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Changes in the Benelux defence policy between 2014-2019

Europe's security situation has evolved somewhat over the past few years, causing national defence policies to be reviewed and strengthened. Being members of Nato and the European Union, the Benelux countries of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg have been changing their defence policies to face complex military and non-military threats. The potential threat from Russia is one factor which has been behind their closer military cooperation, supported by the process of rebuilding national military capabilities. Progress has been especially visible after 2014 most especially due to Russian aggression against Ukraine, along with hybrid threats and terrorists attacks. All three countries tend to cooperate with each other while also enjoying ever-closer relations with Nato and other EU members, while the USA has a special place in this arrangement. All of these connections and areas of cooperation will be covered in this article. The author utilises the qualitative research approach which involves one or more case studies, along with institutional and behavioural analysis, deskbound research, analysis, and synthesis methods.

Introduction

The Benelux Union consists of three countries which collaborate closely across multiple areas. This strategy is shaped by the basic premises of the internal policies and relations for and between these three countries. The most important factor here is geographical, namely the specific location of the three countries and the length of their shared borders. Other factors include historical connections, common languages, the standard of living, the size of each of the countries and their level of urbanisation and, more recently, also their shared currency. It is hardly a coincidence that the three countries were among the first to set up the initial Western European organisations following

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the conclusion of the Second World War, with them acting as the motor for European integration. Established in 1960, the economic union of the Benelux countries had preceded the steps which were taken by the members of the European Economic Community. A comparable situation can be seen to have occurred during the implementation of the concept known as 'multi-speed Europe'. The Benelux countries dictated the fastest possible pace. Moreover, that process also served as a testing ground for other ideas which also concerned collaboration in the field of defence. The painful experience of the Second World War taught the governments of the Benelux countries - as well as the general population here - that a neighbour with imperialistic ambitions may not respect their neutrality. Consequently, these countries decided not only to develop their defence cooperation platform but also to become one of the initiators of Nato, which meant welcoming Nato troops onto their territory. The three countries began collaborating within the areas of politics, economy, culture and, especially, defence. Defence cooperation here has been more highly developed than with or between any other EU members. Taking those facts into account, selecting these three countries for a case study is entirely justified so that changes in defence policies can be analysed, with root causes, similarities, and differences being identified along the way.

The article focuses on changes in the defence policy of small European states: specifically in this case the countries of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, with those changes which are being analysed all taking place after 2014. The changes are examined by taking a close look at strategic documents and political declarations which have been issued during the period in question. Official declarations are compared to the steps which have been taken by the respective national governments, such as implementing new defence policies, conducting military purchases, or accepting treaty responsibilities. The main research question delves into those changes which have taken place in the Benelux defence policies since 2014. To be able to answer that question, particular issues are required to be examined such as, for example, reasons behind the introduction of changes, the directions in which those changes have taken the countries, and the common areas and differences between the countries which are being analysed. It is assumed that the key catalyst of change has been Russia's aggressive political strategy. To discuss the directions of the changes, the author looks at the rebuilding of territorial defence capabilities and the development of special forces, among other areas of change.

1. Materials and methods

The analysis uses an institutional and behavioural approach, one which is supported by quantitative data which has been obtained from various sources which include SIPRI databases. Moreover, the case study method with which to carry out a comparative study of the three countries proves itself to be very effective. By using this method, a small geographical area is selected which contains a limited number of countries in order to describe the nature of changes in the defence policies of the included countries. Based on the desk research which has been carried out by other academic sources and think-tanks, and which is available via online sources, the analysis is supported by examining official documents such as national defence policies, strategies, and reports. The publications are available via the official websites of countries and international organisations such as Nato.

The new approach which has been drawn out by this publication is its highly logical structure and form of argument, which is strictly limited to analysis and conclusions which have been drawn up on that basis. The research on every country is based on the same structure and approach. This makes it possible to form comparisons and to draw clear conclusions when it comes to developments, changes, and resultant government actions.

The behavioural approach provides this study with a fitting framework for the analysis of small countries. There is an abundance of publications which have attempted to define a 'small state' or country. To be able to create a precise definition, researchers tend to look at factors such as the size of the population and overall area, the type of economy, influence on international matters, and so on. A number of academic studies have reviewed possible definitions (Hey, 2003; Marczuk, 2013).

Without going into too much detail, it is sufficient to say that the nature of the EU caused many researchers to try to determine which member states should be considered small. Baldur Thorhallsson's research provides a list of small countries within the EU, based on statistical data such as population size and GDP. The list includes Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Croatia, Ireland, Slovakia, Finland, Denmark, Bulgaria, Austria, Sweden, Hungary, Portugal, Czech Republic, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Romania (Thorhallsson, 2015).

As they fall into the category of small states, the Benelux countries are expected to conduct policies which are typical of such countries. What is important is the fact that the term 'small' must be contextualised since its meaning changes depending upon the area of the world which is under examination. Understanding this very relative term within a regional context adds va-

lidity to the analysis. It is worth examining changes in defence policies which have been introduced by small Western European countries which are farther away from a potential threat, with this threat being identified in 2014 as the aggressive policies of Russia.

2. The defence policy of the Netherlands

The Dutch government assumed that the end of the Cold War meant no more large-scale military conflicts in Europe. Thanks to this, just like other Western European countries, the Netherlands began to make use of the peace dividend. It was, however, clear that military conflicts were still possible in other parts of the world and that their outcomes may have a significant impact on the Netherlands and other members of Nato. Any local conflict could easily spread onto the territory of a Nato member. With time, the Dutch government has opted to see Russia more as a partner than as a threat. European matters, including the expansion of Nato, were overshadowed by pressing global challenges.

This attitude is clearly stressed in the white paper of 2000. The highlighted areas of instability which were seen as being potentially threatening for the allies included the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans in Europe (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2000). Therefore Nato was expected to handle crisis management operations, limiting its original function as the key protector of the members' territories. This conviction was upheld even after 11 September 2001, with stress being laid on the lack of military threats in Europe. Consequently, the armed forces were smaller, more mobile, and technologically superior to the underdeveloped, non-European enemy. It was then assumed that the Dutch soldiers would be capable of participating in operations all over the world. The Russian political strategy has raised more concern since 2007, changing the overall situation in Europe. New fears were confirmed by Russian military operations in Georgia, as well as the new American rebalancing strategy known as 'the Pivot to the Pacific', which resulted in the diminished presence of American troops in Europe. As a result, in 2013, the Dutch government announced new assumptions for national defence policy (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2013). According to the new strategy, the armed forces would have to become more flexible due to the unpredictability of security threats. The main factors were the increasingly important role of non-state agents, the rapid transfer of new forms of technology which serves to undermine the superiority of western forces and, finally, the rapid and dramatic escalation of existing conflicts. The Dutch government

rejected the possibility of a large-scale military conflict, searching mainly outside of Europe for sources of threat (Kołek, 2017). This approach is reflected in the national defence policy and the armed forces as the main tool. At that point, the required capabilities were very different, enough to face off against Islamic State but hardly appropriate for dealing with an opponent of a similar conventional might.

