8% in 2019). Nevertheless, the surging fear of war has not been strongly associated with a potential military aggression from Russia, surveyed only at 15.4% in 2023 (8.6% in 2019, 7.5% in 2021). The Hungarian public is obviously less concerned about the direct Russian military threat than allies in Central Europe, despite being just as anxious about the Russia–Ukraine war as the others are. A plausible explanation is that the war itself is either not perceived as a Russian military aggression or, more likely, Hungarian people increasingly fear its indirect consequences only.

With only a slight decrease, 'uncontrolled migration' and 'natural gas dependency' have maintained their prominence, followed by 'economic vulnerability' this time, previously placed fifth on both occasions.

<sup>3</sup> Alex ETL (2020): [The perception of security in Hungary](#) [online], Source: svkk.uni-nke.hu, [20.12.2023.] and András György DEÁK – Alex ETL – Zoltán FELMÉRY (2022): [A magyar biztonságpercepció jellegzetességei](#) [online], Source: svkk.uni-nke.hu, [20.12.2023.]

Climate change lost most in perceived relevance (2019: 36.8%; 2021: 32.5%; 2023: 18.1%). A possible explanation may be that while this challenge is persistent and pressing, a disproportionate amount of attention could have been diverted from this issue by single, high-profile events and related threats, such as Russia's repeated aggression against Ukraine. In addition, as COVID has mostly been tackled, the decline in fearing epidemics became clearly visible (2021: 21.1%; 2023: 9.7%, still not included in the 2019 poll).

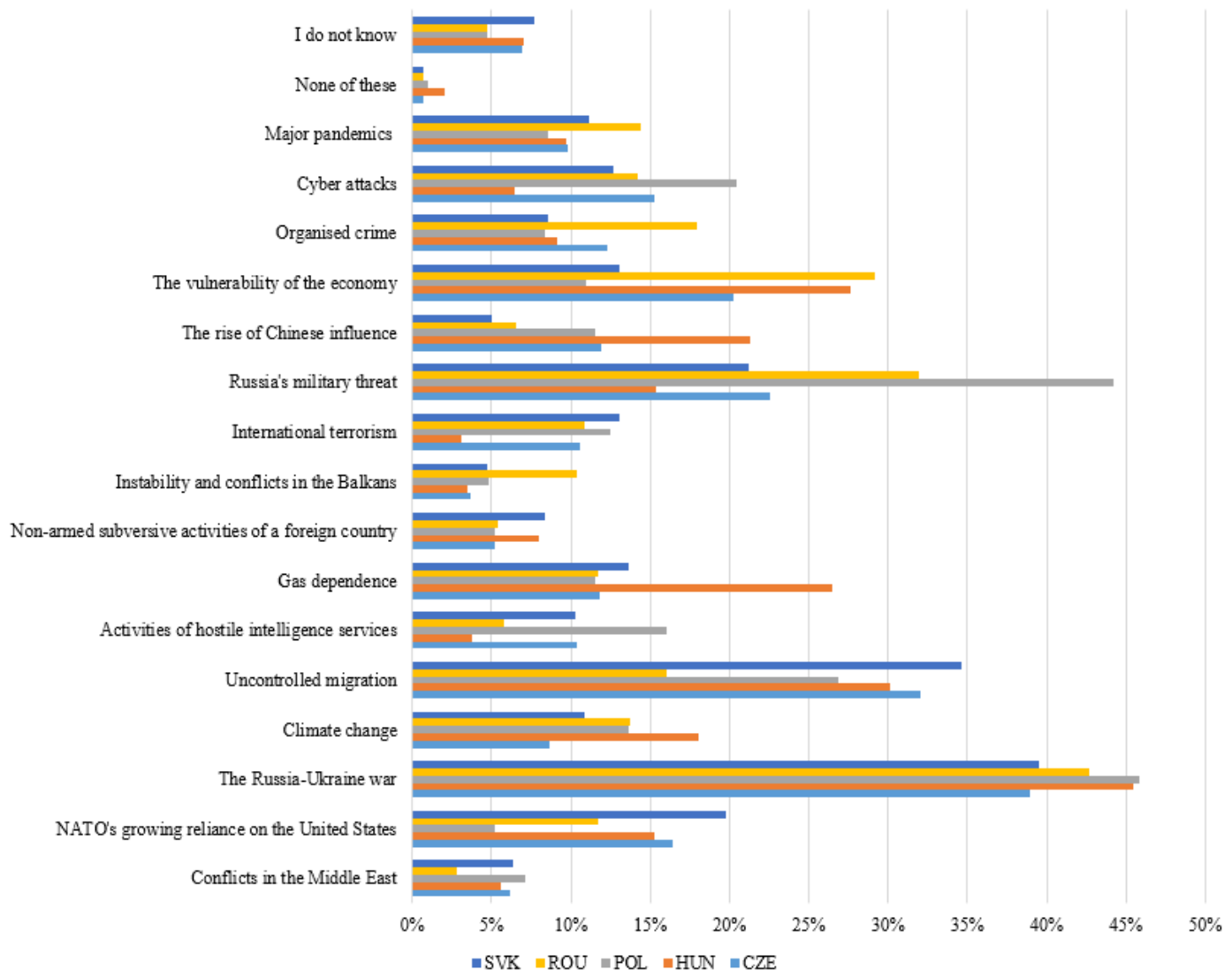


Figure 1: 'Which of the following factors do you think currently have the greatest negative impact on the security of your country (maximum three answers)?'

We also surveyed respondents' military threat perceptions more directly. Figure 2 shows us what respondents think about whether any countries pose a direct military threat to them. Except for Poland, the majority of respondents – although to varying degrees – felt secure and did not perceive such threat. Understandably, the most often mentioned source of military threat was Russia. In Hungary, 1 in 3 people perceive a military threat to the country. Hungarians are more at ease than other Central European nations. While this figure seems to be low in a regional comparison, it represents a noteworthy departure from past, excessively low results. A merely 3.8% of respondents in Hungary expressed a sense of being under military threat in the 2021 survey, with 20.3% either not knowing the answer or choosing not to respond.

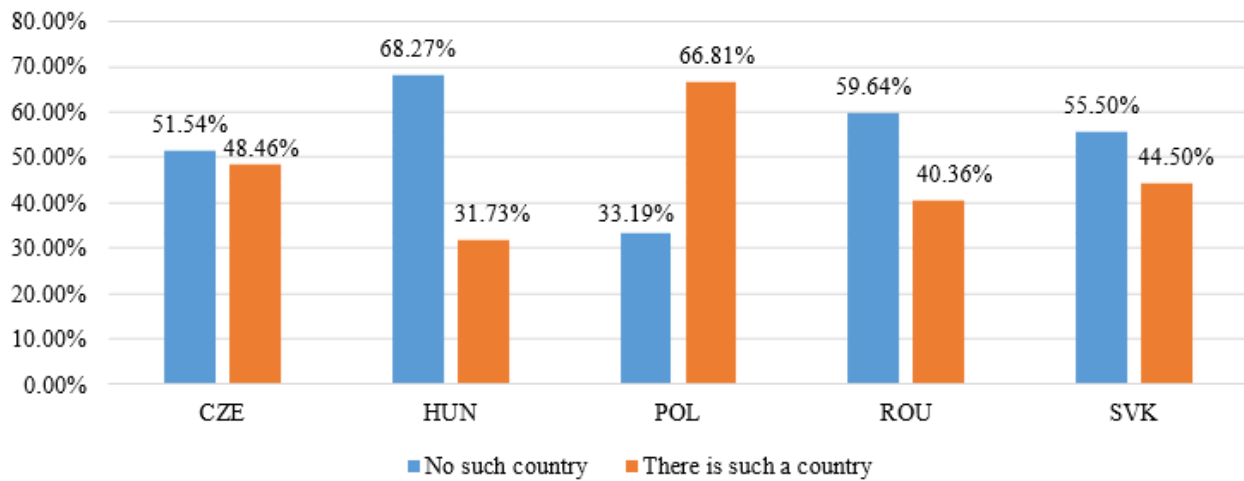


Figure 2: 'Are there any countries that pose a direct military threat to your country today?'

### Future threats and challenges to Central European security

The survey measured how societies assess the probability of certain events having an impact on their security. Figures 3-7 illustrate how the public perceives the likelihood of such security-related incidents in the five countries surveyed.

