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Synergies between EU and NATO? Specialisation as the litmus test for "Smart Defence" and "Pooling and Sharing"

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Abstract

Pooling & Sharing (P&S) and Smart Defence (SD) have become fashionable concepts since the EU launched the former in 2010 and NATO the latter in 2012. They were set up to help European governments in the EU and NATO to deal with the disastrous repercussions that shrinking defence budgets have had on their military might. Both concepts follow the same idea: they incite governments to focus their dwindling defence money on priority projects, to specialise in distinct military tasks, and to seek savings in collaboration with one another. Such an efficiency drive makes sense: by getting rid of unneeded equipment, merging defence colleges, or buying and maintaining future generations of weapons together, governments can buy as much power, hopefully even more, for less money.[1]

However, there seems to be a double paradox:

1. We are grateful to the organizers of the recent workshops on this and related subjects which we attended and to the colleagues who kindly discussed specialization issues with us.

the more NATO and EU states, and the two organisations, praise those concepts, the less they seem to apply them. Moreover, the states appear reluctant to use the synergies that they could gain from two organisations with a large overlap in membership doing more or less the same thing.[2]

Particularly specialisation, which the EU and NATO promote as one solution to deal with defence cuts, has turned into a headache because it is badly implemented. Many countries refuse specialising their efforts on certain military capabilities and abandoning others because it would increase their dependency on partners and curtail their sovereignty. Yet, the reality of austerity has already led to specialisation, but in an uncoordinated way. In fact, the two most serious problems of the many that the Alliance and the Union are currently facing for their military capacity to act are specialisation by default and the fact that states prefer ignoring the consequences of this development.

This paper thus concentrates upon specialisation as a little understood and badly conceptualised phenomenon that will nevertheless shape Europe's armies of tomorrow. It aims to move the specialisation debate forward by developing stepping stones to characterize specialisation and by outlining how the EU and NATO can successfully manage specialisation in both its defence and political dimensions.

The Specialisation Conundrum

Specialisation means that a government focuses its defence resources on the provision of a limited set of capabilities and therefore consciously abandons others. As a result, countries turn into specialists e.g. for airlift or engineers but give up amphibious forces or tanks. This individual decision immediately affects the political and military community that the EU or NATO form – because it affects the collective posture.

Specialisation itself is not new: there has always been a division of labour among allies. Abandoning equipment and forces after the end of cold war was part of the strategic adaptation of the posture to a modified security environment. The current situation, however, is different: now, specialisation takes place without coordination, and fiscal rather than strategic reasoning drives it. When the Dutch army mothballed its battle tanks in 2011 following spending cuts, not only did the Netherlands specialise. By default, Germany and France also became role specialists, because they are the only countries in the region to have significant tank arsenals.

Specialisation by default thus reduces the bandwidth of the EU and NATO posture and curtails the complexity and sustainability of operations that both organisations can carry out. In a long-term perspective, specialisation by default greatly limits the choices that EU and NATO countries will have with regard to the use of armed forces, be it in defence or crisis management.

Instead of acting against these developments, Europeans tend to accommodate to the current defence crisis by pretending that the situation is not as precarious as some observers purport. Several governments simply act as if there were no such a thing as defence austerity and money could be available again soon.

Moreover, they hardly use NATO or the EU as platforms for political and military exchange, for which they have been set up: both organisations are currently sidelined. Although member states pretend to adhere to the collective military goals, they tend to organise specialization – if at all – among themselves and are reluctant to let the EU or NATO organise them.

In fact, most European governments ignore that none less than a paradigm shift has taken place. The future will most probably not consist in a stabilisation of defence budgets, but in a constant decline. Moreover, the end of the NATO combat mission in Afghanistan and the debt services that remain from the fiscal crisis contain risks for future defence budgets. While many prefer to think that we are beyond the crisis and only have to organize the clean up, economic data clearly state that the crisis is not likely to be over soon, and that its repercussions will stay with us for at least two decades.[3]

The Defence Dimension: The many faces of Specialisation

The specialisation debate has so far struggled to describe more precisely the challenges and solutions. Key to both is the distinction between the mechanisms of specialisation and their outcome:

- **Specialisation mechanism: default or design?** If specialisation takes place by default, it poses a serious problem for defence communities. 'Default' means that governments neither coordinate their spe-

2. B. Giegerich,' NATO's Smart Defence: Who's Buying?', *Survival*, (2012) 54:3, 69-77.

3. European Commission: Annual Growth Survey, 12.01.2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0011:FIN:EN:PDF>.

cialisation decision with their partners, EU or NATO, nor link them to the strategic objectives of the Alliance or Union. By contrast, a specialisation by design would involve informing the partners *a priori* and to consider the repercussions it would have on the collective posture.