In the case of the Netherlands it is clear that, after 2014, the situation was much more different than had been anticipated. Matters of self-defence and the defence of allies were prioritised out of other tasks which involved the armed forces. One of the essential factors which influenced Dutch defence policy was aggression against Ukraine. The situation here highlighted the main task of the armed forces and shifted the emphasis from crisis management to the territorial defence of the Netherlands and its allies. Another crucial factor, if not the most important, which forced a change of approach was the shooting down of the Melanesian passenger plane, a flight which carried many Dutch passengers. It caused social uproar, but the tragedy enabled political elites to introduce changes which would stop the ongoing reduction of military expenditure and the limiting of military capabilities. As a result, the projected budget for 2015 already included a slight increase in military expenditure, reaching about €100 million (Palowski, 2014). The amount of money itself was not as important as the possibility of being able to reverse the negative trend in that area. The trend had already led to the decommissioning of tanks and a reduction in the number of active F-16 planes. The government later announced further, similar increases in military spending although these could not, however, make up for the years of underfunding of the military (Kołek, 2017). Still, it set out a new direction for defence policy to take, and kickstarting the rebuilding of at least some military capabilities was part of this process.

The Dutch government was aware that the strategy and its direction was a good decision. The 'Defence White Paper' of 2018 consolidated the new approach for the following years (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2018). The introduction to the document by the Minister of Defence implies that Dutch policymakers had retained a realistic outlook regarding the country's defence policy. It meant that budget capacity must still answer to the requirements of the modern security environment. In this context, budget capacity should meet national expectations concerning expenses for particular sectors of the national economy. The authors of the 'Defence White Paper' considered the main tasks of the armed forces to involve the defence of the Netherlands, along with its territories in the Caribbean and the entirety of Nato, protecting international order based on the rule of law and supporting civil authorities,

especially in the event of natural disasters. Territorial defence is declared as the main priority even if there is no direct threat involved. In an attempt to establish solidarity and a form of reassurance policy, the policymakers included the Nato territories as extras into this definition. With some Nato members experiencing a more unstable situation, the Dutch authorities were able to declare their readiness to contribute to collective defence under the Nato agreement. This was a valid conclusion since some of the most important trends which were recognised within the security environment involved geopolitical shifts, imbalances in world population growth, the digital information revolution, the evolving human-machine relationship, increasingly complexity in terms of security threats (illustrated here by a photo of a terrorist), and diverging expectations for Nato allies and UE members towards the Netherlands.

Possible threats against the security of the Netherlands (even though they were not named as such) included a level of vulnerability in terms of social unrest which may be caused by terrorism or cyber-attacks (strategies which are dedicated towards cybersecurity were published in 2011, 2014, and 2017), the problems of migration and the fragility of Venezuela, and risks these factors could introduce into the Caribbean (especially in terms of drug and human trafficking), a strengthening of the Russian Federation's armed forces and its increasing military activity and, finally 'hybrid threats' which have been mapped out in Russian territory (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2018). It is the only place and context in which policymakers mention Russia. The Dutch government has tended to avoid pointing fingers at the cause of destabilisation or of defining military aggression by using the proper terms. This is a method by which confrontation can be avoided, relegating the problem of Russia to discussions around the shooting down of the Melanesian plane. The document goes on to identify other threats and their potential sources, such as instability in neighbouring regions, new forms of technology, hybrid warfare, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons (something which has been mapped out for the territory of North Korea).

Concerning the defence policy itself, the government's goal is to ensure national security, foster security in neighbouring regions, and maintain the position of the Netherlands as a secure communications hub. This clearly stems from the legacy of the colonial system and the related historical conditions of Dutch politics. According to the declared intention of policymakers, the goals which have been set out here require an increase in defence spending. Expenditure is planned to rise by €1.5 billion annually from 2021, by €1.2 billion in 2019, and by €1.4 billion in 2020. In total, across 2018-2033 a total of €40 billion will be allocated to defence spending, which will increase it to around €2.5-2.8 billion annually. However, as far as GDP goes, an expendi-

ture level of 1.25% is to be achieved in 2022 which, admittedly, is too little to meet Nato requirements. This shows a lack of any radical increase but rather only an increase which can be connected to the growth of GDP. Even so, it should be enough for the authors of the white paper who listed the improvement and development of military personnel as the main goal. This approach is aimed at increasing the number of personnel in the armed forces.

Table 1. **Military expenditure in the Netherlands in 2012-2019.**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019*
% GDP	1.24	1.17	1.15	1.13	1.16	1.15	1.21	1.35
Military equipment expenditure in the budget %	13.41	12.57	10.68	11.16	14.14	14.75	16.46	23.09
Amounts in millions USD	10,365	10,226	10,332	8,668	9,108	9,622	11,115	12,419

* Estimated.

Source: *Defence Expenditure of Nato Countries (2012-2019)*, 25/06/2019: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf.

Developing capabilities which will make it possible to deploy forces where necessary due to the rapidly changing security environment was something which was prioritised in the military development plans. The modernisation of military equipment was also seen as essential in order not to fall even further behind the country's potential opponents.

The next step was the expansion of the IT infrastructure to keep up with technological advances, while also making it possible to use new opportunities, and to cope with security threats. Consequently, it was assumed that the armed forces would be small in size, but mobile and well-equipped, and capable of providing rapid response and support to allied countries. Even though any assistance would not be substantial, it would be swift. The programme of military investments was provided in some detail, and the included tables suggest that only after modernising the old equipment would any new equipment be purchased. The white paper implies that the navy will claim most of the investments, acquiring equipment such as new submarines and frigates which will consume approximately €15 billion, or nearly a third of the total investment amount by 2033. Moreover, the government decided to purchase F-35 fighter aircraft and modernise numerous weapon systems for its land forces (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2018).