#### How likely do you think that in the next 10 years ... (CZE)

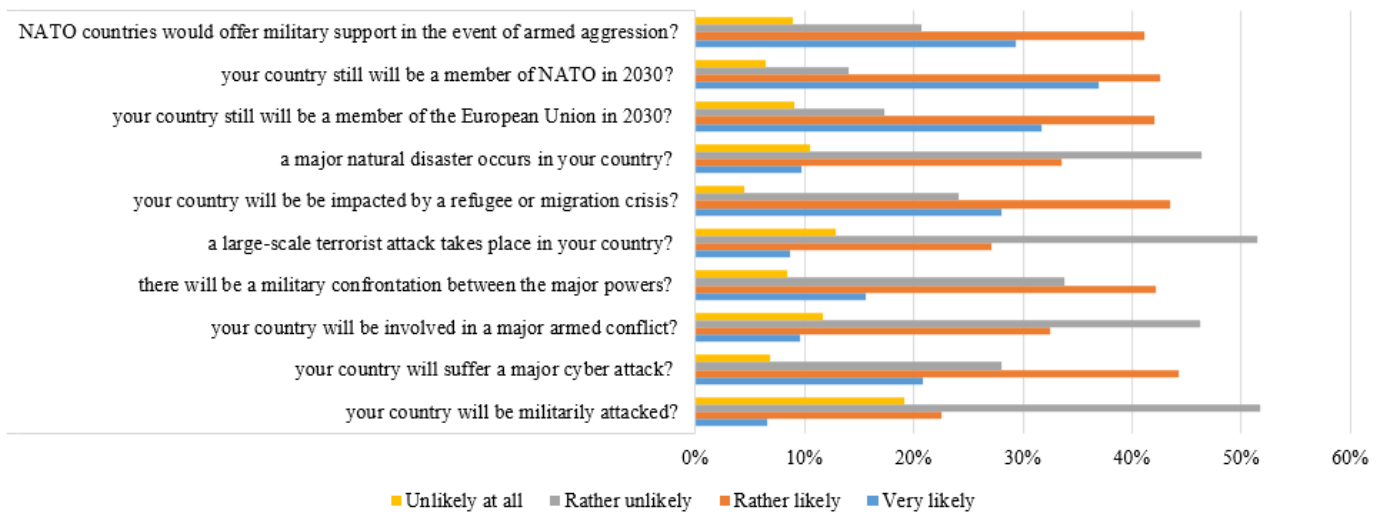


Figure 3: 'How likely do you think the following events are to happen in the next 10 years?' (Czech Republic)

### How likely do you think that in the next 10 years ... (HUN)

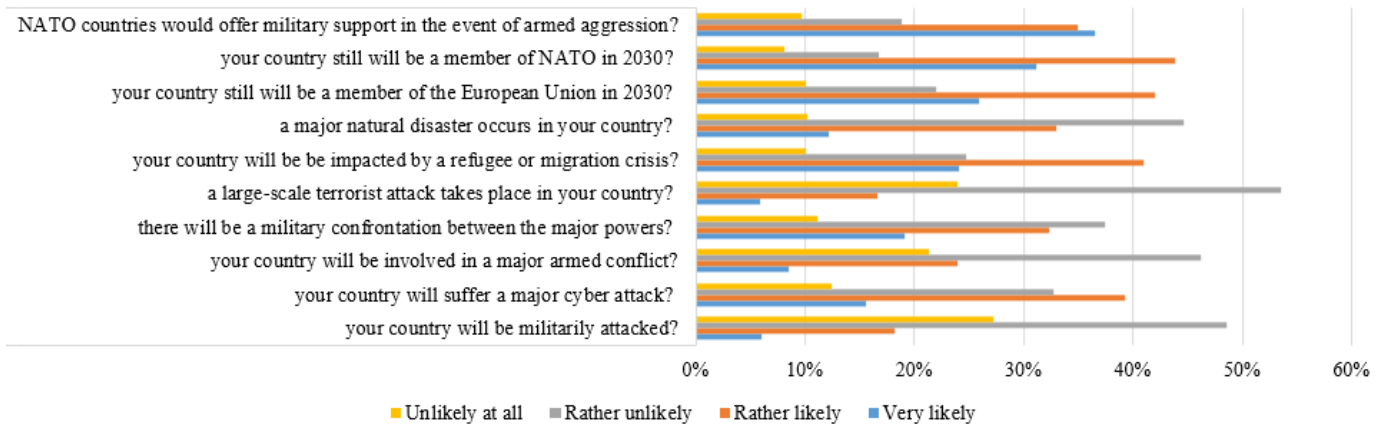


Figure 4: 'How likely do you think the following events are to happen in the next 10 years?' (Hungary)

### How likely do you think that in the next 10 years ... (POL)

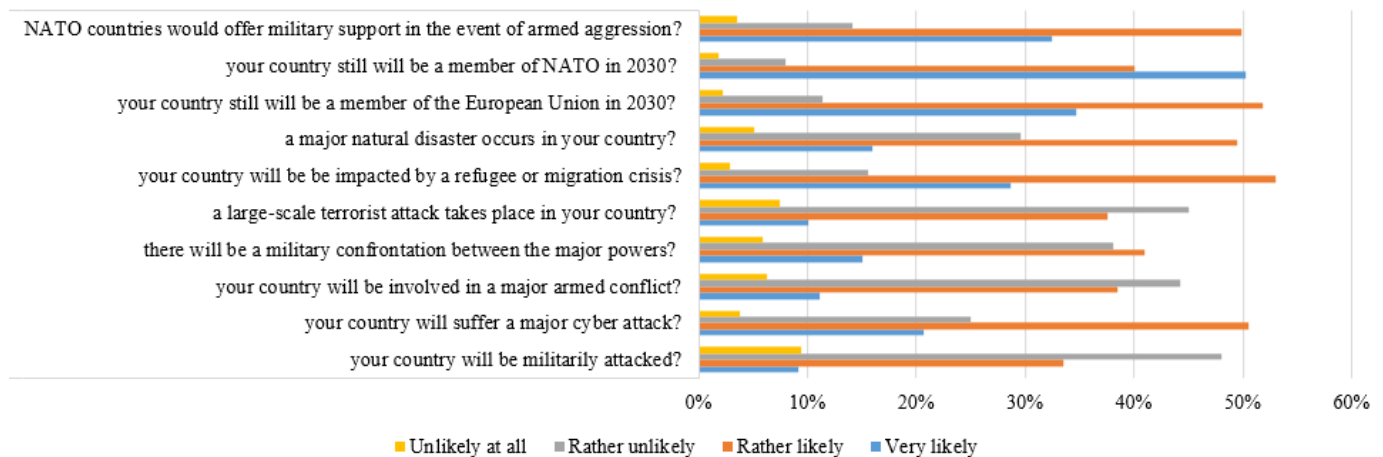


Figure 5: 'How likely do you think the following events are to happen in the next 10 years?' (Poland)

### How likely do you think that in the next 10 years ... (ROU)

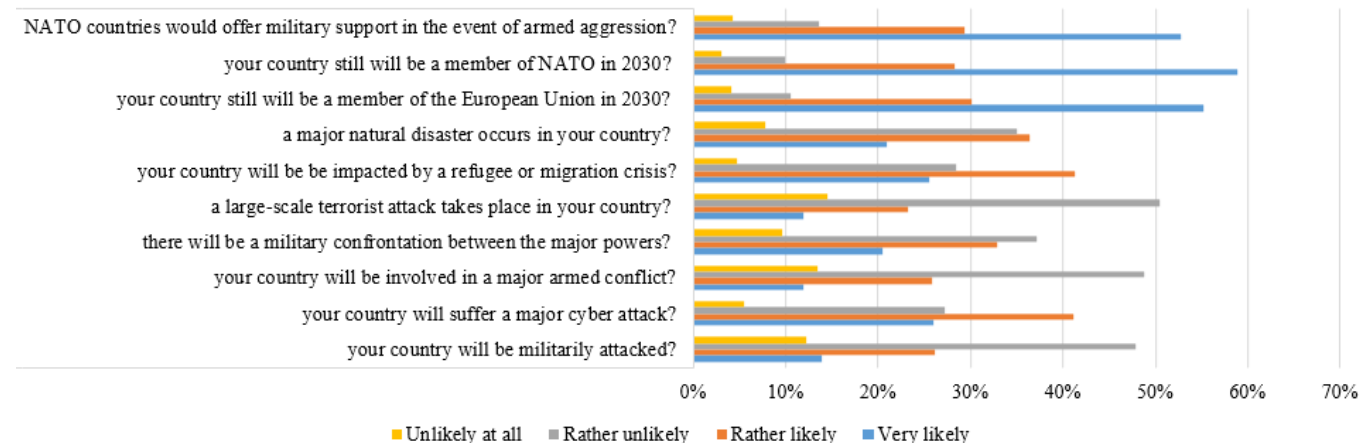


Figure 6: 'How likely do you think the following events are to happen in the next 10 years?' (Romania)