- **Specialisation outcome: are critical or (just) surplus capabilities abandoned**? Some cuts are more crucial than others because they concern rare and high quality capabilities. If a country gives up on infantry, this will be of little significance to the common posture because it is available in excessive quantities in Europe. If, however, one of the few countries that still has amphibious forces decides to abandon them, this will seriously damage the common posture because Europe already dangerously lacks this capability.

Hence, a key challenge when framing specialisation is to distinguish between the outcomes that matter and those that do not. Not every specialisation turns into a nightmare for the EU and NATO: it might indeed take place by default and without any strategic rationale, but if it concerns surplus capabilities, it does not affect the relevant community posture.

Specialisation does not only describe an increasing gap in a capability or the overall capability portfolio that results for example from the decision of governments not to buy equipment or to take it out of service. It can also take the form of *operative specialisation:* when states consciously refrain from deploying capabilities because of the related costs. This is what occurred in Afghanistan (NATO operation, since 2001) or Chad (EU operation, 2008/2009), when governments did not put their helicopters at the disposal of the respective collective endeavour. Although Europeans together hold 3,200 transport helicopters, states prefer leasing them on a private basis. The reason is that in military operation, be they NATO or EU, the "costs lie where they fall" rule applies. Hence, putting helicopters at the disposal of EU or NATO turns into a costly affair for those governments who (still) have some. Here, the problem is thus not so much the availability of the capability, but how to ensure the access for the other partners of the coalition.

Beyond generating a lack of individual capabilities or quantities, a crucial challenge of specialisation is that the overarching "system of systems", the network that generates and keeps together the overall capability spectrum by linking its different elements of platforms, sensors, shooters, forces but also principles and values, through institutionalized procedures and rules is shrinking. Today, states are only capable of providing this system together. If, however, they decide to modify their contributions unilaterally and without strategic considerations, the whole system risks imploding. EU and NATO allies risk losing their collective military capacity to act, because they are no longer able to fill capability gaps, and to create new ones. As a result, Europeans dangerously approach a level of capabilities under which they will become militarily insignificant.

Europe's overall military posture has already reached a worrying level of criticality: if only a small number of actors has some crucial capabilities, there are not many alternatives if one provider refuses a commitment. The more asymmetric the distribution of a capability among the holders is, the more important the single holder becomes . Moreover, quantity matters: capabilities can become subcritical even if they do not shrink to zero; if the quantities are no longer enough to fuel an ongoing operation or force structure, the whole rotation/sustainability and burden-sharing collapses.

At the same time, specialisation increases the need for coordination because an ever more fragmented system needs to be pulled together: ever-smaller contributions also equal more contributors. If Command and Control (C2) shrinks as do the other capabilities, the maximum coordination the EU and NATO can provide may be well below what is needed to assure the required complexity of an operation. They might thus not be able to mount a certain type of it (joint, high intensity). From a different perspective, although governments have specialized to ensure the readiness of their remaining capabilities, they may not be able to use them because EU and NATO partners have lost the capacity to integrate them through an appropriate C2 architecture.

The Political Problem: From Taboo to Vicious Circle

NATO and EU members avoid talking about coordination and specialisation for two reasons which are both related to sovereignty: accepting specialisation would be to acknowledge that they can no longer assure a national core task alone: defence. Recognising coordination inflicts similar headaches: governments would have to admit that their ability to decide and act in security policy does not carry enough weight in view of current security problems. States also insist on their individual right to decide because they do not entirely trust their partners: they fear being left alone in an operation because a partner de-

cides to withdraw; not being able to engage in an operation, as a partner with important capabilities decides not to participate; and giving others, who do not make any contributions of their own to security, a free ride.