However, the priority concerning deployment capability does not equal the creation of capability in this area. It was assumed that the Dutch navy would be able to operate for a limited time as a team of five vessels, and for a

longer period with four vessels. The same goes for the land forces, which can operate in the shorter term as a brigade and in the longer term as a battalion (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2018). In the case of the air force, eight F-16 fighter planes can participate in short operations, and four planes in expanded missions. While purchasing the F-35 aircraft, four planes were dedicated to longer operations. The information in this regard suggests that the level of ambition has not changed overly when compared to 2013, even though the armed forces have been partially developed (eg. the navy went from four to eight vessels). Therefore the current plans are far from ambitious and cannot possibly meet Nato expectations. They also cannot significantly increase the capabilities of the Dutch armed forces and, as a result, Nato capabilities for collective defence, especially if the priority is the navy. For the Dutch government, the implementation of these plans should allow for an enhanced forward presence, albeit using only light units (which is something that is implied by the use of an icon in the white paper which denotes a light combat vehicle), and taking up participation in the Nato 'Rapid Response Force'.

The explanation for this state of affairs is implied in the 'Integrated International Security Strategy' which was issued in 2018. The list of threats starts with terrorist attacks, followed by cyber-threats. Military threats are listed in fourth place, not within the context of threats to national borders but rather in connection with international laws and solidarity amongst Nato allies. The last problem to be named is hybrid threats, something which is illustrated by the 'conflict between Russia and Ukraine' and violations of Nato airspace (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). This is a more direct, and yet still subtle, reference to Russia as a country which breaks international norms and whose political strategy is dangerous for European states. Nevertheless, the strategy uses proper terminology such as, for example, mentioning the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. This approach should be present throughout the document. As regards defence, there should be no surprise at the authors stressing the meaning of Nato in terms of the defence of the Netherlands. Article 5 of the treaty makes the defence of territories a main priority, highlighting expeditionary capabilities as a tool by which a forward defence can be conducted and to allow participation in crisis response operations. The document also announced the strengthening of the armed forces so that they can carry out their assigned tasks, which means trying to reach 2% of GDP by 2024 following the agreement which was drawn up at the Nato summit in Wales in 2014. The strategy states that the Netherlands will take steps to meet its obligations concerning nuclear weapons, which means that capabilities in this area should be rebuilt. The Dutch also decided that the members of the EU should develop their own defence cooperation as a

complementary agreement to Nato obligations. There was no agreement to create a separate European army (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Nato is the dominant force in the area of defence and security policy, and the Dutch government will not condone any actions which may serve to undermine that position. As part of the Benelux countries, Belgium and Luxembourg are the most important partners in any bilateral cooperation agreements, followed by Germany, France, and Norway. These countries have for many years been traditional allies for the Netherlands. Regardless of 'Brexit', Great Britain also remains a key partner, and so does the USA as the key ally in the Caribbean and in matters of migratory waves coming into that region of the world (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). However, it is clear that the US support matters not only in the former colonies but also in Europe. The role of Nato in the security of the Netherlands and on the old continent is unquestionable. While this is a much weaker reference to the role of the USA than in countries from other regions which have been analysed in this work, the relationship is still very strong. Dutch troops often take part in operations which are important to Americans. Cooperation between the two counties has enjoyed a long history since the onset of the Cold War, when the Netherlands was one of the closest partners of the USA. The Dutch were part of Nato's nuclear deterrence policy from the start.

The authorities have gradually implemented the assumptions which were set out in the white paper. For example, they started to modernise the artillery, augmenting it with the purchase of Excalibur precision munitions from the USA and ordering another model of precision munitions, amounting to 3,500 shells for $70 million (Palowski, 2018). Such capabilities are very useful during land operations, and the decision to acquire new equipment was taken following the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine. One tank company serving as part of the German-Dutch unit was returned to service. These activities are part of the process to rebuild those conventional capabilities which may become vital for conflict operations both in and outside Europe. In addition, they signed an agreement for the purchase of the MQ-9 Reaper Block 5 unmanned combat aerial vehicle system, and four airframes from the USA for approximately $340 million (Malicki, 2018). The Dutch government also signed a modernisation agreement for Patriot systems. As illustrated by these examples, American companies have become the beneficiaries of a good many contracts. The Dutch authorities have also not forgotten about European industry, making sure to modernise the navy in cooperation with Belgium, and preparing a strategy for including their own industrial base in the process of modernising their armed forces.

While the programme's goals are modest, it is still a programme which

involves developing the armed forces and defence capabilities rather than reducing them as did the 2015 document. Moreover, despite emphasising the importance of self-defence and the defence of the allied territories, the process of being able to undertake expeditionary capacities and ensuring participation in foreign operations are still both significant areas of interest, especially when compared to other countries. At the same time, the Dutch prime minister appealed to other European countries to increase their defence expenditure, pointing to looming threats from the Russian federation and China, not just for the Netherlands but for all Nato members. The best way to summarise the current state of affairs is in the words of the Dutch prime minister, who claimed that his country was not able to guarantee its own security but that Europe could and should do more (Defence24, 2019).

3. Belgium's defence policy

As in the case of the Netherlands, Belgium had also systematically been reducing its defence capabilities due to the perceived lack of security threat following the ending of the Cold War. Along with the evolution of the international security environment and the emergence of new threats and challenges, a plan came into creation which undertook to modify the country's military capability in order to be able to meet specific needs, such as counterterrorism. It did not, however, stop policymakers from rationalising other options when it came to being able to defund and diminish the armed forces, while ignoring the consequences of a limited capacity for self-defence and the defence of the Nato territories. A good example of an attempt to give up the responsibility to protect oneself, making it a burden of the budgets and armies of other countries, was the initiative which was introduced by Johan Vande Lanotte. An influential leader of the Flander socialists, he suggested reducing the Belgium armed forces by half within the next ten years. Downsizing from forty thousand to twenty thousand troops would make 1.2 billion euros in savings, which could be directed towards other areas such as financial aid for the underdeveloped African countries (Pawlicki, 2006). The politician claimed that such charitable gestures were more important than undertaking to ensure that the country could meet the responsibilities of a Nato member. Both the proposal and the attitude could be brushed off as being marginal if they had not squared up with the plans and undertakings which were already being initiated by the Belgium government itself. The authorities reduced the number of personnel in the armed forces and allotted increasingly meagre funds towards defence expenditure. Notably, this all happened in a country which

serves as the Nato headquarters and which relies on ensuring collective defence for its very own security.