### How likely do you think that in the next 10 years ... (SVK)

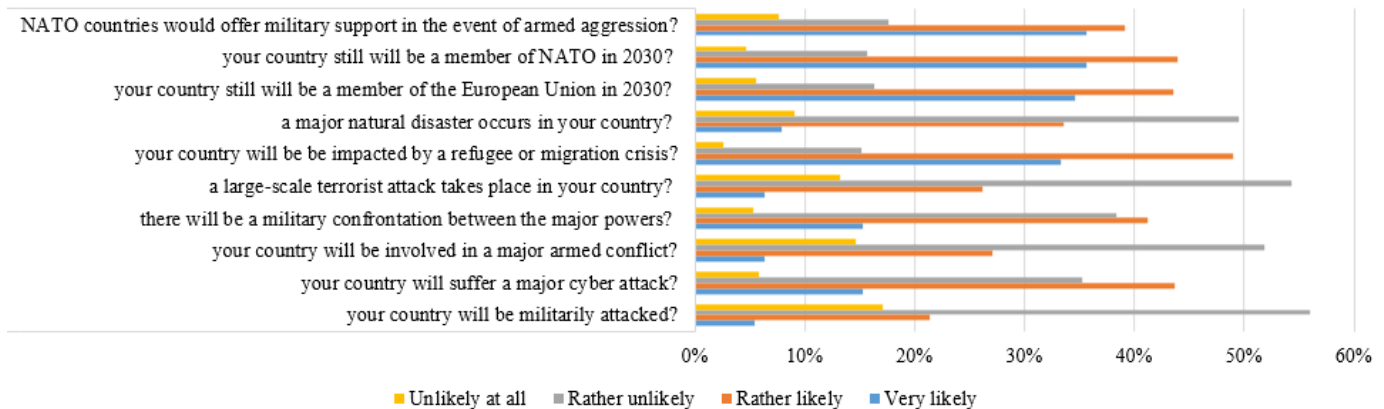


Figure 7: 'How likely do you think the following events are to happen in the next 10 years?' (Slovakia)

The majority of respondents in all countries (58% in the Czech Republic, 56% in Poland and in Slovakia respectively, 53% in Romania, 52% in Hungary) believe that military confrontation will take place among great powers within the next ten years. The belief that NATO countries would offer military support to each other in the event of an armed aggression against one of them, is likewise similarly strong in general (82% in Poland and in Romania respectively, 74% in Slovakia, 71% in Hungary, and 70% in the Czech Republic). Furthermore, there are some cases for which perceptions vary in degree but are generally comparable across the societies surveyed. The majority of respondents (Czech Republic – 75%, Hungary – 75%, Slovakia – 73%, Romania – 59%, Poland – 57%) do not think that their country suffer military aggression in the next decade. When it comes to the perception of serious cyberattacks, things are rather similar. There is a high degree of optimism in Hungary and Slovakia, pessimism in Poland and Romania, and a medium level of optimism in the Czech Republic, despite the fact that overall most respondents believe that a major cyber attack is more likely to happen (71% in Poland, 67% in Romania, 65% in the Czech Republic, 59% in Slovakia, and 55% in Hungary). All societies surveyed concur in a general sense that there is a good chance of the region suffering another major refugee or migration crisis, with highest perception rates among Poles, Slovaks and the Czech (82% in Poland, 71% in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic respectively, 65% in Hungary, and 67% in Romania). The majority of respondents share similar opinions regarding their countries' membership in the European Union and NATO, with few minor variances. While sustained support for NATO membership is higher, ranging from 75 to 90 percent (Poland 90%, Romania 82%, Slovakia 80%, the Czech Republic 79%, and Hungary 75%), a somewhat more moderate support for / belief in EU membership by 2030 is visible, between 68 to 87% of respondents (Poland 87%, Romania 85%, Slovakia 78%, the Czech Republic 74%, and Hungary 68%).

We do not observe any significant variations in the primary components of the survey when compared to the 2021 poll. In 2021, only 14.8% of Hungarian respondents considered military aggression against Hungary 'rather likely or very likely' in 10 years' time, while in 2023 almost a quarter of them (24.1%). It is interesting to compare this change to responses to the question regarding the possible engagement of Hungary in an armed conflict (together with allies): in 2023, 32.4% of respondents said it was 'rather likely or very likely', compared to 15.1% in 2021. Additionally, the percentage of respondents who rather ruled out the possibility of war decreased from 33.4% in 2021 to 14.7% in 2023. Comparing these figures to polling results on the Russia–Ukraine war shows that the Hungarian population has a vivid perception of the war and think of it as being involved, more closely than actually perceiving immediate military threats.

In parallel, the support for sustained NATO and EU membership increased significantly in Hungary: in 2021, 54% and 51.3% of respondents said they thought it would be 'rather likely or very likely' to sustain membership in NATO and the EU respectively in ten years' time, compared to 75.1% and 67.9% in 2023. However, the increase in these two figures should be approached critically, because in 2021 almost 17% refused to answer this question, and it is plausible that in 2023 a significant proportion of them considered

sustained NATO and EU membership a likely option/certainty. (A strong reason for the change was that unlike in 2021, respondents could not skip these questions in the 2023 survey). Another refugee and migration crisis had also been highly rated in expectations and has become a generally accepted element of Hungarian threat perception: in 2021, 30% of respondents considered it to be 'very likely and rather likely' (12.2% did not respond), however in 2023, 65.1% did so.

### *Attitudes to collective defense*

Besides measuring the perceived likelihood of NATO collective response to an attack on the alliance, we also investigated how respondents felt their own country should behave in such a situation (Figure 8). While most people in Poland (77%) Romania (71%) Hungary (60%) and the Czech Republic (57%) supported collective defense, in Slovakia (49%) fewer people were committed. Moreover, across all countries, between 13 and 24 percent of respondents were undecided or/and did not disclose their preferences. We posed this question under the same methodology in 2019 in Hungary with a distribution of 64 (supporting) – 25 (refusing) – 11 percent (d.n./n.a.). The 10 percentage point increase in the number of undecided voters can be considered as a sign of modestly growing hesitancy regarding military commitments during the past four years.

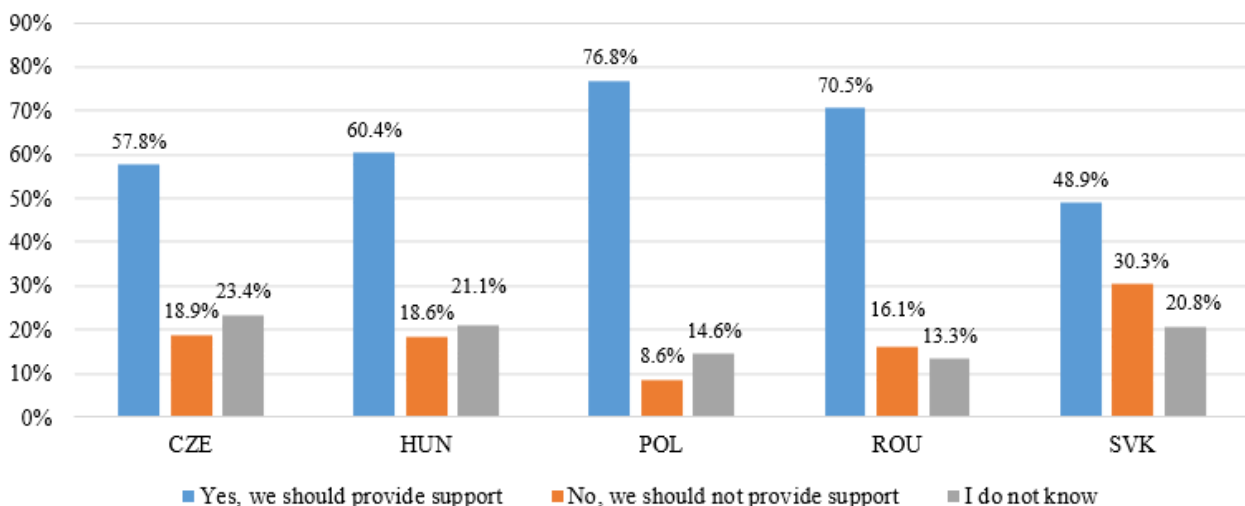


Figure 8: 'Should your country/country's armed forces defend an allied NATO or EU Member State if that Member State is attacked?'

### *Attitudes to joint European defense*

Figures 9-11 show national attitudes concerning the creation of joint European armed forces. The majority of respondents supported the idea by a considerable margin. In Hungary and the Czech Republic backing appears to be somewhat softer given the combination of lower support and the higher level of undecided responses. Still, lower support often means more consistency, clarity, and dedication. Figure 10 demonstrates that the majority of supportive Poles and Hungarians are also ready to delegate elements of decision-making from their respective governments to the EU (sovereignty sharing). The question over creating a 'supranational' versus 'inter-governmental' European armed force remained much more divisive among supporters in the other three regional states. In general, regional societies – with the possible exception of Poland – do not have a uniform opinion regarding a European armed force and defense identity. There is at least one exception: supporters agree on the role of the United States. Figure 11 shows that the overwhelming bulk of those, who back a joint and independent (sovereign) European defense, expect it to be able to act without the U.S.

The 2019 Hungarian survey yielded nearly identical results, indicating a relatively stable level of support in Hungary. Hungarians are not very keen to have a joint European armed force. Still, those who support the idea, would like to create a supranational armed force, also capable to act without U.S.

involvement. Decreasing dependence on the U.S. seems to have gained support over 2019. In 2023, 85.1% favored full European military autonomy (only 65.2% in 2019) and 9.8% opposed this ambition (23.8%). Nonetheless, the two questions were not separated in the past, causing a considerable methodological bias in comparison.