Thus, states have locked themselves into a vicious circle: clinging to national prerogatives eventually increases their dependence upon partners while also diminishing their military capacity to act. National defence planning seems ever more detached from reality. While states are rhetorically adhering to military autonomy, reality is catching up: specialisation is already taking place in an uncontrolled way. At the same time, their individual defence planning and cuts foster what they fear the most: dependency. Today European states are already more dependent on each other than ever before when it comes to military interventions. Because there is no concept for military burden sharing, every state chooses to specialize in the area it can (still) afford. Expensive capabilities like aircrafts, helicopters and satellites are likely to become decreasingly available. Uncontrolled cuts in capabilities not only reduce the possibilities of cooperation among all. They also create more collective capability gaps for the EU and NATO as a whole while maintaining at the same time (unnecessary) surplus material.

While the defence crisis increases the mutual dependence of the Europeans, it also -quite ironically- drives them apart. Their national decisions have centrifugal implications for Europe as a political and military community. States defend diverging positions on how to organise a common defence policy. Their budget cuts differ in style, size and the areas (such as resources, personal and modernization). Those states that are not longer able to maintain their military development are losing the capacity to participate in joint operations of the EU and NATO. Since 2011, some states have been unable to maintain their defence contributions – they are withdrawing personnel and material from ongoing missions (e.g. Italy, Greece). The consequence is reduced interoperability and an increased capability and modernisation gap. It risks resulting in a solidarity gap: many states can only make marginal contributions to international capability packages, and their capacity to define and implement a common defence policy is severely reduced.

In contrast, the experience of NATO- and EU-operations invalidates the fear of the threefold traps that governments cherish: sharing has been a daily business from Bosnia to Afghanistan and Libya, and NATO and the EU have gathered experience in managing the political and military caveats. No state would have been able to carry out these operations alone. Multinational formations, which have been for a long time unthinkable below the level of Brigades, have become a common feature: today, NATO formations in Kosovo rotate on a multinational basis on the company/battalion level.

The Limited Role of NATO and the EU in National Defence Planning

Europe's states, now as in the past, continue to determine unilaterally the capabilities and structure of their armed forces. This antagonises the efforts of the EU and NATO to reduce isolated initiatives, coordinate them and thus increase efficiency through greater cooperation.

Over the last years, a number of initiatives and mechanisms (NATO Capability Initiative, EU Headline Goal) have raised the awareness of capability deficits in EU and NATO states. However, the states hardly ever provided the necessary resources they promised to close these gaps.

Although governments avoid talking about it, for many of them specialisation is part of national defence planning: their level of ambition is to *contribute* to expeditionary operations or territorial defence rather than carrying them on their own. According to experts, the Czech Republic is only able to stop an invasion from the East for 20 minutes. It has given up its capabilities for territorial defence, while specialising for example in CBRN clearance. A collective pattern currently arises from individual choices: the big Europeans keep "bonsai armies"[4] (that is, everything but in too small numbers to be significant), while the small ones keep only chosen niche capabilities. The irony is that specialisation might be conscious and by design at the national level. However, if it is not coordinated at EU or NATO levels, several national specialisations by design risk turning into an overall specialisation by default at the EU or NATO levels: if many states decide to specialise in, say, infantry, who is going to assure the amphibious force capability?

Start thinking about organizing Specialisation

Individual specialisation will continue to create collective criticality as the pressure that induced it in the past (namely lower levels of resources) will persist and may even grow in the future. What governments can change is the way specialisation happens. This requires thinking about and modelling how to transfer current capabilities and cooperation into a collectively framed

4. C. Mölling, *Europe Without Defense*, SWP Comments, C 38, November 2011.

(future) State of Capability	Measure	Instrument
Excess	Abandon until normal	Market place for surplus equipment
Appropriate	Consider Pooling / specialization	Contracts and redundancies. Capability stock exchange, regional capability targets
Critical	Pool/ specialize immediately	Contracts and redundancies. capability stock exchange, regional capability targets
Subcritical	Invest into capability/ abandon objective	Reinvestment pools

long-term European capability framework. Managing specialisation means providing answers to three questions: w*hat* to specialize in, *who* specializes, and *how* to organise the process. known future developments such as future procurements and cuts must be taken into account. In addition, some criteria are needed to measure criticality of the capability portfolio. All suggestions have to take into account that this is a deeply political endeavour.