This approach is therefore one-sided, suggesting that the country is a consumer of security which is being provided by other members of the alliance, amongst its other responsibilities. Belgium's internal problems were also a factor which served to influence the country's national defence policy. Its issues included separatism, ethnic conflict, drug trafficking, and terrorism, all of which made external threats seem less pressing (Marczuk, 2013). To illustrate the main premises of Belgian political strategy prior to 2014, analysis should be made of the plan for the development of the armed forces between 2000-2015 (The Government of Belgium, 2000). According to that document, as an example, the Belgian government gave up on replacing tanks, which meant that such vehicles would no longer form part of the equipment of the country's armed forces, just like self-propelled artillery had also been removed from the country's arsenal of equipment. The collapse in military funding was so deep that even towed artillery pieces were not ready to be used because they lacked the correct ammunition (Sauer, 2015). Generally speaking, Belgian defence options were pictured as relying on international organisations, mostly Nato and the EU (Belgian Ministry of Defence, 2014). The bilateral relation, like the one which had been established with the Netherlands, encouraged Belgium to search for regional cooperation as an important part of its national defence policy. The 'Benelux Defence Cooperation' which was declared in 2012 is the clear result of such a strategy (Biscop, Coelmont, Drent, & Zandee, 2013).

The annexation of Crimea and military operations in eastern Ukraine both served to influence Belgium's defence policy, even though the threats which were being posed by Islamic State and broadly-defined terrorism were more important factors. Still, Russia's aggressive aspirations which served to affect Nato as a whole were also generating a degree of impact upon the Belgian government, which tried to turn the matter of national security into a matter of transatlantic defence, if not just European defence. Consequently, Belgium had to contribute to international security to be able to rely on its allies in times of need and to balance its own expectations with those of other governments. One example of that strategy was the selection and purchase of F-35 fighter planes. Belgium eventually bought thirty-four of these, fewer than initially anticipated. The day after signing the purchase agreement, Belgium announced a large order of military equipment which would be purchased from France, reaching 1.6 billion euros in value. This order was supposed to prove the unique character of the American deal. In other words, choosing a non-European product was unusual, a result of special circumstances. In this way, Belgian politicians showed that European partners are just as

important as the USA. According to their explanations about the matter, the decisive purchasing criterion was the price. The cost of the F-35 fighters - estimated at four billion euros - was lower than the cost of purchasing European equivalents in the form of the Eurofighter Typhoon and the French Rafale jets (Rachwalska, 2018). It was especially important thanks to the consequences of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The signing of the purchase contract was an opportunity to demonstrate to US President Trump that Belgium had indeed been modernising its armed forces and that US criticism about Belgium's low defence spending was somewhat overblown. The participation of Belgian troops in a high number of foreign military operations has had a similar goal. In its need for reassurance, Belgium maintains a level of expeditionary capacity so that it can contribute to crisis response operations, even if this level of military standing is not sufficient to support collective Nato defence in any significant way.

According to Alexander Mattelaer, after 2014 there came a chance to rebuild the Belgian defence policy by increasing military spending, as well as in terms of modernising and staffing the armed forces. This could break the country's downward trend in military terms, and the armed forces would finally be able to carry out a full spectrum of tasks. Such involvement in external affairs would, however, still only take place in times of peace or regional crisis as there would be no possibility of the country being able to participate in a full-scale armed conflict (Mattelaer, 2018). Terrorist attacks which took place in Belgium were an essential factor in the process of convincing the country's population to accept higher spending levels for defence and security. Those events had implications which were similar to those for the Netherlands which were raised by the shooting down of the Melanesian plane. The government used public outrage and its change of perspective to expand the country's defence and security policy. The parliamentary elections in 2014 were accompanied by a debate over potential changes and were concluded in the adoption of 'The Strategic Vision for Defence' in June 2016 (Vandeput, 2016). More funding and the modernisation of the armed forces which was planned for the period between 2020-2030 were both confirmed by the Belgian parliament's decision regarding financing of the programme during the 2016-2030 period. Development priorities included land-based forces (which covered the purchase of new combat vehicles, and maintaining a strategic partnership with France), the air force (which included the purchase of new aircraft, with the possibility of being able to accept offers from various partners), the navy (such as in the purchase of two frigates and six minesweepers), and intelligence (including the purchase of drones and cooperation with France regarding satellite intelligence). Relying on ongoing cooperation with the Netherlands, Belgium decid-

ed that the naval vessels would be acquired under one umbrella project, which both countries planned to have implemented by 2025. This was another way to deepen integration as regards the navy and, consequently, expand defence cooperation between the countries of the Benelux union. France was emerging as another essential partner in the field of defence. This meant, following the decision regarding F-35 fighters, that the next defence project named France as a provider of military equipment. Opening doors to different partners in relation to the air force indicated that Belgium was waiting for an offer from the US, which would also improve their mutual relations. Implementation of the modernisation programmes could bring with it a large-scale increase in the capabilities of the armed forces, and therefore a full rebuilding of their abilities following a long period of cuts and savings. That is, of course, if Belgium was and is able to find a solution to the country's very low recruitment rates. The armed forces are not only dwindling in terms of personnel numbers but are also getting older; only one-third of soldiers are below the age of forty, while the majority are over fifty (Mattelaer, 2018). In order to change this situation, the government has to prioritise the problem, finding a way to create attractive career paths which will encourage younger members of the public to join up (Belgian Ministry of Defence, 2016). According to initial assumptions, the armed forces were supposed reach 25,000 people (including a thousand civilian personnel). To be able to maintain that level of staffing the military would have to add around two thousand new recruits a year.

If the plan is fulfilled, Belgium will have five mechanised battalions, a special operations task force (including Tier 1 units), strike aircraft with multi-role combat planes, and a group of warships with strictly defined tasks and specialities during international operations. This is not enough to meet partner expectations or to defend Belgium's own national territory, but it will provide some form of contribution in crisis response operations, along with declaring the country as a participant in collective defence. Belgium will continue to rely upon its allies, trying to curb their critical assessments thanks to military purchases. From this it can be seen that the process of making Belgium's defence forces a truly international organisation is one which is still ongoing. The Belgian government is still betting on a close, regional collaboration to ensure its country's defence at the local level.