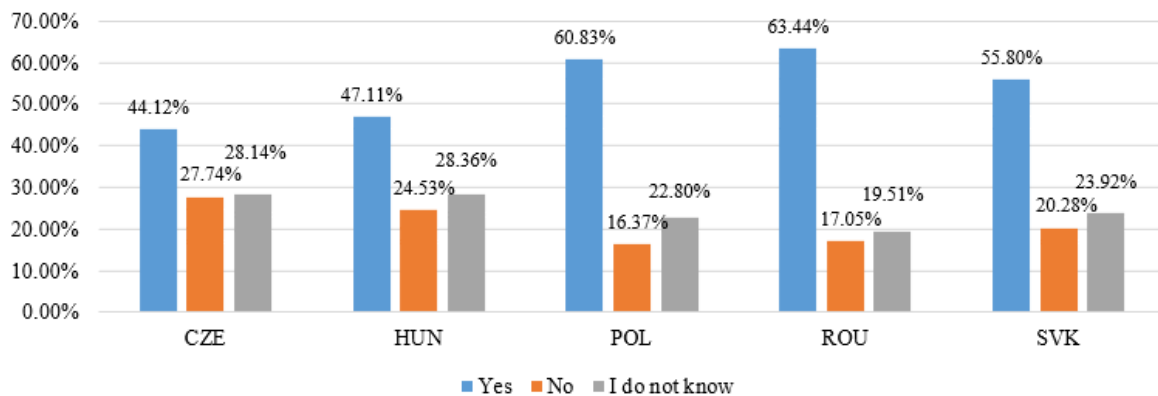


Figure 9: 'Do you think there is a need for creating joint European armed forces in the medium term?'

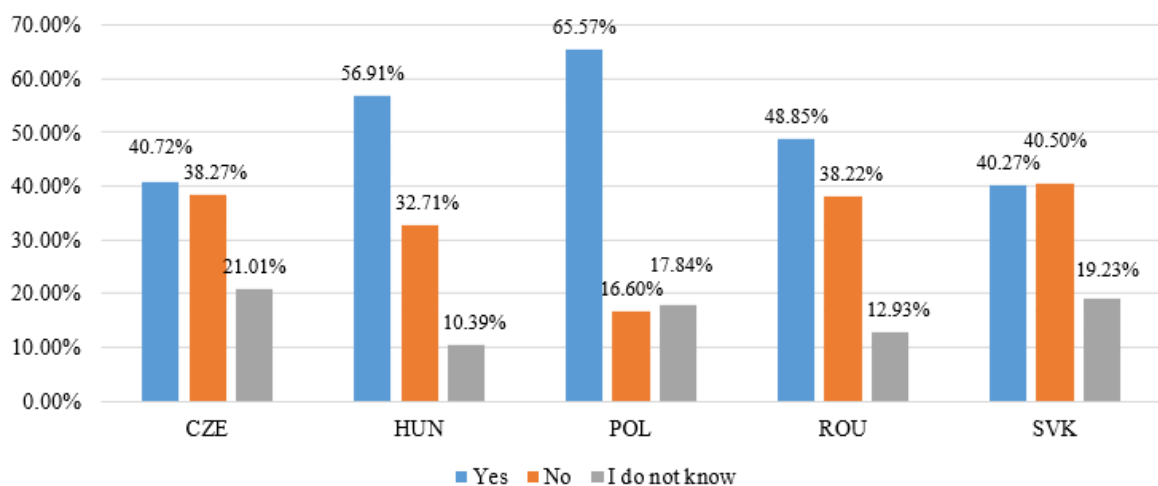


Figure 10: 'Is it necessary to create joint European armed forces, if it would require handing over certain decision-making powers from your national government to the European Union?'

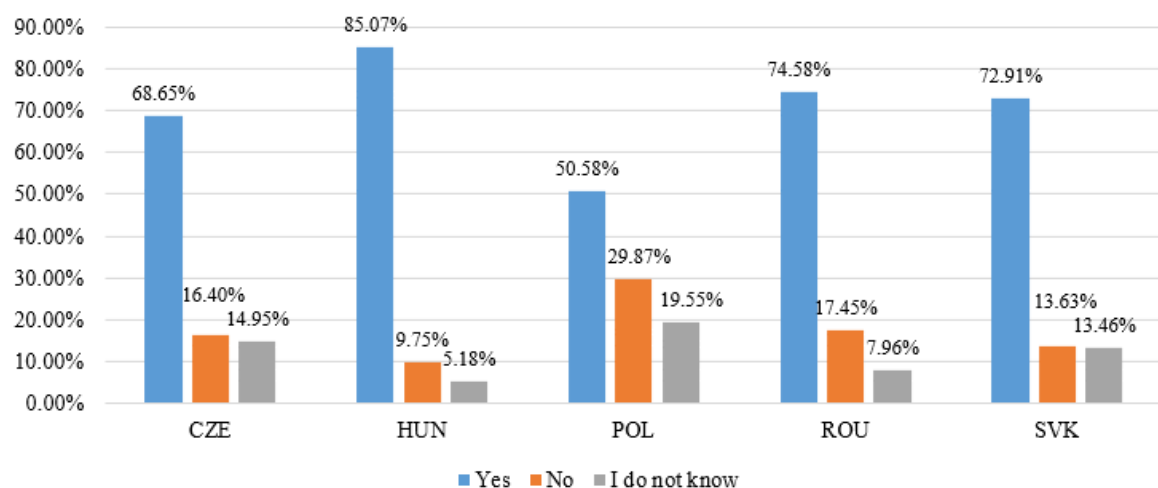


Figure 11: 'Should this joint European armed force be able to act without U.S. support?'



### *Views on defense-related public education and training programs, and the possible reintroduction of conscription*

The survey included a set of questions focusing on attitudes towards defense-related public education and training programs that are designed to increase public information, awareness and direct participation in homeland defense and disaster management, should need arise (Figure 12). Training in practical skills for disaster management is supported by more than 70% of people in all countries. Setting Hungary aside, majorities of the four other nations (60–70% in the Czech Republic and 70–80% in the other countries) favor training in basic defense skills in secondary and higher education, as well as early defense education in elementary and secondary education. Furthermore, 70–80% of people in each of the four nations view voluntary military reserve for people aged 18–65 years favorably. As a matter of fact, the slight majority of the people — 53 percent in Slovakia, 60 percent in Romania, 52 percent in Poland, and 51 percent in the Czech Republic — now also favor implementing conscription.