What to specialize in

For the time being organized specialisation only takes place with respect to individual capabilities like air policing. However, states should make the whole range of capabilities available for specialisation. They should prioritize by deciding first which capabilities are (more) needed and second which are (more) critical than others. The resulting need-criticality matrix determines the value of a capability.

What is needed? The EU and NATO should develop a capability framework: conceptually, the overall portfolio should be driven by the aim to manage strategic uncertainty. Empirically, sensors and enablers are more important than shooters.

When defining the overall community capability portfolio, governments should abstain from letting some vague ideas about potential future threats or scenarios dictate their decision. It would make governments vulnerable to strategic surprise. Instead, they should go for a capability-based planning that defines the overall capability set for EU and NATO to have the capacity to respond to the fundamental strategic uncertainty of future challenges. The objective is to keep enough flexibility and openness to adapt to a wide range of operational challenges.

In fact, experience has shown that 80% of the capabilities used during the last operations are the same: enablers in the area of C4ISTAR/ISR, strategic transport, and logistics.[5] It is thus the core of capabilities that EU or NATO states will need, whatever the scenario. What changes are the frontline capabilities. Here, governments have to ensure that they can swiftly tailor their equipment to the operational needs. They need to retain a certain level of resources and expertise in technical design, such as to ensure that helicopter receive new sensors.

What is critical? Criticality is based on three variables:

1. How much do we (states, EU, NATO) have? It describes the absolute number of forces by role or equipment within the community.
2. How many countries possess such a capability? It depicts the distribution of a role or equipment across the community.
3. Who owns what? It identifies the distribution of these roles or equipment among those who own it.

Four broad categories allow categorizing criticality (see table): there can be too much equipment or forces in terms of quantity or distribution (excess); an adequate amount/distribution (appropriate); a worryingly low number/distribution (critical); and too little (subcritical).

While erecting a precise benchmark potentially allows for greater clarity in the results, it risks hurting political sensitivities and offending some states. Defining relative measures might lack clarity but still allows showing trends, such as where capabilities approach red lines, without exposing governments. Indeed, current figures are telling even without sophisticated benchmarks, as an example in the realm of airplanes show: 20 out of the 27 EU states hold 2,300 fighter and attack planes. However, only eight of them possess more than 100 planes. Nine possess only between ten and 50 aircrafts, but pay the expensive infrastructure.[6]

5. Interviews with EU and NATO staff.

6. In Germany, one flying hour of the Eurofighter induces costs of about 74,000 EUR, see Deutscher Bundestag: *Drucksache 17/2787*, 2012.

While fighters and transport planes are very common, only less than one third of the EU states hold enablers like tankers, electronic warfare, airborne early warning and maritime patrol aircrafts. This scarcity of force multiplyers also affects the strategic transport chain: the concentration of tankers among seven countries makes this chain vulnerable and dependent on some few.

The time dimension is crucial as yesterday's procurements affect tomorrow's force structure. Criticality assessments have to take into account which capabilities will be available in 5, 10 or 15 years. Governments might abandon armoured vehicles without much danger, as they plan to increase the number over the next decade. Abandoning others, critical capabilities such as modern main battle tanks, would create greater damage.

Yet, the time perspective can also alleviate the notion of urgency that may come with criticality. Europe currently debates the introduction of armed UAVs. However, Europe intends to double the number of its modern attack helicopters over the next decade, and those can deliver some of the close air support that UAVs offer. Moreover, they are already paid for.

This last example also shows why it is important to look at the portfolio in a comprehensive way,. for it allows finding capability solutions across different equipment types.

Who specializes (What)

While for almost all European forces specialisation will become a defining element of the years to come, there is a limit to specialisation for Germany, France and the UK. They have to act as framework nations, that provide the backbone for others to plug in their remaining capabilities. This means offering especially the command and control to lead operations, and the ISR on the strategic level. Yet, the big three can specialize among themselves with regard to operational and tactical levels tasks and some other areas: Germany could concentrate on land components and logistics and organize the frame for partners to plug their contributions into the framework. France could lead in air and nuclear operations and the UK could take responsibility for sea-amphibious/cyber. With this exception in mind, three models exist as to how to organise military forces collectively in the future among EU and NATO states.