Going back to the 2016 document, which marked the origins of changes in Belgium's defence policy, it should be noted that the problems in Southern Europe were listed as being more important than those in the east. The document mentioned the struggles in Eastern Europe even after the contemporary situation arose in Central Africa. Russian politics is discussed only in the third part of the analysis of the evolving international security environment and

resultant perceived threats. The document directly refers to the annexation of Crimea, the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, the separatist Transnistria region, and a hostile policy towards Georgia. In the wider context, it refers to attempts to rebuild the Russian sphere of influence over the countries of the former Eastern Bloc and, therefore, Nato and the EU countries.

As these factors are expected to determine Europe's military security for quite an extended period of time, there is a need to return to collective defence as a priority amongst those commitments and operations which are undertaken by the allied countries (Belgian Ministry of Defence, 2016). The Belgian authorities openly refer to their nominated candidate in terms of taking responsibility for the safety of Europe, pointing at Nato as the leader when it comes to preparations for defence. As each member has to contribute to the process, Belgium has and will participate in the strengthening of the alliance's eastern flank. This should also prevent hybrid threats from emerging from Russia. Russia is also mentioned in the section which covers Northern Europe and the militarisation of the Arctic. The Belgian government has noticed problems which are being generated by that country, stating that Russia has broken international law, violating the principle which covers the territorial integrity of countries, and so on. Those observations do not lead to any significant development in terms of defence capabilities but only to their limited increase, something which is typical of a small state. Added to that, a small state with a colonial past, and one which is more concerned about events in Africa than it is about those in Europe. Hence the list of threats starts with the consequences of the 'Arab Spring', terrorism, migration, and so on. The recent terrorist attacks in Belgium are tied to these issues, and so the armed forces must carry out internal duties during this time of peace.

In general, the Belgian armed forces - and more broadly it's the defence policy which involves them - must be able to contribute to Nato's collective defence efforts, securing the capability to participate in crisis response operations which are organised by other agents and to protect Belgian citizens worldwide. Collective defence is obviously prioritised here, and there is no mention of a self-defence capability. However, such a capability must exist in order to ensure internal security and the deployment of troops within the state's territory. The document's authors clearly state that Belgian defence relies on Nato, which means the allied countries in Europe and North America. The European Union is seen as a natural, complementary partner for Nato. Therefore in December 2017, Belgium and twenty-four out of twenty-six EU states initiated a process of cooperation under the umbrella of PESCO (Santopinto, 2018). The priority for Belgium was to implement projects with the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Amongst those projects which were indeed

promoted by Belgium was technological development and the production of marine drones, with the latter being available for use in minesweeping duties. The choice was obvious since the Belgian forces already specialise in minesweepers. Moreover, Belgium was engaged in projects which covered logistical cooperation, and in creating a training facility for EU members. All together, Belgium participated in five projects and acted as an observer in four more (de France, Mampaey, & Zandee, 2016).

On the other hand, Belgium should possess forces which are capable of participating in Nato's collective defensive and crisis response operations. This means that the development of the Belgian military is inevitable. Its forces should reach the required level of expenditure of 2% of GDP (20% of which is required for modernisation purposes), as declared by Nato members by 2024. Belgium plans to achieve that level gradually, eventually spending 9.2 billion euros on the development of its military capability across 2020-2030. However, as regards GDP until 2030, expenditure is planned to reach only 1.3% for each subsequent year (de France, Mampaey, & Zandee, 2016). Clearly, far from being a staggering amount, it will not even meet the expectations of the country's allies. The correct assessment of the reality and awareness of being dependant upon Nato did not bring with it any radical changes but instead only reversed the downward trend and resulted in a slight increase in military expenditure. A significant part of new funds will go toward arms purchases. The targeted purchase should bring Belgium the necessary support, which explains the push towards American suppliers. As the Belgian policymakers explain, the USA is the most important European partner in the area of security. They expect the European states to become more engaged in collective defence, and Belgium will meet their expectations in that regard, albeit in a limited way.

Table 2. **Military expenditure in Belgium in 2012-2019.**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019*
% GDP	1.04	1.01	0.98	0.92	0.91	0.90	0.91	0.93
Military equipment expenditure in the budget %	3.57	2.84	3.52	3.44	4.72	6.52	10.15	10.78
Amount in millions USD	5,169	5,264	5,192	4,202	4,256	4,431	4,840	4,921

* Estimate.

Source: *Defence Expenditure of Nato Countries (2012-2019)*, 25/06/2019: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf.

While the above information confirms the validity of the adopted position, one may assume that Belgium will introduce some changes in order

to speed up the process of rebuilding its military capability. The authors of the 2019 'Security Environment Review' have wondered whether the shifting international situation, including the required increase in military spending, foreshadows the end of the post-Cold War peace period (Belgian Ministry of Defence, 2019). If that is the case, the question about Belgium's position remains valid. Publishing this document was already quite telling as it was the first publication of its kind in Belgium's history. The authors pointed out the main trends which have been revealed in modern times, such as the diminished importance of Europe and the USA, and the subsequent relocation towards the Pacific of the centre of power, and the consequences of technological progress, primarily in the field of information, along with economic instability, environmental changes, political fragmentation and, therefore, a devaluing of international law. The last trend on this list concerns new, powerful weapon systems which are resulting in even higher rates of mortality amongst those who are in the danger zone from such weapons. The Belgian government must protect its own citizens against the negative outcomes of these changes, ensuring the same high standard of living that Belgians had previously been assured. The average Belgian citizen is at the heart of the concept of national security. This refers to the implementation of the idea of 'human security' in the most globalised country in the world.

There is one main conclusion which can be drawn from this: in order to ensure the continued prosperity of Belgian society, the country must be able to protect itself against all emerging threats, and especially global threats. This is especially important now that the golden age experienced by the USA is under threat, if it is not altogether over. US political strategy is unstable as far as their intentions, their role in Nato, their relations with Russia, and even their fight against terrorism goes (Belgian Ministry of Defence, 2019).