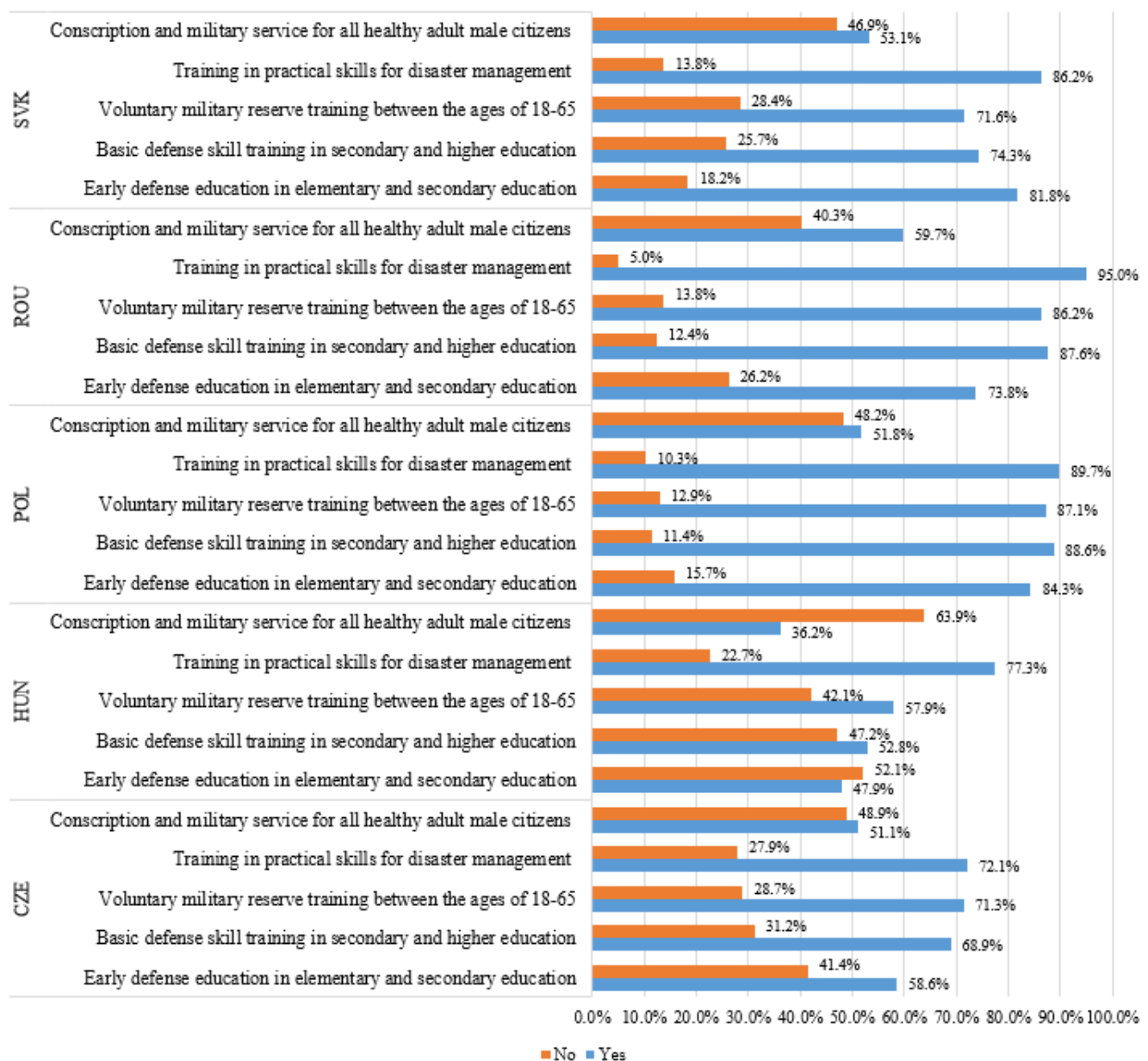


Figure 12: 'Would you consider it necessary to introduce the following activities in your country?'

In contrast to its neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary is an exception for the latter, while in general people express far weaker support for all these initiatives. The survey indicated that 48% of respondents favor early national defense education, 53% favor instruction in fundamental practical defense skills, and 58% would support voluntary military reserve training. As for conscription, the majority opposes it, with only 36% of respondents in favor. Similar questions – with the exception of conscription – were asked of the Hungarian population in 2021, by means of a personal survey. It is challenging to compare the two outcomes due to the increased margin of error. The results of the two surveys, however, do not indicate major differences, and it is unlikely that the public's preferences have altered significantly in the past two years.

### *Perceptions of defense spending*

NATO expects its member states to spend more than 2% of GDP on defense. As Figure 13 illustrates, it is widely known in the five surveyed countries that defense spending has mostly fallen short of this goal in recent years.

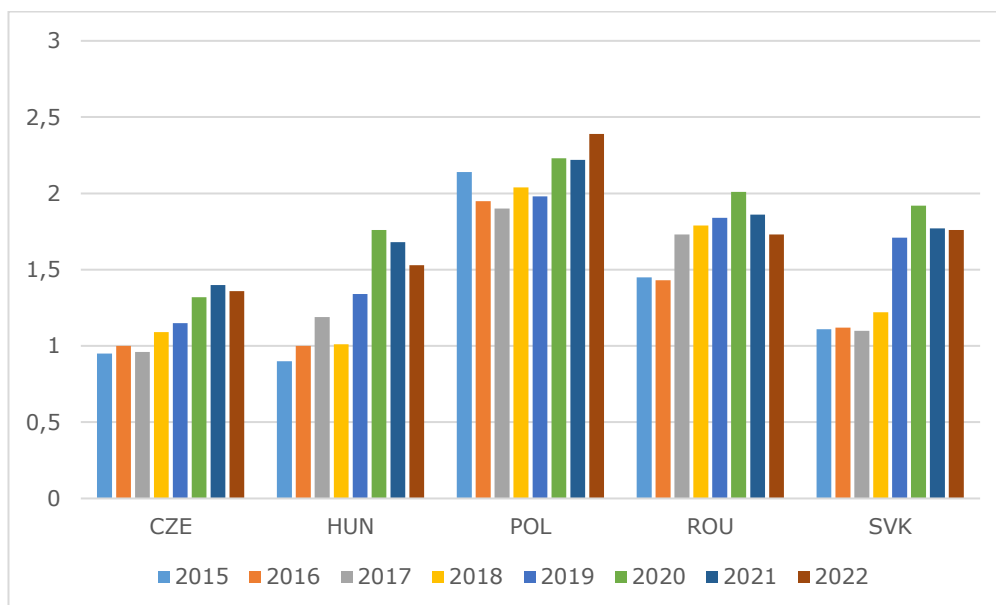


Figure 13: The defense expenditure trend as a share of GDP in five Central and Eastern European countries, 2015-2022.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of defense expenditure trends, changes in the security environment and armed forces' development plans have brought the 2% NATO-target back to the agenda since 2014 in the surveyed countries. Respondents were asked to rank the level of defense spending in their respective countries using the classifications depicted in Figure 14., with their estimated responses ranging from 'less than 1% of GDP' to 'more than 2% of GDP'. Based on the responses, two conclusions can be drawn with certainty. First, the ratio of the local population that provided the right estimate, thus and can be considered well-informed, is between 20-30 percent. Of course, there are variations, and it appears that Poles and Czechs are marginally more knowledgeable than others. Still, generally speaking, we can state that, depending on the respective countries, roughly one in three to one in four people can estimate or identify correctly how much their country spends on defense. This supports our second claim: despite the fact that a sizable fraction of respondents did not even attempt to make an estimate – 'I don't know' –, among whom the proportion of Hungarians is notably high), the majority misjudged the amount of defense spending because they lacked sufficient knowledge. Czechs and Romanians tended to overestimate the amount of money allocated to this sector, whilst Hungarians and Slovaks tended to underestimate it.

<sup>4</sup> Source for the data in this figure: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: [SIPRI Military Expenditure Database](https://www.sipri.org/databases/military-expenditure) [online], Source: [www.sipri.org](https://www.sipri.org), [20.12.2023.]

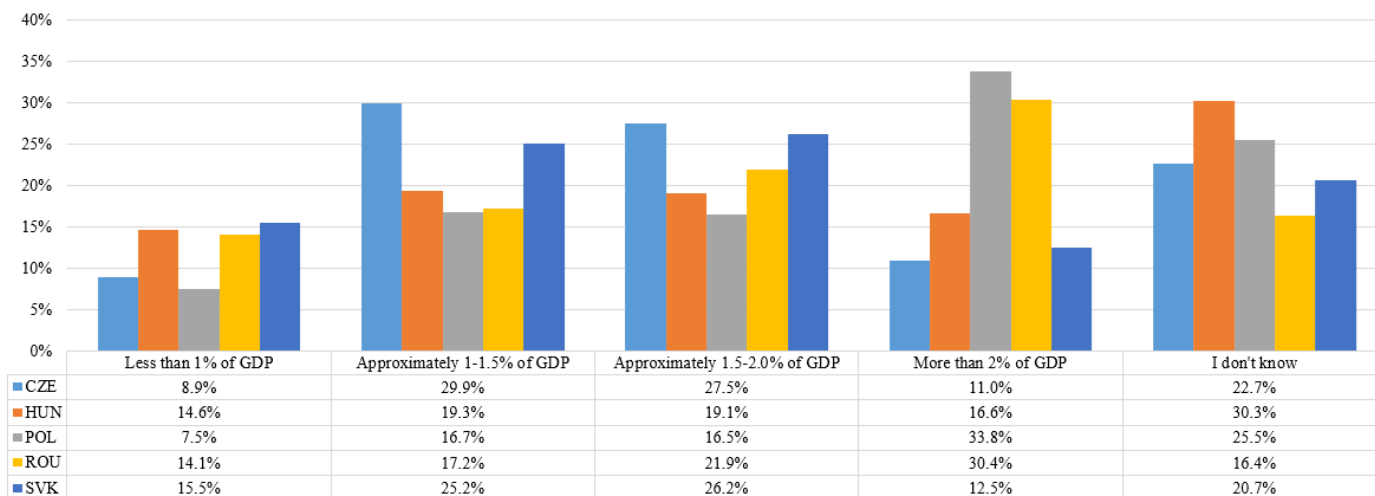


Figure 14: 'How much do you think your country spends on defense in a year?'<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, we also questioned participants about their expectations for future spending preferences. Figure 15 demonstrates that most respondents in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (36-46%) would like to keep defense spending at current (2023) levels for the next five years, with the exception of Romania, where most respondents preferred further increases. The apparently even distribution of responses becomes slightly diverse when we also consider the percentage of people in each society who wish to keep defense budgets at least at the same level (i.e., either to grow them or to preserve current levels). While more than three-quarters of Poles and Romanians belong to this group, in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary this group makes up only 61-65% of the population.