Big with small. One larger state would provide the framework for smaller ones to plug in. Germany is currently promoting such an approach.[7] The big ones would maintain almost all capabilities and also keep the skills to manage them in complex operations. They could, however, reduce the size to a minimum. Germany could keep a battalion of tanks that can build a backbone for others like Poland or Finland to plug in. Even for France and the UK, this would have advantages as the 2011 Libya operation showed, where a pool of Nordic fighter jets delivered the same firepower as the UK. However, the old idea that smaller states only offer the infantry and the big ones do the high end will most probably not work – for it would mean a two-class army and lead to political disinvestment of the smaller partners.

Big with big will be important, especially for core strategic capabilities like transport, satellites, communication, C2 and major procurement projects.

Small with small (capability clusters)**:** given that smaller forces have already specialized, they can contribute only limited capabilities on an individual basis. However they could jointly provide a specific capability, as for example the Visegrad Four (V4) aim to do.[8]

What NATO and EU can do

EU and NATO can only help to provide solutions if states are willing to question the primacy of political sovereignty over military effectiveness and economic efficiency. This still sounds a bridge too far for the EU and NATO countries, which are primarily concerned by P&S and SD. Yet, there are few alternatives. Even France and the UK already consider that they will have to abstain from certain operations because they neither have the partners nor the capabilities.

From a community perspective (EU, NATO), the optimal outcome of specialisation would be to have the least necessary redundancies at a given level of capability bandwidth and sustainability. Moreover, countries would ensure access to capabilities for commonly defined activities in the needed quantities. From a national perspective, before engaging into cooperation, governments should ask three questions: first, under what conditions do they trust a cooperation partner; and to what extent do they accept to curtail their wish to decide unilaterally in order to respond to the defence needs of others? Second, is the cooperation effective in military terms? And third, does it allow for savings?

7. Federal Ministry of Defence: Defence Policy Guidelines. *Safeguarding National Interests – Assuming International Responsibility –Shaping Security Together*, Berlin, 27 May 2011.

8. T. Valasek (ed.) *Towards a smarter V4: How to improve defence collaboration among the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia*, DAV4 Expert Group Report, Bratislava: Slovak Atlantic Commission, May 2012.

The EU and NATO can launch several initiatives in view of better implementing and coordinating P&S and SD within their organisations. The following initiatives offer an excellent starting point:[9]

Assure coordination between EU and NATO: A pre-condition for success is to assure ongoing coordination between the EU and NATO, more precisely between the European Defence Agency (EDA) and NATO Allied Command Transformation (ACT). It should include the exchange of lessons learned, success factors for cooperation and existing cooperation patterns. There is no need for yet another institutionalised setting – informal regular meetings between ACT and EDA would already be beneficial. It would, however, require the members of both institutions to abstain from undermining cooperation for political reasons, as some tend to do. In fact, the Greece-Cyprus-Turkey problem or political considerations of other members risk affecting the coordination for P&S and SD just as they have compromised EU-NATO relations in the past.

A European Defence Review: The starting point for any initiative should be to identify what Europe actually still has in terms of capabilities. Such a mapping, initiated by the states and then carried out by NATO or the EU, would allow identifying capability shortfalls but particularly potentials for cooperation, prioritisation and specialisation and hopefully putting on hold or at least tame the current specialisation by default.

The 2013 EU Defence summit offers the opportunity for EU members to launch such a review. Given the overlapping membership between the EU and NATO, the Alliance would also benefit from the awareness that the review would hopefully provide. Moreover, the EU could invite NATO members to participate in the defence review and allow the Alliance to bring in its experience on capabilities and defence planning. This could encourage real synergies between NATO and EU.

Envisioning specialisation. Based on this review European governments should assess the risks and opportunities for European defence in various specialisation scenarios. This would allow drawing a checklist of pros and cons to facilitate governmental decisions. These scenarios could demonstrate what would be saved and lost in terms of capabilities if specialisation by design were to begin today, in five, ten, or fifteen years. Moreover, such modelling would link the desired capability portfolio with the current state of European defence in three ways. First, it would integrate existing projects into the planning of the future state of SD and P&S. Second, it has to take into consideration the industrial dimension of defence , for the ongoing procurement and the change of industrial suppliers will frame future European equipment. Third, it would show how and by which measures a European defence capability could develop from the current fragmentation and short-term projects into long-term and sustainable programmes.