4. Luxembourg's defence policy

Luxembourg is the smallest of the three countries being analysed. At the same time, its citizens enjoy the highest income GDP per capita in the EU. This is mainly thanks to financial and insurance institutions which are housed in Luxembourg, all of which constitute the largest sector of the nation's economy. Over 80% of the country's exports go to the European Union's markets, and over 90% of its imports come from the same place ('Luksembourg', 2019). Taking the figures into account, one may conclude that the country's prosperity relies heavily on membership in the EU. More broadly, Luxembourg's policies depend upon its membership in international organisations and its coop-

eration with other countries based on various deals and agreements (Bossaert, 2018). What confirms this tendency is the fact that Luxembourg was one of the first countries to initiate the process of European integration and to promote its development, as well as to establish regional cooperation in the form of the Benelux Union. It is also one of the founding countries of Nato.

Defence policy does not have an important position amongst any other of the government's policies. Moreover, as Karina Paulina Marczuk (2013) suggests, there are no references to matters of national or internal security in any of the high-ranking documents or acts (such as the country's constitution). The issue is also absent from a broader political discourse. This means that Luxembourg's case reveals a lack of interest which affects not only its defence policy but also its security policy. The shift in this direction began before 2014. A new coalition was established in 2013 with the formation of the Ministry of Internal Security. The government of the time did not, however, create a separate ministry for defence, keeping it in the form of an office within the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (known as the 'Directorate of Defence', 2019). The office was led by the same minister who was responsible for running the Ministry of Security, something which is a common situation in Luxembourg.

Due to the country's limited number of personnel its the land forces, which form the foundation of the military, were organised into four companies with a total strength which amounted to a battalion. They also had two reconnaissance platoons which were acting as special forces. In total, the armed forces consisted of 900 military and civilian personnel (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015). Taking everything into account, one can conclude that Luxembourg's armed forces formed only a minimal contributor to efforts of collective defence, crisis response operations, and UN peacekeeping operations. As the table below indicates, Luxembourg's government did not meet the expectations of the alliance and did not spend the minimum of 2% GDP on defence, even though the country relied on its allies for protection.

Table 3. **Military expenditure in Luxembourg in 2012-2019.**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019*
% GDP	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.44	0.40	0.52	0.54	0.55
Military equipment expenditure in the budget %	17.11	14.57	22.61	33.33	30.07	42.06	41.77	44.62
Amount in millions USD	214	234	253	249	236	325	373	391

* Estimate.

Source: *Defence Expenditure of Nato Countries (2012-2019)*, 25/06/2019: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf.

To summarise, the country was only a beneficiary of collective defence, not a contributor. According to the available information there was a slight increase in overall spending, but this was not at all impressive. In December 2017, Luxembourg's authorities presented a carefully prepared, long-term strategy for the country's defence policy for 2025 and in the following years (Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2017). An analysis of the document will answer any questions about the basis of the country's defence policy and any changes which have taken place after 2014.

The events of 2014 provided a breakthrough in the approach to a defence policy being taken by Luxembourg's government. The document which delineated the government's vision of its defence policy for 2025 was the first document of this type ever to be issued in the country. The main goal was to develop national defence capacity and to provide an explanation for why Luxembourg needed a defence policy. The authors highlighted the necessity of increasing the state's contribution to EU and Nato collective defence, in that order. The plans by Luxembourg's policymakers are ambitious, covering changes both in the structure and equipment of the armed forces. The changes are going to be introduced in cooperation with the other Benelux countries, both of which play a major role in Luxembourg's defence policy (Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2017). Considering the fact that these were the premises which were provided by the Minister of Defence, Étienne Schneider, in the introduction to the document, it can be concluded that revolutionary changes have taken place in terms of Luxembourg's defence policy. The main directions being taken involved the following:

a) an increase in Luxembourg's defence spending by 50% up until 2020 (in comparison to 2014). Adding investments into the development of the armed forces and their areas of capability, especially in the field of modern forms of technology and selected military specialisations.

b) developing the air component, including the provision of new areas of capability and platforms for strategic airlifts, medical evacuations, and maritime aerial surveillance.

c) implementing a military medicine project, including the creation of operationally deployable medical teams.

d) developing cyberspace and space capacity.

f) developing a strategy for industry, innovation, and research in order to involve Luxembourg's companies in building up the country's defence capability.

g) developing a recruitment strategy, with a special focus on obtaining high-class specialists who are required in order to develop and implement the country's defence capability.

h) conducting a study on establishing a territorial defence force which consists of civilians who can be mobilised to support state institutions in the event of a crisis.

i) establishing a state agency which is responsible for developing the country's military capability, while also being able to implement and supervise major investment projects (Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2017).

The document's authors stress the fact that these are new directions for the country's defence policy. There is now a willingness to specialise in military reconnaissance (including aerial forms), air transport, military medicine, and the use of modern forms of technology in future-orientated combat areas, such as space. The authors also use the word 'niche' which refers to areas of specialisation (Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2017), and is typical of the potential of a small state. Luxembourg wants to use the advantages of being a highly-developed and affluent state, one which abounds in specialists to be recruited into the military. There is also an idea which would involve the creation of a territorial defence force even though the authors do not specifically refer to it in those terms. Still, there is a conviction that a small state like Luxembourg must have additional forces which it can mobilise in the event of a crisis. Those forces would not only increase the country's resilience but of all its individual components, while ensuring that there is a much stronger likelihood of them being local. In general, the armed forces should have the capability of being able to produce a swift response to a threat, and a territorial defence force may be able to meet that expectation.

The process of accepting these directions, along with the idea that Luxembourg's defence policy had reached a point of transformation, has resulted from changes which affected the international security environment. Specifically, they highlighted the need for every member state to fulfil its commitments and to contribute to the process of ensuring continued security which is undertaken by the UN, the EU, and Nato. It is worth noting that the UN claims a very important place in the document, often being referred to as the foundation of Luxembourg's security. This is a reference which is made by a small country to an organisation which ensures collective security, which guards the international norms which guarantee its continued existence. Moreover, it is necessary to be a reliable partner for the countries with which Luxembourg cooperates, and to be a country which makes a visible contribution to the stabilisation of the international environment. The emphasis is well-deserved since the issue of 'visibility' appears in many places in the document. Ultimately, the contribution by Luxembourg cannot be purely symbolic and barely visible. Its partners and allies must be able to notice it in

order to be able to value it. The document presents a long-term plan.