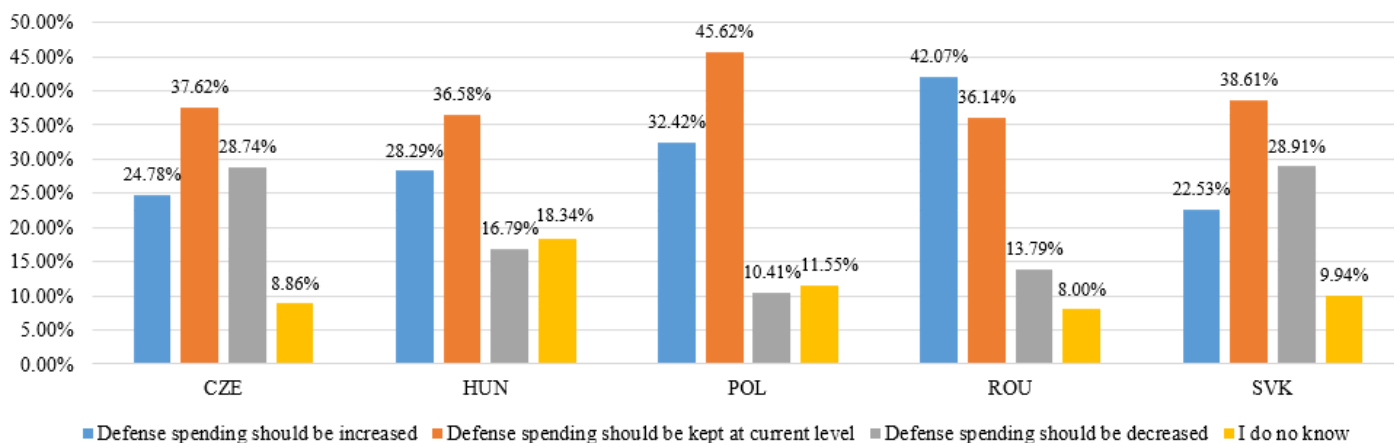


Figure 15: 'How do you feel about your country's defense spending over the next five years?'

Hungarian attitudes to defense spending have remained relatively consistent since the first, 2019 survey. Overall, fewer people would keep it at least at the current level (80.3 percent in 2019, compared to 64.9 percent in 2023) and proportionately the group of the 'undecided' and those preferring reduction grew. The relative rankings among the various response categories have remained unchanged, though. This is especially noteworthy, as Hungarian defense spending has grown to a value 1.5 times higher between 2019 and 2023, while the overall economic situation has unquestionably deteriorated. As we have seen before, the 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine has also drawn public attention and altered public perceptions of threat. A tenable hypothesis would be that these two impacts are inversely related –

<sup>5</sup> The source of all data presented in the figures of the analysis is our own research, referred to in the introduction, with a few exceptions that are specifically indicated. All figures presented in the analysis have been edited by the authors.

high levels of public spending decreases the readiness to maintain current levels, while the war in the neighborhood increases this willingness –, and that the net outcome of these two effects had been reflected in the survey data. However, this is not a verified causal relationship: it is also feasible that people form opinions based on other, universal factors, therefore public perceptions are less reflective of shifting conditions.

### *Views on national armed forces' capabilities, performance and modernization programs*

The degree, to which people support armed forces modernization and the provision of funding does not only depend on threat perceptions formulating expectations towards the armed forces, but on the delivered results of modernization as well – whether it was reasonable to spend on the armed forces (or not). These aspects were also surveyed in the research. The degree to which respondents believe their own national armed forces are capable of protecting the country's borders and people is depicted in Figure 16. Responses to this question vary widely. Poles are the most self-confident: 70 percent of them think the Polish Armed Forces can defend the country, at least in part. Similarly, 61% of respondents in the Czech Republic and Romania, and 59% of respondents in Slovakia believe so. It is interesting to note that only 42% of Hungarians share this opinion – consequently, the majority of Hungarians questions the armed forces' ability to defend the country.

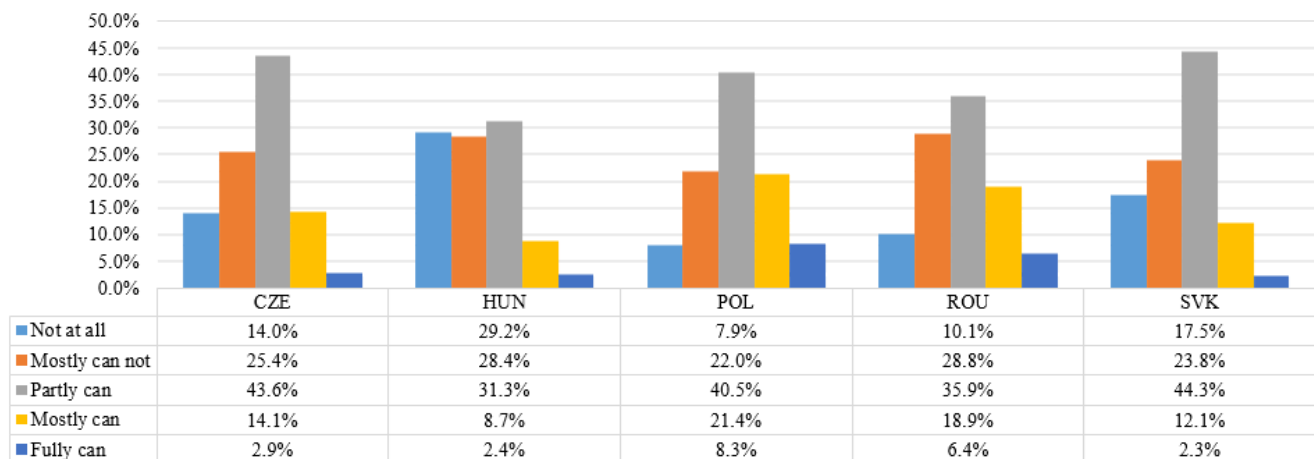


Figure 16: 'How well do you think your country's armed forces can protect your country and its people?'

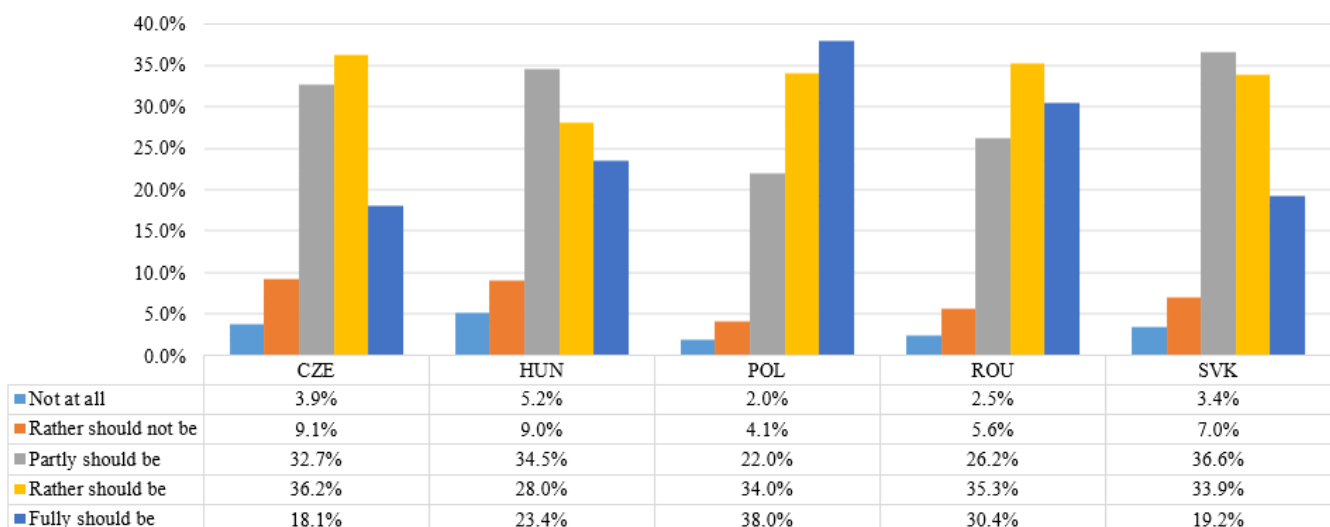


Figure 17: 'To what extent do you think it is necessary to improve the capabilities of your country's armed forces?'

It is impossible to detach this subject from the necessity of determining how much each country's armed forces' current capabilities still require improvement. As we have shown above, respondents generally perceive a modest degree of variation in their respective countries' capabilities. Nonetheless, majority of respondents agree that their armed forces require at least some development: 94% in Poland, 92% in Romania, 90% in Slovakia, 87% in the Czech Republic, and 86% in Hungary (Figure 17).

In theory, making up for delays of modernization or inadequacies of earlier armed forces development initiatives could be the driving forces behind the necessity for development. Figure 18 shows how respondents rated previous/ongoing programs – but this only partially supports these assumptions. It is evident that almost one-third of respondents from Poland (27%), the Czech Republic (34%), Romania (37%), Slovakia (38%), and Hungary (39%) had either never heard of such a program or were rather unhappy with the outcomes.