Defining measures: Far from being a silver bullet, specialisation by design is just one option among others. Whether it is beneficial depends on the state of capabilities in foreseeable timeframes. There are areas in which Europeans have to invest because they do not have the capability at all or at too low a level.

Contracts and redundancies. There are two ways of dealing with a lack of trust: states could either sign legally binding agreements on the provision of capabilities, as did France and the UK in their 2010 Lancaster House Treaty. Moreover, they could hedge against a partner's non-participation by building redundancy into capabilities: the decision of a state to withdraw its airplanes from a mission must not lead to a collapse in the European air transport capability. To compensate, partners who pull out could offer their aircrafts for routine duties, thereby relieving those who want to deploy their planes in the operation from these tasks.

Redundancies can be secured if states have a higher number of equipment and if more states do. In order to reduce the infrastructure and maintenance cost per unit (which would rise if redundancies are kept), states could keep their equipment at the national level but operate it on a joint base. An alternative would be that only one state keeps the equipment and rents it out to others when needed. These overheads could be reduced further once the system runs smoothly.

Capability stock exchange. For individual specialisation to become a benefit for the community, it needs to generate advantages for all partners involved: those who abandon a capability also keep something valuable for the community. The need-criticality matrix would enable states to estimate what their individual preferences to cut would mean for the Alliance or the Union. They can constructively engage in a bargaining about who contributes what. The matrix even offers to develop value and exchange rates for capabilities. The EU and NATO could sup-

9. We raised some of the following ideas already in C. Major, C. Mölling and T. Valasek: *Smart but too cautions: How NATO can improve its fight against austerity*, Policy Brief, Centre for European Reform, May 2012.

port such an economic prioritisation of contributions by offering community investments for those governments who build up or maintain important capabilities.

Setting up a reinvestment pool for subcritical capabilities. Defence ministers and their treasuries should agree that those resources that defence ministers save through collaborative projects should remain in a special 'reinvestment pool'. This money would subsidise future joint purchases of equipment. Countries would compete for subsidy from the fund, with priority given to those purchases that address NATO's and the EU's most pressing capability needs. Governments bidding to make use of money in the fund would need to match the contribution out of their own pocket.

To launch the pool, countries would contribute an amount based on their size and economic power. Bigger countries would contribute more than smaller ones under such a formula. However, the bigger allies would benefit too: if a big country proposes a better project than others, it potentially stands to receive more from the fund than it contributes. And even if subsidies went mostly to the smaller states, the bigger ones would benefit because their investment would allow smaller countries to fight alongside the big ones in future operations. The reverse is also true – without collaboration, the smaller countries will lose some of their capacity to contribute to collective defence, leaving the bigger such as France and the UK bearing a disproportionate burden.

Setting up a market place for surplus military equipment. Many Central European countries struggle to modernise their ageing, Soviet-era equipment, while West Europeans have ordered too many, such as NH-90 helicopters. Countries with surplus equipment usually hope to export it for cash to Asia or the Middle East but, because budgets everywhere in Europe have shrunk and too many countries now compete for the same export markets. Instead of selling their equipment outside Europe at knock-down rates, countries should consider transferring it to poorer countries, and in exchange, the receiving country should agree to contract service, training and upgrades from the donor country.

By using identical equipment, inter-operability would improve, and the donor would benefit from maintenance and training contracts. Both donor and recipient countries could seek additional efficiencies by creating joint units around their common equipment, and share the related costs. In the long run, such 'modernisation through donation' would reduce the number of different types of equipment in Europe, and encourage the defence manufacturers to consolidate. The initiative of the EDA to launch a government-to-government online market place (e-quip) for redundant or surplus equipment can be a starting point.

Creating joint capability targets. Currently, each country unilaterally defines its national defence commitment. Together, these contributions are supposed to amount to a large enough force to fulfil NATO's or the EU's ambitions. Capability targets set up by countries who want to cooperate regionally or with regard to a specific capability would give those governments more reasons to merge parts of their militaries than the current model, and it would give them more political leverage. One option could be a Weimar Capability Goal, in which the Weimar states[10] agree on numbers, equipment and procurement for the next years. Other groups, such as the V4, could follow.◊

10. The initial Weimar countries are France, Germany, Poland; Weimar Plus also includes Italy and Spain.

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