The government decided that Luxembourg needs to have an army (which could mean that the previous armed forces barely kept up the appearance of being an army), and that it needs to be integrates into multinational structures. This is a breakthrough in the history of Luxembourg's defence policy. The source of that breakthrough lies in the events of 2014 even if the policymakers do not directly refer to them, at least partially due to the volume of Russian capital which is held in Luxembourg. The issues of security within the EU and Nato and the act of violating the norms of international law are prioritised in the document, helping to rationalise its general approach. There is a careful reference to the conflict in Ukraine, and the Russian attack on Ukrainian ships in the Kerch Strait, as an existing threat in the EU neighbourhood. This was brought up in 2019, during the presentation of Luxembourg's foreign policy in parliament (Asselborn, 2019). Russia was referred to as a 'difficult partner', one which cannot be ignored due to its importance and proximity to the EU. Luxembourg's politicians decided that there had to be ways - other than sanctions - to respond to the illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of Ukraine, while keeping open dialogue with Russia (Asselborn, 2019). Luxembourg presents a conciliatory approach, especially when considering the fact that Russia's strategy may be especially dangerous to small countries and should be discussed as part of foreign policy rather than defence policy.

With all that in mind, Luxembourg's policymakers defined their key interests and goals within the area of security. Without going into too much detail, it is worth noting that the main goal was a visible and valuable contribution to collective defence (referring to Nato), and joint crisis response operations. This is therefore a model reference to the defence policy of a small state. It is assumed that, in 2022, defence spending will reach 0.6% of GDP, almost doubling the figure from 2014, and this is expected to continue to grow. Such assessments are confirmed by the fact that most of the goals are related to the international dimension of any defence policy. The main partners in this field have been identified as Germany, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, which proves that the Benelux countries do indeed secure partners outside their union with whom they cooperate such as, for example, within the Eurocorps. All partners are equally important when it comes to a defence policy. In terms of institutional partners, policymakers stress the importance of the UN, the EU, and Nato. It is through the alliance that the engagement of the USA in Europe is emphasised and sustained. Upholding transatlantic relations is also a priority, and Luxembourg cooperates with the US in the area of satellite communications. Luxembourg plans to contribute to all of its partners and actively participate in their operations. This requires the further

development of the country's military capability and supporting initiatives such as the EU's 'Common Security and Defence Policy'. As regards Nato, policymakers have highlighted the expectations which were set out in Article 3 regarding the development of the defence capability of Nato members.

Defence capability must be sufficient so that the armed forces can carry out their various assigned missions (Asselborn, 2019). Policymakers have mentioned the need to secure resources to defend the country and act as a host nation. The next task is to develop national resilience in order to successfully deal with hybrid and cyber-threats and to ensure the continuity of public services. The international level is more highly developed. The policymakers in Luxembourg mention Nato collective defence and crisis response operations, among other areas. The commitments to Nato form a separate point. They include, for example, participating in military exercises and the rapid reaction capability. This is similar to the expectation of participating in the EU Battlegroups. In this section of the document, Nato is listed ahead of the EU. Apart from the national and international level, there is also mention of the operational level which will be developed within the sector document (eg. concerning the response time to threats, and the deployment of the armed forces within any area of operations, etc) All in all, ambitions are higher than they were before 2014. There will be a place for the land forces, the air force, military medical services, the space sector, cybersecurity, and research and development. A need has also been identified in terms of creating a plan for personnel recruitment, which can reach as high as 1,400 recruited individuals according to the act which was adopted in 2007. Civilian-soldiers will serve in support of professional units, and should possess specialised skills. They will form a reserve of specialists which will be needed in such areas as medical teams, for instance. The solutions which have been proposed by Luxembourg are, then, highly practical.

The analysis of the document and a comparison with the pre-2014 policy allows us to conclude that, while there is no mention of the Russian federation or Ukraine, it is clear that the conflict between the two countries had an impact on the way in which Luxembourg thinks about its armed forces. Another consequence is the country's first military purchases such as, for example, two H145M helicopters which were purchased in 2018 for transportation, surveillance, and medical evacuation purposes (Defence24, 2018). Moreover, Luxembourg also purchased an Airbus A400M tanker aircraft and a satellite which is intended for military surveillance usage. The Luxembourg contingent in Afghanistan was planned (prior to the events of late 2021) to grow from eleven to twelve soldiers (Mironescu & Schock, 2018), which is a gesture which has symbolic importance.

5. Summary: the Benelux defence policy

Final considerations should start with an emphasis being placed on what the three countries which were analysed have in common, and what was stressed in their political strategies. All three of them seek close cooperation within the Benelux Union (Klinkert, 2018). As regards defence policy, the importance of and internal dynamics within the union have changed after adopting a joint declaration on 18 April 2012. The declaration identified four key areas of cooperation: logistics and maintenance, education and training, the execution of military tasks, and the procurement of equipment. Specifically, this meant common military purchases, training for paratroopers, the sharing of training facilities, and specialising in selected areas ('Benesam', 2012). Everything was to be planned and monitored by specialised institutions, such as twelve expert working groups, and a special steering committee which is to consist of high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Defence. The various ministers of defence served as supervisors and could convene when necessary (Biscop et al, 2013). Despite the tight bonds between all three countries, it has not been an easy process of cooperation. A workable balance needs to be found between economic efficacy and specialised skills, and the loss of some of the privileges of a sovereign nation. For instance, one country may have to give up on a certain area of capability for the sake of its partners, such as shutting down a military base. These difficulties can be dealt with to a certain extent. This all means that these Benelux countries are a good example for the EU when it comes to the deepening of defence cooperation between the member states. When analysing these processes, one may be able to conclude that the process of cooperation is going very smoothly within the fields of education and military training. This can also be successful when it comes to controlling air space, deploying common contingents abroad, or participating in EU Battlegroups.

Many projects were successfully implemented in subsequent years, such as one which involved a 2015 agreement on protecting airspace. According to that document, from 2017 onwards, Benelux airspace would be guarded alternately by the Belgian and Dutch air forces (Sabak, 2015). In 2019, the Belgian and Dutch governments jointly commissioned six minehunters, which illustrates the continuous development of cooperation within the field of naval operations (Nitka, 2019). Finally, at the end of 2019, they finalised a project which involved a joint training facility for NH90 helicopter pilots, which was located in the Netherlands (Calende, 2019). These successful projects prove that it is possible to develop military capability and avoid problems which could appear at the national level.