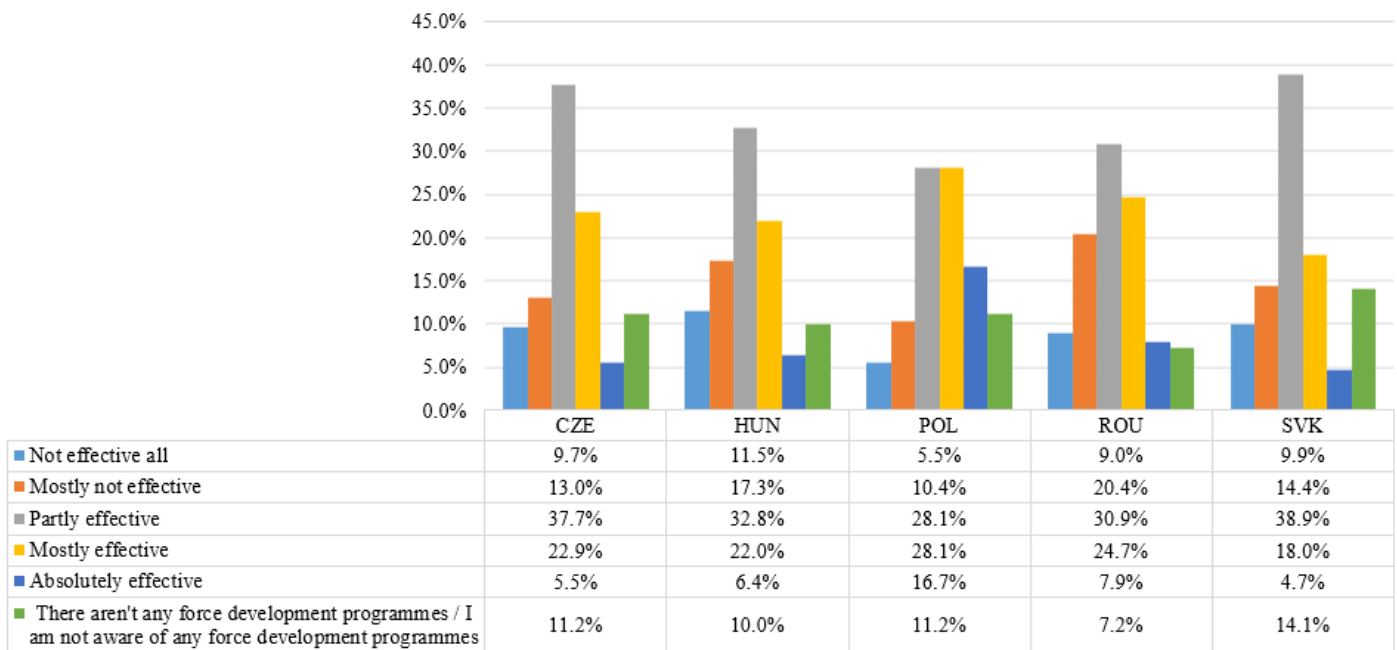


Figure 18: 'Do you think that your country's armed forces development programs are effective in improving the capabilities of the armed forces?'

Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of those polled are at least somewhat satisfied with previous force development programs, suggests that the worsening external security situation may also be behind the opinion that even further development is necessary. Regarding the realized programs, over two thirds of respondents (73% in Poland, 66% in the Czech Republic, 63% in Romania, 62% in Slovakia, and 61% in Hungary) are at least 'somewhat satisfied'.

We also wanted to examine public expectations related to the development of the defense industry. As part of this, we asked respondents to identify characteristics and effects related to the development of defense industry (Figure 19). It is worth noting that, although to varying degrees, the majority of respondents in all countries considered an increase in the supply of military equipment to be important (Romania 37%, Hungary 35%, Poland 33%, Slovakia 24%, and 20% in the Czech Republic).

There were notable differences in the perception of the potential for pursuing cooperation with non-European actors (South Korea, Turkey, and the United States) between Romania (28%), Poland (27%), Slovakia and the Czech Republic respectively (15%), and Hungary (8%). The development of defense industry was also seen as a way to enhance cooperation between European countries (Romania and Slovakia 28%, Poland 27%, Hungary 24%, and the Czech Republic 21%). The fact that this kind of economic development fosters job creation and advances technological innovation was deemed significant in every country surveys (Czech Republic 32% and 21%, Hungary 33% and 22%, Poland 43% and 33%, Romania 44% and 24%, Slovakia 39% and 22%). It is also important to note that respondents in some countries perceive the growth of the defense industry as a risk that possibly generates threats to the

country (20% in the Czech Republic, 14% in Hungary, 8% in Romania, and 7% in Poland and Slovakia, respectively). Furthermore, respondents in Hungary think that if the state supported defense industry, it would deplete resources in other sectors of national economy (27% in Hungary, 16% in the Czech Republic, 12% in Poland and in Slovakia, and 9% in Romania).

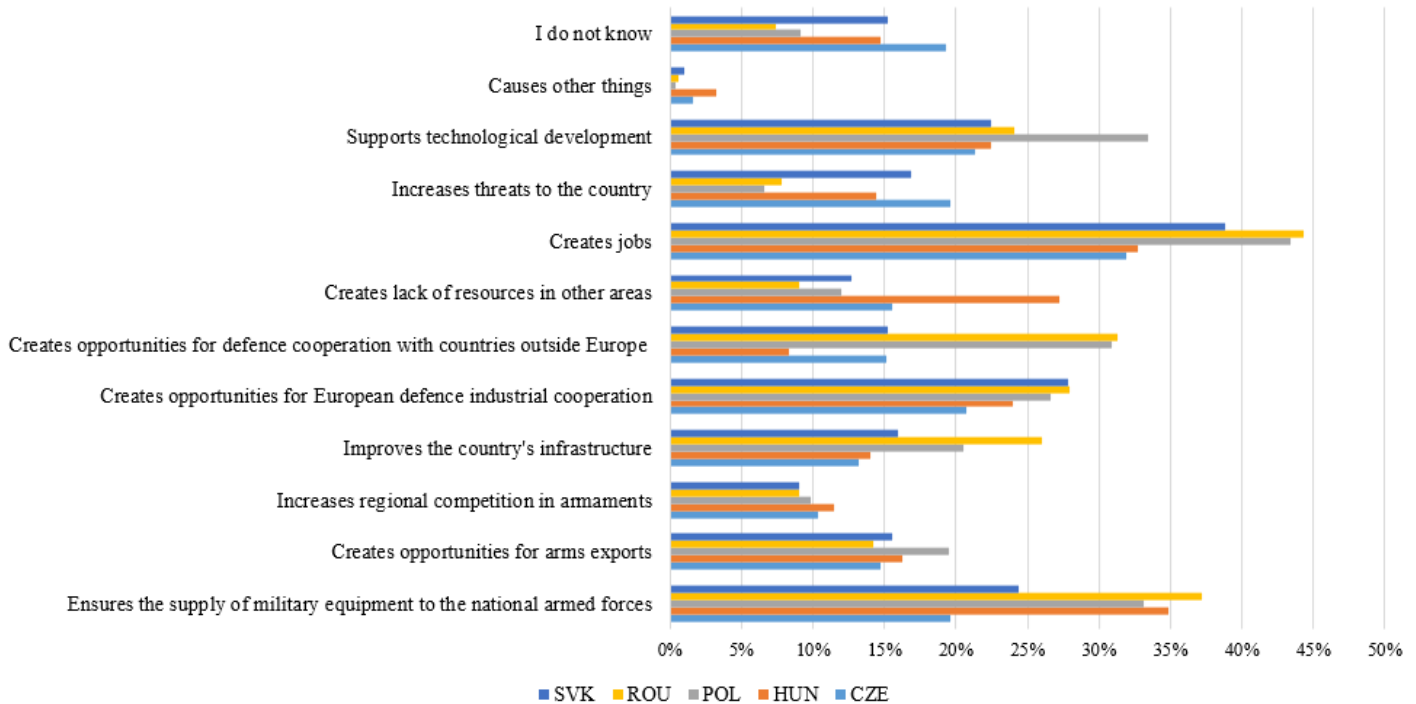


Figure 19: 'What impact does the development of the defense industry would have on your country?' (select up to three answers)

### Cooperation with other countries

Figure 20 summarizes respondents' answers to rank the nations according to the importance of defense cooperation with them (listed on a scale of 1 to 10). The Czech Republic's most preferred allies were identified as Germany (with an average value of 6.34), Slovakia (7.38), and Poland (6.62). Hungary (5.79) trailed closely behind, surpassing militarily significant nations like France (5.71) and the United Kingdom (5.73). The United States (8.08), the Baltic states (7.33) and the United Kingdom (7.27) were ranked as the most significant partners for Poland, while in Hungary the respective list was: Poland (6.76), Germany (6.72) and Slovakia (6.52). The top three countries cited in Romania were the United States (7.89), France (7.58), and the United Kingdom (7.53). Poland (6.38), Hungary (6.07), and the Czech Republic (7.36) were among the top-ranked nations in Slovakia. In general, Poland and Romania prefer to pursue relations with the Anglo-Saxon countries, while the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia view each other – accompanied by Germany and Poland – as their primary defense cooperation partners.