Some interesting conclusions may be drawn from information which covers military procurement processes (SIPRI, 2019). Belgium generally opts for French and German providers, which are its closest partners outside the Benelux Union. However, military purchases were primarily made before 2015, which was something that was related to the implementation of earlier plans. The changes which were caused by the events of 2014 led to new orders being placed which corresponded with the process of rethinking the country's defence policy. During that time, Belgium was already making purchase deals with the US, which were finalised by acquiring F-35 aircraft in a process which was to be implemented over the next few years. As a result, the position of the USA will be reinforced. In the case of the Netherlands, the USA is the first port of call for military purchases. Here, the US position was as stable before 2014 as it was after. This is a result of stable and close cooperation between both countries and a process of relying on transatlantic connections as the guarantee of national and European security. In 2013, the Dutch purchased an order of F-35 aircraft, albeit not a particularly large order. The authorities there have decided to purchase more planes in the next few years owing to increased defence funding, starting with thirty-seven fighters. In 2019, they confirmed the acquisition of eight or nine more planes (Hypś, 2019). Consequently, the USA's position will be further reinforced. Germany has also taken a high position in recent years, being treated as one of the key partners in the defence policy. In the case of Luxembourg, the process of military procurement has also started. These figures are not particularly large due to the nominal amounts being allocated to them, along with the method of payment being used. As announced, the following years should bring about an increase in spending and more transactions, which may be small from the perspective of SIPRI statistics but significant for Luxembourg. Nato members may still find them insufficient, considering the required level of expenditure on defence spending as a percentage of total GDP.

As the final assumption in regards to the defence policy, the strategy of reassurance can be seen to be present and visible in all three countries. Belgium and the Netherlands contribute troops to the same operations, which also indicates their cooperation in this particular area as Benelux members (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). The contribution to Nato operations is highly significant, and the Netherlands is deploying forces to Nato's eastern flank as part of the allied response to Russia's political manoeuvring. Both countries are also active participants in UN peacekeeping operations. Luxembourg's engagement may seem modest but, nevertheless, its government sees as a major contribution the lease of two patrol aircraft from CAE Aviation for the European Union mission, EUNAVFOR. This com-

pany provides services to Luxembourg's government through public-private partnership projects. The idea of outsourcing military procurement operations in terms of tasks which need to be carried out by the armed forces is one which has not gone away. To summarise, the overall involvement of the countries which have been analysed was not particularly significant between 2014-2019, and did not reach a figure of 5% of their total armed forces (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). The Netherlands was the closest to that figure. As the leader of the three countries, the Netherlands was also the most highly involved in Operation Inherent Resolve, which was especially important for the USA. This engagement confirms the weight of relations with the USA, and the largest area of effort being undertaken by the Benelux countries when it comes to legitimising their defence policy based on international security guarantees.

Conclusions

There are several main points which concern the Benelux defence policy which have emerged from the analysis. In the process of enhancing their respective national defence capability, the three governments have decided on some changes (or have decided against some others):

1. All Benelux members introduced changes into their defence policies after 2014. All of them halted the process of decreasing their respective military capability and the view that budget savings could be made. Instead, they either kept the same, albeit low, level of defence capability or decided to a certain extent to rebuild that defence capability. In the case of Luxembourg, its defence policy was developed along with its military capability.

2. Defence spending in the three countries has begun to grow. It is still far from the 2% of GDP which has been required by Nato. Moreover, plans for reaching the specified minimum spending levels are somewhat vague even though these countries have accepted the requirements which were set out during the Nato summit in Newport. The reluctance to increase spending stems from the position of public opinion and the preferences of each of the governments for other forms of expenditure, such as social spending. However, the aftermath of events in Ukraine and various terrorist attacks forced the political elite to assign additional resources to defence, which is a matter which at least some citizens can accept.

3. None of the three countries has decided to directly identify the political strategy of the Russian federation as a security threat. They prefer to suggest it in an ambiguous, descriptive way, referring to the consequences of

the events in Ukraine, especially in terms of the violation of international law. The problem is discussed within the broader context of possible threats to Nato as a whole and the members of the alliance. While the Benelux countries are ready to seek agreement with Russia, they also emphasise solidarity with other Nato members.

4. The countries which have been analysed here all rely on their defence and security requirements and obligations being reorganised at the international level, and are ready to develop their mutual cooperation in that regard. This is visible at the Benelux level, where these countries are able to overcome difficulties which stem from the underlying conflict between defence cooperation and state sovereignty. This process of cooperation has been transferred to the EU level, which plays a crucial role in the discussion around security and defence. The Netherlands stresses the importance of Nato more than the other two countries. However, all of the three countries are involved in UN operations to a high extent, as is confirmed by the available information. As the smallest of the three countries, Luxembourg most strongly highlights the role of the UN in its security strategy.

5. Apart from cooperation within the Benelux Union, the main partners in the field of defence and security are Germany, France, and the USA. The Scandinavian countries are also important partners, something which is shown within the area of military cooperation (such as in terms of Eurocorps and EU Battlegroups), participation in foreign operations, and in military procurement directions. Luxembourg also tries to be an attractive partner for the US, something which is not as easy as it may once have been. This explains the reason for specialisation in space projects and cooperation on the development of satellite communications. All of the three countries count on US engagement in Europe and all host American military bases.

6. All three countries are developing cyber-defence capacity. This is a clear response to hybrid threats, but there are also other reasons behind such a move. Luxembourg's national economy is based on the provision of services, especially financial ones, and this already requires the country to have a well-developed cyber-security provision. This is also one of those niches which can be used by a small state to enhance its visibility within Nato, something for which Luxembourg's authorities have striven in recent years.

7. All three countries struggle with the recruitment of military personnel because the average military career in these countries is simply not that attractive for many of their citizens. The Netherlands has handled this problem better than Belgium and Luxembourg. The latter two deal with problems which stem from the increasingly international perspective of their nations, along with fading national identity and a sense of belonging which generally

finds more favour with a European, western, or global identity. Besides this, military salaries are generally low, expectations are high, and alternative civilian career paths abound.

8. Luxembourg may build up a territorial defence force in the future, and treat it as a reserve of specialists. This will also be brought into action during crisis events. This is one possible remedy when it comes to being able to increase military capability, and which can be used to fill highly specialised positions in the armed forces, such as in medical support services or satellite reconnaissance duties.

In conclusion, changes being made include a strengthening of the Benelux defence capability levels, along with overturning, or at least stopping, the processes of weakening their military power, developing cooperation and specialisation, and using the strongest ally as a guarantee of security. All of these changes include the appropriate costs.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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