It is worth to note that a mere average is not sufficient for providing information when analyzing topics of this nature. In many cases cooperation with certain countries may be divisive issues. Besides simple arithmetic average, median, distribution and other variables may reveal the national attitude better. The survey therefore takes into account distributional concerns, composite indicators, and computational techniques that more accurately reflect orientation in order to overcome these issues. Orientation is a crucial clustering element, critical in the identification of societal subgroups with unified patterns.



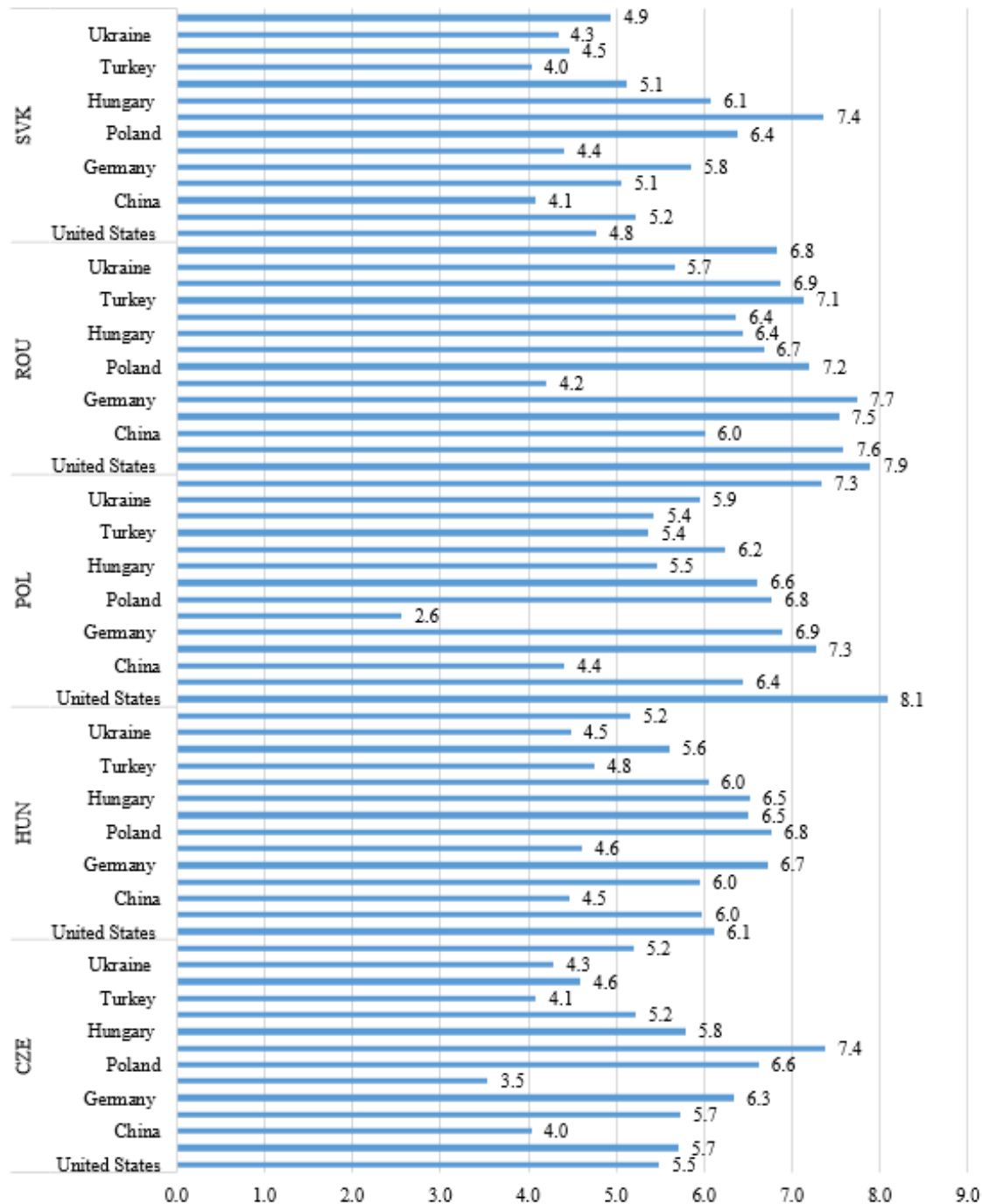


Figure 20: 'With which countries would it be important for your country to develop close military cooperation?' (1 – not important; 10 – very important)

We have also attempted to evaluate the collaboration among the countries surveyed, since, as we have seen above, they view one another as privileged partners in the realm of defense relations. The security domains that require improved regional collaboration are depicted in Figure 21. The most noteworthy areas, according to the responses, are: energy security (Hungary 40%, Poland 36%, Czech Republic 34%, Romania 29%), economic security and stability (Romania 40%, Slovakia 34%, Czech Republic 32%, Poland 32%, Hungary 30%), border security and migration control (Slovakia 50%, Hungary 46%, Czech Republic 45%, Poland 39%, Romania 30%), as well as cyber security, information security, and data protection (Romania 31%, Czech Republic 28%, Hungary 26%, Poland 25%, Slovakia 22%).

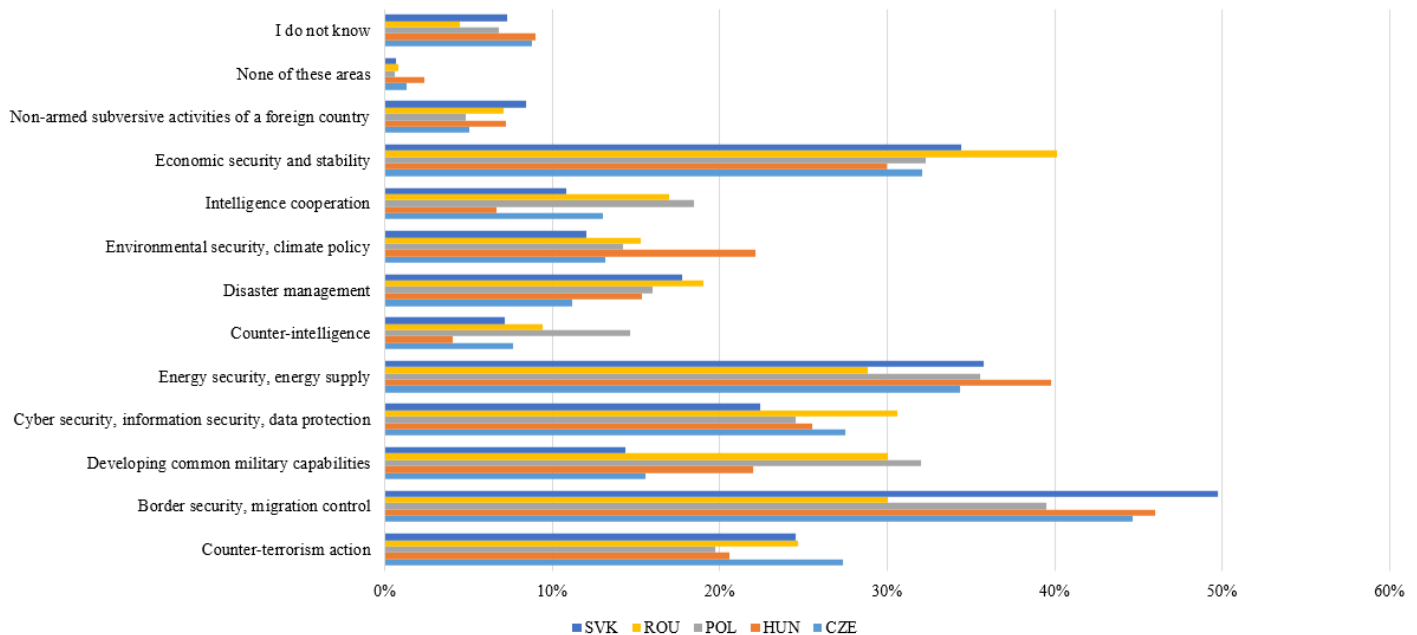


Figure 21: 'In which of the following areas of security do you think there is a need for increased cooperation between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe?' (select up to three answers)

Here, too, there are only modest changes observed in comparison to earlier surveys — mostly inside the margins. Economic security was not among the surveyed options in 2019 and 2021 in Hungary. Even though Hungary is the lowest-ranked country out of the five questioned, the high mention rate of 30% is not shocking in the context of prior responses. Energy security is still a hot topic, and border control is still the preferred option. Like in the threat perception question, here the percentage of respondents who identified disaster management has decreased by about half (2019 – 33.6%; 2021 – 37.8%; 2023 – 15.4%), most likely because many people take crisis management collaboration for granted and are in favor of it, but they prefer to push it aside when there are more pressing issues.



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